

The Good Purposes of God

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: 27 March 2011

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] For God's help, we look again at Genesis chapter 50 and verse 15, section verses 15 to 21. Genesis chapter 50, verse 15 to 21.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.

So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, Your father gave this command before he died. Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.

And now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father, Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, Behold, we are your servants. But Joseph said to them, Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?

[1 : 08] 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. So do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones.

Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Now at the end of chapter 49, and there right into the beginning of chapter 50, we have the account given to us of the death of one of the great men in the Bible.

Well, Jacob was one of the most complex of men. One of the most, I suppose, it would be very hard to define really the kind of person that Jacob was.

Certainly in his younger days, he was a skimmer. He was one of these people that you might say was always on the make. He was always trying to get one over on somebody else.

And if there was any possibility, whatever, of getting the upper hand, then Jacob was your man.

There was an inbuilt into his character, into his nature, that was always looking to get the advantage, always looking to make things work out for him.

[2 : 34] And he wasn't beyond doing some pretty awful things in order to progress. You know, we use the expression often about people who they would use that expression.

You know, he's the kind of person he would sell his granny. You hear that expression? Well, that is the kind of person, really, that Jacob was. He would do anything. He was quite ready to deceive his old blind father and pretend he was his brother in order to get the birthright, to get the special blessing.

He managed to get the birthright out of his brother again by way of deception and trickery. And so that's the kind of person he was.

And when you look at a lot of his early life, it's quite easy to be dismissive of him and say, well, is he really a great man of faith? But when you study the life of Jacob, you realize that he was undoubtedly one of the great men of faith.

And one of the intriguing things about Jacob's life, and that follows right through it, and it's very much part of the earlier part of his life, is that his faith was always taking him to the Lord.

[3 : 57] But his own natural ways would then try and take over. Jacob would have a problem. He would go to the Lord with a problem. But then he would try and sort it out himself.

And sometimes when we look at these sort of things, we realize, you know, there's a bit of that in all of us. We're very ready to give the Lord something. And we're saying to the Lord, Lord, please work this out for me.

And we're no sooner do that than we then ourselves. We busy ourselves. And we try and sort it out. And quite often, we make a mess of things. But what I think, what I do like, really, about Jacob's life, is that Jacob was a man who, as time went on, began to develop and to grow and to mature.

There came a point in Jacob's life where God really came to deal with him, a crisis point. That was the night when the angel of the Lord wrestled with him all night.

That was a defining moment in Jacob's life. Up until that point, there had been twists and turns.

There were many twists and turns. And God was dealing with Jacob here and there.

[5 : 11] And there were many experiences and many incidents and many things. But this was a defining moment. This is where Jacob gave way. And he then became Israel, a prince with God.

And Jacob's life continued to grow and to develop and to mature. So that by the time you come to the end of Jacob's life, I think Jacob becomes one of the, the great believers that we find in the Bible.

Some believers, they start out, some Christian people, when they're converted, they start out well. And then they sort of, it's a kind of plateau. And then they kind of maybe go down a bit. They never stop.

Nobody ever stops being a true believer. But there are some that they seem to go on and on. And as the Psalm says, And in old age when others fade, they fruit still forth shall bring.

Well, that's the kind of person Jacob was. He was, as the years went by, his faith became stronger, his vision of God became greater, his zeal for the Lord became more powerful, his concern for his family in order that they would come and all to trust completely and entirely in the Lord.

[6 : 25] There was just about him a passion for the Lord and for God's way to be uppermost in everything. And this was this growing development in the life of Jacob, which I find just so, so thrilling.

But anyway, we find that Jacob has come to the end of his days and he has retained a remarkably sharp mind to the very end.

And we often find that with people, sometimes people who, very, very, very elderly people. And it's almost like if they go past a particular age, they will retain that sharpness.

A lot of people, as their mind, as they get older, they will begin to lose their minds. Or certainly that their memory begins to go, the sharpness begins to go. But sometimes you will meet people right into really old age and they're still as sharp as ever.

Their minds are as alert. And it's quite remarkable when you meet people like that. Well, Jacob was like that right up until the very last.

[7 : 33] We find that there's this sharpness about him. And he's making preparation. He's aware he's just about to die. And he's making preparation for what will take place with regard to his death, with regard to the funeral.

And he does not want to be buried in Egypt. He's making quite clear that there is a particular place back in the land of Canaan, there that his grandfather Abraham bought a piece of land in the cave of Machpelah.

That's where Abraham was buried and Sarah, his wife. It was the place where Isaac was buried and Rebecca, his wife. That's Jacob's grandparents and his mother and father.

And Jacob himself had buried his wife Leah there as well. And he said, that's where I want to be buried. Egypt had been good to them. Egypt was the place in the world at the time.

But for Jacob, Canaan was the land of promise. Canaan was the land that God had promised to them. And so Jacob, after he had said everything, he tells us that it's like he pulled himself back up into the bed and he just prepared for death.

[8 : 44] And he breathed his last. His journey in this world was over. And he was ready now to depart to be with the Lord. And, you know, I think it's really quite wonderful.

We read that wee bit about him where it says, after he had gathered, you know, all the family. And when, verse 33, when Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed.

It's as if he was there at the edge of the bed and he was speaking to them all. And we read about all the blessings that he gives to his sons and then what he's commanded regarding his burial and so on.

And then it's like he pulls himself into the bed and he breathes his last. And, you know, I suppose when you look at that, you say to Israel, well, I would like to die well as well.

Because I would say here's a man who was as ready for death as any man you'd ever meet. There was a composure, a dignity, a readiness about it all.

[9 : 46] And I would say that if we want to die well, it's important that we live well. It's important that we make preparation for death. And that's a question we need to ask ourselves tonight.

Have you, have I, made preparation for death? Not necessarily talking about have you bought a lair, have you made a will?

Although I suppose all these things are important. What is even more important is have you made, before any of these things actually, before there will be a burial or before, have you made preparation for the journey out of this world?

Because remember, you and I are to depart this world. And that's one of the things that the Word of God is speaking to us about. It speaks to us about realities. It speaks about issues and things that you don't find really anywhere else in this world.

This world will occupy your time and our attention with everything that takes place every day. And with regard to your life, and with regard to your life here. Yes, even your future life here, but it doesn't have anything for you when you close your eyes in death.

[10:59] This world can only take you so far. Can't take you any further. And how thankful we are to God, that God has revealed to us way beyond.

God, as it were, has pulled back the shutters and said, I want you to see. I want you to see what there is to be. There are two destinies. There's heaven and there's hell.

There is a place where you are forever with me, or there is a place where you are ever departed from me. And it is because there are these two destinies, and because we are incapable in and of ourselves to sort things out, that God sent his son Jesus into this world.

God so loved the world that he gave us only begotten son. And he says to us, you know the great way to live life and to prepare for death, and the great way to come to live with me forever, the only way in fact, is to take my provision in taking my son Jesus, to believe in him, to trust in him, to accept him as your Lord.

That's a question you have to ask yourself. Have you done that? Because if you have, then you're prepared for death. You're ready to die. The wonderful thing is that that preparation could be made in a second, just in a moment, but it is important that we make it.

[12:26] Well, certainly, this man Jacob, he had made his preparation long, long before. So we find that after Jacob dies, we find that there's a great demonstration of grief from Joseph.

We find Joseph falling on his father's face and weeping over him. Now, we know that in the Middle East, they're much more demonstrative than we are.

We tend to, as our people, it's not that we don't feel any more deeply. We feel the pain just as much as people anywhere else, but I suppose to, in many ways, we tend to be more stoic and we tend to try and hide our feelings more.

But as you, often you will see on news broadcasts and things like that, you will see amazing public outpourings of grief and where there is great demonstration of grief.

Sometimes people beating their chest and crying out and throwing up their hands. If we were to see people reacting like that here, we might find it a little strange. That's not to say that we feel grief just as much, just as powerfully.

[13:35] And it's right to grieve. God has given us the capacity and he's given us a process of grieving. But as we say, there is a greater demonstration of grief.

They tend to be more demonstrative in the Middle East. And so we find Joseph, he's weeping over his father and there was a process there, we find for 70 days.

Even the Egyptians were caught up in it and they wept for him for 70 years, sorry, 70 days. And that is obviously because of the high esteem that the Egyptians had for Joseph.

And then we find this massive crowd making their way back up to Canaan. But it would appear that it would be just like eventually the 12 sons of Jacob that would be involved in the actual bearing.

That is a background, of course, to what we come to look at as our text tonight. It's on the return back to Egypt. Joseph goes back to ruling the country and the brothers go back to tending to the flocks and to the herds and to all that was given to them.

[14:46] And I don't know exactly at what point the brothers, it says, when they saw that their father was dead, this awful thought comes over them.

what if, what if, Joseph now decides to take revenge? You see, all the years Jacob was alive, they felt there was an element of protection.

They kind of thought, well, Joseph, he won't harm us when our father's alive. There's now this realization, father is dead.

There is nobody between us and Joseph now. And so there's this fearful sense of fear. This monster has risen up.

You know, that's one of the things that sin does. Sin, sin is that which produces in people so much guilt. The years haven't lessened it.

[15:50] There are some, I think it's around about 17 years have passed. Since the brothers and Jacob came down to Egypt. And you know, for 17 years, these brothers lived with that guilt.

17 years, that's a long time. And all the time, they were seeing Jacob, Joseph there, and they knew that Joseph had power, even at the very snap of his fingers, to put them in prison or even to put them to death.

And so there was this incredible sense of guilt, obviously still lying with them. And you know, guilt is an awful thing. We mentioned that this morning.

And really, there's only one place where guilt can properly be dealt with, and that is in and through Jesus. To go to him, to discover personally the forgiveness of sin.

And so, as we say, these 17 years have gone by, and so we find them going to, I think it's probably a deputation. It may, when the brothers saw that their father was dead, and so on, so they sent a message, verse 16, to Joseph saying, your father gave this command before he died.

[17:04] Now, Jacob, I don't believe Jacob gave that command. I don't for one moment think that what the brothers are saying is true. Jacob knew his son Joseph.

Jacob knew that Joseph had no intention of seeking revenge, because Jacob saw the way, the loving way, that Joseph had treated his brothers.

So, I don't think for one moment that Jacob ever said this. The reason why the brothers are saying this is, they knew the deep love that Joseph had for his father.

So, they thought, what we'll do is this. We'll say to Joseph, our father, your father, notice it's not just our father, but your father gave this command.

He commanded, say to Joseph, please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.

[18:08] And so they're saying, that's what your father said. He made this command. So now, now the time has come. Now that, father has passed away. We're at this time.

Please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father. So that was the message. How did Joseph react to that message?

Well, it tells us very simply that when Joseph got this message, Joseph wept when he spoke to him. Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

It's no wonder that he wept. Because from the very beginning, Joseph had opened his arms out wide to his brothers. He had wept with them.

He had kissed them. He had wrapped his arms around them. He continued to provide for them. He did nothing but good for them. He gave them the best of the land.

[19:12] At every twist and turn, Joseph did, did, did good to them. And he told them, listen, I know that you meant this for harm to me, but God meant it for good.

He couldn't have done more. And yet, the brothers don't believe him. So for 17 years, these brothers failed to accept Joseph's forgiveness to them.

You know, that's quite an extraordinary thing. And we look at this and say, oh, you know, these brothers, what would it take? How can they get it into their head that their brother has forgiven them?

But maybe there are people here tonight and it's exactly the same for you with regard to God's dealings with you. You cannot accept God's forgiveness to you.

Maybe years have gone by and somehow you cannot believe that God has forgiven you. And you are acting before the Lord in the very same way as Joseph's brothers were acting before him.

[20:32] What did Joseph's brothers do in the first place? They had to accept the word of Joseph. Joseph gave his word. And we must do the same.

That's what we must do. Once we begin to doubt God's word, we're in trouble. If you begin to doubt God's word, you begin to doubt his love. Once you begin to doubt his love, you begin to lose sight of the hope that you have.

And fear begins to come into your heart. And your faith begins to wobble. And you're not sure anymore about this or that. And you're not sure, am I a believer or am I not?

I'm not sure. My friend, we mustn't go on our feelings. Our feelings are like the minch. Some days the minch is flat calm. Some days our feelings are flat calm.

Some days we feel good. Other days the minch is just heaving and surging and it's all over the place. It's a place of fear and uncertainty. Sometimes that's the way we are spiritually.

[21 : 33] But if we go according to how we feel, we're going to get into all kinds of trouble. Some of you in tonight believers of many years will not feel that you're a Christian.

You will not feel tonight maybe that you're saved. You might feel I don't know if God has saved me or not. My friend, his word is unchanging.

It's not according to what we feel. And if you have been drawn to the Lord, if your desire has been where you have thrown yourself upon him, upon his love and his mercy and his grace, and you've come to that place and point and said, Lord, come into my life.

His word has said one thing, him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. So if you have come to the Lord and thrown yourself upon him, he in turn has said, I will not cast you out.

That is what we have to believe, not our feelings, which change all the time. And so this is what we have here. It's very much like, remember, the prodigal son.

[22 : 56] The prodigal son, when he came home, he couldn't believe that his father could forgive him. Notice there's a great similarity between Joseph's brothers and the prodigal because they're both using the same language.

Verse 18, his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, behold, we are your servants. The prodigal son came to his father.

Could he call himself, could he call him father, could he address himself as a son? No. Make me as a servant. Losing sight of the love, losing sight of this forgiveness.

That's what people can't accept. somehow we cannot accept that forgiveness is free. It's not free in the sense that there was no cost involved.

Our forgiveness cost God everything. The father gave his son. The son gave us all in order that we might be free.

[24 : 04] But our receiving of that forgiveness is free. And that's what people have a problem with. somehow we think we've got to do something. Somehow we think that we've got to work towards it.

Somehow we think it's too simple. But this is what the word says. Forgiven. And the brothers had a problem accepting it.

For as we say for 17 years they lived with a cloud of fear. With the inability to accept that forgiveness.

My friend I hope that you're not journeying to the promised land to Emmanuel's land crippled under a sense of this fear not enjoying having had your sins forgiven.

Not enjoying the assurance and security that God wishes that his people would have. Because we're not to live with this sense of doubt like that.

[25 : 17] And we find then that Joseph is saying remember again with forgiveness of sin the word of God just to quote one verse God does not want us to be living with this crippled fear.

these things says John I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

See that you may know that you have eternal life. And so we find that the brothers there they're really struggling to accept it.

But Joseph said to them do not fear do not fear. And so he says I will provide for you and for your little ones. See this is a language of grace.

This is how God speaks to us. He's a providing God. He's a caring God. He does all these things for us. Fear not. And Joseph is so beautifully honest here.

[26 : 23] And he says to his brothers I know I know that you meant harm to me. I know you wanted me out of the way. You were jealous of me. You hated me. You wanted rid of me.

I know all that. But I know something greater. That God worked your hatred and he worked the slavery and he worked the imprisonment not only for my good but for Canaan's good for Egypt's good for your good.

And that's what God does. God works all things together for good. The greatest example ever of that is a cross. Because when we look at the cross we see hell doing its worst.

When we look at the cross we see man doing his worst. When we look at the cross we see God doing his best. And I don't mean God doing his best in that sense but we see there the high point of

God's work.

Where all the forces of hell and the forces of the world join together combine together to unleash themselves in all their hatred and anger to do the worst possible to the Son of God and at that moment God is doing the best and he's turning what is the ultimate defeat into the ultimate victory. [27 : 44] That's the way God works. And God is able to do with your life whatever. And I don't know where you are in your own journey but you may say to yourself I don't know what to make of myself.

I look back over my life confusion here confusion there good points bad points time close time far away I don't know where I am. My friend you go to the Lord and it's amazing how he will unravel your life and he put it back together wrongs and all sort of things you may say to yourself if you only knew how complex my life is well the Lord does but he's able to turn it all round for good and take glory out of it and that's what he's done here he's able to do that for you and that's a wonderful thing God is in the business of making old things new of making bad things have in Joseph a type of Jesus demonstrating to us this great love this great forgiveness may

I say to you tonight enjoy the forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ let us pray oh Lord we we give thanks for the great message of the gospel and this wonderful gospel that speaks to us of a savior who gives to us and has done for us who provides for us and we ask oh Lord that our hearts might be open to receive bless us we pray guide each one of us with thy grace watch over us and take us to our home safely and forgive us all our sin in Jesus name we ask it Amen