

Death in Egypt

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. The book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 47.

Genesis 47. And if we read again in verse 28. Genesis 47 and verse 28.

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.

And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph. Joseph. Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 147 years.

May I have your attention, please, everyone. Welcome aboard this Caledonian McBrain vessel.

[1 : 14] Your safety is our highest priority. And therefore, we ask that you listen carefully to the following safety announcement. Do you know, as islanders, we are very familiar with ferry travel.

We might not all have sea legs or even the stomach for sailing. But we're all familiar with CalMAC procedures. That when you board the ferry just prior to departure, a safety briefing is given.

It's given and telling us what to do in the unlikely event of an emergency. And for many of us, it's a familiar sound when the tannoy rings and the safety instructions are announced.

But of course, the safety instructions, they are for our benefit. So that we know what to do and we know where to go in the event of an emergency. But more often than not, when the announcement is given, we can hear it.

But not everyone is listening. Not everyone is paying attention. Probably because they've heard it all before. And instead of listening to the safety instructions, they're trying to make themselves comfortable and cozy prior to departure.

[2 : 29] Because the thing is, well, no one ever suspects that anything is going to happen to them. But you know, looking at this passage this morning, the same could be said about death.

The same could be said about death. Because each Lord's Day, the gospel tannoy rings. And safety instructions are announced so that you know what to do and where to go in the likely event of an emergency.

You're told that your only safety is in the gospel. Your assembly point is at the cross of Jesus Christ. And the life jacket that you must put on is the Lord Jesus Christ.

But like it often is with that familiar fairy announcement, when this gospel tannoy rings, you hear it. But you're not listening.

You're not paying attention. You're not responding. Probably because you've heard it all before.

And rather than take in these important instructions, you try and make yourself cozy and comfortable prior to your departure from this world and towards your eternal destination.

[3 : 44] Do you know, my unconverted friend, I read this passage and I'm reminded that death is an enemy. And for you, death is an emergency. It's an emergency that you need to be prepared for.

And the only way to be prepared is by following the safety instructions. You need to experience eternal life in Jesus Christ before you encounter eternal death without Jesus Christ.

Because, you know, that's what Jacob did. Jacob experienced life in Egypt before he encountered death in Egypt. Jacob experienced life in Egypt before he encountered death in Egypt.

And this morning, I'd like us just to think about Jacob's death. And I want us to think about it under three headings. The age of death, the attitude of death, and the approach of death.

The age of death, the attitude of death, and the approach of death. So first of all, the age of death. We see that in verse 28. Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years.

[5 : 00] So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years. Jacob was born to Isaac and Rebekah around the year 2006 BC.

He was the younger twin to his elder brother Esau, who was only born just moments before him. In fact, when Jacob and Esau was born, we're told in the Bible that Jacob came out holding on to Esau's heel.

But as the young boys, as they grew and as they developed in their own character, they were very different as young boys. Esau was a strong kind of lad. He was always out in the field hunting. Whereas Jacob, he was often found at home. He enjoyed his own company. He enjoyed peace and quiet. But sadly, within the family home, the parents, Isaac and Rebekah, they had family favorites. Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. And their family favoritism, it inevitably created a family feud and even tension within the family home.

[6 : 08] And when Rebekah, you remember, she encouraged Jacob to deceive his blind and dying father Isaac and steal his elder brother Esau's inherited birthright, you remember how it caused division.

And to prevent Esau doing something that he might live to later regret, Jacob was sent away from the family home. But, you know, it was when Jacob left home that his life became very, very interesting.

And I'm sure it would have been fascinating to sit down with Jacob in his old age at 147 years and maybe talk through his life. It would have been fascinating to hear what he would have to say. Just like it's fascinating when you sit down with people from a previous generation and they talk about all their experiences that they've gone through in life. But for Jacob, he would have been able to speak about the time when he stopped and slept in Canaan.

And how he dreamt about a ladder that was reaching all the way to heaven and there were angels ascending and descending upon this ladder. And how the Lord promised Jacob in that dream that the land of Canaan would be where his children and also his grandchildren, as great-grandchildren, would live one day.

[7 : 26] But by that point in his life, Jacob, he wasn't married. And he wouldn't be married for another seven years until he had worked for his future father-in-law, Laban.

But you remember that it was on the wedding night. Jacob thought that he had married Rachel, the love of his life. But he was deceived and he discovered that he actually married Rachel's sister, Leah.

Jacob then had to work for a further seven years for Laban in order to marry the love of his life, Rachel. But as you can imagine, having two wives in the house, it was going to bring more family feuds and fighting.

Even more so because Jacob had 13 children to four different women. Jacob had two wives, Rachel and Leah. He also had two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah.

And with Jacob, they had 12 boys and one girl in the family. And in a household with so many wives and children and concubines, you can imagine that emotions often ran quite high.

[8 : 30] There was lots of stresses and strains and you read about it all in the book of Genesis. And it all affected not only the parents, but also it affected the children. You could say that Jacob's family was a complex and complicated family.

And yet the message of the book of Genesis is that God was interested in this family. God was interested in this family because the truth is, well, there's no perfect family.

Not even the family of God is perfect. Our church family isn't perfect. Every family has flaws and failings and fallouts. Every family encounters and experiences breakups and breakdowns, sicknesses and suffering and sorrows, divisions and divorce.

But, you know, the glory of the gospel is that God is interested in your family. God is interested in your family. You know, that's the thrust of the book of Genesis. God is interested in your family.

And God was interested in Jacob's family. Even when Jacob was told by his sons that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

[9 : 39] It's devastating news that every parent dreads to be told that your child has died. And yet for 20 years, Jacob believed that Joseph was dead.

And as we know, we've gone through the story and the narrative of Joseph's life. We know that he was seized and separated and sold into slavery in Egypt.

But it was all part of the Lord's perfect and patiently planned purpose. Jacob's sons, they meant evil against him and Joseph.

But the Lord meant it for good. Because as we saw in the previous chapter, when Jacob's sons finally came clean and confessed what had happened to Joseph, they convinced their father to leave the land of Canaan and come to Egypt.

And they convinced him by proving that Joseph is not dead, but alive. He's not a slave. He's now the saviour of the ancient world. And as we saw last time, when Jacob and his family took that 500-mile journey from Canaan to Egypt, Jacob encountered and he experienced life in Egypt.

[10:52] Jacob encountered and experienced what we saw was resurrection, reunion, renewal, and even redemption in Egypt. Jacob encountered and experienced life in Egypt.

But now he's about to encounter and experience death in Egypt. And as Jacob neared death, I'm sure that he would have thought and looked back over his life and thought about all that he had been through in his life.

Maybe he thought he would have died younger. And yet, what he would have been amazed by is how the Lord was his keeper. However, the Lord was the one who had kept him all these years, throughout every experience and every encounter in his life.

The Lord had kept him. And you know, maybe you look back over your life. And maybe you think, well, after all that I've been through, and all that I've encountered, all the sins or the sicknesses or the sufferings or the sorrows that I've encountered and experienced in my life, maybe you say this morning, well, the Lord is my keeper.

Can you say that this morning? The Lord is my keeper. He's the one who keeps me. That's who he promises to be. He promises to guard me and watch over me and keep me.

[12:12] The Lord is my keeper. But you know, at the age of 147, Jacob had lived a long life. It wasn't as long as his father, Isaac, who lived to 180.

Or even his grandfather, Abraham, who lived until he was 175. But still, it wasn't as long as Adam. Adam, you read in Genesis, in Genesis 5 and 6, you read that he lived until he was 930.

Noah lived until he was 950. Or even Methuselah, who was the oldest man who ever lived, he lived until he was 969.

But in Genesis 6, we're reminded that it was because of the sinfulness of man that the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man.

His days shall be 120 years. And so, from the time of the flood, all the way through to the time of Moses, the average age of death was reduced from 900 years to 120.

[13:20] It was reduced all the way down to the average age, 120 years. In fact, that was the age Moses was when he died. But it was Moses, you remember, who said, after the waywardness in the wilderness, these 40 years, how the children of Israel were wayward, you remember that the average age of death was reduced even further.

Because in Psalm 90, which was written by Moses, Moses said that the years of our life are 70, or if by reason of strength, 80.

But as we know only too well, my friend, death is no respecter of age. Because death never asks us how old we are. It never asks us if we have a family.

It never asks us, Have you made plans for your life? Death doesn't ask us if we're ready. Because death, as the Bible states very clearly, is an enemy.

It's a thief that invades our homes and steals from us those whom we love. And even with all the great advances of science, no one can prevent death.

[14:35] Because your Bible will inform you that the wages of sin is death. And that it is appointed unto man once to die. And after that, the judgment.

And as you know, my unconverted friend, I don't say this lightly. I try to say it as lovingly as possible. I don't say it lightly, because death is an enemy.

And for you, death will be an emergency if you continue in the state you are in today. That's why you need to listen to the safety announcement of the gospel.

Because your age of death, as the Bible is reminding us, it has been appointed, as it has been for me. Your age of death has been appointed.

Therefore, what's important is your attitude towards death. Which is what I want us to consider secondly. Because as we consider Jacob's death, we see the age of death.

[15:38] He was 147. But then the attitude of death. The attitude of death. Look back to verse 7 in Genesis 47. It says there, For then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh.

And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, How many are the days of the years of your life? And Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life. And they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my father in the days of their sojourning.

Now we said a moment ago that Psalm 90 was written by Moses. Which makes it the oldest psalm in the Bible. It's three and a half thousand years old. And yet the amazing thing about Psalm 90, even though it's the oldest psalm in the Bible, and yet it contains the most relevant truth.

That life is uncertain, death is sure, sin is the cause, and Christ is the cure. You've heard me saying it many times before. Life is uncertain, death is sure, sin is the cause, Christ is the cure.

[16:53] But Psalm 90 is the prayer of Moses. And as Moses prayed in Psalm 90, he made this great contrast between who God is and who we are.

And Moses said that God is the creator. And he is from everlasting to everlasting. He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. He has no beginning, and he has no end.

He's not governed by time, because a thousand years are just like one day to him. But of course, in comparison to God, we are created.

We are finite. We have an end point. We're always changing. And we're all governed by time. We are so unlike God.

That's what Moses says. We're so unlike God, because our life is like a tale that is told. It's like a vapor that just appears for a moment and then vanishes.

[17:50] In no time at all, our years, he says, are soon gone. And that's why Moses said in Psalm 90, teach us to number our days that we may apply our heart unto wisdom.

Teach us to number our days that we may apply our heart unto wisdom. And you know, that's the attitude we should have towards death. That's the prayer we should possess and practice in our lives.

Teach us to number our days. Teach me, Lord, to number my days that I may apply my heart unto wisdom. You know, my friend, we need to possess and even practice loving, looking, and living life with an eternal perspective.

We need to possess and practice loving, looking, and living life with an eternal perspective. You know, I'm sure I've told you before about the story about Thomas Chalmers.

Thomas Chalmers, as some of you will know, he was the first moderator of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843. But before Chalmers was converted, before he became a Christian, he spent many years of his life as a professor of mathematics in St. Andrew's University.

[19:07] But because of his intellectual position, because he could read and write, and because he was a professor, Chalmers was also licensed to preach. And so on the Lord's Day, Chalmers would preach in his local congregation, even though he wasn't a Christian.

He was a very religious man, but he wasn't a Christian. And before he was converted, Chalmers used to flippantly say that ministers, well, they had an easy life. They had the easiest job in the world.

Some people might still think that. But, you know, Chalmers, he boasted that he could lecture from Monday to Friday, prepare two sermons on a Saturday afternoon, and preach both ends on the Lord's Day.

But, of course, Chalmers' view of the ministry had changed when he became a Christian. And he began to preach a gospel, the gospel of grace, rather than a gospel of religion.

But, you know, after he left his position as professor of mathematics to go into full-time Christian ministry, Chalmers said that there was one mathematical equation he had never considered before, the shortness of time and the length of eternity.

[20:20] The shortness of time and the length of eternity. My friend, that's why we should possess and practice the prayer of Moses in our lives.

Teach us to number our days that we may apply our heart unto wisdom. Because even though Jacob was given many days in this world, what we read here is that he was conscious that they would come to an end.

He was always conscious that this life would come to an end. That's why we read earlier that when Jacob met Pharaoh at the age of 130, Jacob confessed to Pharaoh.

What he said to Pharaoh was that he was a pilgrim in this world. He was just a sojourner. Jacob knew that he was, this life wasn't permanent and that he was only passing through.

But, you know, for Pharaoh, he was amazed at Jacob's age and also Jacob's attitude towards death. And that's because the Egyptians, they were obsessed with their mortality.

[21 : 26] And they always tried desperately to ensure their immortality. That was the reason the Egyptians had pyramids and practiced mummification. Their attitude towards death was that they wanted to live forever.

They wanted to live forever. In fact, at that time, Egyptians thought that 110 years old, they thought that that was the maximum age anyone could live to.

And so when Pharaoh met Jacob, who was 130, Pharaoh immediately wanted to know Jacob's secret. He wants to know, how are you that old? But instead of boasting about his age, we see that Jacob, he humbly acknowledged the brevity of life.

Jacob confessed that even 130 years in this world, still very short, in comparison to the length of eternity.

It's very, very short. And Jacob's attitude towards death was that he was a pilgrim. He was just a sojourner. He was a stranger in this world.

[22 : 36] He was only passing through. And you know, I love that description, which is given in Hebrews 11, of people like Jacob and Joseph, and all those who died in faith, trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

It says in Hebrews 11, that these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and they were persuaded of them, and they embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Their attitude towards death was that they died in faith, and they confessed that this world is not their home. They were just passing through.

You know, was that not what Jim Reeves sang? This world is not my home. I'm just a passing through. My friend, Jacob's attitude towards death was that this world wasn't permanent.

It's passing. It's only temporary and transient. But for many people, like Pharaoh in this passage, they try to make this world their permanent residence.

[23 : 55] because their attitude towards death is that maybe, well, they don't really think about it. Maybe you're like that. Maybe you never really think about death because you always think, well, it's far away from me.

It's not yet. And if it's going to happen, it'll happen to someone else. You know, I remember hearing about a minister saying that at a cemetery just after they had laid to rest the remains of a member of the community, the minister turned to the congregation who had gathered at the graveside just like we do in our own community.

And the minister lovingly said to those in front of him, pointing at the grave, who's next? Who's next? But you know, the truth is most of them, young and old, their immediate thought was, not me. Not me. And you know, my friend, that's the devil's greatest lie. You won't be next. You have plenty time. You always have tomorrow. And sadly, like Pharaoh, so many people, they swallow the lie and they try hard to make this world their permanent residence.

And for Pharaoh, as we read earlier, he was the most powerful man in Egypt. He owned all of Egypt. He had storehouses that were bursting with grain. He had everything that money could buy.

[25 : 29] He even bought the people and made them slaves. But still, Pharaoh didn't have what Jacob had. He didn't have the promise of eternal life.

Pharaoh didn't have the assurance that when he closed his eyes in this world, he would open them in the glory of heaven. And you know, Pharaoh, you read through the chapter and he just reminds me of the rich fool.

Because Jesus said, the rich fool, he built for himself bigger and better barns. Barns for all his possessions. And as a rich fool, he said to his soul, soul, you have many goods laid up for you for many years.

Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. But you know, when God spoke into his life, as he will speak into all our lives, God said to him, you fool, tonight your soul shall be required of you.

And those things which you have prepared and tried to make permanent, whose shall they be? I always find that question so solemn.

[26 : 47] Whose shall they be? Whose shall they be? You know, people spend their life preparing for retirement, but only some of them live to see it.

And all that they've spent their life planning and preparing for, it's gone in a moment. It's just as Jesus said, isn't it? What shall it profit a man or a woman if they were to gain the whole world and yet lose their own soul?

Do you know, my friend, as we consider Jacob's death, we need to realize and we need to remember that our age of death has been appointed by the Lord.

And our attitude towards death is that we must realize that this world is not our home. We're just passing through. Therefore, the question we should be asking ourselves is, well, how should I approach death?

How should we approach death? And that's what I want us to consider lastly and briefly. The approach of death. The age of death, the attitude of death, and the approach of death.

[27 : 57] The approach of death. Look at verse 29 at the end of the chapter. And when the time drew near that Israel or Jacob must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me.

Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place. He answered, I will do as you have said.

And he said, Swear to me. And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed. You know, as those who live in a rural community with a local cemetery, many of us are familiar with the idea of buying a burial plot and paying annual layer fees.

But I remember a few years ago visiting a woman and she showed me a picture of her relative's gravestone in Canada. But the interesting thing about the relative's gravestone was that the relative was still living.

In the picture, she was standing beside her own gravestone. The burial plot had been purchased. The gravestone had been erected. And words had been written on the gravestone to the effect of in loving memory of and the name of the relative and her date of birth.

[29 : 21] But of course, where the date of death would later be written was still blank. And you know, it was so solemn to see the picture. To see someone's grave and their gravestone and write your name on it and yet they're still living.

Everything had been prepared prior to death. They were prepared for death. And you know, what an approach to death to have.

Because that's the approach to death we should all have. Because we should be prepared prior to our departure. Just like Jacob was. Because Jacob was prepared for death.

Now in these verses we're only given a snapshot of what actually happened in the lead up to Jacob's death. In the following chapters which we'll consider God willing in the coming weeks, the chapters will expand and explain what happened more fully.

In fact, through the experience and example of Jacob, the following chapters, they will actually teach us what it is to die well. What it is to die well.

[30 : 27] Because my friend, we all need to learn how to die well. That's what the whole gospel message is about. It's about how to die well.

But in these verses we see that for Jacob, the witness of death was as important to him as the witness of life. And he prepares himself prior to death by enacting and ensuring his will.

And as we read, Jacob, he called Joseph to come to his bedside, to his deathbed. And it was as Joseph sat beside Jacob, we're told that Joseph put his hand under his thigh.

Jacob asked Joseph to put his hand under his thigh, which might seem like a strange thing for us to do. But in the ancient world, you didn't write a will. The symbol of putting your hand under the thigh of someone who was dying, it was a symbol of promise.

That you were promising to fulfill their dying wishes and will. You were promising to fulfill their wishes and their will after their death.

[31 : 36] And Jacob's request to Joseph was a simple one. Don't bury me in Egypt. Bury me with my family. Don't bury me in Egypt. Bury me with my family.

Bury me in the family lair with all those who have gone before me. And as you'd expect, Joseph, he acquiesced and he accepted his father's wishes and his father's will.

Of course, Jacob's wishes and will to be buried in the family lair, it's very common. We see that often in our own community. But you know, what's been emphasized here is the need to be prepared prior to death.

because we should all be prepared prior to our departure from this world. We should all be prepared prior to entering towards our eternal destination.

My friend, by all means, buy a burial plot. Pay your lair fees. Write a will. But you know, my greatest concern, and you might think this morning, well, murder, you're very morbid.

[32 : 43] But my greatest concern, which should be your greatest concern, when everything is stripped back, your greatest concern should be that your soul is saved for time and for eternity.

That's what this is all about. My greatest concern is that your soul is saved. Your soul needs to be saved. Now, time has gone and it always does, but you know, this morning, we've been reminded about the age of death, that it's appointed unto man once to die, and after that, the judgment.

We've been reminded about the attitude of death, an attitude that we must possess. We must possess and practice Moses' prayer, that we should teach us to number our days, that we may apply our heart unto wisdom.

We're to have the attitude of death where we realize that we're only passing through. We've also been reminded about the approach of death. We all need to be prepared prior to departure.

We all need to be prepared prior to departure. You know, in the words of our familiar ferry briefing, it was very simply, may I have your attention please, everyone.

[34 : 10] And you know, this statement could be the statement of this Kirk Session. Your safety is our highest priority, and therefore we ask that you listen carefully to the following safety announcement.

You know, my unconverted friend, the gospel tannoy, it has rung once again this morning, as it does every Lord's Day. Your safety instructions have been announced so that you know what to do and where to go in the likely event of an emergency.

Your only safety is in the gospel. Your assembly point is the cross of Calvary. Your life jacket, which you must put on, is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you know, my unconverted friend, don't ignore these important instructions. Don't try and make yourself comfortable and cozy in this life, because we're only passing through.

Death is an enemy, and if you're not ready, death will be an emergency. You need to be prepared. You need to be prepared for death.

[35 : 25] How? simply trusting in Jesus with all your heart for time and for eternity. You commit your life to this Jesus, my friend, for time and for eternity.

Don't put it off. Listen to the emergency announcement and follow the instructions given. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our heart unto wisdom, that we would see that the wisdom of God is Christ and him crucified, and that we would put him first, that we would seek him first, as thy word encourages us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, knowing then that all other things will be added unto us.

O Lord, bless thy truth to our souls. O Lord, remind us that we are but one step. There is but one step between us and death, that we all live on the threshold of eternity.

Help us then to be ready. Help us, we pray, to be looking to Jesus, knowing him, loving him, and even confessing him as the author and the finisher of our faith.

[36 : 55] O Lord, do us good and we pray. Bless us, we ask. Keep us on mercy's ground until we find thee. Go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing the words of Psalm 107. Psalm 107.

Does it begin at verse 27? Yeah. Just checking. Psalm 107, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 384. Psalm 107 at verse 27.

They reel and stagger like one drunk. At their wits end they be, then they to God in trouble cry, who them from straits doth free. And the image that's been given in this Psalm is somebody who's out at sea.

It's someone who's, like we had the ferry illustration, it's someone who's out at sea, reeling and staggering like one drunk. And this is someone's conversion. Then they to God in trouble cry, who them from straits doth free.

[38 : 04] And what does the Lord do? The storm is changed into a calm, at his command and will, so that the waves which raged before, now quiet are and still. Then are they glad because at rest, and quiet now they be, so to the haven he then brings, which they desired to see.

So Psalm 107 from verse 27 down to the verse marked 31. And we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. singing along ways.

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CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS O that men to the Lord will give grace for his goodness day and for his works of wonder time and to the sons of men.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.