

59. The End of the Beginning (2007)

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, and we are in the book of Genesis at chapter 50. And we're going to be reading this morning the very last section of this book.

We're coming at long last to our last study in the book of Genesis. And we're going to read from Genesis 50, verse 15 to the end.

It's page 44 in our Church Visitors Bibles. It's near the beginning of whatever Bible you have. And we read last time about the death, eventually, and the burial, the grand funeral of Jacob, the patriarch, whose name became Israel.

And he was buried by his 12 sons. Who had now made up the 12 tribes of Israel. But after that, after that mini exodus of Jacob's body being taken back to Canaan, to the Promised Land, verse 14 there told us that 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.

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.

[1 : 32] 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.

And now please forgive the transgression of your servants of the God of your father. Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

The brothers also came and fell down before him and said, behold, we are your servants. But Joseph said to them, do not fear. For am I in the place of God?

As for you, you meant evil against me. But God meant it for good. To bring it about that many people should be kept alive or saved as they are today.

So do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones. And thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them or spoke to their hearts, literally it says.

[2 : 44] 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 Machia, 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. And 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. They embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. Amen. May God bless us. This is his word. Let's turn together to Genesis chapter 50.

[4 : 01] And this very last section of the book. It was in November, yes, November 1942, after General Montgomery had turned back Rommel's forces at El Alamein in what Winston Churchill called the Battle of Egypt, that Churchill gave that famous speech at the Mansion House in London.

I've never promised anything, he said, but blood, tears, toil and sweat. Now, however, we have a new experience.

We have a victory. A remarkable and definite victory. The bright gleam has caught the helmet of our soldiers. And warmed and warmed and warmed and cheered all our hearts.

Now, this is not the end, he said. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning.

As we come today to the end of Genesis, that is exactly where we find ourselves. Not at the end of the story, but just at the very end of the beginning.

[5 : 17] Of a far greater story, which, of course, continues all through the pages of Scripture. And indeed is still continuing today throughout the story of human history.

Of course, in one sense, it is the end of the Joseph story. Chapter 50 takes us solemnly from Jacob's burial, as we saw last week, to Joseph's bones.

And that's very final. But, of course, we've said many times that Genesis 37 to 50 is not just Joseph's story, no matter what Andrew Lloyd Webber might have thought.

These are the generations of Jacob, is how it begins. It's a story, really, about the decisive establishing, not only of the great family of the patriarch Israel, but it tells us how that family, in fact, is transformed through its own battle of Egypt, if you like.

Into a great and numerous nation, as God had promised. The servant nation, through whom God had promised Abraham blessing, would come to all the families of this world.

[6 : 26] And so it's not the end of that story. Far from it. It's just the end of Genesis, of the book of beginnings. It's the end of the beginning of the gospel of God, that we have seen all the way through this marvelous book.

It began, didn't it, with the beginning of everything, the creation. The beginning of life. But, alas, so quickly, it degenerated into a story about the beginning of sin, and therefore of death.

But wonderfully and immediately, of course, came the beginning of hope. The hope for mankind in the promise of God. And also the beginning of real Christian faith, and the real Christian church, in the story of Abraham, and of his family of covenant faith.

And the beginning, even then, way back then, the beginning of real Christian mission, as Abraham himself became a proclaimer of this God, and indeed an intercessor, for the pagan nations, the peoples round about, the people of Sodom and other places.

And then we've charted, haven't we, God's tenacious grace, grasping this complex, and often calamitous family, and refusing to let them go.

[7 : 43] But rather, showing himself to be a God of transforming grace, who changes his people, even as through them, he will purpose to transform the world.

And above all, and especially in these later chapters, we've seen God showing himself to be the God of triumphant grace, who despite all the folly, all the failure of his people, is working out his purpose for good, for blessing, and for salvation.

Despite everything you did to me, Joseph said back in chapter 45, verse 5, It was God who sent me before you to preserve life, to preserve a remnant on earth, to preserve the many, who will be his people of promise.

And that's a glorious truth, echoed here in this famous verse, 20 of chapter 50. You meant evil against me, says Joseph, but God meant it for good, for the saving of many lives, as the NIV translates.

But God. And many times, we've seen that marvelous refrain again and again, throughout this extraordinary book. Despite the relentlessness, and the sin, and the folly of God's covenant people.

[9 : 06] It is met constantly, with the relentlessness of the grace, and the mercy, of the covenant God. So as we come to the end of Genesis, and the story of Joseph, let's remind ourselves, one last time, that the chief subject of this whole story, has never been Joseph.

Never even been Jacob, and his family. But it's been God. The God of Israel. Their God, and our God. Remember that these words, were first written, for the people of Israel, under Moses, the church in the wilderness, as Stephen calls them in Acts 7.

And they were written, weren't they, to remind them of their past. To remind them who they really were. And above all, to remind them, to whom they really belonged. And that's why we have, these last few paragraphs of Genesis, that we have before us this morning.

Because Moses' concern in writing, echoes Joseph's own concern, as he approaches the end of his life. As Joseph has so faithfully, served his brothers all his life, he serves them faithfully, here right to the very last.

As he points them once again, to their great God and Savior. We can't help but be struck, can we, by this amazing paradox, that this Joseph, whom the brothers rejected, and tried to kill, that he became their ruler, and their Lord.

[10 : 41] And yet, even despite that, he remains, right to the very end, their servant. And when they're weak, and when they're fearful, he is the one, constantly revealing to them, the wonders of their God.

That's a striking pattern, isn't it? Well, what does this extraordinary, servant ruler of God's people, affirm to his brothers, about their God, here at the close of his life, and at the close of this amazing story?

And what does Moses, in recording it for us this way, what does he want his generation, and indeed, all of us, to have, ringing in our ears, and our hearts, as we end this extraordinary book of Genesis?

Well, let's look at these verses, and we'll try and summarize it, under four headings. First of all, he wants us to fully grasp, God's pardon. God's pardon, which is a wonderfully, complete pardon, despite the fear, that his servants, so often experience.

God's servant, Joseph, assures his brothers, and us, of the completeness, of God's pardon, for sin. Look at verse 15.

[11 : 57] The brothers' reaction is very understandable, isn't it? They saw their father was dead, they said, it may be that Joseph will hate us, and now pay us back, for the evil that we did to him. Now, their crimes were many, many decades in the past, by now.

But of course, grudges, and indeed, perhaps, especially family grudges, can last a very long time, can't they? And they were afraid. Joseph had been, wonderfully gracious, wonderfully caring to them.

But they had nagging doubts. Was it all just for our father's sake? Now he's gone. Will there be at last that vengeance?

They still had guilty consciences. Verse 15 says, they knew they had done evil. They use the word transgression. Verse 17, sin against God's law.

They repeat these terms again, speaking to him. They know that they need forgiveness. And they begged Joseph for forgiveness. It seems very likely, that this message, about a last word from their father, was just concocted by them.

[13 : 06] But even if it wasn't, it shows, doesn't it, that they clearly felt, they needed more influence, than just their own plea for mercy. They needed extra added authority. And they were very fearful, because they were very guilty.

And what was Joseph's reaction, verse 17? He wept. Joseph weeps a lot in this story, doesn't he? But they're not tears of weakness, these are tears of love. And yet perhaps also of sadness, because after all this time, his brothers still doubt, the reality of his love, and his commitment to them.

But I think it's more than that. He weeps, because they don't seem to grasp, what he himself, has more than grasped. That is the wonderful grace, and mercy, of their God, their father's God, their own God.

Am I in place of God, he says, verse 19? He turns their eyes, to God. And he explains again, that everything that has happened to him, has been at the hand of God, for blessing, and for salvation, for the saving of many lives.

[14 : 21] It's God's work, as it works, he says. God, our Savior, he knows that. And so he can assure his brothers, that they have complete forgiveness, from him and from God.

This isn't about me, Joseph is saying, it's about God. It's about his grace, and his mercy, which is infinite. You must see that. That's what he says in verse 21, fear not.

I think when we read this, it's easy for us, to disparage the brothers, isn't it? To see them as very deficient. And yet, don't we often ourselves, harbor those very same doubts, in our hearts?

Don't we have the very same fears, when our sins rise up, to accuse us, of our sin, and our guilt, and our transgression, against God? Can God really accept me, after all of this?

I know he promised forgiveness, but, can he change his mind? Can I really be sure? Look what I'm like, look what I've done. Did you feel that?

[15 : 38] You've stumbled so badly again, into some behavior, that you know is so wrong. You've lost control, of your tongue, or your temper, and it's led to, a real breakdown, a disaster, in some relationship, or other.

You've lost control, of your appetite, or your self-control. Maybe in a sexual way, maybe on the internet, maybe in practice.

Or maybe just your past, has caught up with you, in some other way, whatever it might be, and you're crushed, by this sense of guilt, and of failure, and of shame. Don't your failures, make your heart feel, just like that, just like Joseph's brothers?

And don't we also, need to hear, the words of our, wonderful servant brother, to assure us, as the Lord Jesus does, fear not, little flock, for it is, your father's, good pleasure, to give you, the kingdom. Joseph, says in verse 21, spoke kindly, to them, and comforted them. Literally, it says, he spoke to their hearts.

[16:55] It's exactly the words, that are used, when the Lord speaks, to his erring people, and speaks about, forgiveness, and restoration. I will allure her, and speak tenderly, to Israel's heart, says Hosea 2, and 14.

And those wonderful words, that you all know, from Isaiah chapter 40, where God says, comfort ye, comfort ye, my people. And he tells the prophet, to speak tenderly, to Jerusalem, to speak, to her heart, and to tell her, that her iniquity, is pardoned.

An assurance, of pardon. See, God knows, that we need, constantly, in our hearts, an assurance, of the completeness, of his pardon.

And so, he speaks to our hearts, constantly, and does just that. If we confess our sins, says John, he is faithful, and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us, from all unrighteousness.

That's a great assurance, that speaks to our hearts, every time, we come around the Lord's table, as we did last Sunday, as we take the bread, and the wine, in our hands, and into our mouths.

We're proclaiming, that marvelous truth.

[18:16] We're reminding God, of his promise, to be faithful, and to just, and forgive us, on account of Christ's death. And God remembers, his covenant with us, made in his blood.

And he speaks, to our hearts, and assures us, of a complete, pardon for sin. What a great word, this must have been, for Moses, and his people, on the brink of the land.

Think of all, their sin, and failures, and disasters, in the wilderness. Fear not, I will provide, for you, and your little ones.

Joseph, you see, was a living demonstration, before their eyes, of the power, of God's grace, and what it can do, in the human heart. How much easier, it was for his brothers, to believe in a God, of grace and mercy, when they saw, that grace and mercy, and heard it, in the person, of their own brother, Joseph, in his forgiveness, of them.

That's worth remembering, for us, isn't it? You be tender hearted, says Paul, to the Ephesians, in Ephesians 4, 32. You be tender hearted, forgiving one another, as in Christ, God forgave you.

[19:37] See, if our church, if our covenant family, is a place, where that spirit prevails, would it be so much easier, for all of us, to be assured, of God's complete pardon, in our lives?

If we see that spirit, and sense it? Joseph, wanted to assure, his brothers, of God's complete pardon.

And also, he wanted to assure them, secondly, of God's purpose, which is a wonderfully, comforting purpose, despite the faults, that his servants, will never be free from.

God's servant, Joseph, assures his brothers, and us, of the comfort, in God's purpose, of salvation, even when sin, and evil, seem to be rampant, in the life, of his church.

Verse 20, is rightly famous. In many ways, it's the climax, not only of the whole, Joseph story, but of the whole book, of Genesis. In one sense, Genesis is, a tragic book.

[20:41] From the high point, at the end of chapters, one and two, it's all downhill, isn't it? After just a brief, glimpse, of the glory, of creation, it turns immediately, to be a story, of sin, and of rebellion, and of corruption, and of destruction, and death.

The fresh start, after Noah, very quickly degenerates, into the disaster, of the Tower of Babel. Even the story, of Abraham, and his family, by the time we get, to chapter 34, and 38, we've seen, God's covenant family, just as bad, even worse, than the pagans.

And what the brothers, do to Joseph, is the lowest point, of all, killing their own brother, or so they thought. But, you see, God's servant, Joseph, has learned, that this God, his God, is a God, who moves, in a mysterious way, his wonders, to perform.

And that far, from being thwarted, by evil, rather, he often uses, the worst kind, of evil, and rebellion, to rebound, to his greater glory, and to the ultimate, blessing, of all of his people.

And Joseph, had come to grasp, that the more, you are caught up, in the heart, of God's story, the more, that you will share, in that extraordinary, willing suffering, of the long-suffering, Savior God, of grace, who is, the covenant God.

[22:09] And that's why, he can say, with such confidence, in verse 20, you meant evil, against me, but God, meant it for good. Because it's not just, about me, and my life, he's saying.

It's about God's, marvelous plan, his purpose, of grace, for many, for saving, many lives. And you see, when you've come, to see your own life, and everything, in your own life, as part of something, bigger, much, much bigger, as part of God's, wonderful purpose, of grace, and mercy, then, friends, you will see, the whole world, in such a very different way.

Joseph's eyes, had been opened, to the wonders, of God's providence, always at work, to accomplish, his purpose, his perfect way. And he wanted, his brothers, to know, the comfort of that too.

that God's purpose, will never be thwarted. Not even by our own mistakes, and our own folly. Not even, by our own sin, and the evil in our hearts.

Not even that. That was the message, wasn't it, that the apostles, understood, when the message, of Christ's resurrection, had sunk in. Before that, of course, they thought, Jesus' death, was a total disaster.

[23 : 30] That even the first Easter morning, wasn't a day of hallelujahs. It was a day of weeping, and confusion. But later, later, they could see, God's wonderful purpose, at work, even through, that most terrible, of evils.

This Jesus, whom you crucified, says Peter, God raised up, and Herod, and Pilate, and all of those others, only did, he says, what God's hand, had purposed, to take place, to work out, his great salvation.

Friends, isn't it a wonderful comfort, and indeed, a great liberation, when we have our eyes, open to that great truth, especially, in a time of, of great personal pain, and darkness, and struggle.

To know, that however evil, things may seem, to be to us, that God is at work, in it all, and indeed, over it all, performing his wonders.

It was William Cooper, John Newton's great friend, who wrote that hymn, God Moves, in a mysterious way, in a mysterious way. I believe that, he was a man, who suffered very greatly, from a dark, dark depression, and I believe it was just, as he was sinking, into a great blanket, of darkness, from which he never, fully recovered, that he wrote those words.

[25 : 03] Listen, ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds, you so much dread, are big with mercy, and shall break, in blessings, on your head.

Judge not the Lord, by feeble sense, but trust him, for his grace. Behind, a frowning providence, there lies, a smiling face.

His purposes, will ripen fast, unfolding, every hour. The bud, may have a bitter taste, but sweet, will be the flower.

Blind unbelief, is sure to err, and scan his work, in vain. God, is his own interpreter, and he will, make it plain.

You see, God did make it plain, in the end, to Joseph. What a glorious testimony, he had. And he will, make things plain, to us also, in our lives.

[26 : 06] Although it might take, many, many years. I don't think, Joseph, was seeing things, quite this way, back in chapter 37, at the bottom of that pit. And that actually, reminds us, doesn't it, that we do need, to be very careful, how we, apply a kind of text, like this.

It's one thing, to say to ourselves, and to say it, of ourselves, as we look back, over our own lives, and an experience, where we've, been able to come at last, to see God, working wonders, through dark, and difficult days.

It's one thing, to do that. It's quite another, to glibly, quote texts like that, to somebody, who's in the pit of darkness, in the midst of despair. Don't do that.

That's just crass, that's just insensitive. But, but to hear, the testimony, of a wounded saint, about how God, does work, wonders of grace, and how God, has turned, clouds of dread, into showers of mercy, as they look back, over their life.

And to see in scripture, that all, through the story, of God's great redemption, how that has been the pattern, that is a great comfort, great friends. But we find ourselves, feeble saints, struggling to see, in the dark.

[27 : 29] Remember, a few years ago, speaking to a policeman, who was a Christian, who told me, that his job, had been downgraded, his pay, had been cut. He'd been having a terrible time, and he did cutbacks, in the service.

But, you know, he sat and, smiled at me. And he said, you know, I can see now, that God was using, all of that, to bless me, because, he's helped me, to see so much more clearly, what the

whole of my life, is really all about.

And can't we look back, friends, as a fellowship here, even over these last months, last year or two, and can't we testify, that what some have meant, for evil, God has meant, for good, for the saving, of lives?

Yes, we can. And you see, the more, that you learn, to walk with God, in his service, the more, you find yourself, taken up, in his ways, ways which will, often pain us, and will often perplex us.

But the more, we do that, trusting, and obeying, his commands, the more, we will rejoice, in the comfort, of knowing, his purpose, knowing, his providence, and knowing, that when things, seem to be, smiling, frowning upon us, that these things, hide, a wonderfully, smiling face, of great grace, and great mercy, and great goodness.

[29 : 01] purpose. And our certainty, and that wonderfully, comforting purpose, will guard us, and keep us, even amid the many, mysteries that we will face, in life.

Never forget, the wonderful comfort, of God's purpose, for all who are his. purpose. And nor, must we ever forget, God's promise.

God's promise, which is, a wonderfully, certain promise, despite the frailty, that his servants, so often feel. That's the third thing, that Joseph points, his brothers, and indeed us to, the certainty, of God's promise, for his servants.

That even in the face, of death itself, there is a glorious, future, for every one, of the people, of God. I'm not sure about you, but I certainly, prefer to read books, with a happy ending.

Last time I was on holiday, I was reading a thrilling book, and I got to the very end, and the hero, of the whole thing, died in the last couple of pages, and it just totally, spoiled my holiday mood. So don't learn many books, like that.

[30 : 12] But what about, this story of Genesis? Is there a happy ending? In one sense, no, in one sense, it's a tragic story, with a sad ending.

I was reading my father's notes, and he put it very succinctly, like this. The first words of Genesis, were, in the beginning God. Words of infinite meaning, and possibility, and hope.

Its last, a coffin in Egypt. That's very telling, isn't it? It's rather chilling. The book that begins with, the glory of God's creation, ends in the grave of man's corruption.

Reminds us of that genealogy, way back, if you can remember, to Genesis chapter 5. Adam fathered Seth, and he died. And Seth fathered Enosh, and he died.

And so it goes on, and he died, and he died, and he died, and he died. And here we are at last, in the very last verse, of the book of Genesis, with Joseph, and he dies.

[31 : 22] A book that opened with life, and it ends with death. But as we've said, the end of Genesis, is not the end of the story. And that's what Joseph is crying out, on his own deathbed.

This is just the end of the beginning, he's saying to his brothers. It's just one brief chapter, in a far, far greater story, that does not end with death, but with life.

Remember God's promise of life, is what he's saying to them. The covenant promise, which is certain, it cannot fail, because God will do, everything that he has promised, and he will dwell with us, his people, forever.

It's wonderful, isn't it, to see where Joseph's heart, is really invested. So often it is, at the end of a life, that you see, what that life, has really been all about, what it's been lived for, what's been so important, to that person.

You see it sometimes, in what they determine, to have at their funeral. They want to have, Frank Sinatra played, I did it my way. That's the commonest song, I'm told at funerals.

[32 : 30] Defiance, right to the end. Or sometimes, somebody wants their ashes, to be scattered, on the football pitch, of the team, which has really been, their life.

That's what it's all been about. It's very sad, and pathetic. But how different, with this man, Joseph. In one sense, you see, this man had everything, that earth could afford.

The very structures, of these last paragraphs, makes that point. It's bracketed, you can see, verse 22, and verse 26, with reference to his age, 110. Apparently, that was the age, of perfect blessing, in Egyptian thinking, of the day.

As was living, to see, the third generation, of your family, as verse 23, relates to us. Here is a man, who had it all, in life, we're being told. But what is it, that grips his heart?

What is it, that he vocalizes, about that, in the midst, of this last paragraph? Well it's there, in verses 24, and 25. It's the promise, of God. It's the covenant, sworn to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, a

promise, about a future.

[33 : 40] God had promised Abraham, four things. Do you remember, back in Genesis 12? A people, like the sand, of the seashore. A place, the land, where they would dwell. The presence of God, to bless them, and protect them, in that place.

And the plan of God, to bless all the earth, through his seed. And you see, that is exactly, where Joseph's eyes, and heart are fixed, at the very last.

He speaks of God's, people, and them coming back, verse 24, to the place, and the land. He speaks of God's, presence with them, verse 25, visiting them, to save them.

And of God's, great plan, going on, as he foresees, the exodus. And I, he says to his brothers, I will be part, of that future.

Because you're taking, my bones with you. See, just like Jacob, it was a last, supreme confession, of his faith. Faith, and the promise, of an everlasting, home with God.

[34 : 47] He wanted his bones, planted, like his forefathers, in the land of promise, in the place of inheritance. So that he, would receive, his inheritance, alongside all the rest, of God's people.

That's what he's saying. As we saw with Jacob, last week, it was the true hope, of all the patriarchs, for a bodily future.

For a real future, in a tangible world, in a better country, in a real city, built, with everlasting foundations, by God himself. Hebrews 11, tells us plainly, they were seeking, that homeland.

Goes right on, in Hebrews 11, verse 22, to summarize, the whole of Joseph's life, in just one verse. Listen, by faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention, of the exile, of the Israelites, and gave direction, concerning his bones.

I think, we could fairly, summarize that, and say that, Joseph's dying words, were focused, on God's great redemption, to come, and the great resurrection, to come. Now, that is no light thing, is it?

[35 : 58] To be somebody, who has got it all. Everything in life, was at his disposal. And yet, for your heart, to be taken up, wholly, with the promise of God, for the future.

So that, that is the only thing, that you really want to talk about, when death is staring you, in the face. And that was Joseph's message, to his brothers, and to all the Israelites, years later, on the brink of the promised land, carrying his coffin, with them, as they did.

That coffin, spoke to them. See how God, keeps his promises. Look where we are today. So keep, looking to the future, in faith.

The story, still isn't over. And all that he has promised, he will yet fulfill. Even bringing to life, these very bones, in the box, that you're carrying, with you today.

So yes, the end of this book, is, a coffin in Egypt. But even there, there is a sure, and certain hope, of the future. And yes, when you come to Moses' last book, the book of Deuteronomy, it ends with the death, of another of God's servants, Moses himself.

[37 : 14] You come to the end, of the book of Joshua, and it ends, with the death of Joshua. You come to the end, of the book of Chronicles, and it ends, with the death of David, the great promised king.

And so it goes on, and on, and on. Until you turn over the page, and you read Matthew's gospel, and you come towards, the end of that book, and it also ends, or so it seems, in a death, and a tomb, and a burial, in the promised land.

And yet, that book does not end there, in death, does it? But with resurrection, with the first fruits, of the promise, of eternal life, fulfilled at last, for a human body.

But still, the story is not yet over. And we too, need God's servants, don't we, to point us to the future, to the ultimate fulfillment, of all God's people, in the certain promise, of God.

That's still not yet. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 15, Christ, is the first fruits, but only at his coming, shall all who are his, rise at last, to be re clothed, in a resurrection body, like his.

[38 : 33] It's not yet, even for us. But it is certain, and on that day, says Revelation chapter 21, death shall be no more, and every tear, shall be wiped away.

It's so very powerful, isn't it? So wonderful, when someone facing death, themselves, is just so taken up, with assuring, their brothers and sisters, of the certainty, of God's great promise.

Pointing others, to the glorious news, of the gospel. I recall, just a couple of years ago, visiting, David, early, just before he died.

As you know, he had terminal cancer, he'd been having, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy, he was in great pain, and I went to see him, on that occasion, actually, he was listening, to George Beverly

Shea, singing gospel songs, on a CD.

We talked, and I prayed for him. Before I could get up, to leave, he started praying too, for me, and for my family, and for our church fellowship, here, in our struggles, and praying especially, that through it all, people would hear, the good news, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[39 : 53] A man, who was once, a bitter, communist, an atheist, an opposer, of the gospel. But that day, as he stared death, in the face, his heart was full, of everything, that truly matters, in life.

Gospel of the Lord, Jesus Christ. That's what it was, with Joseph, friends. I'm about to die, he says, but God will visit you, and bring you, into a land, of promise.

Wonderful echoes, aren't they? of the words, of the Lord Jesus, in the upper room, as he faced his death, and encouraged his brothers. Let not your hearts, be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in me, I go to prepare, a place, for you. That brings me, to one final word, as we close.

Surely here, and in all this, marvelous story, the writer wants us, to see God's pattern, which is a wonderfully, Christ-like pattern. God's servant, Joseph, points his brothers, and us, to the Christ, because he is, a true pattern, of the Savior, to come.

[41 : 13] We've seen so many ways, haven't we, in which Joseph's life, echoes, and foreshadows, the great servant, of the Lord, Jesus, from his rejection, by his own, and yet God's blessing, being manifest on him, for all to see, so that he grew, in stature, and in favor, with all men.

And his extraordinary mission, going before his brothers, to become their Savior, and indeed their Lord, so that they do, bow the knee to him, just as the dream foretold, and also his wonderful, wonderful grace, and mercy, and forgiving them, who tried to kill him.

Almost everything, in Joseph's life, is a powerful, powerful proclamation, of the saving mercy, of God, which of course, came to its fullness, in the Lord Jesus himself.

Why is that? It's because, he was a man, conformed, to the image, of his God, in Christ. Listen to what, the writer to the Hebrews, says about Jesus, in chapter 2.

It was fitting, that he, from whom, and by whom, all things exist, in bringing many sons, to glory, should make the founder, of their salvation, perfect, through suffering.

[42 : 30] It goes on, he is not ashamed, to call them brothers. And we're told, he delivers, these brothers, from the fear of death. Therefore, says the writer, he had to be made, like his brothers, in every respect, so that he might become, a merciful, high priest, in the service of God, to make propitiation, for the sins of his people.

And Hebrews 5 says, he learned obedience, through what he suffered, and thus became, the source of eternal salvation, to all, who obey him.

The evil done to him, issued in the saving, of many lives. Joseph's life, Joseph's life, was remarkably, Jesus shaped, don't you think?

But we shouldn't be, surprised by that. Because all, who are taken up, into God's story, and whose hearts, thrill with that promise, all such, will find, their experience, likewise, conformed, to the image, of God's son.

Because we're all, united to him, by the same faith. Whether it's like Joseph, long, long before Jesus came, or like in our day, long after his resurrection, we're all part, of this same, great story, which isn't over yet.

[43 : 52] Sure, our calling in life, is different to Joseph's. We don't have, a unique role, in preserving, God's covenant seed, until Christ came, in the flesh. But we are, all likewise, called to live, as true servants, of God's promise, his gospel.

By what we speak, of that grace, to people's hearts, and, by what we shine, of that grace, from our hearts. If you like, in our weeping, with others, as well as, in our words, to others, just as Joseph, was.

And that is, the Christ-like, pattern, of every, truly faithful servant, right from the beginning, of the story in Genesis, and right up, until the coming, of our Lord Jesus.

So as we end, this study, of Genesis together, that surely is, what we want to be, isn't it? Servants, of our Lord, and Savior, who live, and love, to assure our brethren, of God's complete pardon.

And who assure them, of the wonderfully, comforting purpose, of his great salvation, even in the midst, of present pain. And who point them, and one another, always, and to the very end, to the certain promise, that we also, are his forever.

[45 : 18] friends, if we live like that, and if we die like that, in the same, Christ-like pattern, of this man, Joseph, then we too, shall have lived, and died well, by faith, pointing others, to the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christ. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you, for the gospel, of your grace, which, from this, earliest of books, has shone forth, to us, so wonderfully, with such comfort, and such hope, assuring us, of your pardon, reassuring us, of your great purpose, for us, above all, pointing us, constantly, to our great Savior, who fill us, with your spirit, like mourning, dew shed down, and with our praises, loyal, King Jesus, we shall crown, who be our lives, our tribute, the mead of praise, we bring, when thus, we join, to honor, our teacher, and our king, amen.
Amen.