

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 30:5:2010

GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

Reading: Genesis 47:27-48:11 49:22-26

11. THE SUNSET OF A LIFE

D. L. Moody, the famous American evangelist, badly overweight, took ill in Kansas City, cancelled his engagement and returned home to Northfield, Massachusetts. He dragged himself up to his bedroom to dress for dinner but felt so exhausted that he took to bed. He declined very quickly, and it became clear that he was dying of “*fatty degeneration of the heart.*” On 22nd December 1899 he suddenly opened his eyes and spoke clearly. “*Earth is receding, heaven is opening, God is calling I must go, this is my triumph, this is my coronation day. If this is death it is sweet, I have been looking forward to it for years.*” A little later Moody raised himself on an elbow and exclaimed, “*What are you all doing here ?*” His wife explained that he had not been well. Moody fell back on the bed and said, “*This is very strange. I’ve been beyond the gates of death to the very portals of heaven, and here I am back again. It is very strange.*” To everyone’s surprise some time later D. L. Moody rose, walked across the room and sat in an easy chair. But he soon returned to bed exhausted, spoke tenderly to his family once more and then slipped out into glory.

It is no exaggeration to say that the whole world had been watching the course of events at Mentone, in the south of France where the Prince of Preachers lay ill. Some days before his death Charles Spurgeon gave out the last hymns to a company of worshippers gathered in his sitting room. He could hardly have chosen a more appropriate farewell.

*The sands of time are sinking
The dawn of heaven breaks
The summer morn I’ve sighed for
The fair sweet morn awakes
Dark, dark has been the midnight
But dayspring is at hand
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel’s land*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, fell asleep in Jesus on Sunday evening the 31st January, 1892 in the presence of his dear wife and a few intimate friends. In many ways the Book of Genesis is a graveyard. It contains the story of how death started. Right near the start there is the death of Abel, then eventually there are the deaths of everyone during the flood, and throughout the text we are confronted with the deaths of individuals. Now old Jacob is coming to the closing days of his life. The Bible says, “*And the time drew nigh that Israel must die.*” (47:29) It almost seems that with the *breakdown of his body*, there is the *built up of his faith*. So it is that his *last years* are noteworthy because *he walked with God.* (46:3-4) His *last days* are noteworthy because *he worshipped God* (47:31) His *last moments* are noteworthy *because he welcomed God.* (49:33) And so this I want to talk to

you about “ *The Sunset of a Life.*” But I don’t want you to think that this is a downbeat message. No, this is an upbeat message. For the Bible says, “ *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*” (Ps 116:15) The Bible says, “ *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.*” (Rev 14:13) Now we can sum up this section of Scripture by viewing them as three bedside scenes. They describe three times when Joseph came to the bedside of his dear father as he neared the end of his journey. Three times in which Joseph visited his dying father and each visit had its own particular significance. The first time he went alone. Just he and his father. The next time Joseph brought his two sons. The third time he went with his brothers to their father’s bedside. The first scene has to do with,

(1) JACOB’S BURIAL

His journey is nearing the end. In his 147th year he realizes that the angel of death is already on his way to lay an icy hand on him. But there is no regret or uncertainty, just the knowledge that the time of his departure is at hand. So with a serenity of faith he sets sail for eternity. What a way to go. Now I want you to notice that in relation to his father’s burial,

(a) JOSEPH WAS PRACTICAL:

Jacob sensed that his time was coming to an end and so he summoned Joseph to his side, and high ranking official though he was when his father he responded. You see,

1. Joseph was Caring of his Father:

The Bible says, “ *And Joseph nourished his father and his brethren and all his father’s household.*” (47:12) Joseph, who as a seventeen year old boy was doted on by his father, found himself in a position of taking care of his father. Joseph made sure his Dad’s needs were met. Erma Bombeck used to tell the story of driving her car with her aged mother by her side. As they were driving down the highway, someone pulled out in front of them, and her first reaction was to reach her hand out to keep her mother from hitting the dashboard. As soon as she did so her mind went back to all the times her mother had done that to her as a little girl, and she realized that what everyone says is true, as you age you reverse roles with your parents. *Erma was now the mother, her mum was the little girl and Erma was watching out for her.* Is this not exactly what Joseph was doing ? Young folk, do you watch out for your aging parents ? Do you provide for them ? Do you make sure their needs are met ? 1.

2. Joseph was Proud of his Father:

In a land where shepherds were despised, Joseph brings his father Jacob the shepherd into a face to face meeting with Pharaoh. There is no shame at all in Joseph. He does not hide his father out of embarrassment or try to deny their connection. No, rather he proudly brings his father into Pharaoh’s court to meet the king. Did you know that honoring your parents is a duty placed on us by God Himself ? (Ex 20:12, 6:12) Are you too big or too busy

to give your parents the time, honour and attention that they need ?

3. Joseph was Responsive to his Father:

Look if you will at (47:29) Jacob's last request was that he not be buried in Egypt. He even had Joseph swear to it, using an old Hebrew custom of placing one's hand under the thigh. You see, he wants to make Jacob's last hours comfortable. *Sure, he stood before his father in the apparel of a great statesman, but more importantly, he stood by his father with the affection of a great son.* On Monday 1st November 1993 the greatest friend I had on this earth passed into glory. For the previous three months I had sought to minister to my father as he lay in the Royal Victoria Hospital. It wasn't easy to shave a barber, so fussy, feeding him, reading to him the Word, praying with him and for him. *But what an honour, to see him going home to heaven with confidence.* Are you practical when it comes to your parents ? Do you know what it is to give them some tender loving care ? Isn't it tragic that the only time some children appear is when their parents die ?

(b) JACOB WAS SPIRITUAL:

Here is a beat up old shepherd who has been living in Egypt for seventeen years, and on his deathbed he wants it known that he is not to be buried in Egypt. *Is this just like a Lurgan man saying that he does not want to be buried in Portadown and vice versa ?* I think this is more. This is more than sentiment. To ask to be buried in Canaan is to show's one faith in the promises of God and one's interest

in the things of God. Indeed Joseph shared Jacob's faith and when it came for Joseph to die, Joseph also requested burial in Canaan. (50:25) But why ? Well, do you recall God's Word to 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. And also that nation whom they shall serve, will I judge and afterward shall they come out with great substance.* ” (15:13-14) Now Jacob knew that what God had promised He would perform. The Lord said that Israel would live in a foreign land for four hundred years, but then move back into the promised land. So when Jacob asked not to be left in Egypt he was saying that he believed in God's promise. My Jacob is a study in contrast, the first part of his life is wild and unruly, the second part is settled and godly. Though prosperous in Egypt his chief interest was in Canaan. He was more interested in the things of God (Canaan) than in the things of the world. (Egypt) Here's old Jacob laying out plans for his funeral and burial. Is this not one of the life's necessities to make preparations for death ? Is it not wise to follow Jacob's example and make,

1. Physical Preparation:

So that others know the manner and place chosen for burial.

2. Material Preparation:

Is this not what (Ch 48) is all about ? Here there is brought before us the double portion blessing. This gave the recipient twice as much of the family's inheritance as anyone else received. In Jacob's family Reuben the

firstborn should have received this, but he forfeited the birthright because of his shameful incest. (1 Chron 5:1-2) Joseph therefore received the double blessing. (48:22) Have you made material preparation in light of your death ? Do you know where your material assets are going, and what they will be used for ?

3. Spiritual Preparation:

My has Satan so dulled your mind, blinded your eyes and hardened your heart, that you can go carefree from this scene of time into hell ? Do you need to heed the biblical exhortation, “ *Prepare to meet thy God ?* ” (Amos 4:12) And what about those of us who are believers ? Are you more interested in the things of God than in the things of this world ? Do the things of God hold prior claim, prominent claim, preeminent claim in your life ? My we expect to see nothing but Egypt in the hearts of the unsaved, but to see the same thing in the hearts of the saved is not good. Do you need to hear God’s Word afresh, “ *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.* ” (Col 3:2) (1) The second scene has to do with,

(2) JACOB’S BEDSIDE

Joseph taking his two sons was a thoughtful act of love and compassion for his father, for what grandfather is not cheered up by seeing his grandsons ? *Can you picture the scene ?* Jacob is dying. Joseph knows his father is dying and he brings those two grandsons in. Ephraim means forgetful. Manasseh means fruitful. We could call them

amnesia and ambrosia. I mean, don’t you want the ones you love most to be there when you step into eternity ? Now can you visualize this scene ? Jacob sitting on the side of the bed and in comes Joseph and the two grandsons. And do you know what Jacob does ? He gives them his testimony ? I believe the words of Jacob on his deathbed gives us some direction as to how we can best prepare for our homecall. Do you see this old saint on the verge of eternity and thoughts of God are on his mind ?

(a) Jacob Looked Backward in Gratitude:

He looks back over the events that had befallen him. You know as we get older we begin to reminisce. I listen to Granny that is Catherine’s mother tell me the same story, over and over and over again. *Come to think of it, I think I am starting to do that myself.* But old saints enjoy the opportunity to look back in gratitude to the Lord for his blessings don’t they ? Here is Jacob dying and he is worshipping. Is this not amazing ? The writer to the Hebrews says, “ *By faith Jacob when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph and worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff.* ” (Heb 11:21) Do you see that as Jacob looks back, God was everything to him ? When he was before Pharaoh he spoke of his days as “ *few and evil,* ” (47:9) but in his words to Joseph he speaks of One who had “ *redeemed from all evil.* ” (48:16) God was everything to Jacob for he speaks of “ *the God before whom my fathers did walk,* ” “ *The God which fed me (shepherded me) all my life long unto this day,* ” “ *The Angel which redeemed me from all evil.* ” (48:15-16) No doubt an Old Testament reference to the Lord Jesus. My

.... Jacob dies talking about the Lord. His death becomes an act of worship. Will your thoughts be of God when you come to the moment of death ? Will your meditation of Him be sweet ? (Ps 104:34) Will you look backward in gratitude ?

(b) Jacob Looked Upward in Faith:

Here was a man who knew the reality of God's presence (48:3) and God's promise (48:4) His entire speech is punctuated with references to God's intervention in his life. That's why he starts out by saying, " *God Almighty appeared unto me,*" (48:3) continues by uttering, " *God hath showed me also thy seed,*" (48:11) and concludes by exclaiming " *God shall be with you.*" (48:21) Jacob had become a God centered person in his old age. He had been a self centered man in his earlier years, scheming to get the things he wanted. But in his golden years something happened to turn his attention to the Lord. He had experienced all kinds of trouble and his life was checkered with disappointment, but at 147 he could look back and see the hand of God. *Sure he had been disappointed with some of his children, Reuben and Simeon and Levi. He had been cheated by Laban, he had lost Joseph for over 20 years but now he could see how God was working for him and walking with him all the time.* You know when we are passing through trials and troubles, its not always easy to see the hand of God, but as we review the past and look over life's journey we are enabled to see the way in which the Lord hath led us. And at the end of the journey will we not be able to say " *He hath done all things well ?*" (Mk 7:37) (a) (b)

(c) Jacob Looked Outward in Love:

For the aged patriarch not only thought of God and his past, but also of Joseph and his two sons, and with outstretched hands he called down the Divine benediction upon his grandsons, praying that God would " *bless the lads.*" (48:16) Now in the Hebrew tradition you bless the older son first, placing your right hand upon his head, then you bless the younger with your left hand. Joseph, trying to make sure they get in the right order moved the boys closer to his father. But as he moves them close, Jacob does something surprising. He places his right hand on the younger boy Ephraim and his left hand on the older boy Manasseh. Joseph tried to straighten things out but his father was having none of it. (48:19) *You see, this was not a personal preference, but a prophetic announcement.* For Ephraim certainly became the greater of the two tribes. Indeed Ephraim became so dominant, that after the ten tribes broke away to set up its rival kingdom, it took the name Ephraim to stand for the entire northern kingdom. By the way, Manasseh and Ephraim were at least around twenty years of age at this time. Like Moses, they would have been treated like Princes in Egypt with everything that Egypt that could offer.

But for Joseph that was only secondary, for his primary concern was spiritual blessing for his children and so he brought them to the place where they were likely to be blessed. *What is your chief desire for your kids ?* Is it their exam results, a good job, climbing the ladder of success, getting on well in Egypt, this world ? Or is your primary

concern that they seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ? (a) (b) (c)

(d) Jacob Looked Forward in Hope:

Do you see what he says to Joseph ? (48:21) He trusted in God for a future blessing, knowing that his descendants would not stay forever in Egypt. Someday they would return to Canaan and the Lord would give it to them. You see, Jacob remembered God’s promise to bless the nation with land. (28:13) That’s why he asked to be buried in the cave of Machpelah (23:19) where Abraham and Isaac were buried. (25:9 35:29) “ *And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost and was gathered unto his people.* ” (49:33) Isn’t that lovely ? Can you see the old man now, 147 years of age, he just kind of pulls his feet under the covers, smiles in the face of God and he’s gone on to glory. Is that not the way it is ? “ *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.* ” (Ps 116:15) He “ *was gathered unto his people.* ” There was a family reunion. Old Abraham, Isaac, Rachael they were all there, and there he met them in glory. Is this not our hope ? “ *Friends will be there* ” (1) (2) The final scene has to do with,

(3) JACOB’S BLESSING

The first scene. Joseph before his father alone. The second scene. Joseph before his father with his children.

The last scene. Joseph before his father with his brothers.

Here is a dying father calling his sons to his bedside, and literally with his dying breath prophesying regarding their character and future in the land of Canaan “ *as the twelve tribes of Israel.* ” (49:28) We are told them that Jacob “ *blessed them.* ” (49:28) Did you notice that the blessing on Joseph was the longest ? Here old Jacob spoke of ***his foes:*** (49:23) ***his faith:*** (49:24) ***his fullness:*** (49:25-26) but he begins by extolling ***his fruitfulness:*** Do you see what he says ? (49:22) Jacob had just given Joseph a double portion by adding Ephraim and Manasseh to the tribes. It was not that long before those two tribes taken together, were by far the most numerous in Israel. Joseph was a fruitful bough. Think of,

(a) THE EVIDENCE OF HIS FRUITFULNESS:

Do you recall how Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit ?

1. Love: is seen in Joseph’s love for his father, for his brothers, for Benjamin.

2. Joy: when he was given the coat of many colours, and when he was reunited with his father.

3. Peace: which he gave to Pharaoh (41:16) to Egypt when the famine came (41:55-56 47:25) and to his brothers when they concerned about their situation.

4. Long-suffering: exhibited in his attitude as a slave, in his reaction to injustice, in his faithful service in prison

5. Gentleness: in his treatment of his brothers.

6. Goodness: in his purity when tempted.

7. Faith: did he confess it in the prison ? (40:8) In the palace ? (41:16) and in his passing ? (50:24-25)

8. Meekness: as he said to his father “ *here am I.* ”

(37:13)

9. Temperance: self control when tempted to sexual immorality.

You see, the evidence of fruitfulness abounded in Joseph's life. Does he abound in yours ? What about your character ? Are these Christ like traits exemplified in your life ?

(b) THE ENERGY FOR HIS FRUITFULNESS:

For Jacob said that Joseph was “ *by a well.* ” (49:22) He lived all his life in nearness to God and in constant remembrance of God's revelation through the dreams. In temptation he said, “ *How then can I sin against God.* ” (39:9) In prison he said, “ *Do not interpretations belong to God ?* ” (40:8) Before Pharaoh he said, “ *God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.* ” (41:16) Speaking to his brothers he said, “ *God meant it unto good.* ” (50:20) Joseph always dwelt by the well of God, hence his energy for fruitfulness was great. Do you want to bear spiritual fruit ? Well, are you living near the well of the Word ? The Incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus, the Written Word, the Holy Scriptures ? Are you like the Psalmist ? Is your delight in the law of the Lord ? (Ps 1:2) (a) (b)

(c) THE EXTENT TO HIS FRUITFULNESS:

“ *Whose branches run over the wall,* ” (49:22) The picture is of a tree so productive that its fruit laden branches reach far over the wall within the reach of

passers by. Was Joseph not like that ? He not only bore fruit at home, but his branches reached into Potiphar's house, then the prison, then the palace, and then into much of the world. Having one's branches “ *run over the wall,* ” means being extra fruitful, doing more than expected. It's a picture of consecration of the highest order. The Good Samaritan was “ *over the wall,* ” in **compassion**. The Macedonian saints were “ *over the wall,* ” in **liberality**. (2 Cor 8:3-5) The blessing in Nineveh was “ *over the wall,* ” in **revival**. My do you know anything of “ *over the wall,* ” fruitfulness ? Do you go “ *over the wall,* ” in **prayer** ? Or is it “ *Lord, bless me, my wife and two kids us four and no more ?* ” Do you go “ *over the wall,* ” in **evangelism** ? Do you go “ *over the wall,* ” in **giving** or are you still just tipping God ?

My what do you have, what will you have in your hand when it comes to die ? I mean that really counts ? Like Jacob, (48:4) like Joseph, will you have a fruitful life behind you ? “ *Oh,* ” you say “ *Well, you don't have to do good works to get to heaven. I'll just go to heaven by the grace of God.* ” Do you what Billy Sunday called that ? “ ***Burning the candle of your life for the Devil, and blowing the smoke in God's face.*** ” Don't do that. Don't miss the blessing of looking back at your life from your death bed and saying, “ *My life was not in vain, it was not wood, hay and stubble. It was fruitful to the glory of God.* ”

