

Text: Genesis 49:28 – 50:14

Title: "Lessons on how to die from the death of Jacob"

Time: 10/29/09 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: It is true that we often get a sense of the predominate theme of a passage of Scripture through the author's repeated use of a word or a series of words related directly to that theme. This is the case in the passage that we have come to this morning.

Were I to sit down each week and try to decipher from the multitude of pages of this great book what page I ought to preach from on that particular week so as to address the needs of those whom I know will be worshipping here on the coming Sunday, I do not believe that I would ever pick the theme that our study of Genesis has brought us to, nor would I likely ever find myself preaching from this passage. Yet this fact speaks to my own shortcomings as a pastor, not the shortcomings of this passage.

No text of Scripture correctly understood can ever be accurately described as unprofitable for our consideration. Paul tells us "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit wrote this passage for our consideration because we need it to be perfected into the image of our dear Savior, Jesus Christ.

So what is the topic before us this week which the Lord has designed to perfect us? It is unmistakably the topic of *burial*. With this passage God wants each of us, I believe, to reflect on the fact that we are going to be buried some day,

should the Lord's return tarry. We can see that this is the theme of this passage by the way that words referring to it keep repeating ("bury": 49:29, 49:31 [3 times], 50:5 [2 times], 50:6, 50:7, 50:13, 50:14 [2 times]; "burial plot/grave": 49:30, 50:5, 50:13; "embalm": 50:2 [2 times], 50:3).

I have entitled our study of Genesis 49:28 - 50:14 this morning, "Lessons on how to die from the death of Jacob." The death of this great patriarch is one of the momentous occasions in the history of the Jewish people, and it is one of the climaxes of the book of Genesis. Lessons on how to die are, of course, some of the most important lessons we can learn while still living.

I. Die teaching others about the importance of the blessing of the Lord (49:28, 50:1-14).

Illustration: We had some strong winds around here yesterday that caused a lot of us to lose power again. Losing power brought back some memories of last year's ice-storm devastation that left tremendous wreckage in its wake. That storm taught me not to complain too much about what happened yesterday. Other than the power outage, there was really very little left behind by this wind. Our parking lot was strewn with pine cones, but not much else happened.

For better or for worse, the winds of weather always leave something behind. It may be the devastation of an ice storm, or the cooling effect of a summer breeze. It may be a scorching drought, or the renewing refreshment of driving rains.

Application: Every life leaves something behind as it blows through this needy world. We call that our legacy, and each of us will have one. How I live is going to determine the

kind of home my children are able to enjoy, which will determine the well-being of their children, and so on.

Our legacy may leave something behind that is beyond our family. I trust that you hope to leave something positive behind here at New Boston Baptist Church, which shall further the cause of Christ here after you are gone. The fact that we are going to be buried some day ought to make us reflect on the nature of what it is that we are leaving behind us. Like Jacob, we especially ought to desire to die teaching others about the importance of the blessing of the Lord. Jacob did this in two ways:

A. Jacob's words taught his children about the blessing of the Lord (49:28).

Application: Did you catch that last phrase: "Every one with the blessing that was appropriate to him"? That phrase emphasizes two things that I believe we must teach our children about the Lord's blessing:

(1) The Lord blesses us personally as individuals. Our children will never be truly blessed of the Lord until they understand the Lord's blessing is to be theirs personally, something suited especially to God's plan for their lives. They must experience God's blessing directly from their relationship with God.

As fathers, we need to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Our relationship with God ought to be something that our children can emulate and model for themselves. We want them to know that we love their mother, and they should too. In the same way, we must want them to know that we love God, and they should too.

(2) The Lord blesses us appropriately according to whether we obey. Some of the blessings of Jacob on his sons were curses rather than blessings, because that is what was appropriate to them. Where forgiveness is sought, God's grace shines through (Levi; Judah). But where the heart remains hard, what should be a blessing will actually be a curse (Rueben, Simeon).

Jacob's words taught his children about the blessing of the Lord. Ours should do the same.

B. Jacob's life taught the Egyptians about the blessing of the Lord (50:1-14).

Application: Jacob led the kind of life that caused people to focus at his death on the Lord. I have been to funerals like that already here in my short time in New Hampshire. Some of your funerals are going to be like that. Notice some things we learn about the Lord's will for a believer's funeral from this passage.

1. Expect to grieve the loss of a loved one. The grieving process for a lost loved one is precious to the Lord (note the weeping and sorrowing emphasis, vv. 1-3, 10-11). The Lord Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53), and this means that grief is not sinful.

Although Paul makes clear in 1 Thessalonians 4 that the sorrow over the death of a believer is uniquely hopeful, it is still very real sorrow. Physical death brings grief, in part, because we were not created to experience it. Although we face death with confidence, it should always be viewed as a bitter enemy. We should not become familiar with and accepting of physical death. More and more our world has

adopted a culture that glorifies death: abortion, euthanasia, suicide, etc..

2. Think about the testimony of your funeral to a dying world in need of Christ. Part of what made the burying of Jacob a significant event was the testimony the funeral had to the lost world around it (vv. 4-9).

Not all funerals are created equal. The funeral of every believer is ultimately about something more than that believer; it is about that believer's faith and the need of those remembering that believer to share his faith.

Part of the testimony of any funeral is the way the body is treated. We ought to treat the body of a deceased loved one with respect as much as possible as an expression of our faith in a bodily resurrection. Now to be sure, cremation can for various reasons be the best option when it comes to dealing respectfully with the body, and God is not going to have any trouble bodily resurrecting cremated bodies any more than buried ones, but we need to make sure that our handling of the body is never an expression of our denial of the truth of bodily resurrection. We do not use cremation to deny the resurrection.

3. Think about the needs of those you leave behind (vv. 12-14). The text spends a few verses reiterating that the fact that Jacob was gone and that his sons were beginning a phase of their lives without him. Because his sons were grown, Jacob did not have to do much to prepare them for this, other than to communicate the God-ordained blessing that was to rest on each of them as a tribe of Israel.

Some of us have dependents that need to be cared for in the event of our death. Have we considered how our death

will impact them, and have we made any preparations for their ability to go on afterward? Life insurance is an important part of this preparation. A will is an important part of this preparation as well.

And so the first lesson we learn about dying from the death of Jacob is that we should die reminding others of the blessings of the Lord.

II. Die expressing confidence about where you are going (49:29-33).

Illustration: For Thanksgiving this year we made our way down to Hopedale, MA for a wonderful time with my wife's family. It had been a while since we had been to Hopedale, so although I was pretty certain that I knew the way, I had to guess a few times and follow some good advice from my wife at the very end to get there without any wrong turns.

Application: The Bible recognizes that there is much that is shadowy and unknown for us when it comes to death. The great Shepherd's Psalm, Psalm 23, speaks of the *valley of the shadow of death*. There are tremendous uncertainties about what that experience is going to be like.

Yet in spite of this intimidating nature of the reality of death, the Bible is equally clear about the fact that we can die with confidence about where we are going. Jacob had this confidence, and I want you to see from where his confidence came.

A. Believers like Jacob face death with the resurrection hope of eternal life.

Jacob wanted to be buried in the land of Canaan, because he believed in God's promise of a resurrection that would give him that land. He spoke of dying as being gathered to his people because he understood that he had eternal life, that the afterlife is real, that he would not come to an end when he died physically. He had confidence in all of this. [Note that the text says that Jacob was gathered to his people immediately after expiring and prior to being buried with Abraham and the others, v. 33.]

The Apostle Paul shared Jacob's confidence, and when contemplating the reality of his death he said: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

B. Believers face death on the basis of their faith in Christ's work, not their own work.

Note the emphasis on "I have believed" when it comes to this confidence. Jacob's hope was that he would be gathered to the place the people of God dwelt.

"Was gathered" is passive. Eternal life was something that was going to be done for Jacob and to Jacob. It was not something that he was achieving on his own. Paul's expression is still clearer: "I know whom I have believed"; not "I know all the good things I have done" or "I know that I deserve better than God's judgment"; rather "I know whom I have believed." Eternal life is a gift of God offered to us freely through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jacob did not gather himself to his people because he had accomplished some impressive things. God gathered Jacob to his people because Jacob had trusted Him for salvation. God knew Jacob. Jacob was a part of God's people long before he was gathered to them.

Conclusion: You and I are going to be buried some day.
Shall we die teaching others about the blessing of the Lord?
Shall we die with the confidence about where we are going
through saving faith?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching