

Funerals and Faith

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 August 2013

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now briefly to the passage in Genesis, where we read from chapter 49 and verse 28 right through to the end of the book of Genesis, chapter 50, verse 26.

We're going to look at this passage, but pick out of it the two events of Joseph's death and, firstly, his father Jacob's death. And this final study in the life of Joseph, as we come to the end of his life, reminds us again of how, as we've seen in our studies of Joseph's life, how the life of Joseph in the book of Genesis really fits into the wider theme of the history of the people of Israel, who took their name, of course, from Jacob, Joseph's father.

But we've seen how God's purpose is really to bring his people, these people of Israel, into Egypt and then, ultimately, to bring them back out of Egypt, which is what we'll see referred to here by Joseph himself before he died.

He's going to bring them, God's going to bring them out of Egypt in what became and remains one of the great events of history as far as the church is concerned, and indeed one of the great illustrations of God's salvation or redemption and what redemption means.

That it's a deliverance from one thing, here from the Egyptians and the slavery of Egypt, but we're seeing how that is itself an illustration of God's redemption from sin and from the effects of sin.

[1 : 37] It's redemption from that, it's redemption from that, it's redemption as we'll see today, to being companionship and fellowship with God until we come to the inheritance that God has prepared for us, of which Cain in itself was also an illustration or a type.

So that all of these things that we'll see here, to be able to see how that is, of which Cain in itself is an illustration of the life that believers now live as we anticipate that final aspect of salvation in the coming of Christ.

Just as these people live as we anticipate that just as we anticipate that just as we anticipate that God has prepared for his people.

Just the same principle but different in the sense of times of history. Now Joseph of course understood that wider plan of God, that purpose of God and how his own life fitted into that.

It's very clear, as we've seen already, that Joseph had a grasp of these issues and really had to teach his brothers how the wider purpose of God included even such things as their selling of him into Egypt.

[2 : 55] And you can see it here, we're not going to really look at it in the chapter in detail, but you can see in verses 19 and 21 when his brothers, afraid then because their father had died, knowing that it was still in their mind what they had done to Joseph.

And Joseph was here, the governor of Egypt. What's he going to do to us now that our father is no longer here? Well of course Joseph assured them, no it's not going to be like that. You meant evil against me. He's not letting them off thinking that what they did wasn't serious.

But he says, I'm not in the place of God. God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

In other words, Joseph saw how all the events of his life fitted into God's big picture, into God's purpose for his people. And in a way that's how we also have to see the tiny little slice of God's purpose and the history of God's people that we are part of in the span of our lives.

It's an important span nevertheless. And we have to see it as fitted into God's big picture of salvation. Where it begins, where it ends, what's in between.

[4 : 11] We fit into that somewhere. And as they did then, we live by faith. And as we live by faith, we live in anticipation, what the Bible calls hope, of eternal life, of the inheritance that God has prepared.

So let's look at Jacob's death first of all. And we're looking really at, if you like, funerals and faith, just to give our study a bit of a title.

And first of all, Jacob's faith and his hope at death. And then secondly, Joseph's faith and hope at death. Now we'll need to deal with them very briefly, just looking at the very basic outline of them. But you notice first of all, with Jacob's death, the end of chapter 49 there, he talks first of all about being gathered to his people. A phrase which is quite common in the Old Testament.

He was saying to his sons, I am about to be gathered to my people. And then when he had in fact passed away, in verse 33, when Jacob finished commanding the sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

[5 : 22] And that itself, really right there at the beginning of the Bible and in these far off times, before God had revealed all that much about himself, yet he had revealed enough for these people to see that there is more to it than this life.

That in fact there's more to it than what you find or associate with life physically in this world. So that Jacob here, when he came to die and before he died, he spoke about himself in his person continuing.

His body was going to be left behind, of course in this world. It was going to be buried. He gave instructions about where he was to be buried in the land of Canaan.

But he was conscious that he himself, as a person, in his own life, if you like it, the life of the person. But that goes on, although the body is separate from what we know as the soul.

And being gathered to his father, or gathered to his people, is a way in the Old Testament of showing that these people were actually conscious of something beyond the grave, of life continuing with those believers who had gone on and died before them.

[6 : 38] Now that of course is something that Jacob himself knew. And although it's dimly seen in the Old Testament, nevertheless it was something that faith connected with.

There was more to life than just this world. And life, in the biggest sense, in the fullest sense, it didn't end when your body was laid into the ground to rest in the grave of sepulchre.

Because life is more than just what you see in your body. And Jesus, in fact, was given at one time a question. You find it in Matthew chapter 22.

And it's itself quite a significant answer, and fits in with what we're looking at here in this point. In Matthew 22, the Sadducees came to Jesus with, it was a question, but it was designed to catch him out.

The Sadducees didn't believe there was such a thing as resurrection. They were a religious sect, but one of the things they did not believe in was resurrection.

[7 : 49] So they came to Jesus, and they told him about someone who had died and left no children. And under the Old Testament regulations, his brother married the widow in order to raise up children for his brother.

And there were seven brothers, and one after another they died, and each of them had married, and according to the custom, they had married this widow, who had been all these times widowed. And so the series of brothers who married this woman carried on to the last of them died. And the question they put to Jesus, in the resurrection, therefore, which they didn't believe in, of the seven, whose wife will she be?

Or they all had her as a wife. Then Jesus answered that. He says, You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures, nor the power of God.

And he tied that together. They were ignorant of the Scriptures, and the meaning of Scripture, and they didn't know the power of God. For he says, In the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven.

[8 : 51] As for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God? I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

In other words, Jesus is actually saying to the Sadducees, the name that God gave to himself, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, is still relevant, because these three individuals are still living.

They are not dead, in the fullest sense. They are living with God. He is their God today, because they are with him. They have life in him.

Their body is left behind, but they and their persons are with God. He is the God of, not of the dead, but of the living. And it is interesting that that was, Jesus responds to a denial of resurrection. How did he answer people who didn't believe in the resurrection? He answered them by saying, this is the title God gave to himself, and if there is no resurrection, that title is meaningless, because he is not the God of the dead, but actually of the living.

[10:04] They live with him now, and even their bodies will be brought to live with him, in the resurrection. So that is something of, what they were conscious of, in a much dimmer way, in these kinds of descriptions, gathered to his people.

But then, there is the instruction, to be buried in the land of Canaan. And that too is interesting, because why was Canaan so important to them?

Well, it ties in with, what they were aware of, and believed in, as life beyond this world. It is a great contrast, even in itself, to the atheistic view, that is so prominent today, where increasingly people will say to you, I believe when I die, I shall be put, as they put it very graphically, and very boldly, I will be put in a box, and that is it.

That is the end of it. There is nothing after that. I do not believe there is anything else to my life, but what I have in this world, and when I come to die, and be put in a coffin, then that is it. Well, here is the Bible telling us, that even in early times, God had revealed to people, that that was not it.

He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living. And now he is saying, bury me in Canaan. Why was Canaan important? Well, Canaan, and the burying place, especially in Canaan, if you go back to, earlier chapters in Genesis, it was bought by Abraham from the Hittites, as a burying place.

[11:39] Why did Abraham, want a burying place in Canaan? When he knew that his descendants, were going to be, taken to the land of Egypt, for many hundreds of years.

Well, because Canaan, was what God promised his people, as an inheritance. In other words, God had said to Abraham, the land that you are presently living in, which was Canaan, that came to be known at least as Canaan afterwards, this land I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, to be an inheritance.

Fair enough. But Abraham died, and his descendants ended up in Egypt, for hundreds of years. So, why is Canaan that important to them?

Well, because it represented, something greater. And we'll come to that in a minute, from the New Testament. But, the first thing you have to realize, is that, Canaan was important, because, it was God's promise, that was attached to it.

Everything, God gives to us, by way of promise, or will yet give to us, by way of promise, is bound to be true. If you believe in God, and believe in the truthfulness of God, and you believe in the truthfulness of God's promises, then what God promises to give us, beyond this world, must be true.

[13:13] Because God, otherwise, would be found untruthful. If God is saying, I will bring you my people, to heaven, to be with me, forevermore, if the words of Jesus, in John 17, are true, as we surely believe they are, Father, I will, it is my will, that they whom you have given me, be with me, where I am, that they may see my glory, which you have given me.

He didn't just mean, in terms of our, disembodied spirits, as we die in this world, he meant, our entire persons. All of these people, that you have given to me, Father, this is my prayer, this is my wish, this is my will for them, that they be with me, where I am.

If there is no resurrection, if there is nothing beyond the box, our bodies put in, these words are meaningless. They just fall to the ground. There is nothing in them for us.

But if you believe, from the beginning of the Bible, through to the end, in the truth of God's promises, then, as they believed, Canaan was their inheritance, in this world, so, they had such great attachment, to Canaan, because that was, God's promised land for them.

God in covenant, that said, this is what I am giving you, this is where you are going to be, this is your inheritance. Therefore, that is why they wanted, to be buried in Canaan. It wasn't a matter of, simply looking to, a connection with their family, or people who had been buried, their belonging to their family, in previous generations, not just family customs, or sentiment, it's a matter of faith, you see, faith in God, faith in the promises of God, faith that wants to, inherit what God has promised, as an inheritance.

[15:06] But you need to go further than that, because, it's not just an inheritance, in a physical sense. There is, as we've said, that aspect to it. Canaan is, a specific part, geographically, of the world, of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob's time.

That's the area, they associate with their inheritance, in this world. But they were given, this inheritance, and Abraham, bought this piece of ground, for a burying place, not simply, because they wanted, to be buried, physically, for their bodies, to be buried, in that piece of ground. By faith, they were looking, beyond it, to a spiritual inheritance. Just as we are, as we look towards heaven, from where we are now.

They were looking towards heaven, from where they are now, from where they were now, and when they came to think, about Canaan, they thought about, something higher, especially, those of them, who had faith.

I want to just, mention a few texts, from the New Testament, that shows, that that's how indeed it was, and that's how we, should understand this. We turn first of all, to Acts, chapter 7, and you'll find there, when Stephen, was giving, this very long, but important speech, before he was put to death, he included, in his speech there, quite a bit of the main, history, of the people, of Israel.

[16:34] And this is what he actually, said there, in chapter 7, verses 3 to 5, of the book of Acts. This is what God, he said, said to Abraham, go out from your land, from your kindred, and go into the land, that I will show you.

Then he went out, from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran, and then so on, God gave, removed him, from there, into this land, in which you, are now living.

The people that, Stephen was then, speaking to, had of course, settled, in Cana, of course, Cana. After this, his father died, God gave him, removed him, into this land, in which you are now living. Yet, just listen to this, yet he gave him, no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it, to him as a possession, and to his offspring, bring after him, but he had no child, and all of the, he goes then, to speak about Abraham, about Jacob, and the people in Egypt.

But just think about that. Here is God saying, to Abraham, this land, I will give to you, and to your children, as an inheritance. Not just to your children, to you as well.

[17:42] And there's, Stephen saying, but he didn't give him, not even a foot's length, as an inheritance. Is that not a contradiction? Well it is, if you don't understand it, something beyond, this literal Canaan, to have been in Abraham's vision.

When Abraham thought of Canaan, he didn't just think of, that physical land of Canaan. He thought of, what that physical land of Canaan, as God's inheritance to them, represented.

And it represented, something higher, something better. It represented the land of heaven. And probably the best place, to see that, along with Act 7, is in the letter, to the Hebrews.

And if we turn to that, you can see, just very briefly, you can read it, more detail for yourselves later. Hebrews chapter 11, and verses 8 to 10.

In verse 9 especially, he talks here about Abraham, and also Isaac, and Jacob. By faith, he went to live, in the land of promise, as in a foreign land. Living in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him, of the same promise.

[18:54] For, he was looking, forward to the city, that has foundations, whose designer, and builder, is God. When he looked to Canaan, and to the cities of Canaan, Abraham said, this is important, but it's important, as a sign, of something better.

As an illustration, or a type, or a symbol, of the promise, of an inheritance, that will last forever. And it's interesting, that he talks there, about living in tents.

And that's contrasted, with a city, that has foundations. Tents don't have foundations. Just yesterday, we went across, to the west side, with our Korean friends, and went down, to Dalmore Beach.

And on Dalmore Beach, just near the beach, we saw, two or three tents, probably those who were there, for surfing, or whatever. But they were just there, at the entrance, to the beach, looking very vulnerable.

Nice day yesterday, but just imagine, if there had been, a gale of wind, how difficult it would have been, to keep those tents, intact. They don't have foundations. They're tied, just with a peg, to the ground.

[20:08] But Abraham, looked forward, to a city, that has foundations. As he lived, in his tents, with Isaac, and with Jacob. Heirs, of the same promise. They lived in tents.

They went from one place, to another. They had to uproot their tents, and move on. In Canaan. But Canaan, was for them, a sign, of something better.

It was an inheritance, geographically, in this world. But it was a sign, of the, of the, spiritual inheritance. A city, that has foundations.

Whose builder, and designer, is God. That's heaven. That's what Abraham, was looking forward to. So was Joseph, so was Jacob. That's what meant, in these verses here, where, you find him, talking about, being buried in Canaan.

And indeed, as we'll see, that entered into, Joseph's command, as well, regarding his bones. Dying in Egypt, but taken up to Canaan, and buried in Canaan, because Canaan, is the picture for them, of the better land of heaven.

[21 : 16] And God's promise, that's what they believe in. So, that means that, the word pilgrim, I'm just going to mention this in passing, the word pilgrim in the Bible, or sojourner, it means more than just a traveler.

When we think of ourselves, as sojourners, or pilgrims, in this world, we're passing through this world, we're on a journey in this world, but it means more than just people, on a journey.

It means, in the spiritual sense, people who are traveling homewards. There are pilgrims in this world, because they're not at home, in this world. But they're going home.

They're going to the city, that has foundations, which this world does not have. This builder, and maker is God. So, in essence, their faith, is exactly the same as our faith.

Even though we're looking back on, Christ having accomplished his work on the cross, still we're looking forward, to resurrection, as they did. And to, the final glory in the city, that has foundations.

[22 : 21] So, let's look secondly at Joseph's faith, and his hope, at death. We'll go to the end of the chapter, in verse 24. Joseph said to his brothers, I'm about to die, 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.

Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here. So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin, in Egypt.

And it might seem that, reading the book of Genesis, which begins with that wonderful picture of life, and that account of life, indeed, in the garden of Eden, where God created mankind, Adam and Eve.

He placed them in that environment of Egypt. They were surrounded by Eden, and all its delights.

And the book of Genesis ends, with a note of death, and a body that's being surrounded, by a sarcophagus, or a coffin, in Egypt.

And you might think, well, that's such a sad end, for a book that begins, with such a brilliant emphasis of life, in Eden, with God.

[23 : 44] Yes, in a way, that's true. You have to acknowledge that, death is part of the picture there, but, it's not a sad ending. It's not a dark ending.

It's not a hopeless ending. Because what Joseph was giving instruction about, was, was his bones, not to be left in Egypt.

So when they put him in a coffin in Egypt, and embalmed him, in the way the Egyptian practice was to embalm, they were doing that in anticipation. They were actually keeping that coffin ready, for 400 years from then, when they would leave Egypt, and go to Canaan.

Every time they would see that coffin, left there for that time, they would say to one another, or could say to one another, remember what Joseph said.

And when the bad times came, and when things got difficult, and when the Egyptians oppressed them, and made them slaves, and made their life utterly miserable, one of the things they could go to, was Joseph's coffin.

[24 : 57] And they could say, there's an end to the bad times. These sufferings will not go on forever. There's redemption. There's deliverance coming.

There's the fulfillment of God's promise. There's what Joseph himself looked forward to. And you can take that into your own situation as well.

The trying times. The difficulties. The unexpected things which cause you pain. The things which maybe at times will question even your faith.

And your relationship with God. And where God is in your life. And where you are in relation to God, and his providence, and his sovereignty, and where your faith fits into all of that.

Sometimes life is confusing. Even for the best believers. Look at Job in the Bible. Then you come back to God's promise, and to God's truthfulness.

[25 : 57] And you say, no. Whatever's happening in my life, I believe in God. I believe in his wisdom. I believe in his sovereign control of my life.

I believe in his promises. I believe in the truth of his promises. And when this life is done, there's a city that has foundations.

Of which he is the builder and maker. And that's his promise to me and to you. That's his promise. That will not remain unfulfilled. Now what he's saying is, God will visit you.

That's a great word. Visit you. Because in the Bible it means more than what it generally comes to us to mean today. Because we think about a visit as something very temporary.

You go and visit somebody, maybe for a couple of hours in the daytime, or in the evening, and you go back to your own home. But when the Bible speaks about God visiting his people, it usually means something dramatic.

[27 : 03] Something to do with his salvation being actually worked out by him, or his promises being fulfilled. You go to other places in the Bible talking about God visiting his people.

When you go to Exodus chapter 3 and verse 8, it then describes, it begins to describe, how did God visit his people? What was Joseph here talking about?

God will surely visit you. Well, he meant God will come down and powerfully take you out from this place and lead you towards your inheritance.

And that's what happens when God comes into our life. He comes to visit us. In the biblical sense of visit. He doesn't come just to pay a quick visit and say hello and then go on.

He comes to visit in a way that comes into your life never to leave it again. He comes to occupy your life. He comes to make a home for himself in your life.

[28 : 11] Within our persons. Because that is what happens when we come to be saved. God comes to visit us. God comes to visit us to take up residence in us.

God comes to live in us and assures us this is now my home forevermore. I'm not going to leave you. I'm not going to leave you to your enemies. I'm not going to leave you even to death. I've come to visit you and when I come to visit you it's to make sure that you actually come to be brought home to be with me.

And of course that's a word that's described about the coming of Jesus. Where has God visited his people most dramatically of all? Well in Luke chapter 1 verse 68 this is Zechariah the father of John the Baptist and when God had revealed to him the meaning of the son that he was going to have. How he would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah God he said has visited and redeemed his people. Bringing the two words into close connection. A visit to redeem.

And you follow that through into the next book of the Bible. And Joseph is actually putting it this way. He will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here.

[29 : 25] He will I'm about to die 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. And notice the contrast.

There's Joseph saying I'm about to die I'm just shortly going to die but I want to tell you this before I go he's saying. And the contrast is between Joseph human being frail dying human being but he says I know someone who never dies and he's going to come to visit you your descendants my God.

There's the contrast the God who ever lives fulfilling his promises working out his plan and that's a contrast to Joseph himself I'm about to die.

And when God visits he does exactly the same thing as he did with Israel. He takes you out from the bondage of sin. He takes you into fellowship with himself for all the time that you then live as a believer in this life.

And he then takes you into your inheritance. How often the Psalms celebrate that great fact in song and how great it is that we're able to actually sing out our faith and our hope in God.

[30 : 50] Nevertheless says the Psalmist continually I am with you you will guide me by your counsel and afterwards you will receive me into your glory.

That's redemption. That's what Joseph was aware of and was telling his brother. That's why he gave command that his bones would not be left in Egypt when they left Egypt.

They would take his bones with them to be buried in Canaan. And today we too have these reminders especially in the Bible.

But we have other reminders too just similar to Joseph's coffin. When you go to Aganish or to any other graveyard especially people that you knew and lived by faith in Christ in this life very often

there's something on their gravestone of a text or maybe not but even if there isn't their very name still speaks to you about the life they lived.

And when you go and look at these gravestones of believers who have passed on they're saying to you just as Joseph's coffin did to them God is real God is true God's promises are important eternal life is a reality death is not the end there is resurrection there is glory there is being with Christ forever and that faith the faith of Joseph the faith of Jacob the faith of Abraham the faith of the disciples and Paul the faith of many believers down through the years it's the same faith that you and I have when our faith is in Christ a faith and a hope that looks forward beyond this life let's pray [33 : 06] O Lord God we thank you that the faith of your people the faith that you give to them gives to them in this life stability in looking forward to that inheritance that you have prepared for them help us we pray to live that life of faith help us to draw our strength from you and from your promises and from the truthfulness that we know us and so much a part of your promise and of your very being so hear us now we pray and continue with us throughout this day for your glory's sake Amen amen thank you thank you