

Resting Place

Genesis 49:28-50:14

Go ahead and turn to Genesis 49 in your Bibles...

After almost three and a half years (with breaks along the way), we will finally reach the final chapter of Genesis. We aren't finished; there's one more message after this one. To me it feels like a TV show (or a series of novels) you've come to love that's ending. You know what I mean? The story has already climaxed and come to resolution, but you know there are still a couple of episodes left, and you know that it's over those episodes that you're going watch as all of the characters you've grown attached to over the years go their separate ways, from each other, and in a way, from you. You say, "*Gee, thanks for such an uplifting thought, Matthew!*" YOU'RE WELCOME! Truly, I feel such a somber tone befits the final messages of this series. A couple of weeks ago, Tim described where we are in our series as "bittersweet," and that's exactly the word I'd use as well, especially for tonight's passage.

As we cross over into the final chapter in our study of the book of Genesis, we will see Jacob cross over from this world to glory. It's a somber, mournful passage, but also one that's brimming with hope and promise! "Bittersweet." We've been privy to many funerals throughout our study. It isn't the way God intended for things to be, but when man sinned, death entered the world, and what was supposed to be went out the window. We seemingly stood by Abraham's side as he mourned and buried his beloved princess Sarah. Isaac and Ishmael would temporarily put aside the bad blood between them in order to bury their father Abraham. We saw Jacob and Esau reunited shortly before the death of their father Isaac, whom they buried together. Just a couple of weeks ago, we listened as Jacob tearfully recounted burying his beloved Rachel some distance from Ephrath, and tonight, we'll witness the passing of Jacob. We'll pick up at verse 28, just after all the blessings that Jacob spoke over his sons. We read...

Genesis 49:28-32

28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. 29 Then he commanded them and said to them, I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah— 32 the field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites.

The Holy Spirit ties a bow on this section of blessings with these words. We're transitioning to Jacob's last request, but before that, we read that Jacob "**blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him.**" Last week, as Pastor Dale taught, we saw that Jacob's blessings had to do with what would happen to each son (and the tribe that would descend from him) "**in the days to come.**" Some of his pronouncements would take place closer to the time when they were spoken, others have YET to

take place, but they will. This was a supernatural act, a prophetic word uttered in faith and divinely enabled by God, but you know what else?

This was a prophetic word spoken by a LOVING FATHER. Such prophetic utterances could not have been made without wisdom and revelation from above. That means that Jacob was talking to God specifically about each of his sons, and he was listening to what God had to tell him about them. Though he had failed to show love to his sons equally in his life, he showed his concern for each of them in his death. True, some of the things he had to say regarding some of his sons were brutally hard, but one of the most loving things a person can do for another is tell him the truth, no matter how hard or hurtful the truth may be. Though he had done a poor job showing it throughout his life, Jacob had carried his sons in his heart before the Father in prayer, and now his heart for them was on full display. These final words would never be forgotten.

Moms and dads, are your kids hearing from God by you? Between your time in the Word and in prayer, are they hearing from Him? Are you carrying them before the Father in prayer? Do they hear you calling out their names before the Lord? It's like when a couple of adults are having a conversation, and a child is standing by just listening. In this way, they learn how to have a conversation. Then you start talking about the child with the other adult; this is an invitation to join the conversation when they're ready. When our children recognize that we're having a conversation with God through prayer and time in the Word, and then when we talk to them about spiritual things and they hear us call out their names to Him in prayer, it primes their hearts, teaching them that THEY need to start such a conversation, a RELATIONSHIP of their own, with God. These are the Deuteronomy 6, "**[sitting] in your house... [walking] by the way... [lying]down... and [rising]**" up conversations that we have about God as a family that Pastor Dale mentioned last week. It's through such conversations and spoken prayers that we BLESS our own kids, like Jacob blessed his, preparing them for the "**days to come.**"

After bestowing these blessings upon his sons, Jacob said, "**I am to be gathered to my people.**" This was an ancient idiomatic expression referring to dying. The Bible says that Abraham was "**gathered to his people,**" as was Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron, and Moses. Now given how Abraham, Aaron, and Moses weren't buried anywhere near their ancestors, we can understand that this phrase isn't merely referring to being put in the ground. Our bodies are put in the ground, but our bodies aren't us. We aren't a body that possesses a soul and a spirit. We're soul and spirit that possess a body, and it's the soul and spirit that are in view with this "gathering." The Patriarchs understood that there were people who had gone on before them, whose unique identities were still intact, and they would be gathered to them. As Matthew Henry well said, "***If God's people be our people, death will gather us to them.***"

The whole idea of being "**gathered to [our] people**" is a much more favorable way to think about dying, isn't it? Many theologians have described dying as a "hard work," and our minds can whirl with fears over what those final moments will be like. However, throughout Scripture, we see that God's people may rightly minimize and even trivialize the moment of death. It can do its worst, but we still come out on top in the end. Paul's way of doing this was to quote the prophet Hosea and CHIDE death by saying...

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

55 “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, as God’s people, we may rightly think little of death because Christ has made it nothing. Oh, sure, fearfulness associated with the unknowns of death may swell in our hearts from time to time, but the reality of death for God’s people is that it’s merely a shadow that we pass through, the appearance of separation (of our soul and spirit from our body), but in actuality, the ultimate reunion with the One who took our sin, our death, our hell, and invites us to dwell in His presence forevermore.

Jacob was vividly mindful of his desired resting place here on this earth. His focus on that place was connected to God’s promise to give all the land to his family as a resting place in life on this earth, a homeland that was meant to be a place of rest for the nation of Israel. **“Bury me with my fathers”** was a statement of FAITH and HOPE in the GOD who had promised.

It’s clear as Jacob recounted the precise details of the family’s burial site that he was still sharp as a tack even at 147 years old. He lived so much closer to the time of the fall than we do, so he was much LESS CORRUPTED physically and mentally by sin than we are; dementia that is so common today doesn’t seem like it was much of an issue then, at least, not for Jacob. He may as well have been dictating the property description of the family burial plot...**“in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place.”** He even recounts who the previous property owner was, and the detail about “possessing” the land was a reference to the witnessed fact that Abraham paid FULL PRICE for the property. He paid the 400 shekels of silver named by Ephron without haggling, and therefore, Ephron’s descendants could never accuse Abraham of cheating their father Ephron and contest the land’s ownership. Abraham’s family owned it free and clear.

WHY THE HISTORY LESSON? Well, Jacob’s family had lived in Egypt for 17 years at this point. All the geographical and historical details that Jacob shared with them certainly would’ve served to help his sons see and remember the place in their minds and recognize it when they came to it. This information also would’ve prepared them to answer any dispute regarding property ownership as well.

Apart from saying all of this from the edge of his bed, there’s a great sense of formality and solemnity in this moment. Do you feel that? The ceremony attached even to this drawn-out description of the family burial plot? Jacob’s heart was set on that land, not for the land itself, mind you, but for the PROMISE it represented. Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob trusted in the promise so much that they wanted to be sown in the Land, in a plot where he knew his body could securely rest until it was resurrected to possess the land. Like his fathers before him, Jacob’s heart was tethered to the God of the promise of the land, and with his final words, Jacob sought to further TETHER HIS SONS’ HEARTS to that same God as well. Finally, we read...

Genesis 49:33

When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

And just like that, Jacob stepped into eternity! His body had yet to be laid to rest in Canaan, but he had already entered that ultimate rest that the writer of Hebrews talked about in Hebrews 4! He wrote about an ultimate rest that can only be entered into BY FAITH. We surely know that Jacob had such faith, believing the promises of God even though he never received them before he died (large family but no nation, evil days rather than blessed, possessed a grave in Canaan, but not ALL of Canaan). The writer goes on to lay out this apologetic that, while God rested from His work on the seventh day, and while Joshua eventually led Israel to take possession of the promised land, there is a rest mentioned later that is still available to be entered, **“a Sabbath rest for the people of God,”** Hebrews 4:9 calls it. Jacob found THAT REST. HALLELUJAH! Jacob was no longer confined to his bed. When Jacob crossed the Jordan, he only owned a staff. When he crossed back over the Jordan he leaned on that same staff as he hobbled along after his wrestling match with God. Well, now that wrestling match with God and man was over. He wasn't crossing the Jordan into Canaan again, he was crossing over to GLORY, but this time he left that old staff behind. He'd never need it again. This is one more way in which death, for the believer, is a mercy. In death, our frail, weak bodies will be laid in the ground along with all their sickness, pain, and parts that don't work as well as they once did, and when we get them back, they'll be BETTER than new. We won't just lay down our physical ailments either; we'll be FREE FROM THE SIN THAT CAUSED OUR SUFFERING TOO! This is the difference knowing God makes. The apostle John said...

1 John 5:4

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

So, because of his faith, we read that Jacob **“drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.”** Another way **“breathed his last”** can be translated is **“yielded up his spirit.”** We would describe this scene this way: Jacob was READY. He laid back, closed his eyes, took his last breath in this world, and immediately took his first in paradise, where those among whom he would shortly be buried STILL LIVED! It's a beautiful scene, but still hard, as we know. The scene continues, and we read...

Genesis 50:1-3

1 Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

Physical death is SEPARATION. The separation of Jacob's soul and spirit from his body that caused him to be **“gathered to his people”** also separated him from those he left behind. Though we're a people of

faith who believe God for bodily resurrection and reunion in glory, the death of a loved one is still painful. We don't mourn as the Gentiles who have no hope of seeing their loved ones ever again, but just as the death of the saints is precious in the eyes of the Lord (Psalm 116:15), it's precious in ours. Joseph likely felt like he had just gotten his father back, and now he was separated from him again, but just for a while. Naturally, Joseph wept over his father. God told Jacob this would be the case when He said...

Genesis 46:4

I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.

This was the fulfillment of that prophecy, and God intended for us to see that fulfillment by focusing on Joseph. When we observe Joseph's mourning, knowing that his brothers were still standing by after having been blessed by their father, we understand that they were all mourning. They were all broken especially after the blessings he had just spoken over them and the love for God's promises that he sought to instill in them right up to his last breath. Jacob had finished well, and such good men—men made good by God and who sought to see others perfected by Him—they ought to be so mourned. The world is at a loss in their absence.

Of course, the world doesn't stop at anyone's death; the decomposition process that begins immediately after death affords little to no time for mourning. Those of you who have had to make arrangements for a deceased loved one understand this. Despite his broken heart, Joseph took charge and began making preparations to honor his father's dying wish to be buried in Canaan. Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father. As we're told, it was a 40-day process, during which time his internal organs would be removed and stored (though Egyptians usually left the heart inside). The body would be washed with WINE, and then DEHYDRATED by coating it and possibly even packing it full of bags of NATRON, a desert SALT found in abundance along the Nile River. Egyptians would then MUMMIFY the body by coating it in about 150 YARDS of PITCH-SOAKED LINENS. We don't know if Jacob was mummified; the Scriptures simply say that he was embalmed, and this was certainly part of honoring Jacob's dying wish because this process would help prevent putrefaction as his body was transported back to Canaan, which was potentially a three-to-four-week-long journey on foot (one way).

For a period of ten weeks the Egyptians mourned the passing of Jacob! That's notable because that's JUST TWO DAYS short of the mourning period observed for the death of a Pharaoh! Some scholars believe that Jacob may have been afforded the honors of a foreign dignitary because he had somehow endeared himself to the Egyptians over the 17 years that he had lived in Egypt, and maybe he did! In all likelihood, though, Jacob was so honored upon his passing because of who his son was. Joseph had faithfully served Pharaoh, and his inspired administration during the years of plenty and the years of famine had preserved the lives of everyone in the empire and in surrounding nations. JOSEPH WAS A NATIONAL HERO, and now their hero was mourning, so they mourned with him, an Old Testament example of Paul's instructions to **"weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15b)**. Then we read...

Genesis 50:4-6

4 And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 5 My father made me swear, saying, I am about to die: in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me. Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return. 6 And Pharaoh answered, Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear.

After the 70-day mourning period had been observed, Joseph sent word to Pharaoh, asking leave of him through an intermediary. Notice, once again, Joseph's shrewdness in the formation of his request. Though his father had made it clear that he absolutely did NOT want to be buried in Egypt (Genesis 47:29-30), Joseph avoided potentially offending Pharaoh with that detail and made no mention of it. He simply appealed to Pharaoh's sense of propriety, asking to honor his father's last request: to be buried in the tomb he had hewn out for himself as a burial site. It would've been wrong not to honor such a request, knowing that Jacob had made arrangements for his own burial and that they would be wasted otherwise. Note also that Joseph put Pharaoh at ease with his promise to return. Though the famine had ended more than a decade earlier, it's apparent that Pharaoh still relied upon Joseph. Therefore, he remained in his office as viceroy, providing wise leadership to the nation. Joseph's request seemed reasonable, and his promise to return reassuring because Pharaoh granted the request AND MORE. Once again, we see Pharaoh's heart for Joseph in the way that he went exceedingly beyond merely granting his request. We read...

Genesis 50:7-9

7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. 9 And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company.

Did you catch who all were part of Jacob's funeral procession?! **"ALL the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and ALL the elders of the land of Egypt!"** This was a REGAL procession! From the sound of it, practically all of the courtiers of Egypt TRAVELED ALL THE WAY TO HEBRON to mourn this patriarch. Undoubtedly, however, the most precious attendants to Jacob's body were those of his family. How many times did Jacob bemoan his wretched state and claim that his gray hairs would go down to the grave BEREFT and in SORROW? Yet here we see that Jacob yielded up his spirit in peace and was laid to rest by ALL of his children. This is the graciousness and sovereignty of God.

This was a large procession, full of high-ranking officials from across Egypt, the Hebrew Joseph being preeminent among them, not to mention Joseph's family. It was a precious troop indeed; we protect that which is precious, and Pharaoh would do the same by sending **"chariots and horsemen"** along with them. With an armed military escort by their side, Joseph and those traveling with him could give themselves fully to the task at hand, grieving his father's death and carrying out his dying wish, without

concern for their personal safety. Pharaoh granted Joseph's request to bury Jacob in Canaan, he sent representatives from his own household as well as officials from across Egypt, and he sought to protect them on their journey there and back with an armed military escort. It's amazing!

Genesis 50:10-11

10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and grievous lamentation, and he made a mourning for his father seven days. 11 When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians. Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan.

What a lament! We don't know the exact location of the threshing floor of Atad, but given that it was a site where business was conducted, legal decisions were made, and grain was processed for sustenance, it was a very appropriate place to mourn the passing of such a tribal leader. There were so many Egyptians there mourning for Jacob that the locals hardly noticed the Hebrews among them! The number of the Egyptians, not to mention their dignified status and the severity of their lamentation, led to the place being renamed Abel-mizraim, the "*mourning of the Egyptians.*" And with that, we read...

Genesis 50:12-13

12 Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them, 13 for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place.

You'll notice the repeated details surrounding the burial site from where our passage began in Genesis 49. It speaks of the diligence and dutifulness of Jacob's sons. The boys honored their father to the end and to the utmost. However, this was as much for them as it was for Jacob. This was a final faith-growing exercise that Jacob was able to lead his sons through, even after he had been gone for several months now. They had briefly returned to Canaan, laid eyes on the land promised to their family, and were challenged to cling to that promise themselves. Then we read...

Genesis 50:14

After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

Now it seems like it's just wrapping up the story, the account of Jacob's death and burial, but consider the GRAVITY of this moment, their departure from Canaan. THIS IS THE LAST TIME ANY OF THEM WOULD SEE THE PROMISED LAND, THEIR HOMELAND, THIS SIDE OF GLORY! They buried their dad and RETURNED TO EXILE IN EGYPT, where they would live in expectation of the fulfillment of God's promise. This return to Egypt was itself a massive step of faith. They were walking away from the Land trusting God to bring them back.

They could've stayed! THE FAMINE HAD BEEN OVER FOR OVER A DECADE! They were NOT enslaved! They could've sent a few back for the kids and livestock! They could've simply made plans to take everyone and everything when they went and buried their father and just stayed afterward. However, God had led them to Egypt, and He had not led them out, so they RESTED IN HIM as they left their father's grave and their familiar homeland and returned to Egypt. They RESTED IN HIM, knowing by faith that Egypt (or this world, for that matter) wasn't their forever home.

Jacob had been laid to rest in the cave of Machpelah, in the land promised to later give rest to the nation of Israel. Through faith in the promises of God, Jacob entered the ultimate rest as he departed this world for glory, and now his sons would find their rest in the God who had **"granted to [them] his precious and very great promises" (2 Peter 1:4a)**. This is the REST that's available to us here and now as followers of Jesus. This world isn't our forever home, and the stuff we have here is stuff that will stay here when we leave it. The aches and pains are temporary. The doubts and fears are temporary. Our tendency to sin and the shame we feel after giving in to it yet again are temporary!

I can trust and obey. I can love with abandon. I can stop holding back and trying to save some for myself. I can stop thinking about and worrying about how things in this world will affect ME, and just trust the Lord to take care of me. I CAN REST IN HIM, and truly, there's no other way to live. Augustine well said...

Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.

"RESTING in Him" is embracing the purpose for which He made us, to GLORIFY HIMSELF. It's remembering the work He's done in us and giving ourselves over to the work He wants to do through us as we surrender to Him. Jesus calls us to this rest today and everyday...

Matthew 11:28-30

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Are you HEAVY LADEN by the rat race, chasing everything that the world says is important rather than what God says is ETERNAL? Perhaps you've been tricked into finding fulfillment in God AND! You know, God AND your job, or God AND some relationship, or God AND your stuff, or your hobbies, or your entertainment. So many attempt to stand with one foot in God and the other in the world. They try to LOVE both, but God says you can't, and when you try, you're MISERABLE AND EXHAUSTED! God is the only One who can fulfill you and sustain you! It's the "AND" that will suck you dry and leave you empty, like trying to dip water from a well with a bucket full of holes! King Solomon said it **"is vanity and a striving after wind."** Or perhaps tonight you find that your relationship with Jesus has become all about the DOING and not simply about BEING HIS. Martha got caught up in that, to the point that her sister's joy IN THE LORD irritated her...

Luke 10:41-42

41 But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.

Are you **“anxious and troubled about many things?”** Maybe you’re wore out and beat up by a sin you struggle to overcome because you’re attempting to secure your own victory. The power to do that isn’t in you! As we’ve already seen tonight, it’s God **“who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Sanctification, like salvation, is a voluntary process. God wills to save and to sanctify, and we must respond to His gracious initiatives, but not by greater personal effort; it’s through greater personal SURRENDER. **“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find REST for your souls.”**

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO REST IN HIM NOW? It looks like you as you REST IN THOSE CHAIRS right now! Those chairs are for sitting, and you’ve fully given yourself over to that purpose. You’re supplying no effort of your own in the process. Rather, you’re cooperating with the chair, allowing it to do all the work. That’s RESTING IN GOD. It’s giving yourself over to His purposes, His will that’s revealed in His Word, not attempting to reinterpret it or accomplish it in your own power, but surrendering to His Spirit and trusting Him for the power to live out that will. You see? It’s all Him! And when you and I let it be all Him, there’s REST NOW. This is the abundant, eternal life that Jesus died to give us and that we are meant to experience from the moment we first trusted Him.

If you have yet to call on Him to forgive your sins and take them away, you know nothing of the PEACE and the REST I’ve been talking about tonight. AREN’T YOU TIRED? You’ve been carrying the heavy burden of your sin all your life. You could give it up tonight. You could tell Jesus about the sin you’ve been carrying, and you could ask Him to forgive you for it and take it away, AND HE WILL. You could find rest for your soul tonight.

If the Lord tarries, we are all going to some earthen resting place. I pray that as we step closer and closer to that place each day that our hearts are set on the promise of God that gives us hope in this world and access to the next, and that as we walk through this world, we do so with His yoke squarely across our shoulders and around our neck, patiently and submissively following His lead as He does the pulling and brings about the provision, the guidance, the life-change, and above all, the REST we so desperately desire and that He is overjoyed to give as we keep following Him.