

The Brothers Reconciled

- Genesis 45
- When we left the brothers last Sunday, Judah had made his appeal to Joseph, offering himself in Benjamin's place. That was the final piece of the puzzle for Joseph. He could see that his brothers who sold him into slavery 22 years ago were changed men. And his response was overwhelming joy mingled with sorrow, such that he "could not control himself" before them. He ordered everyone out of the room except his brothers. And he wept so loudly as he told his brothers who he was that the people outside heard it and the people in Pharaoh's house heard it. When he said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" they could not answer him. Same word as in verse 1. He could not control his joy mingled with sorrow. They could not answer him out of dismay mingled with terror. The moment of truth has come and the question is, how will Joseph deal with his brothers who sold him into slavery as a teenager? Let's look at this passage under three main points: Sovereign God, Forgiving brother, Shocked father.
- **Sovereign God (verses 1-8)**
- We talked about the providence of God five weeks ago, on the Sunday the women were on retreat, many of them. And I used part of this passage then, and do not plan to repeat that sermon this morning. But this message Joseph spoke to his brothers is as clear a teaching by any biblical figure on God's sovereignty over the affairs of men as you will find anywhere. Joseph is his brothers' teacher here and he has earned a right to be in that position. He has advanced degrees in suffering that have come at the hand of his ten older brothers, but instead of making him bitter, his suffering has made him wise and compassionate. The same boiling water softens the potato but hardens the egg, as the saying goes. The same suffering softens one heart but hardens another. Here's the advantage we have over eggs and potatoes, neither of which has a clue why they are sitting in boiling water: **we** can understand the sovereignty of God, with his help. Joseph acknowledges the guilt of his brothers in his suffering, saying twice, "you sold me." But he says three times, "God sent me." *You sold me but God sent me.* He has a three-point sermon for the brothers on why God sent him to Egypt. First, "God sent me here to preserve life." (verse 5) Who knows how many people were saved from starvation because of Joseph's wisdom that came from God. Second, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant." (verse 7) What would have happened to the covenant family without God's intervention that involved sending a slave from Canaan to Egypt 20 years before a famine would occur? Joseph says *I went from the pit to the prison to the palace for the sake of God's covenant promise.* Third, "God made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord over all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt." (verse 8) The brothers had scoffed and asked the young dreamer many years ago, "Are you indeed to rule over us?" Yes. But it was part of God's sovereign plan. Joseph sums it up with this statement: "So it was not you who sent me here, but God." I was reminded of Peter's denial of Christ three times in the courtyard in front of a charcoal fire. Just a few days later, the resurrected Jesus, beside a charcoal fire, turned Peter's thoughts from his failure to his forgiveness, telling him three times, "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," and "Feed my sheep." He said to Peter, *You love me? Then love my people.*
- Joseph had learned to trust God instead of his own heart. Because of that, he was not bitter, not seeking revenge, not wanting to hurt his brothers as they had hurt him. Had Joseph not come to terms with that many years before, the boiling water of suffering he endured would have made his heart harder than granite. Instead, it was softer than clay that the Lord was now shaping towards forgiveness. That leads us to...
- **Forgiving brother (verses 9-24)**
- Years ago a seminary student in Chicago faced a forgiveness test. Although he preferred to work in some kind of ministry, the only job he could find was driving a bus on Chicago's south side. One day a gang of teenagers got on board and refused to pay the fare. After a few days of this, the seminarian

spotted a policeman on the corner, stopped the bus, and reported them. The officer made them pay, but then he got off. When the bus rounded a corner, the gang made him stop the bus so they could rob him and beat him severely. He pressed charges and the gang was rounded up. They were found guilty. But as soon as the jail sentence was given, the young Christian saw their spiritual need and felt pity for them. So he asked the judge if he could serve their sentences for them. The gang members and the judge were dumbfounded. "It's because I forgive you," he explained. His request was denied, of course, but he visited the young men in jail and led several of them to faith in Christ.

- Forgiveness is not just a feeling but it is also a commitment of the will. We see that in Joseph in several ways. He tells them to go back for their father and bring him back here. All of you, do not tarry, hurry back! Forgiveness does not look like, *Well, I forgive you, but I never want to see you again.* Joseph then told them he would give them a place to live and it would be near him. "I will provide for you," he says. In effect he said, "I will make sure that by God's provision you will live and not die." There were 5 more years of famine. To send his brothers back with his "forgiveness" and an order to fend for themselves in Canaan would have been the end of them.
- Forgiveness is not just a commitment of the will, but it is a feeling. Because Joseph chose to forgive his brothers, God brought a warmth into his heart for them. We see that as he "kissed all his brothers and wept upon them." (verse 15) Derek Kidner wrote, "It was applied theology, God's truth releasing the will for constructive effort and the emotions for healing affection." After this, the Bible says, "his brothers talked with him." What was that conversation about? We don't know But I *don't think* he was venting and rehearsing a list of all the ways they had hurt him.
- A couple married for 15 years began having more than usual disagreements. They wanted to make their marriage work and agreed on an idea the wife had. For one month they planned to drop a slip of paper into a "Complaints" box. The boxes would provide a place to let the other know about daily irritations. The wife was diligent in her efforts and approach: "leaving the jelly top off the jar," "wet towels on the shower floor," "dirty socks not in the hamper," on and on until the end of the month. After dinner, at the end of the month, they exchanged boxes. The husband reflected on what he had done wrong. Then the wife opened her box and began reading. They were all the same; each one said, "I love you!"
- The Pharaoh heard the news about the brothers and joined in the fun, telling Joseph his family would have the best of the land when they returned. Oh, and Joseph, *tell them to take wagons from Egypt back with them so they can easily make that long move here* without looking like the Clampetts coming to town. He closed with, "Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours." Don't you love this? It goes back to the promise God made to Abraham that those who bless you would also enjoy God's blessing on the land.
- Joseph sent the brothers away loaded with the good things of Egypt, and with grain, bread, and provisions for Jacob on his return journey. Joseph even gave them a change of clothes! Well, five changes of clothes if your name was Benjamin. The youngest also got about \$3000 worth of silver, according to today's market value.
- I love the last thing Joseph said to his brothers as they were headed toward Canaan. "Do not quarrel on the way." There are two reasons I believe Joseph said this and Moses made sure to include it. First, he said it because he knew them so well. And he knew the long journey with nothing to do but talk could lend itself to argument, especially over how they were going to break the news to their father about how Joseph ended up in Egypt. Don't give in to argument and divisiveness, Joseph could have said. You have just become the beneficiaries of the most selfless act of mercy you have ever seen. Think about that and the God who made it possible. The second reason Moses made sure to include this may be simply this: he was writing for the people of God who at that very time were traveling in the wilderness. And doing lots of grumbling. Keith Green wrote in his song, "So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt," "There's nothing to do but travel, and we sure travel a lot. 'Cause it's hard to keep your feet from moving when this sand gets so hot. Youch!" This leads us to...

- **Shocked father (verses 25-28)**
- Do you think the boys said when they got home, “Dad, you should sit down before we tell you this”? Because from all appearances, they just blurted it out as soon as they stepped into the house. **“Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.”** Is there any wonder that Jacob went numb and did not believe it? Think of the shock of each of those statements. He is still alive? Joseph, my son, is still alive? That’s not possible. And he is what?! Ruler over all the land of Egypt? That is impossible. *He’s dead. And he is Hebrew. No way!*
- They convinced their father with the words that Joseph had said to them. Which would have included Joseph saying twice, “You sold me,” and three times, “God sent me.” What they dreaded the most on the 10-day journey from Egypt had to be done. They had to tell their father the truth that they had sold Joseph into slavery and then lied to their father all these years that he was dead. James 5:16 teaches us to “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Part of the healing of the brothers’ souls included their confession. Israel received the news and believed it, saying “It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.” Well, that is true, but a bit dramatic from father Israel. He will live 17 years after arriving in Egypt and die at the ripe old age of 147.
- What can we take away from this passage? 1- Suffering can harden or soften our hearts, depending on our view of God’s love for us and his sovereign working in our lives for our good and his glory. 2- Forgiveness is a commitment of the will that moves our emotions to healing affection. 3- Confession of sin puts us in position to receive God’s healing.
- Prayer
- Greet One Another