

The Joseph Story | Broken Family/Beautiful Plan

The End of Jacob's Journey (Part Three)

Genesis 49.29-50.14

November 10, 2013

Then (Jacob) charged them and said to them, "I am about 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 along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site.³¹ "There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah--³² the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth."³³ When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him.² Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel.³ Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.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,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.'"⁶ 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 household and all the elders of the land of Egypt,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.⁹ There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company.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.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.¹² Thus his sons did for him as he had charged 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 had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite.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.

Throughout the Book of Genesis there are some *pretty famous deathbed scenes*. There are two deaths in these final three chapters: the death of Joseph in ch. 50 and the death of Jacob, here in chs. 48- 49 (a deathbed scene spanning more than two long chapters).

We've been walking with this broken family a long time now...*And we've seen, going back to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, that this family had a lot of deep conflicts and character flaws... But they were also THE family God had chosen.* This family would be the one pipeline of grace

and truth FROM God TO *a world that did not know God. God swore to bless this family (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants) and to make this family a source of blessing to all the families of the world.* And eventually, God would BRING, from this family, *a Savior who would rescue the world and heal it and make everything new.*

Today, we meet the death of the man after whom the family would be named: God changed the name of this man, from Jacob to Israel and the nation that came from the Patriarchs would TAKE that name as THEIR national name, Israel.

Today, Jacob or Israel dies and he dies well...seems odd to say but it's true. He dies with grit and he's vital and direct and bold right to the end. *He's blind, physically but he sees life very clearly.* Last week, we saw his eyes and legs and especially his HANDS but today his FEET come into focus *as he draws them up into the bed* and he finishes the race.

Today, we consider what it means to live well BUT ALSO TO DIE WELL...*to finish the race...* how to do that with grit and with composure and purpose right to the last breath. *Let's look at: 1) The Family Plot 2) The Big Barrier and a Funeral Fit for a King and 3) Living Well and Dying Well*

Our society is probably very unusual in all of human history IN THE WAY we think about and respond to death. We're all very familiar with death (we see it all the time on television and in movies) but we're not very comfortable talking about it...have a lot of euphemisms...We do our best to sterilize it.

Jacob was dying...he seemed to see it coming for him from a long way off. His feet outran a lot of trouble in his life but they can't outrun death... And now he pulls his feet into bed. His walk is over.

But before he dies, he calls all his sons in and he addresses them. We saw, last week, that Joseph went first and Joseph's sons were blessed in that cross-handed blessing. And THEN, the whole of ch. 49 finds Jacob both blessing and warning each son. He pulls no punches but speaks to both the strengths and the weaknesses of his ruffian sons.

And then, once more, with directness and with *passionate insistence* he instructs his sons to bury his body in the old country...*in a very specific place... in a field... in a cave... where his father, Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham were also buried.*

That cave was first mentioned way back in ch. 23 when Abraham's beloved wife died. He's been married to Sarah a long, long, VERY LONG time. He was a traveler, a life-long pilgrim and NOW with the body of Sarah...and no place to bury her...Abraham's "PILGRIM-NESS" was felt very acutely.

So, he gathers all the chieftains of the land of Canaan where he was. They all knew Abraham. They'd not only SEEN his great wealth and his huge entourage of employees but they'd also heard that Abraham's God could defend him (Gen 20) and bring pain or even death to anyone who messed with Abraham's wife...So the chieftains, "Hethites" as they were called, were very eager to help Abraham bury his beloved wife... and several offered up space in their own family mausoleums... "Sarah can be laid to rest on OUR property!"

But Abraham wanted his own plot of land for the burial...because God had PROMISED all the Land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants ...and yet... *Canaanite law strictly prohibited foreigners from owning Canaanite land...*and everyone knew that Abraham was an alien...a pilgrim... "NOT FROM these parts!"

And Genesis 23 records the negotiations that took place between Abraham and those Hethites. He asks this guy "Ephron" to buy his field with a cave on it...And Ephron says, "What 'BUY'?...I'll give it!"

But Abraham insists, "I must OWN it...I must buy it and we MUST transact this sale before lots of eyewitnesses! HOW MUCH FOR THE LAND?"

And now it's a kind of Real Estate showdown! Ephron knows he can't sell it...*the chieftains, The Canaanite Chamber of Commerce is watching the negotiations...* "How will Ephron put the foreigner in his place and yet not insult this powerful man with his powerful God and his dead beloved wife?"

And then Ephron has a brainstorm: he asks a price that's ten-times the value of this little field. "Give me 400 shekels of silver and the lot is yours!"

It's brilliant because NO ONE would pay that! It's like selling a \$200,000 house for 2 million! And Abraham shouts out, "SOLD!"

He makes the eyewitnesses sign an affidavit...they record the deed in the Canaanite Courthouse... Abraham is apparently the biggest sucker that ever lived... BUT Abraham thinks, "I would have offered 100 times the asking price...1000 times... because this is MY FOOTHOLD...this is the down-payment and the pledge...the sign that God is indeed going to give this land to MY PEOPLE."

We were childless and God promised Sarah and me descendants as numerous as the stars...and though all we got was ONE son... but WE received that son as a down-payment. And NOW this: God promised us this whole land...and He has given us this ONE tiny family plot as a down-payment... IT'S LIKE GOD PROMISED US A TRILLION DOLLARS AND ALL WE GOT WAS THIS LITTLE DEBIT CARD AND A LITTLE PASSWORD ...but we trust that there's an inexhaustible bank account

behind the card and the pin number! SO, the one child and the one little plot of land will suffice...It's God's pledge and down-payment and it means EVERYTHING to our believing hearts!"

And now we fast forward to Jacob's deathbed and his passionate insistence on being buried in this land...We imagine his sons saying, "But Dad, don't you want to be buried with Rachel in Bethlehem ...with your true love...and not with Leah?"

And Jacob answers, "No! This is our family plot and it was given to us by the LORD of the Promise...the God of Grace...and I ABSOLUTELY MUST BE BURIED in that piece of land...It's not just a piece of plastic... it's a debit card...it's not just a string of numbers, it's a password...IT'S NOT JUST A DUMPY LITTLE FIELD WITH A CAVE – it's God's pledge/guarantee to our family FOREVER and I must stake my claim on it...must be laid to rest there...I have WALKED by faith and now that my feet will walk no more I must also DIE in faith..."

And they know he means it...So, as soon as he dies, Joseph has the body embalmed so it can make the long journey *and very delicately* he sends word to his boss...the Pharaoh.

Only Pharaoh can stand in the way...*and he may... because, why would Joseph want to leave? What's wrong with Egypt? Haven't we been good to you? Are you trying to pull a fast one?..."*

And the reader waits to exhale... "Will Pharaoh let the people go?" *And then the answer comes, "Pharaoh said, 'Go up! And bury your father as he made you swear!"* And, in fact, Pharaoh sends a huge funeral procession that's fit for a king...and all the nations see that Jacob is beloved by God...and a blessing to all nations!

Moses is writing the children of the Exodus and saying, "See, Pharaoh never was a BIG BARRIER to God's promise...God will overcome ANY barrier... nothing will separate us from the love of God... not king...not principalities nor powers...God's faithfulness will NEVER be thwarted...HE will always save His people will always keep His promise to those who trust Him!"

And in time...it turns out that even the greatest barrier of all will be overcome. God will overcome even sin and death itself...He will give Himself, in the Person of Jesus Christ...will fulfill His part of the promise and OUR PART TOO...He will come as a Man, the second Adam, and will live obediently, as the first Adam had failed to live. GOD HIMSELF WILL OBEY IN OUR PLACE.

And Jesus Christ, the Man who was God, will also take the blame for our sin, for Jacob's sin, will take the blame for the sin of everyone who ever believes this God of the Promise. Jesus Christ will cancel out sin on MY BEHALF... He removes the BIG BARRIER...

And because of His obedience and His sacrifice, I am forgiven and embraced with everlasting arms... And as the believer faces his/her own death...we, like Jacob, are taken to a Cave.

There's an Empty Tomb where the dead body of Jesus Christ was laid...and that fact of that Empty Tomb...the fact for which His earliest followers were willing to face prison and death rather than DENY what they had seen...A RISEN MAN... that Empty Tomb and that Risen Man is for us everything!

He is our down-payment and pledge, that IF we look to this covenant keeping God...we will NOT be disappointed. It's so much more than just an interesting story or a freak happening – DEATH HAS BEEN DEFEATED for all who believe. We have the first fruits! That's what the Empty Tomb says – it's ULTIMATELY SIGNIFICANT!

And as the God of Promise did indeed give a land to His people, HE WILL ALSO make all things new...will turn this fallen world into a Perfect Place...without cancer and without typhoons and without deceit and hatred...and where broken families are at last restored and forgiven and in love.

When we are believing this Story of the Empty Tomb, a better debit card, a better down-payment than that Cave of Ephron's...*when we trust all that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ says*, then we, like Jacob, can face death with an amazing sense of composure and grit!

It's not that we're closing our eyes to the horror that death is... *It's not that we're saying these mindless slogans about "the sweet-by-and-by"...* or like we're ignoring the fact that EVERYONE will stand before God and give an answer... *But instead, we're saying that WE HAVE AN ATTORNEY, AN ADVOCATE who will answer for us...a High Priest...Jesus Christ the Mediator who stands for sinners who trust in Him.*

If you are terrified of death...and you should BE (*no one can out run it!*)...if you are hoping to just plead your own case before a HOLY, HOLY, HOLY GOD...that IS terrifying! So, why don't you come and talk to someone after the service and begin to employ this Advocate, let Jesus Christ plead your case...See His empty tomb and know that HE IS eminently qualified to represent you...PUT YOUR PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE IN HIS HANDS...I'll be here and others too after the service.

For a lot of others today, those who are daily trusting Jesus Christ, how can we live in the light of our coming death? It's something that paralyzes some people...and others just never give it any thought. Jacob was interested, in living well AND in dying well...and we should be too.

Soon, we'll pull our feet under the covers for the last time...we'll give everything BACK to God, even our own bodies. But there are resources in the Gospel not only for good living but for good dying!

So, It's good to ask ourselves, "Is the Gospel the reason I get up in the morning and the reason I am living like I do? And is it the REASON I HAVE BOLD HOPE IN THE FACE OF DEATH?"

As we stay believing...as we keep singing about this Good News of the Big Barrier collapsed by the Cross and of Death de-fanged by the open tomb...as we keep singing it ...praying it...sharing it...preaching it to ourselves...AS WE KEEP BELIEVING...it instills in us the kind of passionate persistence we see in Jacob. The Gospel makes us people with GRIT...

As we keep repenting and believing the Good News, it helps us avoid the morbidity and timidity many experience when they think about death.

And yet it frees us from desperately depending on the many diversions people use to ignore or deny death. Instead, we live with HOPE...and we make wise life investments because THAT DOWNPAYMENT is real...that Empty Tomb IS my destiny and the land God has promised us, the renewal of all things IS coming... That Good News enables us to live humbly and confidently, to be forgiving and to be filled with hope and bold love.

So, keep believing, keep a hold of that down-payment at all costs.