

Week 14 – Faithful to the End – Genesis 50:1-26

Scripture Reading: Exodus 13:17-22

Introduction

This morning we come to the end of our 14-week series on the life of Joseph

And what a life it was!

The account of Joseph is an outstanding riches to rags to riches story – but it's actually so much more than that

We have seen that Joseph was a man of exceptional character as we have noted that Scripture doesn't have one negative word to say about him

We have seen that he was a man of profound tenacity with a seemingly limitless capacity for keeping his eye focused on God and with seeing God's hand on his life through any and all circumstances

And we saw how God rewarded Joseph's faithfulness and prospered him in everything he did whether he was a slave, a prisoner, or a prime minister

But we also saw early on that Joseph's story wasn't really about Joseph at all but that it was recorded by God in his Word to show us how God provided for the preservation of the family line of his father, Jacob

During the last two weeks, we've looked at Jacob's last days as his death came near

And when we left off last week, Jacob had drawn his feet into his bed and died

But before he died he blessed each of his sons in turn and issued his last command to them as their father; that they not bury his body in Egypt but that they transport it back to Canaan for burial in the family plot

And we saw how this was a supreme statement of faith on Jacob's part as he looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promise concerning the Promised Land

Now, as we consider the last chapter of Genesis, we see that over half of the verses contained in the chapter deal with the events surrounding the interment of Jacob's body

And we are going to see that Jacob's funeral arrangements were quite lengthy and lavish

Extravagant funerals aren't exactly unknown in modern times as celebrities and dignitaries are given send-offs that befit their status or their popularity

The funerals of people like Michael Jackson, Elvis Presley, Princess Diana, and others are all found on the lists of those that cost a great deal and were attended, or at least watched, by many

President Ronald Reagan's funeral tops the list though at an estimated \$400 million

But that wasn't because it was a particularly extravagant funeral, most of the cost was because a federal day of mourning was declared and that meant that federal workers got the day off with pay

It would be impossible to even begin to give a plausible estimate of the cost of Jacob's funeral but we see that he was given great honor that was just barely short of the honor given to a pharaoh

In **Genesis 50:2-3** we read about the initial honors given to Jacob

First, we see that Joseph commanded that Jacob's body be preserved by mummification which was reserved for pharaohs, priests, and the like because of the time, skill, and expense involved

Verse 3 tells us that the process of embalming took skilled embalmers 40 days to complete

Then we see that the Egyptians mourned him for seventy days which was just two days shy of the ritual 72 days of mourning that were set aside for a pharaoh

And a bit farther along we'll read of Jacob's funeral entourage that carried him to Canaan and how it included *"all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household"*

And then we see how they were accompanied by chariots and horsemen

No doubt this was because of the great amount of provisions that such a group would need on their journey

Genesis 50:9 says *“It was a very great company”*

In fact, it was so great that the Canaanites took notice of it and memorialized it by naming the place they camped just before the Jordan, “the mourning of Egypt”

Joseph’s position and influence in Egypt would have made the attendance of many of these people an expected courtesy but still, it was quite an outpouring of respect for Jacob who for all practical purposes had come to Egypt as a refugee

And whether all of this pomp and circumstance was because of how Pharaoh and the Egyptians felt about Jacob or Joseph is really immaterial

Because what is most important is that we see Joseph and his brothers fulfill their deathbed promise to their father

I. Fulfilled Promise

Look with me at verses 4-5 (**Genesis 50:4-5**)

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, ‘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.”

Once again, we see how Joseph wisely acted in such a way as to show submission to Pharaoh while at the same time serving to alleviate any misgivings Pharaoh might have felt about Joseph leaving Egypt

After all, how was Pharaoh to know that Joseph might not just decide to remain in Canaan once his father was buried?

Earlier, we saw how Joseph operated with great diplomacy in settling his family in Goshen and this appears to be another case of it as he makes his request through intermediaries and ties it to the vow his father had commanded

I want you to be sure to also notice a detail that would be easy to miss concerning Jacob’s desire to be buried in Canaan

We looked at the faith Jacob exhibited with his request last week but now we see that **he had actually prepared a place for himself at some point in the past**

We know that the burial caves in that region had niches or shelves carved into the walls where the bodies would be laid and it seems that Jacob had hewn his own spot at some earlier point

This shows that where he was buried was a matter of planning and the oath he extracted from Joseph was not a rash or capricious one made on the spur of the moment

In any event, we see that the message was carried to Pharaoh and he issued his command to Joseph in verse 6 (**Genesis 50:6**) to *“Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear”*

And this was no half-hearted or reluctant consent as is demonstrated by the retinue that Pharaoh sent along to Canaan

We have no way of knowing just how expensive such a funeral procession would be in today’s dollars but we know it had to have been done at great expense and so it would rank right up there with history’s most expensive funerals

The party travelled to Canaan which, as we saw in a previous sermon, would have been a journey taking roughly two weeks and when they reached the Jordan River they camped there and lamented for seven additional days

Then it seems that the Egyptians stayed there and allowed Joseph and his brothers to continue on to the burial site to inter their father’s remains – which they did – and then return to travel back to Egypt together

Joseph’s actions surrounding his father’s death are instructive to us as Christ-followers

First, we see that he grieved

These days, the trend at the end of a person's life is to celebrate the life of the deceased – almost to the point that their death is sort of denied and photos, videos, and special possessions of the deceased are put on display

Funeral directors report that the modern trend in funeral arrangements is to get it over with as quickly as possible and more traditional funerals with their message of the inevitability of death and the need to prepare for it are being replaced with affairs that are more like cocktail parties – oftentimes complete with buffets – than funerals

But that's not how Joseph responded to Jacob's death

In verse 1 (**Genesis 50:1**) we read that he *“fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him”*

And then there were the 70-days of formal, national mourning, the trek to Canaan, the 7-days of additional mourning at the threshing floor, and the final leg of the journey to the cave where Jacob's body was laid to rest

Joseph's actions throughout his entire life show that he understood the nature of life and death and the life to come and that he was not without hope but still, he mourned his father fully

Second, we see that Joseph honored his father by caring for his remains and fulfilling his promise to him

The Egyptians were somewhat obsessed with death and their ideas of the afterlife as demonstrated by their embalming methods and the grand tombs built for their elite

So, in caring for Jacob's remains as he did, Joseph demonstrated his belief in an afterlife as well

But Joseph didn't believe as the Egyptians believed in spite of his long sojourn there as his carrying of his father's body to Canaan demonstrated

Joseph honored his father's faith and then, as we are going to see in just a little while, he placed the same demand on his descendants regarding the disposition of his own body

In so doing, Joseph demonstrated the hope that his family had that was based on God's promises and testified to God's promise of salvation

So we see that grieving is normal, even for believers, but we grieve while being secure in knowledge that death has been defeated and how we handle death can have a profound effect on those who observe us

II. Forgiveness Actualized

At some point after they had finished fulfilling their duties to their father, it dawned on Joseph's brothers that he might now seek to take his revenge on them

Perhaps their own grief or the duties they had to perform had pushed the thought from their minds but all of a sudden they were filled with apprehension as it struck them that their father might have been all that prevented Joseph from acting against them

I'm reminded of the movie, The Godfather, how Michael Corleone waited until his mother had died to take revenge on his brother, Fredo, who had betrayed him years earlier

And this would be a natural fear based on their family history

After all, when Jacob had stolen Esau's blessing, Esau vowed to kill him as soon as their father had died (**Genesis 27:41**) and they had probably heard the story

Of course, that didn't happen in the end but Joseph's brothers had real reason to be filled with apprehension – all of them except Benjamin were guilty of great evil against Joseph and they all knew it

What they really feared was justice

A pastor friend of mine told me of the time he asked a woman in his congregation which of God's attributes she liked best and she answered, “His justice. Because all the bad people will get what's coming in the end.”

But in reality, the thought of God's righteous justice should make us tremble because we're all “bad people” who deserve God's wrath

Instead, we should favor God's mercy that restrains his wrath from those who have accepted his Son's sacrifice that satisfied the Father's righteous justice

But Joseph's older brothers were in a bit of a predicament – at least in their own minds as their imaginations ran wild and fed their fears

So they sent a messenger to Joseph with a message – it might have even been Benjamin who they sent although we aren't told that

And we see the message they sent in verses 16-7 (**Genesis 50:16-17**)

"Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father."

I don't know how important it is for us to know whether or not Jacob actually said any such thing to the brothers

It seems like the thing Jacob would have wanted but it also seems suspicious that he wouldn't have simply told Joseph himself based on the close relationship they enjoyed as father and son

But even if the brothers were completely making up that part of their plea, they followed it up by appearing in person and humbling themselves before Joseph once again and offering to become his slaves

And they discovered to their undoubtedly great relief that Joseph had already forgiven them even though they didn't think themselves forgivable and thought they surely must pay a great price for their sin

And the fact that their mistrust of him or their mischaracterization of the situation blinded them to the reality of his forgiveness made Joseph weep

In this account, I see something of the sinner who has finally realized the seriousness of their sin and the punishment that they deserve because of it and how they come trembling before God with a plea for mercy only to discover that their debt has already been paid, forgiveness has already been granted, and all that is left is for them to accept it

Am I in the place of God?

In our day, revenge and retaliation are the bywords by which people live and it seems that no wound is so slight that it doesn't warrant payback and to overlook any wound is thought to make one weak

But Joseph not only didn't seek to get even and he didn't even get mad or hold his brothers' sin against them

He actually sought to understand what they had done to him within the context of God's sovereignty

And in the second half of verse 20 (**Genesis 50:20b**) he says: *"God meant it for good"*

That statement provides us with a great and powerful testimony of submission to God's will but its real force is found in the statement that precedes it

(Genesis 50:20a) *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but..."*

Verse 20 in its entirety provides us with the necessary contrast between the harm intended by those who truly hated Joseph and the evil that they perpetrated against him with the love of God and the good he brought about from that evil

We need to remember that we are able to read through these chapters that record the life of Joseph rather quickly so we are able to see what God was doing and easily discern the thread of God's working that runs through it

But it wasn't that way for Joseph who lived through the events in real time

First, he was hated and despised and eventually sold by his older brothers who should have loved and protected him

And as he trudged toward Egypt in chains he had no way of knowing how this was going to end

Then he dutifully and honorably labored for years as a menial slave in Potiphar's household until his master promoted him and put him in charge of his estate

Only to have Potiphar's wife try to seduce him before she directly solicited him and then finally tried to force him into sexual relations with her

And when he fled from her presence he experienced the fury of a woman scorned as she would have gladly seen him executed and he found himself thrown into Pharaoh's prison

Then the cupbearer whom he befriended cruelly forgot all about him and left him to languish in jail until Joseph's services were needed to interpret Pharaoh's dreams

And through it all Joseph had kept his eyes on God and determined to maintain a godly character

At no point during those years do we get the sense that Joseph ever thought about turning away from the path that he knew honored God even though he couldn't possibly see what God was doing or precisely where that path was heading

Imagine Joseph's surprise at seeing his brothers again when they first came down to Egypt for food

We have no indication that God had revealed to him that they would come and I would have to imagine that Joseph never even really considered that he might ever see his family again

Joseph had to live through each day and live out each moment trusting in God as God progressively worked out his plan over many years

But now Joseph clearly sees that all that had happened was according to God's sovereignty and none of the evil that he had endured was for naught

God had used every bit of it for the good that he was doing

I believe Joseph was able to endure through it all because he recognized and never forgot two very important truths

First, **God is sovereign** and, second, **God is good**

And the account of his life helps us to understand **Romans 8:28** which encapsulates what Joseph recognized

God is sovereignly working for the good of those who love him no matter how things might look at the moment

Because all things that come into our lives are under God's full control so, while we may not immediately see the good, nothing can possibly violate this truth

And perhaps the greatest truth of all is that we can *know* right now that this is true

We may not fully understand *how* it can be true but we can bank on it *being* true and wait for the good to be revealed

That's precisely what Joseph had to do

Joseph knew God; he knew of God's character and power so he was able to persevere through all that he lived through with the certainty that his sovereign and loving God had things in hand so he had no reason to despair or doubt

And when the end of the matter became clear, Joseph recognized that he had no right to annul what God had ordained even if humanly speaking he might have liked to get back at all who had done him wrong

Not that we have any indication that thoughts of revenge ever crossed his mind although we might well excuse him if he had at least contemplated it

Continued care

But Joseph not only put his brothers at ease concerning his possible retribution as he made them aware of the merciful forgiveness he had already determined in his heart – the forgiveness that had been a fact was now actualized reality

He went even further and extended abundant grace to them as he assured them of his continued care for them and their families

And verse 21 (**Genesis 50:21**) ends by saying Joseph "*comforted them and spoke kindly to them*"

III. Faith Demonstrated

The final five verses of Genesis 50 seem far too brief to close out the life of a man like Joseph as verse 22 (Genesis 50:22) simply says, *“So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father’s house. Joseph lived 110 years.”*

Joseph was 17 years old when his brothers sold him and he was 30 when he entered Pharaoh’s service

He was 39 when he revealed himself to his brothers and arranged for them to bring Jacob and the rest of the family to Egypt and then his father had lived in Egypt for 17 years making Joseph 56 years old when Jacob died

So, when we do the math we see that Joseph lived another 54 years after his father died and he was able to see his grandchildren and maybe even some great-grandchildren born depending on how we interpret the words, *“of the third generation”*

That’s a rather fine point that we don’t need to delve into this morning because the important part of this final section is what is revealed in verses 24-25 (**Genesis 50:24-25**)

Look with me at those verses:

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.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.”

The first thing I want you to notice is that we have another one of those contrasts indicated by the words *“but God”*

Up to this point Joseph’s brothers had relied on Joseph’s patronage while in Egypt but now he was dying and he sensed that they would likely have reason to worry about their future

So Joseph assured them that’ while he was going away, God would continue to provide for them

And really, when we think about it, God had been providing for them all along – he was just using Joseph to do so

In so doing Joseph again reveals his faith in God’s sovereign provision

But more importantly he reveals his abiding faith in God’s promise concerning the possession of the Promised Land as he speaks of God’s care reaching all the way to their being returned to possess the Land

Then, like his father before him, Joseph makes his brothers swear an oath to take his bones along when God leads them back to the Land

It’s quite interesting to me that this is the thing that Joseph is remembered for in **Hebrews 11:22**

In fact, in spite of all that Joseph did in his life and all that we have looked at as exemplary for us, this is the only thing the New Testament commends Joseph for

I suppose that goes to show us once again that God doesn’t see things the way we do

But when we stop to think about it, this last statement recorded from the lips of Joseph truly do encapsulate what kind of man he was

Once again, his supreme faith in God is on display

But also his care for his brethren and the generations that would live in Egypt until God’s timing for their return

Joseph obviously didn’t expect his brothers to take his body up immediately like they had with their father

Instead, he understood that his body would remain in Egypt and be a constant reminder of the oath that was given to return it to Canaan at some future date which in turn would keep God’s promise of the Land before the eyes of his people

Joseph lived his entire life with his eyes fixed firmly on God’s person and promises and lived each day according to that light – no matter what the events of the day might hold

And so the account that began with the dreams of a youthful dreamer in a fancy coat comes to a close with his body lain in a coffin in Egypt awaiting the fulfillment of God’s promise to return his people to Canaan

Conclusion

As we close out our series I don't know what stood out to each of you personally

For me, the series served as a mild rebuke or corrective to some of my attitudes as I looked at how Joseph handled the ups and downs of his life

There are far too many times when I am tempted to do the opposite of Joseph and would gladly put myself in God's place and make things be different – if only I was able

There are far too many times when I despair over the way people treat me and react to mistreatment with less than equanimity

And the list could probably go on

For me, the number one lesson I got from the life of Joseph is to know that God has all things in his control and to always be looking for what God is doing and to patiently continue on with what I know God would have me do while I wait for his good result to be revealed

What I have found is that I have to continually put the brakes on my nature and my tendencies and ask myself, "What do you suppose God is working to accomplish in your life by what is going on here?" and then to ask God to reveal what he is up to

And my experience has shown that I'm not Joseph and those thoughts don't come naturally to me and it will require effort to make it a habit to ask those questions

Perhaps you got something completely different from the series

I know I only preach the middle message that stands between God's written Word and the message the Holy Spirit speaks to each heart that is truly listening for it

I'd love to hear what that message is for you so if you'd drop me an email or let me know in some other way, I'd appreciate it

Let's pray