

Jacob's Final Wishes

Genesis 47:29-31

If you knew you had only a short time left to live, what would matter most to you?

What would be your final request? The truth is, our last wishes often reveal our deepest convictions. When death is near, we stop thinking about the trivial things of life and begin focusing on what we truly believe is important. Our final words and final requests have a way of exposing the priorities of our life and heart.

Throughout history, the dying have left behind final instructions for their loved ones. Some have spoken about their possessions, others about their families, and still others about unfinished business. Yet for the believer, our final wishes should reveal something greater than earthly concerns. They should reveal where our hope truly rests.

As Genesis 47 comes to a close, Jacob knows his death is approaching. After living seventeen years in Egypt under Joseph's care, he calls his beloved son to his bedside and makes one final request. At first glance, it may seem like nothing more than funeral arrangements. But Jacob's final wish is about far more than where he wants to be buried. It reveals what mattered most to him. His request demonstrates

that his confidence was not in the comfort of Egypt, but in the covenant promises of God.

Moses reminds us that true faith rests so completely in God's promises that it responds with worship, even in the face of death. We see that faith revealed through The Plea, The Promise, and The Praise. Let if you will consider first the Plea.

1. The Plea of Jacob.

No one lives forever. Unless the Lord Jesus Christ returns first, every one of us will one day face death. We don't know when that day will come, but we do know it is coming. That reality has a way of changing our perspective.

Jacob has now reached that point in his life. He knows his time on earth is drawing to an end. The years have passed, God's promises have sustained him, and now he is preparing to leave this world. Like many of us would do if we knew our departure was near, Jacob calls those closest to him and shares what is most important on his heart.

What Jacob is about to say is more than the final wish of an old man. It is the confession of a man whose faith has rested in God's promises for more than a century. His final request reveals what mattered most to him, and in doing so, it teaches us what should matter most to every believer.

Moses writes in,

Genesis 47:29

"When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, 'Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt.'"

Moses begins with a simple statement that every one of us must eventually face:

"When the time for Israel to die drew near." Death is the one appointment no one will ever cancel. We are reminded in,

Hebrews 9:27

"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."

No amount of wealth, influence, medicine, or power can postpone that appointment forever. Jacob had lived one hundred and forty-seven years, but even the great patriarch had reached the closing chapter of his earthly life.

There is something refreshing about Jacob's response. He does not deny death, he doesn't ignore death, or fear death. He prepares for death. The world spends enormous amounts of time trying to avoid thinking about death, but Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to live with eternity in view. The Psalter reminds us of this in,

Psalm 90:12

"So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom."

A wise person is not the one who pretends death is far away; a wise person is the one who lives today in light of that certainty.

As Jacob senses that his death is approaching, he sends for Joseph. Think about the emotion of this moment. The son whom he believed dead for more than twenty years now stands beside his father's bed as Jacob prepares to leave this world. Yet Jacob's first concern is not his comfort, his possessions, or even his family. His concern is God's promise. This is death bed perspective.

He asks Joseph to place his hand under his thigh, I know this is a strange for us to understand and becomes even more strange as we discovery the cultural reality of its statement and process. "The placing of the hand under the thigh is probably connected with the organs of procreation and thus with the covenant promises concerning descendants."¹ What we see here is an ancient covenant gesture expressing the seriousness of the oath that was about to be made.

We have seen this only one other time in Genesis. In Genesis 24, Abraham required his servant to make this same oath before seeking a wife for Isaac. In both cases, the oath is directly connected to God's covenant purposes.

Then Jacob makes his request: "Please do not bury me in Egypt."

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 16–50, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 228.

At first, that may sound like nothing more than a burial preference. We all know people who have purchased cemetery plots or expressed where they would like to be buried. But Jacob's request is far more significant than that. This is not sentimentality; this is theology.

Remember where Jacob is. Egypt has treated him well. The famine has not touched his family. Joseph is there. His grandchildren are there. For the last seventeen years of his life, Jacob has experienced peace, provision, and security. Humanly speaking, Egypt would have been a wonderful place to remain.

But Jacob understood something that prosperity could never make him forget: Egypt was not home. Egypt was simply the place that God used to protect, provide and prosper His people. And no amount of prosperity could ever outweigh to Jacob the promises of God.

Jacob's heart is still anchored in God's covenant promise. God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the land of Canaan. While everyone else was selling themselves, and their land to Egypt, the people of God never lost their land, they never sold their land to Pharaoh or their lives. Because God has persevered His people and their land.

Though Jacob would die in Egypt, he wanted his burial to testify that God's promise was still true. Even in death, Jacob was declaring, "God is not finished with His people, and Egypt is not our final destination."

There is an important application for every believer. One of the greatest dangers we face is becoming too comfortable in a world that is not our home. God has richly blessed many of us with families, careers, homes, and countless provisions, and we should thank God for every one of them. But we must never confuse God's temporary blessings with His eternal promises.

The writer of Hebrews describes the patriarchs this way:

Hebrews 11:13

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Jacob's plea reveals what mattered most to him. Even as death approached, his confidence rested not in Egypt's prosperity but in God's promises.

Jacob's plea was not simply about where his body would rest. It was a declaration of where his faith rested. Even as death approached, Jacob's confidence remained anchored in the promises of God rather than the comforts of Egypt.

But an important question still remains. Would Joseph honor his father's request? Would he bind himself to an oath that would one day require him to leave the power, prestige, and security of Egypt to bury his father in the land of Canaan? Jacob has made his plea, but a plea alone provides no assurance. What he now needs is a promise.

That brings us to our second point, The Promise.

2. The Promise.

Jacob has made his plea. Now he waits for Joseph's response.

Genesis 47:30b-31a

"And he said, 'I will do as you have said.' He said, 'Swear to me.' So he swore to him."

Joseph's response is immediate. There is no hesitation, no negotiation, and no attempt to persuade his father otherwise. He simply says, "I will do as you have said." Throughout the book of Genesis, Joseph has proven himself to be a man of integrity. His word carried weight because his life had consistently demonstrated faithfulness.

Yet Jacob asks for something more. "Swear to me."

At first, that may seem unnecessary. Was Jacob questioning Joseph's honesty? I don't believe so. Rather, Jacob understood the significance of what he was asking. Years could pass before his death. Circumstances could change. Pharaoh could object. The temptation to leave Jacob buried in Egypt could become very real. By requiring an oath, Jacob elevated Joseph's promise from a personal commitment to a solemn covenant obligation made before God.

That says something about the importance of our word.

Have you ever noticed how easily promises are made today? Politicians make promises every election season. Businesses promise satisfaction guaranteed.

Contractors promise they'll be there "first thing Monday morning." Parents promise

their children a trip somewhere if they behave. Children promise they'll clean their room. Husbands promise they'll fix that leaky faucet "next weekend." Wives promise they'll only be shopping for five minutes. We make promises all the time.

The problem isn't making promises. The problem is keeping them.

Most of us have made promises we fully intended to keep, only to discover that circumstances changed. We became sick. We lost a job. We forgot. Something unexpected happened. Sometimes promises are broken because people are dishonest. Other times they are broken simply because life gets in the way.

That is why Jacob asks for more than Joseph's word. Joseph had already said, "I will do as you have said." For many people that would have been enough. Joseph had proven himself to be a man of integrity throughout his entire life. Yet Jacob asks for something more.

Genesis 47:31a

"He said, 'Swear to me.' So he swore to him."

There is something comforting about a promise backed by character. We trust certain people because they have demonstrated faithfulness over time. Joseph was that kind of man.

But there is Someone whose promises are infinitely greater than Joseph's. Every promise God has ever made has been kept. Not one has failed. Not one has been forgotten. Not one has been altered by changing circumstances. As Joshua would later tell the nation of Israel:

Joshua 21:45

"Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made... failed; all came to pass."

That is why believers have such confidence. Our hope is not built upon the promises of men but upon the promises of God. Circumstances change, yes. Governments change, yes. Economies change of course. Our health changes, without a doubt. But God never changes. Theologians refer to this as the immutability of God. It's a big word with a simple meaning: because God is unchanging, His promises are unchanging. He will always be who He has always been, and He will always do what He has said He will do.

The old hymn writer understood this well:

"Standing on the promises that cannot fail..."

Jacob could rest because Joseph swore an oath. And you and I can rest because God cannot lie.

His oath gave Jacob confidence because it rested upon a life marked by faithfulness.

One of the reasons believers have such confidence is because our hope does not rest upon the promises of men but upon the promises of God. Unlike us, God never forgets, never changes, and never fails to accomplish what He has spoken. In fact, Hebrews tells us that God not only made a promise but confirmed it with an oath:

Hebrews 6:17-18

"So that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us."

Think about that. God did not swear an oath because His Word was insufficient. He swore an oath because He desired His people to have complete assurance. If Jacob

found comfort in Joseph's oath, how much more should we find comfort in the promises of a God who cannot lie?

Think of the promises we have because of the gospel. God has promised to forgive all who repent and believe in Christ. Do you believe Him for that? He has promised that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Do you believe Him for that? Or do you walk around thinking that because you have failed God is going to just punish you for the rest of your life?

He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. He has promised that nothing can separate us from His love. He has promised to complete the good work He began in us. He has promised to conform us to the image of His Son. He has promised to supply all our needs according to His riches in glory. He has promised us an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and will never fade away. And He has promised that one day Christ will return to receive us to Himself, so that where He is, we will be also.

How can we know those promises are true? Because they do not rest upon our faithfulness; they rest upon God's. The same God who kept every promise to

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph has also kept His greatest promise by sending His Son into the world to save sinners.

As Paul writes in

2 Corinthians 1:20

"For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us."

Jacob rested in Joseph's oath because it pointed him to God's covenant faithfulness. We rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ because every promise God has made finds its certainty and fulfillment in Him, for that we believe!

We have considered The Plea and The Promise. Jacob has made his final request, and Joseph has responded with a solemn oath. The matter has been settled. The promise has been given. What Moses records next is both simple and profound. This brings us to our final point: The Praise.

3. The Praise

What an incredible way to end the chapter.

Genesis 47:31

"Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed."

Jacob does not celebrate Joseph. He does not congratulate himself. He does not begin making additional requests. Instead, his immediate response is worship.

Why? Because Joseph's promise reminded Jacob of God's promise.

The oath did not create Jacob's faith; it confirmed what Jacob had believed all along. The same God who called Abraham out of Ur, who reaffirmed His covenant to Isaac, who met Jacob at Bethel, who preserved Joseph in Egypt, and who brought this family safely through the famine had once again demonstrated His faithfulness.

Jacob understood that Joseph's oath was only possible because God had been faithful first.

Notice something else that Moses does. He refers to him as Israel rather than Jacob. Throughout Genesis, Moses often uses the name "Israel" when emphasizing God's covenant dealings with the patriarch. This is more than an old man lying on

his deathbed. This is the covenant head of the nation responding in worship to the faithfulness of his covenant-keeping God.

Isn't that where every promise of God is meant to lead us? Worship.

God does not reveal His faithfulness merely to increase our knowledge. He reveals His faithfulness to deepen our worship. Every fulfilled promise, every answered prayer, every evidence of His providence should move our hearts to bow before Him in gratitude and praise.

The question we have to personally ask, are we often moved to worship God for his faithfulness?

The writer of Hebrews reflects on this very moment:

Hebrews 11:21

"By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped..."

Do not miss that. Jacob's final recorded act in Genesis 47 is not fear. It is not anxiety. It is not regret. It is worship. What a testimony.

As one pastor wisely observed, "The truest measure of a life of faith is often seen in how it finishes." Jacob's life had been filled with failures, fears, deception, grief, and hardship. Yet at the end of his journey, he is found doing what every believer should desire to be doing, trusting God's promises and worshiping God because of them.

That is the goal of the Christian life. We do not simply receive God's promises; we respond to God's promises with worship. The more we understand His faithfulness, the more our hearts are drawn to adore Him.

Psalm 150:1-6

Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse. 2 Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. 3 Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. 4 Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. 5 Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals. 6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

As Genesis 47 comes to a close, Moses leaves us with a dying man whose greatest concern was not the comfort of Egypt but the certainty of God's promises. Jacob's final wish revealed what mattered most to him. His plea demonstrated his faith. Joseph's promise strengthened his confidence. His praise revealed the condition of his heart.

That is the way every believer should desire to finish life's race.

One day, each of us will come to the end of our earthly journey. The question is not whether that day will come, but what our lives will reveal when it does. Will our confidence rest in what we have accumulated, what we have accomplished, or what we have left behind? Or will our confidence rest in the unchanging promises of God?

The good news of the gospel is that our hope is not built upon our ability to hold on to God but upon God's unwavering commitment to hold on to us. Because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, every promise of God is secure. Our sins are forgiven. Our salvation is certain. Our inheritance is reserved in heaven. Our future is guaranteed, not because of our faithfulness, but because of His.

Jacob believed that God would one day bring His people back to the Promised Land. We live with an even greater promise. Jesus said in

John 14:3

"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

Just as Jacob refused to let Egypt become his permanent home, we must never allow this world to become ours. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our inheritance is with Christ. Our home is still ahead.

So until that day comes, let us live by faith, rest in God's promises, and respond with worship. And when our final day arrives, may our greatest testimony not be what we owned, what we achieved, or what others remember about us. May it simply be this: that we trusted the Lord to the very end, because He had been faithful from the very beginning.