

“Tombstones and Resurrections”
Genesis 50
December 10, 2000
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Beneath this stone my wife doth lie
Now she's at rest and so am I.

Here lies as silent clay
Miss Arabella Young.
Who on the 21st of May,
Began to hold her tongue.

Here lies Johnny Yeast
Pardon me for not rising

The original story was that someone found this on a tombstone
buried deep in the grass. Upon pushing the grass aside, he read:
“Pause, stranger, when you pass me by,
For as you are, so once was I.
As I am now, so will you be.
So prepare for death, and follow me.

Pushing the grass aside a bit more, he found the following scratched
on the stone, done with a crude instrument:
“To follow you I'm not content
Until I know which way you went!

Here lies an atheist
All dressed up,
And no place to go.

Here under this sod, and under these trees
Is buried the body of Solomon Pease
But here in this hole lies only the pod,
His soul is shelled out, and gone up to God.

Josiah Hodgman Died Jan. 14, 1852 Aged 52
Death thou has conquered me, I by thy dart am slain;
But Christ has conquered thee And I shall rise again.

Which is it for you?

All dressed up with no place to go? OR
Death has conquered me but I shall rise again?

Are you certain?

More than any other subject, death presses us to consider what we truly believe.

Our text today is the final one in the book of Genesis.

I can't even remember the first sermon, and I preached it.

Fifty-some sermons later we arrive at the end .

Thank you for not applauding that we are finally through with this book.

In our final text, two deaths are recorded.

And the events and words around those two deaths form the emphasis that Moses wishes to make as he closes this first book of the Bible.

Open your Bible please to the end of the 49th chapter beginning at verse 29.

I have skipped some portions of the text for the sake of time in reading but I will tell you the number of the next verse as I skip forward in the reading.

Please watch for the two deaths and particularly note the same basic request made in both situations.

I believe it is this same request in both deaths that points to the purpose of the closing story of Genesis.

READ Genesis 49:29 – 50:26 (excerpts)

What's the same basic request in both situations?

Don't bury me here in Egypt but bury me in Canaan – the Promised Land.

What is so significant about that?

Isn't it a rather common thing for people to want to be buried in their hometown?

We often hear of people requesting that their bodies be taken back to Nebraska, Texas or California to be buried.

They speak of family cemetery plots already arranged.

Is that all this is? Absolutely not!

Both of these men are making a huge statement about the future.

As each of these men grew close to death, he staked a claim on the future.

And what was the future they saw for themselves and their families?

Their future was in the promises of God.

By faith, they believed more in what God has promised than in what they could see with their eyes.

What did they believe about the future?

First of all what didn't they believe about the future?

This is fairly impressive.

Neither Jacob nor Joseph saw their future in Egypt.

I say that is impressive because of the circumstances they were in when they made their requests to be buried in Canaan when they died.

Wouldn't it have been natural for them to think of a future for their family in Egypt?

After all Joseph was the Prime Minister of the country.

His father Jacob and sons had been given the richest land in the country on which to build a future.

Wouldn't you expect Joseph to imagine his children and grandchildren as educated in the finest Egyptian schools, brought into government roles and enjoying the best that Egypt had to offer?

Wouldn't you expect Jacob to think of his sons and grandsons as enlarging their herds, increasing their wealth and comfort and making a good life, no an excellent life, here in Egypt?

Amazingly, they didn't see their future in Egypt.

They saw their future in Canaan.

Why?

Because God had said Canaan will be your home.

To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob God had reiterated the promise that he would make of them a great nation in a land of their own and would bless the world through them.

Joseph had all the power and wealth of Egypt at his disposal **but** he believed more in the promise of God about a future he couldn't see than he did in the privilege and prosperity he could see.

He had lived his life based on the promises of God regarding the future.

He had resisted great temptation, he had patiently and faithfully endured slavery and false imprisonment for 13 years because he believed God's word about the future.

And now at death, he was betting his and his family's future based on the promises of God more than on all that Egypt could provide.

What he believed about the future affected everything about the present.

It is rightly said that your present life determines your future life but is just as rightly said that your future determines your present.

Joseph made decisions in his life based on what he believed about a future he couldn't see but trusted God to bring to pass.

What do you believe about the future and how does it impact your present life?

Does what God says about the future determine the way you spend your time, your money, your life now?

The book of Genesis ends on a note of great expectancy.

Jacob and Joseph had died but they believed a day was coming when God would deliver on his promise to provide them a land and make of them a nation of people who would bless the world.

And nearly 500 years later God returned their descendants to the Promised Land of Canaan and blessed them beyond measure in the years that followed.

The Old Testament likewise ends on a note of great expectancy.

In the 1500 years following their return to the Promised Land, the people of God, the descendants of Jacob, known as the Israelites, failed miserably over and over again.

As God judged his people for their sins, he also promised that their salvation, their future, lay in a coming Messiah.

The last book of the OT and the last chapter of that book declares, Malachi 4 “For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”

And the NT makes it clear that Jesus is that “sun of righteousness” – the fulfillment of the expected Messiah.

Likewise the NT ends on a note of expectancy, where Jesus declares, speaking of his second coming, Revelation 22:20 “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Do you believe him?

What future do you see?

Here’s what Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph saw:

Genesis 17:6-8 “I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

They saw a day when they would be in their own land, they would number hundred’s of thousands with nations within their nation so large and influential that kings would be necessary.

They saw a day when that great and prosperous land and people would enjoy the presence of God and they would be his people.

What future do you see?

God has said in his Word that there is coming a day when our bodies will be resurrected from the graves and will be transformed into new bodies that will know nothing of the limitations and suffering of our present bodies.

God has said this old earth and the universe will pass away and that he is going to create a new universe and earth that makes this one look sick (because that's what it is since sin has corrupted it) and on that new earth, more glorious than anything we can imagine, we will live for ever and ever.

And God has said that on that new earth we will live forever in his presence – we will know him more intimately than is even possible now.

And all those who love him will be with him and each other on that new earth forever and ever.

The NT books of Romans, I Corinthians, Thessalonians, Peter and Revelation all paint this awesome picture of the future that God has promised for us.

I have emphasized before that the heaven that most people speak of going to when we die is not the completion of the story for God's people.

Heaven now is not what God saved us for.

The future for God's people today is not completed with being absent from the body and present with the Lord.

The completion is the new earth, with the resurrected people of God living for eternity in the new way of life.

As God's people we don't look forward to death, we look forward to resurrection!

I find it difficult to get especially young people excited about dying and going to heaven because that is such a limited view of the future.

What they **can** get excited about is the resurrection and a world that is radically different from the one in which we now live and a community of people radically different than the communities of people we now live among.

That's the future we have to look forward to.

That's the future that shapes our present lives.

That's the yet invisible future we see by faith just as much as Jacob and Joseph saw the invisible with their eyes of faith.

So many of us are men and women only of the present.

We see and invest no further in the future than a party next week, something we are working to purchase, a position at work we covet, a security and plenty we can have in retirement.

God has called us to be men and women of the future.

Men and women who invest more in what **will be**, than in what is.

Men and women with eyes of faith who see clearly and believe that future that God promises.

That's the kind of men Abraham, Jacob and Joseph were.

It's a long passage but I want you to hear it with new ears in light of our study of Genesis and particularly this last chapter.

Hebrews 11:8-16,22 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance... They were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

It is what we don't yet see with our physical eyes that determines who we are and how we live.

It is that which makes it possible to struggle through untold burdens and know with certainty, the struggles are not the last chapter of the story.

It is that which makes it possible to stand by the casket of a loved one and say with confidence, this is not the end.

I like the story of the missionary couple returning to the United States following 40 years of service for God among a difficult people in a difficult country.

As they stepped off the plane they couldn't help but notice the large crowd gathered around a dignitary who had flown on the same plane.

The missionary turned to his wife and remarked that it was too bad that **they** hadn't been so enthusiastically welcomed home.

His wife smiled and said, but we aren't home yet.

We'll be home when Christ returns and in resurrected bodies we live with him forever on the new earth.

Until then the story isn't complete.

Faith sees the invisible and orders one's life around that certain future.

Not only did Jacob and Joseph **see** the future with eyes of faith, They believed it so thoroughly that they didn't succumb to delay or opposition.

By the time Jacob and then Joseph died the promise of God to them was over 150 years old.

Think about it, how long do you go on believing something is going to happen when it hasn't yet?

Jacob was an old man, he was not even **in** the land that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants - he was in a foreign country, Egypt.

Surely the vision has faded away!

After that much time – maybe they misunderstood God.

But what do we find: From Genesis 48-49 we learn that Jacob spoke to Joseph and his sons about the part of the land that would be theirs when they left Egypt and went to Caanan.

And they knew that it would be over 400 years before that happened.

All those years later and Jacob didn't miss a beat - he believed that God-given picture in his head as much as if it had already happened.

Faith overcomes delay and opposition.

The author of Hebrews referring to these men, said that even imminent death couldn't conquer their vision of the future.

Hebrews 11 "All these people were still living by faith when they died.

Richard Wurmbbrand is a man who has for many years worked to get the Scriptures and the Gospel to people behind what was once the "iron curtain" - into once communist controlled countries.

Before he began that ministry, Wurmbbrand was imprisoned in his country because of his Christianity.

For 14 years he lived in a soundless cell 30 feet below the ground. He saw no trees, no sky, no children.

He was hungry all the time - fed potato peel soup and sometimes only a slice of bread a week.

For those 14 years they tried every inhumane form of torture they could think of to get him to renounce his faith.

Why did he not renounce it?

Because his God-given picture of the future, that he carried in his head, was clearer and more real than even the circumstances under which he lived.

Does this orientation toward the future mean that real Christians become no earthly good in the here and now?

To the contrary, it is the Christians who see the future with eyes of faith **that are most engaged** in this life.

The greatest benefactors the world has ever known have been men and women of faith – people who believed as much in the world to come as in this world.

And they have engaged this world, they have not withdrawn from it.

The most influential Christians were not monks or ascetics but were people who fully lived in this world.

They didn't withdraw to a secluded place but engaged in the "stuff" of life.

Think of the list of faith-heroes in Hebrews 11.

These men and women believed in the life to come and from that perspective they applied themselves to the present.

Joseph was a man fully engaged in the real stuff of life.

The great theologian John Calvin didn't withdraw from life but applied his faith to the life of his day – making a better life for thousands in his native Geneva, Switzerland.

The faith of the Puritans laid a foundation for the great social work of England and America.

The spiritual revival of England in the 18th century kept her from a senseless and bloody revolution as experienced in France and other countries.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "When men **forget** the next world and concentrate only on this present life, this world becomes a kind of living hell, with confusion and lawlessness and immorality and vice rampant. It is only men who have a complete view of life who really know how to live in their world. The only man who really respects life in this world is the man who knows that this world is only the entryway to the next world. It is only the man who knows himself to be a child of God and who knows that this is God's world, who is really concerned about decency in this world." (Lloyd-Jones Ephesians p383)

It is the men and women who, with eyes of faith, see the life to come, that are most engaged in this life.

I ask you, what is the future you see?

With eyes of faith, do you see the future God has promised?

Do you let it shape your life now?

Christians are men and women of the future.

