

Joseph Saves His Family

Series “In the Beginning...”

Genesis 50:15-20 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, saying, "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." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives

Today we bring to a close our series “In the Beginning...”, a look at the book of Genesis. At the end of this book, Jacob is dead. The long-present fears of his sons, the brothers of Joseph, came to the surface: What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him? Their fear of retribution and retaliation was well-founded. Raw envy and jealousy had motivated them to do terrible things to Joseph. First, they had planned to kill him and tell Jacob that a wild animal had done it. But they changed that plan. Not only would they get rid of the "dreamer," but they would make a profit while they were at it: They sold him to the Ishmaelites as a slave. (37:27). And so they were rid of Joseph.

Last week, we heard how in time, God's time, Joseph, resold by the Ishmaelites to the Egyptians, had risen from household slave to master of Potiphar's house, then was falsely accused and sent to prison. Yet God was with him and raise him to high position in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He was put in charge of making sure the famine revealed by Pharaoh's dream would not adversely affect Egypt. The famine foretold and prepared for by Joseph occurred, and there was plenty of grain in Egypt, but the rest of the world was hurting.

Genesis 42:1-5 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die." Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

When they came to Egypt, can you guess who they had to go to in order to buy grain? It had been over 30 years since they sold their brother into slavery, and they did not recognize him. They didn't even know he was alive. But Joseph recognized his brothers. And because he was a ruler, when they came before him, they bowed down before him, just as he had dreamed when he was a boy.

Joseph accused them of being spies, but they protested that they had only come to buy food.

Genesis 42:13 But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.”

They thought Joseph was dead. So Joseph decides to test them. He insists that they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, to him to prove that they are telling the truth. He has them all thrown in prison for three days, then says that he will keep one of them in prison and send the rest home with food. However, they must bring Benjamin back to secure the release of the one left behind, Simeon.

Speaking among themselves in Hebrew, they said they were being punished for what they had done to Joseph. They didn't realize he understood everything they were saying. He ordered that their sacks be filled with grain and that the silver they had used to pay for the grain be put into their sacks. On the first night on their return trip, one of them found his silver in his sack. And they began to panic. They were afraid they would be accused of stealing the grain and not paying for it. When they got back to their father, they were telling him everything that happened. Then they opened all of their sacks and each of them found that their silver had been returned.

Genesis 42:36-38 Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!” Then Reuben said to his father, “You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back.” But Jacob said, “My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.”

Jacob was not about to lose Benjamin. So they left Simeon in prison in Egypt. Until they started running out of food. Jacob told them to go back and get some more grain. Judah said they could not return without Benjamin, for the ruler told them they would not be allowed to buy grain again unless they bought their brother. Jacob protested for awhile, but Judah said he would personally guarantee Benjamin's safe return. Finally, Jacob relented. He would send them back with gifts from their land, twice the silver, in order to pay for the first grain and that which they hoped to buy this time, and Benjamin.

Genesis 43:13-14 Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”

When Joseph saw that they had returned with Benjamin, he ordered his servants to prepare a feast and take his brothers to his house. Remember, they still did not know it was Joseph. They were afraid that he was angry with them. They tried to explain that they didn't know why their silver was in their sacks, and that they had come to buy more grain. Joseph said they had paid for their grain, and the silver in their sacks must have been a gift from God. And then he returned Simeon to them.

The brothers were given a royal reception. Joseph was so overcome by seeing all his brothers again, including his full blood brother Benjamin, that he ran out of the room and wept. When he regained his composure, he returned and served the feast to his brothers. They were astonished when they realized he had seated them in order of their ages.

The next day, he had their sacks loaded with grain, and again returned their silver to them. He also ordered that his cup be placed in the sack of Benjamin. He let them go on their way, then sent his servants out to accuse them of stealing his cup. They protested.

Genesis 44:6-13 *When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house? If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." "Very well, then," he said, "let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame." Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.*

When they return, Joseph says that he will keep Benjamin as his slave and the rest can go home. But the brothers will not have it. Judah takes it upon himself to offer an impassioned plea for mercy for Benjamin, saying that he must return to Jacob, offering to become Joseph's servant in his place. When Joseph heard all this, he ordered all his servants to leave. He had seen that his brothers had changed, and were not the same people who sold him into slavery. They had repented.

Genesis 45:3-5 *Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.*

He reveals himself to his astonished brothers and forgives them. He has seen their remorse and repentance, reflected in the way they care for Benjamin. They don't want any more sorrow to come to their father. Joseph tells them there will be five more years of famine, and sends them back to bring Jacob and all his household down to Egypt where he can provide for them. I've often wondered what all those brothers said to Jacob, having to admit that they sold Joseph and lied to him for all those years. But that would all be forgiven. They had repented, were restored, and Joseph was in a position to provide for his family. So Jacob goes to Egypt where he is reunited with Joseph, and they settle in a good land where they prosper.

Genesis comes to a close with the passage I read at the start of this message: Jacob died and the brothers feared that Joseph would finally get his revenge. They go and tell Joseph that their father had requested he show them kindness. Whether Jacob actually said this or not, we do not know. But they threw themselves on the mercy of God, saying: *now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father* (50:17).

When Joseph heard this message from his brothers, wondering whether or not he was still angry, he wept. He cried because his brothers lacked confidence in His love and forgiveness for them. Their fear betrayed a lack of confidence in the love and forgiveness of God. One can only wonder how many sleepless nights and anxious days those brothers spent in Goshen wondering and worrying.

Genesis 50:19-21 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

What Joseph speaks of here is not his own magnanimous attitude, but the grace of God, God's undeserved love to sinners. What was happening here in this text was a foretaste of God's plan for all mankind that would be played out centuries later. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would be handed over, treated spitefully, whipped, mocked, and crucified as he bore the iniquity of us all. Of those responsible for the death of Christ--Pilate, Judas, the soldiers, scribes, Pharisees, even you and me--Jesus can say: *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

God's grace was at work in the life of Joseph and his brothers. God's grace was at work for you at Calvary and the empty tomb. That grace of God is still at work in your lives.