



The End of the Beginning

God Meant It for Good, Part 6

Genesis 48-50

David Sunday

July 9, 2017

It's a pleasure to have Tom and his wife in our service this morning. He's recently moved here from California, but before that they lived in Iran. They are an Assyrian family who follow Jesus. He's asked for prayer for Pastor V____ and three others who are right now in jail in Iran. Let's express the brotherhood of believers as we lift our hearts in unison to the Lord.

God, we pray for deliverance. We pray for Your light to shine in a dark place. We pray that the glory of Christ would be known all over Iran, all over Iraq. Lord Jesus, King of the nations, let Your glory cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Let Your name be magnified, and let your people who trust in Your name be preserved in the midst of great tribulation with hope and joy in the gospel. For Pastor V_____ and his brothers in prison, we pray that they would have the experience of Paul and Silas, singing praise and thanksgiving to You even in the midst of their capture. Bless their families and their churches with Your peace that passes all understanding. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Turn in your Bible to Genesis 48. We've come to the end of this book and we're going to look at three chapters today. As we come to the last section of this first book of the Bible, I have in mind Winston Churchill's words in the middle of World War II, "Now is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." We're at the end of the beginning of the Bible.

But this same thing could be said about the death of every believer. The death of a believer is not the end. It's not even the beginning of the end. It's just the end of the beginning of life everlasting in God's presence. Isn't this a wonderful thing to know that death is just the end of the beginning for a believer in Jesus? And that's what we're going to focus on today. This section of Genesis is one of the longest death-bed scenes in the whole Bible. We see two believers die: Jacob and Joseph. You might think, "Well, that's a lovely topic for a warm July day." But in reality, there's great encouragement in this passage for us, because death is not the end for Jacob and Joseph. It's not even the beginning of the end. It's just the end of the beginning of their lives.

I was tempted to title this sermon, “The Believer’s Bucket List.” But I thought it might be a little too snarky to name this sermon after a movie I don’t recommend you see. But that movie was so popular that the term “bucket list” has become well-known in our culture. It’s a list of all the things you hope to do and experience before you kick the proverbial bucket—before you die. And there’s nothing wrong per se with making a list like that.

For instance, I would love to spend four consecutive seasons in Door County before I die, and my kids think that is so boring. “We wouldn’t even want to come visit you, if you did that.” But for me, that’s just idyllic. That’s serenity—the best it can get here on earth—to be able to be in Door County for four seasons. It’s probably never going to happen, because I have work to do—that I love doing, by the way—and life to live. But if I could write a bucket list, that might be on it. Or ride on a hot air balloon. Wouldn’t that be cool? Or maybe some of you would say something like throw the first pitch in a major league baseball game. That would not be on my bucket list, but for some of you, that might be what you pick.

There’s nothing wrong per se with thinking about things we’d like to do and experience before we die. But the problem with the mentality in our culture is that it’s usually motivated by a sense of trying to stop the clock of our own mortality, trying to squeeze out of this life everything we can possibly get out of it—as if this life is all there is to live. If you believe the Bible, you know this life isn’t all there is. This life is just the beginning. There is much more—infinitely more—for us in Christ and in the life to come, much more than we can squeeze out of this life in this present age.

So I’m not suggesting that you write a bucket list. But if you did, I am saying that Genesis 48-50 can point you to the few things that should be on the list of every believer—things we want to experience or do before we die. Death concentrates the mind. If you knew you were going to die before the end of July, what would you want to make sure you had resolved before you drew your final breath? If you knew you were going to die before the end of this month, what would you want to tell your loved ones about God? What would you want to settle in your relationships? What would be most important to you, as you are dying? Here’s a portion of Scripture that can focus our minds on the few essential things that, if you were to write a bucket list, should be on every believer’s list.

1. Make sure you’ve cast a vision of God’s faithfulness for future generations.

That’s what’s happening in Genesis 48 and 49. Jacob, also known as Israel, is ill. He’s lying on his bed and Joseph hears that his father is dying. So Joseph brings his sons, Manasseh the firstborn and Ephraim, to be blessed by their grandfather. Jacob summons all his strength to

sit up in his bed (verse two) and the first thing he does is remind Joseph and his sons of God's promise to him(48:3-4) to make him fruitful, to multiply him, to make him a company of peoples, and to give him a land and an offspring. It's God's covenant promise of a seed and offspring and land where God will show forth His faithfulness from generation to generation. He says, "I'm going to give you this as an everlasting possession" (48:4).

So Jacob reminds Joseph and his sons of God's covenant faithfulness, then he does something amazing. He adopts Joseph's two sons—Manasseh and Ephraim—as his own. Jacob takes them into his family as if they are his own sons. This is really significant because these two sons were born, not in the Promised Land, but in the foreign country of Egypt. Also, they were born to an Egyptian mother. Yet they are included in the covenant promises of God, showing that His promises are for all the nations. His plan encompasses all peoples.

Jacob adopts them as his own sons so that Joseph—who is not his firstborn son, but who was the firstborn of his wife Rachel—will be the one who receives the rights of the firstborn son. Jacob wants Joseph to get a double portion of the blessing and the inheritance. Joseph is not going to get just one-twelfth of the land, as will the other tribes; he will get one-sixth of the land. He's going to get a double portion of the blessing.

So we see Jacob and Joseph talking together, and Joseph introducing his sons to his father. In verse 11, Jacob says to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face, and now I've seen your offspring." In verse 15, Jacob testifies to them of God's shepherding care over him all his life long to this day and how God has redeemed him from evil. He's saying to him, "My heart is filled with thankfulness to Him Who has walked beside me all the days of my life. He's flooded my weaknesses with strength. He's caused fears to fly. I've seen Him take me in the midst of evil situations and redeem the evil for my good. And in the name of this God I bless you my son, and I bless your boys."

Then Jacob does something that Joseph does not like. Jacob is old and his vision is deeply impaired. So Joseph brings his two boys and sets it up so that the older one will get the first blessing. Who's the older one? Manasseh. Joseph puts him forward, but Jacob crosses his arms and blesses Ephraim, the younger, before Manasseh. Joseph is very displeased. "No, Dad. You're doing it wrong. You have to bless the older first." Jacob says, "Oh, no, my son. I know. I know. Both the boys will be blessed by God." Even though his physical vision is limited, his spiritual vision is crystal clear. He understands that God is sovereign in the way He dispenses His blessing. God is sovereign in the way He shows His grace to people.

God is the One Who determines how He will bless. We want to convey to future generations: the sovereignty of God in the way He shows His grace. We want to convey to future

generations that God is not gracious to us because of our birth order. God is not gracious to us because of the family into which we were born. He's not gracious to us because of how smart we are or how powerful we are or how much money we have. He's not gracious to us because of anything that's in us. God is gracious to us, though we don't deserve it, though we have not earned it. God is gracious because God is gracious. He's sovereign in the way He shows that grace in people's lives.

I was reading about a book that's been written about the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, which is coming up in October. We're planning to focus on that some in our services. The author of the book, Michael Reeves, said, "This is how you could summarize the message of the Reformation: Failing, broken people are not loved because they are attractive. They are attractive because they are loved." I thought this was just brilliant. That's the message of the gospel. Failing, broken people—which is each one of us—are not loved because we are attractive. We become attractive because we are loved. That's God's grace. That's what God's grace does. It takes failing, broken people and lavishes love on them. God is sovereign in how He does that; it's not because of anything in us. This is a message we want to pass on to future generations.

Do you remember the memorial service of Ross Stern this past September? Do you remember how he chose the songs for his service, how he wrote out a description of why he chose each of those songs—the testimony he wanted to give? Do you remember one of the first songs we sang? Ross wanted to make sure this was what came out at the very beginning. It was the song, "Not In Me." Ross said, "This is my testimony."

No list of sins I have not done, no list of virtues I pursue,
No list of those I am not like can earn myself a place with You.
O God, be merciful to me! I am a sinner through and through.
My only hope of righteousness is not in me, but only You.

(From "Not In Me," by Eric Schumacher & David L. Ward)

That's the legacy Ross wanted to leave for us. That's the truth he wanted passed on to future generations. "It's not in me. God's blessing did not come because of anything in me. The lines did not fall for me in pleasant places and I did not have a beautiful inheritance because of anything in me. It's all in Christ. That's my hope."

And that's something we need to pass on, isn't it? It's something our children and grandchildren need to hear, believe and understand. God does not love people because they're attractive. People become attractive because they're loved by God. That's grace.

Jacob wants all of his sons to understand this grace. So in Genesis 49, immediately after blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, he calls all of them together. He says to them in verse one, *“Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.”* We need to understand that Jacob is speaking as a prophet in chapter 49. He wants to cast their vision forward into the future. He wants them to know and believe that God has a gracious plan, and that God is faithfully working out His plan. He is faithfully going to fulfill all His promises and is going to include each of the sons of Israel in that gracious plan. He wants them to understand how great is His faithfulness from generation to generation.

So Jacob speaks as a prophet and does not tickle his sons’ ears. He doesn’t tell them what they want to hear—he tells them what they need to hear. One of the things they need to hear is that God’s gracious plans include discipline. It includes earthly consequences for our sins, because God’s faithfulness, sovereignty and grace do not excuse us from living however we please. He is a faithful God and when He lays hold of us by His grace, He wants that grace to produce faithfulness in our lives. That’s one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Jacob begins with three sons who should have been lined up to be at the head of the blessing—Reuben, Simeon and Levi—and he has some hard words for these guys. There are going to be some earthly consequences for their sins. Look at Reuben in Genesis 49:3-4: *“Reuben, you are my firstborn. You are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.”* In other words, “You should be the one who gets preeminent blessing, if we go by nature, if we go by birth order here. But there’s a problem, Reuben. You are unstable as water, and you shall not have preeminence. Remember how I was silent many years ago, when you committed incest with one of my wives? Well, I have not forgotten that. And there are consequences for that kind of behavior.” *“You went up to your father’s bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!”* “So you’re not going to have the preeminence, Reuben.”

In Genesis 49:5-7, Jacob says, “Simeon and Levi, you are brothers and partners in crime. Weapons of violence are your swords. Remember when your sister Dinah was raped? Do you remember when vengeance got hold of your hearts and unbridled rage took hold of you? Do you remember what you did to the Shechemites, how you cast off all restraint and ravaged that whole people?” Look at Jacob’s statement in 49:6-7:

*Let my soul come not into their council;
O my glory, be not joined to their company.
For in their anger they killed men,
and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen.
Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,*

*and their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
and scatter them in Israel.*

In other words, “There are going to be some earthly consequences for the sins you’ve committed. Nevertheless, you’re going to be blessed, but there are going to be consequences.” We need to pass that on to future generations, don’t we? We need to convey the truth of God’s sovereign grace, and at the same time we need to convey the truth that that grace is meant to lead us to holy lives. God’s faithfulness to us should produce faithfulness from us. We need to teach our children not just how to be justified by grace through faith in Christ alone, but how God wants to sanctify us by His Spirit. We need to teach disciples, Jesus said, to obey all that He has commanded us, right? That’s part of what we want to pass on to future generations: obedience to Christ’s commandments.

But praise be to God, Jacob also makes clear that our sin—of which all of us are guilty—when we repent of it, does not disqualify us from being used by God to forward His plan of grace. Isn’t that good news? We see that in the next person, Judah, in verse eight. What stands out in the blessing of Jacob on Judah is that this is one of his sons who has also sinned in some pretty grotesque ways. Prostitution with his daughter-in-law, and then wanting to burn her, and then realizing, “I’m the guilty one.”

Yet somehow in the grace of God Judah has experienced repentance and transformation. We saw him as a new man in the Joseph narrative: how he stood up for his brother, how he was willing to stand in his place and take the punishment or serve the sentence that Joseph wanted to give to his brother. We saw how Judah pleaded for his brother’s heart and showed love to his brother. There was a transformation taking place in Judah, and even though he sinned greatly, he’s going to have a place of preeminence amongst the 12 tribes of Israel.

Genesis 49:8-9: “*Judah, your brothers shall praise you.*” (Judah means praise.) “*Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?*” “There’s going to be a dominance to you, Judah. Your enemies are going to tremble before you.” And then a verse that we who follow Christ the Messiah recognize was pointing forward to Him long, long before His birth in Bethlehem. Verse ten, “*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*”

In other words, “Judah, from you is going to come a King before whom all the peoples of the earth will bow. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, King of all the nations.” Verse 11—His Kingdom is going to be characterized by prosperity and fruitfulness. *“Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine....”* Remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the colt (Matthew 21:1-11). Back to Genesis 49:11: *“He has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes,”* bringing up all kinds of prophetic images. *“He has trampled out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored”* (from Battle Hymn of the Republic). He’s the Judge. He’s the Ruler. He’s the King. And He’s the One Who turns the water into wine, in His first miracle at the wedding of Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11). Genesis 49:12: *“His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.”* I don’t know what that really means, but I know Who it’s talking about—Jesus, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He came from a brother who failed miserably. But Judah’s sin did not disqualify him from being used in the furthering of God’s purposes.

Don’t you want to tell your kids about this kind of God? Don’t you want to pass on a legacy of knowing this God, seeing the unfolding of His works in Scripture, so that they can be confident in God’s grace and faithfulness, His fulfillment of His promises in a King Whose reign shall never end?

If we keep on going, we’ll see all the other sons receive a blessing. I want to skip down to Joseph in verse 22. I love what he says about Joseph. Joseph is going to be fruitful, even in the midst of his afflictions. Joseph has suffered greatly. But look at what Jacob says, beginning in verse 22. Think of his brothers and what they did to him.

²²*“Joseph is a fruitful bough,
a fruitful bough by a spring;
his branches run over the wall.
²³The archers bitterly attacked him,
shot at him, and harassed him severely,
Yet his bow remained unmoved;
his arms were made agile
by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),
by the God of your father who will help you,
by the Almighty who will bless you
with blessings of heaven above,
blessings of the deep that crouches beneath,
blessings of the breasts and of the womb.
The blessings of your father
are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents,
up to the bounties of the everlasting hills.
May they be on the head of Joseph,*

and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.

“You’ve suffered greatly, Joseph, but God’s going to make you fruitful with abundant blessing.” When I read those words, I’m reminded of a quote from Charles Spurgeon that was given to Kate and me when we first discovered her cancer. It has stood on a plaque in our house ever since as a source of great comfort to us. Spurgeon said:

Believe that the deepest afflictions are always neighbors to the highest joys.
The greatest possible privileges lie close to the darkest trials.
The more bitter your sorrow, the louder your song in the end.

Thank God that He makes our sufferings fruitful when we trust in Him. He did that in Joseph’s life. I want my children to know that God.

Then there’s Benjamin, Joseph’s younger brother from Rachel. Look at verse 27: *“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil.”* Again, we might scratch our heads at this seemingly cryptic phrase. What does that really mean? Who do you know in the New Testament who came from the tribe of Benjamin? He gives his pedigree in Philippians 3:5—the Apostle Paul, of the tribe of Benjamin. When Martin Luther looked at Genesis 49:27, he remarked: “Paul first devoured the holy Stephen like a wolf.” That’s what Paul was like in the beginning. He was a ravenous wolf. But he spent the rest of his days sharing the gospel with the whole world. He divided the spoil, and all the nations are blessed because of his sharing of the gospel.

So these are the blessings of Jacob, the prophecies of Jacob upon his family. Even though some of them had to hear harsh words, warnings, disciplines and chastisements, all of them were blessed. Notice verse 28: *“All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him.”*

Friends, the same is true for us in Jesus Christ. We may need chastisement. We may need warnings. We may need earthly, temporal discipline for our sins and failures. But this is true if you belong to Jesus: “You have been born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, kept in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:3-5). And nothing in all creation, including your own sin or failure, can separate you from the inheritance you will receive in Christ. That’s the triumph of His grace, and that’s what we want to pass on to our children.

That’s just what Jacob is doing in these chapters. Once he’s done, he’s ready to die. Look at what he says in Genesis 49:29-31:

Then he commanded them 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 at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah."

Jacob told his sons, "That's where I want to be buried too—in that cave, with my forefathers—because I want to show that I'm trusting in God's faithfulness to His promises to give His people a land for an everlasting possession." Verse 33 concludes, "*When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.*" He left a legacy, he spoke of God's faithfulness to future generations, and then he died.

Don't you want that to be on your bucket list? "I will proclaim Your might to future generations." Isn't that the prayer of your life? We read in Psalm 71:18, "*So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.*" This is what a believer wants before we die. We're not thinking just of ourselves. We want to declare God's faithfulness to the next generation. We want to leave a legacy of trust in Him. So add this to your list of priorities you must focus on before you come to die: to cast a vision of God's faithfulness to future generations.

Now look with me at Genesis 50. Just scan verses one through 14 to see what's happening here. What do you see? You see weeping, because Jacob is dead. You see embalming of his body. For 40 days the physicians of Egypt embalmed him. And you see the Egyptians weeping for him for 70 days. And then at the end of those 70 days, verse four, Joseph speaks to Pharaoh about his dad's burial wishes in the land of Canaan, and Pharaoh says, "I am going to send an entourage fit for a king." Jacob's body is taken by Joseph and his sons—along with all the mighty men of Egypt and their horses and chariots. It's a magnificent funeral procession from Egypt all the way up into Canaan, to the burial place of Jacob, where he is laid to rest.

We'll come back to the significance of that in a few moments. But what I want to focus on is what happens after Joseph and his brothers get back home to Egypt—their home away from home. Verse 14, "*After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.*" Now read with me verses 15 through 17, and pay careful attention to what's going on in the hearts of Joseph's brothers:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil

that we did to him.” So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died, ‘Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.’

I doubt that Jacob really did that. I think they’re making this up. I think if Jacob wanted to say that to Joseph, he would have said it when he was alive. I think Jacob believed 17 years ago Joseph forgave his brothers—which he did. But they’re afraid. They’re thinking, “Now that Dad’s dead, Joseph is going to get back at us. All that forgiveness that Joseph has shown us these 17 years—all the love and kindness that he’s done for us in Goshen in Egypt—it was all just a show for our dad. Joseph doesn’t really love us. Joseph doesn’t really forgive us. Now he’s going to get us.” That’s what they’re thinking, because they have not really understood and embraced God’s message of forgiveness.

They know the guilt and evil of their sin. They call it what it is—evil. It’s transgression. It’s sin. “What we did to you, Joseph, was horrible”—and that’s true. But they’ve lost sight of their forgiveness. They’re fawning like slaves instead of rejoicing like brothers who’ve been reconciled, who’ve been forgiven. That brings me to number two on your bucket list. This is for every one of us.

2. Make sure you know your sins are forgiven and that nothing can possibly separate you from God’s love in Christ.

I can’t think of anything more important than that—for each of us. Before you come to die—whether you are a Christian or not yet a Christian—make sure you know your sins are forgiven. And there’s only one way to know: trust in what Jesus did on the cross. He died for sins once for all. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree so that we could die to our sins and live to righteousness. By His wounds on that cross we are healed from the guilt and shame of our transgressions. Make sure you know you’ve been forgiven and that God loves you with a love that will not let you go. Don’t die without settling that once and for all. Don’t die without knowing that your sins are forgiven. Because you, like Joseph’s brothers, have done evil. You have transgressed God’s law. You have sinned. I have sinned. I would tremble to die without knowing that my sins are forgiven.

Even if you are a believer in Jesus, we often struggle the same way Joseph’s brothers struggle here. We know that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, but we tend to take ten looks at our sin for every one little glance we take at Jesus. We become more aware of our failures and sins than we do of the glory of His grace and the freeness of His forgiveness. We say we believe

that Jesus died to forgive us for our sins, but then when our car doesn't start in the morning, we say, "God, did You stop loving me?" When we don't get the promotion we were looking for or the job we applied for, we say, "God, You must hate me." When something's going wrong in our family and our wife is sick, we start to think, "God, are You against me?" And when we fail and when we sin again and again and stumble and fall and hate our sins, we start to think, "God must hate me. God must be against me."

Even after we've walked with the Lord for 17 years, 30 years, 40 years, and experienced grace upon grace, kindness upon kindness, there lurks in the back of our minds this fear, "What if I'm not really forgiven? What if He doesn't really love me?" Puritan John Owen says, "The greatest grief, the greatest sorrow and burden, you can lay on the Father in heaven, the greatest unkindness you can do to God, is not to believe that He loves you." It breaks the heart of God. Because God says, "I did not spare My only Son. I gave Him up for you all. Won't I also freely give you all things? Will you not believe that you are loved and nothing in all creation can separate you from My love in Christ?" Friends, you can know that your sins are forgiven. You can know that you are loved by God. God wants you to know this.

I've heard this illustration that works well here: You're at your wedding. You're a groom. Your bride is in the back there, and they open the door. But instead of looking for you, you see her eyes drop to the ground. She very sheepishly makes her way up that aisle. When she gets near you, instead of looking to you, she's trembling and afraid. Then she falls on the ground and she cries out, "I will be your slave, if you'll just let me into your house." How many of you want a wedding day like that? How many of you would be happy to have a wife who doesn't believe you love her?

What you want and what God wants is a bride who is radiant, who holds her head high, who fixes her gaze on the Bridegroom Who made her beautiful through His love. She loves to be loved by Him and rejoices in knowing, "I am His and He is mine." That's what God wants. And God can give that to you. If you trust in Jesus and what He's done, the Holy Spirit can assure you of God's love for you deep within your being. If you don't have that assurance, ask Him for that. Put that on your bucket list. Make that a priority. Don't die without knowing this.

3. Make sure you have forgiven others as God in Christ has forgiven you.

I love Joseph's response in verse 19: "*But Joseph said to them, 'Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?'*" Because you see, when you refuse to forgive, you're saying you are in the place of God. You're saying, "Vengeance is not Yours, Lord. It's mine. It's my place to punish

people for the evil they've done to me." Joseph says, "Oh, no. Those are choppy waters for me to swim in. I'm not going there. I'm not in the place of God."

Then Joseph says in verse 20, "*As for you, you meant evil against me.*" He doesn't whitewash what they've done. He calls evil what it is. He doesn't brush it under his rug. He doesn't say, "Oh, yeah, I know you were jealous. I know you betrayed me. I know you wanted to murder me. But then you just sold me into slavery, so it's no big deal. It's okay." He doesn't say that. He looks evil straight in the eye and says, "I hate it. I hate what you did. It was evil." But, "*God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*" "God's good and gracious plan cannot be thwarted by your evil scheming. God can use your sin to bring about your salvation and to bring about the salvation of many."

Isn't that what the cross is all about? The greatest evil ever done is that the Lord Who came to give us life is held up to the tree and nailed there, and His life is snuffed out by those He came to save. But in that greatest evil, evil itself comes unglued. Evil itself is being destroyed, because that King of Glory, that "Light of the World by darkness slain, will soon burst forth in glorious day." And up from the grave He will rise again, triumphing over death and hell and sin, bringing salvation to all the nations who trust in Him.

Whenever we refuse to forgive, we're saying, "God, what You did to Christ on the cross is not enough to satisfy me. It might satisfy You, God, but it won't satisfy me."

Or in the case of refusing to forgive an unbeliever, you're saying, "Hell is not enough, God. Your wrath in hell is not enough. I've got to add some of my own." It's the height of arrogance. It's like saying to a person, "My sins are forgivable, but yours aren't." Voddie Baucham says, "We act as though the sins of others are too significant to forgive, while simultaneously believing that ours aren't significant enough to matter."

So when I come to die, I don't want any bitterness or unforgiveness to be poisoning my heart. I can't fix every relationship. I can't be reconciled with everyone, if they will not repent. I know that. But I don't want to be harboring any bitterness in my heart. I don't want that poison in me. What I can do is I cannot be overcome by evil, but I can overcome evil with good. I can love my enemy. I can bless those who curse. I can offer a cup of cold water in His name to anyone who does poorly to me. I can take on the attitude of kindness that our Father shows to His enemies as long as He gives them breath. And in doing so, I am freed from this noxious, toxic poison of unforgiveness.

I love Joseph's words: "*Do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.*" *Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*" He's not a passive-aggressive guy at all. He freely

embraces his brothers. Make sure, when you come to die, you have forgiven others as God in Christ has forgiven you.

4. Make sure you die in the hope of resurrection.

We've come to the end of this story, but let's just look at Genesis 50:22-36:

So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." So Joseph died, being 110 years old.

Now, instead of carrying him back to Canaan right away like they did with Jacob, *"They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt."* That's how Genesis ends. We've gone from the Garden of Eden to a coffin in Egypt. Yet that coffin is a sign of hope. They're going to carry that coffin through all their wilderness wanderings. They're going to carry that coffin until the end of the days of Joshua. And we read in Joshua 24 that they take that coffin and bury it in the land on the mountain slope that Jacob gave to Joseph back in Genesis 48. That coffin is a sign of hope that they would return to the land of promise.

What's our sign of hope? An empty tomb. A Savior risen from the dead, Who says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God—believe also in Me. In My Father's house there are many rooms, and I've gone to prepare a place for you. And I will come to you. I will come again. I will take you to be with Me, that where I am, you also may be" (John 14:1-3).

When I lie dying, I want to be listening for His voice. When I lay there on my dying bed, I want to be waiting eagerly for His visit. I may be physically incapacitated, but I want to be spiritually standing on pins and needles, waiting for His knock, waiting to hear His voice. Because "I will rise when He calls my name. No more sorrow, no more pain." This is the hope of the resurrection. This is the hope that can belong to every believer.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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