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INTERNATIONAL

TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Genesis 2011 - Lesson 50

Chapter 50

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- After 2 years, 5 months, and 30 days...
 - 109 lessons...
 - And over 71 hours of teaching...
 - We reach the end of the book of Genesis
 - And not a moment too soon
 - This is the fourth time I've taught through the entire book of Genesis
 - It's my favorite book of scripture
 - It's the book that was being taught when the Lord called me to faith in the Gospel
 - It's the first book of the Bible I ever studied as a student
 - It's the first book of the Bible I ever attempted to teach
 - And this may well be the last time I have opportunity to teach it
 - So today I'm experiencing decidedly mixed emotions
 - While I always look forward to the end of a study and the sense of accomplishment it provides
 - I am also melancholy at the thought that I may be concluding a study of Genesis for the final time
 - Many untaught books of scripture await
 - And Jesus' return won't
 - So I approached this study with the expectation that I wanted to give you my best understanding of this special book
 - I prayed my fourth time teaching through the book would do justice to the depth and significance of what God has revealed in it
 - I suspect that's a desire every Bible teacher has but none can realize
 - Still, I've done my best, and now we are at the end
- Israel is securely planted in Egypt, Joseph is reconciled with his family, and Jacob has died
 - All that remains in the story is to put Jacob's body to rest
 - And with his passing, to set the scene for what happens next for his family
 - In particular, we see the brothers face life without their father
 - And finally, we see Joseph's life come to an end, immediately before the story of Exodus begins
 - But the chapter begins where Chapter 49 ended, with Jacob's death

Gen. 50:1 Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him.

Gen. 50:2 Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel.

Gen. 50:3 Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

- Joseph mourns his father’s passing, with obvious sadness and loss
 - We can know from Joseph’s actions and words that his grieving was not the same mourning as those who have no hope, as Paul says

1Th. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

1Th. 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

- Paul taught the church it was natural to grieve for the loss of a loved one
- But our grieving is entirely different than the grieving of those who have no hope
 - We grieve the separation that death creates
 - We may even grieve the ugly process of death
- Our grieving is tempered by our hope in the promises of God
 - We know the Lord has promised the believer paradise upon death
 - I think of the story of Lazarus coming back to life in John’s Gospel
 - The story never shares Lazarus’ reaction to being raised, but I wonder if he was a little annoyed at being brought back
 - Because I can assure you that those who die in Christ aren’t missing us nearly as much as we are missing them
 - The Lord’s promise is that one day we will all enjoy a new life in a resurrected body, and we will enjoy the company of all those who shared our faith
 - So truly death for the believer is a temporary separation
- But death for the unbeliever is a death without such hope
 - It is truly a forever separation
 - And for those who are left behind, the absence of any assurance about what follows leaves only hopelessness and unreconcilable grief
 - Our faith rescues us from this hopelessness
- Joseph’s actions reveal his hope in the Lord’s promises of resurrection
 - First, we notice he commands his servants to embalm his father
 - While embalming bodies was a common practice in Egypt, this is not and has never been a practice of Israel
 - So why does Joseph want to embalm Jacob?
 - He had lived for seventeen years in Egypt with only his father, so naturally Joseph wanted his mummy
 - The real answer is faith
 - Joseph shares his father’s faith in the Lord’s promise of resurrection
 - And having promised Jacob that he would bury Jacob in Canaan, Joseph needed to be sure the body could be preserved for the time required to reach Canaan

- So in faithful agreement with Jacob’s request, Joseph embalms Jacob’s body
 - In an unusual step, Joseph commands physicians to conduct the embalming
 - Normally, Egyptians used professional embalmers to mummify bodies
 - But these embalmers were usually priests or other agents of the Egyptian gods
 - Their embalming methods included pagan religious rituals, in keeping with the pagan practices of Egypt
 - Joseph wanted none of this for his father
 - Instead, Egyptian physicians were used
 - These are men who knew how to embalm a body but who didn’t necessarily practice any religious rituals in the process
 - We can safely assume that Joseph ordered the men to steer clear of such ritual
 - While the embalming takes place, both Egypt and Israel mourn for Jacob
 - The standard period for mourning in Israel is 40-days
 - But in Egypt, the period of mourning for a beloved leader, like a Pharaoh was seventy-two days
 - Joseph smartly institutes only 70 days for Jacob’s mourning
 - Because it would leave one additional day of mourning for himself
 - And then one more day for Pharaoh’s death
 - This ensured that Jacob’s mourning period wasn’t seen as a challenge to the prominence of himself or Pharaoh
 - It’s also interesting that Israel’s history is filled with 40s and 70s (not 72s)
- So then after 70 days, Joseph is ready to fulfill his promise to his father

Gen. 50:4 When the days of mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, “If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying,

Gen. 50:5 ‘My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am about to die; 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; then I will return.’”

Gen. 50:6 Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.”

Gen. 50:7 So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt,

Gen. 50:8 and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father’s household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen.

Gen. 50:9 There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company.

Gen. 50:10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation;

and he observed seven days mourning for his father.

Gen. 50:11 Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians.” Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.

Gen. 50:12 Thus his sons did for him as he had charged them;

Gen. 50:13 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 had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite.

Gen. 50:14 After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

- Joseph asks permission to take Jacob’s body back to Canaan
 - Why does Joseph ask permission?
 - Remember Pharaoh permitted Israel to live in Egypt and gave them the best land
 - He did this because he wanted Semites to settle in the land and he wanted to retain Joseph’s loyalty
 - But now Joseph and virtually all of Israel wants to return to Canaan to bury Jacob
 - Pharaoh could easily assume Israel is returning for good
 - The famine has been over for a long time
 - Notice Joseph doesn’t even ask Pharaoh personally, but speaks through others to show Pharaoh respect
 - Joseph assures Pharaoh he is fulfilling a promise to Jacob
 - And then in v.5 Joseph promises he will return to Egypt
 - Why doesn’t Joseph move his family back to Canaan at this point?
 - It seems the perfect opportunity
 - Joseph’s promise to return is another demonstration of faith in God’s word
 - Joseph knew that Israel was in Egypt according to God’s plan
 - And when the Lord gave the plan to Abraham, He also gave a timeline
 - Four generations must live in Egypt
 - And only one generation has experienced Egypt at this point
 - Joseph’s generation
 - So in faith to God’s promises, Joseph promises to return with his family
- Pharaoh agrees, but to be sure Joseph returns, Pharaoh sends along many of his servants and the elders of the land of Egypt along with a guard of horsemen
 - The elders served as the Pharaoh’s representatives at the funeral and the servants were of assistance to Joseph, certainly
 - But these people were also Pharaoh’s property
 - So should Joseph have a sudden change of heart, he would be risking stealing

from Pharaoh

- This would give Pharaoh legitimate cause to pursue Joseph, much in the same way Joseph was able to pursue his brothers for taking his silver cup
- In v.9, we're told that all the family and wagons and chariots and servants and the horsemen amounted to a great procession
 - This is easily the greatest funeral procession recorded in scripture
 - In fact, the effect of such a great company engaged in such great mourning caught the attention of the local inhabitants
- The company stops at a place on the west bank of the Jordan
 - They are in the land of Canaan, but on the very eastern edge
 - Here for seven days the people mourn Jacob, especially Joseph
 - The mourning is so pronounced that the locals are fascinated with it
 - Egypt has conquered Canaan by this time, so the mere presence of Egyptians in the land was no surprise
 - But the willingness to bury someone of such importance in Canaan instead of Egypt surprised them
 - They named the valley a name that means the mourning or the meadow of the Egyptians
- The next time the inhabitants of Canaan see the family of Israel on the western bank of the Jordan, it will be forty years after the Exodus
 - In that time, the nation will come to invade and lay claim to the land the Lord has given them
 - Joseph will accompany the people in that day as well
 - Like his father before him, he will be carried into the land in a coffin
 - Ready to be buried with his fathers
- But for now, it's Jacob's burial and Joseph completes the mission his father gave him
 - He places Jacob's body in the cave, seals it and returns with his family to Egypt
 - Joseph returns knowing he is leading his family into a future of slavery and oppression
 - But he also knows God's promise to deliver the nation in a future day, under a future leader
- Jacob's death produced more than just mourning in the family of Israel
 - It also produced worry among Joseph's brothers

Gen. 50:15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!"

Gen. 50:16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying,

Gen. 50:17 ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph, “Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

Gen. 50:18 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.”

Gen. 50:19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place?

Gen. 50:20 “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Gen. 50:21 “So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

- It’s been seventeen years since the family learned that Joseph was alive and was reconciled with him
 - At that time, Joseph welcomed his brothers and embraced them, forgiving them of their transgressions against him
 - And for the past 17 years the family has lived in Goshen with Joseph in Memphis
 - During that time, Jacob was still the patriarch over the family
 - And the brothers probably assumed that Joseph’s respect and love for his father served to protect them from Joseph’s wrath and vengeance
 - So now that Jacob has died, the brothers’ thoughts immediately turn to wondering if Joseph will take the opportunity to bring vengeance against them
 - This was the natural way of kings and powerful men
 - When presented with an opportunity to remove opposition or vanquish enemies, powerful men always take that opportunity
 - And so the brothers assumed Joseph would take action against them now that the last obstacle was removed
 - So the brothers send word to Joseph concerning Jacob’s dying words
 - Supposedly, Jacob asked Joseph to forgive them for their sins
 - Obviously, Jacob left no such message
 - The brothers invented the story to invoke Joseph’s love and respect for his father
 - The irony is that had Joseph been the type of person to take revenge on his brothers, Jacob’s dying wish – even if it were true – wouldn’t have stopped Joseph from acting
 - Joseph weeps at hearing the brother’s words, which were to spoken to Joseph by a messenger
 - Later in v.18 we’re told the brothers appeared before Joseph to make a personal appeal
 - They come and bow down before Joseph, one more fulfillment of Joseph’s dreams

- They call themselves his servants
 - They do not consider themselves his brothers
 - They lower themselves to the station of slaves
- And in this moment, the book of Genesis concludes with the most powerful, most meaningful picture of Christ found in the story of Joseph
 - Joseph's brothers, the sons of Israel, appear before their kinsman and lord, declaring themselves to be his servants or slaves
 - They fear his response will be anger for the way they treated him
 - They know he has absolute power to do with them whatever he wishes
 - They are at his mercy, and so the only question is what is in Joseph's heart
 - Joseph's response is to raise their thoughts to the purposes of God in Heaven
 - He asks rhetorically, am I in God's place?
 - In other words, does Joseph own this plan or this outcome?
 - The purpose in the question is to suggest the obvious answer: no
 - Joseph didn't design the plan
 - And he doesn't own the outcome
 - God in Heaven has orchestrated these events from the beginning
 - Joseph had a role, the brothers had a role, and the outcome was as God intended
 - Joseph says to his brothers, you harbored evil in your hearts toward me
 - His brothers wanted to hurt or even kill their brother
 - His brothers were jealous of him, and allowed that jealousy and hate to drive them into rising up against Joseph
 - For his part, Joseph was innocent
 - He suffered under his brothers' sin
 - He endured the shame and reproach of slavery
 - Yet he knew it was the Lord Who desired for these things to happen to him
 - Now Joseph tells his brothers that the Lord was always at work using their sin to accomplish a greater good
 - He intended to bring about the present result, that many people would be alive
 - The word for alive in Hebrew is an interesting choice, *chayah*
 - It literally means to come to life or to be healed or to be raised to life
 - Joseph says this elaborate plan was God's design to result in bringing many people to life
- Jesus was the innocent brother of the sons of Israel
 - He was born and lived among His brothers for a time
 - Until they became jealous of Him

- They harbored jealousy and hatred against Him and refused to be ruled by Him
 - So they rose up against Him, rejecting His authority and sending Him to the cross
 - Jesus endured their mistreatment, knowing the Father in Heaven had appointed Him to this outcome for a greater good, both for Israel and for the world
 - Then in a day to come, Israel will behold their Messiah, triumphant and reigning, returning to them according to the promises of God
 - And when the sons of Israel set eyes upon the Lord, many will wonder what the Messiah will do with a people who betrayed Him
 - When He comes with all power and authority, when nothing stands in His way, when He will be free to take vengeance, will He vanquish His kinsmen?
 - What appeal can they make? What excuse could they offer?
- When that day comes, scripture tells us the Lord will come as Israel's deliverer
 - He will look upon God's people with mercy, extend them grace, and welcome them into His kingdom
 - And in that day, the people of Israel will understand that their rejection of the Messiah was the plan God the Father appointed
 - He used their sinful hearts to accomplish a great good, to send His son to death in payment for the sins of the world
 - And thereby make reconciliation possible
 - What Israel intended for evil, the Father in Heaven intended for good
 - And as a result the Lord will provide for all God's children
 - The book of Genesis is a book of beginnings
 - But it is also a story of endings, endings conceived by the Lord Himself, and written before the foundation of the Earth
 - And if we are to understand this book properly, we have to acknowledge, understand and appreciate God's limitless sovereignty
 - God brings all things to good for His children, but if this is to be true, then all things must be under God's control
 - And God is way ahead of us in everything
 - Long before Joseph and his brothers were even born, God told Abraham how it would be
 - And then He made it happen, just like He said
 - When you can learn to live with eyes that see the Lord at work in every circumstance, knowing His promises and living with eager expectation of their fulfillment...
 - Then you have learned the lesson of Genesis
 - You have learned the beginning, so you can look forward to the end... which is just a new beginning

- Speaking of the end, it's time we ended our study

Gen. 50:22 Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.

Gen. 50:23 Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees.

Gen. 50:24 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob."

Gen. 50:25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

Gen. 50:26 So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

- Joseph lives another 54 years after the death of his father, Jacob
 - Joseph lived long enough to see his great grandchildren born
 - Manasseh gives birth to Machir
 - And Machir gives birth to Gilead
 - It will be Gilead's sons who are of the generation to leave Egypt and return to Canaan
 - Joseph's age at death is 110 years old, which is itself another demonstration of God's sovereignty
 - In Egyptian culture, the ideal length of life was considered to be 110 years old
 - In fact, ancient Egyptian texts discovered in tombs and libraries reveal no less than 27 references to the age of 110 as proof of the favor of the gods
 - So the Lord brings Joseph's life to an end at 110 to honor Joseph one last time in the eyes of the Egyptians
 - Finally, Joseph makes the same request of his family that his father made of him
 - His body was not to be enshrined in a pyramid or some other tomb in Egypt
 - Instead, he was to be preserved and left in a coffin, to be returned to Canaan in the day the Lord fulfills His promises to Abraham
 - For the next four generations, the nation of Israel will have opportunity to look upon Joseph's coffin, and bring to mind God's promise to return Israel to Canaan one day
- Will that be our legacy as a man or woman of God?
 - When people reflect back on our life and even upon our death, what will they bring to mind?
 - Will our life be a testimony to faith in God's promises?
 - Will our legacy be of one who led others to trust and rely in God's word?
 - Let's aspire to be like Joseph, as he reflected Christ
 - Let it be said we lived with eyes for eternity, looking forward to a country in

Heaven and for a reward that cannot be found on earth