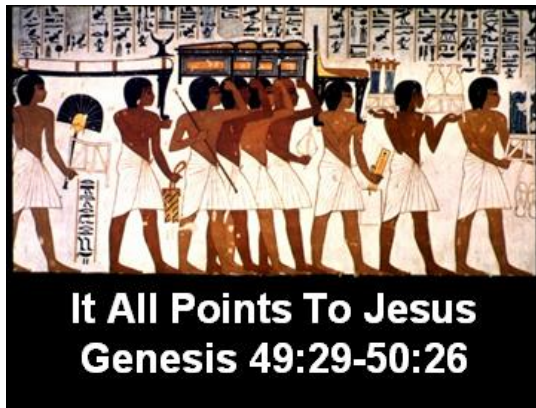


It All Points To Jesus (Genesis 49:29-50:26 August 31, 2008)



At the end of my fourth year of medicine – I suffered a grave injustice.

I was one of the many who were too comfortable to leave the residential colleges at the University of Queensland. You had your meals made, your room cleaned – who would want to leave?

But there was one other incentive to stay at King's College. On the campus was a huge old five bedroom house that had once been the home of the associate master.

Every year – five of the more senior Kingsmen could apply to live in the house.

I was certain that our group was a shoo-in to get it. We had three men entering their fifth year and two entering fourth year.

The only other serious applicants had two entering fifth year, two entering fourth year and one was only going to be a very juvenile third year.

But like a dagger to my heart – the other group was *unfairly* and *unjustly* – given the keys to the house.

I sulked. I was offered a bigger room but being in the throes of injustice I said couldn't be bothered moving – I would stay right where I was next year.

When I came back to College to start my fifth year – I found that I had two new flatmates in the rooms right next to me. They were fourth year medical students – and to my utter horror – they turned out to be brand new born again evangelicals – and what is more – they decided that I was a good target to evangelise. How much worse could things get?

Yet, many months later when the Lord finally opened my blinded eyes to the truth of the gospel – one thought struck me.

If I had gotten my way – If I had received what I thought was my due – If I had been allowed to live in the house – I would have had a great place to live for one year – but

I would not have met Marty and Andrew – I would not have heard the gospel and – I would still be heading to hell for all eternity.

If the Master of the College had chosen me to live in the house – I would be lost – I would not have gone to seminary and met Dena – I would not have been involved with starting this church – and we would not be meeting here today.

But the Lord knew what He was doing. He used what was quite frankly a very minor disappointment in my life – to grant me the greatest blessing possible – He drew me to Himself.

That is how the Lord works – He takes our sin, our failures, the low points of our life – and somehow He weaves them into the magnificent tapestry of His will.

Nothing – not the sin of man or the move of history – can thwart His plan for us.

Consider this – what is the most heinous sin ever committed? Surely it is the crucifixion of the sinless Lord of Glory.

Then what is the greatest act of goodness in all history? Surely it is the crucifixion of the sinless Lord of Glory.

God took the most wicked act of men and used it to work the greatest act of good possible.

So as we come to the end of the book of Genesis – it is this perspective – the ability of God to work the good of salvation amid the evil of men that comes to the fore.

To show you what the focus is right at the end of Genesis – look with me at the last five words in the book. Genesis ends with these words:

... in a coffin in Egypt.

Two words in Hebrew – five words in English.

At first, you might think this is a harsh and brutal way to end such a great book.

Joseph – one of the transcendent figures of the Old Testament. A man who suffered so much. A unjustly man sold into slavery. A man unjustly cast into prison. A man separated from his home and family.

A man who holds no grudges and showers good upon those who harmed him – and what is his reward? – *in a coffin in Egypt*.

He is dead in a land that is not his home.

But I want to suggest that this is the perfect way for the book of Genesis to end. Chapter 50 actually ties the themes of Genesis together.

Think how this book began. The creation of the heavens and the earth. The creation of Eden – the most glorious home possible. The creation of man. Man walking with God in harmony.

Without the fall – how would Genesis end? It would end like this:

With God in Eden.

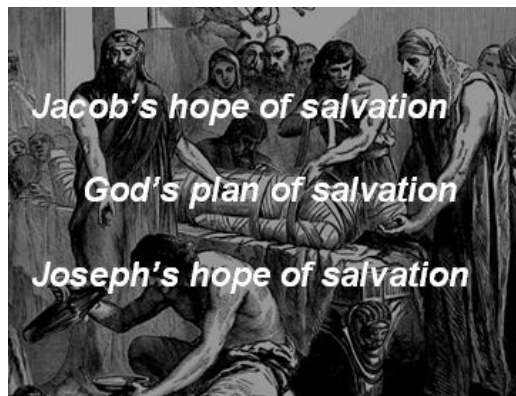
This was the way our lives were supposed to end – *with God in Eden*. But, because of the fall – even for a man such as the great Joseph it ends – *in a coffin in Egypt*. This could be taken as a tone of defeat and hopelessness.

It might be viewed like the end of Thomas Jefferson's Bible. Jefferson loved the moral teaching of Jesus – but hated the miraculous. So he took a copy of the gospels and literally cut out every miracle. The closing words of Jefferson's Bible are: "There laid they Jesus and rolled a great stone at the mouth of the sepulchre and departed."

It ends with hopeless despair – Christ dead with no hope.

At first it might seem that this is how Genesis ends. But that is **not** the way we are supposed to understand the end of Genesis. Far from it!

The end of Genesis can be outlined like this:



Jacob's hope of salvation

God's plan of salvation

Joseph's hope of salvation

It actually ends with hope for the undoing of the curse and the restoration of our relationship with the Lord.

It begins with ***Jacob's*** *hope of salvation* in Genesis 49:29 to 50:14.

Jacob is at the end of his life. One hundred and forty-seven long years.

He has lived in Egypt for the last seventeen years – good years. The family had seen much fruit. They had acquired property and had grown in number. Egypt had been good to Jacob.

To ask to be buried in Canaan would require a huge effort. His body would have to be embalmed so it didn't rot on the way. It would take many men and much time to take his remains to Canaan.

So why does he ask to be buried in Canaan? Does it really matter where he is buried? On the final day – God can raise him in Egypt or Canaan – embalmed, buried or cremated. Does it really matter?

We know this is crucial because with his last breath Jacob gathers his sons and extracts a costly difficult promise from them that they will return his body to Canaan and bury him in the tomb of his ancestors in the cave of Machpelah.

He does this because he understands that the gift of the Promised Land pointed to something greater than a mere place to live. Hebrews 11 reminds us that their ultimate faith was not merely in gaining the land of Canaan. The land was important as a place for the nation – but its true significance pointed to heaven and their salvation.

As Jacob lies dying – he is expressing his faith that death is not the end. There is a real land of promise – heaven – available to all men and women of faith.

The land was a symbol that God would finally save His people and bring them to their true home.

By insisting on being buried in Canaan – Jacob was giving his sons and descendants and you and I one great final charge. He was saying:

My sons – you will die in this land. Your children's children will die in this land. But don't get too comfortable. This land is not your home. Not even the Promised Land is your home.

You are sons of the covenant. You are the children of the Almighty.

You are bound for heaven. You have to be men of faith. You have to cling to the hope of heaven.

Then the real gift will be yours – eternal life.

Jacob then dies. His spirit is in glory – but as a symbol of faith – his sons will bury him in Canaan.

Notice the chain of events his death begins.

Jacob is embalmed. This was an uncommon honour and was reserved for royalty and the highest nobles in the land. It took forty days for the process to be finished.

The Egyptians mourn for him for 70 days. It is not just that his family mourned – *the Egyptians* mourned – and they mourned for *70 days*.

The time of mourning for a Pharaoh was 72 days – Jacob's death is treated as one rung down from Pharaoh.

The Hebrews did not mourn this long. When Moses died – they mourned thirty days.

Jacob is being treated as Egyptian nobility.

Then we see that Joseph gets permission from Pharaoh to bury his father – note verses 7-9:

***All** Pharaoh's officials accompanied him—the dignitaries of his court and **all** the dignitaries of Egypt—besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household. Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. *It was a very large company.**

Do you see the picture here? They embalmed him like royalty. They mourned 70 days – a royal length of time. A great company – All Pharaoh's officials—all the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt – made the long trek to Canaan. This was a burial fit for a king.

Why? Why did the Egyptians accord this old shepherd from a foreign land such an honour?

Humanly speaking – they did this to honour Joseph. Joseph was a great man in Egypt. He didn't just save his family – he saved Egypt. He was a national hero. He was Winston Churchill or Lord Nelson or George Washington.

So to honour Joseph – they treated the death of his father like the death of royalty.

But, there is also more going on here. God also superintended this event to prefigure the Exodus.

Notice the terms – Pharaoh, officials, court, children, flocks, herds, Goshen, chariots, horsemen, large company. These are all terms used in the Exodus 400 years later.

Notice the route they take is not the direct route – they travel around the southern end of the Dead Sea – this is the way the Israelites will travel 400 years later.

The point is this – Jacob had faith that God **would** bring his children out of Egypt into the Promised Land **and** we are meant to see his death as pointing to the Exodus to come and as a precursor to the great Exodus – when God brings his children out of sin into the real land of promise – heaven.

Jacob – a man who was a deceiver, a liar, a failure as a father. A man with many flaws and short comings. He knows that on the basis of the promise of Messiah to come – the hope of salvation is his.

There is no sin beyond the scope of God's salvation. The death of Jesus covers every sin.

If you will turn to Him – no matter what you have done – He will wash you clean and bring you to the Promised Land.

This theme is amplified by how this chapter ends.

It ends with **Joseph's** *hope of salvation* – verses 22-26.

Joseph dies at the age of one hundred and ten. This was the age Egyptians considered was the perfect lifespan – a sign of blessing.

He sees his great-great grandchildren. He adopts the children of Makir as his own.

He had a fruitful life. 110 years. But the last 93 of them in Egypt.

Almost certainly the memories of Canaan from his youth were well and truly faded.

He is a great man in Egypt. No doubt there were monuments erected in his honour. Songs sung of his deeds. He was the Saviour of the nation.

When he dies – most likely there was a great tomb prepared for his body.

Archaeologists have found a tomb in Goshen that some think may have been the tomb of Joseph before his body was taken back to Canaan.

It is huge. It contains a huge statue of a ruler.

Whether this is Joseph's or not – have no doubt he was buried like a King.

But despite all of this – Joseph is not an Egyptian – he is a child of God. His hope is heaven. He has never lost sight of the fact that his faith is in God – his hope is in heaven.

Genesis 50:24-26:

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." 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." So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Joseph's hope was the salvation of God. And as a sign of his faith – he extracted a promise from the sons of Israel that when the 400 years of enslavement had passed and the Lord delivered His people and returned them to the Promised Land – that they would take his bones and bury them in the land.

After 400 hundred years – the Lord *did* deliver Israel – and we read this in Exodus 13:19:

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.”

Moses knew that God was fulfilling His promise to give them the land – so he made sure to take the bones of Joseph with him.

Then in Joshua 24:32 we read:

And Joseph’s bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph’s descendants.

Joseph’s sons moved into this part of the land. Joseph was buried there as a sign that the promise of God had been fulfilled.

Joseph lived all of his adult life in Egypt. He died in Egypt. It would be hundreds of years – many generations before the sons of Israel would leave.

But he was insistent. God **will** keep His promise. His promise of deliverance – his promise of salvation.

He knew that his hope was not in a huge tomb or the skill of embalmers – but in God.

He knew that neither Egypt nor Canaan was his true home – but heaven.

This week I looked on a few websites that recorded many of the Negro Spirituals from the nineteenth century.

In the aftermath of the Great Awakening in America – many evangelists went and shared the gospel with the African slaves of the South – and to their amazement the gospel found fertile ground.

What attracted these slaves to the gospel was the hope of heaven. They had little hope in this life. They were slaves – poorly treated – they worked hard and died young.

But in the gospel they heard that this world was not their home – that they had a hope of heaven – that Jesus died for their sins – and Jesus will come back to take them to heaven.

They knew that north of the Ohio River – there was no slavery – so they sang about going to a “free country”, “my home” “Sweet Canaan, the Promised Land” across the “Jordan”.

But they knew that this was *not* their real hope. Slave or free – their real hope was heaven. So when you read their songs – so many spoke of the hope of freedom

sometimes using the language of escaping to the north – but knowing that their ultimate hope – their ultimate destiny was heaven.

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home.

I looked over Jordan and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home
A band of angels coming after me
Coming for to carry me home

If you get there before I do
Coming for to carry me home
Tell all my friends I'm coming too
Coming for to carry me home

This was Jacob – and this was Joseph. The Promised Land was good – but it was a sign of the ultimate hope – the hope of heaven.

But – how will God take us home to heaven. How do sinners like Jacob and Joseph and you and I go to be where a perfectly holy God dwells?

It is here that Genesis comes to its great conclusion.

We saw that God created man to worship Him and enjoy Him forever. Man's sin destroyed that relationship. But God loved us enough to set in motion a plan of salvation.

So sandwiched in between *Jacob's hope of salvation* and *Joseph's hope of salvation* we find:

God's plan of salvation in verses 15-20.

Look at verses 15-16:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph.

Jacob dies – the boys bury him. But after they get back from the long journey to the tomb in the cave of Machpelah – they begin to think.

Maybe Joseph has been kind to us because he wanted to stay in dad's good books. Maybe he has been waiting for the time dad is gone and then he will give us what we deserve. Boys – we might be in trouble and Joseph has the means to do whatever he wants to us.

So they sent word to Joseph and this is what they said – verses 16-17:

“Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.”

There is a lot of debate as to whether Jacob did say this before he died or whether the brothers just made this up to try and get Joseph to continue treating them well.

I suspect that most likely Jacob did say this because of what the message says, Joseph’s response and how the brothers act.

Up until this point, nowhere do we have any record of the brothers confessing their sin and asking Joseph for forgiveness.

Here it is made very clear what they did was wrong. Look at the words – sins, wrongs, treating so badly and sins is used again.

They are saying – we sinned against you and now we ask forgiveness.

We see Joseph’s response at the end of verse 17:

When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

Some have said Joseph wept because he knew they lied or because he was dismayed that they were worried that he might harm them – did they still know so little about him?

But probably it is the fact that at long last these men understand the depth of their sin and their need of forgiveness. But as well, Joseph is dismayed that they still can’t see the hand of God in these events or grasp the grace of God on their lives.

This is strengthened by what they do next. Verse 18:

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said.

We sinned against you. We are your servants. Forgive us.

But it is in the next verses that Joseph shows them and us – the heart of the gospel.

These men sinned against Joseph in despicable ways – sold him into slavery and lied to their father.

Finally, they come and say – we know we sinned – forgive us.

Joseph could have said:

My brothers. I forgive you. I love you. I would never harm you or your families. Instead – I long to provide for you and your children.

But Joseph knows that what they need to grasp is something greater than his forgiveness.

The brothers could have received forgiveness from Joseph – felt relieved – walked out the door – and missed the whole point of the famine – Joseph’s rise to power – and the salvation of the nation.

They had to learn the lesson of Genesis 3 that all sin is ultimately sin against God.

Genesis 3:1:

The serpent said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

God created Adam and Eve – gave them a Paradise beyond our comprehension. And He gave them only one command – from the tree in the middle of the garden you must not eat.

Anything else you want to do – fine.

But Satan knows that it is at this very point that we find the essence of sin. Do we obey God or do we choose to make ourselves the final arbiter? Do we make ourselves to be God?

To disobey God in any way is the greatest act of rebellion and sin possible.

So great it brought about the fall of man. Disease, death, famine, injustice, wars, pain, suffering.

When you read Genesis 3 – there is a sense in which Eve sinned against Adam. She violated his headship. She encouraged him to join her in the rebellion.

There is a sense in which Adam’s sin against Eve was even greater. He did not grasp his headship and leadership responsibilities and refuse the fruit. He joined her in the rebellion.

But – without doubt – their sins against each other are minor compared to their sin against God.

I am sure that after the fall – Adam said:

Eve honey – forgive me for not being the man I should have been and not taking the lead.

And I suspect Eve said:

Forgive me. I was deceived so easily and I took the headship and I encouraged you to sin.

There would have been hugs and tears and forgiveness all around.

But, this would not have undone their great sin. They sinned against God. They were still going to hell. They had not dealt with their root sin – sin against God.

They sinned against an all powerful, all holy being who cannot tolerate the presence of sin. They had destroyed their relationship with God.

They could not return to walking with God till their sin is dealt with.

This is a lesson we all have to learn. We get angry – blow up at the wife or the kids – then we realise what a fool we are and we apologise.

But that does not deal with our sin against our Creator.

Ultimately, all sin is against God.

Consider King David. This man who knew God's word – chose to violate it.

He committed adultery and covered up his sin through murder.

But in Psalm 51:4 he cries in anguish:

Against you [God], [against] you **only**, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

The first time you read this – you think – He didn't *only* sin against God.

David sinned against Bathsheba by taking this woman in adultery and by killing her husband.

He sinned against Uriah – both by violating his wife and then by murdering him.

He sinned against the baby in Bathsheba's womb.

He sinned against the army officers he used to commit murder and cover up his sin.

He sinned against the whole nation through his actions.

In fact, there is just about no one David did not sin against.

Yet, he says:

Against you [God], [against] you *only*, have I sinned.

But what David means is that ultimately his sin is sin against God. Ultimately, the sin that counts is his sin against the Lord.

Joseph knows this. His brothers come and ask for forgiveness. And in verse 19:

Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"

It is not wrong that they came asking Joseph to forgive them – they should do that.

But if Joseph simply said I forgive you – the relationship with Joseph is restored – but they would have missed that their relationship with the Lord is still in tatters.

Joseph knows that to become the people of God they have to know that the ultimate One they sinned against was the Lord.

So he asks – Am I in the place of God? Am I the ultimate One to forgive your sin? Can I truly forgive your sin?

Listen to Paul in Romans 12:19:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Joseph won't harm them – they should not be afraid – He is not in the place of God to seek vengeance.

But Joseph knows that ultimately vengeance – or forgiveness – is not in his hands but in God's hands.

Yet there is an implication behind what he says. The One who *is* God – Him you need to fear. You have sinned against Him. Men like me can only harm you in this life – He can cast you body and soul into hell forever.

Then it all comes together in one of the key verses – perhaps the key verse in Genesis – but one that is often sadly misunderstood. Genesis 50:20:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Everything that happened – Jacob's favouritism of Joseph leading to the brother's anger leading to them selling Joseph into slavery and the home of Potiphar.

The vile accusation of Mrs Potiphar leading to prison and the encounter with the baker. The dreams of the baker, the dreams of Pharaoh leading to Joseph rising to power.

The famine leading the brothers to Egypt where Joseph could save the family.

There is a sense in which their sin led to a cascade of events that resulted in the saving of many lives.

But here is where this verse is often misunderstood.

Often it is only interpreted like this – the brother's sin led to Joseph being able to save the nation from the famine.

And that is true. But there is a whole other layer that has to be grasped.

God could have saved the nation in many ways. He could have told the family to save grain in the seven good years. He could have sent manna to feed them.

What he did was to use Joseph to save the nation. Verse 21:

“So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph saved them. But now it is twelve years after the end of the famine and Joseph is still caring for them.

But, what the brothers have to grasp – what we have to grasp is that – this salvation points forward to the real salvation.

The salvation from Joseph points forward to the provision from Jesus. There is a sense in which Joseph is a type pointing to Jesus. Consider Joseph and Jesus:

- both were at first despised by their brothers, yet eventually their brothers would bow to them.
- both were sold for silver.
- both were handed over to Gentiles.
- both were humbled as servants.
- both were stripped of their robes in their time of great trial.
- both were conspired against to be put to death, even abandoned to the grave.
- both were highly exalted from their humiliation.
- both suffered evil – but God used it for good – the salvation of many.

Joseph points us to the greater Saviour – Jesus.

Joseph points us to the great salvation – the One who gave His life that we might live – the One who died to save the many.

What the brothers and indeed every person on the face of the earth really need is salvation from our sins.

Our problem is that we were created to be in a perfect relationship with God forever.

One sin – one stray thought – one flash of anger – and that relationship is shattered forever.

The point of Genesis is that God set in motion a plan to reverse this shattered relationship.

But to do this – He has to deal with our sin.

He told Adam that He would send the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head and restore our relationship.

How much Joseph knew I can’t tell you.

What I can tell you is that now we know how God would work this salvation.

Jesus – God Himself – would enter this world as a man – a sinless man – live a sinless life – be persecuted, suffer and die.

When we place our faith in Him – we become joined with Him on the cross. As He suffers – we suffer – as He dies – we die. In this way our sins are paid for.

Joseph may not have known this in detail – but he knew Messiah was coming.

He knew that without faith in the Messiah to come he would not have his sins washed away and would not see heaven.

He knew that his brothers need that forgiveness.

The brothers come to Joseph and say – forgive us. Joseph says – I am not God only God can forgive you.

Centuries later Jesus appears. In Mark 2 we read that when Jesus began His ministry He was teaching in a home at Capernaum.

Huge crowds surrounded the house – and this caused a problem for some men who were bringing a friend with a problem – he was paralysed. They wanted to bring him to Jesus but couldn't get near the house.

Finally, they managed to get the man onto the roof – they literally dug a hole in the roof and lowered the man down in front of Jesus.

The man came to Jesus wanting to get up and walk. But Jesus looked at the man and said, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

When Adam took the fruit – disease and death entered the world. Sin caused that man to be a paralytic.

Jesus says – I forgive your sins.

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, and they went ballistic. They were thinking He is blaspheming because who can forgive sins but God alone?

And Jesus knew this – so He said, "Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Disease has as its root cause our sin. To show He could forgive sin – to show that He was God the One sinned against – He healed the man.

The brothers came to Joseph wanting forgiveness. Joseph says – what you really need is God's forgiveness.

This man came to Jesus wanting healing. Jesus says – what you really need is God's forgiveness.

The great need of every person here is to have their sins forgiven.

This is the whole point of Genesis – One day someone will come who can forgive sin – undo the fall – and He has to be God Himself.

We live in the time after He has come. We know who He is – Jesus. We know how He can forgive sin – by bearing it in His body and washing us clean. We know that the greatest need of any man is the need of Adam – the need of the brothers – the need of the paralytic – the need of Craig Lloyd – forgiveness of sin.

We know that Jesus delights to forgive sinners today.

Genesis is a great book – fascinating stories – interesting passages – diverse characters – but at the centre and heart of Genesis is this – Jesus is coming to forgive sins so that we can walk with God.

If you do not love Jesus – your earthly end will be – in a coffin in Brisbane. But your spirit will not end – it will suffer for your sin of rebelling against God – and since you cannot pay off your sin – you will suffer forever.

But God doesn't want that. It is not His will that any should perish. He loves us and sent Jesus so that we don't have to suffer forever.

Trust Him and live.