

Reading: Genesis 49:29-50:26

Theme: Loss, care and departure.

In this passage we learn of the deaths of both Jacob and Joseph. They had dramatic lives and we have seen of Joseph's life in some detail. Last time we saw Jacob blessing Joseph's two sons; We will finish this little series by learning from the deaths of Jacob and Joseph. 4 things concerning Joseph:

1. Joseph's loss.

Realise that no matter the blessings and successes we have in life or even our standing with and service of God, we all will be faced with death - of loved ones and friends, or one day our own death. Joseph had a very pleasant, even luxurious life at this time. The hard work of the years of famine had ended, yet he was still a man of influence and power. No more hardships, no hard slog or logistic problems with food distribution - all that had ended 12 years before. Joseph had his own family, his father, his brothers and their families in Egypt too. He had wealth, popularity, access to the people in high places; some suggest he was prime minister. Even though he had, during the famine years, acquired everything for Pharaoh, yet the people were still grateful to him for saving their lives (47:25). Yet there came a time when Joseph's life was touched by the grief of loss as his father died.

Apart from the Lord Jesus, more space is given over to recounting the death and burial of Jacob than of any other person in the Bible. Jacob died believing and in hope. Jacob had expressed his hope a number of times in the previous 17 years - joyful years and precious years to them both. Yet those years came to an end - Jacob died - not fearful, or confused, but he had a clear mind, a hope of something more. We see his clarity of mind as he called his sons to him and spoke of being gathered to his people. He again gave specific details about his burial and his funeral arrangements. He viewed his death not as a leap in the dark, but as the gathering to his people/fathers. Jacob wanted to be buried with them, having a view of something

more after death - the continuity of life - he would be with Abraham and Isaac. Abraham had the hope of an eternal city not built with hands, as did Isaac and Jacob.

Jacob is specific about his burial place - it is named, many details are given to ensure the place would be correctly identified. Jacob does this so his sons would remember they should never consider Egypt as their final inheritance or resting place. Jacob did not doubt that the promises of God would be kept. With these last words of faith, he showed his view of death - he made himself comfortable in a sleeping posture and breathed his last - no terror, no fear or dread and we read of him being gathered to his people.

How will we face death? Not only our own death, but the death of our loved ones? Do we and they have a view of death that gives us hope and confidence? For many people death is a leap into the great unknown, saying "*When we're dead we are dead and that's it!*" (that is their hope.) Others are not so sure, for in us all there is an awareness that there is more. Many have stood by a graveside, attended a funeral and questioned "*Is there more to life than this?*" The Bible tells us eternity is set in our hearts, is before us and we enter into eternity when life ends. The Bible tells us of 2 places where we will spend eternity; one is heaven - a stunningly wonderful, amazing place of joy, peace and comfort; the other is hell - an unimaginably terrifying and awful place - to be avoided at all costs because of its eternal horror and suffering.

Jacob had a hope of something more after his death - an eternal hope. We don't know how clear a view he had, but it was there and even that obscure view of eternal life enabled him to face death with hope and confidence. As we go through the OT and into the NT, the knowledge of that eternal life becomes clearer and clearer. In the Lord Jesus Christ, we have heaven offered freely to whosoever will believe on Him as their Saviour. There is only one way to get eternal life there - by believing on Jesus as our own Saviour.

2. Joseph's responsibilities.

When we have secured our eternal destiny through trusting the Lord Jesus, we can then be practical in our approach to death - make our wills, leave clear, written instructions regarding our funeral; letting our wishes be known to family (*& where to find them!*), so in their grief and loss they will not wonder what we would want. Jacob left his sons in no doubt - Joseph had been given his instructions and had promised to fulfil them (47:28-31).

Joseph with all his power etc. could not prevent his father's death. Joseph felt his loss, as did all the brothers and family. In 50:1 we again see Joseph's tears - no doubt the other brothers wept also. Why is Joseph singled out here? Yes, as the main character, but it shows us the fulfilment of God's promise to Jacob 17 years previously - that his son Joseph would "*put his hand on your eyes*" (46:4). Joseph now fulfils his responsibilities to organise his father's embalming, his mummification - it was a long and expensive process taking up to 70 days. Joseph, did not use the professional embalmers who used pagan religious rites, but physicians who were able to do the task. They took 40 days for Jacob's body to be preserved from decomposing during this time and allowing them to journey back to Canaan to his burial site.

There was national mourning for Jacob - of 70 days, which historians, archaeologists tell us is 2 days short of the mourning for a pharaoh. Jacob was greatly honoured – reflecting the honour and esteem Joseph was held in. It is amazing that a world superpower paused and mourned over Jacob, a wandering nomad from Canaan! Occasionally in our nation's history, a non-royal, a commoner has been granted the honour of a state funeral - Winston Churchill: his body lay in state for 3 days as people filed past to pay their last respects to Britain's great wartime leader.

After such national grief, it could be expected Jacob would be laid in a great tomb in Egypt, but Joseph had a promise to fulfil. He asked permission from Pharaoh, to allow the burial to take place in Canaan; doing so through his connections at court - because someone in mourning was considered unclean and could not approach the king. Joseph, and no doubt Pharaoh, knew this journey to his homeland would give him an opportunity to "*defect*", so in his request he gives the assurance "*then I will return*" (v5).

Great emphasis is put on the funeral procession from Egypt to Canaan. Many went up to bury Joseph's father - royal officers of Pharaoh, elders of the land of Egypt, Joseph's family, his brothers and members of Jacob's household. Only children stayed in Goshen with those caring for the flocks. They went up, stopped and mourned a further 7 days - an unusual sight for the Canaanites and it impressed them and they named it Abel Mizraim - *the mourning of the Egyptians*. Possibly the Egyptians delegation stayed there while the sons of Jacob buried him in the grave in the field of Machpelah.

Joseph fulfilled his duties to his father, then fulfilled his duties to Pharaoh and Egypt - he returned back there, along with his brothers and all who had gone with him. Joseph was faithful to his father in both life and death, was faithful to his king and adopted country too. Joseph, along with his brothers, suffered a great loss. He had taken the burden of fulfilling the wishes of his father, then back in Egypt there is more sorrow for him and in it we see:

3. Joseph's compassion.

On return to Egypt, his brothers feared he'd take revenge on them now their father was out of the way. They invent words to say to Joseph as if from Jacob (v15-17). It is strange to think they were now some 40 years plus from selling Joseph as a slave. Yet the brothers were still bothered by what they had done. Guilt is an awful thing and can haunt us until the day we die. The brothers were judging Joseph as **they** would have behaved and reacted! They suspected him

of being vengeful and just biding his time. Joseph was not an angry, or vengeful man. He had learned much in his years of suffering and had truly, totally forgiven them and he loved them. In fact, it grieved him to hear such words and are told that again “*he wept*”.

The brothers (v18) came and bowed before Joseph, offered to be his slaves. Thankfully Joseph’s love, forgiveness and compassion were shown to them. It is remarkable he could do so when we remember all they had done, who he was and he had no fear of hurting Jacob. He was in the position of power and could easily have taken revenge. Yet God had worked in his life, had changed him to a man who could totally forgive, for he could totally love! In a sense the brothers were accusing Joseph of being a hypocrite for the past 17 years, but he said that even though they intended to harm him - not minimising the seriousness of what they did, he pointed them and himself to God – God intended it for good, for the saving of many lives. By God’s grace Joseph assured his brothers he really had forgiven them - so accept and enjoy it.

The good news of the gospel tells us: God freely forgives us totally; we can be brand-new and clean. Yet many people cannot take in that God offers us a total and utter forgiveness from all our sin and offences against Him. Sadly, we can refuse to forgive ourselves even when we have trusted the Lord Jesus and are assured, by God’s promises, that it is the case. We have looked at the proofs of total forgiveness before, but here it is illustrated, highlighted again:

A. Total forgiveness doesn't want the forgiven ones to fear (v19a) - no snide remarks and knowing looks, no making them feel uneasy in our company.

B. No taking advantage of a superior position - Joseph asked “*Am I in the place of God?*” He did not use his official position, but he, their brother forgave them and didn't want them to respect his position, but to respect **him**.

C. He showed them it was for good – they and we are to see God can even overrule our times of bitterness, mistrust, imagined wrong or real wrong, and do so for good. God sent Joseph to preserve life; to give the family a home, to allow them to develop as a nation.

D. Forgiveness is continued and demonstrated in practical ways - here was Joseph providing for them and their little ones. He kept doing them good.

In the Lord Jesus Christ, we have total forgiveness offered to us. God no longer wants us to have a cringing fear at the prospect of meeting Him; He does not want us merely to admire Him, but to love Him; He wants us to see He works all things together for good – even in our lives and situations; He wants us to recognise His care and provision for us. Yet He wants us who have His total forgiveness, to totally forgive others who have grieved and hurt us in any way. Seeing that, we realise we need His help to do so.

Joseph's compassion was shown throughout the next (30+7+3+17=57) 53 years as he, his brothers and their families lived in Egypt. Eventually a time came when he retired, but in the closing verses of this chapter we see:

4. Joseph's death.

This sermon seems to be about death. Sorry about that! That may disturb or distress, even frighten us, but it was not my aim, but I do aim to challenge us regarding our hope of eternal life, of a home in heaven. Here in these verses, we see Joseph was like us - we all have to die. He had great prosperity, great family life, had the joy of seeing his great, great grandchildren (v23); had great honour in Egypt even then, but he was dying - as all of us have to. All his wealth, power and influence could not prevent it.

During the last few verses of Genesis, we read Joseph's last will and testament. He knew he was dying - didn't dismiss the evidence so plain to those around him; also, he was not afraid to die for he, since

a young man, had had a trust and confidence in God that kept his heart and mind at ease and did so even now on the brink of the unknown experience of his own death. His thoughts were not concerned with his own fears, or regret, so he spoke of the future. He looked forward to the fulfilment of God's word to the people of Israel - they would be restored back to Canaan, to the Promised Land and he gave a command regarding his mortal remains that they too should be taken with them when they left and be buried there in Canaan.

Joseph knew that God's word would be fulfilled and he looked forward to such. Death to him, as to Jacob, was to be a gathering to his fathers. He had a sure hope and he also wanted his bones buried in the Promised Land. An act of faith - as the writer to the Hebrews tells us (11:22) *"By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones."*

What of us? Do we look to God's promises and say *"Yes that will happen"*? God's word says *"it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"* (Hebrews 9:27). Have we realised God said this and it is true of us? How does it affect us? It's a solemn thought and yet God's word goes on to say in the next verse *"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."* All who believe in – look to and for - the Lord Jesus as their Saviour will have everlasting life. It should excite and move us! He is the Saviour who will be with us not only in life, but in death; also He will welcome us home to heaven and deliver us from the judgement to come.

Even if our bodies die, yet our souls will be alive for ever. One day, our resurrection bodies will be joined with our souls and we, in our new bodies, will enjoy the delights of the new heaven and a new earth. What a glorious prospect! If we do not trust the Lord Jesus,

the Lord Jesus Himself, tells us there is an agonising eternal hell waiting. So instead of fullness of life in heaven, we will know eternal punishment both of which God has provided.

The book of Genesis opens with human beings in the Garden of Eden enjoying the fullness of life God had provided; they sinned and part of the punishment on sin was death. Genesis ends with a coffin in Egypt. Yet that coffin - a symbol of death also spoke of life and hope because it was held onto by the Israelites in Egypt and pointed them on to the time of liberation when they would go to the Promised Land. The word translated coffin is the same word for used for an ark e.g. the Ark of the Covenant - and these two 'arks' both went into the Promised Land - one the sign of God's covenant with his people at Sinai and the other was a sign of His covenant with Abraham concerning the land. God was still encouraging His people then. He still encourages us, even when we go through difficult situations. The Israelites knew many hardships and called to their God who heard in heaven, answered their prayers and delivered them from the slavery of Egypt, but that is leaping 400 years ahead - maybe the turn of a page in our Bibles.

My prayer is that God will be with us all and we would know and own His faithfulness to us in all the situations of life we go through and then one day He will receive us and welcome as to the true Canaan – Heaven itself.