

Genesis 50: 15-21; "To Save Many People Alive", Sermon # 120 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 27th, 2008, in the Morning Worship Service.

We are now drawing near to the close of the book of Genesis, and what a journey it has been. We have seen God's great wisdom which He displayed in the creation of the heavens and the earth. We saw God bring about the institutions of the Sabbath and Marriage into being. We have seen the Fall of man and Adam and Eve being driven out of the garden. We have seen the first promise of God concerning Jesus Christ in the "seed of the woman" crushing the serpent's head. We have seen Abel's sealing the life and testimony of his true worship of God with his own blood, which was shed by his brother's hand. We have seen the establishment of the godly line of Seth, and the godly walk of Enoch, and Noah building the ark because he was the only one God saw as righteous in his day. We saw the landing of the ark on Ararat, and the rainbow in the cloud. We saw the building of the tower of Babel by men's united strategy and wisdom; and of God's bringing it down and scattering the people and giving them many different languages. We saw the call of Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees to go the land of Canaan. We saw God establish His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And we have learned many lessons about how God teaches His people to walk by faith and not by sight. We have now seen the great purpose of God in relation to Jacob and his posterity being fulfilled primarily in the life of Joseph. Joseph, who had such great dreams when he was a lad of seventeen. Joseph, whose dreams were hated and despised by his envious brothers. They hated him so much that they stripped him his coat of many colors, the coat which his father gave him because he loved him more than his brothers, and they threw him into a pit. And then after some consultation on what they would do with him, they lifted up their eyes and they saw a caravan of camels coming with a company of Ishmaelites upon them on their way to Egypt bearing spices, balm, and myrrh. They decided to sell Joseph to these Midianite traders for twenty shekels of silver. We have seen how the brothers thought that they had gotten rid of him without murdering him. They thought that they would never see him again. They fabricated a story of how he was killed by a wild beast and told it to their father. And what grief he had, but life went on. And although it may not have looked like it at the time, God was with Joseph in Egypt, as we have seen.

I have taken you through the many lessons of his life, and I have shown you how he was an eminent type of our Lord Jesus Christ; his being hated by his brothers, his being sold for silver, his being placed in the prison even though he was innocent. His being the interpreter of men's dreams in the prison, and his being brought out to rich fulfillment in the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams.

His being placed in the highest position of office in Egypt; second in command to Pharaoh. His storing up grain to feed the multitudes. His testing of his brother's repentance and his revealing himself to them. His revealing himself to Jacob and bringing him down to Goshen to live near him. In all of this you should think of Joseph as a type of Christ, for he most certainly is. The story of Joseph ends for us this morning in this touching interchange between he and his brothers. The main lesson that we should learn from the life of Joseph is that God has a manifold purpose in permitting His dear children to go through various trials and testings of their faith. Even though He has ordained these trials it is always His intention to bring about great good in the lives of His people. His holy purpose is to "save many people alive; not only physically as in the case of Joseph becoming the ruler of Egypt, but also spiritually in terms of the Lord Jesus becoming the Lord of all. So the question that we are asking this morning is, "What was the manifold purpose of God in permitting these trials and testings, not only to Joseph but to all of his brothers; and how is this a type of Christ and those who are being saved by Him? And as we look carefully at the text we find that there are 3 observations that we can draw.

1st- The Manifold Purpose of God was to bring about a sincere and humble heart in his brothers who had so grievously sinned against him. (Verses 15-17)

When Jacob died, a great fear came upon all his brothers who had mistreated him. This fear was that perhaps Joseph would hate them, and actually repay them for all the evil that they had done unto him. Now this is an astounding thing for them to think since Joseph, when he first revealed himself to them, gave them very real assurance by his own words that he was not going to repay them for their sins against him. That was 17 years before the events of the verses that we are studying, and yet now his brothers become afraid. They had lived this long in Goshen, being shown the goodness of Joseph to them in providing for all of their needs and never once did he act in a manner which would lead them to believe that he held anything against them. Turn over to Genesis 45 for a moment and we will see this. Joseph is now revealing himself to his brothers as being their brother and not the Egyptian Vizier that they think they have been dealing with all this time before. Verse 3 says, "Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come near to me.'" "So they came near." "Then he said, 'I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.'" "But now do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." In these words, "do not grieve or be angry with yourself" is the implied forgiveness of their sinful acts even though he never expressly declared it at that time. A person who has sinned in the way that these brothers sinned against Joseph has every reason to be grieved and angry with themselves when they realize their guilt in the sight of the holy God. These brothers had sinned so badly when they mistreated Joseph and sold him into

Egypt, but following their sinful acts, and for many years afterward, they had suppressed the voice of their conscience. Their conscience was only truly awakened when they were brought down to Egypt in the time of the famine and came into the trouble of not being able to buy grain unless they brought Benjamin to Joseph. Chapter 42, verse 18 shows this. Joseph says to them, "Do this and live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses." "And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die." "And they did so." "Then they said to one another, we are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us." "And Reuben answered them saying, 'Did I not speak to you saying, "Do not sin against the boy"; and you would not listen?" "Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us." That was when conscience was awakened, for all of them together, for the first time. But that was 17 years before and now their consciences are still raking them over the coals for what they did to Joseph so many years before.

This leads me to make some observations on our conscience, with relation to sin. Conscience is that faculty of our soul that God has placed as a witness within us. It enables us to know and experience whether what we are doing and saying is wrong or right, at least to some degree. It is either awake or asleep to sin and righteousness depending upon whether grace is at work in our soul or not. The preaching of the law may awaken conscience to a sense of sin, but only grace from God can give it peace. Our thoughts alternately accuse or defend us in relation to the instruction of the Word of God which we have received, the light from God that we have received, which is meant to guide and direct us in our performing righteous thoughts and actions. If we sin, our conscience, if it is doing its duty, will accuse us and let us know that we are guilty. We are breaking God's law in some way. A guilty conscience, once it is awakened, has a voice to speak unrest, and agitation, and blame to the soul, which is very great. And the issues that conscience will bring to the floor in the judgment hall of our own mind, in regard to the sins of our past, will not let our soul rest satisfied and content.

I don't know how many of you have read that great book by John Bunyan, *The Holy War*. It is an allegory like *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is the story of the struggles of a man's soul; the soul of man is being pictured for the reader as a town called Mansoul. Satan with all of his forces besieges Mansoul and takes it over, and in order to do so, he has to deal with Conscience, which in the allegory is called Mr. Recorder. This is what Bunyan says about Mr. Recorder, or the conscience in man. "As for Mr. Recorder, before the town was taken, he was a man well read in the law of his king, and also a man of courage and faithfulness to speak the truth on every occasion; and he had a tongue as bravely hung, as he

had an head filled with judgment." "Now Diabolus (Satan in the story), could by no means abide this Mr. Recorder, because though he gave his consent to his coming into the town, yet he could not, by all wiles, trials, stratagems, and devises that he could use, make him his own." "True he was much degenerated from his former king, and also much pleased with the giant's service,(that is Satan's service) and many of his laws." "But all this would not do, forasmuch as he was not wholly his; he (that is Conscience) would now and then think upon Shaddai, (that is God) and have a dread of his law upon him, and then he would speak against Diabolus with a voice as great as when a lion roareth: yea and would also at certain times, when his fits were upon him (for you must know, that sometimes he had terrible fits,) make the whole town of Mansoul shake with his voice; and therefore the new king of Mansoul (that is the Devil) could not abide him."

So Conscience, I say, has a loud voice once it is awakened. Listen to what Matthew Henry says. "A guilty conscience exposes men to continual frights, even where no fear is, and makes them suspicious of everybody, as Cain." "Those who would be fearless must keep themselves guiltless." I would say to you that these brothers were afraid, and they were suspicious of Joseph; one who had only shown them kindness; because they were still experiencing the fits of a guilty conscience, a conscience awakened to sense of what their sins deserved. And a conscience once awakened must be cleared, and it can only be cleared by the blood of Jesus Christ. A declaration of sins forgiven must be made if ever peace and joy shall rule in the heart once again, or perhaps even for the first time. Who can forgive sins but God alone? But often our sins are against those who are closest to us; those whom we should most dearly love. This is what aggravated the sense of sin to these brothers so many years later. It was that Joseph had been so loving to them, so forgiving of them, that they simply could not believe it that it could continue forever. Surely, at some point, he would bring up their sins and avenge himself upon them. That's the way they thought. But they were totally mistaken; and they came to be mistaken because of the loudness of the voice of conscience crying against them in their souls. How could they find peace, and how could they really know if Joseph would forgive their sins? Truly Joseph was a man of grace; the perfect picture to us of what we should do when those who are closest to us; those who are supposed to love us, have instead hated us, mistreated us. This is how a Christian should act when later on, the ones who have offended us or harmed us, come to their senses by God's grace and they come to us looking for us to forgive them. We are not to bring up all their faults, once again and plague their consciences with guilt. We have been forgiven by God. We should freely forgive those who have offended us. Joseph had even done this before they ever asked for forgiveness from him. He did it when he first revealed himself to his brothers.

These brother's consciences and their fears bothered them so much that they did not believe that they could go to Joseph in person, first off, and ask his forgiveness. Verse 16 says, "So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, thus you shall forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." "Now please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." I am quite convinced that this is the work of God, to thoroughly convince men of their sin where they need it. These men were convinced and convicted sinners who needed peace spoken to their consciences; especially in light of all the goodness and mercy which Joseph had shown to them in the past 17 years. Since they call themselves the "servants of the God of your father", they are saying that they had, at some point in those 17 years, humbled themselves in the sight of Almighty God and had asked Him for forgiveness of their sins. But now because of the death of their father, they wondered if Joseph would continue to show them kindness and treat them well. There were so many sins that were coming to their minds at this time. The way that they had treated him in light of his dreams, which had all come true, the lie that they told their father when they came home and showed him the coat of many colors all stained with the blood of an animal. The cover-up of their sinful actions for many years afterward. But all of this was forgiven by God. They knew this; but would Joseph really forgive them?

What was God's purpose in letting them wait so long to find peace of conscience in relation to their brother Joseph? His purpose, I believe, was to bring about a sincere and humble heart in the life of each one of them. Our hearts can be so very tricky and so very treacherous even after we become a true Christian. Yes, it is true that God has forgiven us through Christ, our Joseph, who has suffered for us on the cross and died. And yet it is possible to think that our sins have been so great in the past, the things which we have done to grieve and wound the heart of our Lord, so great, that surely we cannot be forgiven. Our past sins may continue to plague us for many years, even though forgiven. It is good to come directly to God Himself, confessing our sins, and we can be assured that He will cleanse us of all iniquity. But the guilt of our past sins is not something that we can simply confess, once, and then forever be convinced that our conscience will let us forget it. God chooses not to remember our sins, but He may indeed let us remember them at times, in order that we might sincerely regret ever having committed them. He would have it that we would be humbled to walk in His fear all of our days. That is the first purpose of God in permitting these kind of trials to Joseph and his brothers.

2ndly- These trials were permitted in order to show the brothers that God meant it all for good. (Verse 17 b and verses 18 -20)

"And Joseph wept when they spoke to him." "Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, 'Behold, we are your servants.'" "Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?" This

weeping of Joseph took place after he had heard the message of the messengers which were sent to him by his brothers. The brothers had not yet seen him personally themselves, as of yet. While the brothers were yet fearful of having their sins against Joseph, of many years past, forgiven them, Joseph is weeping when he hears what they are saying and understands the way that they think. I believe that God ordered these things for the good of both Joseph and his brothers. The brothers had already been forgiven by God, but they were really doubting his Joseph's love and good-will toward them. Joseph is a good picture to us of what our Lord Jesus Christ is like. He weeps for us in the secret place where He is, because in His life, and in His death on the cross, He has demonstrated His love to us in many ways, and yet we continue to think that God cannot forgive our grievous sins of the past. And we question how it is that Jesus can really love us and continue to provide for all of our spiritual needs. The fact that He died for our sins, bore our sins in His body on the tree, was in order to bring us to God. We have no reason to doubt His love, but a troubled conscience sometimes will.

The brothers then did the right thing. They came to Joseph and "fell down before his face, and they said, 'Behold, we are your servants.'" They all feel so badly about what they had done to Joseph that they all offer to become Joseph's slaves. They throw themselves upon the mercy of Joseph so that he will not take revenge upon them for their evil deeds against him. But he says to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?" Truly this is a statement to consider. Let us always remember that no matter what sins we have committed against other people, and no matter what we think we might owe them because we have done them harm in the past; no matter what any man has done for us to free us from any earthly danger, that no man is ever in the place of God. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can take that place in our lives. These brothers of Joseph's knew that they owed everything to him, that he had preserved their lives from dying in the famine and that he had in the past never taken revenge upon them for their sins against him. But Joseph means to keep them from them from serving him as a man as they would God or the Son of God, as the basis of their forgiveness. He was right to do this. Their coming to know God, and their being forgiven of their sins by God, and their being forgiven by Joseph personally for all of the offenses that they had committed against him, and their being reconciled to Joseph, was all of grace. He was not in the place of God, either to judge them or to save them.

In the end, as great a type as Joseph is, of our Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot stand in God's or Christ's place. There is only 1 mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Even though the words and actions of Joseph's brothers were not right to put Joseph in the place of God, they are a good example of what those who have been saved by the gospel should do when they have come to understand that their sins are forgiven. We become the servants of Christ.

We present ourselves to God and Christ as their servants forever. Listen to Romans 6: 16 - "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered." "And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." And verse 22 - "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life."

The thing that Joseph wanted to persuade his brothers of more than anything was that even though they had truly meant all that they did to him those many years ago, to be something that was evil and hurtful to him, that God meant it for good for him; and not only for him, but also for them in the final analysis. The purpose of God in His decrees of what should happen to every Christian in their suffering at the hands of men is the great and overruling purpose which no man can thwart, no matter what they purpose to do or actually do succeed in doing in evil. They mean it for evil, but God means it for good. This was exactly what the brothers needed to know, and to hear from Joseph, so that their guilty consciences could be freed. God was so much greater than they were in His purposes that He was able to take all the evil that they did to Joseph and to work it for good in his life and theirs. How about you, my friend? Can you apply this to yourself and the worst situations that you have had to endure at the hands of men? Have you come to understand this mighty truth? Have you come to think about our mighty, wise, and holy God in this way? This is the way that He is and the thing that He does for all of His dear children. The messengers that you send to your heavenly Joseph, the Lord Jesus Christ, are your prayers. He hears the message from your lips that you are looking for forgiveness from a guilty conscience, even though he has forgiven you of all your sins years ago. He weeps for you in secret to think that you do not think that He loves you, in spite of His wounds and His death for you. He would have you read once again the words of God's love letter to you, and His love letter to you, that you might once again freely offer yourself to His service. Romans 8: 28 - "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." And verse 35 - "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Verse 37 - "Yet in all these things we more than conquerors through Him who loved us." This is what Joseph wanted his brothers to see. And this is what I would have you to see as we think of the greatest of the lessons of the book of Genesis.

For 3rdly - It was the manifold purpose of God to save many people alive. (Verse 21)

"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?" "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." "Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." "And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them." Let us end this sermon this morning by knowing in our hearts that the purposes of God are very great, much greater than our conception of them. His purpose is to save many people alive through Jesus Christ our Lord. He will not fail in His purpose. So do not be afraid as you live your Christian life. If Joseph comforted his brethren and spoke kindly to them, after all the sins that they committed and all the trials which disciplined them for the purpose of godliness, even so Christ will comfort you who trust in Him. You may fail in your purposes to accomplish and do many things to His glory, but His purpose for you will never fail. Please remember this. Remember that His grace is greater than all of your sin, and present your body to Him a living sacrifice. This is holy and acceptable to God and pleasing to Him. Then go on to prove His good and acceptable and perfect will for your life.