

A Life Well Lived Genesis 50:1-26

Genesis 1 begins with these words: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”** Then throughout **chapter 1** we read **“and God said.”** His words are both powerful and creative. On each of six succeeding days God spoke and something came into existence where there had been nothing at all, creating from nothing everything through the power of His spoken word. **John 1:3 “Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.”**

Hebrews 11:3 “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

In the beginning there was God already existing who spoke and created everything and we believe it by faith. Each day He created something new. On day six He said **“Let us make man in our own image.”** He gave man responsibility to care for the garden; rule over creation; multiply and fill all the earth; and not eat from the tree that was in the center of the garden because in the day he did, he would die.

They were simple and direct. There wasn’t any confusion about the commands, no way they could have been misunderstood except through manipulation and misrepresentation. But so it happened that one day after the man and his wife were in the garden that they were attending to separate duties when the serpent, embodied by Satan himself, spoke to the woman and enticed her to eat the forbidden fruit with a simple and subtle question: **“Has God said that you must not eat of the tree in the middle of the garden?”**

Did God really say that?

Did God really mean what He said? In effect he was asking: Can God be trusted?

The woman responded by saying they weren’t to eat it or even touch it or they would die.

Satan’s response was to attack the credibility of God by suggesting that they would not die.

Genesis begins with two people who had been given life and here in the last chapter we have two people whose end is death. It is the very thing God promised would happen in the beginning if man ate the forbidden fruit. Death would be the consequence and the lot of every person born from the seed of Adam and Eve until the end of time. Death is the natural way of things. God said they would die. Satan said they wouldn’t die. God was right. Satan was a liar.

Hebrews 9:27 “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment.”

Chapter 50 opens with the death of Jacob. It happened when he is 147 years old. While his other siblings are there with him, the primary focus on the response is of Joseph. In **verses 1-14** we see that Joseph’s mourning is understandable.

I. JOSEPH’S MOURNING IS UNDERSTANDABLE – vs. 1-14

Death is a bitter enemy. Scripture says it stings. Rightfully so, we respond in anguish. The opening verses show us that Joseph’s anguish is real.

A. Joseph’s Anguish Is Real – vs. 1-3

The favored son will have no more opportunity to hear the sound of his father’s voice or smile on his face. Gone will be the smell of his cologne, the quaint sayings he would utter from time to time, and the wisdom of his age. No more Dad jokes. No more stories. No more visits. Just memories.

We sometimes hear about a fatal accident on some highway. We often refer to the death of someone young as being accidental. But the cold, hard reality is that death is not an accident. There is an appointed time, by an appointed means that has been ordained by God when that day, that time, that means happens and someone draws a last breath.

Woody Allen quipped “It’s not that I’m afraid to die, I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”

Warren Wiersbe writes that “Nobody has yet figured out how to peek into God’s appointment book and erase the date.”

Death is our destiny and the day came when Jacob drew his last breath and entered into God’s presence. When it happened, Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him. His signs of grief are obvious. The loss was deep. The expression was sincere. We can become overwhelmed with grief when we are at the bedside of a loved one at their passing. When I was a hospice chaplain, I was a part of many of those scenes when family would ask me to be with them when a loved one passed.

It was a very surreal moment standing by my Mom when she drew her last breath and as they put her on the gurney to take her to the funeral home. There was a numbness that lasted all day. But the real grief came at the end of the day when sitting alone the reality of her passing finally gripped me and I burst into heavy sobs. Hearing my grief, a little 5-year-old came and gave me a hug. There was no exchange of words, just an embrace to let me know he was there in my time of grief.

We have all felt the pain of Joseph that rips us apart, when tears flow freely. The consolation, the comfort, the reassurance is in the promises of Scripture that remind us that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Paul’s words to the Thessalonians comfort us.

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

He wrote to correct some misinformation by someone who gave them false teaching. This group came into town teaching that anyone who died before the return of Christ wouldn’t go to heaven. Others had misunderstood Paul to say that all believers would remain alive until Christ returned. So Paul needed to address those erroneous beliefs.

He began by saying that grief is normal, but for Christians, it’s a different kind of grief because we have hope not only in a resurrection, but also in a reunion. Because Jesus died and rose again, those who are believers in Christ who die will also rise again when Christ returns. When He descends from

heaven with the trumpet blast and shout from the angel, those who have already died will be raised from the dead and those who are alive will be reunited in the sky and all will be taken to heaven to be with the Lord forever.

Joseph grieved the loss of his father and had his personal physicians prepare the body for burial. It was quite a process. Embalmmment was usually done by professional embalmers which also incorporated religious rituals. The cult of Osiris required that every body be carefully prepared for the afterlife so that the afterlife could be enjoyed. Since Jacob was not Egyptian and didn’t embrace their gods, Joseph had his physicians attend to the embalming process that took 40 days.

Kent Hughes helps us understand what was involved. “How much attention a body received was determined by how much money the family had. The poor were simply washed and dried in the sun. Some were packed in salt. Those with a little more means were injected with juniper oil to dissolve and ease the removal of organs and to scent the body before salting. But neither of these two options included a mummy wrap. However, the rich got a total redo as well as a body wrap... The body was soaked in saltpeter (niter) and then bound in linen and laid out for an eternal good time.”

The total time of mourning was 70 days which included the 40 days of embalming. **Verse 3 says** the Egyptians also mourned for Jacob. It was out of respect for Joseph as father to Pharaoh and governor of Egypt. This period of mourning was two days short of the time of mourning for a Pharaoh.

After the mourning period, where Joseph’s anguish is real, we note that his appeal is reasonable.

B. Joseph’s Appeal Is Reasonable – vs. 4-6

Even though he had the ear of Pharaoh, even though they were on the best of terms, Joseph thought it wise to go through his advisors. Ever the diplomat he is discerning in how he approaches Pharaoh. It is also possible that since he had touched a dead body he would be considered defiled so he sent his appeal

through the court to Pharaoh.

First, he appealed to Pharaoh's grace. **"If I have found favor in your eyes."** After all, it was Joseph who saved the kingdom from utter destruction.

Second, he appealed to the oath he had made to his father that he be buried in Canaan. It was out of a sense of obligation and commitment to his father.

Third, he appealed to Pharaoh on the basis of his own commitment or loyalty to his responsibilities as governor of Egypt, assuring Pharaoh of his return.

It's a reasonable request made to Pharaoh, one in which Pharaoh granted Joseph to do as he requested. And so began a journey back to Canaan to fulfill his father's request to carry out his dying wish. In **verses 7-14** Joseph's accompaniment is respectful.

C. Joseph's Accompaniment Is Respectful – vs. 7-14

It's quite an entourage of people who went with Joseph on the march back to Canaan.

Accompanying him were people serving Pharaoh's court and of Egypt itself. They are elite politicians. In our system it would include the chiefs of staff and the congressional leaders and ambassadors.

In one of the churches I served, the director of the Silver Dome was a member. When he died the church was packed. The mayor, police chief and fire chief along with other political officials of Pontiac were in attendance as they paid respect to him.

Naturally the group would include Joseph's brothers and their families with the exception of young children and their flocks, which remained in Egypt.

Finally, there was a military escort. It was an arduous journey that included many of the important leaders of Egypt. They would need the presence of military personnel for protection for obvious reasons because they were leaving the borders of Egypt.

Out of respect for Joseph, these high-ranking public officials journeyed with Joseph to pay tribute to his

father and out of respect for Joseph.

The entourage paused at the threshing floor of Atad near the Jordan River where they mourned for seven more days. So impressed with the mourning of the Egyptians that the Canaanites called the place Abel Mizraim. It's a play on words. The name means meadow of the Egyptians. The word meadow is very close to the spelling of mourning. So while the name actually means meadow of the Egyptians it could also be taken to mean mourning of the Egyptians. Both would be accurate.

When we look at these verses, we see that Joseph's mourning is understandable. But now we come to the heart of the chapter. The death of a family leader can leave the rest to wonder what will happen next. Joseph's brothers wondered what he would do now that dear old dad was gone. It's in **verses 15-21** that we notice Joseph's message is unmistakable.

II. JOSEPH'S MESSAGE IS UNMISTAKABLE – vs. 15-21

Have you ever misjudged someone? Or if you are the one misjudged, how did you feel? Fear or guilt can play on a person's mind and emotions. That seems to be the case here with Joseph's brothers.

We first see unfounded worry.

A. Unfounded Worry – vs. 15-17

It was the same fear Jacob had toward his brother Esau when he returned to Canaan after living in Padan Aram for 20 years. Jacob worried that Esau was still holding a grudge, still holding onto his hatred for him over stealing the blessing. He even feared the worst when he was told that Esau was coming to see him and bringing 300 men with him. He thought for sure that after all those years Esau was going to make good on his threats. But what he found instead was that there wasn't any hostility and while they didn't become bosom buddies, we do see a marked change in Esau toward Jacob when they met.

Joseph's brothers had wondered now that their father was gone if Joseph had just been biding his

time waiting for the old guy to be out of the picture so he could get revenge for how they had mistreated him as a youth selling him into slavery.

Are you living with the same kind of fear wondering when the shoe is going to drop and the person you think is holding a grudge is just waiting for the right moment to get revenge?

What if Joseph has been nursing a grudge? A grudge is defined as a “persistent feeling of ill will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury.” Their feelings of fear for what Joseph might do were fueled by two things.

The first is their own guilt. They had never forgiven themselves for their own sinful character and conduct toward their younger brother. Guilt caused them to keep looking over their shoulder.

The second is their inability to believe what Joseph said to them earlier.

Genesis 45:3-7

Genesis 47:11-12

For 17 years Joseph had provided for them, cared for them, watched over them. If he wanted to do something to them, he wouldn't have had to wait till after their father was gone. He had the opportunity and the means to do them harm when they came to Egypt for food and no one would have been the wiser. They could have been branded as spies, put in prison, made slaves or put to death and he would never have to look over his shoulder or think twice about it. No one would know the real reason.

His brothers doubted his word.

Do we ever do that to God?

Do we ever doubt His Word to us?

Warren Wiersbe writes that “when you doubt God’s Word, you soon begin to question God’s love and then you give up all hope for the future, because faith, hope, and love go together.”

They weren't sure of their future because they doubted Joseph. They had no faith that he would keep his word. And so they worried. Guilt and fear will do that. Doubt and fear are the seeds of so

many untruths. So they sent a delegation to appeal to Joseph. Many scholars believe it was either Benjamin or Judah or both. After all, Benjamin was his own true flesh and blood brother. And don't forget that was never involved in the earlier schemes. Judah was clearly the family spokesman and had appealed to Joseph to spare Benjamin and be a substitute. Maybe Joseph would listen to reason. Sending a messenger goes to show that they were hesitant to approach him as a group.

It's doubtful that Jacob actually gave those instructions before he died. I think if he had wanted to make sure Joseph forgave his brothers, he would have spoken to his son directly.

Whether what they said was true or not notice something of importance in their words to Joseph. First is their admission. Whether they had ever fully admitted their wrongdoing before, this is an admission of their sin.

The second thing we see is their repentance.

“Please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.”

We were wrong and we're coming to you to ask you to forgive us. They wanted to be free of their guilt, free of their fear. But their fear was unfounded. Why? It was because of unselfish weeping.

B. Unselfish Weeping – v. 17

“When their message came to him, Joseph wept.”

Joseph wept because he was hurt that they didn't believe him. It boils down to them really not trusting him. They somehow missed the mercy he showed them in sparing them or the grace in giving them what they didn't deserve and he wept because of it. They somehow thought that Joseph didn't really forgive them earlier.

Kent Hughes states that “It was as if all he had done had been in vain. Despite their sins against him, he had loved them and forgiven them. Everything he had done had been with an eye to their well-being.

How pitiful as his eleven brothers groveled before him as if he had just threatened to take their lives.”

Does God weep, is He grieved when we don't believe Him?

Why is it we doubt His forgiveness when His Word explicitly states that **“if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” I John 1:9**

Joseph wept because they didn't believe him. Long before the words were penned, Joseph had learned the principle of **Romans 12:19-20 “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’”**

Peter provides this additional advice.

I Peter 3:9-12

I believe Joseph's weeping was unselfish because all along he was thinking about the welfare of his siblings and their families. They could trust that he had their best interest at heart. Otherwise he could have left them in Canaan, left them to fend for themselves. But we see in his response unusual wisdom.

C. Unusual Wisdom – vs. 18-21

Here is the sovereignty of God that Joseph had come to understand so well. He had been ridiculed by his brothers, sold into slavery; falsely accused by Potiphar's wife; imprisoned; forgotten but it was all part of God's plan to bring about good.

It is a lesson we should never forget, one that we need to be reminded of again and again.

Romans 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

Jeremiah 29:11-14 “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come

and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord.”

Joseph reminded them that despite all the wrong they had done to him, it was God's plan in order to save lives.

Joseph talked to them about God's **purpose**, God's **protection**, and God's **provision**.

It was meant to keep them alive.

They had nothing to fear.

They would be provided for.

We can have that same confidence in the plans of God for our lives. **Do you believe that if God brings you to it He will bring you through it? Do you believe He is with you along every path, every bend in the road, every bump along the way? And do you believe He has a purpose for it all?** When it's God's plan, there is nothing to fear when we trust the Lord with all our heart.

Joseph's wisdom about God's sovereignty provided reassurance to his brothers. To abate their fear we read that he spoke kindly to them.

At his father's passing Joseph's mourning was understandable and when he spoke to his brothers his message was unmistakable. As we finish out the chapter and the book of Genesis notice that Joseph's musing is unveiled.

III. JOSEPH'S MUSING IS UNVEILED – vs. 22-26

Joseph had kept his promise to Pharaoh and returned to Egypt after they buried his father in Canaan. He returned and lived out his remaining days in Egypt. We read that he lived to be 110 years old. Egyptians believed that if you lived to that age you had a blessed life. But the curse of death is evident, yet for the one who trusts God, death is a blessing. In these remaining verses we see first that his family is growing.

A. Joseph's Family Is Growing – vs. 22-23

It's unclear if it's meant that Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's children or if it includes Ephraim as part of the three generations. Five generations are possible.

There were four generations with Manasseh's grandchildren who had been born at Joseph's passing.

Oh, the stories he must have told them. I imagine that he spent a lot of time with them telling them about the true and living God, teaching them what it is to walk by faith, passing on to them the promise that his father had given to him, that his two sons and their families would inherit portions of land in Canaan. I believe he impressed on them the importance of following God no matter what.

Deuteronomy 6:5-8

How important it is to pass on a heritage of faith to our children and children's children.

Joseph's family is growing.

As we close, we see Joseph's future is guaranteed.

B. Joseph's Future Is Guaranteed – vs. 24-26

Brothers could mean his actual siblings. It's possible that some or all could still be alive. We don't know for sure. Brothers can also refer to nephews as well. Much like Jacob did with his 12 sons, Joseph gathers his extended family around him to make a request of them.

He reassured them that there was nothing for them to fear. Just as God had been with him, they could be guaranteed that God would be with them and provide for them while in Egypt. It is both a reminder of God's presence with them as well as God's promise to them. What he says is an expression of faith that some day they would all leave Egypt and return to the Promised Land.

Hebrews 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.”

Like his father, he didn't want to be buried in Egypt. Even though he had lived 93 years of his life in Egypt, his real home was in Canaan, in the

Promised Land. He had faith in God's promise to lead them out and to take him with them.

Joseph leaves us with three important lessons when we choose to walk by faith and trust God.

The first lesson is that God works all things for His glory and our good. He understood that God used everything in his life to that end and when you walk with God, there isn't anything to fear.

The second lesson is that Joseph learned to live free of bitterness.

Hebrews 12:14-15 “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

Ephesians 4:31 “Get rid of all bitterness...”

When others harm us in some way, how do we respond?

When God sends hardships our way, how do we respond?

Joseph used them to grow his faith and trust God and allow them to develop bitterness in him.

The third lesson we learn from Joseph is that he was in a right relationship with God and with all men.

Acts 24:16 “So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

And so we close out the book of Genesis. We have learned a lot about faith, about God's power and about His presence. We have learned that God always keeps His promises. We have learned about grace and mercy and forgiveness. My prayer is that we have also learned these lessons along the way.

Has it helped shape your faith?

Has it helped you see the sovereignty of God?

Has it helped you realize the presence of God?

Have you learned to trust Him in all things?