

A coffin in Egypt

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, the book of Genesis, chapter 50. And we may read again the last verse of the chapter.

So Joseph died, been a hundred and ten years old. They abandoned, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

And I'd like just to reflect on that last phrase, a coffin in Egypt. The book of Genesis provides us with the foundational doctrines of the faith.

Without an understanding of the book of Genesis, in my view, you can't adequately understand the New Testament.

In fact, many of the themes of the book of Genesis are developed in the New Testament itself.

Genesis gives us the story of God's sovereignty in the world before the time of the patriarchs.

[1 : 12] It tells of the primeval world in chapters 1 to 11. And then the story of God's dealings with the world, with the patriarchs, from Genesis, chapter 12 to chapter 50.

The book of Genesis begins, begins with God, in the beginning, God. Note how the God of Genesis, to whom we are introduced, is both personal and majestic.

He deliberates with himself. Let us make man in our image after our likeness. He brought the animals to the man to see what he would call them.

He walks in the garden, calling to Adam. He asks searching questions.

He comes from heaven. The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men had built. He is grieved by human wickedness.

[2 : 24] He is not impersonal and indifferent. He is active, approves of good, disapproves of evil, interested in his creatures all the time.

He is not limited in knowledge or in power. Remember, he is the creator who brings order out of chaos.

He calls life into being by his word. Making Adam from earth's dust. He is Lord of all that he has made.

He curses the ground, subjects mankind to physical death, changing the original perfect world order. He floods the earth in judgment.

He confounds human plans and scatters the builders of the Tower of Babel. He overthrows Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain.

[3 : 28] He is addressed as judge of all the earth. He is present everywhere and observes everything. Murder by Cain.

Corruption of man. Destitution of Hagar. He hears and sees. He is God Almighty.

And all his actions illustrate the omnipotence which this name proclaims. He promises what appears to be the impossible.

A son to a couple in their 90s. So incredible in the eyes of the wife that she makes it known by her incredulous laughter.

He takes control of events. Everything is under his control. And yet this great book that sets before us the personal and majestic God.

[4 : 32] The God of covenant faithfulness ends with the phrase a coffin in Egypt. It begins with the great creator God.

And it ends with a reminder of the feeble mortality of man. It seems such, for want of a better phrase, such a lame or a tame ending to such a marvelous book with such great beginning.

A coffin in Egypt. You might have expected the book to end differently. Perhaps a description of the lavish honors paid to Joseph as Egypt's savior.

Or perhaps an upbeat, optimistic ending. But that is not the way that this book appears to end.

It declares simply and starkly the death of Joseph. Without the kind of extended, protracted deathbed scene that describes his father's passing.

[5 : 55] Moses emphasized in the death of Jacob that God's servants come and go. And they live and die.

But God's promise endures. The transition from Jacob to Joseph in the line of promises stresses the nature of God's promise to Abraham as it has been passed to Isaac, now to Israel, now to Joseph, and to the sons of Israel.

And that is continued in the following book of Exodus. In the opening verses. The death of Jacob and Joseph's request of Pharaoh.

That request of Joseph sets in motion not just the fulfillment of his father's wishes, but it sets in motion a testimony to God's faithfulness in fulfilling the promises.

And so, though the patriarchs come and go, God's promise endures. God's faithfulness continues.

[7 : 09] This great man, Joseph, despite the level of grandeur, power, and prestige he enjoyed, as second only to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt, yet he could not save himself from the hands of the last enemy, death.

In his lifetime, instrumental under God in delivering most of the civilized world from starvation, yet now at the close of his life, this is now how he is portrayed, lying in a coffin in Egypt, but not buried, at least his remains.

And for centuries, that silent coffin in Egypt preached impressive messages. What did it say?

Well, in my view, this coffin spoke. It spoke faint whispers of its silent testimony.

That's how it might have sounded in the hearts. And it helped to keep alive some hopes. What did the coffin say?

[8 : 32] And I wish to raise four thoughts. First of all, it was a silent, somber reminder of man's mortality.

You might say, well, that's obvious. Secondly, though, it was a symbol of hope. Thirdly, it was a soundless call to patience.

And fourthly, a surety of eventual possession. It was a silent, somber reminder of man's mortality. I think, first of all, that is the very obvious lesson that is taught by these words. And you might ask me, do we need such a reminder?

And my response is that we do. Why? For the very reason that we tend to dismiss death so far from us.

[9 : 45] When we look at this man's coffin, we are reminded, as we should by every coffin, of the mortality of man and of the reality of death.

The wise man in the book of Ecclesiastes begins the third chapter in that book with the following words. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.

We do not live in a world of chance or fate. For everything there is a season, says the writer in the book of Ecclesiastes.

In other words, it is all under divine control. A time to be born, he writes, and a time to die.

When did you last look at your birth certificate? Maybe that makes you think, where will you find it? Maybe you can't even remember where you placed it.

[10 : 58] But if you look at it, you will see, written on your birth certificate, the time you were born, assuming the registrar or the person who informed the registrar has not made an error.

If you were not born on the hour, even the minutes are recorded. You did not determine that moment.

Neither did your parents. God did. Both the cradle and the deathbed follow God's timetable.

It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment. We may enjoy greatness, like Joseph.

We may even have the world at our feet, looking to us for wisdom or praising our achievements. But like Joseph, no matter how high we may scale the ladder in this world, we succumb to the power of death.

[12 : 09] Fame, wealth, position, power cannot protect us from the power of death. Love cannot prevent death from robbing us of those whom we hold so dear in life.

There may be even those who say, I cannot live without you. But death does not care about these sentiments.

Death is impervious to such sentiments. People may be dependent on you for jobs, work security, comfort or care.

It does not matter. All the love or dependence in the world will not give you or I one second more of life when our appointed moment, determined by God, comes to depart this world.

That's why the writer of this book, Moses, is so concerned that we take on board the plea written in Psalm 90, So teach us to number our days that we may set our heart on wisdom, or that we may get a heart of wisdom.

[13:42] A coffin speaks of the finality of death, doesn't it? But let us remember that while that coffin, that silent, somber coffin, enforced the old, old lesson to the successive generations that looked on it and perhaps paid scant attention to the solemn and somber teaching of mortality.

Joseph had spoken words of encouragement to the members of his family before he died.

I am about to die, he says, 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.

That's the promise that Joseph reminded them of on his deathbed, as he came to the end of his life. Here is a promise to hang on to. It's not a promise made by man. It's not something devised by the ingenuity of Joseph to cheer up those who were mourning his departure out of life.

[15:09] It is a promise that comes directly from God. So that Israel came to learn that they could survive the loss of the strongest, the most powerful, and the wisest.

God lives, though a hundred Josephs die. And that's part of the lesson that is taught by this coffin in Egypt.

This and that man dies, but God lives. Remember the words of the psalmist, frail man, his days are like the grass.

As flower and field he grows, for over it the wind doth pass, and it away is gone. And off the place where once it was, shall no more be known. But unto them that do fear, God's mercy never ends.

The result of our contemplation of our mortality as affecting our most loved and most dear in life, and which ultimately is to include ourselves, ought to drive us to seek God's mercy.

[16:49] That there we may find a friend who has overcome death, who has conquered death, and who has risen in power, triumphing over death and the grave.

Nor are these thoughts all the message of that coffin in Egypt. In the first verses of the next book, the book of Exodus, there is a remarkable contrasting of ideas.

When we read that Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation, but was that the end of Israel? By no means. For the narrative goes on immediately to say, linking the two things together by a simple but.

But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly. In chapter 1 of Exodus, they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong.

So life springs side by side with death. There are credes as well as graves. The individual is gone, the great leader that he was.

[18:05] But the family grew, and it became more numerous. We see it in our gardens. If you're into gardening, leaves drop.

Then in the springtime, new leaves come. And the fresh leaf buds are all the more vigorous and luxurious because they are fed from the decaying leaves that litter the roots of the tree.

Thus, through the ages, pine and changes take place. Joseph dies, but Israel grows. In our individual histories, and on the wider, the wider field of the world's history, the same large laws at work which is expressed in the simplest terms by these old words.

Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation, but the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly. Today, a coffin in Egypt speaks to us of our mortality, a silent, somber reminder of our mortality, but secondly, a symbol of hope.

How could a coffin possibly be looked on as a symbol of hope? Remember the old adage, where there is, there is life, there is hope.

[19:42] But a coffin is so crushingly final, isn't it? It gives you no hope. You notice that Joseph's body was embalmed.

What was the reason for this? Mummification was a complicated and lengthy process, which lasted up, could last up to 70 days.

It was an expensive process, and usually, only was the preserve of the very wealthy bar those of title.

Only they were accorded the practice in death. And of course, Joseph was a wealthy, powerful individual in his own right in the nation.

He did not wish his body to remain in the land of Egypt, where he had exercised such huge influence over a period of time. Nor did he request, like his father, that he be buried immediately with his fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah.

[20 : 56] Jacob, his father, was also embalmed, but Jacob was looking to the past in the sense of burial. Joseph, on the other hand, is looking to the future.

He is looking to what God is yet to do. And he disposes his present affairs in that light. Joseph's dying command was the expression of his unshaken face.

Out of all the incidents in his life, it is this expression that is chosen by the Holy Spirit to include as an example of faith in that great chapter, in chapter 11 of the letter to the Hebrews.

By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave direction concerning his remains or concerning his bones.

You might have thought that the review that he conducts of his life would be the example chosen to illustrate faith in the life of this man.

[22 : 15] Because you note earlier in the chapter, 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.

And you remember how hazardous life was for Joseph before he came into a position of power, shackled in an Egyptian jail, a prisoner, not because he had broken any law, but because he was falsely accused and shackled in prison.

and yet his trust in God remained undimmed. You know, often when you confront difficult providence, perhaps your faith begins to waver.

and it's not as strong as it was when you were, as it were, on Easy Street. Because you are facing difficulty and trial.

That's not how it was in the life of this man. And yet, illustrious as his faith was, that's not the example that was chosen by the Holy Spirit to indicate to us the nature of faith in the life of this man.

[23 : 46] But it was the assertion that one day we are going to Cain on the promised land. That was the confident assertion of faith in the life of dying Joseph.

I believe God's promise to Abraham that though we are going to sojourn here for 400 years in total in the land of Goshen, in the land in the land of Egypt.

Yet God is going to bring us out of the house of bondage, out of the house of slavery, and bring us into the land that he promised to Abraham.

And so Joseph tells his people what they have to do. When that day comes, you shall carry up my remains or my bones to the land of Canaan because I know that the Lord is going to take us there. That's how sure Joseph was of the fulfillment of the promise. This is an example of a man who believes in the promise of God. That's what faith is.

[24 : 57] Faith is believing the promises of God, taking God at his word. Joseph is going to die before he sees the promise of God fulfilled to take the children of Israel back to Canaan.

But what does he say? You take my remains with you because I know that God is going to fulfill his promise. And so a coffin in Egypt was a symbol of hope.

How many generations looked on that coffin and perhaps wondered about their ancestors?

Perhaps wondered about the promise that he had given to his family? Did they ask themselves, was this man deceived?

Could it possibly be that what he had promised would be fulfilled because there was so much to discourage? There was so much to remove hope with the passing of the years.

[26 : 17] And as the Egyptians tightened their grip upon this enslaved people and made conditions so difficult for them, to is it possible that Joseph had it wrong?

Because as a people they became more and more entrapped and entrenched in bondage, and especially since there arose a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph, more hardship with the increasing rigors and demands of slavery so that the likelihood of the promise being fulfilled seemed so remote, seemed further away than ever.

But in these dark, gloomy, difficult years, there was the coffin, a symbol of hope, a gleam of light in what was an increasingly dark providence.

hope, it spoke of triumphant faith, leaping over the barrier of death and far beyond to grasp the real, beyond the dark, brooding providence of the present.

Now, we have a better messenger of hope than a coffin placed somewhere in the world.

[27 : 49] We have an empty grace and an occupied throne and glory by which to nourish our confidence in immortality and our estimate of the insignificance of death for every person in Christ.

The Joseph of the New Testament does not say, I am about to die, but God will visit you. But he gives us the wonderful assurance of identification with himself and consequent participation in his glory.

I will not leave you as orphans is the pledge of the Joseph of the New Testament. I will come to you because as I live, you also will live.

Therefore, our hope should be as much brighter and more confirmed than it was for those trapped in slavery in Egypt.

and our hope is based on a better and more joyous outcome. The Israelites must have been tempted by many incentives to settle for good, infertile Goshen, and to think themselves better off than embarking on a perilous journey to take possession of a land.

[29 : 29] that they had not seen. So that when deliverance came, it was not particularly welcome.

Even though oppression was embittering their spirits, hope had died down in them, desire had become lethargic, and base contentment with their flocks and herds had dulled their spirits, and there is Joseph's coffin, saying loudly, but not with a verbal voice.

This is not your rest. Arise and claim your inheritance. Is there not a danger for us too, that we lose sight of the future and become submerged in the present, so taken up with the things of this life, that the eternal realm is ignored?

Lord, or has so little focus in our lives? How often do we think of glory or of being with Christ?

How often is that at the forefront of our lives? Being in glory and being with Christ? Christ, among the many truths which I believe almost need to be rediscovered by the professing church, is the rest that remains for the people of God.

[31 : 31] God. For the test of believing a truth is its influence on our conduct and life.

And that prompts the question, does the conduct of the average Christian of our times bear marks of being deeply influenced by that glorious future and the hope of winning it?

do we live as if we consider we are aliens among the material things surrounding us in life?

There was a song once, I think it was a country and western song, but it has a grain of truth in it.

This world is not my home.

I am just a passing through. The angels beckon me from heavens open door and I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

[32 : 38] Friend, is that true of you this evening? Is that true that you don't feel at home in this world anymore?

You know, some would say of people that he or she are too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. I don't quite accept that. I think those whose lives focus on the things that are yet to be, the things that are permanent in contrast to the temporal, then that of itself is an incentive to work more earnestly in the present duties.

You remember how Paul expresses it with regard to his own life. One thing I do, he says, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the price of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The thought that here we have no continuing city could be depressing. But you see, we seek one to come, whose builder and maker is God, city that has foundations.

We need even more than Israel in bondage did to realize we are strangers and pilgrims in this life. It concerns the depths of our religion and the reality of our profiting by the discipline as well as of our securing the enjoyment of the blessings.

[34 : 27] All that we keep in mind constantly the great future that dignifies and interprets this enigmatical earthly life.

a symbol of hope, a silent somber reminder of our mortality, a soundless call to patience. Hundreds of years passed.

Between the time when Joseph's mummified body was laid in the coffin and the night and the night when the Israelites having partaken of the Passover meal as they set out from Egypt.

No doubt hope deferred had made many a heart sick and the weary question, where is the fulfillment of the promise?

Perhaps in some cases it had changed into bitter disbelief that the promise would ever be fulfilled. But for all these years and throughout all these years, the coffin was there proclaiming, if it seems slow, wait for it.

[35 : 58] Faithful is he who has promised. And surely we need to learn the same lesson. It is hard for us to acquiesce in the slow march of the divine purposes.

Life is short, and desire would gladly see the great harvest reap before death, closes our eyes. Sometimes the very prospect of great things that shall one day be accomplished in this world. And that we will not be there to see it.

Perhaps it weighs heavily on the minds of some. But there is great and deep truth in Paul's apparent paradox, when he says if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. The more sure the confidence, the more quiet the patient waiting. It is uncertainty which makes earthly hope short of breath and impatient of delay.

[37 : 15] You know, we hear it often, since our country agreed in 2016 by a majority to leave the European Union.

Too often do we hear in the media, uncertainty is leaving businesses in difficulty. And uncertainty in the life of the believer creates its own peculiar problems.

But you see, a Christian's hope is not based on something uncertain. It is based on certainty. God has pledged that it will be so.

With the Lord, it may seem long in coming about with the Lord one day as a thousand years in respect of the magnitude of the changes which are to come about.

When that appointed hour shall strike, then a thousand years shall be as one day.

[38 : 37] There are more than two thousand years since Christ was on the cross. and many will say much is as it was.

The earth goes on, men come and men go, and the world continues to be as it was. Oh, yes, it may appear that God works slowly and moves slowly.

He lifts his foot slowly and plants it firmly in his march through the world. But we would do wisely to leave God to settle the when.

Since we are duty-bound, we are in Christ tonight, we are sure that he is duty-bound to accomplish what he has promised.

A soundless call to patience. Patience is not easily exercised, is it? We become so impatient. We would want to see conversions by the thousand.

[39 : 58] We would want to see families and homes gathered into the kingdom of the son of his love. And it's easy to become impatient when we do not see such things taking place.

Here was a test as to the trust of the people of Israel. A soundless call to patience, a symbol of hope, a silent, somber reminder of our mortality, and finally, a surety of eventual possession. confession. The coffin remained long among the Israelites on visible display. We're not told where it was placed, but it was obviously placed where it was visible to support feeble faith.

And we read on the night of the Exodus, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.

And the implication is that they reverently guarded the coffin during forty years of wanderings in the desert or in the wilderness until this coffin was deposited in the cave beside the graves or the coffins of the fathers of the nation.

[41 : 28] 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 Hamur, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money.

It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph. Thus it became to the nation and remains for us a symbol of the truth that no hope based upon God's bare word is ever finally disappointed. There is no disappointment with regard to the promises of God. All other anticipations grounded on anything less solid are liable to disappointment.

But there is no disappointment with regard to the promise of God. So that you see the person who builds on the rock, who builds on the promises of God, on the word of God will never be put to shame.

And when the floods sweep away every refuge built on the sand, the person who is on the rock will remain secure in the darkness and the storm and in the wildest torrent that may assail that building. [43 : 19] And no, hope that they are secure. Here is faith and exercise in Joseph's dying command as he encourages his descendants to look towards the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to them as the God of covenant faithfulness.

is our faith this evening is it in exercise upon the promises of God or is our faith looking at the difficulties and the trials of the present and losing sight of the one who has promised and who has promised to fulfill and to bring to pass all that he has promised with regard to the destination of every person in Christ.

A coffin in Egypt a silent somber reminder of our mortality community a symbol of hope a soundless call to patience a surety of eventual possession when they reached the land of promise and they deposited the coffin there I wonder how many gave thanks to God for the way in which he had fulfilled his promise to them despite how almost impossible it appeared that it would ever come to pass us and so this evening if you trust in

Christ Jesus as your Lord and God and Saviour you can look forward with expectation to a glorious future where the sun never sets where there is no need of the light of the moon for the Lord God is the light there that's the future for every person in Christ you don't need the coffin of your fellow man to remind you of it because the Lord Christ has died and risen again he's left an empty grave he's conquered death and the grave and because he has triumphed all in him shall triumph also let us pray again as well and he has going and his go