

Genesis 49 & 50 Blessings and Burials

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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This morning we wrap up our study of the book of Genesis by looking at some blessings and burials. Honestly, there isn't a lot of rich, meaty application in the blessings, but there will be by the end, and they do serve one important function overall - they were Jacob's final effort to point his boys toward the work God had done and the promises He had made for the future. So let's look at what he has to say and see what we can learn.

1 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days:

2 "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob,
And listen to Israel your father.

3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn,
My might and the beginning of my strength,
The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.

4 Unstable as water, you shall not excel,
Because you went up to your father's bed;
Then you defiled *it*—
He went up to my couch.

As the first-born son Reuben had potential, but he was unstable. He should have been the model of dignity and masterfully handled the power that comes from the natural leadership opportunities that come with being the oldest sibling, but he didn't.

Instead of waiting for dad to appoint him as the leader of the family, he made a grab for power and had sex with Bilhah, one of his dad's concubines. In so doing, he lost everything he was trying to establish - no prophet, priest or king; no real leader of any kind in the nation of Israel ever came from the tribe of Reuben.

5 "Simeon and Levi *are* brothers;
Instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place.

6 Let not my soul enter their council;
Let not my honor be united to their assembly;
For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.

7 Cursed *be* their anger, for *it is* fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
And scatter them in Israel.

You remember what Simeon and Levi did – after their sister Dinah had been raped they took revenge, not just on the man who did it, but on his entire city – they killed all the men of the area after manipulating them into getting circumcised and then came through and slaughtered people while they were recovering and too weak to fight.

As a result, they too lost the opportunity to lead the family by showing that they could not control themselves and use power within its proper boundaries.

That brings us to the fourth born son.

[8](#) “Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies;
Your father’s children shall bow down before you.

[9](#) Judah *is* a lion’s whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?

[10](#) The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.

[11](#) Binding his donkey to the vine,
And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine,
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.

[12](#) His eyes *are* darker than wine,
And his teeth whiter than milk.

So Judah is to be the head of the family from here on out. Eventually, as the family grows into a nation, King David will come from the tribe of Judah and rule them all. Then his descendants will continue to lead the nation.

But what they were really looking for was Shiloh. Shiloh is related to the Hebrew word “Shalom” or peace, so the one they were really waiting for was Jesus, the Messiah, also known as the Prince of Peace. And one day He would come as a descendant of Judah “And to Him (vs 10) shall be the obedience of the people.”

Now, Judah and Joseph are the two brothers whose blessings have the most for us to learn from, most commentators don’t have much to say about the rest of the brothers, because they just weren’t as significant as Judah and Joseph.

[13](#) “Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea;
He *shall become* a haven for ships,
And his border shall adjoin Sidon.

[14](#) “Issachar is a strong donkey,

Lying down between two burdens;
[15](#) He saw that rest *was* good,
And that the land *was* pleasant;
He bowed his shoulder to bear *a burden*,
And became a band of slaves.

The land of Issachar was extremely fruitful and it was easy to cultivate, but because they didn't keep their guard up, eventually other people took their crops and made them slaves.

[16](#) "Dan shall judge his people
As one of the tribes of Israel.
[17](#) Dan shall be a serpent by the way,
A viper by the path,
That bites the horse's heels
So that its rider shall fall backward.
[18](#) I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!

Vs 18 seems to be just an inserted praise of God. Jacob has made it through half of the boys, and he just proclaims how he has been waiting for salvation from God. The word 'your salvation' here is actually Yeshua, which is the proper name of Jesus. From the Hebrew, through the Greek and Latin and finally into English, Yeshua became Iesus, then Jesus. So Jacob is literally saying I have waited for Jesus O Yahweh.

[19](#) "Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him,
But he shall triumph at last.

[20](#) "Bread from Asher *shall be* rich,
And he shall yield royal dainties.

[21](#) "Naphtali *is* a deer let loose;
He uses beautiful words.

[22](#) "Joseph *is* a fruitful bough [the main branch of a tree],
A fruitful bough by a well;
His branches run over the wall.

[23](#) The archers have bitterly grieved him,
Shot *at him* and hated him.

[24](#) But his bow remained in strength,
And the arms of his hands were made strong
By the hands of the Mighty *God* of Jacob
(From there *is* the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

Joseph was fruitful, he had a lot of stuff due to his position in the Egyptian government, and he was overseeing the fruitfulness of the land as he led the people through a difficult time of famine. But he didn't hoard it all to himself. His branches, which bore the fruit, extended over the walls and were accessible to other people. His blessings weren't just locked up for only him to enjoy.

When Mady and I owned our first home in Hemet we had a bunch of citrus trees in the backyard. On the side of our house was a grapefruit tree and it's branches literally stuck out over the fence into the yard of our neighbor Rosemary. She was a wonderful woman in her late 70's who had lost her husband just weeks after their 50th anniversary, and she had been adopted when she was a little girl – so she was a widow, and an orphan so Mady and I felt like we got double credit for helping her out. Anyway, she loved grapefruit so we always encouraged her to take as much as she liked from our tree. And I remember how that used to make us feel so biblical.

Well, Joseph used his position to help others too, even the 'archers' who had 'bitterly grieved him.' This is probably a reference to the difficulties he had in getting to the position he now held. Yes, if you were to look at him, you'd see him riding by on his royal chariot, you'd see his nice clothes, his fancy house in the right neighborhood, and maybe you would be envious. But if you dig deeper, you would see all the grief and betrayal he dealt with along the way.

And yet, when he came to a position of power, he didn't use it to go out and get revenge on those who had wounded him, he used his position to bless. Remember what we have seen all throughout Genesis – God blesses us SO THAT we can be a blessing to others. If you get stingy and keep all your blessings to yourself, you can start counting the days because sooner or later those blessings are either going to go rancid or they will just be taken away.

Joseph on the other hand shared his blessings and as a result, even more blessing is promised to him.

[25](#) By the God of your father who will help you,
And by the Almighty who will bless you
~~With~~ blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

[26](#) The blessings of your father
Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors,
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.
They shall be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.

[27](#) "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he shall devour the prey,
And at night he shall divide the spoil."

[28](#) All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel, and this *is* what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing.

[29](#) Then he charged 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 of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field

of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial 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* there *were* purchased from the sons of Heth.” [33](#) And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Jacob has spoken his peace, given his last will and testament, and died. Now they’re about to have a state funeral for him. Those of you who remember the death of President Reagan a few years back, you can remember what all this pomp and circumstance looks like.

[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 him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.

[4](#) Now when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the hearing of Pharaoh, saying, [5](#) ‘My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.” Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.’ ”

[6](#) And Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.”

[7](#) So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, [8](#) as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. [9](#) And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering.

[10](#) Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which *is* beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. He observed seven days of mourning for his father. [11](#) And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This *is* a deep mourning of the Egyptians.” Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which *is* beyond the Jordan.

[12](#) So his sons did for him just 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 of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place. [14](#) And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father.

Anytime an organization loses an important leader, or when a family loses that special matriarch or patriarch that held everything together, there is always a bit of a shake up. A kind of ‘now what?’ period when people wonder what’s going to happen next. That happens with Jacob’s family, as the brothers wonder if Joseph was only being kind and gracious to them because dad was still alive.

[15](#) When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.” [16](#) So they sent *messengers* to Joseph, saying, “Before your father died he commanded, saying, [17](#) ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph: “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to

you.” Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

Now, in all likelihood, they are telling a fib here. If dad was really concerned about it, he would have just said something to Joseph himself, but we have no record of that. The brothers are just concerned about whether he has really forgiven them or not.

[18](#) Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we *are* your servants.”

[19](#) Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? [20](#) But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. [21](#) Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Alright, let’s park here for a minute and open this one up. How does Joseph respond to his brothers?

1. He really forgives them. In His famous Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us to simply let our yes be yes, and our no, no (Matt 5:37). If we say we are going to do something, we need to do it. Joseph told his brothers he had forgiven them and then he did it. *He* doesn’t bring it up again, *they* do. We all need to be more like Joseph and less like his brothers, we need to forgive and be done with it, don’t bring it up again, to them or your other friends, let it be done.
2. Even though he has forgiven them, he still calls a spade a spade. He doesn’t just whitewash over it and say “oh, it was no big deal.” No, he labels it for what it is – it was evil of them to have sold their own brother into slavery. We need to grasp this! You are going to get hurt in this world. People are going to do you wrong. Circumstances are going to do you wrong. And it’s OK to call them wrong, or evil, or sinful. You’re even going to do some of those things to other people. And yes, all of it can be forgiven, *but that doesn’t change the nature of what happened*. Why is that a big deal? Because if we’re not careful, we can whitewash over the evil of an action in an attempt to be forgiving and wind up with two problems.
 - a. First of all, we find that it is hard to let go of the event and find healing. We keep trying to tell ourselves, “oh, I just have to forgive and forget” but we don’t call it sin, we don’t want to say it was evil or wrong, but we feel like it was inside. So we keep trying to muscle our way through ‘putting it behind us’ but the pain and the injustice of it all keeps mounding up and we finally get frustrated and say, “I can’t do it, I just can’t forgive them.” We might find a workaround that lets us get through daily life again, but the issue is still there under the surface festering because we couldn’t find a way to call it evil and still forgive.
 - b. The other reason why we need to call it sin or evil or in some way label it as heinous and wrong is that if we don’t, the other person, or other observers, might think it was somehow OK. You seem to have forgiven them; maybe what they

did wasn't so bad. **Yes, it was.** And sin needs to be forgiven not just by you, *but also by God.* They need to know, and onlookers need to know, that a wrong has been done and that it should not be done again. Now obviously there is a right way and a wrong way to do this - you need to be able to call it sin without having a sinful attitude yourself.

3. Which brings us back to our original issue of Joseph's forgiveness. First, he really forgave them. Second, he called a spade a spade. But third, he was able to do all of this BECAUSE he relied on God not himself. He says "you meant it for evil, BUT GOD meant it for good." And even though God used it for good, even though He redeemed the situation, *the brothers were still guilty of sin.*

They didn't do what they did because they were trying to love and serve God; they did it because they were loving themselves. But, through the whole process Joseph learned to trust God. He learned that God can take the worst, most humiliating, most painful, most disgusting things that have happened to us, and he can twist them and he can turn them and he can polish them and he can create something beautiful out of what once was a jagged wreck.

Now, there's one more thing to say about that – it took time. God may have rushed in immediately with comfort, but the beauty and the good didn't come out of this situation for many years – remember, God is working on an eternal time schedule. He doesn't have to get things done as quickly as you may want or hope, but they will still get done.

[22](#) So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. [23](#) Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third *generation*. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph's knees.

[24](#) And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." [25](#) Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." [26](#) So Joseph died, *being* one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

This is the end of Genesis. The book that opened with the creation of man in a beautiful garden ends with a dead man in a box.

It's a reminder of the consequences of sin and the promises of God. Death entered into the world when man first rebelled against the God who had made him. But God promised to take action to forgive him.

The problem was, as we saw with Joseph's brothers, evil had been done and it wouldn't be just to pretend it hadn't. It might be merciful to simply forgive, but it wouldn't be just. We need to remember that both mercy **and** justice are characteristics of God.

So, since we couldn't bear the consequences for our sin without being crushed, Jesus offered Himself up for us. He received the wrath of God and ensured justice was done - our evil wasn't just covered up, it was paid for.

And now, since it has been paid for, you can come to Him and ask for forgiveness. But it isn't automatic. You have to come to Him and confess your need for forgiveness and ask for Him to help you to live in a way that is pleasing to Him from here on out.

But if you do that, your evil has been paid for. And therefore, you don't need to come back to Him like the brothers did and ask again. You can take Him for His word. When He tells you you are forgiven He really means it. Sin is still sin, we call it what it was and what it is, but you are forgiven. Really and truly, totally and completely forgiven in Him. He's not going to remember what you did one day and whack you for it. So let it go.

And let go of the sins that others have committed against you too. It will all be paid for one day - either the blood of Christ will pay for their evil too or they will pay in hell, but one way or the other, all the evil in this world will be paid for.

What does all of this mean for you today? It means you have a reason to rejoice. Jesus went to the cross and now sits on the throne. Evil may be done to you but God can use it for good. And the evil you have done yourself can be forgiven too, all you have to do is ask. This is what we call the gospel and this is why we say it is really good news.