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A Dying Father's Witness

"And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed." — Genesis 48:1–2

Summary:

Jacob's troubled life closes in peace. His sickness reminds us to entrust the time, place, and manner of death to Christ. Joseph leaves public duties to visit him, showing that care for the sick is both compassion and spiritual instruction. He brings his sons from the court to witness a godly death and receive counsel and blessing. Parents likewise must guide children toward Scripture, prayer, and godly examples, protecting them from corruption without making religion harsh or joyless. Christian piety should be inviting while directing the young toward God.

Outline:

1. **Jacob's life ends in peace**
   - After a clouded pilgrimage, he approaches death with the calm assurance of God's sustaining grace.
2. **The manner of death belongs to God**
   - Whether death comes suddenly or through sickness, believers may leave its time, place, and manner to Christ.
3. **Visiting the sick is a sacred duty**
   - Compassion comforts the sufferer and teaches visitors seriousness, tenderness, and readiness for their own end.
4. **Joseph brings his sons to Jacob**
   - Manasseh and Ephraim leave the court to witness a godly death and receive their grandfather's counsel and blessing.
5. **Parents must guide children toward God**
   - Faithful nurture combines inviting piety with protection from corrupting books, companions, and destructive paths.

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Text

After a cloudy day, Jacob has a calm, clear evening—his final one. He must go the way of all the earth, but his end is peaceful. Some die suddenly, yet most travel to the appointed house through sickness's narrow, dark, and dismal lane. Sudden death spares the individual "the pains, the groans, the dying strife;" but sickness better serves others, giving him chances to practice the Holy Spirit's graces and show how religion sustains and comforts when every other source fails.

We cannot choose for ourselves. If we hope the Saviour will receive us, we may leave the when, where, and how to his wisdom and love. We are surprised when sickness takes people early, amid their usefulness. Yet why? Are not all our days vanity? Even fourscore years bring labour and sorrow. What, then, can we expect at one hundred and forty-seven?

Jacob had been bedridden, and Joseph had visited him, but returned when death seemed unlikely. Now his condition worsens, and Joseph is recalled. They had doubtless told another Being, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." They rightly inform Joseph, who leaves his public duties and hastens to visit him.

Visiting the sick is a duty. Even when we cannot relieve their suffering, our presence offers comfort and shows sympathy and willingness to help. Such visits benefit us, too, making the heart more serious and tender—far better than visiting a house of mirth. Infidel and worldly companions shun the dying because they do not wish to be reminded that their own condition may soon be the same.

How painful to visit someone whose illness is nearing corruption, who might say, "Thou art my father" to corruption and "Thou art my mother and my sister" to the worm. Yet more painful is seeing a dear friend, beloved relation, or revered parent succumb to age and disease.

Joseph visits his sick, dying father, who had raised him with excessive affection. Though death comes by God's appointment, not nature's order, our parents' presence seems to shield us; once they are gone, we naturally feel death's path is open and that we are next. Joseph brings his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Wisely, he leads them from courtly splendour to witness life's end: a deathbed more dignified than any palace,

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where a servant of God departs this world. They can hear their grandfather's counsel and blessing, and learn that, though born in Egypt, it is not their home. Though living among strangers, they must seek the heritage of Jacob, God's chosen.

How much wiser than parents who, instead of raising their children in the Lord's nurture and admonition, lead them into merriment and indulgence, feeding their pride and fleshly lusts.

We mourn children bereaved of their parents, yet may wish some wicked parents gone, hoping their children would then learn to bear the yoke in youth and be taken up by the Lord. The worst orphans are those whose wicked parents are still alive! What a dreadful meeting awaits children and parents who neglected their souls and taught them to stray!

Do not confine children to religious prisons or cells. Let them see and enjoy what is pleasing and instructive in nature and art. Do not keep them in a frozen world that stifles harmless growth of mind and affection. Let your piety invite, not rebuke or repel.

Parents, keep them from infidel books, vicious companions, and every path of the Destroyer. Lead them to the Bible, the Throne of Grace, the grave of friendship, and the chamber where a dying Jacob awaits God's salvation—to every place they may meet Him who says, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, Morning and Evening Exercises (January 25, Morning), first published in 1854.