

"... the years of my pilgrimage" - Week 88

After many God-guided adventures, Joseph was able to bring his elderly father Jacob and the rest of his family down into Egypt (Genesis 46).

The time came for Jacob to meet with Pharaoh himself (47.7). In response to Pharaoh's question (verse 8), here is Jacob's reply - "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years" (verse 9, AV). Jacob then speaks of the shortcomings within his life as compared with those who have gone before him - he is quite right there then! !

Jacob's age, of one hundred and thirty years, is not our main concern this time. It is entirely in keeping with the general decline in longevity of the patriarchs in the years after the Flood. This decline was due to the massive changes in the post-Flood global climate, caused by the collapse of the vapour canopy that had given the Earth greater protection from the Sun's rays than is now the case.

Rather, let us consider the lovely phrase, "the years of my pilgrimage" - a description not only of Jacob's life, but of your life and mine too.

In this life all human beings are on a journey, physically, from birth, through childhood and adulthood, to eventual physical death. This pilgrimage is obvious to one and all. But we are all also on a spiritual journey, which is less obvious, and many do not seem to realise this, or even care about it. Where are we going, and what is the way to get there?

Answers to those questions abound these days. One of the most widespread of these answers is the notion that death is simply oblivion, the end, "curtains" - so we must all make the most of life while we can, in the spirit of, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die" (Isaiah 22.13).

That notion of oblivion after physical death is as false, and as highly dangerous, as ever! - for it wholly ignores the Person, work and words of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 9.27 we are told that after physical death comes the judgement - which does not sound much like oblivion; and in Revelation 20 is the sombre scene of the final judgement, when the dead, "small and great", will stand before God (20.12). In the Gospel of John Jesus clearly informs us, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14.6). This Figure, if true, is Who the pilgrimage of each of our lives is about, whether people care to acknowledge that fact or not.

We have to say concerning Jesus, "if true", because these matters are not in the realm of proof but of likelihood - an element of belief will always be required. What we can say without hesitation is that the evidence for Jesus being true is overwhelmingly strong, and far, far stronger than is the likelihood of truth in the many rival claims around us today.

And Jesus by His resurrection confirms the statements of Scripture that physical death is not the end of the pilgrimage, for anyone. The plain fact is that our response to Jesus Christ during this stage of our lives decides where we are going to spend the next stage of our lives - that timeless state termed "eternity" that awaits each of us after physical death. This state will be spent either consciously in the glorious presence of Almighty God, or consciously not in His glorious presence. The choice is real, and the difference will be horribly stark. In the present "years of our pilgrimage" through life, are we seeking to love God and accept His Son Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, with all that that implies, or turn our backs with a "No thanks, I'll do things my way"?

If the Christian Church regained the willingness to declare these issues publicly, boldly and clearly, what a difference that could make to the still-incomplete "harvest of souls".

Meanwhile let us ensure each of us is indeed travelling on the true Christ-road of this pilgrimage. As we journey on, we support one another, while "holding forth the word of life" (Philippians 2.16) to fellow pilgrims around us, most of whom are travelling on different paths, towards a very different destination (eg John 3.16-18).

We keep in view both heaven itself, our own Christ-won final destination, as well as the need to live each day fully and thankfully, in the service of the Lord and of one another.

In this way, whether the remaining years of own particular pilgrimages turn out to be many or few, we rest assured that in Christ, and in Christ alone, all shall be well.

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