

## Preparing for the future by dealing with the past Genesis 49:29-50:26

Here is Bill Gates,  
Founder of the Microsoft company  
And, until recently, the world's richest man.

Back in 1999, Bill Gates wrote a book called *Business @ the Speed of Thought*,  
and in that book he predicted all sorts of things that have come to pass.

*People will carry around small devices that allow them to constantly stay in touch and do electronic business from wherever they are.* And so here is what he's talking about – a smart phone that does exactly what Gates describes.

*Automated price comparison services will be developed, Gates wrote, allowing people to see prices across multiple websites, making it effortless to find the cheapest product for all industries.* You now that irritating ad on TV with the meerkat saying "simples"? Well, it's an add for a website that does exactly what Gates describes. It compares car insurance and health insurance so you can get the best premium.

*Gates continued Devices will have smart advertising. They will know your purchasing trends, and will display advertisements that are tailored toward your preferences.* If you're spending time on the internet, you'll notice that the ads that pop up in various places will reflect something of your viewing history. Jas and I bought a car recently which involved a lot of research on the internet, and then I noticed ads for the various models we were interested in would pop up even if we were using the internet for something totally unrelated.

We live in a very different world, and Bill Gates saw it before anyone else.

If you're a follower of the God of the Bible,  
then here's what you and Bill Gates have in common.  
You both know something about the future.  
Bill Gates doesn't know everything, but he does know some things.  
And God's people don't know everything,  
but we do know *the most important thing* about what's coming up:  
The fact that when Jesus returns he'll bring with him an eternal kingdom!

God's people have always been blessed with some kind of knowledge of the future, including two characters that we've been getting to know over the last few weeks.  
This week we come to the end of our journey with Jacob and his sons,  
We started with Jacob's birth, and now we come to his death,  
and not long after his passing, we read of the death of his son Joseph.

And as these two men prepare to die,  
 they are very aware that the larger story is not going to end with them.  
 They know there's a future that is relevant for them,  
 and so they make plans accordingly.  
 Are we thinking in the same way?  
 Are deeply do we consider the future that *we know* is waiting for us?  
 Let's have a look and see if we recognize their thinking.

First of all the death of Jacob. Ch 49:29.

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,<sup>30</sup> the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite.<sup>31</sup> There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah.

Why is Jacob so insistent upon being buried in the ancestral burial ground?

He doesn't say it explicitly, but we know Jacob is very mindful of the promises that were made to both him and his ancestors. Back in Ch 28, God had said to Jacob in a dream  
 I will give you the land on which you are lying.  
 Jacob knows that even though he is about to die in Egypt, and even though his family was settled and growing in Egypt, there was going to be a day when, somehow, the whole show was going to move north and the family would be settled in the land that God had promised.

Jacob doesn't want to be left behind!

He's planning ahead of time  
 to ensure that his resting place is among his own people.

And so with these instructions he dies, v 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.

What follows next in Ch 50 is an account of the mourning period and burial of Jacob.

What's really interesting in this section is how Egyptian the whole process is. Anyone who's done any high school history would know that the Egyptians were big on embalming and preparing the dead for burial. And we see this here. V2: Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel. So the physicians embalmed him,<sup>3</sup> taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.

So Jacob is receiving a very Egyptian burial, and not only that, but it's also an upper class Egyptian burial, akin to a state funeral.

V7: So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him—the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt—<sup>8</sup> besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household. Only their

children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. <sup>9</sup> Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company.

In fact the process was so Egyptian that the locals in Canaan were left in no doubt as to the cultural origins of this ceremony, V11 When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning. That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim. Which, according to the footnote we have in our Bibles there means "mourning of the Egyptians".

What does this description teach us?

It tells us that Jacob had been accepted by the Egyptians as one of their own. Jacob could have requested any number of arrangements for his burial, and as a well-respected member of Egyptian society

he had some good options!

But the trappings of Egypt didn't hold that much sway for Jacob.

He knew where he belonged, and he knew what the future would bring about.

He belonged to God's people, the family of Abraham,

and he knew that this family would be established in Canaan, not Egypt.

We read at the very end of Chapter 50 that Joseph had come to the same conclusion

V 24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." <sup>25</sup> And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." <sup>26</sup> So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Joseph's final words couldn't be any clearer:

the desire to be buried in Canaan is a desire based a promise made by God, a promise about what will happen in the future. God will surely come to your aid, Joseph says, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.

And as we turn over the page we start on the book of Exodus,

which tells the story of how this promise came true many generations later.

As the descendants of Abraham are led out of Egypt by Moses

who do they take with them? They take Joseph.

Joseph by that stage is just a collection of bones,

but Moses takes him nonetheless.

So here's the lesson that both Jacob and Joseph leave us with:

We must live as people who have mind the future that's promised by God.

What is the future that's promised us as God's people today?

Jesus puts it like this in John 14: My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Like the promise to Abraham and his descendants,  
the promise to us is of a place to live.



“Your father left these instructions before he died: <sup>17</sup> “This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.

It’s a fairly comprehensive apology.

They describe their actions as *sins*, as “wrongs they have committed”.

They recognise the victim; “we treated you badly” is what they are saying.

Friends as we look to the future, we may need to deal with things from the past. If we’ve treated people badly we’ll need to apologize and seek forgiveness.

Recently I got into an argument with a member of my extended family, words were exchanged which shouldn’t have been said. My plan, afterwards, was to just forget about it and pretend it never happened. It’s awkward to say “I was wrong, I’m sorry”. Maybe with time we could just all move on. Fortunately my wife didn’t let me get away with that kind of thinking. “You must apologise!” she said. “you must!” And so I did.

But it’s also hard to forgive, isn’t it?

People can really hurt us, so it’s easy to stay angry.

And if anyone had a reason to stay angry then it was Joseph!

How does Joseph respond to this apology from his brothers?

From the end of v 17 When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

Obviously the history within this family still causes some pain.

V 18 “His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup> So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

V 20 is often highlighted as a key point of theology within this story:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.

It’s a verse which reminds us that even though bad things happen, God is still working out a good purpose.

Even though humans can carry out very evil things,

God can be doing wonderful things through those very same actions.

But what’s interesting is that Joseph reflects on this truth while offering forgiveness.

How is it possible that someone as abused as Joseph

can demonstrate this remarkable ability to forgive and forget?

Well, Joseph understands the big picture of what God is doing, and that helps.

The big picture is that God is showering mercy upon others,

the saving of many lives is how Joseph describes it.

Because Joseph understands God as doing something good in the situation,

Then the evil perpetrated by his brothers loses something of its prominence.

A couple of years ago Jas and I had tickets to see Les Miserables.

The night of the show came round and Jas was sick with the flu.

Ordinarily, the flu would men a night in bed, but Jas got herself to that theatre because the promise of something greater

meant the present difficulty could be overcome.

Or a sports hero might play through a Grand Final with broken bones because there's a bigger picture that gives strength to endure the pain.

And so Joseph was able to overlook the pain of caused by his brothers because this bigger picture of God at work was flooding his vision.

I think that's one key to letting go of grudges and offering forgiveness.

When you're captured by what God is doing, other things seem smaller.

In fact, it's a necessity to learn how to offer forgiveness because if we fail to do so then the forgiveness we so desperately need from God might not arrive.

If we're going to enjoy an eternal future with God

then we need our own sins to be forgiven, and God is willing to do this but he wants us to forgive others too, that's part of the deal.

How did Jesus teach us to pray?

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

And so friends we must learn to forgive,

and having knowledge of God's bigger plan in the world can help us get there.

Now, we learn in Genesis is that Jacob and his sons were always on the move.

And when you move house a lot you learn to travel light.

Each time I move I leave behind all sorts of things.

Last time it was my golf clubs.

I hadn't played golf in 12 years so out they went.

But there are some things I'll never get rid of: Photo albums, personal documents.

These are the things that are central to who I am,

and so they come with me into the future.

And so as we travel on towards our final home,

there are some things we're better off leaving behind

—Grudges, memories of past hurts—

but there are other things we will carry with us,

and those things, as Jacob has taught us, are the promises of God:

the promise that in Christ sins are forgiven

and that with God an eternal home is being prepared for us.

I'll lead us in prayer.