

Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years²³ and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees.

²⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."²⁵ And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."

²⁶ So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt. (Genesis 50:22-26)

What will your Legacy Be?

Have you ever thought about what kind of legacy you will leave? Strictly speaking, a legacy is an inheritance. It's money or property that someone gets when someone else dies. But we often use the word in a broader sense to speak of a person's contribution to society. A medical researcher's legacy might be a new approach to fighting cancer. A politician's legacy might be a law or a policy that he believes he will be remembered for. In our Old Testament lesson for this evening, we have the last words of the patriarch Joseph. Those words contain a legacy, a final gift to the world. What was it? **What will your legacy be?**

I.

At first glance, it might look like Joseph's legacy was really a set of commands. But it was more than that. In truth, his legacy was really a confession of his faith in God's promises. **What will your legacy be? Where will it come from?** Hopefully, all our legacies will come from our faith.

This was not the Joseph who was the husband of Mary and the step-father of Jesus. This was the Old Testament Joseph. He lived almost two thousand years before Jesus was born. He was the great-grandson of Abraham. Joseph was 110 years old when he spoke these words and then died. During those years, he had incurred the hatred of his older brothers because he was his father's favorite. He had been sold into slavery and then earned the confidence of his master in Egypt, only to be falsely accused of attacking his mistress for which he spent at least two years in prison. But God had raised him from prison to be the prime minister of Egypt. God revealed to him that a massive famine was coming and guided him in preparing for that famine, so that the whole population was saved. And in the process, God brought Joseph's family back together after more than a decade of separation.

All that was past. Joseph was about to die. With his family gathered around him, Joseph passed on to them his greatest gift: a confession of his faith. He said, **"I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."** That confession is his legacy. It told what Joseph's long life had really been about. But the last thing he wanted his loved ones to hear before he died was not really about him: it was God's promises. That is what makes this such a tremendous legacy. The last gift he wanted to give his family was faith.

Considering all he had done for them, that's quite a statement. Joseph had rescued them from starvation when all they had ever given him was hatred. Joseph had engineered their settlement in Goshen, away from the mainstream of Egyptian life so that they could maintain their own culture and faith in a good and fertile land. But none of that was what Joseph reminded them of as he lay dying. He reminded them of God's promises, because he knew that he didn't really do any of those great things. God was working in all of them to save his people and to secure the line of the Savior. All of it pointed back to the God who loved them and who would not forget about them during the next four hundred years that Israel would live in Egypt. God would make them into a great nation there. Then God would come to their aid and bring them home.

My friends, what will your legacy be? By the grace of God, I hope that Becky and I are able to leave our children something when the time comes. God has blessed some of you with real financial success and you have a certain amount of wealth and property that you hope to pass on. In most families, there are treasures that our parents and grandparents gave us and we want to give them to our children. Our children and grandchildren will be glad to have those things when the time comes. All that will be part of our legacies. But don't let all

that be the greatest or the most important part. What if our children have to receive that legacy in 2016? What if God doesn't give us years more to accumulate that legacy? What will you pass on then?

Doesn't Joseph teach us what our greatest legacy is? The confession of our faith. When we're leaving this world, the best thing we can do for our children is point them to all that God promises them. Let that be your legacy. And not just to your children, but to all those who know you. Jesus calls us to be lights to the world. Are we faithful in doing that? Have we been faithful in 2015? Will 2016 be any better? I think that most of us would have to admit to having some qualms about that, wouldn't we? We're all sinners. We all have those moments when we should do a better job of confessing our faith, but we chicken out. Our sinful flesh wins and we just feel bad because we know we blew it. We undercut our legacy.

But that's why Jesus came. He came because we sinners will never get it completely right. Even if we do as well as Joseph did, there will still be countless times when we fell short of what God calls us to. But Jesus never fell short. He always made a good confession. He never chickened out. That perfect life is now ours. God gives us credit for his success in testifying about him even when we fail, because God sees Jesus when he looks at us. Jesus' blood has washed away all our sins and failures. It has washed us clean of fear and selfishness and being ashamed to talk about our Lord. God calls us perfect now. In heaven, we will never feel guilty again.

So don't wallow in guilt now. You are free! Be free! That joy in Christ is what will make your confession your true legacy. Don't worry about manufacturing it. Know Christ! Trust Christ! Grow in Christ! And that confession will be there because it's the work of the Holy Spirit inside you. Joseph spent 110 years being worked on by the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit is working in you through the gospel. That's where your true legacy will come from.

II.

Since ancient times, people have gathered when someone they love is dying. We have just a glimpse of that kind of gathering in our text, and it's not unlike what happens in our lives. But we don't always hear eloquent last words like Joseph's. Sometimes, there are no words at all. And it isn't just words that make our true confession. Actions speak just as loud, as we all know. How will our confession show itself? **What will be your legacy? What will it say?**

It's interesting that when Joseph reminded his family of God's promises, he said, **"God will surely come to your aid."** We have no indication that Israel was in trouble yet. The book of Exodus tells us that a king eventually arose who was so afraid of the Israelites that he enslaved them. That led to the Ten Plagues and the Exodus and Mt. Sinai and conquering the Promised Land. But none of that had happened yet. But Joseph was a prophet and he foresaw how hard it was all going to be for them. Before it began, God promised to help them and bring them home.

Joseph also pointed the promises God had already made – to the oath he had sworn to give the Promised Land to the descendants of Abraham. That promise was part of the promise of the Savior. God had tied his promise that through Abraham's descendants all the nations of the world would be blessed with a Savior to his promise that the land of Israel would belong to those descendants. Of course, for Abraham, that was all a question of faith. He was a foreigner in that land. For the four hundred years that his descendants were in Egypt, that was a promise they clung to, but the fulfillment lay in the future. But that promise was part of his promise to send Jesus. God gave them a land and a covenant so that when the time was right, Jesus would be born, from the tribe of Judah, in the town of Bethlehem. God planned for Jesus to grow up in Nazareth in Galilee and to die outside of Jerusalem. So every time God promised to give them the land of Israel, God was really promising to send their Savior.

Joseph trusted in the same Jesus that you and I trust in. The promises are phrased a little differently for us, but in the end, they are promises of God coming to aid against all the powers of sin and death and giving us eternal life. They are promises of God doing what is best for us in a hard and sinful world, so that when the time is right, he brings us home to heaven. They are promises that God knows what is best for us and that his goal is to keep our faith in Christ alive. He will do all that is necessary, even the hard things, to make sure that our faith lives. God will take away distractions and even blessings that threaten to become idols. God will bless us and love us and give us relief from pain and hardship. God will hear and answer our prayers and Jesus will be with us to the very end of the age.

And then we will go home to be with him – not to a physical land where we could sin again and where we could lose our physical blessings. Heaven is our true home. But for the people of Israel, the prophets often pictured heaven in terms of Zion and the land and peace and prosperity there. So it's not surprising that Joseph gave a final command that was tied to that land: he commanded them to take his body back there when they finally went. Now, it would've been possible to do that sooner. In this same chapter, Joseph's father, Jacob died. And they went back to the Promised Land and buried him in Abraham's tomb. But when Joseph died, they didn't. Instead, they embalmed him and kept his body for four hundred years until Moses led them out of Egypt? Why? Because that's what Joseph told them to do, certainly. But why did he command that? To give them a concrete reminder that Egypt was not their true home. They were going to the Promised Land. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But some day. When they finally did go, carrying that body back was a sign of the legacy of Joseph, the confession of his faith and of God's promises.

My friends, the point here is not whatever instructions you give your children about your funeral. The truth is, I think we should all be careful not to give too many of those instructions. Our funeral is not for our benefit, it's for the benefit of those who outlive us. We will be in heaven. There will be nothing that anyone on earth can do for us anymore. But while you are here, make sure your actions are a part of your confession. It isn't just that you say the right words, but that you live that confession. Come to church – confess how important it is to hear the word of God, even on New Year's Eve. Be faithful at work, honor your spouse, care for your parents and your children, show mercy to those in need. In all these things, you show that you are trusting in Jesus' promise that he will point to those acts of faith on Judgment Day, just as Joseph showed that he was trusting in God's promise to bring his people home. Jesus has won heaven for you. Jesus has given you faith. Your legacy, your greatest gift to your children and to all those who know you here is to confess that faith in Christ and live a life that points to his promises. The miracle here is that God is working through the gospel you hear every Sunday. He will give you the grace to live that legacy. Amen.