

“God Meant it For Good”
Genesis 50:15-26
August 20th, 2017

How do you want to be remembered?

Almost ten years ago, Randy Pausch’s last lecture went viral. The Carnegie Mellon University computer science professor was dying of liver cancer. So, he took the opportunity to deliver a final lecture in which he talked about the lessons he had learned from life and his illness, and also gave advice to students on how to achieve career and personal success. Pausch’s irreverent lecture later became the basis for a bestselling book.

I presided at a funeral service this past Friday for a woman I didn’t know; nor did I know any of her family members. When I met with the family to plan their beloved’s funeral, I asked them to describe her to me. They recounted a couple memories of helping neighbors and donating to charitable causes. They knew her favorite color, and that she liked to cook and bake. No one wanted to say anything about her – no eulogy or tribute. As they shared with me there was no mention of Christianity, nothing about believing in Christ, or her belonging to a church family.

Hers was a private visitation, private funeral, private burial; no pictures or things displayed of times gone by; no mementos. This woman had lived 81 years, and all her family could come up with were a few paragraphs of general comments in her obituary.

As we come to the end of the last chapter in the Book of Genesis, we also come to the end of our long sermon series entitled *The Book of Beginnings: God’s Grace in Genesis*. The first sermon took place back on April 28th, 2015 (2 ½ years ago). Some here today weren’t with us then, and others have gone on. You’ll remember that when we completed our study of **Genesis Chapter 11**, we took a break and studied **2 Timothy** – that was a four month period from January 25th, 2016 to May 16, 2016. But the following Sunday, we returned to Genesis 12. Some 84 sermons in all as we worked through this incredible book.

Today, we see that Joseph leaves instructions for how he wants to be remembered.

Genesis 50:15-26:

⁵ When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.” ¹⁶ So they sent *messengers* to Joseph, saying, “Before your father died he commanded, saying, ¹⁷ ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph: “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.”’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

¹⁸ Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we *are* your servants.”

¹⁹ Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. ²¹ Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

²² So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father’s household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. ²³ Joseph saw Ephraim’s children to the third *generation*. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph’s knees.

²⁴ And Joseph said to his brethren, “I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” ²⁵ Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” ²⁶ So Joseph died, *being* one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

MP 1 – Fear of Punishment (v. 15-18);

MP 2 – Assurance of Provision (v. 19-21):

MP 3 – Blessing of Old Age (v. 22-26)

The passage begins with a foreboding **fear of punishment**. As soon as Joseph’s brothers learned that their father Jacob had died, they wondered whether Joseph (would) hate (them), and “(might) actually repay (them) for all the evil which (they) did to him.” Obviously, even after some 17 years, Joseph’s brothers doubted whether they were forgiven by their powerful, influential younger brother and cleared of their wrongdoing.

Joseph’s brothers expect him to act in the same way that they did when outside of their father’s oversight. Remember, Joseph went a good ways away from home to find his brothers in Dothan (**Genesis 37**) It would seem there are many among the people of God who live with similar fears of reprisal – they are “waiting for the other shoe to drop,” so to speak. Though they profess to be the Lord’s children, they act as if they are not acquainted with God – their faith has been battered and damaged, it is bruised and diminished. *Isn’t that a miserable existence? Does it describe yours, dear one?*

Application: Jacob was dead and gone, and Joseph’s brothers’ grief over his passing was compounded by their shame and guilt. Fear and anxieties after the passing of a believer in Jesus Christ provide one of the greatest opportunities for demonstrating faith in the sovereignty of God. Relationships among God’s people may sometimes be tense, especially when, through death, leadership changes hands. But believers can use such occasions to demonstrate God’s sovereign design, even through human failures. They may do so through forgiveness and kindness, like Joseph does in verses 19-21.

Those verses show Joseph’s **assurance of provision**. Joseph’s brothers sent a third party to inform him of what was likely a fictitious report for him to be nice to his brothers after Jacob was gone. *What was Joseph’s response?* He wept when they spoke to him (see verse 17). Then, Joseph comforts his brothers with his words of grace and kindness in verse 19 – “Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God?” Joseph had already forgiven his brothers; and as far as he was concerned the matter was over with.

But, Joseph’s counsel isn’t finished. Verse 20 is one of the great verses in all the Bible, showing clearly that God is sovereign over all people and all situations. Joseph continues, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.” There is nothing that we can do to thwart God’s working in our lives. Because of the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, we are naturally self-centered in our orientation to the world around us; that includes the spiritual world of faith. Naturally, we bristle when things don’t go the way we think that they should – we are masters of manipulation; we are denizens of discontentment.

God used the sinful actions of Joseph's brothers to bring about the circumstance for Joseph to be taken to Egypt where God would elevate him to governor of all the land. The sin of Potiphar's wife in slandering Joseph resulted in a two-year imprisonment, but God used that time to prepare Joseph for leadership in pagan Egypt.

Back in **Genesis 45:5-8**, we looked at Joseph's instruction to his brothers after he revealed his identity to them. It's instructive for us to hear them again:

"But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For these two years the famine *has been* in the land, and *there are* still five years in which *there will be* neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."

Samuel Brengle was a worker with the Salvation Army in Boston many years ago. As he passed by a saloon, some men threw a brick at his head. Their aim was good, and Brengle nearly died as a result. As it was, he spent 18 months in recovery. During that time he wrote a little book entitled *Helps to Holiness*. Thousands of copies were published.

After he was able to begin preaching again, people would often thank him for the book. He would respond by saying, "If there had been no little brick, there had been no little book." His wife saved the brick and had Genesis 50:20 engraved on it.

Application: The New Testament's equivalent to **Genesis 50:20** would have to be **Romans 8:28** – "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose." Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is God's promise to us – there are no such thing as tragedies in the Christian's life. God is able to take the wickedness of sinful humanity and fashion it into something good for His children and for His glory. I challenge you to look back over the difficult things God has brought you through and trace how He produces great good out of your struggles, your failings, and your difficulties. Thank him for not treating you as your sins deserve; praise Him for pouring out His grace for your benefit. Worship Him and serve Him faithfully in every area of your life – for He is worthy!

Finally, we see an elderly Joseph near the end of his life. And he is blessed by God in his old age. Verse 22 reveals that at the advanced age of 110, he saw his great grandchildren! And verse 24, reveals his wisdom. Though Joseph was about to die, he told his brothers that "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." That wouldn't be until after some 430 years had passed. But, the presence of Joseph's coffin, which wouldn't be moved until after the people of God were delivered from Pharaoh, remained as a symbol of hope. Joseph's bones served to point God's people to the future.

We who are Christians are convinced that our future in God's program lies elsewhere and that this current world is but part of a pilgrimage to that land. We know that God will surely visit and deliver His people, in spite of death and discouragement. If believers wholeheartedly trust in the sovereignty of God, death will lose its power over us, and persecution will fade into God's sovereign plan.

The only serious mention of Joseph in the New Testament is in **Hebrews 11:22**. It reads, “By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.” It is not much in words. But it is a record of faith, and it puts Joseph in the very center of that great cloud of witnesses spoken of in that chapter, a chain stretching backward to Adam through such saints as Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Noah, Enoch, and Abel, and forward to Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel, David, and others – even to those in our own time who are admonished:

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” **(Hebrews 12:1-2)**

MP 1 – Fear of Punishment (v. 15-18); *Would Jacob’s death mean Joseph got his revenge?*

MP 2 – Assurance of Provision (v. 19-21): Joseph comforted his brothers not to be afraid; he’d take care of their little ones.

MP 3 – Blessing of Old Age (v. 22-26) a long life points us to the great faithfulness of our God.

I began this message by asking you how you’d like to be remembered. A high school girl wrote the following letter to a friend:

I attended your church yesterday. Although you had invited me, you were not there. I looked for you, hoping to sit with you. I sat alone. A stranger, I wanted to sit near the back of the church but those rows were all packed with regular attenders. An usher took me to the front. I felt as if I was on parade.

More than a few people were filing into the sanctuary after the service had begun; I wondered what was more important than being on time for the beginning of the service.

During the singing of the hymns I was surprised to note that some of the church people weren’t singing. Between their sighs and yawns, they just stared into space. Three of the kids that I had respected at school were whispering to one another throughout the whole service. Another girl was giggling. I really didn’t expect that in your church. The pastor’s sermon was very interesting, although some members of the choir didn’t seem to think so. They look bored and restless. There were several people who left and then came back in during the sermon. I thought, “How rude!” I could hear the constant shuffling of feet and doors opening and closing.

The pastor spoke about Jacob and Joseph and God’s plan for them. The message got to me and I made up my mind to speak to someone about it after the service. But utter chaos reigned after the pastor pronounced what he called the “Benediction.” I said good morning to one couple, but their response was less than cordial. I looked for fellow teenagers with whom I could discuss the sermon, but they were all huddled in a corner talking about the newest video game.

My parents don’t go to church. I came alone yesterday hoping to find a place to truly worship and feel some love. I’m sorry, but I didn’t find it in your church. I won’t be back.

Is this us, Trinity Church? Is this how you want to be remembered? I surely hope not.