

## The Book of Jesus | Crossing Into the Land of Promise

### Dem Bones

Genesis 50.15ff; Joshua 24.28ff

11.4.18

*When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!"<sup>16</sup> So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying,<sup>17</sup> '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.' And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.<sup>18</sup> Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?<sup>20</sup> "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.<sup>21</sup> "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.<sup>22</sup> Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.<sup>23</sup> Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees.<sup>24</sup> 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."<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26</sup> So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.*

**(Joshua 24.29ff)** *Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance.*

*<sup>29</sup> It came about after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old.<sup>30</sup> And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of Mount Gaash.<sup>31</sup> Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel.<sup>32</sup> Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons.<sup>33</sup> And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the hill country of Ephraim.*

This is the final sermon on the Book of Joshua and we not only included the very last paragraphs of this book we've been considering for eight weeks but a flashback to the very end of Genesis.

The two books end in very similar ways with the death of Joseph (Genesis) and the death of Joshua. Both these leaders give an important farewell address and the Book of Joshua actually makes a direct reference to the final words of Genesis.

Today we talk about DEATH... it's the inescapable theme in these two endings AND death is an inescapable reality...facing US. The Ninetieth Psalm says, "Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom."(12) So, as unpleasant as it might be, it's good to keep our mortality in mind.

We've spoken before about that Latin phrase, "memento mori" and today we get an opportunity to DO that in two engaging texts... that are actually BRIMMING with hope. Let's get into it and look at:

- 1) The Burden of the Bones
- 2) Faith at the Funeral
- 3) The Final Frontier (LIVING with HOPE in light of death)

Joseph was the one responsible (humanly speaking) for taking the Israelites INTO Egypt and Joshua was the one responsible for taking them INTO the Land of Promise. They both lived to 110 years of age.

Joseph was the favored son of Jacob ("coat of many colors") and was hated by his brothers and then sold into slavery...which took him from Canaan INTO Egypt. Meanwhile back at the ranch his family was starving and went looking for food IN Egypt and through an amazing series of events they found that Joseph was NOT a slave but the Prime Minister in charge of welfare...And there was a painful reunion...and there was forgiveness. Then the brothers brought Jacob, their father, back to Egypt and they "lived happily ever after" except when Jacob, the father, died he wanted to be buried in Canaan – the Promised Land.

Joseph had to work it out with the Pharaoh... kind of dicey but Pharaoh allowed it and even sent a giant military escort ...and they buried Jacob in the family plot that Jacob had purchased as a foothold in the Land of Promise (Gen 33.19).

THEN, the brothers were nervous that Joseph was going to take revenge on them (after Dad was no longer around to see it) and they make up a story, "Hey...uh...right before Dad died, he told us to tell you NOT to punish us... but to forgive!...So...ok?"

And Joseph weeps... and says... "Haven't you guys learned to stop manipulating/lying... and haven't we ALL learned the lesson (BTW – some say this lesson is the theme of Genesis or even of the whole Bible) and that is, "What YOU meant for evil – God turned to good and for the saving of many lives!"

And because Joseph believed that God was in control (EVEN of his past hurts!) and that God had mysterious but GOOD purposes, therefore Joseph was able to forgive. And he lived a long life...in Egypt.

Then Genesis ends with Joseph's death... but not before Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

And they did...somehow...after many generations that VOW was remembered. And when Moses took the people OUT of Egypt, he had to request from Pharaoh "dem bones" Exodus CH. 13 "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, 'God shall surely take care of you; and you shall carry my bones from here with you.'" (19)

It was NOT a little ...after-thought or a quirky little preference from an eccentric old man... Moses had heard about it...other Israelites had heard and it HAD to be done... So, they carried that coffin...and dem bones for all those years. Imagine that!

Imagine that there must've been some sort of arrangement...some sort of "bones-detail", like a rotation... always asking, "Whose turn IS it to carry dem bones?" I picture them approaching Moses... "Look can we leave the casket HERE...this dead weight is a burden...I mean I'm as sentimental as the next guy but ...we've been luggin' dem bones for 40 years... ENOUGH!"

And then Joshua... through all those battles... "May we PLEASE bury this coffin HERE?!" "Nope!..."

The burden of the BONES: it's like an emblem for our mortality. We are all facing the day of our own death.

And it's a burden...to know that we are all standing in that LONG LINE... Even in this sanctuary: someone will be first and someone last...but in 150 years... WE WILL ALL BE GONE. The fear of death...the end of life ...the judgment...it's a burden heavy to bear.

And why was Joseph so intent...like his father, Jacob, why were these worshipers so intent on being buried in the LAND? Why when it was so costly for the Israelites to carry that "dead weight" for all those years, why was it so important? Superstition?

Did you know that in that famous chapter, Hebrews 11, "the Hall of Faith" – that listing of all these characters who lived "B.C." and who triumphed NOT because they were good or moral but because they BELIEVED ("by faith...by faith...by faith...") and included with each person listed is the PRIMARY WAY that character's faith was exhibited. So, e.g. Abel (offered a better sacrifice, [4]) Moses (united with his own people rather than be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter [24]) Rahab (we just read about her) – what way did SHE show faith? ("By faith Rahab the harlot...welcomed the spies in peace" [31]).

And of all the deeds and amazing exploits by Joseph – WHAT, do you suppose is LISTED as THE way he demonstrated faith? Listen: “By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.” (22)

Joseph... and with him...Jacob... Abraham/Sarah, Isaac...and the Israelites who bore the burden of the bones... THEY HAD FAITH AT A FUNERAL!

Somehow, Joseph knew they would return to their inheritance ... He knew, “BY FAITH” that God would make good on His Promise. He faced his own death with a solid conviction that God could be trusted.

It’s like the most important thing of Joseph’s whole life-story...THE way he’s remembered as a believing man – he had faith as he faced the prospect of his own death – Faith at the Funeral. He wanted his bones buried in the Land. It was NOT a quirky or sentimental eccentricity (“I gotta be buried in Alaska”) NO! He was making a statement of faith in the promises of God.

And now with Joshua (who was also buried in the Land) and Eleazar, the Priest (also buried in the Land) THEY ALSO BURY dem bones of Joseph.

It’s a statement of continuity - it’s the other bookend after the ending of Genesis. “See”, says the writer, “What we mess up – God works out for good. When WE mean something for evil, God somehow includes in His beautiful plan! WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED, HE WILL ALSO DO WITHOUT ANY HELP FROM US! Therefore as we all approach our own deaths, let us TOO have faith at the funeral! God can be trusted!”

Each of these ancient tombs is there to inspire faith in those who saw them (or like we – even KNOW about them). They’re all signs of God’s faithfulness and they all call us to TRUST HIM WHO PROMISED!

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...didn’t see the Promise fulfilled...didn’t see the Promised Land given and occupied by God’s Covenant People... They only got a tiny little toehold, a symbolic (sacramental?) down-payment – but it was enough!

Joseph believed God in his lifetime and wanted to make a statement of faith even in his funeral... He wanted his bones to speak and for all those years THEY DID... And while his tomb was known it spoke!

Those tombs spoke! They gave reason to believe! But, as we know, there’s another tomb that speaks even louder to US... And if we could find it today, if we could locate the exact tomb where the Body of Jesus Christ was laid after His crucifixion, the one thing you would NOT FIND THERE...are dem bones!

Because after He lived for me (and obeyed all the Law that I had broken – when He obeyed FOR me!) and when He had died under the penalty of justice that I deserved... and when He was truly and fully DEAD... and laid in the tomb... Then, just as He said He would, three days later, He rose from the dead.

Where then ARE the Bones of Jesus Christ?

They are in heaven... They are IN THE PRESENCE of God the Father...They are glorified like mine will be someday...soon and very soon!

And in the time between now and when my turn comes, that tomb, THAT EMPTY TOMB speaks to me. It's the sign that my debt is paid and God will work all things for good... As for us, what we meant for evil, "God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." (Genesis 50.20)

The Tomb of Jesus Christ – the Man death could not hold – the empty tomb is calling to us... God has a toehold on this planet. God has staked His claim and that tomb absent of bones (NO BONES ABOUT IT!) is calling you to believe – to have faith at your own funeral! There is a reason to believe.

You know, each of us will face this final frontier. We will go the way of all flesh. You may have loved ones who believed in the Empty Tomb of Jesus Christ.

You may have friends/family who found relief from guilt and will be spared in the Judgment because their hope was NOT in their own moral superiority or their own religiosity – people who STOPPED BELIEVING IN THEMSELVES and started believing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If you are also believing, then YOU are now privy to a kind of unbreakable communion with those who have died believing in Jesus Christ... It's not that we try to contact them (the Bible forbids that – necromancy) but that they are cheering us on. They are a part of the "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12) that includes, Joshua, Eleazar, Joseph and everyone who dies believing the Promise of God.

Death is not a good thing – the Bible calls it the last enemy (1 Cor 15.26) but there is a way to face this Final Frontier, this last enemy in hope and in peace. God can turn evil to good...as Joseph knew full well!

So put your confidence NOT in yourself but in Jesus Christ who lived for me, died for me and whose empty tomb is a guarantee that all will be well...all will be made new....THE reason to believe.

The Communion  
November 4, 2018

For the many who DO belong to this Church or another Good News Church, this Table is, for us, like the tombs of the Patriarchs were to ancient Israel. This Table speaks like those ancient bones – it says, “God’s promises are true and if you receive them by faith YOU WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

When the Gospel is announced/proclaimed we receive it with our ears but here at this Table we receive it with our mouths... It’s Good News made edible: a sign that as your body is nourished by this bread and wine so your faith is nourished when you take and eat this sign-ificant meal. If you take Him and internalize Him, you will live... NOT by qualifying but simply receiving – trusting, resting, putting your confidence in Him is the way to know True Life.

This table is a seal – like those ancient tombs – it’s a witness to us of the mighty deeds of God. It guarantees that Jesus Christ is able to sustain everyone who trusts Him.

It tells of His justifying death and it tells of His saving life.

At this Table, we take again, God’s promise that He has landed among us...and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ tells everyone who believes – “even death will not destroy you... and everything is going to be ok!”

Let’s pause in silence and then come together and receive.