4. A time of preparation

Jez and his Dad stories were first written as 1-minute Monday-Friday thoughts for Pennine Radio

The garden in the valley stood empty. It looked untended. Already there were thorns and thistles and other weeds. From a hill far above, Jez sadly surveyed the scene.

"Ruined!" he said. "All that beauty and joy thrown away – all for selfishness."

"We had to let them walk, and they stumbled and fell," said his Dad, putting an arm on the lad's shoulder.

Jez looked up at him. "What now?" he asked. "Is there any hope of recovery?"

"Oh yes!" said his Dad. "You are their hope, though they don't know that yet. That fall has damaged their senses, and before they can recognise you again, they have a lot to learn."

"How will we teach them?"

"Through experience and by stages," said his Dad. "Through history and in all living."

"And when they *have* learned?"

"In the end," said his Dad, "we shall live with them and move among them. They shall be my people. You will bring them back, and make all things as new and fresh as they were in the beginning."

Jez sat deep in thought. Despite his Dad's promise, the loss of the people from the garden was a sad blow.

He asked, "Why do we have to wait so long before I can go and rescue them?"

"They're simply not ready for you yet, Jez," said his Dad. "The plan has stages."

"Where do we begin?"

"Well, things have begun already," said his Dad.

"You mean they've already seen that doing wrong brings harm?"

"Having to leave the garden, and weeds growing all over the place was only a start," said his Dad. "The evil they have let loose will grow far beyond themselves, until it ripples back in waves of trouble and grows to a flood."

"But we could save them!"

"Exactly!" said his Dad. "And that is just the lesson I want them to learn by experience – evil matters horribly, but even in the deepest outpourings of trouble, they can be saved if they turn to us for help."

Later, in the heavens above the valley, the first rainbow sparkled as the sun found its way through the clouds.

"Dad!", said Jez in delight, "who else would have thought of teasing colours out of light with a sprinkling of water!"

His Dad smiled. "It's a promise for the people in the valley – that God's in his heaven, even if all's not right with the world."

"Is that their next lesson?"

"Well, yes," said his Dad, "at least, it's about promises."

" So what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to choose one nation," said his Dad. "They're to be an example to all the rest, though they may need reminding of that from time to time."

"And the promise?" Jez asked.

"You'll laugh when you hear," said his Dad. "I'm going to promise to make this come true through one elderly childless couple."

"Oh, Dad!!"

"The very lesson I want our people to learn," said his Dad, "is that however laughably impossible the promises may seem to them, my word will *always* come true."

Generations passed, and the family became a nation.

Jez said, “Now we’ve got a people, chosen, down there, who know you can save them in their troubles, and who trust your promises – is it time for me to go to them?”

“No,” said his Dad. “Remember – when you go there in person, it will be to bring them back to where they belong. Before you can do that, we must get them used to the idea of being given a place called ‘home’.”

“Ah,” said Jez, “so that’s why you’ve given them a land of their own.”

“Yes,” said his Dad, “and a set of laws so they know how to live in it.”

“Those laws are really good,” said Jez. “They so perfectly point out what went wrong when they went their *own* way.”

“That’s right,” said his Dad.

“So,” Jez went on, “people should always know to be obedient to God.”

“And care for others,” added his Dad.

“And,” said Jez and his Dad together, “they should always know to turn to the Lord for help when things go wrong.”

After a while Jez went back to his favourite spot, where he could keep an eye on what was happening to the people in the valley.

He turned to his Dad. “You’ve shown them you can save them in trouble. You’ve made promises and never failed them. You’ve given them a land to live in, with laws to live by. But Dad, why are they so unhappy?”

“Remember, we’re still only preparing them,” said his Dad. “You are the hope that has yet to dawn on them.”

“Dawn on them?” said Jez. “How am I going to do that?”

“The people want a king,” said his Dad, “to unite them, and protect them, and enforce the law. You could do all that, and more. But they can’t see it clearly enough yet. So, along with the experience of having kings, I will give them the promise of a kingdom from heaven that will never end.”

“Oh,” said Jez, “you mean like up here – where perfect life eternal reigns for ever.”

“That’s it,” said his Dad. “Once they’re expecting that, *then* you can go down to them with the good news that the new kingdom is open to all who will accept *your* rule in their lives.”

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