

Joseph Forgives Genesis 50: 14-26

Some portions adapted from, "Forgiveness," by Pat Damiani @ SermonCentral.com

Let's finish up our story of Joseph as it spans the last four chapters of Genesis.

At Joseph's invitation, Jacob has moved his entire extended family – all sons and wives and grandchildren – down to the fertile plains in Egypt where he will live for another 17 years and they in 400 years time will grow into a nation. Just before his death, Jacob summons Joseph and his two sons to come to his bedside so that he might bless the

boys. Jacob then gives Joseph a double portion of the family inheritance traditionally given to the eldest son (48:22), but interestingly he also claims Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh as his own. This is why Joseph's name does not appear in a listing of the 12 tribes of Israel, while the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh do; so in tribal recognition Joseph's family also received a double portion.



Next Jacob calls Joseph's other eleven brothers giving each a prophetic blessing according to how they have lived. It is very interesting to see how these blessings affect in the subsequent family histories of the brothers. But this is too much for a Sunday sermon, so we will delve deeper into this topic next Tuesday during Something More.

Jacob then dies and as per his request all the brothers carry his body back to the land of Canaan, to be buried beside his parents and grandparents - Isaac & Rebekah, Abraham & Sarah – in the cave at Machpelah.



Having returned back to Egypt, more as a reflection of their own continuing character flaws and fears, Joseph's brothers fabricate a "final message" from Jacob once again urging Joseph to forgive for his brother's sins.

"Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.'

But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them (50:17-21).

Hearing this "final message" from his father and recognizing it as actually coming from his brothers, Joseph's first response was to break down weeping. Then the brothers

break down weeping and now offer themselves to be his slaves; fully acknowledging as he had once dreamed, Joseph's full authority and leadership over Jacob's entire family.

BUT... this final message was delivered some six months after Jacob's death and after a long official period of mourning in his behalf, so why was Joseph now weeping?

Certainly being newly reminded his father's death would be enough to cause renewed weeping, but I think there was more to it than that. I think that once again seeing all his brothers gathered before him, bowing down to him, asking for his mercy, brought back to memory all the years of loneliness and suffering that these brothers had caused him, all the family and friendships that they had stolen from him. Though he had recognized God's guiding hand through all of this, that didn't lessen the pain, the loneliness he had suffered because of them. Which is what made Joseph's reply all the more powerful. I hope you noticed two different parts in Joseph's reply.

1. First he asked, *Am I in the place of God?*
2. Then he said, *Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.*

Let's dwell on these two thoughts for a moment.

What do you think Joseph meant by asking, *am I in the place of God?*

Well, what would your first response be, if the ten men who had caused you over 20 years of loneliness and suffering now stood before you asking for mercy? You and I would at first be very tempted to do exactly what the brothers feared Joseph would now do ... which is to seek revenge.

But from his years of reliance upon God, Joseph apparently already knew a truth that we don't find written in our Bible until the commands in Leviticus and writings of the New Testament. **Which is that believers are called to leave our desire for revenge in the hands of God and instead only return good for evil.** Such as...

You shall not take vengeance ... or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself:
I am the Lord.

Leviticus 19:18

Did you also notice that the second half of this command makes up the second half of Jesus' great commandment. Then in the New Testament ...

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.'

Romans 12:19

'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink ...' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (12:20-21).

I know that this is a hard lesson for us to learn, it goes against our first response to fight back; to answer pain with pain. We don't know where and how Joseph first learned this truth – since giving forgiveness was very contrary to the normal response of his world – but learn it he did. So when confronted with his brothers again asking forgiveness, newly remembering the suffering they had caused him and knowing they were completely within his power to do as he wished, all Joseph could do was weep.

His weeping brought on their weeping, hopefully not for the first time but in a renewed act of repentance for the wrongs they had done him. As we earlier learned from Joseph's life, true forgiveness, true healing of a broken relationship, can only begin when I recognize and am willing to be forgiven for my sins as well as forgiving others for theirs. But this can only happen when first "*I give up my right to hurt you for hurting me.*"

Joseph knew that like his brothers, he would also one day stand before God to be judged for his actions. So as he had already determined some twenty years earlier, Joseph was willing to trust his brother's evil actions against himself to God's justice.

Joseph had not forgotten what they had done, the recalled memory of their past sins against him had brought on renewed weeping. But because he was able to understand that God had used all those events for good, he was able to let go of any bitterness that he might have harbored against his brothers perhaps even against God at one time.

Thus, while I have to give up my right to hurt you for hurting me, it doesn't mean I have to forget the offence. This is another area of healing relationships where I think we tend to have some misconceptions about forgiveness. How many times have we heard someone urge us to "**forgive and forget**" and we feel guilty because we can't seem to forget the offense.

It is true that **we are not to dwell on the offense**. After all, in his definition of true love Paul writes that... *Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful* (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

The word “resentful” used there is a bookkeeping term that described making an entry in a ledger. So the idea here is that true love does not make a permanent entry that can later be consulted whenever I need to use it as a weapon against others.

So clearly we are not to dwell on the offense, or keep it fresh in our minds, or save it as a tool that we can use to hurt someone else later. **But that does not mean that we have to, or will ever be able to, forget some of the more serious offenses that have been committed against us.**

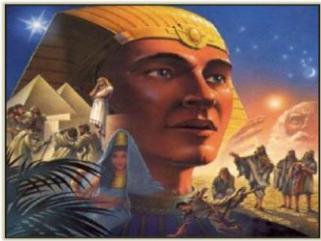
God is not asking us to forget the offenses that others have done us, when in fact remembering can help keep us from getting hurt again, or hurting another as we had been hurt. **But God is asking us to leave the desire for revenge in His Hands trusting in His ultimate justice to repay any wrongs.** Hearing again their confession, Joseph remembered and wept but he left any desire for vengeance in the hands of God.

Joseph’s tears then caused the brothers to also respond, their mutual weeping washing away years of resentment and perhaps finally, fully, healing relationships that had been broken for over 30 years.

Now let’s turn to Joseph’s second response. As he had said some years earlier, when they first reappeared in his life, Joseph again reminded the brothers that both their evil and his resulting years of suffering were nevertheless under the loving supervision of God. He said, *even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear. I myself will provide for you and your little ones* (50:19-22).

Joseph was able to forgive because he could see the operation of God’s grace in his life. He understood that even the most painful things he had experienced were used by God for his good and for the good of others, including the brothers that now stood before him. The forgiveness that Joseph now extended to his brothers was merely the overflow of the grace that God had extended to him; his experience of God’s grace in his own life freed him up to be a channel of God’s grace toward others; even those who had wronged him.

Forgiveness is not to be granted because the other person deserves it. Instead it is an act of love, mercy and grace on my part. The Bible consistently teaches that our forgiveness is not to be conditional based on the other person’s contrition, but rather it is to be unconditional based on God’s grace toward us. As Paul would often write in his letters to the churches, *be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you* (Ephesians 4:32).



Thus, hearing their renewed confession, Joseph wept and they wept with him. Forgiveness and grace were extended and long broken relationships were finally restored.

Biblical history records that Joseph lived on as a ruler in Egypt to the age of 110, personally caring for Jacob's extended family all the way to Ephraim's children of the third generation which would make them Joseph's great-great-grandchildren. Then after that, the entire family would continue to thrive for nearly four hundred years more because of all the good Joseph had done not only for them but for all the people of Egypt.

But Joseph knew that his family could not stay in Egypt forever. Whether he remembered great grandfather Abraham's prophecy or God had newly shown it to him, before his death Joseph reminded the family that Egypt was not their intended home.

Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, 'When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.' (Genesis 50:24-25)

Thus, when Joseph died, his body was mummified, placed in a coffin, and entombed in Egypt. Then, some 400 years later, remembering Joseph's charge, Moses would carry the his bones out with the Exodus where according to Hebrew tradition, Joseph was reburied along with the bones of his sons Ephraim and Manasseh on the plot of land originally purchased by Jacob which was now also in that portion of the Promised Land allotted to the tribe of Manasseh (Exodus 13:19).

So what is our take home for today.

Simply that the very first step in healing a broken relationship is when *I give up my right to hurt you for hurting me*. This runs so against our fallen human nature that we can only do this by remembering the grace and forgiveness that God had first extended to us and as we learn to leave revenge seeking to God, to only return good for evil, as we pray every Sunday: that we might be forgiven to the extent that we have forgiven each other (cf: Colossians 3:12-15).

Let's pray about this.