

Genesis 50

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- [0 : 00] Death comes to us all. It may come suddenly and tragically, like it did last summer to two Peruvian teenagers and their driver in Inverness, or like a young person killed at a railway level crossing in Easter Ross just this past week.
- Or it may come to us quietly at the end of a long and fulfilled life, as it did here in the case of Joseph.
- But death comes. It is said that there are only two certain things in life, death and taxes, and we don't like either of them.
- And that's very true. We know that certain things are certain in life and there is nothing more certain than death, but we don't like to think about it.
- And isn't that one of the most irrational things about us? That we know it's certain, but we put off thinking about it. Imagine that you knew that you were to live here for the next six months.
- [1 : 12] And then, for the rest of your lives, say, for the next 50 years of life, if you were spared, you were going to live in a village in the High Andes in Peru.
- How would you spend those next six months? Well, I think you would spend the next six months making all the necessary preparations for living in a totally different environment.
- You would have all the plans as to how to get there and all the preparations as to how to live there, how to learn about the language and the customs and the culture and so on. Well, shouldn't it be the same with death?
- But most of us live as if it is not going to happen and we don't make those necessary preparations. Of course, people even joke about it.
- Woody Allen, the American comedian, said, It's not that I'm afraid to die, it's just that I don't want to be there when it happens. And that was just his way of saying, well, he doesn't want to think about it and he is afraid to die.
- [2 : 20] We don't want to think about death maybe because it's too horrible or too remote or too unreal. But it's foolish nonetheless not to face up to that reality.
- And the Bible, I believe, helps us to overcome this foolishness and unreality. And we see this in the words of Joseph here. He says, I am about to die.
- At one level, the book of Genesis seems to end on a pessimistic note. What's described in this last passage that we've read in the book of Genesis?
- It's the death of Jacob, first of all, at the end of chapter 49 and into chapter 50. And then the death of Joseph and all the arrangements made about their death.
- So it's as if the whole of the book of Genesis ends in these two deaths and the funeral arrangements and so on to do with the death. It seems a very pessimistic way to finish this amazing book that is really the foundation of all that God has revealed to us.
- [3 : 34] And indeed, the final words of the book of Genesis hammer home this point that it seems to be such a pessimistic end. The last words are these, in a coffin in Egypt.

And it seems a very dramatic way, but a very strange way to end this book. This amazing, glorious book that speaks so much in earlier parts about hope, about God's promises for the future.

And yet it ends on what seems to be a very pessimistic, hopeless note, a coffin in Egypt. Now, I'm sure all of us, to one extent or another, are familiar with a coffin.

Some of us more familiar than others. Many of us in the ministry can look back on many, many funerals that we have taken. People that we have had to bury.

And it's always a very solemn and fearful thing to consider a coffin. Speaking of the end of life. That the whole of that life has come down to this, as far as this world is concerned.

[4 : 46] And so, as it speaks here of a coffin in Egypt, it's speaking of that reality of death. And it seems a very final and also a very hopeless kind of note.

But it does bring home to us important lessons, as Joseph was doing here. He was saying, I'm about to die. And that means that no matter how important or prestigious you are, whether, like Joseph, you were the second in command of the whole of Egypt, the great superpower of that ancient world.

Or whether, like him, you were long-lived, 110. It doesn't matter. Death comes. It ends with a coffin.

Sir Walter Raleigh, a very Ken Speckle adventurer of the Elizabethan age. The last sentences of his unfinished history of the world read, The power of death.

No matter how powerful people may be, their world comes to an end with death. It ends with a coffin. Now, we may prolong life.

[6 : 24] And in the age in which we live, because of medical advances and so on, life is more prolonged than it was in the age of our parents or grandparents. We may prolong life.

But we can only postpone our appointment with death. We cannot cancel it. Now, in the book of Genesis, there is a tremendous contrast between the beginning of the book and the end of the book.

The book starts, of course, with a famous word, some of the most famous words in the whole of the Bible and, indeed, in the English language. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

It starts with the story of creation. God saying, let there be light, and there was light. It speaks of the creation of life, of human life. He breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

It speaks of creation. It speaks of energy. It speaks of power. It speaks of life. But it ends in a coffin in Egypt. What has happened to all the glorious expectations at the beginning of the book of Genesis?

[7 : 38] What, indeed, has happened to all the great promises that God has made? As we read through this book of Genesis, we discover that God is constantly making promises. Promises to Abraham, for instance, that through his seed, a descendant of his, all the nations will be blessed.

Well, we've seen a little bit of that in the book of Genesis. How Joseph was a blessing to Egypt and the lands about. But it all seems to come crumbling down in the end.

To end with a coffin in Egypt. It seems as if all the great achievements of this life are mocked, and they come to this end. But this apparently pessimistic note is indeed in tune with a major theme of the book of Genesis.

Because, as we read through the book of Genesis, every life that is described, every glorious thing that has happened, or every amazing thing that has happened, it all comes down in the end, except in the case of one individual, it comes down to these words, And he died.

And that theme is repeated. It is hammered home. You might wonder as you're reading Genesis sometimes, why is it always? Because, you might say, well, after a while we could take it for granted, surely.

[8 : 58] We could say, yes, Adam died, and then maybe his children died, but every generation, every generation, and he died. But it is bringing home to us this reality.

Because at the very beginning of the book, after that glorious start, the eruption of creation and of life, we read of the fall of man, of the rebellion of the human race.

Because God said to Adam and Eve, there is one tree in this garden, you can have everything else, but there is one tree that you must not eat the fruit of it, because if you do, dying, you shall die.

You shall surely die. And it's speaking there about how the New Testament sums it up in the memorable phrase, The wages of sin is death. To disobey God is death.

To cut yourself off from God is death. And so, that is why the book of Genesis repeats this time and time again. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 5, verse 14, Death reigned from the time of Adam.

[10 : 06] It's bringing home to us the seriousness of sin. If there had been no sin, there would have been no death. Sin entered the world, and with it came death.

And so, yes, there is what appears to be a very pessimistic note here. But it's a very realistic note. It's speaking about the reality that we know, and it is tying us into the great explanation given in Scripture as to why there is death.

Because we have rebelled against God. And here we have, of course, a great realistic note with Joseph. As he says, I'm about to die.

There is no pretense or wishful thinking with Joseph. He's not carrying on as if he's going to live forever. He's had an amazing life. A very full life.

A life that went from the very depths to the very heights. But he knows that it must come to an end. And he realizes, I'm about to die.

[11 : 15] He was facing up to reality and making the appropriate preparations. And it is important for us as human beings to do that. To realize the reality.

And to make the practical preparations concerning death. As the philosopher Heidegger said, Dying my death is the one thing that no one else can do for me.

We talk today a lot about individual responsibility and individual expression and so on. And all these things are important.

But there's one area where we don't want to face up to it. That individually we must die. We have to pass through that valley. No one else can pass there for us.

So that's the first thing that we must do. Our death may be near. It may be a long way off. But it's approaching fast. And we must face up to that reality.

[12 : 10] We see that in the case of the Lord Jesus Himself. Whose death, of course, was unique and different in many ways. But still, He was realizing and looking forward to that time He was going to die.

And He kept speaking to His disciples about it. And they kept either misunderstanding it or refusing to listen to it. They were very much like us. We don't want to think about that. Or it's not true.

But Jesus said, it is true. I'm going to die. And He was making all the preparations for that. So, where does this leave us then? As we think about this apparently pessimistic note.

This very realistic note that's here in the book of Genesis at its end. Where does that leave us? Does it leave us then just in a kind of stoical despair? Yes, face up to the reality.

But that's it. It ends in a coffin in Egypt. Well, no. That is not the message of the book of Genesis. And we have it neatly summed up here in the words of Joseph.

[13 : 12] He says, I am about to die, but God. And it's this great expression that we find recurring either literally or the idea of it throughout the whole book of Genesis.

But God. Ultimately, Joseph's words are not pessimistic. We see this principle of but God in many places.

But we see it particularly earlier in this chapter in verse 20. The words of Joseph to his brothers. You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.

There we have this principle again. But God. See, the brothers were afraid when their father died. They were afraid that Joseph's sort of apparent forgiveness of them was really just a facade.

That he hadn't really. He was just doing it for his father's sake where he was alive. And when his father died, then he was going to pay them back for what they had done to him, selling him as a slave into Egypt.

[14 : 14] And you know, it's understandable. Of course, that was the way that people acted in the ancient world. It's the way that people still act today. That they bear these grudges, sometimes for a long time.

And when they get in a position of power or have the opportunity, they will use that power against the people who had slighted them or insulted them or whatever.

And so, it's understandable the brothers felt like that. But they didn't really understand Joseph. And surely that's why when he hears this, he weeps. They don't understand that he has a good, loving heart towards them.

That his forgiveness is real and genuine. And it is very hurtful, that, isn't it? When people don't take our forgiveness and our love at its face value. And they're thinking there must be something behind it.

There must be some ulterior motive. There must be some pretense. Yes. But Joseph's attitude towards them is real. And we see here, we see it in his humility.

[15 : 12] He says, I'm not in the place of God. I'm not in control of all these events that have taken place. And they shouldn't fall down before him as slaves before a master.

We see his mercy and his kindness in verse 21. He says, don't be afraid. I'll provide for you and your children. He reassured them, spoke kindly to them. But above all, we see Joseph's faith.

In verse 20, you meant to harm me, but God meant it for good. Now, that is an amazing statement. It is one of the great key statements in the whole of the Bible. Because it speaks to us about God's providence.

About God's sovereign will at work in the world. And that does not take away individual responsibility. Because you see, here, he recognizes, Joseph recognizes, that yes, the brothers were responsible for the evil that they'd done.

He doesn't try to cover it over. His forgiveness, his love is not that kind of unreal, sort of soppy kind of thing that says, oh, don't mention it. It was nothing. He knows it was something. He knows that he suffered in that pit and in that slavery when he was sold into Egypt.

[16 : 19] It was something. It would be wrong to pass over it and to say it's nothing. You did it, he says. It's true. It can't be undone. But God meant it for good.

He had this great faith in God's sovereign purposes to work all things together for good. And you see, that is the great thing that we see in this book of Genesis.

Yes, it begins in the great glory of creation and new life. But then it plumbs the depths and it goes down to desperate depths of human depravity in various ways.

But out of it there comes great hope. As we see this principle, but gone. And we see it here, primarily in the life of Joseph. How, yes, he was sold as a slave into Egypt.

And it would seem to be just the end. The end of all the glorious dreams that he had. It was all going to come to nothing. But God. God had the man at the right time and the right place.

[17 : 18] Even although he was in a prison in Egypt. And God raised him out of that prison to be the very second in command after Pharaoh in the whole of Egypt. And blessed that ancient world.

Egypt and the nations round about. God meant it for good. And so here's this great principle we see again in the words of Joseph here.

I am about to die, but gone. Now this encapsulates, as I've said, a theme of the whole book of Genesis. At the beginning we read, yes, Adam and Eve sinned.

They rebelled against God. But God. But God. Because, you see, the way it's described is that Satan comes. And Satan takes Adam and Eve from being on the side of God.

And he pulls them onto his side. But God comes and he says, I will put enmity between the woman and the serpent.

[18 : 19] Between his seed and her seed. In other words, he sovereignly comes in and he says, No, I am not going to accept this enmity that you have created.

I am going to draw them back into covenant with myself. And I will put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And that enmity was finally fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ who crushed the head of Satan.

And so we see that principle right there at the beginning. But then we see it further on. How the whole world turned wicked at the time of Noah. But God. But God had this one man, Noah.

That he caused to be the saviour of that world. To build this ark to save the human family. And to save the world of that time. And then at the time of Abraham, the whole world was sunk in idolatry.

And God took this one man, Abraham, out of Ur of the Chaldees. And he made out of him eventually a great nation. But God, you see. This theme repeated time and again.

[19 : 29] Sibling rivalry nearly destroyed this family of promise. At various occasions. Jacob and Esau. Joseph and his brothers. But God. God overruled.

God worked out his purposes. And so we come to this final expression of this principle at the end of the book. I am going to die. But God.

Genesis does not end in despair. Because the full expression here is. But God will surely come to your aid. You see.

There is hope because of the great promises of God. There is hope for the people of God. Promises concerning their inheritance. What was happening here. In this particular time of God's revelation.

Was that. Yes. God had made glorious promises to Abraham. Various ones. Some concerning the whole world. Some concerning his own family. That they were going to inherit.

[20 : 28] That land of Canaan. But it wasn't going to happen in his lifetime. There was a time of 400 years. That had to be fulfilled. Before the sins of the Canaanites.

Or Amorites were fulfilled. So that a time of judgment would come for them. And so you see. God's promises may be slow in working out. But they are sure. And here this is what Joseph is referring to.

Yes. The promises of God will be fulfilled. But God will surely come to your aid. And take you up out of this land. To the land he promised on oath. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

There is also hope because of the great promises of God. Concerning a glorious future for the world. We've already referred to the fact. That God. In speaking to Satan.

Satan said that the seed of the woman would crush his head. And we see that coming to fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the promise being given to Abraham.

[21 : 29] That a descendant of his would be the one through whom all nations of the world would be blessed. And we have seen these promises going on being fulfilled from the time of Christ.

As that descendant of Abraham, Jesus. Is the saviour of the world. And as the good news about him goes out throughout the whole world. People are coming to see that truth and reality.

So yes there is hope at that level. Of hope for the promises of God. Hope for the people of God. Because of the promises of God. But what about at the individual level?

Because we started off talking about the reality of death. And you may say that's all very well. Joseph was saying here well there's great promises for you. For my family.

For future generations. But had he no hope for himself? Well there are certain notes at the end of the book of Genesis. That say that that is not true.

[22 : 28] That these people did have hope beyond death. Think of the expression that was used concerning Jacob. In chapter 49 verse 33. When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons.

He drew his feet up into the bed. Breathed his last. And was gathered to his people. Now that's one of the most beautiful expressions I think. In the whole of the Old Testament.

The expression that he was gathered to his people. And we've got to ask the question. Well who were his people? Well his people of course were. His grandfather Abraham.

And grandmother Sarah. His father Isaac. And his mother Rebecca. His wives. Rachel and Leah. All the people who had died before him.

Where were they? They were dead. But he was being gathered to them. And that's not just a kind of poetic expression to say. Well.

[23 : 29] He's dying. He died. It's really saying. Beyond death. There is fellowship and communion. He is gathered to his people. There is community.

And so there is this great expression of hope. As the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Applied. This same idea. From the book of Genesis. You know how.

In discussing with the Sadducees. Who believed there was no resurrection. No hope beyond death. Jesus said. God. Is the God of Abraham.

Isaac. And Jacob. And he is not the God of the dead. But of the living. God gave himself this title. God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He would never take these names to himself.

If these people were dead. That remained dead. Or went out of existence. Or whatever. He's the God of the living. And so Jesus is saying. That is evidence. Of not only life beyond death.

[24 : 27] But of resurrection. As well. But there's another interesting note here. And it is a unique note. Not only is it unique. That it's mentioned.

That Joseph was placed in a coffin. A unique reference in the Bible. But also it's unique. In that. As far as I can make out. Only Jacob and Joseph.

Were embalmed. The normal practice. Amongst the Hebrew peoples. Was simply just to bury the dead. But of course. The custom amongst the Egyptians. Was to embalm.

And that was a very complex. Programme. Programme. Of preserving. The life. Sorry. The body. Of the departed.

And we know of course. About that. Through the Valley of the Kings. And Tutankhamun. And all that. All these ancient pharaohs. Whose bodies were embalmed. And some of them have survived.

[25 : 22] To the present day. But. What is this saying? Is this saying. Well. They just. It so happened. That these two men. Because they were living in Egypt. This.

And they were. Honored by the Egyptians. They also. Their bodies underwent. This process. I think there's more to it. Than that. Because you see. Amongst the Egyptians. This embalming process.

Was part. Of a great belief. In the afterlife. They believed. That. The soul lived on. And they preserved the body. Out of respect. For the body.

And perhaps. This is indication again. Of some kind of belief. In the resurrection. That the body again. Would be raised. So. The words.

A coffin. In Egypt. Or the words. I am about. To die. They may seem. A very pessimistic ending. But in fact. They have seeds of hope. In them.

[26 : 19] As they speak. Of the body. Being preserved. Awaiting. Resurrection. And of course.

We have the final. Expression. Of the principle. Of but God. In the New Testament. When Peter. Speaking. To the crowds. In Jerusalem.

Said. You killed. The author of life. But God. Raised him. From the dead. You see again. The principle. But God. You killed.

The author of life. But God. Raised him. From the dead. And that of course. Is the supreme evidence. Of hope beyond death. That Jesus. Was not held by dead. That Jesus.

Has risen. From the dead. And there have been people. Who have come to that evidence. With great skepticism. People who. In their own line of work. Were trained.

[27 : 12] To be skeptical. And investigative. Whether journalists. Or lawyers. Or whoever. And they came. And they examined that evidence. And they came to the conclusion. There was no satisfactory explanation.

Of it. In normal. Ordinary terms. And they were being pointed. To the reality. That yes. Something amazing had happened. The tomb was empty. That Jesus had indeed.

Risen. From the dead. And so. The end of the book of Genesis. It points forward. To these things. I am going to die. But God.

Death. Death. Is real. And death. Is certain. Indeed. Death. Is imminent. And the question is. How do we approach it? Do we approach it? With uncertainty.

Fear. And pessimism. Or like Joseph. Do we approach it? In faith. And hope. In the New Testament. Joseph is spoken of.

[28 : 09] In these terms. In the letter to the Hebrews. Chapter 11. Verse 22. By faith. Joseph. When his life. When his end was near.

Spoke of the exodus. Of the Israelites. From Egypt. And gave instructions. About his bones. In other words. He realized his end was near.

But he spoke of two things. He spoke of the exodus. Of the Israelites. That was the hope of his people. But also he gave instructions. About his bones. This belief. In resurrection.

This belief. That his body would be raised. From the dead. So we can have hope. In the face of death. If our faith is in God. Because in Jesus Christ. His son. He has dealt with sin.

And overcome death. And there is for us. A promised land. Beyond death. And for all those. Who trust. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

[29 : 05] Thank you. Thank you. Lord Jesus Christ. That was all. God bless you. Amen. Which is all. God bless. Amen. Amen. Amen. God bless Tape. God bless you. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Oh heaven. Amen. Amen.