

God Surpasses Our Hopes

"I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed." – Genesis 48:11

Summary:

Jacob's delight in seeing Joseph and his sons teaches believers to acknowledge God as the source of every comfort. Jacob had long believed Joseph dead, yet God not only restored his son but allowed him to embrace his grandchildren. Throughout Scripture and Christian experience, God repeatedly frustrates the fears and surpasses the hopes of his people. He provides beyond temporal need, gives pardoned sinners more than mere deliverance, and often replaces lifelong fear of death with peace and joy. Heaven itself will exceed every report, foretaste, and expectation. Therefore believers should resist discouragement, refuse to limit God, and face future duties and difficulties with confidence in his power to do abundantly above all they ask or think.

Outline:

1. **Acknowledge God in every comfort**

- Whatever the means or instrument, God is the true source and author of every blessing.

2. **God overturns our gloomy conclusions**

- Jacob's long sorrow was contradicted when Joseph was restored to him with his children.

3. **God gives more than his people expect**

- His provision often exceeds hope in temporal circumstances and spiritual salvation.

4. **Grace can transform the fear of death**

- Believers who once trembled may receive peace, courage, and joy as eternity approaches.

5. **Hope confidently in God's future help**

- Nothing is impossible to him, and he can do far above all that we ask or imagine.

Text

When Joseph presented Manasseh and Ephraim to the dying Jacob, Jacob said: "I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed." These words reveal Jacob's piety. He recognized God as the source of his blessings: "God hath shewed me." Comforts become sanctified and sweeter when received from God's hand. Though others may live without God, we should acknowledge him in all our ways.

Let others credit their successes and pleasures to chance, influential friends, or their own effort and skill. We should give God the glory due his name. Whatever comforts us, he is the source; whatever instrument he uses, he is the author. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."

Observe Jacob's surprise: his expectations were more than fulfilled. We remember Joseph's reported loss and the blood-dipped garment. Recognizing it, Jacob said, "It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." He tore his clothes, donned sackcloth, and mourned for many days. Though his family tried to comfort him, he refused.

For years, Jacob never dreamed Joseph had survived. He lamented, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and will ye take Benjamin away? all these things are against me." But his gloomy conclusion was eventually disproved. His sons told him, "Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt." At first, Jacob fainted because he did not believe them.

When Jacob heard Joseph's words and saw the wagons sent for him, his spirit revived. Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." Joseph prepared his chariot and met his father in Goshen. He fell on Jacob's neck and wept for a long while. Israel said, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive." Joseph's sons were still to meet him and would be especially dear to Jacob. At last, Jacob embraced them with their father: "I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed."

Is this the only instance in which God not only frustrated his people's fears but surpassed their hopes? When Moses lay in the ark of bulrushes, his parents could reasonably hope only for his preservation, perhaps through someone who would care for him,

though they might never see him again. Instead, Pharaoh's daughter found and adopted him; his mother became his nurse; he was educated in Egypt's learning; and he became Israel's deliverer and leader.

David said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Yet after many narrow escapes, he was saved from his enemies, took the throne, and became "a wonder unto many." Many have experienced the same in temporal matters. Once without inheritance—even a place to set their feet—they hoped only to gain bread and clothing through humble work. Yet God gave them not merely subsistence, but sufficiency and abundance.

The same is true spiritually. The penitent recalls awakening to the horror of his condition, with nothing before him but fearful judgment and fiery indignation. Deliverance seemed almost impossible to hope for. Yet the Lord appeared to his joy—not merely sparing and pardoning him, but enriching and ennobling him, welcoming him not only into his service but into his house and heart.

This truth is most strikingly confirmed in believers' final experience. Throughout life, they were enslaved by fear of death, which embittered countless comforts. Yet as death approached, they found peace and joy and entered abundantly into the Saviour's everlasting kingdom. Some who once trembled at a falling leaf then showed heroic courage. Those reluctant to speak, especially about themselves, shouted from their beds and sang of God's righteousness. "Ah!" said Dr Goodwin, "is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend!" To die is gain.

The Queen of Sheba, accustomed to royal magnificence, declared upon seeing Solomon's glory that half had not been told her. Likewise, after hearing Scripture's promises and receiving foretastes of heaven, the believer will discover an even greater glory. Entering it, he will confess that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered the human heart what God has prepared for those who love him.

Let this dispel our doubts and lead us to say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him." Let this truth shape how we face every future duty and difficulty. We must not limit the Holy One of Israel: what is impossible for us is easy for him. His thoughts and ways surpass ours as the heavens exceed the earth,

and he can do far more than we can ask or think. God cannot fail. He loves to surprise, turning the shadow of death into morning. "At evening time," he says, "it shall be light."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 19, Morning), first published in 1854.