

Genesis 49:28-50:26 — Living and Dying by Faith

January 15, 2017

Good morning. Welcome to a special day in the life of CrossWinds. This morning we finish our study of the book of Genesis. I know some of you feel a sense of relief, almost like crossing the finish line of a 10K. Genesis is a big book. The reason we studied it is because it is the most important book in the Bible to understand the rest of the Bible. When we read about creation, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the rest of the Bible, we have to know their back stories from Genesis.

The big question is, “What are we doing after Genesis?”

Next week, I am taking a break. Pastor Stephen will teach on both campuses. The week after that we launch into 1 Timothy for a series titled, “What is the Church?” The series will last approximately 12 weeks.

Before we jump into the final chapter of Genesis, let me set the stage by reviewing what we learned last week.

In Genesis 49, Jacob was about to die. He called his 12 sons to his bedside to give each of them their final blessing before he breathed his last. Some of the blessings he gave were encouraging; others were harsh. He used his final words to rebuke his rebellious sons Reuben, Simeon and Levi. He just lit them up and took away their inheritances. Judah was his fourth son. His life was on the same track as his rebellious older brothers. When he hit the bottom of life he changed. He repented. In humility he sought God’s grace and moved home. Instead of taking advantage of his brothers he was willing to sacrifice his life for

his brothers. He went through a total change of heart through the grace of God in his life. He went from a broken life to a beautiful life. By God's grace he became a leader in the family, and it was through the bloodline of Judah, that Jesus, our savior, was born. Judah was a man who received God's grace, and Jesus was God's son who came to bring us grace.

That was last week. This week as we pick up the story, Jacob just finished blessing his sons.

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. Then he commanded 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, in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah—the field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites." When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people. Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days. Genesis 49:28–50:3 (ESV)

More space is given to the death of Jacob in the Bible than any other person except Jesus. This means he was a significant man.

The one thing Jacob insisted on was his sons not burying him in Egypt. He wanted to be buried in the land of Canaan in the same cave his grandfather Abraham was buried. He wanted to be buried where his father and mother were buried. He wanted to be buried where one of his wives named Leah was buried. Jacob wanted to be buried in the family graveyard in the Promised Land. After he was sure his sons understood these final instructions, he pulled his feet into bed,

breathed his last and died. He was apparently very aware that he was on death's door. It doesn't tell us there was much suffering. The switch just turned off. "Good night guys. I will see you in heaven. Game over."

There are a few things I want us to notice in Jacob's death.

First, we should notice that while his body died, his spirit continued to live on because twice it says he was gathered to his people while he body was embalmed. In Genesis, we find that when we die, while our bodies go in the ground, the spirit of those who know God through Christ go home to be with Christ. Jacob was a Christian in the Old Testament sense because he was looking forward to Jesus. We look back upon Jesus. We are New Testament Christians. The Bible tells us that right now Jacob is very much alive and with Jesus. Look what Jesus said about Jacob.

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." Matthew 22:31–32 (ESV)

Jacob's body died but his spirit continues to live in the presence of God until the resurrection. When Christ returns and resurrects our bodies, Jacob's spirit will be reunited with his body at that time. Until then, Jacob the person is alive today with Jesus. The point is everyone is alive after death. If you are trusting in Jesus we are brought home to God's presence through the grace of Jesus. If we someone dies apart from trusting in Jesus the Bible is clear they are in torment because they are separated from God and his goodness because of their sins. It is clear that death is not the end of life. It is only the temporary end of our bodies. We continue to live.

The second thing I want us to notice is how Joseph responded to his father's death. Joseph cried at the loss of his father. Even though his father was 147, he lived a good life and was going home to be with God, Joseph cried.

At Christian funerals there usually isn't enough crying. At Christian funerals we latch onto Paul's words, which are good and true, when he said that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, which is better by far and we celebrate our loved one going home to be with Jesus. We should celebrate the victory of Christ over death but the problem is our loved one died! Death is an enemy! We should cry! Joseph cried at the death of his father even though Jacob lived a full and blessed life. Jesus also cried at the death of Lazarus even though he knew he would raise him from the dead. If Joseph cried in the face of the death and Jesus cried in the face of death, when we go to a funeral, even though we have victory in the face of death through Jesus, it is appropriate to cry.

The third thing we should notice is that Joseph had his father mummified. Incidentally, I am not suggesting we started mummifying our dead relatives and keeping them in the living room for a topic of conversation. In Egypt, mummification was a long and expensive process. It took 28 to 70 days. It was usually done by pagan priests who performed it as part of their false view of the afterlife. Joseph didn't believe in the false Egyptian religion and the practice of pagan priests so he didn't use pagan priests for the mummification. He used physicians. The simple point is Joseph treated his father's body with great respect trying to keep it as intact as possible.

When a believer dies, it is appropriate for us to treat his or her body with honor and respect because that same body will one day come back from the dead. That is what Joseph did for his father by mummifying him. He was treating his father's remains respectfully.

In the Bible, cremation was never practiced. The only time I found cremation in the Bible was when Daniel's three friends were thrown in the fiery furnace. The problem is it didn't work. The consistent biblical witness is burial is practiced, never cremation. Does this mean that a cremated body will not rise from the dead? Of course not. God can raise a body from the dead in any state of decomposition. The problem is the burning of a body symbolizes hell, while the burial of a body symbolizes sleeping in the dust of the earth while waiting for the resurrection. Burial symbolizes that the body remains at a specific place while cremation and the scattering of ashes removes all remains of a body. The gravesite of your dead relatives can be visited as you see the patch of earth where they lie waiting the return of Christ but that doesn't happen with cremation.

In summary, not only was Jacob confident his body would rise from the dead but he was confident his ancestors would one day possess the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. God would be faithful to his word. In Genesis 23 Abraham bought a burial plot in the Promised Land in faith that God would one day give his ancestors that land so that is where his remains belonged. The same was true for Isaac and then for Jacob. They all died in faith believing God would keep his word and give their ancestors the Promised Land.

We now move from the death of Jacob to his funeral.

And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die: in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me.'" Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return.' " And Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear." So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company. When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and grievous lamentation, and he made a mourning for his father seven days. When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan. Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them, for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father. Genesis 50:4–14 (ESV)

Apparently Joseph needed permission to bury his father outside of Egypt. Pharaoh gave him permission to bury Jacob in the land of Canaan. What followed was a state funeral. We see that all of Egypt mourned for Jacob 70 days. That is only two days short of the number of days for national mourning of the death of a Pharaoh. After the lengthy period of mourning, everybody who was somebody in Egypt attended the funeral and made the trek to the grave in the Promised Land. All of the sons of Jacob made the journey. The only people left behind in their homes were the animals and the kids. Apparently this was the original set up for the "Home Alone" movie. The kids were home alone while the parents went on a trip. Not only did everybody who was somebody in Egypt attend the funeral but there was a full military escort for the funeral. When they came to the threshing floor at Atad, they stopped and mourned for another seven

days. Most likely what happened was the great company of the Egyptians stayed mourning at the threshing floor of Atad while Joseph and his brothers made the final miles of the trip to the family graveyard. These are interesting details but what in these details could possibly do us spiritual good?

I wanted to find a good map to show this to you but I couldn't. If the funeral procession ended up at the threshing floor of Atad beyond the Jordan, this means they took an indirect, circuitous route around the bottom of the Dead Sea and up the east side of the Jordan River to end up in the Promised Land. Why did they take this longer route to the Promised Land? While we don't know why they took it, we do know that approximately 400 years later, when God led the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land, the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night led them on the exact same indirect route to the Promised Land.

Put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite coming out of Egypt in the Exodus. Can you imagine scratching your head wondering what God was going when he led you out of Egypt but then made a hard right turn into the wilderness instead of directly into the Promised Land? As you pondered God's loss of direction, somebody in the group connected the dots. Suddenly you realized you were following the same route as the funeral procession of Jacob approximately 400 years before.

If you were an Israelite in Egypt for the last few decades you were oppressed. Your back felt the crack of your slavemaster's whip. The sons born into your house were thrown into the Nile River to drown. You were calling out to God but feeling like your prayers were making it no higher than the sand you

stood upon. For that brief moment, God pulled back the curtain on his master plan and you could see God had it all under control. God knew what he was doing and things were happening according to his master plan. He knew what life was like in Egypt and now was the time for him to come to the rescue.

I find this incredibly encouraging. Just like the ancient Israelites suffered under a pharaoh that wanted to kill them, there will be plenty of times when we are suffering and wondering if God has forgotten us. In the same way, from time to time God encourages us by pulling back the curtain and letting us see how our suffering and rescue are part of his master plan coming together. It is those times when God pulls back the curtain and we can see what he is doing that carry us through the tough times when we have no idea what God is up to.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." ' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Genesis 50:15–21 (ESV)

Now we switch from what it means to die in faith to what it means to live in faith. After the death of Jacob, the brothers were terror stricken. They were filled with guilt. They thought that now that Jacob was out of the picture, Joseph would take the opportunity to get even. They made up a lie from their father asking for forgiveness. The brothers came before Joseph and offered to be his slave because they had sold him into slavery. This move of desperation was not based

on anything Joseph did to make them feel insecure. It was because they couldn't believe they were forgiven. They couldn't believe Joseph didn't harbor deep-seated resentment.

Aren't we just like these brothers? We look at our own sin and while we are completely forgiven by Jesus, we struggle to forgive ourselves. We struggle to believe we are truly forgiven. For 17 years Joseph loved and cared for his brothers and their families but they still struggled to believe they were forgiven. What else could Joseph have done to help them believe his word?

In the same way, when we struggle to believe we are forgiven, God the Father says, "What more can I do? I gave you my own son to pay for your sin in full. What more could I do to help you believe you are forgiven?" How much more clearly could God say he loves us and forgives us other than with his crucified son.

The million dollar question is how could Joseph forgive them? How could Joseph put all the hurt and betrayal behind him? If you have been alive for a while, you have those people in your life that have wounded you deeply. You will never trust them again. You will never believe them again. The things they did to you were painful beyond your imagination. Maybe it is your spouse in your marriage that has hurt you beyond repair; maybe it is your best friend in church who stabbed you in the back; maybe it is a cutthroat boss at work that heartlessly threw you on the street devastating your family. Jacob taught us how to die by faith; now Joseph will show us what it means to live by faith.

How do we forgive those that hurt us?

1. Trust judgment into God's hands.

But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?” Genesis 50:19 (ESV)

Joseph was one of the most powerful people on the planet. He could have easily played the role of God in their lives and brought vengeance. He had enough power to do to them anything he wanted. He had learned that when it comes to righting personal wrongs, we are to leave vengeance in God's hands, not take it into our own.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” Romans 12:19 (ESV)

God tells us to never, never, never avenge ourselves. Leave it in God's hands. He will take care of it. He is perfectly capable of dishing out justice. He will do a much better job of it than we ever could.

There are also common sense reasons why we leave justice to God.

1. **We don't know the whole story.** God knows the whole story. He knows the extenuating circumstances in people's lives that we will never know. He knows what people meant in their hearts, not just what they said with their lips. How many times has someone done something hurtful to you and you later find out he or she was facing a terrible tragedy that day that you knew nothing about. Sometimes, when we find out the rest of the story, our anger turns to empathy. God always knows the backstory we do not know.
2. **God's justice is always the perfect response.** He never punishes too harshly or too softly. He is always fair when it comes to administering justice.

When we administer justice, how often does the person upon which we seek revenge respond by saying, “Now we are even.” People never say that. They always feel we overdid our revenge and they escalate the response.

Is there a place for courts? Yes. Is there a place for earthly justice? Of course. When it comes to personal justice, we are not to seek personal vengeance. We leave that in God’s hands because God will do a better and a fairer job of dishing out justice than we ever will.

For some of you, this is hard right now. You were hurt deeply. Everything inside of you tells you to get even. You lay in bed dreaming of vengeance. Don’t go there. Leave it in God’s hands.

2. Trust in God’s sovereignty to bring good out of evil.

Genesis 50:20 is one of the most famous verses in Genesis. It emphasizes one of the key messages of the entire book. God can achieve his good purposes in spite of human sinfulness. While sin is real and God hates sin, sin is not big enough to thwart God and his good purposes. God is able to achieve his good purposes for us in spite of the sin done against us. The sin of Joseph’s brothers sent him to Egypt as a slave, but God used it as part of his plan to save millions of people. The sin of Mrs. Potiphar falsely accusing him of rape which landed him in a dungeon was used by God to cross Joseph’s path with Pharaoh’s cupbearer and set Joseph up to become second-in-command of Egypt in one day.

This means we need to see God’s good hand working not just in the good circumstances of life but in the difficult and painful circumstances of life. Sin

cannot thwart God's good plans for you and for me as his children. Even when life is falling apart, God will still do something good for our lives and for his glory through all of it.

The best example of this is Jesus. He was falsely accused. He was scourged. He was crucified. He died on a cross accused of evil he did not commit. He endured the greatest injustice the world has ever experienced. The amazing part in this is all the evil done against Jesus did not thwart God's plan for his son but it was used as part of God's plan to save us from our sin and to conquer Satan, sin and death.

I don't know what difficulty or trial you are facing today. If you are a Christian, you need to know that even though you may be at the bottom of your rope, none of the evil done against you is capable of thwarting God's good plans for you as his beloved son or daughter. That doesn't mean life will be easy. It doesn't mean life will be trouble free. It means God has a good plan for your life and the sin of others cannot ruin what God is doing. God will incorporate all the sin done against you and use it for his glory and good purposes.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 (ESV)

Romans 8:28 is the New Testament restatement of Genesis 50:20.

Another verse I love is Romans 8:31-32.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:31–32 (ESV)

If God gave us his own son, we can be confident that he has a good plan for us, even if it involves suffering, just like God had a good plan for Joseph that

involved suffering, just like God had a good plan for his own son that involved suffering. He has a good plan for us and sometimes it involves suffering.

If God took the evil done against Joseph and used it to save millions of lives, and if God took the evil done against his son and transformed it into the saving of billions of lives for all eternity, he is certainly capable of taking the evil done against us and transforming it into something good and much better than we can imagine.

If you truly believe this, it will change your life. It is the only way you can move on after people hurt you.

What is the third part of living by faith?

3. God wants me to return good for evil.

Joseph continued to do good to his brothers and to provide for them and their families. When someone sins against us, God wants us to go out of our way to do them good, not to do them evil or to ignore them.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21 (ESV)

**But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...
Matthew 5:44 (ESV)**

I want you to notice it doesn't tell us to ignore our enemies. It doesn't tell us to avoid our enemies. It doesn't tell us to gripe about our enemies. It tells us to go out of our way to do them good. This is completely against everything in our culture.

As I was preparing this message, I kept thinking about the movie "Untouchables." In the movie, there is a famous line that goes something like this. "They pull out a knife, you pull out a gun. They send one of yours to the

hospital, you send off theirs to the morgue.” The idea is that you always take revenge and you teach people not to mess with you. Those are not the words of Jesus. He tells us to go out of our way to love our enemies, not to kill them.

Loving our enemies is the secret to living well and living by faith.

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

As much as it possible, we go out of our way to do good to those who do evil against us. We have faith that God will use the good we do toward our enemies as part of his good purposes.

The way we live by faith is by giving up on revenge. We leave that in God’s hands. We trust God’s sovereignty over sin and know it can never thwart God’s good purposes for us, and we do good to our enemies and let God handle it from there.

We began with Jacob dying in faith, confident that God would keep his promise and give Jacob’s descendants the Promised Land. As we close, we go back to Joseph dying by that very same faith. He also died trusting that God would eventually keep his promise and give Joseph’s descendants the Promised Land.

So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father’s house. Joseph lived 110 years. And Joseph saw Ephraim’s children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph’s own. And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. Genesis 50:22–26 (ESV)

Joseph lived another 54 years after his father died. He had the joy of grandkids and great-grandkids on his knee. I don't know what could be much better than seeing kids that follow in your footsteps walking with God. That is the best way to cross the finish line of life.

Just as Jacob died in faith that God would keep his promise of the land of Canaan, Joseph believed the same thing. When he died, he was mummified, just like his father. I want us to notice that he made his kids promise to not bury him in a pyramid in Egypt but to put him in a coffin. The word for coffin in the Hebrew is the same Hebrew word used for ark. Joseph was put in a wooden shipping container. He was put in a big Fed-Ex box with an address stamped on the front that said, "Ship to the Promised Land." Approximately 400 years after his death, when Israel came out of Egypt, they picked up the shipping crate with Joseph's bones in them and carried his bones out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Remember that God led them on the exact same route as Jacob's funeral procession to the Promised Land a little less than 400 years later.

The nation of Israel carried his shipping container through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and finally when you get to the end of the book of Joshua after Joshua finally conquered the Promised Land and ancient Israel arrived at its long-awaited promise from God that it took generations to fulfill, we read these words.

As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money. It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph. Joshua 24:32 (ESV)

God kept his promise and brought Joseph's bones to rest in the Promised Land. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and everyone else who died in hope that God would keep his word found that God's word proved true. He kept his promise.

Conclusion

As we look back on the book of Genesis, we see it is a book challenging us to place our faith in God's Word for both our life and our death.

The best summary of Genesis comes from Hebrews 11 and 12. Let me read a little of that chapter as we close.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain,... By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household...By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise... Hebrews 11:1-10 (ESV)

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. Hebrews 11:13 (ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

My friends, just as the men and women of Genesis lived and died by faith in God's Word, looking forward to God keeping his promises through the future

coming of Jesus, may we be men and women who live and die placing our faith in God's word as we look back upon Jesus who has come. God kept all of the promises he made to his people in the past. He will keep all of the promises he has made to us about the future.

Let us be men and women that live and die trusting him.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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