

The preaching of the bones of Joseph

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Bible Text: Exodus 13:19
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The Scripture reading in this afternoon's service we find in the Old Testament in the book of Exodus 13, the verses 17 through 22. After the reading of the Scripture, we will confess our faith with the words of the 12 Articles and after that we will sing Psalter #121, the stanzas 1 and 4. So we read Exodus 13, the verses 17 through 22, we confess our faith, and we sing Psalter 121, the stanzas 1 and 4.

17 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: 18 But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. 19 And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you. 20 And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. 21 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: 22 He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Here ends the reading of the Scripture.

The word of God that we have to preach to you in this earth evening service you find in the part of the Scripture that we're at from the book of Exodus 13 and that chapter, verse 19. So the text is Exodus 13:19. There we read our text, the word of God,

19 And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.

Congregation of the Lord, here on earth we have no continuing city. You know the truth of this word from the Scriptures. Maybe we have to take by heart the warning of this word. There comes a time that you have to leave your earthly home. The comfort of this

word you may hear, the sufferings of this present time are worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, for after a short time of sorrow he will give us endless joy, but the reality of this word is an established fact. Everything goes by. Maybe you know it in a very painful way and the question that we have to answer is did you learn also the truth of what follows on that word of the Lord? Here we have no continuing city, we seek one to come. Are we pilgrims traveling through the city where everything has become new, where the old things have come by, and where the Lord is dwelling in the midst of his people? I hope that you understand that that's a decisive for time and eternity. The word of our God in this evening service will help us to find a good answer and I hope that we will listen. To receive that answer when we didn't until now, and to agree with that answer and know and you learned it, to say that's the answer for time and eternity.

So we listen this evening service to our text in which we hear the preaching of the bones of Joseph. Three thoughts. We hear the preaching, first, in Egypt; secondly, on the way; and thirdly, in Canaan. The preaching of the bones of Joseph in Egypt, on the way, in Canaan.

It will not sound strange to you when I tell you that those who have to explain the word of God have troubled their head about the order of Joseph in regard to his bones. Something is very clear, it's clear that Joseph in these words shows that he in no way wants to belong to Egypt. This man who learned to know Egypt and all the power and all the wealth and all the wisdom of Egypt, this man who had received a lot of respect in Egypt, this man who knows what he is saying when he's speaking of Egypt, who knows the beauty of the world of Egypt, this very man says, "My dear family, don't dwell in Egypt. It's not good to be there. I don't want to leave there even my dead body because in Egypt there is no future. Egypt, that's the world that goes by, the world that gets lost in the fire of God's judgment just like Sodom and just like Babel." On his deathbed Joseph says, "My dear brothers, I have become acquainted with the world of Egypt, you know that, and I know that we find there lots of treasures, lots of wealth, food enough, filled barns, you can enjoy the world of Egypt really, but it is only for a short time and at the end of that time you will need God and you can stand before him as the Judge of all men, then you perish forever in the Red sea of God's anger."

So for the message of our text must be very clear, that what we receive here, that's real and necessary to us for to listen to Joseph. He speaks by experience. He knows what he is saying and he is seeking by the same faith of Moses of whom God's word says "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." It's by faith that Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones, but and that's the next question, there you have also the problem with this text. Why didn't Joseph ask his family to bring him to Canaan and immediately after his death just like they did with his father Jacob? It was possible when you think of the position of Joseph, he had the authority to order in that way, and this has given more surety, isn't it, when they had brought his dead body immediately after his death to Canaan? Don't forget that Joseph knew from his father that there would be about four centuries before Israel would leave

Egypt and enter the Promised Land. In that time, there could have been the real possibility of forgetting the old promises by the coming generations.

Well, seeking for an answer to that question, commentators have pointed to the political situation of Israel in Egypt and to the position of Joseph as a high placed person. He couldn't rebuff Egypt that gave him such a position. He would not raise suspicion in Egypt against the people of Jacob. Such a funeral procession easily could be explained as a kind of a demonstration against the government. Think only of the present situation in the Middle East when a high placed person from the Palestinians is to be buried, or another one, the political situation, in that case the demonstration that happens. But however and whatever any man says, God had his purpose with this order of Joseph. The bones of Joseph had to be a sign, a visible preaching given by him to his people and that's what we are discerning when we look after the fact that for the first time is spoken of the bones of Joseph in the book of Genesis, the book of the birth of the world and the birth of the people of God. He's finishing in the reminding of the bones of Joseph which they laid in a coffin.

Secondly, we read of these bones in our text, in Exodus, the book of the departure of the people of Israel out of the house of bondage, the world of Egypt where they were strangers and slaves, and certainly we read of the bones of Joseph in the book of Joshua, the book of the entering of God's people in the Promised Land under the guidance and under the leader, the Old Testament Joshua, whose name is a message, the Lord gives room, the Lord saves his people. And all these words have been affirmed by the letter of the Hebrews where we read that Joseph mentioned of the departing of the children of Israel and gave commandments concerning his bones. You read the connection according to the book of Hebrews, the departure of Israel from Egypt and the bones of Joseph.

Let me say it so: reading the Scriptures, you discover that the Lord has made Joseph willing to serve his people as he did before his death, also after his death. He has placed his bones at God's and Israel's disposal. He has given them to a visible preaching, a very clear message to underline what Israel had to know during the ages in the land of Egypt, "We are not at home here. Our destination is elsewhere." And then you read the Scriptures and you see so it has happened, for when Moses is called to lead Israel out of Egypt about 3 ½ centuries after the death of Joseph, no one had to remember him from old books what Joseph has said, and it is not necessary to look in old records to find out where they have to seek the coffin with the bones of Joseph, and they have not to send an expedition to one of the big cities of Egypt or to one of the out-of-the-way places to pick up the bones of Joseph. Very simply we read in our text: Moses took with him the bones of Joseph. Just like I took with me my Bible when I go to the church or when I go on a house visitation, and I think that the kids in the church believe that I have not to seek first my Bible, I can pick it up, take it with me. It didn't cost any time to seek it, I have it at hand all the day.

So it is with the coffin, with the bones of Joseph. That coffin with the embalmed body of Joseph stood at the well-known place in the center of the area where Israel lived and it stood there ready to be taken away. At any time during these 360 years, Israel could pick

it up and take it with them immediately. In that wondrous night full of turmoil that Pharaoh said after the death of the firstborn, "Go away! Go out as soon as you can," they had not to say, "Well, we first have to seek the bones of Joseph because we have promised him that we should take it away." They could pick it up. It stood there. I think it stood there, it's the possibility they were in need of to carry it with them just as they carried in a later time the ark. Through all the hundreds of years, the coffin of Joseph has been standing there, ready for the departure. All the years.

Well, you know, when you read the Scriptures in the beginning of that time that had been good years, years of prosperity. In the fat land along the shores of the River Nile, there is plenty of food for the cattle. It had been a time of enormous economical growth. We read in Exodus 1:7, "the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty." How do things go in such circumstances? I think, congregation, I don't need to tell it to you because most of us live, maybe you have to say in these times of financial crisis, most of us have lived in such circumstances. There were men and women in Israel who felt at home more and more in the land where they had to live as strangers. There were people who caught up the way of life from the Egyptians, they served the gods of Egypt, they lived and loved the goods of Egypt.

Let me try to say it with an example. Maybe there was an old Israelite whose son had made it in business in Egypt and the son had the day off and he comes to his father to visit him and they talk together for a while and then the father says, "Well, my son, let us go for a little walk." And the father leads his son along the place by the coffin where the bones of Joseph is standing, and then he stands still and he points at that place and he says, "My son, you know, for I told you when you were only a little boy, I told you of Joseph and of the promise that we did for him, and the word that he has said before he died, 'God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land into the land that he promised your fathers.' My son, then that's happening. Are you ready to go with the people? Do you go out with Israel?" And then the son after some hesitation says, "Oh, dad, I feel so good at home in Egypt."

Now let me give us another example. There is a mother who loves the world of Egypt and she's walking with her little young daughter, accidentally they walk along the place where the coffin with the bones of Joseph is standing and the little girl sees it and she says, "Mother, mum, what's that?" And her mother is telling her, "That's the coffin with the bones of Joseph. Years ago he was a great leader from our people in the midst of the Egyptians." "But," the little girl says, "But, mum, why didn't they bury him after his death?" And her mum says, "He has said God will visit the people of Israel and bring them out of Egypt to the land that he has promised our fathers." "Oh, mum," the daughter says, "when that happens, shall we go with them?" And her mother doesn't give any answer but in that night she can't sleep. She hears the voice of her child time and again, "Shall we go with them?" And there is a struggle in her heart. She so very loves the world of Egypt but what about the future, as her parents told her? And what about her own child that she has to guide?

You understand there's one side of the story, but there is still another side of this story, congregation, after good times there came bad times in Egypt. You know Israel becomes a people of slaves and a people living in extreme poorness. The Goshen area becomes a concentration camp. They have to throw the baby boys in the river Nile as food for the crocodiles. And in the meantime, the coffin of Joseph is standing there. That coffin is like a question to the people, "Is the Lord at work perhaps to stir up your nest? Is he busy to make you loose from Egypt?" The coffin remembers them of a promise, a promise to plead. God's poor people may say on the basis of that promise, "O Lord, Joseph has said God will surely visit you and bring you out of Egypt. O, that thou should rent the heavens and that thou would come down!" They cried, so we read in Exodus 2, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. The coffin is a promise, this suffering will have an end. Although you are in sorrow and distress, the day of salvation is coming.

What did it work out in their hearts, you may ask? Well, anyway they didn't lose sight of the coffin. They didn't forget what Joseph has said in these days, and that after so many years they heard the words and they didn't forget it. "Yes," you say, "but what if it worked out in a personal and a scriptural way?" Congregation, wouldn't that be better to ask the question to ourselves? The preaching of the bones of Joseph is also heard in our midst also in days of prosperity. Do we reckon in our lives with the fact that we are living here only for a time, for a couple of years only? If the Lord comes in this time, are we prepared to meet him? Are we prepared to go with him even through the valley of death? Are we prepared to go to the city where he will dwell in the midst of his people? Do we prepare our children, congregation, for the life hereafter? Do we know from each other as a man and his wife, as a woman and her husband, do we know to where we are trifling? Do you have an answer? When you hear of the sudden death of one of your beloved ones, do you know about his or her eternal destination? Imagine the Lord comes and one of you goes with him and the other one stays behind. Remember the wife of Lot. Remember the people in the days of the flood.

Congregation, do we live as strangers in this world? That we learn to distinguish the treasures of Egypt, we can enjoy them, surely you can, but it's only for a time. It's so very relative and then, well, sometimes people, maybe young people, maybe older ones say, "Then I will have a further look." I once said to one of my Catechism students not long after those who are here now, but one of my Catechism students who said, "Minister, when things come, I will have a look and I will see what will happen." And I said, "Yes, but that's why the problem, then you see it, and then that's you are seeing a door which is closed and when you see that you are too late."

The coffin with the bones of Joseph says you have to choose to what people you want to belong. You say, "That's so difficult." When things go very well. You can say it any longer when you see the situation in which Joseph lived. He had made it in the world in a special way. All the wealth of Egypt and all the power of Egypt, he had it. He could use it. And what does he say? "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." He had learned, take away the world and its treasures because the world goes by and the love of God only is an eternal love.

Please let me ask you: walk along that coffin, congregation. Maybe I can say it in another way also: walk along the grave of a God-fearing mother, of a pious grandfather. Maybe you know by heart the inscription you find on his gravestone as I remember the inscription on the stone of one of my grandmothers in my birthplace, the words that she so often said and so often sung, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever." And when I come there and I read that inscription, I hear, as it were, her lovely old voice, "My grandson, will you sing with me forever?" You understand what I mean? And when I think of the gravestone of my father who died at a young age, there we find the words that were his words, especially in the last week of his life, "To be with Christ is much better." And when I'm standing there, he asks me, as it were, "My son, do you agree that it is far better to be with Christ?" May I ask you: walk along these graves in your thoughts. Maybe the graves are far from here but you know the words and you hear the question and what's your answer to that question, congregation? To where you walk and to where you go with your children, be prepared to go with him. Then he is coming.

The preaching of the bones of Joseph is also heard in days of adversity, of suffering and cross. The question is also to us: is the Lord busy to stir up our nest? Is it necessary to take you away from Egypt, from what the world has to present to you? Maybe that financial crisis all over the world of which so much is spoken in our days, is the Lord using it to stir up our nest to show you that all what the world has to present to you is going by, and that only the fear of the Lord will be forever? That cross that came in your life, did the Lord use it to draw you nearer to him? Did he use your illness, your handicap to teach you, "It's good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes"? Did the Lord therefore bump your home to take you away from the life of the world of Egypt and to teach you, "I thank thee, O Lord, though thou wast angry with me"?

Please walk along that coffin of Joseph and hear the message. God will surely visit you. Is there a place in your life for that visit of the Lord? When he comes to take you with him, to bring you to the country where he is willing to dwell in the midst of his people, that you become thankful for the blessing of a cross that brought you at the foot of the cross of the Lord Jesus, isn't it wonderful that the Lord is using these things to take you away from the world that is perishing? Oh, for sure, it must not have been necessary to do so but then we don't listen in another way, isn't it a blessing that he is teaching us in this way?

You say, "But why in such a hard way?" Look unto Israel, it's the only way to bring them on their place. "And why during such a long time," you ask. Because they didn't hear before. You read it in Exodus 2, then the children of Israel cried to the Lord, after so many years, and when they cried, the Lord was hearing them. And there is a great comfort towards God's own people in our text. The misery comes to an end. For Egypt there will be eternal misery and eternal night after a short period of joy and fun. And to God's people there is an eternity of lovingkindness. What about you who know about the suffering of the present time? Do you ask sometimes, "Lord, use it and teach me to make me walk in the way of life with you"?

The bones of Joseph proclaim this comes to an end. Soon he will give the daybreak of salvation. Here is comfort for those who are in sorrow, congregation. Here is power for those who are weak. Here is courage for those who have lost all courage. He shall redeem Israel. Cry unto him and he will answer. He, that is the God of our salvation, and to God alone belong the issues from that. But there is also a message for the people that has been called out from the house of bondage and it is on the way home to the Promised Land. That's not an easy way, not a calm journey. God's people often come home in a way of sorrow and cross but also there on the way, there is the preaching of the bones of Joseph, God shall bring you into the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. God will bring you there.

On the way home, the people of Israel is standing at the shores of the Red sea and they cry because the Egyptian army is persecuting them and there seems to be no way for them to reach the other side. But then there is the preaching of the bones of Joseph. The coffin is standing in their midst, isn't it? And that coffin proclaims, "The Lord has by us consigned to bring you unto the Promised Land and to give it you as a fulfillment of all his promises. When you pass through the waters," he says, "I will be with thee. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee, for I am the Lord thy God, the holy one of Israel. I save you."

And the Lord fulfills his promises in a wondrous way, he provides a way where there is no way. He goes before them by day in a pillar of a cloud and by night in a pillar of fire. He leads his people just like a shepherd is leading his flock. He turned the sea into dry land. They went through the flood on foot. Later on, the army of Amalek is coming and Israel fears and has to fight against a mighty enemy. But then there is that coffin of Joseph and it proclaims, "The Lord shall fight for you and ye shall hold your peace." And then Moses is praying, he gives his people a glorious victory.

There comes a time when Israel is thinking, "We shall never enter the Promised Land and never have it in possession. The walls of the cities are untakeable and the people living there are so mighty, and there are even giants." But then there is the preaching of the bones of Joseph, "The Lord shall give it you. You will receive it as a gift out of his hand." And believing that promise, they can go further on the way home believing that promise. Yes, they can go further by faith alone.

That's what becomes very clear on the way. Many of the people perish in the wilderness. They couldn't enter because of unbelief. They could not. They went out of Egypt, they passed through the Red sea, they were under the cloud, and they all ate the same spiritual food, they saw how the Lord was fulfilling all his promises and still they didn't enter the Promised Land. Why not? There's only one reason: because of unbelief in the promises of the Lord. Although he did show the fulfillment of that promise, every day, you know.

That's a serious message, especially for the people of the covenant. By faith alone you enter the Promised Land. The Lord redeems Israel in the way of prayer, pleading for his promises. "O Lord, thou hast promised this. Thou should bring us there." And may I ask you and anew I ask it: do you know this way of life, living in the life of the preaching of

the bones of Joseph? Are you standing sometimes at that coffin with the bones of Joseph? Do you see it carried before you that you may follow? That you may look at him who promised you there's a hope in your life? Does it give you perspective? Oh, today sometimes we also stand at the shore of the Red sea and we look upon the waves and we don't know where to find the path for our feet. We walk through the wilderness and think that we all shall perish there. There are the enemies, the devil, the world and our own flesh, and we are so weak in ourselves we cannot stand in our own power. And then you are thinking of the Promised Land. You see the river of death that you have to cross, and you see the Judge who you have to meet, and you hear the voice of your own conscience that is accusing you. There are all these things, may you seek your refuge in the Lord.

Do you hear the preaching of the promises of the Lord for the people on the way? "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. I shall perfect the work concerning you. I'll take you with me that you may be where I am." May you put your hand on the coffin, "Lord, thou hast promised me never to leave me, never to forsake me. Thou hast said, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my own name's sake." Then you receive new courage, isn't it? You could go further on your way. You are walking quiet with the Lord, "The Lord is my light and my salvation. For whom shall I fear?" You experience how blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord and you went from strength to strength and silent surety was in your heart because the Lord promised every one of them appeared before God in Zion.

Yes, the message of the bones of Joseph also is speaking about that last point. These wanderers on earth, these strangers out of Egypt, these pilgrims in the wilderness of the world will come home. We read it in Joshua in the book of the Lord, who brings his people home in the Promised Land and gives them his heritage that he has promised them, the land. The slaves are living in freedom. The strangers come home, they're wanderers finding a city.

We read it at the end of the book of Joshua, chapter 24, verse 32. There we see how the bones of Joseph find rest four centuries after his death. Four centuries. To believe the promises of the Lord means you have to wait, but waiting on the Lord is expecting him, what he is doing, and then he shall fulfill all his promises. And await on the Lord, congregation. He shall never be ashamed. Faith knows though he tarries, wait for him because he will surely come. There in Joshua we find such a beautiful touch of this work of the Lord: they buried the bones of Joseph in a parcel of ground which became an inheritance of the children of Joseph. No, I don't tell you this evening that grace is an inheritance. There are God-fearing parents, maybe they are in our midst, who know of the painful puzzle of a child of prayer who chose to serve the world and to live without God. Maybe there is a name in your thoughts and there is a silent prayer in your heart, "O Lord, bring them home before it is too late."

But to live by faith and that's what we see here is a blessing and often you'll see the track of it in the following generations. Anyway, living in such a family means that there is a wall of prayer, young people, around you, and I think there must be people in our midst who know what that means and who know the power of it. As one of my uncles, a brother

of my father, who went into the world when he was a young man and was brought back by the power of the word of God said, "It was my mother and her prayers. She kept me until the Lord become too strong for me." Maybe you know it by yourself, the prayer of one of your parents during all their life. Here you see the fruit. Joseph feared the Lord, trusted in him and his seed inherits the Promised Land.

Young people in our midst, it is such a rich blessing to have such parents who take you with them to the service of the Lord on Sunday and during the week in his house and in the society. What a blessing, parents who instruct you. We have to be there where we see the coffin of the bones of Joseph, where we hear the preaching of the mighty promises of the Lord. Maybe there is a young one in our midst who's saying or thinking on this moment, "Yes, pastor, you can say that." And let it be so, but in Canaan they buried Joseph. What's the profit that he had in that case? You were all right when you say that but read again what we are reading here: they buried him in the land that God had promised his people. There he promised to visit them and there he has given his beloved Son in the fullness of time. In that land, the Lord Jesus has said, "I'm the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me though he were dead, yet he shall live." Do you hear it? He shall live. Joseph lives by faith in him who is more than Joseph, who is the real Savior of life.

Here Joseph is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just like the bones of Joseph have been brought into the Promised Land, so Jesus brought his body in which he lived, in which he died, and in which he arose from the dead into heavenly salvation, and he promises, "Where I am, there shall be my servant also." And he's praying for them, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me shall be with me where I am, that I may behold your glory that thou hast given me." Maybe for anyone in our midst, the time of that will come very soon but whosoever is living by the preaching of the bones of Joseph, he may stand. In his thoughts, sometimes at his own coffin where they will lay you after you're dead, and then you may hear the word of him who is more than Joseph and you may say, "O Lord, thou hast promised, I surely shall visit you and bring you out of this valley of tears to that land where nobody will say evermore I am sick. Lord, thou are the God who is fulfilling all his promises and thou hast promised it. Fulfill thy promise also in my life and in the life of my children." Then your pathway may seem impassable and the road through the wilderness may be very difficult, the river Jordan may give you an impression that you'll never reach in safety the other side, but then the coffin of Joseph goes ahead, a mighty word of the promises of the living God, and walking behind that coffin in the light of that mighty word full of promise of him who promised by free grace, you hear God's pilgrims coming out of the world of Egypt, walking through the wilderness, passing the river Jordan, and you hear them singing, "Blessed they who dwell in Zion, whose joy and strength thou art. Forever they will praise thee. Thy ways are in their heart. Their tears like showers shall fill the spring of peace and all the way to Zion, their strength shall still increase." Amen.