

Genesis 49: 29 - 50: 14; " How Death is to be Understood", Sermon # 119 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 20th, 2008, in the Morning Worship Service.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3, verses 1 and 2 it says, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die." It is no doubt true that for many of us the time to die is something that we would rather put off. Death is such an unpleasant thought to many people that they choose to remain in ignorance about it and somehow deal with it when it comes to them. But for the Christian it ought not to be so. The Christian who is seeing things rightly is of the same attitude as the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1: 21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." It is good for you and I to live to the fullest to our Lord Jesus Christ and to be prepared to die at any time; to have our house set in order. For it may come to us in the time that we think not. Jacob, however, knew that it was his time to die. He was given time to set his house in order and to give instructions to his son Joseph of what should be done in regard to his funeral. What a blessing it was to him. Death is to be understood by the Christian as a time in which both the person who is dying and those who love him can think deeply about what death will mean for the one who is going to God, and what it means for those who are left, to continue to live, here upon the earth. So there is a question which we need to ask ourselves this morning in relation to death. And the question is this, "What will death mean for the one who dies, and what should it mean for the family and for those who remain here upon the earth?" The death of Jacob in these verses teaches us 3 clear lessons about how death is to be understood by the dying Christian and those who love him. These verses teach us that death is a time of gathering, a time of mourning, and a time of sympathizing. Let's see if each one of us can learn something from this subject this morning.

1st- Death is to be understood by the dying Christian as a gathering to his people. (Chapter 49, verses 29-33)

This was how Jacob specifically describes his own death. "Then he charged them," it says in verse 29, "and said to them: 'I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place.'" Death for all believers, those who have believed in the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ, is a gathering to our own people. Who were Jacob's people? Jacob's people were God's elect among his relatives, Abraham and Isaac and their wives. They were not simply all the relatives of

Jacob. They were the believing relatives of Jacob; Abraham and Isaac. His dead body was going to the place where some of his believing relative's bodies had been placed. But this word gathering does not relate only to the body of Jacob. It has a more direct and immediate reference to his soul. It was his soul that was being gathered to his people. This has a broader reference than simply that he would, after he died, be buried with Abraham and Isaac. His spirit was going to be with all of the righteous dead who had died before him. Jacob was going to be gathered to Adam and Eve, Abel and Seth; he was being gathered to all those saints in the godly line of Seth. He was being gathered to Methuselah and Enoch and Noah and no doubt many others who believed but whose profession is not recorded in the Word of God. This place to which Jacob was being gathered is the place of the spirits of righteous men made perfect. It is now known to us as the New Jerusalem. Turn over with me to Hebrews Chapter 12.

It is very important that each of us, in this life come to repentance of all known sins in ourselves. At the time of our death it will be too late. The writer of this book is drawing a contrast between Esau and all those who lived by faith. He is exhorting those to whom he is writing to have right relationships with all men, lest when it comes our time to die that we will not enter in to the heavenly Jerusalem. Verse 14 says, "Pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright." "For you know that afterward when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears." Let me stop here just for a moment and make comment. Esau was Jacob's brother. Jacob stole the birthright and the blessing from his brother, both of which he did sinfully, and yet he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Esau was a man who wanted to inherit a blessing, it says here, but he was rejected by God because he found no place for repentance. It even says that he sought the blessing diligently with tears, but it is evident that they were tears of self-pity because he did not want repentance. He did not want to serve and honor God. He wanted himself to be served and honored. He was an angry and a violent man; he was a fornicator and a profane person. He was not displeased with himself as regards these things of sin which he held to. He stands, spiritually in the line of Cain. You remember Cain. He killed his brother Abel because Abel's offering to the Lord was accepted and his was not. He had a separate genealogy devoted to him in Genesis 4: 16 and following. After he killed Abel it says, "Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden." Many of Cain's descendents were great men of the earth, their fame was in the earth; but they are gathered to their own people

when they die too. They are gathered with the wicked and separated from the presence of the Lord to await the judgment of the great day, and Esau with them. They are dead spiritually and so they will die eternally.

Not so, with Jacob and all the righteous. Listen to what it says in verse 18. "For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest," (All fearful sights and sounds which cause fear and dread to guilty sinners.), "and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore." Verse 22 - "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." This is where the spirit of Jacob was going to be gathered. And this the place where all of the spirits of righteous men made perfect from the foundation of the world have been gathered to await the day of the resurrection. The spiritual benefits and blessings of the death of Christ were surely not withheld from them at the time of their death, even though they were born before Christ came; even thousands of years before. No they are kept in the presence of God, and they delight greatly in Him forever. It is only the redemption of the body that awaits the day of the resurrection.

This should cause us most seriously to ask ourselves this question this morning. Which people would I be gathered to, if I were to die this morning? Would you be gathered to the company of the condemned and the damned? Or would you be gathered to the heavenly Jerusalem where the forgiven and blessed are? It is a question not only worth pondering over, but a question to be answered and acted upon. If you do not believe in Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, you cannot enter heaven this morning. If you are more interested in an earthly inheritance, earthly fame, earthly and sensual pleasure, and have no real interest in the things that are important to God and Christ, then your portion at death is to be separated from God forever and to suffer torment. But, on the other hand, if you will embrace Christ with the arms of faith, then every good and righteous spiritual delight awaits you and you have nothing to fear from death. If you died, even this morning, you would be with him in Paradise immediately. It is faith in Christ that saves. It is faith in Christ that receives the free gift. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who takes away your sins, who clothes you in His righteousness, and gives you a new heart. It is Christ who gives you grace to repent and to believe and to obey.

Jacob's death was as simple as "drawing his legs up into the bed and breathing his last." Not all deaths of God's saints are this simple. Some are painful and

drawn out. But Christ is just as much there at the death beds of those believers as he was at Jacob's. You remember the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16. Lazarus was a beggar who was full of sores, who was laid at the rich man's gate. He was so poor that he desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. And more than that, the dogs came and licked his sores. It was not a good situation in life that this man Lazarus had. The rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day, it says. But they both died. And when Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. He was gathered to his people. The rich man also died and was buried, it says there. What a difference; to be greeted, when you die, by the angels wafting you up to heaven; or being escorted to the place of torment. There is no turning back to do things over again once you have died. Once you have died, all is fixed. So I urge you, consider your eternal soul this day, in light of eternity and all that is coming. It will mean everything to you on the day that you are gathered to your people.

Well, 2ndly- Death is to be understood by those who love the one who died as a time of mourning. (Chapter 50: 1-3)

"Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him." Let us learn a lesson from Joseph this morning. All of you who are strong men, who might be tempted to think that crying and grief are not to be expressed by a strong masculine faith; think again. Joseph wept over the death of his father. Joseph, if you have noticed, as we studied through his life, was a man who felt deeply. He was a man who was affected emotionally by the changes which took place in other people. This was because he loved them deeply. As we saw earlier, in the case of Cain, people can be brought to tears by self-pity or other selfish motives. But we see here, that the godly man will weep over others and he will weep with others. It is true that a godly person may weep because he feels his own loss of the person who has died. But it is a loss which was based upon love for that person, knowing that there will never be another like them, and that this life with them, with all the joys and sorrows that it might have held, was the gift of God. This particular earthly life has ended, and things will not be the same again. It's not that things will not be much, much better in the future. Because of Christ they will be glorious. But weeping is appropriate because of what a righteous man's life was; what it contributed to the showing forth of God's goodness in His giving us fathers to teach us, to love us, to raise us and to provide for us, in an earthly sense. And even more, what they gave to us and showed to us in a spiritual sense. In our loss we are thankful for the gift of this person. Weeping is appropriate because another man who loved truth and righteousness has left this earthly scene for the heavenly and eternal realm. He will be welcomed there, but he will be missed here. The Lord only knows how much even 1 godly man means to keeping an increasingly pagan society from falling under the judgment of God.

How far should weeping and emotion be allowed by the righteous man, in himself, after the death of someone close to him? This is difficult to gauge. But our sorrow as a Christian is governed by what the Scriptures say, as everything else is in the experience of a Christian. Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 and you will find the answer. "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus." "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep." "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God." "And the dead in Christ will rise first. We see from these verses that excessive grief in a Christian is due to two factors at work in their life. The first is ignorance and the second is having no hope of seeing their Christian relatives again. Paul is taking the steps to alleviate the first and he warns against the second.

The truth is, that all of the righteous dead shall be raised together at the last Day. All of the righteous dead, both Old and New testament will be raised, and they will "precede" those who are alive and still walking the earth on that day. They will precede them in the fact that "the dead in Christ shall rise first". "Then we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." "And thus we shall always be with the Lord." This, needless to say, precludes a secret rapture with a 7 year tribulation to follow, and a Millennium to follow that. Eternity sets in from this Day that is being talked about. The sure hope of everyone who has Christian relatives is that they shall see them again. They will be transformed. They will be more beautiful and powerful than we have ever seen them before, but we will be able to recognize them. I say this because if we were not to be able to recognize them, it would be very hard not to sorrow as those who have no hope. It would be very hard to "comfort one another with these words."

So the Christian is to be one who sorrows; yes he is, but he is not to be one who sorrows as those who have no hope. The sorrow of one who has no hope is the sorrow of one who does not believe in the promises of God; that there will be a resurrection from the dead, and there will be the comfort of seeing those again who have fallen asleep in Jesus. We should weep over the loss of our loved ones who have died in Christ, but as we do, we should remember that we shall be reunited with them again, and this time for all of eternity. Marriage shall not exist in that day, but the marriage of the Lamb with His bride, the Church, shall last and that relationship continue through all of eternity. The spiritual delights of eternity shall far outstrip the legitimate joys of marriage in this present day. There will be no need to fear that they shall not. Something far better is coming of which

marriage in this age is only a picture. Paul speaks of it as a great mystery in Ephesians chapter 5. It says there in verse 30, "For we are members of Christ's body, of His flesh and of His bones." "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Christ at that last Day will "present us to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but she will be holy and without blemish." This is the marriage of the Lamb; to see Christ on the last Day as our heavenly Bridegroom and to realize that we are "one flesh" with Him in the sense that we shall be like Him; receive a glorious body like unto His glorious body. This is why we cannot mourn excessively as Christians. It shows unbelief in us; it shows a lack of the grace of self-control in us. It shows a lack of hope; the expectation that God shall do great and mighty things in the resurrection of our bodies; we who have sought refuge in Jesus for salvation. Remember this in your grief, O Christian, as you lay your loved one who trusted Christ in the grave.

You say to me, "But what about those people who we are close to in this life who have not trusted in Jesus Christ, but they still have died and gone to an eternal punishment?" Should we not weep for them unceasingly since they have perished in their sins? No, I think that we need to grieve, and to be saddened exceedingly for a time. But I believe we have to leave with God, the things that are too great for us to understand or bear indefinitely. I think of the example of David in 2 Samuel 12: 13 and following. Let me read it to you. This is after David's sin with Bathsheba was found out and Nathan is speaking to David. His sin was forgiven, but there would be certain consequences. "So David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" "And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.'" "However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." "Then Nathan departed to his house." "And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David and it became very ill." "David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground." "So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground." "But he would not, nor did he eat food with them." "On the seventh day it came to pass that the child died." "And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead." "For they said, 'Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice.'" "How can we tell him that the child is dead." "He may do some harm!" "When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead." "Therefore David said to his servants, 'Is the child dead?'" "And they said, 'He is dead.'" "So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped." "Then he went to

his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate." "Then his servants said to him, 'What is this that you have done?' "You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food." "And he said, 'While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" "But now he is dead; why should I fast?" "Can I bring him back again?" "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Now I know that this is a very famous and good verse to prove that infants who die in their infancy all go to heaven. I think that I believe in this truth, as you perhaps also do too. But it is all so very hard to prove. David going to the child may simply mean that he is going to die someday and will go to the house of death. I think that it means more than that, but I leave it with God. He will know what is right to do. Some might question God at this point and ask, "If it was not the child's fault that the sin of David took place, then why does God punish the child?" I would say that we always have to remember that God knows what is just and right in the punishment of sin and sinners. We have no right to question it. But it is just in God that the fruit of this sinful alliance between David and Bathsheba, the conception of a child resulting from their sin, should not live. All sin and the fruit that it bears results in death. It is an inviolable principle in God's mind and in His Universe. And it is just as much mercy in God, that later on, when David makes Bathsheba one of his wives and he comforts her, and goes into her, and she conceives another child, that it is from that union that Solomon came. The Lord called him Jedidiah, and He sent word through Nathan the prophet to David and Bathsheba, because He loved him. And it was through his descendants that One came who would be the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. God knows both how to exercise justice and to show mercy to an infinite degree of perfection. Do you believe this?

But the truth that I want most to apply from this passage is in relation to grief. It is right to grieve and cry over unbelieving people while they live, greatly desiring for their salvation, and praying that God would be merciful. But if it comes their time and they die, we need to do what David did. We recognize God's goodness to them while they lived. They received many good things, but still rejected Christ. We recognize also His justice, and it is enough for us to know that God could have shown mercy unto salvation if it was His purpose. We leave it there. We get up from our fasting and praying and go on with life. God will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and He will have compassion upon whom He will have compassion. Why should I question this and grieve excessively? I cannot change God's mind. I must submit to His ordering of things. Are you willing to do this if you lose someone who is in your family, someone you are close to, who does not know Christ? There is a tendency in funerals in our day; perhaps it has been a

tendency in all generations, to try and make people who have never really shown evidence that they know the Lord, to be those who were really Christians. It is a very spiritually dangerous practice. Let us leave it with the Lord, if we are not sure of the state of our loved one. Let us say that, "The Lord knows." "I will be very glad if I come to find them numbered among God's dear children on the last day." But let us leave it there, knowing that God will know what to do.

Now lastly- Death is to be understood by those who love the one who died as a time for sympathizing with, and comforting, the relatives of the deceased.

(Chapter 50, verses 4-14)

It says in our text that the Egyptians mourned for Jacob 70 days. I am told that usually they mourned for their kings 72 days. Jacob's mourning was only slightly less. Some say that the embalming of the body took 40 days, and then the time of mourning took 30 and this accounts for the seventy days. I would take it that because Joseph was a head of state, that it was much like the mourning of our nation over a President or other great and recognized personage who has died. We fly the flags at half-staff, and we think of the great good brought to our country by this man. The Egyptians perhaps were excessive in their grieving, but they wanted to pay respect to Joseph's father; the one who was so loved of their beloved leader. We need to recognize the fact that in different sections of the world, people express their grief differently. Some are long and loud in it, suggesting that they may not really know the God whom we worship and serve. But this may not be true. I really think that we should take notice of the way that the Egyptians sympathized with the family of the deceased. It is found in verse 7 of our text. "So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt...." This is true sympathy, to go to the funeral of a relative of a Christian brother or sister. It shows your love and kindness toward him. This was quite a show of support that came with Joseph and the family to the land of Canaan. In verse 9 it says, "And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering." "Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation." "Joseph observed seven days of mourning for his father." All this is very appropriate, a far cry from the great "celebrations" which funerals are made into in our day, whether the person knew the Lord or not. There is nothing to celebrate if the person did not know Christ. But if they did, true mourning will sympathize by a solemn lamentation. For the Christian, this should never preclude the joy in our hearts, or upon our lips for what we know Christ has done for the deceased. The two are never incompatible with each other at a Christian funeral; solemn mourning and true joy. Let us always sympathize and give condolences to the relatives of people who have died,

whose funeral we attend. Let us not give false hope to unbelievers, but let us pray to give real comfort through the gospel of Christ.