

Jacob: A dying man's faith

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[0 : 0 0] to Genesis chapter 47 on page 54. We find ourselves coming to the last words of Jacob as he blesses his grandchildren, his sons, and as he places his hope in God and God's promises.

Now let's hear the word of God, first of all, in Genesis 47 and at verse 28. Jacob lived in Egypt 17 years, and the years of his life were 147.

When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, if I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness.

Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried. I will do as you say, he said. Swear to me, he said.

Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. Sometime later, Joseph was told, your father is ill. So he took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, along with him.

[1 : 2 4] When Jacob was told, your son Joseph has come to you, Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed. Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers.

I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you. Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine.

Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Any children born to you after them will be yours. In the territory they inherit, they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers.

As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow, Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephraim. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephraim, that is Bethlehem.

When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, who are these? They are the sons God has given me here, Joseph said to his father. Then Israel said, bring them to me so that I may bless them.

[2 : 3 3] Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him and his father kissed them and embraced them. Israel said to Joseph, I never expected to see your face again and now God has allowed me to see your children too.

Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right towards Israel's left hand, and Manasseh on his left towards Israel's right hand and brought them close to him.

But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.

Then he blessed Joseph and said, may the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm, may he bless these boys.

May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth. When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, he was displeased.

[3 : 39] So he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to him, no, my father, this one is the firstborn. Put your right hand on his head. But his father refused and said, I know, my son, I know.

He too will become a people and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he and his descendants will become a group of nations. He blessed them that day and said, in your name will Israel pronounce this blessing.

May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh. So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. Then Israel said to Joseph, I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers.

And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow. And then into Genesis 49, we find Jacob blessing each of his children, speaking prophetic words of them.

But I want us to turn to chapter 49 and verse 29. So just over the page. So after he blessed them, then he gave them these instructions.

[4 : 51] I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the land of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre in Canaan, which Abram bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite along with the field.

There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried. There Isaac and his wife Rebecca were buried. And there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were brought from the Hittites. 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.

Let's pray once again. Now, can we turn back in our Bibles to Genesis 47 to 49 in our church Bibles on page 54?

Let me say at this time, welcome to those who are listening online. It's great to be able to worship together. As we think today about Jacob, as we think about a dying man's faith, and as we see in his experience and in his words, hope for a fearful world.

It's almost hard to avoid fear right now. There are words that are becoming such a normal part of our vocabulary. Pandemic, self-isolation, virus that cannot be contained.

[6 : 19] And we can see that these words and the reality of the virus are striking fear around the globe. And perhaps as we gather here or at home, perhaps there is fear in our own hearts too.

We're waiting, always waiting, waiting for the World Health Organization or for government or for the NHS to issue guidelines. It's dominating every conversation in every household, so it seems.

And I wonder if we're finding too that it's setting the beat for our own hearts, that it's determining how we think and how we feel. So I want to use the words of Jacob to speak to us in this situation.

How can Jacob's dying words guide us? Two questions to think about this morning. The first is to do with promise, to ask ourselves the question, what is it that I am hanging my hope on?

And then a question to do with peace. How can I have rest in a climate of fear? Whether we're Christians or whether we're not Christians, it's always good for us to think, what is my life built on?

[7 : 35] And what do I look for, look to for peace and security? So let's first of all, think about this question, what am I hanging my hope on? And let's see it in Jacob's experience, first of all.

So we began reading in chapter 47 from verse 28 to 31. And there we see that Jacob, who'd arrived as an old man in Egypt, 130, he enjoyed prosperity and plenty in Egypt for 17 years, cared for, provided for by Joseph, his son.

But now he is dying and his thoughts turn to his burial where his bones will rest.

And you notice what he asks, what he wants Joseph to swear to, do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.

Now this is not some kind of superstition and this is not a simple sentiment. This is Jacob showing that he is holding onto a greater hope, that God's promised land is his true home.

[8 : 52] Jacob has been in Egypt for 17 years, but still he is homesick for the promised land. His heart is back in Canaan.

That was the land of God's promise. And that was the land where God had promised to be with his people. So just as at the beginning of Genesis, you discover God creating the world and God establishing the Garden of Eden, that good, that perfect land where God and his people could dwell together.

So Canaan becomes Eden part two in Jacob's thought. So he wants to be home. We see how important the promise of God is to him and to his family at the end of chapter 48, which we read.

What is his dying wish for Joseph? What does he give to Joseph? To you as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land.

I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow. So Joseph has become really wealthy in Egypt. He has power and influence in Egypt.

[10 : 10] He is second only to the Pharaoh. But Jacob in his dying words reminds Joseph, this is not your true home. So he gives him that ridge, that portion of land that connects Joseph to the promise of God.

And we'll see in chapter 50 how Joseph, the man of faith, also in his heart longs for the promised land because it's God's land.

And then we concluded and we heard the dying words of Jacob in chapter 49, his last will and testament. What are the last instructions he gives to his sons?

His detailed instructions for where he is to be buried. He wants to be buried with the people of God in the land that God had promised. And what we see here is that Jacob both lives and dies standing on the promises of God.

We have that wonderful picture when he anticipates his own death there at the end of verse 47. We see him worshipping. He worships the God that he knows.

[11 : 20] The God who has proved faithful to him, who has proved faithful to his family, and who will prove faithful to those promises even after he has died. So we can say that Jacob's life and especially here Jacob's death reveals the foundation for his life.

All of us have something that we build our hope and identity on. All of us, when we are pushed, whether we would say it explicitly or whether it's just the implicit reality of our lives, we think and we act as if my life is about something.

When I face trouble, we turn in a particular direction. Now we see for Jacob, his life was built on God and his promises in his heart and mind is turned there often.

In different industries, we talk about stress testing. In the construction industry, the stress testing of materials to see if they will stand the strain or the stress testing of banking procedures.

Will they be able to cope with financial strain and crisis? I want to suggest to you and to me today that the coronavirus is serving for us as a stress test to the foundation of your life and mine.

[12 : 49] It's making us perhaps ask questions that we hardly ever find the time to ask ourselves. Am I hanging my hope on something solid and firm or is my whole life hanging on a sugary pang?

Jesus, speaking to the crowd, said that he was a solid rock, that his word was a solid rock to build on, that anything else is shifting sands that will not hold the weight of a life and especially not as we consider eternity.

One of the striking things that this virus is revealing to us is that our gods are too small. What is it that our culture and society, what is it that we often live for?

Wealth. What's happening? The stock markets are crashing. Businesses are collapsing. Work is coming to an end.

That God is not one that people are able to rely on. Health. We so often live as if health is everything, but here we have this unseen virus that can take it and it is no respecter of persons.

[14 : 20] For many people in our culture, we love and we live for leisure. But what are we seeing? Sports closing down, holidays being cancelled, life is grinding to a halt.

We cannot bank on these. What we are seeing in these weeks is that all the pillars of modern life are shaking. That they are failing the stress test and they are reminding us if we're Christians or not that we need to find a hope that lasts.

Something to build our life on that will not fail and disappoint us. And what do we see in Jacob? We see a man who trusts God and who trusts the promises of God and we see a solid and stable foundation both in his life and in his death.

Jacob points us to the better way, the way of faith in God. And when we think about the coming of Jesus, we have the one that we are called to look to and to place all our trust and confidence in.

This Jesus who in love entered into our world. Jesus who suffered with us, who knows what it is to experience want and to suffer.

[15 : 40] Jesus who goes to the cross to deal with the great enemy that so many of us are confronting in our mind's eye, the enemy of death, the wages for sin.

And Jesus goes to the cross to defeat that enemy so that by faith in him, through his loving sacrifice, we might be forgiven, that we too might become the people of God adopted into God's family, that we too might live in the presence of God with a hope of the place of God, glory, the new heaven and earth still to come.

This virus is proving a wake-up call to all of us. God and his word, Jesus and the gospel are the only virus-proof and future-proof hope that we will find anywhere.

Another thing that we see in Jacob is just that his heart has that longing for home, the place where God's promises lie.

It explains why when people move to different countries, they treasure and they hold on to their home culture really tightly, move to a different part of the world, but hold on to language and food and festivals.

[17 : 15] Home is where the heart is. and this virus is exposing to us where our hearts really lie.

We see stories, we read stories, we watch videos of people panic buying, people fighting over toilet paper and packets of pasta, people living with fear because if all I have is now, if this life is it, then I need to grab hold of everything I can get.

And so this virus is striking real terror into many people's hearts because this is it in many people's thinking. But there's a different response.

It's gone under the radar, but maybe you heard of what the Christians in Wuhan were doing, the center of the epidemic as the virus was just beginning to become news for the rest of the world.

There were Christians, while facing opposition from a government, they were caring for the sick. They were bringing supplies, they were showing mercy and sharing the hope of Jesus Christ.

[18 : 25] Why? Because as Christians, they knew they had a true and better home coming. That's where their heart is. So they were able to serve rather than to cling on, able to show peace rather than panic.

What is our source of hope really and truly? The source of hope we long for can only be found in Jesus, not in stuff.

Jesus in his mercy and his grace, he offers himself to us. He offers himself to our fearful and fragile world to receive by faith.

So that was Jacob showing us that he was holding on to God's promise. But what about this question of peace? How can I have rest in a climate of fear?

Chapter 49 and verse 33 is a beautiful deathbed scene. 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.

[19 : 47] Here is Jacob, a man at peace with God, now enters his eternal rest to be with God.

Catechisms, the Heidelberg Catechism, the New City Catechism, more recently, begin with the question, what is our only hope in life and death? The answer that we are not our own, but we belong body and soul to God and to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I had hope that we would be learning as a church together a new hymn for Easter by the Gettys and some of their friends, Christ our hope in life and death, which speaks to this truth.

And we see Jacob, this dying man of faith, he gets it. He's got hope and he's got peace because his faith is rooted in God.

The God who has entered into covenant with his family, with Abraham, with Isaac, and now with Jacob, the one who has shown himself faithful to those covenant promises so that Jacob is able to rest in peace.

[20 : 59] peace. Isn't that what we would all want? To have peace. To have peace in our hearts regardless of circumstances.

To have peace in our hearts for life and facing death. Isn't this what we want for ourselves, for our families, for our city, for our country, for our world?

That instead of panic and fear, there'd be hope and peace? We find it in God's word. I love as well how Jacob wants this legacy of faith for future generations that they might have the peace that he has enjoyed.

Genesis 48 and 49 is one extended deathbed scene where Jacob, first of all, blesses Joseph and his grandchildren, Jacob's grandchildren, and then he turns to bless his sons.

But I want us to focus on the words that Grandpa Jacob has for Ephraim and Manasseh in verses 15 and 16.

[22 : 10] So remember, these are two boys born to Joseph, born in Egypt, never been to the promised land, born and raised Egyptian. As he blesses Joseph, extending blessing to Ephraim and Manasseh, he said, may the God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm, may he bless these boys.

May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth.

what's happening there? He's adopting his grandkids into the family of faith. He is desiring for them that they would have God as their Lord and that they too would come under the blessing of God's promises.

Here is Grandpa Jacob saying to them, I want you boys to know God as your good shepherd, just as I have known him as mine. I want you to trust him to guide you and protect you.

I want you to see your true identity not as an Egyptian but as a child of God to place your hope in the promises of God not the wealth of Egypt.

[23 : 39] This is the legacy that he wants for his children and his grandchildren. Let me speak to our parents and our grandchildren, our grandparents.

What legacy is it that we want to pass on to our kids and our grandkids? What is it that we want for them? Of course we want health, we want success, and we want happiness, and we want security, but do we want above all that they would know God, that they would love Jesus, that they would walk by faith, that they would live lives of obedience?

obedience. Nothing else matters, really, eternally, nothing else matters, except that our children and our grandchildren belong to God.

They need Jesus. They need the peace of God, and so do we. how can we have this peace that allows Jacob to die and rest in peace?

We need to look to Jesus, who comes to us as the prince of peace. We've heard Jacob's dying words. Let's hear Jesus' words, dying words spoken on the cross.

[25 : 06] Let's see how they can give us peace and rest. Think about Jesus saying, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.

Think of Jesus extending love and seeking forgiveness for his enemies, and recognize that Jesus' death on the cross is the answer to the problem of sin and guilt and the fear of judgment that lies in all of our hearts.

There is hope for peace beyond that because of the forgiveness that Jesus came to secure. And how does he secure it? He secures it by becoming a sacrifice.

Think too of the words of Jesus as he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Here is Jesus at the cross having experienced and enjoyed the eternal love of the Father, enjoying fellowship with the Father, but here in this moment as he takes on himself the crushing weight of the Father's anger against our sin, he cannot feel that love.

He feels forsaken. Why? He is going there so that you and I could be adopted into the family of God.

[26 : 33] He knows no peace so that we might have true and eternal peace. Think too of Jesus' words, it is finished.

What is he saying there? He's saying his work of salvation is complete. The victory had been won. Those great enemies of Satan, sin and death, no longer rule and reign.

for us as the people of God, we are no longer slaves to sin. We don't need to live with a fear of death. The way home to God is now open through the sacrifice of Jesus and that's a finished work that we don't have to earn for ourselves, we receive it as a gift of his grace and there is peace in that because our salvation and our eternal security does not depend on me and my effort.

It depends on me looking to Christ and clinging to him and trusting in what he has done. And we also hear Jesus on the cross say, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Jesus ready to be received back to return to glory with his father and Jesus had already said to his disciples that where he would go his people would follow.

[28 : 03] Here is a promise of eternal lasting peace in the glorious presence of our God and our Savior in a world made new, in a world free of sin, in a world free of virus and the threat of death, all because of Jesus.

What promise can we rely on? What peace will never fail us? Jesus said, in this world you will have trouble.

And the coronavirus is just one example, isn't it? We've lived long enough, we know there are many troubles, but it's certainly a wake-up call to how fragile life is.

And one of the things that we can do as a church, as Christians, is to pray that God would use this in his wisdom, in his mercy, in his desire to save, that he would open people's hearts and minds at this time to the goodness of Jesus.

But Jesus said, more than in this world you will have trouble, he also said, take heart, I have overcome the world. He said, do not let your hearts be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me.

[29 : 22] Here is the peace that all our hearts are longing for, is found and trusting in Jesus, Jesus' death, Jesus' resurrection. That's the hope and the peace that a dying world needs.

So as we consider the words of Jacob, as we consider the words of Jesus, let me invite all of us to repent of sin and unbelief, to believe in Jesus, to trust the promises of God, to find true rest, not in people or things, circumstances, to find true rest in Jesus.

Let's pray together.