

Genesis 50:1-26

Refusing Bitterness; Choosing Blessedness

We began our study of Genesis on May 27, 2006

- That is 90 weeks ago today

We have walked through the pages of this book, covering every single verse

- I have delivered 76 messages on Genesis during this time
- I have read nearly 7000 pages of commentary during this series

I have to be honest with you

- It was very intimidating to tackle such a large book like this
- I had never preached through an OT book in its entirety

But here we are this morning

- This is our last week of studying Genesis at this time

I don't want you to think, however, that we are leaving Genesis behind after this morning

- Rather, we will carry the truths that we have learned with us for the rest of our lives

We have noticed several reoccurring themes

- God's faithfulness to His promises
- Man's unfaithfulness and sinfulness
- The reality of sin and its consequences
- God's undeserved blessing upon sinful humanity

Genesis is the book of beginnings

- Thus, it makes sense that these same truths and themes will reappear throughout the remainder of the Bible

Genesis 50 will bring some level of closure to this book

- The patriarch Jacob will be buried
- Joseph will die
- But God's work continues

Let's read Genesis 50:1-26

The possibility of bitterness is a very real temptation in our lives

- A spouse cheats on you
- A friend disappoints you
- A boss fires or demotes you
- A co-worker is promoted instead of you
- A neighbor seems to have everything he/she wants

But bitterness can also be directed toward God

- Bitterness over health issues
- Bitterness over a failed or unhealthy marriage
- Bitterness over disobedient children
- Bitterness over a job

Joseph is a prime example of how we are to respond when we are tempted to become bitter

- As we have seen, Joseph had plenty of reasons why he *could* have been bitter
- But he chose to trust the Lord instead of becoming bitter

If you and I want to live a life free of bitterness, it will take a great work of God

- Left to ourselves, we will smolder in our bitterness

But Genesis 50 displays three (3) crucial truths which will help to free us from the battle over bitterness

- **Be hopeful of God's promises (50:1-14)**
- **Be thankful for God's forgiveness (50:15-21)**
- **Be humbled by God's grace (50:22-26)**

I. Be hopeful of God's promises (50:1-14)

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

Genesis 49 recorded the last words of Jacob

- He spent the entire chapter giving a blessing to each of his sons

Verse 33 records the finality of Jacob's life, "When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people"

Genesis 50:1 picks up immediately where chapter 49 left off

- Joseph expresses his grief and sorrow over the loss of his father

We have seen and read how Joseph was the favorite son

- But now we see how much Joseph loved his father, "Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him"

This is certainly an expression of grief and loss from a son toward his deceased father

- And we should expect such a kind gesture as this

We are not told how the other sons of Jacob responded to his death

- Joseph is the one who is focused on

Joseph teaches us that it is perfectly acceptable to grieve over the loss of a loved one

- We miss our family or loved one
- We are sorry that they have left us

But for those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, we know that people will live for eternity

- Heaven will be the home for all those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal life
- Hell will be the home for all those who have refused to trust and submit to Jesus Christ

Joseph was convinced that his father would be gathered with his people

- Jacob was an Old Testament believer

The apostle Paul writes to the young believers at Thessalonica and says, “**But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope**” (1 Thess 4:13)

- Believers grieve when someone dies
- But we don't grieve as those “**who have no hope**”

We who have been forgiven of our sins have hope

- A certainty, not a probability
- A confidence, not an insecurity

Joseph has this hope for his father

- Yet, he still grieves

There is nothing incompatible with these two truths

² And 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.

After Joseph grieves over the loss of his father, he calls for “**his servants the physicians to embalm his father**”

- Joseph is still second in command over Egypt
- These individuals are very much at his disposal

The process of embalming was to prevent the body from decaying

- The timeframe for embalming seldom took less than a month
- It was typically forty (40) days¹

The Jews did not embalm their dead

- But the Egyptians did

And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

The Egyptians had a very high regard for Jacob

- They were grateful for Joseph's leadership
- So they naturally had a great amount of respect and appreciation for Joseph's father

The normal time of mourning for a king was 72 days

- The Egyptians mourned for Jacob 70 days
- This tells us that they viewed him as a very important individual, almost to the level of a king²

¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 715.

² Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 223.

⁴ And 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.’”

When this long period of mourning was over, Joseph set his mind to carry out his father’s dying wish

- Jacob wanted to be buried in Canaan, not in Egypt

Notice in verse 4 that Joseph does not directly approach Pharaoh himself

- Rather, he sends word to “**the household of Pharaoh**”

We know that Joseph was grieving over the past 70 days

- It may have been entirely possible that his appearance was not suitable to approach Pharaoh
- Also the fact that Joseph had come into contact with a dead corpse may have caused him not to approach Pharaoh himself

Whatever the reason, Joseph made his request known to Pharaoh

- Jacob had already made preparations to be buried in Canaan

Joseph had to be wise with his words

- If he wasn’t careful, he could easily give the impression that Jacob didn’t like Egypt³
- This would have been taken personally by Pharaoh

Joseph accurately portrays his father as having made burial plans even prior to moving to Egypt

- Thus, Joseph is portrayed as simply carrying out what his father desired

The latter half of verse 5 indicates Joseph’s motivation, “**Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return**”

- Joseph didn’t plan on staying in Canaan
- He fully planned on returning to Egypt after burying his father

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

Thus Pharaoh gave permission to Joseph to bury his father in Canaan

- Pharaoh undoubtedly appreciated the level of loyalty that Joseph exhibited toward his father in carrying out his dying wish

Pharaoh must have seen this same level of loyalty to the Egyptians over the years

- Joseph had never been one to compromise his integrity
- He was a man of his word

³ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 693.

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.

So Joseph leaves for Canaan with a huge group of people

- “all the servants of Pharaoh”
- “the elders of his household”
- “all the elders of the land of Egypt”
- “all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father’s household”
- “chariots and horsemen”

The only people who seemed to stay back in Egypt were

- Pharaoh
- The little children of Joseph and his brothers

The fact that Joseph left his children back in Egypt was a sign that he would, in fact, return⁴

Verse 9 records the magnitude of this group of individuals, “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.

We are not told exactly how long it took for this group of people to travel from Egypt to Canaan

- We are told that they made a seven-day stop at “the threshing floor of Atad”

The procession did not take the shortest route⁵

- Perhaps there was some political reasons involved with this decision
- We do know that “chariots and horsemen” accompanied Joseph (50:9)

It was here that the people “lamented...with a very great and sorrowful lamentation”

- Their sorrow and grief were genuine

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.

The threshing floor of Atad was within the land of Canaan

- We are told that the Canaanites noticed and observed the mourning of the people

The Canaanites were amazed that so many Egyptians were outside their own country

- That must have puzzled them

⁴ Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Vol 1B*, 918.

⁵ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol 1*, 264.

¹² And 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.

Verse 12 brings back into focus Jacob's desire to be buried in Canaan

- Joseph was not the only one who had heard his father request this
- In Genesis 49, Jacob told all of his sons about his desire to be buried in Canaan

All of his sons carried Jacob and buried him “**in the cave of the field of Machpelah**”

- This was the family burial site for
 - o Abraham and Sarah
 - o Isaac and Rebekah
 - o Leah (Gen 49:31)

Abraham's decision to purchase this field gave God's people a permanent possession in the land of promise

- This piece of land was a guarantee that the people of God would have this a future possession⁶

¹⁴ And 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.

Not much is said about the actual burial ceremony

- It is all but skipped over in silence

The trip from Canaan back to Egypt must have been a hard one for this family

- They were leaving their father behind
- They were leaving the land that was promised to them

But Joseph promised Pharaoh that he would return to Egypt

- And he was a man of his word

At times, we are tempted to become bitter

- In many of these instances, our bitterness results from our own hopes and dreams not being met
- We become selfish in our expectations

We need to take an honest evaluation of our heart motivations during times of potential bitterness

- Are God's priorities most important to us?
- Or have we substituted what we think is right?

Joseph and his family could have been bitter

- Their father had died
- They had to leave Canaan and return to Egypt, knowing that Egypt was not the Promised Land

But Joseph demonstrates for us the first truth we need to embrace in order to win the battle over bitterness

- **We must be hopeful of God's promises**

Joseph knew all about the promises of God

- His father Jacob had told them to him

⁶ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 481.

But Joseph realized that God's timetable was far different than his own

- God is eternal
- Joseph is not

Joseph submitted to God's sovereign control over history

- He was totally at peace with the idea that the promises were not yet fulfilled

But Joseph was hopeful that one day in the future, all of God's promises would come true

- Until then, he would be hopeful
- He refused to become bitter

- Be hopeful of God's promises (50:1-14)

II. Be thankful for God's forgiveness (50:15-21)

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

Some time after the family and the entourage returned to Egypt, the brothers of Joseph began to fear

- They feared that Joseph might retaliate against them

After all, Joseph was second-in-command over Egypt

- He had the power and authority to do with them whatever he wanted to do

Verse 15 tells us that the brothers feared that Joseph would exact revenge

- Revenge for all the bad things that they had done to him earlier in his life

We remember that it was the brothers of Joseph who threatened to kill him

- They later changed their mind and decided to sell him to a group of Ishmaelites
- For years, the brothers had lied to their father about what really happened to Joseph

Now that Joseph was in a position of power, his brothers displayed this attitude of fear

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

Verse 16 is hard to understand for one simple reason

- We don't really know whether or not this message from Jacob was real or not

Perhaps the brothers fabricated the story in order to give some sense of credibility

- They could use this letter as leverage against Joseph, knowing that he always wanted to please his father

Perhaps Jacob really did tell his brothers this private message

- Jacob would want there to be harmony and peace in the home after his death

We don't know for certain whether or not this supposed message from Jacob was legitimate or not

- The Text just doesn't provide us with any clear evidence one way or the other

But the basic thrust of this message was forgiveness

- Joseph should forgive his brothers for what they had done to him

We know that forgiveness is mentioned in verses 17 & 18

- We also note that three different words for sin are mentioned in verse 17⁷
- Their actions toward Joseph were tainted with sinful, evil motives

The assumption of this supposed message from Jacob is that Joseph had not forgiven his brothers

And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

When Joseph heard of this supposed message from his father, he “wept”

- This is the second time that Joseph weeps in this chapter (50:1, 17)

Joseph was heartbroken!

- Had they never come to grips over this issue?
- Did they truly believe that he was harboring some sense of grudge over the past?

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

After mentioning this supposed message from Jacob, the brothers came before Joseph and “fell down”

- They humbled themselves before their brother Joseph, realizing that he had great authority over them

The brothers also told Joseph, “Behold, we are your servants”

- They prostrated themselves and submitted themselves to Joseph

Could this be further fulfillment of Joseph’s dream about his brothers bowing down to him?

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? ²⁰ And 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. 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.

Verses 19-21 are very familiar verses

- They have been quoted many times

But understood in their proper context here in Genesis 50, these words of Joseph are simply astounding

- They express the true theology of Joseph, a man of integrity

In response to what his brothers had just said, Joseph replies in verse 19, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?”

- Joseph was a man with great authority
- But Joseph was not God

Joseph did not claim to have sovereign authority over his brothers

- He refused to play the part of God

⁷ Mathews, 926.

Verse 20 is the heart of Joseph's story

- This is where Joseph could have vented his frustration and bitterness
- But he doesn't

Rather than express his bitterness, Joseph expresses a fundamental truth that every one of us needs to embrace

- “**And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good**” (50:20a)

Joseph admits that his brothers meant “**evil**” against him

- But “**God meant it for good**”

This reference to “good” and “evil” reminds us of Genesis 2

- The Garden of Eden was a perfect paradise

God had given Adam and Eve full access to everything in the Garden, with one exception

- They were not to eat from “**the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**” (Gen 2:17)

We know what happened

- Eve was deceived by Satan, thereby eating the fruit
- She then gave the fruit to Adam, who also ate the fruit

This act of disobedience plunged humanity into a state of sin

- Mankind now come to experience both “**good**” and “**evil**”

But God showed His power over sin

- He issued forth a promise that One would come from the seed of a woman who would crush the head of the serpent (3:15)

Time and time again, we have seen God's ability to overcome sin

- And we see that truth fleshed out in Joseph's life

Joseph continues in verse 20, “**you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive**”

- Joseph understood that God was working despite the actions of his brothers
- God was using these circumstances “**to preserve many people alive**”

When we look back on Joseph's life, there are situations that we may think were unnecessary

- Perhaps you have asked, “God, why did you allow that to happen in Joseph's life?”
- If you and I are tempted to ask those questions, then we can guess that Joseph probably contemplated them as well

But we are humbled when we realize how many lives were spared because of Joseph being placed in Egypt

- Those in Egypt
- Those in Canaan
- Those in other parts of the world that were not mentioned in Genesis

Joseph is not bitter

- He understands God's purpose in allowing him to go through all of these circumstances

Joseph doesn't stop there

- He tells his brothers in verse 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**”

Joseph has taken care of his family from the first time that he saw them in Egypt

- He gave them free food on multiple occasions
- He recognized them, but they didn't recognize him

Even though the brothers fear that Joseph may exact revenge, Joseph tells them, “do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones”

- There was no reason for them to fear

Joseph was not bitter

- Neither was he seeking revenge
- He had already forgiven them

The brothers struggled to accept the forgiveness from Joseph

- They feared for their lives
- Even after witnessing the goodness and grace of Joseph to them over the years

The reality is that we can view God in the same manner

- We may sometimes struggle to accept God's gracious forgiveness of our sins
- We may be tempted to think that we must do something in order to earn God's forgiveness

The truth of 1 John 1:9 must be inserted here, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”

- God is faithful and righteous to forgive us when we confess our sins to Him

Joseph could have been bitter

- He could have exacted revenge

However, Joseph understood God's purpose in taking him through the trials of his life

- He understood God's forgiveness

As one who had experienced God's forgiveness, Joseph was ready to extend that same forgiveness to others

Joseph displays two truths that will liberate us from becoming bitter

- Be hopeful of God's promises (50:1-14)
- Be thankful for God's forgiveness (50:15-21)

III. Be humbled by God's grace (50:22-26)

²² Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. ²³ And Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees.

Many years pass between the statements of verses 19-21 and verse 22

- Life has gone on for Joseph and his brothers
- These years are passed over in silence

We do know that Joseph and his brothers have remained in Egypt

- Joseph is now 110 years old
- The Egyptians held that this was the ideal lifespan⁸

⁸ Kidner, 224.

Joseph has lived 54 years after the death of his father Jacob⁹

- He lived long enough to see his grandchildren
- And perhaps his great-grandchildren

²⁴ And 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.”

Genesis 48 and 49 both ended with Jacob telling his sons that he was about to die

- Genesis 50 ends with Joseph telling his brothers that he is about to die

The words that Joseph uses toward his brothers are very encouraging, “I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you”

- What a reassuring promise this was!

Up to this point, the brothers and their families had relied heavily upon Joseph

- He represented them to Pharaoh
- He made sure that they were taken care of

But with Joseph dead, what would the future hold?

- Who would take care of their needs?

Joseph tells his brothers, “God will surely take care of you”

- In other words, “You don’t need me! God is the One who will supply your needs”

Joseph also tells his brothers that God would “bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob”

- Once again, Joseph references the promise of God regarding the land
- Joseph goes all the way back to the promise issued to Abraham

Joseph stands in a long line of those who wait for the fulfillment of the LORD’s promises

- These believers fully understood that the fulfillment of these promises may not be completed in their lifetimes

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

For the second time, Joseph tells his brothers, “God will surely take care of you”

- He promises and reassures his brothers that God would sustain and provide for them

Just like his father Jacob, Joseph doesn’t want his body to remain in Egypt forever

- He asked his brothers to “carry my bones up from here”

What is different with Joseph is that there was not a huge funeral procession from Egypt to Canaan

- This seems strange considering Joseph was second to Pharaoh

⁹ Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 149.

We are not told why Joseph was not given such a royal procession as his father had received

- Perhaps there was some political unrest that prevented this from taking place¹⁰

The author of Hebrews looks back upon Joseph's comments to his brothers, "**By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones**" (11:22)

- By faith, Joseph knew that the children of Israel would eventually return to Canaan¹¹

Joseph died at the age of 110 years old

- He was embalmed, just like his father
- He was placed in a "**coffin in Egypt**"

Genesis begins with God creating the heavens and the earth

- Literally, it was Paradise on Earth

But Genesis ends with death¹²

- This great book of beginnings ends with a coffin

The book doesn't even end in Canaan

- It ends with Egypt
- A foreign land

With Joseph dead, who would lead the people of God?

- That role would be filled by Moses
- He would be the influential leader during the book of Exodus

The book of Genesis as well as the Old Testament both end on the same note

- God's promises are yet to be fulfilled
- God's people must remain hopeful

In the Gospel of Luke, when Zacharias's ability to speak was returned to him, his first statement was, "**Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people**" (Lk 1:68)

- Notice that God had "**visited**" His people, just as Joseph had promised¹³

We could talk about a lot of themes that emerge in Genesis

- I have emphasized many of these throughout our study

God has issued forth some tremendous promises to different individuals

- But those promises await their final fulfillment in the future

This is why the great chapter of faith, Hebrews 11, includes this verse in its conclusion, "**And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised**" (Heb 11:39)

The same could be said of us as well

- We live our lives
- But we will die

¹⁰ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 304.

¹¹ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 668.

¹² Griffith-Thomas, 488.

¹³ Ross, 716.

Granted, God could return in the Rapture in our lifetimes

- That would be a glorious privilege
- We earnestly desire that in our lifetimes

But if the Lord does not return in our lifetime, we will all die

- We will pass from this Earth into eternity

But God's work continues

- His promises will be fulfilled

There are only two paths as it relates to eternity

- Heaven
- Hell

And it has nothing to do with

- How good you have been
- What family you belong to
- How much money you have given

Your eternity hinges upon whether or you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior

- Everything else is insignificant and temporal

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ to forgive you of your sins, you need to settle that today

- You are not promised life beyond this moment

Believing friends, don't become bitter over what happens in your life

- **Be hopeful of God's promises (50:1-14)**
- **Be thankful for God's forgiveness (50:15-21)**
- **Be humbled by God's grace (50:22-26)**