

Place: Lurgan Baptist 6:6:2010

GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

Reading: Genesis 50:1-26

12. JOURNEY'S END

On the day that Karl Marx died, which was the 14th March 1883, his housekeeper came to him and said, “ *Tell me your last words, and I’ll write them down.*” Marx replied, “ *Go on get out. Last words are for fools who have haven’t said enough.*” Yet last words can be very revealing. P.T. Barnum the famous circus magnate said as he was dying, “ *What were today’s receipts?*” Napoleon said, “ *Chief of the army.*” The great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “ *Jesus died for me.*” And John Wesley the founder of Methodism said, “ *The best of all is, God is with us.*” Did you notice Joseph’s last words? “ *I die, and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob.*” (50:24) Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel saying, “ *God will surely visit you and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.*” The implication of Joseph’s words was that the people of God would have to pass through a time of trouble. Oppression would come but they must not forget the promise of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Gen 17:15 26:2 28:10) You see, the promise of God was Joseph’s great hope when he was dying.

Grandpa Joseph would tell his grandchildren, “ *You know we’re going back to Canaan one day. God is going to bring us back. Don’t start liking Egypt too much or get too involved here, because we’re going somewhere else.*” My this is not conjecture. Of all the things the writer to the Hebrews could have recorded about Joseph, he chose this, “ *By faith Joseph, when he died made mention of the departing of the children of Israel and gave them commandment concerning his bones.*” (Heb 11:22) Isn’t that amazing? Why did the Holy Spirit choose to report this fact about Joseph? Because it was so significant. Here he was living in the most advanced civilization of his day. He was deeply involved in the political, social and economic structure of Egypt. Next to Pharaoh he was the most recognized man in the country. And yet when Joseph gathered his children and grandchildren and great grandchildren around him he reminded them, “ *Our hope for the future is not tied to the things of Egypt. God has helped us in the past, God will help us in the future. We are going to return to the Land of Promise someday, and I want you to take my bones with you.*”

Do you see the legacy that Joseph left to his posterity? He kept reminding his generation and future generations, that the promises of God were sure. You see, Abraham had passed this legacy on to Isaac, and Isaac had passed it on to Jacob, and Jacob had passed it on to Joseph, and now Joseph is passing it on to his family. My what legacy are we passing on to our children and grandchildren? We have a tremendous advantage over the patriarchs because “ *we have also a more sure word of prophecy.*”

(2 Pet 1:19) You see, because we have all the word from God we will ever need we can bequeath to our family the truth of God in all its fullness.

(2 Tim 1:13-14) Is this not the legacy that you want to leave when you come to the end of the journey ? As we see Joseph at “ **Journey’s End,**” we notice,

(1) JOSEPH’S BEREAVEMENT

The death of a family member is one of the hardest events any one of us will have to face. The loss of a loved one can send shock waves through a family, especially when that individual has been the head of a family over a significant number of years as was Jacob. You see, last time we looked at Jacob’s death from the viewpoint of Jacob, but here the scene changes and we see Jacob’s death from the viewpoint of Joseph. Notice,

(a) *THE EXPERIENCE JOSEPH FACES:*

As Jacob was gathered to his people, Joseph was left to grieve. Whoever has endured the loss of a loving, faithful father as many of us have, knows only too well the grip of grief that tightens itself around you. Sure Joseph knew that his father was a believer and died confidently and yes he believed in the resurrection but he was human and he grieved. The Bible says “ *And Joseph fell upon his father’s neck and wept upon him and kissed him.* ” (50:1) Have you had that experience ? You have kissed the cold marble face of a loved one. Those eyes so expressive of love and affection for you are now closed in death. Those lips, so many times speaking of things of tenderness are

silent. Those hands that reached out in care for you are stilled. *It is only natural that we weep.* God gives us the opportunity of mourning for those we love when they go to be with the Lord. Of course, we are not weeping for those who have died in the Lord, we’re weeping for ourselves. I know at times of bereavement some well meaning people say, “ *Don’t weep, their pain is over, don’t weep they are in a better place.* ” Listen, Joseph knew that his father was with the Lord but he wept. Don’t feel you are unspiritual if you weep. Paul says to the Thessalonian believers who had lost loved ones, “ *Ye sorrow.* ” (1 Thes 4:13) But then he quickly adds “ *Ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope.* ” In the face of death the pagan world stood in despair. A typical inscription on a grave reveals this fact. “ *I was not, I became, I am not, I care not.* ” Do you see the hopelessness that marked the pagan world ?

Is this not the philosophy that is being propagated today ? “ *Live it up for death will come and that will be the end.* ” But that’s not our prospect. You see, our loved ones in Christ are with Christ, and one day their bodies will be raised. The Bible says, “ *It is sown in dishonour it is raised in glory.* ” (1 Cor 15:43) Tell me, are you experiencing bereavement? My does the hope of the Lord’s return, the believer’s resurrection, and the future reunion not comfort your soul ? (a)

(b) *THE ENCOURAGEMENT JOSEPH FINDS:*

Isn’t it interesting that out of love and respect for the man who had endeared himself to them, the Egyptians from

Pharaoh down felt his loss ? *Indeed there was a special honour given to Jacob.* In those days if you had been Egyptian royalty they would have mourned for you seventy two days, so they are giving unusual honour to Jacob in mourning for him seventy days. I wonder what folks thought as they saw this procession wending its way out of Egypt, then eastward across the Sinai, and finally turning northward toward the God given region called the Promised Land ? If I counted correctly there are about six groups that accompany Joseph as they take the body of Jacob back to Canaan land to be buried. Is it not great that others can join us in our grief and sorrow ?

Do you recall that when Job's friends heard of his calamity they came to be with him ? (Job 2:11-13) Job later called his friends “ *miserable comforters.* ” (Job 16:2) But they did come. Are you an encouragement to others in their sorrow ? Do you show that you care ? Have you discovered that being with someone who hurts deeply does help wonderfully ? Just by being there, just by sitting there, just by listening there we can lighten the load. We can heed the exhortation of Paul to “ *weep with them that weep.* ” (Rom 12:15)

(c) ***THE EXAMPLE JOSEPH FURNISHES:***

For we read “ *And Joseph returned into Egypt.* ” (50:14) That is returned to the business of life. You know we must deal with people who suffer bereavement gently, graciously, and lovingly. Dealing with grief takes time, but life must resume in full some time, and the knowledge of that is part of the healing process. Many studies have

been carried out on the stages of bereavement. Shock, denial, numbness, and perhaps anger. Then eventually there comes the renewed activity and adapting to life. No doubt it will be different, but we must seek to know God's grace for the readjustments ahead. We need to be still and know that He is God. We need to reflect on the Lord in time of grief. (1)

(2) **JOSEPH'S BROTHERS**

Do you remember Joseph's brothers ? I mean they had mistreated him when he was a boy. In fact, when he was just seventeen they sold into slavery. When eventually they came down to Egypt they didn't recognize him. Then Joseph graciously forgave them. But now the old man is dead. Do you see what the text says ? “ *And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead they said Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.* ” (50:15) Do you see,

(a) ***THE FEARS THAT CONTROLLED THEM:***

You know, sometimes after funeral services, true family issues, concerns and conflicts rise to the surface. Old wounds that have never been treated, family grievances that have been repressed all begin to surface. Is this not exactly what happened here ? They still couldn't appropriate grace. It was still “ *too good to be true.* ” Everything they had said and done so many years ago came rushing back into their minds. As long as Jacob was there, they felt safe or a least safer. *With him gone, who*

knew what might happen ? With Jacob passing from this scene of time, Joseph would be free to repay them. You see, what you have here is the lingering problem of guilt. ***Joseph had already forgiven his brothers, the problem was they had not forgiven themselves.*** Does this scenario sound familiar to you ? Indeed is there someone here like that this ? You came to Christ, and Christ forgave you of your sin, but are you having a hard time forgiving yourself ? Are you asking yourself these questions, “ *What if ?* ” “ *What if I am not forgiven ?* ” “ *What if it wasn’t real ?* ” “ *What if I’m not going to heaven ?* ” “ *What if the promises of God are faulty ?* ” Martin Luther knew something of this when he wrote,

***For feelings come, and feelings go,
Now feelings are deceiving.
My warrant is the Word of God,
Not else is worth believing***

***Though all my heart should feel condemned
For want of some sweet token,
There is One greater than my heart
Whose Word cannot be broken.***

***I’ll stand on His unchanging Word
Till soul and body sever
Though all things should pass away
His Word shall stand forever***

Are you living in the fear of “ *What if ?* ” Are you grappling with the problem of lingering guilt ? The answer to this problem is given in a letter on Christian assurance written by the apostle John. John says, “ *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life.* ” (1 Jn 5:13) The word “ *know,* ” should be circled in your Bible, its the key word in 1 John for its used over 30 times. Some say, “ *Well, you can’t really know if you are going to heaven when you die.* ” Yet John says “ *You can.* ” You see, he is writing to provide assurance for the child of God. My are you sure of your salvation ? Or are you still living in the fear of “ *what if ?* ” (a)

(b) THE FACTS THAT CONSOLED THEM:

Do you see what Joseph does here ? He *encourages* them: He says, “ *Fear not.* ” Then he *enlightens* them: “ *Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.* ” Finally, he *enables* them: he says, “ *I will nourish you and your little ones.* ” You see, over against the lingering problem of guilt there was the loving purpose of God.

1. Joseph Recognized the Place of God:

He says “ *Am I in the place of God ?* ” (50:19) Had he been a lesser man, he could have played “ *king of the mountain,* ” and filled the role of God. But he refused to do that. In effect, he said, “ *Brothers listen to me. Lets get this cleared up for the last time. I know what you did. I know you meant to do me evil. I understand that was your plan. But God had other plans. Get this straight, God*

meant it all for good.” Joseph refused to take God’s place. If punishment was to be meted out it would have to come from God. The Bible says, “ *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord.*” (Rom 12;19) Our responsibility is to overcome evil with good. Joseph had his brother’s right where he wanted them but he refused to take God’s place. That’s why he was free from bitterness. Do you want to end up a bitter old Christian, wrapped in a blanket of anger, poring over albums of wrong done ? Is that the way you want to finish your years ? Will that be the memory that is left of your life when you are gone ? 1.

2. Joseph Recognised the Providence of God:

“ *Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.*” (50:20) Joseph could look into the eyes of his brothers and say, “ *I know you planned to harm me. I know these people bought me so that they could make a profit from me. I know Potiphar’s wife sent me to jail because she was spiteful and hateful. But through it all I’ve learned to trust in God and depend on His Word.*” At the centre of Joseph’s life was God. The sovereignty of God, the providence of God, and the purpose of God. Joseph had learned the truth of (Rom 8:28) “ *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*” (Rom 8:28) Do you know what our problem is ? ***We can’t see beyond our nose.*** We need to get the long purpose of God. God has a purpose far beyond what our eyes are able to see. God is putting the pieces of the

jigsaw all together and when we get to glory we’ll be able to say, “ *He hath done all things well.*” (1) (2)

(3) JOSEPH’S BONES

The bones of Joseph are mentioned three times in the Old Testament. Each time, they have a message for us. Just as Abel spoke through his martyrdom (Heb 11:4) so Joseph speaks to us through his bones. The first thing they say is,

(a) GOD WILL BRING YOU OUT:

Look if you will at (50:25) Can you picture the scene ? He is now 110 years old and he is going to die. His brothers and sons gather around waiting for the end. Suddenly the old man’s eyes kindle. His feeble voice strengthens. He is going to make known his last will and testament. What did they expect to hear ? “ *To my son Ephraim, my robes, my mansion on the Nile, a letter commending him for high office ?*” “ *To my son Manasseh, my stables, my horses, my golden chariot, my holdings in the Valley of the Kings ?*” Can you imagine the dismay of those gathered around when he says, “ ***I bequeath you my bones.***” You see, he was giving them a tangible reminder that God would not forget his promise to Abraham concerning the Promised Land. Do you recall that promise ? “ *And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years but in the fourth generation they shall come hither again.*” (15:13-16) The days ahead would be dark and dangerous. Goshen would become a

ghetto. But Joseph's bones would bear witness to the promise. They would say, " *God will bring you out of this land into that land.*" My do you see this old man's heart ? I mean here we see a man sick to death of Egypt. Joseph bore an Egyptian title married an Egyptian wife, and enjoyed the Egyptian lifestyle yet he never bought the whole package. He had seen the inside of its prisons and he had seen its pomp and pageantry and power. *All that Egypt had to offer was his to command, but he was tired of Egypt, a land that, throughout the Bible is a consistent type of the world and its ways.* What was the secret that keep Joseph from surrendering to the world when it was offered to him on such a golden platter ? The Word of God. " *God will bring you out of this land, out, out of this land.*" Egypt was not his home. He did not belong there. He was a citizen of another country. My do we realise that this world is not our home ? Is this not why Paul says " *And be not conformed to this world*" (Rom 12:1) " *Don't let the world around squeeze you into its mould.*" Just because everyone else is putting down deep roots in this world doesn't mean that's what we are supposed to do.

Its takes a firm commitment to live in this world and yet keep reminding our children and grandchildren, " ***This world is not where its at.***" Some of us can't say that because everything we're doing with our time, talents and money says to our children, " ***This world is it. This is all there is. That's why I'm working all the time and can't come home. That's why I can only take two days holidays. That's why I'm sorry I wasn't at your football ball. That's why I won't be at my grandchild's birthday***

party." Do you recall Paul's words, " *Set your affection on things above not on things on the earth.*" (Col 3:2) My those bones spoke, they said, (a) But they said,

(b) GOD WILL BRING YOU THROUGH:

It is the night of the Exodus. Joseph had said, " *God will surely visit you,*" (50:24) and so He had. The avenging angel has passed through the land. The death of every firstborn in the land acted as a spur. The Egyptians begged the Hebrews to leave and loaded them down with gifts. Everyone was carrying something of value. But what do you think Moses was carrying ? Some Egyptian treasure, no doubt. Oh, no, nothing like that. The Bible says, " *And Moses took the bones of Joseph went him,*" (Ex 13:19) All the way from Egypt to Canaan, that body, the body of Joseph was a memorial body, and that memorial body ministered to Moses. That memorial body whispered to Moses, " *God will bring you out. God will bring you through.*" And so it was that at every crisis at the Red Sea, at Marah, at Rephidim, at Kadesh-Barnea, Moses stood firm he had the bones of Joseph with him.

My on our present New Testament journey from " ***Egypt,***" to " ***Canaan,***" we have with us what Moses had with him. You see, just as Joseph's bones spoke to Moses, the memorial body of our Lord Jesus set before us in the breaking of bread speaks to us. It declares " *As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.*" That memorial body points us back and it points us on. It will see us through. But that was not the last message of this box of bones. (a) (b)

(c) GOD WILL BRING YOU IN:

In the end Joshua fell heir to Joseph's bones and he buried them in Canaan. " *And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought for an hundred pieces of silver.*" (Jos 24:32) They were at rest at last. But Joseph's bones still had something to say. Can you picture that scene as Joshua and his men are busy, burying a box of bones ? Will you put your ear to the ground ? For inside a gilded coffin the footbone is talking to the anklebone, the anklebone is talking to the shinbone, the shinbone is talking to the thighbone and the backbone is talking to the neckbone. " *Now hear the Word of the Lord,*" they say to each other. " *God will surely visit you and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.*"

Hallelujah, we're not here to stay. God will bring out of this land and into that land, up from the graves and on into glory. God will bring us UP ! For Joseph died in hope of the resurrection. And so do we. But I've got something that encourages me far better than a box of bones. Not a coffin but a cave, and an empty one at that. One that I hope to be standing in a few days time. Do you know what it says on the door of that empty cave ? "**He is not here but is risen.**" Are you tempted to settle down here ? That empty cave tells me it won't be long, you'll be leaving. Are things presently tough for you ? That empty cave tells me its alright. " *Because He lives I can face tomorrow.*" Are you experiencing loneliness ?

That empty cave tells me He will never leave you nor forsake you. My we die with faith in the resurrection. Death does not separate us from our loved ones forever. We will meet one another in the morning, we will greet each other in the skies. We will have bodies, the same but different, ours but eternally like Christ's. Our bones may be put in a box and buried deep, but death cannot hold them down. "**We shall rise, Hallelujah, we shall rise.**"

So we take our leave of this fascinating and faithful man called Joseph. I wonder will our entrance into heaven be like his, " *Well done, good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*" (Matt 25:23)