

April 5, 2020
Palm Sunday

Last Words

Genesis 50:22-26

Matthew 21:1-11

It's a rather unusual beginning to our Palm Sunday this year as we go into our sermon for the day. Unusual because we're going to begin in the Old Testament. We're going to begin way back in the Old Testament. Going back to the Old Testament Covenant; "I will be your God and you will be My people." This is the Covenant, or two-way agreement that God initiated with Abram back in Genesis 12. It began with God giving Abram a command. He said, "go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." that took a lot of faith on Abram's part. Imagine someone telling you pack everything you own up and leave your family, leave your house, leave everything you have and go to the place I'm going to tell you. If you were to ask them, 'well where is that place?' And they said, 'well just get on the road and start driving and I'll show you as you go.' You probably would pause at that. When you think back to that Covenant, "I will be your God you will be my people," what is asked of the people is this; your job just have faith in me to trust me. Trust me and do what I say; that is the job of God's people. What is God's role in this? Well to Abram He said, "to your offspring I will give you this land." The land that He was going to show Abraham, He would give that to Him but when it comes to God, He is in many ways (and I don't mean this to be demeaning) but He is in many ways like some of the commercials we see on TV where they offer you something that sounds really good, and then they say; but wait there's more. If you act now... With God He begins with Abram and says, to your offspring I will give this land. But He just keeps on giving. There's more! As your God, the God of this Covenant, I will be your God. As your God, I will bless your family and bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. Even though you are well advanced in years, I will bless you with a son, with Isaac. Abram. I am your shield. I will protect you."

Now there's many other promises that God makes to Abram and He follows through on all of them; changes his name to Abraham and what happens when Abraham passes away? Well Abraham passed all of that covenant, all those blessings, on to Isaac. We see the beginnings of that in Genesis chapter 22. Then his son Isaac in Genesis chapter 27:26-29, he passes those blessings onto his son, then Abraham's grandson Jacob, who is later named by God Israel. And what does Jacob do? Well as he's getting older and he's ready to die he passes on that blessing the promise of this land to all twelve of his sons. He passes on the messianic blessing to Judah and he passes on the overall blessings to the two sons of Joseph.

What about Joseph? Joseph, the one out of the 12 brothers who was consistently faithful to God, who was consistently living under that covenant, "I will be your God" I'm

going to take care of Joseph, "You will be my people," be faithful to me Joseph. Joseph was faithful, even though his brothers hated him, we're going to kill him but instead sold him into slavery to their cousins the Ishmaelites; even though he was bought by Potiphar for and served Potiphar magnificently well, to the point that Potiphar put him in charge of his entire household. When Potiphar's wife wanted a little bit more than Joseph was willing to give, because he was faithful to God, she cried out rape and Potiphar had Joseph thrown in prison. There again he was faithful to God. He became the model prisoner and the warden put him in charge of all the other prisoners. Again, he was taken advantage of. Pharaoh's baker and chief steward were sent to prison, it must have been a bad dinner. They had bad dreams and Joseph interpreted them. When he interpreted them, he was faithful to God. He told them, it's not me, it's God. Please remember me. If you remember the story; the baker, his dream came true, he was executed. But Pharaoh's steward was restored to his position, and he began serving Pharaoh again. He completely forgot Joseph until Pharaoh himself had a series of most troubling dreams. That's when the steward remembered, oh there's this guy in prison, a Hebrew chap, he interpreted my dreams maybe you should get him, and he can interpret yours.

And so, Pharaoh calls for Joseph and asks Joseph if he can give an answer to his dreams, interpret them. Joseph responds, again faithfully, no I can't but the God I worship can tell me your dream Pharaoh, and my God will give you the answer. Can you imagine someone in our political landscape today saying I can't do that, but God can? Joseph is doing this in front of a pagan Pharaoh who believed in multiple gods. And Joseph is holding true to what we call the Shemah, "Hear oh Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One there is no other God." Joseph stays true, he stays faithful, he interprets the dreams. He's put in power in Egypt. Second in power only behind pharaoh. Then later when famine hits the Promised Land, his brothers come to Egypt to get food, and Joseph remains faithful. He does not seek revenge or retribution, instead he invites them, and he invites his dad to come and live in Egypt. They're given the area of the land of Goshen in Egypt which is down in the River Nile or the Nile Delta region; which is some of the most fertile ground there is in the world. It rivals central California.

In fact, just recently archaeologists believe they have uncovered Joseph's tomb. There's a great article in Biblical Archaeological Review or Bible and Spade about that, if you want to Google that and find it. What happens with Joseph? Like everyone, he also gets old. Does he follow in the footsteps of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and now him? When we look in Genesis, we read Joseph's last words. 'I'm 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, to Jacob.' He remains faithful with faith in the promise of God. And we continue, 'Joseph made the sons of Israel swear saying God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here. Boy if Abraham was alive, I would imagine he would just be bursting with joy to hear his great grandson repeating the promises made to him; passed down from him to Isaac to Jacob to Joseph.

What happens from there? Well the children of Israel stay in Egypt for 400 years. 350 years after the time of Joseph's death. Then you know God delivered them using Moses and they were out in the wilderness for 40 years with Moses. Then they got to the Promised Land. Moses died, Joshua was put in control and Joshua led them into the Promised Land, in the conquest of the Promised Land which took quite a number of years. And then Joshua gets old, 110 years old in fact, and he dies. But when we look there at Joshua's death in Joshua 24:29-32; we also see that Joshua evidently gave some instructions with his last words; because we read "the bones of Joseph which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem."

Now how many years had passed since then, how many generations? Well if we go all the way back to Abraham and go from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Joseph, through the time in Egypt, through the time of the wilderness, and through the time of the conquest of the Promised Land we have 600 plus years. How many generations is that? I don't know, it's got to be close to 20 or more. These generations entrusted with this sacred duty of passing on the Covenant and the faithful following of that Covenant; the last words of the patriarchs passed down from one generation to the next; these Israelites followed through and met their responsibility. We often times look at them and kind of wag our heads in shame when we see them at Mount Sinai and doubting God. Following Korah, and we've got Korah's rebellion, or that situation with the snake being lifted up on the pole because of their sin out in the wilderness. We oftentimes think of them and don't give them some of the credit they are supposed to be do. While yes, they were faithless in some areas, to the words of the patriarchs and their last words; they stayed true for over 600 years. They took Joseph's bones, they buried them in the Promised Land just that he had said because of that Covenant.

Put that into the context of our country. Our country is only 244 years old and our country struggles with passing down a Constitution. Our country is greatly struggling with passing down the Christian heritage that this country was founded on. Our country is having a very difficult time in passing down accurate history. So compared to the Israelites, I would have to say we are getting a failing grade. At least they got an A for following the last words of the patriarchs. Before we pat ourselves on the back and say well, but the church is different, please remember that 503 years ago there was this thing called the Reformation. The Reformation had a five-pointed call to it, we are saved by grace, through faith and this is found in scripture, which points us to Jesus and that God deserves all the glory. How well is the church passed that on? Not too well.

You see, when we look at passing things down whether it be the Covenant, whether it be from a country standpoint, our constitution, or from the church standpoint, basic doctrines; the critical component for someone to be able to pass it down is faith. When we look to Hebrews 11, we read about the great people of faith. By faith, Abraham left his home and followed God. There's a whole series of by faith what Abraham did. But it doesn't stop with Abraham. We then read by faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph. By faith, Joseph at the end

of his life, made mention of the Exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. These are what we call faithful last words. Faithful concerning the Covenant entrusted to them and taken so seriously that their last words, were words of faith. Their last actions were actions of faith.

So, let's fast forward to today. What about us? What has been entrusted to us? Our faith, and with that faith comes some sacred things that are entrusted to us. In first Thessalonians 2 verse four, we read that the gospel of the risen Savior has been entrusted to us. And in first Peter 4 verse 10, we read that the grace of God has been entrusted to us and first Corinthians 4 verse 12, we read that the role of being faithful stewards has been entrusted to us. In Matthew 6:19- 21 we have been entrusted with laying up treasures in heaven, not on earth. And in first Timothy 5 verse 8, our families are entrusted to us.

But as we think of these things that have been entrusted to us, we also are entrusted with a heritage; a Christian heritage. A heritage that many years ago, going back into the earliest centuries of the Christian Church. A heritage that took the Hebrew heritage, the Hebrew calendar, and turned it into a Christian calendar. With events to remind us of the actions of God, just as the Hebrew calendar was revolving around actions of God. The Church year begins with Advent, and the focus of Advent is that God acted through the prophets and through the patriarchs and promised a Messiah.

Advent is followed by Christmas and God acted and He gave us His Son. We go from Christmas into Epiphany. The focus of Epiphany, well the word means to make known and it's the action of God that makes the Savior known. Whether it be God speaking from heaven and saying, 'this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,' or Jesus performing the miracles that only God can do. Epiphany is followed by Lent, the season we have just finished. What is the focus of Lent? The focus is us and our need for a Savior. The focus of Lent is that we are sinners. God is not, but that God is going to take action.

Which brings us to today the first day of Holy Week, Palm Sunday. The focus is again on God's action. Jesus arrives in Jerusalem where He is praised, and He's condemned. As we look at Holy Week, we see Jesus in action, God in action. Going into the temple turning the tables over of the moneychangers. We see Him teaching. We see Him being confronted by the Pharisees and the Sadducees and we see Him taking them on and showing them their errors in their thinking. We see Him using parables to make His point. We see Him speaking of the end times. We see Him clearly stating that His job was to be arrested, suffer die, and rise. On Thursday, Maundy Thursday, we see Him celebrating the Passover, fulfilling the Passover, giving us the Last Supper or the Lord's Supper. On Friday, we see Him betrayed, arrested, trials, crucifixion.

What happens on the cross? Just like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Joseph and the many generations following; Christ used His last words and His last actions as a faith building experience. He said, "It is finished." What is it? Salvation, our salvation has been won, which is what He is saying. That, we already pass on. But then He says one more

thing. “Father into Your hands, do I commit my spirit.” And that is a call for us to turn to God and put everything into His hands. He has won our salvation for us. It's a call to give back to God what He has earned. That is us. We turned to God and put everything into His hands; ourselves, our family, everything we own. And then like the patriarchs, we faithfully walk through this week. We faithfully share with our family and friends the events of this week. We faithfully pass on the heritage; that God promised the Savior, the Savior was born, He was made known by voice from heaven, by miracles, and we are sinners and we need that Savior and it all comes down to this week. And so, we faithfully live this week, Holy Week. A week set apart for God, a week where we focus, and we tell our family, ‘this is all about what God has done.’ And we faithfully pass on all that has been entrusted to us; the gospel, the grace, the role of being faithful stewards, the treasures in heaven, the role of the family, a Christian heritage, and everything that comes with it we faithfully passed it on.

In our Savior's name Amen