

The Final Lesson

Genesis 49:29 - 50:26

I plan to preach one more sermon on Genesis, focusing on verses 19-21 in order to tie together the whole, broad message of this great book, but in terms of working through each chapter in expository preaching, we reach the end of the book this morning, 50 chapters. We began this study two years ago this month, beginning with those familiar words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” We have studied, among other things, the creation of the world, man’s fall into sin, the children of Adam, Noah and the flood, the Tower of Babel, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, plus Jacob’s wives and his twelve sons including Joseph.

But most of all, we’ve studied God’s covenant and his faithfulness to his own covenant promises. And as we end the narrative of this book with the deaths of Jacob and then Joseph, what I want to stress today as the final lesson from the lives of these great patriarchs is their demonstration of faithfulness. The exhortation found in the book of Revelation spoken, “to the angel of the church in Smyrna” are very appropriate as a conclusion to our study of Genesis.

Rev. 2:8 “These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Ultimately, that’s our calling as God’s people. “Be faithful, until death.” In Jacob’s case, it was a natural death, unlike the

persecution and martyrdom suggested by those words to the church in Smyrna. Jacob would die at the rich old age of 147.

49:33 “And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.”

Broadly speaking, I call that confidence, and example to us that we can,

I. APPROACH DEATH WITH CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

So how was his confidence made evident? First,

A. Jacob faced death with confidence in God’s covenant promises.

Jacob knew those promises, and he believed them. Those promises focused upon the land of Canaan, the promised land. Like his fathers, Jacob would make sure that he would be buried in that land.

49:29 “Then he charged them and said to them: “I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. 32 The field and the cave that is there were purchased from the sons of Heth.”

Now, to repeat what I said a couple weeks ago, in one sense that wasn’t necessary. For God could raise up Jacob’s body from an Egyptian grave just as easily as from a grave in Canaan. By faith, the promise was his regardless of where his physical flesh and bones might decay and return to the dust.

But it did matter, because the covenant promise of the land was for him and for his descendants, and to claim that promise, to express his belief in the truthfulness of that promise, he wished for his sons to bury him in that land. Knowing that he wouldn't inherit the land during his lifetime, looking forward to a heavenly city whose builder and architect was God, still, by faith, he made sure that his own burial reflected his confidence in the truthfulness of God's word and God's faithfulness to keep his promise.

But there is another aspect of Jacob's faith here, another way in which he remains faithful unto death. And that is this:

B. Jacob faced death with the hope of the resurrection.

Notice what it says in,

v.29 "I am to be gathered to my people..."

Then also, as Moses records it in,

v.33 "[H]e drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people."

Jacob regards his people as still existing, still alive, even though they had died. He saw his own death as the opportunity to be gathered to his people, the chance to join his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Jacob obviously didn't view death as the final end of mankind. He would not cease to exist. Instead, in a very real way, he would continue to live. Along with his people! He would join them who had already died, but who where, therefore, still alive.

Now, the only way to explain that is to say that Jacob believed in life after death. We found the same faith in Abraham.

Gen. 25:7 "This is the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years. 8 Then

Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people."

And Isaac,

Gen.35:28 "Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. 29 So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him."

That OT faith in the resurrection is also described by the words of,

Hebr. 11:13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

So, for all his youthful scheming, the legacy of Jacob is one of faithfulness. Unto death. That is a worthy goal for all of us to this day, striving to live out our lives and approach death with the ability to say,

2Tim. 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Next, next look at Joseph's brothers. What is the final lesson of Joseph's brothers? To put it in plain and easy to understand language, the lesson is simply,

II. REPENT OF YOUR SIN.

As I've noted, there are few actual confessions of sin in this book of Genesis. There is a lot of sin, and many examples the evidence of repentance in the changed hearts and lives. But few actual confessions. Few actual expressions of repentance. But in this chapter we find a very clear and explicit one. I have identified four elements of true confession and genuine repentance, all demonstrated by Joseph's brothers. Remember, their sin was horrible. They had sold Joseph into slavery. They had been led their father to believe that he was dead. And they lived with their lie for years and years.

So what is the first element of their repentance?

v.15

That was a legitimate question for them to ask, because they recognized their guilt. They recognized that Joseph had a legitimate right to inflict justice, to "actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." The point is, if you are to genuinely repent, you must,

A. Admit that you deserve justice.

They recognize that they deserve justice. Their sins deserve retribution. It is easy to make the comparison to David's great confession of sin found in Psalm 51, for David also understood that he deserved justice.

Ps. 51:4 "Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge."

Repentance is saying to God, "You are right when you condemn me. You are justified when you judge me." Don't let the doctrines of God's grace remove that sense of God's justice. Don't let the promise of grace remove the sense of the

appropriateness of his justice. For it is just that understanding of God's justice that enables you to understand what grace is all about. Grace is emptied of its meaning unless you first realize that what you deserve is justice and condemnation.

Joseph's brothers understood their guilt. They understood the just consequences they rightly deserved for their own sins. Along with that, they show us also that you must,

B. Admit that you have broken God's law.

They see their sin as a violation of God's revealed law. Notice how they describe their sin.

v.17 "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you. Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father."

They we in verse 17 of "trespass" and then "sin." The word in Hebrew for trespass means transgression, or perhaps even more strongly and accurately, rebellion. Rebellion against God's law and covenant. Rebellion against God's authority to issue laws. Rebellion against the submission to God to which we are called.

The second word translated "sin" means to defiantly stand in opposition to God, claiming independence from his sovereign and loving authority over us as a lawgiver. David confessed his sin in very similar ways.

Ps. 51:3 "For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. 4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight."

You see, sin is defined by God. Sin is an offense against God. Sin is a violation of God's law. Any failure to conform to the fullness of what the law requires, and any transgression of what the law forbids. And that is what is what you and I do every time

we sin. You need to look at sin in that way. There are no little sins, no sins easily overlooked. Every sin is a transgression of his holy will, and an act of rebellion in the eyes of God.

The word for sin means to fall short. To miss the mark. To fail to measure up to an absolute standard or law. When you sin, you fall short of God's standard. You fail to measure up. And everyone of us fails to measure up to God's standards. Everyone of us rebels against his authority, every time we sin. As we read in Paul's letter to the Romans,

Rom.3:23 "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Until you admit that and understand that, you can't really understand the very next verse in Romans 3, the very message of the gospel.

Rom.3:24 "...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Repentance means first of all admitting that you deserve justice, then admitting that you have broken God's law. And then pleading for forgiveness! Joseph's brothers show us that you must,

C. Plead for forgiveness with no rationalizing excuses.

Again, David's example. Psalm 51 is filled with such pleading. The Psalm begins,

Ps. 51:1 "Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions."

No excuses. Just pleading for mercy. Pleading for forgiveness.

Ps. 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse

me from my sin."

Joseph's brothers follow that example.
v.16-17

Now, there is some question among the commentators as to whether Jacob actually gave that instruction to the brothers at all, or whether they just made it up for their own benefit. The reason suggested for thinking they made it up is because we don't have a record of it. Nowhere does the Bible say that Jacob gave such instructions to the brothers. But if they did make it up, it would really call into question their whole confession, for true repentance is not manipulative nor can it possibly be offered in the context of lying. And since this extended passage seems to show genuine remorse, I have to believe that it was not made up, that Jacob did actually give this advice, and that the brothers are merely repeating to Joseph what their father had said.

Jacob would be then pleading on behalf of the eleven sons, pleading with them for forgiveness. Notice how the brothers express themselves.

v.17 "Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father."

Notice a couple obvious things. Notice the words, "Please forgive the trespass..."

Every true confession must have those words, or words very close. "Please forgive the sins." Not simply, "I'm sorry." But, "Please forgive." Not simply, "I apologize," but "please forgive." There is all the difference in the world between those two things. "I'm sorry" doesn't require any response. And it surely doesn't specify what response you are asking for.

But the words, “Please forgive” require a response. Either “yes” or “no.” And when offense has been committed, that is what is so necessary for reconciliation to take place, among men and between man and God. When confessing sin, we must plead for forgiveness. We must ask for it specifically.

And notice what the brothers don’t say. They don’t offer any excuses, no rationalizations. They don’t add the word “but” and continue on. As soon as you add the word “but” to a confession of sin, it is no longer a confession of sin. It is simply an explanation of why you did what you did. And if you are trying to explain what you did and rationalize it, then you are not repenting of sin!

Don’t ever say, “I’m sorry, but...” Or, “I apologize, but...” Or even, “Please forgive me, but...” Just stop where Joseph’s brothers stopped.

v.17 “Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” Period.

That is, actually, very difficult for most of us to do. It’s not too hard to say, “I’m sorry,” but it’s very hard to say, “I was wrong. Please forgive me my sins.” Likewise, it’s very hard to say, “Please forgive me” without adding anything afterward. Try it. You’ll see how difficult it is. So devious is Satan, that he even wants to keep us from every truly repenting of our sins.

But there is one more thing that the brothers do. One more aspect of repentance. And this, more than any other, proves to me the sincerity of the brothers request and proves to me, therefore, that they haven’t lied about the instructions Jacob gave. When they confess their sins to Joseph, they offer restitution!

v.18

I find that to be a legitimate offer. They would do whatever Joseph wanted for the rest of their lives. They would, in effect, offer themselves to him as slaves. After all, they had sold him into slavery. That was a legitimate offer to make, a just offer of appropriate restitution.

So, to express genuine repentance, you must,

D. Offer appropriate restitution.

You can’t just say I’m sorry. You can’t even say, “Please forgive me.” You need to offer to make it right.

Now, that offer might be declined, as it was by Joseph. The victim of sin might forgive the sin and cancel any obligation of restitution. That is a praiseworthy thing to do. But the one offering the confession cannot presume upon the grace of the one offended. You must offer appropriate restitution, for sin, by definition, implies that you incur a debt, an obligation. Indeed, one of the common words for sin in the NT is the word “debt.”

In the realm of the civil government, when inflicting punishment for civil crimes, that restitution ought to be enforced. That’s how the principles of biblical justice work. And it isn’t a debt to society, as we speak of it today, but a debt to the one harmed. On a personal level, you ought to offer to undo whatever damage has been done, if that is at all possible. If you cause harm, then you should make it right. That’s not a very hard principle to understand, is it?

Next time we’ll look more closely at Joseph’s response, and because it is so startling, and so significant, I wanted to devote an entire sermon to it. But today we will look at the remaining verses, and identify the final lesson of Joseph. As a point in my outline, I’ll define that lesson the same way as I did for Jacob.

III. BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

I believe that's why these deaths and burials are described for us in such detail. Because faithfulness is to be our lifelong ambition. Faithfulness unto death is the objective, the goal of life.

And surely Joseph was. Thus, we read the account of his death.

v.22-26

Let me describe three ways that Joseph was faithful to God right up until he took his last breath. First,

A. Joseph lovingly obeyed his father's instructions even after his death.

Actually, that's what the bulk of this chapter is all about. Joseph honored his father's request. He did what he had promised to do. He made certain that Jacob would be buried in the promised land of Canaan. And actually his brothers joined him in this.

It is quite an elaborate description.

v.1-13

Secondly, I'll mention briefly as an introduction to the next sermon, that,

B. Joseph was gracious to his brothers.

It was a good thing for his brothers to confess their sin and offer themselves as slaves. And it was a good thing for Joseph to forgive them graciously. Notice Joseph's response.

v.17

He wept. No explanation of his tears, but obviously he was deeply moved by what his brothers were offering. For his part,

forgiveness had already been granted, but the genuine repentance which his brother showed him moved him to tears. Surely full reconciliation was accomplished, and those tears must have therefore been tears of joy also.

He is so gracious to them, so tenderhearted. So loving. So warm and compassionate. And so thoroughly convinced of God's good sovereign pleasure being accomplished in everything that had happened.

v.19-21

He reassured them. He comforted them. He spoke kindly to them, literally, he spoke to their heart. This was a deep, deep experience of the heart. This is human relationships at their best. Full reconciliation and restoration. And mutual love. A willingness to show grace, a willingness to be gracious, in response to genuine repentance.

Joseph would never hold it against his brothers what they had done to him. He would never gloat over them nor exalt himself over them. He would be their servant. He would provide for them, and be kind to them. And he had plenty of time to do it, for the chronology of years reveals that Joseph lived another 54 years, finally dying at the age of 110.

v.26

Let me end with one more way in which Joseph was faithful unto death. One more way in which his faith was firm as he faced death.

v.24-25

Joseph would be embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt. But he, like his fathers before him, believed God's promise of the land, and he, too, would be brought back to that land. But there is

something even deeper about Josephs understanding of God's promise in,

v.24

He encouraged his brothers with the sure and certain hope that they would be taken up out of Egypt and into the promise land. And that sure and certain hope was based upon his faith that "God will surely visit you."

God did visit his people, and means he came to be their help, to be their deliverance. The exodus was certainly a visitation of God. But it was but a foreshadowing of a far greater visitation, the visitation of God in the flesh. The incarnation of the second person of the trinity. The great visitation of God to his people was, in fact, the coming of Jesus Christ.

So Joseph was actually prophesying the coming of Jesus Christ. In that sense of believing that God would bring a visitation to his people,

C. Joseph understood the true hope of the gospel.

This same language of visitation is used by Zechariah, when his son John was born.

Luke 1:67 "Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: 68 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, 71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and

righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

Continuing,

Luke 1:76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

The great visitation of God was the first coming of Jesus Christ. And even further, the second coming of Jesus Christ is also referred to as a visitation. Surely the very hope of the gospel is that God will visit his people. He will come to our aid, bringing salvation, which he has done in Jesus Christ and which he will finish when Jesus returns.

And so, from the beginning of Genesis to the very end, we see Jesus. We see the people of God expressing their faith in him who would come from God as their savior. And with that faith, Joseph remained faithful unto death. May that worthy example be our great encouragement, that you and I could join in the chorus of those words spoken by the Apostle Paul,

2Tim. 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."