

To Be Continued...

Genesis 50 / Hebrews 11:22, 39-40

INTRODUCTION: Most Easter sermons begin in a garden — the garden tomb, early in the morning, the stone rolled away, the folded linen. And we will get there. But we're going to take a different route this morning. We're going to begin, not with an empty tomb, but with a full coffin.

CONTEXT: For the last 12 months, we have been systematically working our way through the book of Genesis. If you are new to FBFirst, every single sermon is online, and we encourage you to check those out.

The book began with light and life - the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the darkness as God began to speak - God said, "Let there be light," and light there was. Slowly and carefully, like a great artist, God forms creation into a majestic paradise until he places in the midst of the garden the crowning work of His creative efforts - the image bearer.

Simultaneously, a cosmic rebellion occurred in the heavens, and Satan, no longer fit to dwell among the Angelic hosts, was cast down to earth, where he subsequently tempted the image bearer, bringing the unrelenting sentence of death. Yet, even amid the curse, there was a promise of hope that one day, the seed would come and set things right.

Thus, throughout the generations of man, two tracks ran side by side - the curse of sin and the promise of a seed.

Generation, after generation, the refrain reverberates throughout the cosmos - the wages of sin are death, the wages of sin are death, without variation. Adam dies, Seth dies, Righteous Noah dies, Abraham dies, Isaac dies, Jacob dies, and for the last several weeks, we have looked at one who has been called the most Christlike man in the Old Testament - surely this one will conquer death. Perhaps he is even that promised seed who is to come.

But sadly, the book concludes very differently from how it began. It began with LIGHT and LIFE, but notice how it concludes -

TEXT: Genesis 50:26 (ESV)

²⁶ So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

The story began with celestial light willing the cosmos, and it concludes with a dead body in a coffin in Egypt.

This is how Joseph's story ends, and it is not all that different than how your story will one day end. You see, in spite of all of the life you have enjoyed, the children you have

birthed, the light your eyes have seen - scripture gives one unrelenting promise, **Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)** 27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.

It is appointed - you have an appointment that you are not privy to. You have a date with death, or might I say it better, death has a date with you. Why? For the same reason, death visited our ancient ancestors in the garden - the promise remains, "the wages of sin are death, and all have sinned".

Death visits the elderly, the youth, the strong, the weak, the rich, and the poor. Strong young men die, and occasionally, small children drop their toys to wrestle with the strong arm of death.

Here in the state of Florida, you have access to the best the medical profession has to offer - yet not a single citizen in the state has cheated death.

Billy Graham once said, *"The statistics on death are staggering, one out of every one person dies".*

Joseph couldn't cheat death. He knew it - thus, he made arrangements for a date that would surely come.

It happened soon after Joseph buried his own father. There is something about seeing our parents or grandparents pass from this life that reminds us that our time is coming. If they could not defeat death, how could we possibly do so? Just a few days ago, Chuck Norris died - if Chuck Norris can't beat death, who can?

In verses 14-21, Joseph reminds his brothers that he had no intention of seeking vengeance for what they had done to him. He had seen God's hand in every step of his journey.

TEXT: Genesis 50:22–26 (ESV)

22 So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. 23 And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. 24 And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am 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." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."

Joseph, in all his wisdom, faced the fact that if Adam died, Seth died, Noah died, Abraham died, Isaac died, and Jacob died... then one day he would as well. So he makes arrangements for his death and gives some very odd instructions. Carry my bones to Canaan.

Consider the options before Joseph - the one thing the Egyptians have been known for throughout the ages was how to bury someone. They were able to preserve the flesh of a man longer than any other civilization in history. Not only that, the Egyptians knew how to build a tombstone. A man of Joseph's stature would have been given a tremendous burial.

- He would have received the mummification of a royal. This is what is referred to in verse 26.

²⁶ So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

- He would have received a highly ornate sarcophagus.
- His remains would be placed in one of the royal burial chambers. Decorated with hieroglyphs and scenes of honor. His tomb would be stocked with goods for the afterlife (food, clothing, tools).

Yet, Joseph instructed that he wished for something different. The word "COFFIN" at the end of verse 26 is a very rare Hebrew word used here, '*arôn*', which is the same word used for the Ark of the Covenant — the box that held the commandments of the living God.

Joseph's bones weren't hidden in a tomb. They were placed in a visible, portable box, as if they were waiting on something. Or might I say, waiting on a few somethings.

The first thing Joseph's bones were waiting on would come in 360 years. We read of this in Hebrews 11:22.

Hebrews 11:22 (ESV)

²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

Joseph knew that the story of God's covenant people could not possibly end in Egypt. God made a solemn promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. Thus, Joseph surmised that apparently the time would come when the Jews would leave, no longer as a tiny tribe of shepherds, but now as a great Nation of people to claim the land of promise.

Joseph says, "I want to be a part of that. So, don't bury my bones, let them serve as a reminder - our story is not over".

Day by day, Egyptians and Jews alike would pass by the Sarcophagus of Joseph and consider his final words.

Ironically, those words didn't come to fruition until in the words of Moses - **Exodus 1:8 (ESV)** ⁸ Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

It was then that a series of events began to occur that our friends in the Jewish community are celebrating this very week - PASSOVER.

I've always enjoyed the classic movie by Cecil B. DeMille, The Ten Commandments. He captures so much of what really happened:

- The stories of Moses vs. Pharaoh
- The plagues
- The Exodus itself
- The Red Sea

But you know what it leaves out? The bones of Joseph. You see, when the real Exodus occurred, someone remembered that sarcophagus. That body of the Patriarch Joseph who prophesied that this would happen. And as the Hebrews marched out of Egypt, in their midst was a funeral spire - carrying the dead bones of Joseph.

But that wasn't the only reason Joseph refused a typical Egyptian burial. You see, Hebrews goes on to tell us that he and those others in the hall of faith were anticipating something even greater.

You see, there remained a number of unanswered questions - for example: When God appeared to Isaac soon after the death of Abraham, he introduced himself for the first time as the God of Abraham.

Genesis 26:24 (ESV)

²⁴ And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake."

There is something interesting about the Hebrew construction of that verse. You see, the construction in Hebrew seems to indicate that Abraham still exists. This is what the Lord meant when He said in...

Matthew 22:32 (ESV)

³² 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.'

Even though the body of Abraham was dead, Abraham still existed somewhere.
 Even though the body of Isaac was dead, Isaac still existed somewhere.
 Even though the body of Jacob was dead, Jacob still existed somewhere.
 Joseph knew that one day his body would die, but Joseph would still exist somewhere.

AND, wherever Joseph's spirit would be, there he would wait on something.

Jesus affirms in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus that those who die in faith go to what he calls the bosom of Abraham. So, where Abraham is, there Joseph would be as well. And there they both would await the fulfillment of a promise.

The writer to the Hebrews sheds light on what they were waiting for:

Hebrews 11:8–10 (ESV)

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

So Abraham was awaiting the place we call Heaven - the dwelling place of God. Joseph would also be waiting for it, with Father Abraham.

Oh, and by the way, these men had no intention of inheriting the promises of God as disembodied spirits. They intended to walk on streets of gold with real feet. But to this day, they have not experienced it yet.

Somewhere in the sands of Israel, the bones of Abraham have begun to return to the dust from which they were taken. The bones of Joseph have begun to return to the dust from which they were taken.

The spirits of both remained together, with the saints of the ages, until something remarkable occurred.

You see, generation after generation lived and died, each of the faithful taking their place at the bosom of Abraham, while the unfaithful are consigned to the place of the dead. All waiting... then it happened.... We don't know the first sign that they were aware of, if any at all.

- Perhaps it was the departure of the Second Person of the Godhead from the portals of Glory to take His place in the Womb of a Virgin.
- Perhaps it was when the silent night of Bethlehem was disturbed by the cry of a baby.
- Or perhaps it was when miracles began to happen, the blind could see, the lame could walk, even the dead, yes, the dead, were raised.

But it had happened - the long-awaited SEED had finally arrived. The one who would set right all that went wrong in EDEN. Once again, LIGHT and LIFE filled the cosmos.

But then, something changed.... A deep groan... the sound of nails being hammered into human flesh reverberated throughout the universe. This could not be - not HIm. Certainly, it had been true for all of them - the wages of sin were death, it was appointed unto man once to die.

But this was no ordinary man - this was the God Man. This was the one who knew no sin. Yet, it did happen - HE DIED... and with him all of their hope, all of their faith... dead. Soon, like them, he, Jesus of Nazareth, would take his place at Abraham's bosom and wait...

Now, this is one of those mysterious and enigmatic truths we find in God's Word. You see, we are told in Ephesians 4:8-10 that while Jesus was physically dead, His spirit was very busy. Paul tells us that he descended into the lower regions of the earth and led out, he released, a host of captives.

What does that mean? It means that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and all of those who had looked forward to the long-awaited Seed's arrival were now able to leave the place of the dead and be welcomed into the presence of the Lord.

That is why Paul tells us that to this very day - if we die, as believers in Christ, that **2 Corinthians 5:8 (ESV)** ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Imagine it - the spirit of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, King David, the Apostle Paul, so many of our loved ones, are there with Him now. YET, they are still waiting on something.

You see, once Jesus brought the Old Testament saints into Glory, the Spirit of Jesus was sent back into the dead body of Jesus, and that very body was raised to newness of life, glorified - fit for eternity, never to taste death again.

Paul explains in **1 Corinthians 15:20–23 (ESV)**

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

That means that the bones of Joseph continue to wait on something... as do the bones of Abraham, Paul, and so many others.

Hebrews 11:39–40 (ESV)

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Think of it - God is His Sovereign wisdom has determined that Joseph would not physically walk on the streets of gold, until you do as well. apart from us they should not be made perfect. Why? The same faith in the promised Seed that saved them is the same faith that saves us.

They looked forward to the coming of the Seed; we look back on the coming of the Seed. They trusted Jesus; we trust Jesus.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: I've thought many times about the day when I will die... I've often considered what I would want chiseled in the stone over my grave.

At this point in my journey, I would request that the promise of **1 Thessalonians 4:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

But I am told they charge by the letter, so if that is too extravagant, maybe just write ***“To be continued...”***

Because you see, the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. There is nothing wrong with me and nothing wrong with you that the resurrection cannot fix.

But remember, this is only for those looking to the SEED. Have you looked by faith to Jesus Christ, believing that He was sent to redeem you from your sin?

ILLUSTRATION:

There is a story told in the Middle East that only they could tell. The story is of a Baghdad merchant who sent his servant to the market to pick up some goods for him. While the servant was making the purchases in the marketplace, he found himself face to face with Death (the grim Reaper, as it were). When he saw death, he noticed that death gave him a strange look that terrified him.

In great fear, he returned to his master and was told that Death had given him a menacing look and that he must have a horse to escape to Samara, a city some distance away.

The master quickly gave his servant a horse, then went to the marketplace to find Death. When he found him, he asked, "Why did you give my servant a menacing look?" Death replied, "I wasn't looking at him menacingly; I was merely surprised to see him here in Bagdad, for, you see, I have an appointment with him tonight in Samara."

The servant couldn't cheat death, Joseph couldn't cheat death, you can't cheat death.

Dr. Adrian Rogers said it best - until a man is prepared to die, he is not yet ready to live. Are you prepared?