

## *Dying Well*

Genesis 49:28-50:3

November 10, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to Gen 49. Pew Bible. An elderly father passed away in the care of his daughter who contacted her brother for help with funeral expenses. She explained that she had pretty much everything else covered but needed some help to buy him a burial suit since his others no longer fit. Her brother, who claimed to be too busy to even come, sent a check to help with the cost. A few months later, he called his sister and asked why he kept getting a bill every month from men's warehouse. She said, "Well thanks for your help with dad's service, but with the little you sent, I could only afford to rent him a tux."

The last two weeks we've talked about death for a Christian. The first week, we looked at how Paul contrasted our temporary body tents with the permanent houses God is building for us. We also looked at his illustration of our physical bodies being the jars that hold the liquid of our souls and that when a Christian's jars is destroyed, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Last week, we glanced into heaven to see that it is a place of perfect peace, rest, health, and joy. We looked at whether we become angels, will we know each other, can those in heaven see us, and what about our pets? We finished by looking at what the Bible says our new bodies will be like and how Jesus is the only one who can raise you from the dead. If you missed any of this, go back and watch on our YouTube channel.

Today, we want to finish this mini-series by talking about how to die well and glorify God in our passing. Say die well. It's something none of us want to think about, but Charles Spurgeon once said, "He who does not prepare for death is more than an ordinary fool, he is a madman." He said that because I Cor 15:22 assures us that in Adam, all die. So how should we prepare for our death? For Biblical direction, please stand if you are able as we read from Genesis 49:28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him. 29 Then he gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. 31 There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. 32 The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites." 33 When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

Say Jacob. Jacob's life was like many of ours. Filled with bold faith and courage and horrible failures and sin. He did, however, like many of the people of his time, live longer than we do today for he was 147 or so years old when he died. I'm sure the

government lost money on his Social security. Interestingly, we have a more complete account of Jacob's passing than most anyone else in the Bible so let's see what we can learn from it that can help us prepare for our own death.

Number 1, he made peace with others. Say peace. We don't have time to read all the scripture, but over the years, Jacob lied to his father and stole from his brother. He had been shrewd and sly. But as God spoke to him, he grew in his faith and obedience. Those two always go hand in hand. You cannot become more faithful without become more obedient and vice versa. After returning home after 20 years, he and his brother Esau reconciled. Their father was still living and it seems Jacob made peace with him for Gen 35:27 says that he came home to his dad and that he and his brother both buried their father Isaac when he died at the age of 180.

Oh my friends, do all in your power to make peace with others, especially in your family. I know how hard it can be. I know it depends on both parties and some parties consistently refuse any attempts at peace and reconciliation, but Rom 12:18-19 commands believers, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Do everything you can on your end. Forgive even if they don't repent and apologize. Forgive even if they don't accept it. Do all in your power as much as depends on you. Thankfully, Jacob had that opportunity. Thankfully he lived long enough to make peace. Thankfully, he did! But we don't know when we may leave this earth so please keep short accounts with others. As much as it depends on you. We all know people who waited too long and now regret their refusal to make peace with their loved ones when they had the chance. Please let's learn this lesson from Jacob.

Number 2, say blessing. Jacob blessed his children and his grandchildren. In the verses leading up to the ones we read, he took his sons and blessed each of them in turn, and in the previous chapter, he blessed some of his grandchildren. As far as we know he didn't give them any tangible assets, instead he gave them something far better. He gave them encouragement, direction, and advice. As a father and a grandfather, he spoke life and God's richness and truth into their lives. And he did it intentionally.

Once again, he lived long enough to do that. He had the opportunity, and he did it. We will probably not live to 147 so take whatever opportunity you have now to bless your children and grandchildren. To speak God's truth to them. To let them know that God has good plans for them and encourage them to be true and faithful. Some do this in person; others do it in writing and some do both. Let your family know how much you love them. I hear from people sometimes who tell me they never heard their dad tell them he was proud of them or worse yet, that he loved them. "I'm sure he did, he just never said so." For God's sake, say so! Don't die and leave them wondering. And children also to your parents. Take time to talk about what really matters to you and what you hope will matter to them. Jacob's blessings carried forward many generations and

hundreds of years into the future. Your words are very powerful and your silence can be also negatively. Make peace and bless others. These are some relational preparations with spiritual implications.

Let's mention some practical preparations. Say practical. Jacob gave clear directions to his family about his burial. I know we don't want to think about it. I know we don't want to ever face it, but unless Jesus comes first, and He very well might with all that is going on in the world, but if He doesn't, we're all going to die. And one of the best gifts you can give your family, after peace and blessing, is direction regarding what to do. Jacob told them where he was to be buried even though it was 250 miles away. He already had a spot picked out and his family honored his request when the time came. We're not always able to do that, but if at all possible, we should seek to honor our loved ones' requests. And we need to make requests and make arrangements so it will be easier for them to fulfill them. Burial practices vary from Jacob's day to ours and the Bible doesn't actually prescribe anything in particular regarding burial although the Jews and early Christians both buried the body in the ground or in a cave.

It says in vs 33 that Jacob was gathered to his people indicating his people still lived in paradise that we mentioned last week while his body would be gathered with the bodies his relatives in that cave of Machpelah. Your body may or may not be buried in the same place as your parents or other relatives but if they know Jesus and you know Jesus, you will be gathered to them no matter where your bodies are!

After Jacob died, chapter 50 tells us his sons did for their father what he directed. They mourned for him, in this case 70 days, and then took his body north for the graveside. His tomb along with this dad's and grandad's are still there in Hebron, Israel today. Later, Joseph told his family to carry his bones with them whenever they left Egypt to go to the land God promised his great grandfather, Abraham. He too gave clear directions. Although they didn't do it when he died at 110 years, they did it 400 years later when God freed the Israelites in the Exodus as he asked. They still knew where his bones were, they carried them with them 40 years in the desert (how would you like to be a pallbearer for 40 years?) and in Josh 24:32 we read, "...Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants." If you can, make your own burial arrangements.

But also describe the type of memorial or funeral you'd like. It's a time for your family to grieve, mourn and heal. It is also the last chance you will have to speak to your family and friends, what do you want to say to them? It makes it so much easier on whoever officiates if the person has left directions as to what they want said and done. Songs to be sung. Congregational hymns give people a chance to participate and to sing their grief and their hope so consider including one or more of those. Also,

Scriptures that have been important in your life and why. Any ministries or churches that you have supported and been a part of that you'd like folks to consider donating to.

If there are particular people that you would like to be involved either speaking or singing. This will be your last chance to give a testimony for Jesus. My mother was very clear and others have been as well, that they want an invitation to be saved at their funeral. I do that in every service I officiate anyway, but not all do. Several years ago I drew up a form that I've put in the church newsletter from time to time entitled, Glorifying God in our deaths. It is a one-page sheet of wishes you can leave with your loved ones or with me or both so that we can know what you want. And if I leave first, it's still there for whoever will do it. Leave it somewhere where they can find it and tell them where it is. Maybe in your Bible.

Take care of as much of the expense in advance as possible. I know it's not always possible, but if you are able, to pay for the burial plot, the funeral expenses, etc. Either with life insurance or prepayments or whatever. I don't know if it's still true or not, but a funeral used to be third biggest expense in a person's life. This can lift an enormous burden from your loved ones who will be dealing with enough already. Lift this burden from them if at all possible so they don't have to rent you a suit to be buried in.

It's also important to prepare and provide whatever legal documents are needed. A well-written up-to-date will insures that your wishes will be followed. If we are to glorify God with our property and wealth in our lives, should we not also do so in our deaths? Leave clear directions for your loved ones for if not, the state will determine who gets what, and that can get very ugly and create bitterness that is never resolved. It doesn't have to be. Some people write their own obituary to make sure this last testimony includes what they want included. Of course advanced medical directives and power of attorney, etc should all be prepared because it's too late when a person is in a coma. Again, it can lift the burden from loved ones who sometimes carry guilt to their graves wondering if they did the right thing for their spouses or their parents. And make sure your loved ones know where those papers are. It doesn't do a bit a good to have them if they can't find them when they are needed.

Speaking of living wills, when is it right to die? Certainly not to do anything to hasten it like assisted suicide, even to ease bitter suffering, but also you can specify no heroic measures if you're ready to go. Many medical advancements today allow us to extend life but often at the expense of quality and at enormous financial expense. For non-Christians, death should be avoided at all costs until the person is saved. But for a Christian, it is an escape from earthly suffering and an instant entrance into glory. Don't hasten it, but don't prolong it unnecessarily.

In vs 33, it says, “When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.” It’s obviously not always that peaceful and it might not have been for Jacob either. This could be a summary. Nevertheless, let us be aware that even our death, and especially our dying can be a powerful witness for Jesus. We don’t all get the same opportunities, but you’ll remember how my mom witnessed to the folks in the ambulance, the doctors and nurses in the ER, as well as to her family as she was preparing to go home. One of the most powerful aspects of her witness was her peace facing what she knew was imminent. She wasn’t hysterical, fearful, or distraught. She was calm and even joyful as she stared death square in the face knowing that her Savior had defeated it. Knowing that she would soon be in His very presence. Knowing that even though her badly scorched clay pot was very broken, the liquid of her soul within was very, very healthy.

I was talking last week with the state leader of Weekday Religious Education in Virginia and his father is now near death. And Jeff told me, Dad has taught me how to live like Jesus and now he’s teaching me how to die like Jesus. His dad has been witnessing to the Hospice nurses and to family and visitors. They have to listen. What choice do they have? He knows that he will soon go the way of all the earth, as the Bible describes death in another passage, but his testimony and his great peace, is what it means to die well.

And if you know someone else that is going to die, which by the way, includes everyone, ask them if they are ready. You can discuss the physical arrangements but by all means, make sure they’re ready spiritually! We don’t get a do over on this. It’s appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment. I was preparing for a funeral once and the family was noticeably quiet about any kind of faith of their loved one. I contacted the person’s best friend, who had talked to them every day. And that person, who was a Christian, said to me, “I don’t know for sure what they thought about Jesus. We never talked about it.” Oh my friends, talk about it! Death is coming, Hell is brewing, can you bear to let them go? If you are a true friend, a true loved one, talk about it! If they reject it, pray and fast for them. But at least talk about it! Do it now! Today! This week! Don’t wait until they’re in a coma, or worse yet in a casket. They may hear and they may be able to pray and even receive Jesus in a coma, but they may not. Don’t let them die and you go on wondering. Ask them how things are between them and God. Have you ever given your heart to Jesus? Have you ever been saved? Oh please, dear friend, too much is at stake to not ask. Eternity is at stake.

And so, because all of us are going to die, I ask you, have you been saved? Have you given your heart to Jesus? Have you made the most important preparations of all? Part of this certainly involves forgiving others and asking them to forgive you if you haven’t. But it also involves, confessing and turning from any known sin. If you are living in a sexual relationship outside of marriage, dishonest business practices, idolatry, or anything else, repent and turn from it while yet you may! Those are very dangerous

conditions to die under. Keep short accounts with God for we never know when we may go. I read an obituary the other day that said the man lived life on his own terms. Ok, but neither he nor any of us will live eternity on our own terms. I did it my way is a very sad, self-centered, evil statement of rebellion against a loving God who gave His only Son. And if we die in that sin, we will not enjoy the benefits of heaven we discussed last week. Make your calling and election sure today and live your life on Jesus' terms and be prepared when the time comes to die well.