

“By faith Jacob, when he was dying...” Hebrews chapter 11 verse 21

Jacob lived a good long life, and an eventful one. He had a son, Joseph, who we know well because of his amazing technicolour dreamcoat. Ill treated by his older brothers because of his boasting, he was sold into slavery in Egypt and unjustly imprisoned there. Released from prison he rose to be second only to the Pharaoh in power. He saved Egypt from seven years of famine, and finally brought Jacob and his family to Egypt, where they were granted land in the region of Goshen.

At the end of his life he blessed his sons, telling them what would happen to them in the days to come. But first he blessed the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, born to him in Egypt. This was the act of faith that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews commends him for. If we go back again to the book of Genesis we discover why.

Once again we come upon this recurring theme in the bible; the advancement of the second born over the conventional place of the firstborn. Manasseh was Joseph's eldest son, and Ephraim the younger, yet Jacob crossed his hands over, placing his right hand on the head of the younger and his left on that of the elder.

Joseph objected, attempting to correct his father. But Jacob had learned over the years how to hear from God, and he knew what God wanted. Both Manasseh and Ephraim would become tribes of Israel, but Ephraim would be greater than Manasseh. And, indeed, the tribe of Ephraim always did take precedence over Manasseh throughout the history of Israel.

One thing that is characteristic of God is that he is not bound by human rules and conventions. Mostly, we conform to the traditions and customs of our culture, and most people try to keep to the rules.

But this is where hearing from God can often be difficult. He is not reluctant to completely overturn human norms in order to carry out his will. For example, he presents Moses with a burning bush in the desert. Moses is drawn to it because it does not behave according to what he might expect. He would expect it to burn until its fuel ran out and then stop, but this one keeps on burning. In being drawn to something that confounds his expectations of what is normal, he hears God speaking to him.

So in hearing from God, we ought to be ready for him to want to overturn our expectations and those of others. But what do we do then? In moving in obedience to God many have drawn, outrage, indignation and opposition from others, from people who have fiercely resisted change in the life of a church to those who have passionately begged people not to embark on some course that seemed dangerous or foolhardy.

But we live to serve God, not people, and sometimes faith requires that we obey the call of God and not the expectations of people.

Prayer

Father, I want to live in obedience to you, but I know that to obey your leading may well bring the opposition of others, even other believers. At those times, Lord, please grant me the faith and courage to stand my ground and act according to your word to me. In Jesus name, amen.

All these devotionals can be found on our website inghamitechurch.org on the 'Resources' page. Click on the link to go there.