

Scripture Reading: Genesis 49:28 – 50:13

“28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing. 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.” 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. Genesis 50:1 Then Joseph fell on his father’s face, and wept over him, and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Forty days were required for him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; & the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.

"Jacob Blesses Pharaoh"

As we begin the final chapter of Genesis we come this morning to the death & burial of Jacob: I want to first make some general comments about death, then we will consider the details of the text we read and a bit more into chapter 50 here in the Book of Beginnings and then turn to some insights shared by the Apostle Paul in his final Epistle to the Corinthians as our application.

Almost all of chapter 49 consisted of the blessings given to the sons of Jacob, which of course establishes the Twelve Tribes of Israel. This is the 1st reference to the twelve tribes in the Bible and they will continue to play a critical role in God’s grand plan of salvation. This followed the focus on Jacob’s request to be buried with his father and grandfather, which was repeated in our text which I just read: This we saw as the good foundation of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

These gave us the first two great lessons we wanted to learn here in the final days of Jacob’s life:

It reminded us that Jesus is our rock or solid foundation for all of life pictured here by those Patriarchs.

It reminded us that Jesus is also our life, our living hope just as Jacob gave all of his sons hope for the future as the Nation of Israel.

- **In the final chapter of Genesis the focus shifts to the final lesson: The hope in the future, the Resurrection!**

We will see this as we consider how Jacob was buried, we will see this as Joseph comforts his brothers...

- **And we will see it as Joseph is laid to rest waiting for the promised Exodus to the Promised Land.**

So, if we are going to see hope in the midst of death, then we need to first consider a few thoughts about a subject we would rather avoid. At bottom death simply means separation and it is NOT a natural part of the created order... God created man in His image as a united body and soul. Reflecting and demonstrating the very nature of our Triune God.

- **Our physical death is the tearing apart of this created union and in history death is the final enemy that must be destroyed.**

We also learned that God created them male & female, further demonstrating the unity & diversity of our Triune God as they lived as one flesh and in fellowship with God Himself.

And yes, they were tasked with caring for and tending the glorious Creation that God had made them to rule over, commanded to fill it with righteous people like themselves!

As Pastor Alexander taught us so well last week, God set a glorious banquet before man and said take and eat!

Man could partake of and enjoy all of creation, save for one tree in the Garden of Eden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil...

- **A tree that represented wisdom, which was to be learned from God and not grasped for prematurely.**

God's grace was boundless, but His warning was severe when it came to that tree, telling Adam: "In the day you eat of it you shall surely die... Strong language meaning you will die the death or die completely!"

To understand the force of that warning we should consider the results of the failure of our first parents... They did eat of that tree and they did die... First and foremost, their relationship with God died... Rather than walk with God in the cool of the morning they had to hide in fear.

- **Adam and ALL of his children were now separated from God!**

Their relationship with each other died as well, with Adam blaming Eve for his problems... The woman YOU gave me did it! Today, everywhere we look outside of Christ there are broken relationships...

- **Man is separated from man!**
- **Seen from simple divorce to national wars.**

Their relationship with the Creation died as the natural world became their bitter enemy bringing pain in childbirth and sweat & tears as they battled weeds and turmoil in a once peaceful Creation.

- **Man is separated from Creation!**

And finally man himself died... On the day Adam eat of that tree... Not only was man separated from creation, from his wife and from God Almighty, but he was separated from himself...

In many quarters today they debate how real mental problems are, and I am here to tell you that as Christians, leaning on the truth of the Scriptures, we can understand just how real they are under the reign of sin and death. And they are both emotional and physical because man is separated from himself in his sin nature and will one day be separated from his own body. On that fateful day in the Garden, Adam took his first step toward physical death as do each of us with every breath we take.

Under the sun, death cannot be avoided & death cannot be reversed... There is no fountain of youth!

- **So, what does all of this have to do with our text or a lesson on the hope of the resurrection???**

As we have often pointed out here in our studies of the Book of Beginnings, if you don't get things right here, the rest of the story does not make sense.

We have the hope of the resurrection because of the work of Jesus and just what was that work?

He came to save His people from their sins and that required that He die in our place...

The New Adam, unlike the first Adam, brought life and not death because He obeyed His Father as Adam should have and was then able to present His perfect life as the perfect sacrifice.

- **Thus, as the Apostle Paul teaches us so clearly in the 3rd chapter of Romans, God can be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in His Son!**

We must never downplay the reality of death because we see it in the Scriptures from the beginning with the fall of Adam in the Garden until the final judgment when death is cast into the Lake of Fire.

However, unlike the world we should have no fear of death because we know that the story of life also runs from the beginning to the end of the Bible: From the first promise of salvation given to Adam and Eve, to the final judgment when the last enemy death is destroyed!

Jesus came and crushed the head of the serpent just as was promised and so now we can know the hope of the resurrection because Jesus has gone before us showing the way!

- **But, we must always remember that death is the last enemy to be defeated and thus death is still a reality for us today just as it was for the Patriarchs of old.**

And thus, they along with the Apostle Paul can give us great insights into how we should face and deal with death. I believe that what we see here in our text this morning and what Paul taught the Corinthians is clearly demonstrated by Jesus Himself at the gravesite of His dear friend Lazarus.

His friend has died and Jesus goes to demonstrate the power of His own resurrection which would shortly be fulfilled in Jerusalem. Jesus stands before the grave of Lazarus, knowing that He is about to command him to come forth... Just as He will command ALL the dead to do at the final judgment!

And knowing this, what does Jesus do? We are told in the shortest verse in the Bible, where at John 11:35 we read, “Jesus weep.” And just as we have with the language in Genesis three about death, it is a very strong emotional expression! So even as the Savior prepares to show the power of His salvation with the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus still agonizes over the reality of death. As I said, such separation was never intended to be a part of the Created order and it will not be when things are put right...

- **But until then, weeping with those who weep is very appropriate and what we certainly see in our text before us this morning!**

At the end of chapter 49 we read, “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.”

Jacob has died, but we immediately see the hope of the resurrection when we are told that he was gathered to his people... This is not some vain hope or wishful thinking as is so often what we see or hear today. Jacob does not live on because his sons or people will remember him: He is dead and gone from a human standpoint...

- **But that is not the end of the story for him nor any of God’s children!**

We should be reminded here about how Jesus used Jacob, along with his father and grandfather to show those skeptical Sadducees about the truth of the resurrection when He said to them, “31 But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

Then just as we saw with Jesus at the gravesite, Joseph weeps over his father after his passing:

50:1 “Then Joseph fell on his father’s face, and wept over him, and kissed him.”

Because of the reality of death, we learn here that mourning is very proper and Biblical... It is why we are called upon to weep with those who weep, not come along side trying to understand or telling them that it will be OK.

Yes, there is a time to point to and rejoice in the reality and power of the resurrection, but just as Jesus weep at the grave of Lazarus there is a time for weeping and mourning.

However, we must also remember that it is the hope of the resurrection that leads to the preparation of a proper burial... We see this in almost all human cultures, where no place do we find people just casting bodies aside with the attitude that says he or she is gone and who cares what happens now.

Sadly, the closest we might find to that type of attitude today comes from some of more intellectual skeptics.

- **But here in our text we see Joseph making proper preparations for a grand burial.**

2 “And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel.”

Here there was a need to prepare the body for travel, but there is often care of the body even for a local burial. Such preparations along with caskets and gravestones are appropriate but should not be abused. They are to remember a life that was lived and to look forward to the future resurrection but they are not intended to somehow preserve the body for future use or to worship those who have gone before as we see in many cultures.

- **That body is dead and decaying and the hope of the resurrection looks forward to our new glorious bodies from above!**

4 “Now when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the hearing of Pharaoh, saying, 5 ‘My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.” Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.”” 6 And Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.”

There are various speculations about why Joseph did not approach Pharaoh directly with this matter, but I think it revolves around his been away where his father died and his period of mourning. In many cultures, a mourner may not go into the presence of a king and that may have been the case here.

Jacob had made Joseph swear to make it easier for Pharaoh to consent, but as we have seen Pharaoh goes above and beyond for this man of God.

7 “So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. 9 And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering. 10 Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. He observed seven days of mourning for his father. 11 And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a deep mourning of the Egyptians.” Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. 12 So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. 13 For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place.”

- **And so the life of Jacob, the final patriarch is brought to a grand end!**
- **And verse 14 gives us one more important lesson about dealing with death in history... Life must go on!**

14 And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father.”

And now my goal is to bring all of this together with some of the comments made by the Apostle Paul in his final Epistle to the Corinthians... As I do, I want us to remember the three lessons we have been learning AND remember that they are not separate points of theology for a systematic course...

- **But rather principles for Christian living which of necessity must run together in many ways in our daily lives today.**

Keep that in mind as I read a lengthy passage from the end of chapter four and going on into chapter five:

II Corinthians 4: “5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

- **Our lives must be lived on a proper foundation and the only proper foundation is the work of our Lord Jesus!**

Paul then reminds those Corinthians about the reality of the fall that we reviewed at the beginning of this message:

7 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.”

- **Jesus is our only hope of overcoming the reality of sin and death in this life, and we must live our lives in that hope!**

13 “And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

- **Yes, our only hope for the future is in the power of the resurrection!**

5:1 “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”

- **The Apostle Paul concludes his thought on this matter with wisdom that can and certainly should make us all a very contented people:**

6 “So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.”

Communion Meditation: Psalm 49

“10 For he sees wise men die; Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, And leave their wealth to others. 11 Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, Their dwelling places to all generations; They call their lands after their own names. 12 Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; He is like the beasts that perish. 13 This is the way of those who are foolish, And of their posterity who approve their sayings. Selah 14 Like sheep they are laid in the grave; Death shall feed on them; The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; And their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling. 15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For He shall receive me. ”