

Our Hope in Life and Death

Genesis 49:29-50:26

[Last sermon in Genesis; helped to have a Bible open to pg. 40]

Intro: The Message of Easter

If you could summarize Easter in one word, what word would you use? Some might say, “Resurrection.” Others may say, “Joy.” Still others may say, “Family.”

You know what word I would use to summarize Easter? Hope. More than any other holiday, Easter is a holiday of hope. Why? *Tim Keller, pastor and author, said it this way, “If Jesus Christ was actually raised from the dead...if he really got up, walked out [of the tomb], was seen by hundreds of people, talked to them...then you know what? Everything’s gonna be alright. Whatever your worried about right now, whatever you’re afraid, everything is actually gonna be ok.”*

Tim Keller died from cancer not long after saying that. And he said that because he knew he had cancer and he didn’t have much longer to live. That’s called...hope. Do you have it?

You've heard it said, "There only two certainties in life: death and taxes." The deadline for one of those is very soon. BUT you don't know which one will come first. You could die before April 15. Death has a way of sobering us to ask the all-important question, "Do I have hope beyond this life, or is this all there is?"

That's what this closing passage in Genesis answers for us. It's a passage laid out like a sandwich (or a hamburger). You got the top and bottom pieces of bread—what's in the middle? The meat! The bread is there just to compliment the meat!

This passage has a top and bottom piece that describe two men facing death in hope. The question is: What gives them hope in the face of death? What gives YOU hope in the face of death? That's what the middle part of the passage (the meat) answers.

So let's take the two pieces of bread first, and then we'll close by tasting and chewing on and digesting the perfectly cooked, well-seasoned piece of meat in the middle.

Three questions: 1) Do you have hope when *others die*? 2) Will you have hope when *you die*? 3) What gives you hope in *life and death*?

1) Do you have hope when others die?

Jacob, the father of the people of Israel, is on his deathbed. He and his whole family are currently in Egypt because a famine forced them out of their land. About 40 years prior, Jacob's son Joseph was sold by his jealous brothers into slavery in Egypt.

And through a series of insane events, Joseph ended up becoming the righthand man to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. So when the famine hit, Joseph invited his whole family to live in Egypt where there was food. They've been there 17 years. Jacob is about to die...in Egypt.

That's a problem! Because God promised Jacob and his people would inherit the land of Canaan...the place that represents God's presence and God's rest for God's people. So consider the hope Jacob has as he faces death outside of the promised land. He's speaking to his sons. **[49:29-32]**

He's referring to the burial site that his grandfather Abraham bought many years prior in the land God promised to give his offspring—the land of Canaan. He's saying, "Bury me there. Don't let my body remain here in Egypt. Take me home to the land of promise."

That's a big ask because Canaan was 250 miles from Egypt. They couldn't fly his body on a plane. They had to travel by foot/caravan. But Jacob was sure he needed to be buried there. **[v33]** Here's what's interesting: he doesn't get buried in the cave of his people for another 3 months or so. So how can it say, "He was gathered to his people"?

The answer is: something happened to his soul after he breathed his last. His inner man was gathered to his people. Death is not the end. He knew that. His family knows that, even though they grieve greatly. **[50:1-3]**

Embalming would be necessary to preserve his body for the long travel to Canaan. There's great grief that comes with his death. The question is: Can we grieve and still have hope?

Do you have hope when others die? I want you to see the hope the author of Genesis (Moses) instills in the original readers (the people of Israel who came up out of Egypt and are on their way to the promised land). **[vv4-5]**

Joseph asks Pharaoh's permission to take his father's body on a 250-mile journey to Canaan. And the way he asks it is interesting: "Please let me *go up*." That's the direction he would head, but the author of Genesis is hinting at something here.

He uses this term "go up" 7x in ch50. It's a term that he'll later use in the second book he writes called Exodus. That book describes the event when the people of Israel get out of Egypt and "go up" to Canaan.

So this term would've meant something to the original readers who literally "went up" from Egypt to Canaan. Jacob's body is gonna "go up" from Egypt to Canaan, prefiguring the promise that the people will also "go up."

In fact, notice some other details that demonstrate Jacob's journey to Canaan prefigures Israel's journey. **[vv6-9]** A ton of Egyptians went up, including chariots and horseman. That hints at what will take place later in the Exodus event. An army of Egyptians (chariots and horseman) would chase after the Israelites as they exited Egypt.

Here in Genesis, they're going up *with* them, whereas in Exodus they'll be chasing them. But they're still taking the same route. Notice that route. **[vv10-11]**

So there's great grief in the midst of this loss. But the author is giving hints of hope because he says they stop just beyond the Jordan river to spend time mourning. That's the same path Israel would take to the promised land—they would cross the Jordan river.

These little details are designed to give the original readers hope in the face of death. Just as God got Jacob home to the promised land, so too, he would get them home.

If you've been with us in our study of Genesis, you know that the promised land of Canaan points beyond itself to the greater promise of an eternal land—a new creation—where God dwells with his people. That's our hope. And death cannot prevent God's people from getting there!

Jacob's family had that hope as they buried their dad in the place he told them to. **[vv12-14]** They knew this wasn't the end of their dad. That's why they buried him in the promised land—the place of hope of eternal life. Do you have that hope when others die?

2) Will you have hope when you die?

When you're on your death bed, what will be your hope? Let's jump to the bottom slice of bread that records *Joseph's* death. **[vv22-23]**

It was rare to live long enough to see your great, great grandchildren. Joseph does. His life was full. BUT his life still came to end. It doesn't matter if you live to 110 (like Joseph) or 147 (like Jacob). At the end of the day, we will all take a final breath.

So the question remains: Will you have hope in the face of your own death? Look at Joseph's hope. **[v24]** He is confident God will bring them home to the promised land. He says, "God will *visit* you." That's the same language that will be used in the book of Exodus to describe God coming to their rescue.

Joseph is looking ahead to that. He has hope God will keep his promises. But he knows it won't be for a long time. **[vv25-26]** They're not getting out of Egypt anytime soon if he's telling them to carry his bones from Egypt. His body is gonna rot and decay there.

So why does he make this request? Because he knows: Egypt is not his final home! He's looking forward to the land God promised. And he wants his *remains* to be buried there because he believes his *remains* will not be *remains* forever! He will be given a new, glorified body that will rise from the dead in the land of promise. He had that hope. Do you? Will you have hope on your death bed?

How sad it is that so many people are banking on false hopes...

- “I’ve lived a good enough life. That’s my ticket into heaven.” To which I ask: What makes you think you’ll meet the standard?
- “God will just overlook all the wrong I’ve done and let me in.” Why? That’s sounds unjust. God is not unjust. He cannot sweep sin under the rug.
- “Everyone goes to a better place.” Where did you get that idea?

What gives you hope—true hope—in the face of death? What are you banking on? The answer to that question is in the juicy meat of this passage. So let’s ask...

3) What gives you hope in life and death?

Look at the exchange between Joseph and his brothers right after their dad’s funeral. **[v15]**

Do you know what they did to him? He was 17-yrs-old when they sold him as a slave to Egypt. For 22 years, he was away from his homeland. His father thought he was dead. He had to grow up in an unfamiliar culture. He was mistreated, falsely accused, imprisoned.

What his brothers did was terrible and led to terrible things. And now that their dad is dead, they fear Joseph will take revenge, even though he already forgave them in ch45. But when you've done really bad things, the hardest thing to believe is that you CAN be forgiven.

So they come up with a fabricated story to appease Joseph's potential wrath. **[vv16-17b, "please forgive"]** Jacob never said that. Fear makes people fabricate stories. But look at Joseph's response. **[v17c, "wept"]**

He wept at the *thought* that *they thought* he still has vengeful *thoughts* towards them. It opened old relational wounds. But they're desperate. **[v18]**

Would you be frustrated? "Guys, I already forgave you! Get over yourselves! After all this, you still don't know my heart?" **[v19]** Get the connection: they fear he's going to put them to *death* for what they did to him, and he says, "Don't fear because I'm *not* in the place of God." Which must mean, "God is ultimately in charge of death and life."

Joseph is trusting in the sovereignty (control) of God over death. That's why HE could face his own death with hope, and that's why he had hope when his dad died. And that's why he's not gonna take vengeance on his brothers and put them to death.

God is sovereign over death. And if God is sovereign over death, then he must be sovereign over everything! Why? Because death is sovereign over everyone! Everyone dies and there's no stopping it. As much as people try to stop death—with our anti-aging creams and our frequent trips to the doctor...

OR even our irrational attempts to avoid thinking about the inevitability of death by NOT going to the doctor, so we don't have to hear them tell us something we don't wanna hear!

Death remains sovereign. And therefore, if God is sovereign over death, then he must be sovereign over everything! That's the very point Joseph makes in **[vv20-21]**. "You, brothers, when you sold me into slavery all those years ago, you did it from an evil, jealousy heart..."

Notice, he's not excusing their sin! He's acknowledging it. "You meant evil in that act of selling me into slavery." They're TOTALLY responsible for what they did. "Your intention/motive was evil..."

"BUT God meant it for good." That's hope. There's *meaning* to your suffering that often *feels* meaningless. God *meant* IT for good. What's the IT? Their evil! Their wicked act of selling him into slavery, God meant IT for good.

There were two actors in Joseph being sold into slavery: his brothers (who acted wickedly because their hearts were wicked) and God (who acted good because his heart was good). What was the "good" God intended? **[v20b]**.

You know what he's talking about. Joseph became the instrument through which Egypt, and many surrounding nations, were saved in a famine. Take ANY of the events in Joseph's life away, millions of people would've died...

- It began with his dad's favor of him that fueled jealousy in his brothers towards him.

- Then Joseph dreamt his brothers would one day bow to him, which made them even angrier, so they tried to kill him.
- But they didn't because Rueben, the oldest, intervened.
- Instead, their greediness was aroused when Midianite traders on their way to Egypt just so happened to pass by at that exact time, so they sold him as a slave.
- In Egypt, he became a servant in Potiphar's house, whose wife was a floozie, and she came onto Joseph.
- But he resister her, so she falsely accused him of rape, landing him in prison...
- Which just so happened to be the same prison two of Pharaoh's servants were in.
- And they had disturbing dreams, both of which Joseph was able to interpret.
- Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream, and one of his servants, now out of prison, said, "Oh I know a guy!"
- And Joseph told Pharaoh that his dream was a vision of the future—a famine was on its way.

- So Pharaoh—king of Egypt—put Joseph in charge of storing up food.
- As a result, millions upon millions of people survived.

Every...single...detail of Joseph's life mattered, including all his suffering. God was doing thousands of things behind the scenes.

He's doing ten thousand things in your life that you can't see, and he's working it all together for good, if you're his. He does not pick up the pieces of the mess we've made. The mess is part of his plan to bring about good!

There's a book my kids like called "Mistakes that Worked." It's about famous inventions that happened by accident, like the chocolate chip cookie! Did you know that was a mistake?

Ruth Wakefield, in 1938, was trying to make chocolate cookies but ran out of baker's chocolate, so she thought she'd just put little chunks of chocolate into the batter, and it would melt and spread throughout the batter and make the whole cookie chocolate.

Instead, the pieces of chocolate stayed in place and became gooey goodness. It was a mistake that worked out for good the good of all mankind.

That's how many people think life works. "Mistakes happen and God makes the best of it." Not true! God is always working out his plan for the good of his people.

The clearest example of this is in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Listen to how Acts 4:27-28 puts it. (This is a prayer of Jesus' followers.) "Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus...both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan predestined to take place."

That's talking about the cross. The most wicked act by men in the history of the world—the killing of Jesus—was part of God's plan. WHY? To bring about the salvation of many.

“As for you [Herod and Pontius Pilate] ...you meant evil against Jesus, but God meant it for good, to bring salvation to sinners.” That’s why Jesus died! The men who put him to death had no clue that God was working salvation for sinners like you and me! **[Gospel]**

Death could not defeat him. Why? He is sovereign over death, and he proved that by rising from the dead! And if he is sovereign over death, he’s sovereign over everything, including all the hard things you’ve gone through in your life.

Conclusion

Our only hope in life and death is the God who is sovereign over both. Would you trust him, today? Would you surrender any illusion you have that you are in control of your life? Surrender it to him!

And come, rest in the sovereign goodness of God revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ. Hope is found in him.