

Finishing the Course

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[0 : 00] Thank you all. If you have your Bible, I want to turn to Genesis chapter 50. Genesis chapter 50. If you're one of those that mark your Bibles and puts the date and! I know I preached part of this passage a couple of weeks ago. I haven't lost it, but I'm not going to say the same thing, I hope. I guess I'll never forget it. I played football in high school, and as a senior, we got a new coach who was a head coach for the first time, and he came in with a lot of vigor and took it out on us. He's a great coach. He won as long as he coached, and I'm thankful that he is now a wonderful Christian. I wish he had acted more like one when he treated us the way he treated us in practice. Summer camp started with what he called county fair, which sounded fun to me, and I came with a lot of excitement. Little did I know that we'd be running around cones on our hands and feet and pushing sleds with coaches standing on them, big sleds with big coaches, and they'd put us in a circle and let other guys take shots at us, and water? Well, you didn't need water in those days. I didn't believe in it. And whenever they did give it to you, maybe once, that you ran over to a PVC pipe that was attached to the dugout with holes drilled in it, and like a pack of dogs eating out of one food bowl, you tried to get a sip of water.

It was awful, but boy, it was great, you know. And when we thought we couldn't take it anymore, he'd sit us down, and he'd go over the intangibles. In the locker room, there were a piece of plywood that had been painted with either words or statements put on them. I contacted two guys that I played football with this week and said, remind me of a couple of those. He called them intangibles.

Remind me of a couple more of those intangibles, and they couldn't remember anything either. So I remember one of them, and so what he'd do, he taught us those things, and then before football game, we'd go to middle school, and before we would have our meal, our pregame meal, we'd sit in the library at the middle school to get us away from the high school atmosphere. And he'd say, let's go over the intangibles.

Give me an intangible. Some of them would say, Oski. So when you hear Oski, what does that mean? That means somebody intercepted the ball. And that means that if you were playing defense, when somebody yells Oski, you turn around and start blocking. You look for somebody to hit. And so somebody with a lot of vigor would say, you find somebody to hit. You go the different way, you know.

Yeah. But the one I really stands out to me, and I think that's how I remember as much as I do anything. Any old nag can start a race, but it takes a thoroughbred to finish. We had a bunch of people go out to start with, and then they'd fall out like flies when they got in the heat. And every time somebody'd fall out, he'd stand before us and go, any old nag can start a race, but it takes a thoroughbred to finish. It was such a memorable statement. As the summer went on, we ridiculed the quitters. Any old nag can start a race. My heart ran through my head as I ran the sprints in the summer, and boys would be leaning over the fence, losing their breakfast, and oh, what a life. Any old nag can start a race. It takes thoroughbred to finish. Echoed in my bones as my bones rattled, my fingers crushed, and I fell. I don't think I mounted much, but I was there to the end. And there's something to be said about being there until the end. Because a lot of people can start out strong, but that don't mean much. Have you ever watched the 400 meters or the 800 meter races? What you'll notice is that the guys who usually start out winning that race are not the ones that win it. The ones that are leading in the beginning usually pale out. Kentucky Derby. Love to watch the Kentucky Derby. Those horses that come out of the gate strong, very seldom are the ones that win in the end. It's all about finishing.

[4 : 42] Hardly ever is the winner in front at the start, but that leads, those that lead at first sometimes never make it to the end. And the reality is the Christian life is a lot like that.

So many claim to be saved and they claim to love God and to be faithful. However, time tells another story. As they go on, something changes. Too many fall by the spiritual wayside. And it's not that some are perfect and others are not. It's not that at all. All of us are imperfect. But some of us keep coming to the perfect one. Some of us keep going to the one that can help us while others lean on their own ability or try to find help from another source. And well, we're not only to start for Jesus, we're to finish the course. We look today at two men who were faithful for their entire lives. They were not perfect by any means. Thankfully, because if they were, we couldn't relate to them. And I believe that God puts these men in Scripture for us to watch and to learn from. And Scripture is so true. It shows everything. It tells the real story. This morning, we look at Joseph and his father, Jacob. Joseph, as we've seen, did live a good, faithful life, regardless of what came. But he was not perfect. And Jacob, his father, was faithful to God. Perfect by no means. He needed a course in fatherhood especially.

However, both finished well. And we can learn from their example. Genesis 50, beginning in verse 15, says this, 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.

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 sins, because they did evil to you. And now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.

Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His 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? [7:16] 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 as they are today.

So do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones. Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly. To them.

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 Bacar, the son of Manasseh, were counted as Joseph's own. Amen. And Joseph said to his brothers, I'm about to die, but God will visit you and bring you out of this land to the land he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry my bones from here. So Joseph died being 110 years old.

[8:30] They embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. Whether young or old, if you're a Christian, there is a journey ahead for you.

You're in the midst of that journey, but there is more to come. You have not reached the end. Your job is not done. There's more to come. You may have today.

You may have a year. You may have a generation or two. But whatever we have, we are to pursue God's goal for us. Jacob and Joseph gives us some guidelines on how to finish well.

First, Jacob shows us that we ought to be a blessing to our families. We ought to be a blessing to our families. Hebrews 11, verse 21 says, By faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

As Jacob's journey wound down to a close, he didn't get selfish. Jacob had been blessed and was determined to be a blessing, so he blessed.

[9:43] After Joseph was reunited with his father after many years, he soon found that his father was dying, and therefore he took his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to his father, Jacob, and asked his father to bless them.

That's in Genesis chapter 48. And when I say bless them, what do I mean by that? I mean he directed them with a word from the Lord. He encouraged them to go forward in God, and he laid his hands upon them and prayed for them.

He didn't focus on himself, he focused on others. Friend, that's not only a good way to die, that's a good way to live. Genesis 49 tells us the same thing happened with his own sons.

So special events in crucial times. I want all of us to finish well. That's what I asked the deacons for. Just a few days after I was out of the hospital after a cardiac arrest, I asked, as the book of James tells us, I asked the elders of the church to come to lay hands on me and pray for me.

[10:57] And when I asked them to pray, I told them, pray that I'm not compromised. Pray that I'm not weakened. Pray that I'll be strong until the end.

God's doing wonderful things in Pickens First Baptist Church. I don't want to do anything to be a hindrance to that, and I don't want to slow down at all. So, maybe make me wiser in how to do it, but Lord, give me the strength to carry out as long as you give me breath.

Well, we ought to live well, too. Don't wait until your final breath, but the blessings don't have to be at the end of our lives.

As God told Abraham in Genesis 12, he tells us through the cross. In Genesis 12, he told Abraham, I blessed you. Now, I'll make you a blessing, and now you go be a blessing.

And that's exactly what he wants us to do. He wants us to be a blessing. Regardless of what you did or didn't do for God yesterday, be a blessing today. Bless others as long as God gives you breath.

[12:08] The second thing he told us about finishing the course was Joseph shows us to be at peace. peace. Be at peace. Joseph had a lot to be bitter about.

He did. So much that his brothers were scared of him after their dad died. But Joseph was not superficial. He knew the story was bigger than his brothers.

He saw the bigger picture. To read verse 20 is powerful and life changing. It's one of the most significant passages in the book of Genesis. And in Genesis chapter 50 verse 20 it says, 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 as they are today. One of the most ungodly feelings that we can feel is bitterness. To refuse to forgive.

Not only does that destroy our relationships with hate but it is systemic. You cannot compartmentalize that kind of stuff.

[13:14] Especially if it is those you are close to. It affects you and you affect other relationships. And that all is a serious matter to God.

I want you to notice what Christ says about it. It's in Matthew chapter 5 verse 23 and 24. And he says this. So if you, so if you're offering your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you.

Leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Now I will add a pastoral note there.

Notice that he says leave your gift. Okay. You don't take it with you. Leave your gift. In reality what he's saying is when the Holy Spirit of God convicts you, not enough of y'all laughed at that.

I was kidding. Somewhat. Jesus is saying when the Holy Spirit convicts you about a strained relationship, go above and beyond to take care of that.

[14:21] When the Holy Spirit of God speaks to you when you worship together in this place, don't ignore it when you leave here. Deal with it as God allows you to.

And keep some things in mind. And I love what Paul said in Romans 12 verse 18. He said, if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Do all you can. There ain't so much you can do, but do all you can to live peaceably with others. Some people don't want to live peaceably. And because they ain't happy, they don't want you happy.

They don't want you to live peaceably. But don't be that person, okay? Just don't be that person. There's also something biblical that you can do daily.

Ephesians chapter 4 verse 26 and 27 says this. Be angry and do not sin. Don't let your sin go down on the anger and give no opportunity to the devil.

[15:26] Our stubborn natures or maybe our hurt feelings will let stuff hang around way too long. And if you let it stay there, it'll fester, it'll infect, it'll run over.

Bitterness will take you over like kutzu will if you're not determined to give that up to the Lord. So solve it every day. Don't go to bed angry.

Joseph had a lot to be angry about. But he chose to bury the axe. And he didn't bury it in his brother's necks. He did it long before they came to him scared, I believe.

As a matter of fact, it seems obvious to me that he did it before he saw him coming for food the first time. He dealt with it. But not only did he forgive him, but he told him.

He told him. He was at peace. Peace. Don't ever misunderstand the word peace. Peace does not mean the absence of conflict. You will have conflict in this life.

[16:32] If that's what you're looking for is an absence of conflict, it's not going to happen on this earth. And you know why? Because we are an imperfect people. And we are an imperfect people

and who live in the midst of sinners.

And some of those sinners are saved by grace. And some of those sinners are not. And so we live in the midst of that. We're going to have conflict along the way. It's going to happen. Our sin causes conflict.

Peace is not an absence of conflict. It is instead God's intervention into the midst of the conflict. It is the calmness that passes all understanding.

It is the presence in the midst of the storm. In 2011, we went to the Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix, Arizona.

We lived in Mississippi at the time. And because the convention from time to time, it used to be about every seven years. Now it's more like every five years or so. Go out west.

[17 : 34] We always try to make a trip of it to see something. And we had bought a new van and we loaded up the kids and we drove across the Panhandle of Texas and out to Albuquerque and Phoenix and saw Santa Fe and went to the convention and then drove up, saw the Grand Canyon and Durango and Colorado Springs and came across Kansas.

It was a great trip. And while we were gone, my grandmother had got sick. And on the last morning of that trip, we were about to head out after being gone for two weeks.

I called my mom and dad to check on grandma and I found out she had passed in the night. We went to our home in Mississippi that day. That was our last day on the road.

And we went to our home and we washed our drawers as fast as we could and we loaded back up and went to South Carolina. Along with her pastor, I preached my grandmother's funeral. Now my grandmother loved Jesus as much as anyone that I've ever met.

She was an independent, free will, hard shell, jugular vein, blood washed, spirit filled, sanctified to the bone, Baptist child of God.

[18 : 55] Praise God. And if you don't know what that means, I'm sorry. You've missed it. She had been to the spout when the glory came out and she hadn't got over it.

And she was 96 years old. And in her last years, she wondered what the Lord was waiting on. But she trusted him.

She leaned on him and she was at peace with him. When her pastor would come to see her, she'd tell him, just keep telling people that Jesus still saves. The last time I saw her alive, we gathered in a circle to pray as my family left Greenville to go back to Mississippi about three months before she died.

And my mama asked her to pray. And pray she did. The rafters shook when grandma prayed. And that's because she had a lot of practice.

She prayed for a hedge of protection around us. She prayed that God would put angels to ride on the bumpers of the car. The spirit of God would lead us. I drove faster home because my grandma had prayed for me.

[20 : 06] And I was told that as she laid on her deathbed, she prayed, Lord, I've tried to live my life to honor you in every way, Lord Jesus.

Please have mercy on me. And he did. And she went on to glory. As was written in her obituary, 1 Timothy chapter 4 says, For I am already being poured out as a drink offering.

And the time of my departure has come. I've fought the good fight. I've finished the race. I've kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. My grandma died at peace with the Lord. And do you know why?

Because she lived at peace. Peace with the Lord. So did Joseph. Be at peace with the Lord.

[21 : 13] And lastly, go out with vision. When the eyes of Jacob and Joseph grew dim in their life, their vision for God only grew brighter as they approached their home going.

Jacob and Joseph had seen the hand of God. They had heard the will of God. They had trusted the vision of God. And Jacob told them at the end of chapter 49, bury me with my family.

Now listen, when Jacob says bury my family, that's not just any family. His family is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the patriarchs of the chosen people, the nation of Israel.

He said, that's where I belong. Bury me with them. And Joseph knew that the same God would lead his people out of Egypt and would bring them to a land that he had promised them.

That was his vision. That was his confidence in the Lord. That was his direction by the hand of God. He saw God's vision shine even as earth's vision dimmed.

[22 : 33] And my friend, as long as God gives us breath, that's what we ought to do. Not get selfish, but have vision.

For what God's got in store. Beyond us. Let's get beyond us. What's God gonna do? I was on the treadmill this week at cardiac rehab.

And there was a quote taped to that treadmill that said this, Don't count the days. Make the days count.

My friend, maybe you've started well. And maybe you haven't. Maybe you came out of the gate a little slow.

Regardless, the good news is today's a new day. And it's the first day of the rest of your life. And so as long as God gives us breath, let's live for his glory.

[23 : 39] Let's live a legacy. Leave a legacy. Let's let's finish well through obedience. A life that is filled with sacrifice.

A life that's filled with commitment. A life that's not filled with us. A life that's filled with Jesus. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I want to ask you this morning if you've ever given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you've ever confessed your sins to him and asked you to come into your life and save you and change you. if that's never happened to you, I want to encourage you today to give your life to Christ.

To trust him. We're going to stand in just a moment and we're going to sing and as we do, I encourage you if you've never given your life to Christ, you come and say, Pastor, I need to be saved.

Maybe you're here and you have done that and you've never acknowledged that publicly through baptism. We plan to baptize next Sunday. I'd love to talk to you about that if you've never followed the Lord in obedience baptism.

[25 : 01] Maybe you're here and God's leading you to First Baptist Church and I'm thankful for God's blessing us and moving in our midst and I'm thankful for that. And if you feel like the Lord's leading you to come, I encourage you to come.

I'd love to talk to you about that. Or maybe you're here like most of us and you look at your life and you see things that you need to lay down before the Lord.

Today's the first day of the rest of our lives. So why don't we live the rest of our lives to please Him, to honor Him in all we do?

Whether it be in the pew where you'll stand in just a moment or whether it be at this altar or whether it be with a pastor praying for you. Obey God. Trust Him.

Respond to Him. And then leave here different however He's told you to be different. Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you for the love that you have for us.

[26 : 08] and I ask to your God that you'll work and you'll move in our midst right now that you'll have your will and your way. Help us to be obedient to follow you as you lead.

In Jesus' precious name, Amen. Amen. Stay tuned.