

Unveiling 3-9-08

Genesis 45

We went over these first five verses previously, but I wanted to include them again in today's message. What a dramatic scene! You've probably seen television docu-dramas of long lost brothers or sisters meeting each other after being separated as children. There is always so much emotion, and that is why it makes such good drama. Add to that all the drama of the betrayal, famine, rise to power, and deceit and you have a drama of epic proportions.

I'd like to emphasize how dramatic this was by having you visualize the scene. Close your eyes for a moment and picture this. Joseph had his steward follow the brothers and discover the silver cup supposedly stolen in Benjamin's bag. The brothers, grieved to the depths of their souls, all went back to Joseph's home where they had such a good time eating and drinking the previous afternoon.

They threw themselves on the ground and offered their lives as servants of Joseph. Visualize the scowls on Joseph's face and the harsh Egyptian phrases going to the translator. "Why have you repaid evil for good?" The brothers don't know if they'll be executed or enslaved. Then see Judah rising hesitantly and daring to explain the situation. In the process of explaining it, he expressed his deep concern for their father and his willingness to give his life in place of Benjamin.

Now see Joseph, unable to contain himself any longer, chest heaving, trying to hold back a flood of emotion, screaming in Egyptian, "Everyone out!" As soon as the Egyptians left, the damn of emotion burst. The Egyptians in the adjoining rooms could hear Joseph wail and word spread throughout the royal palace. The brothers were in shock, not knowing what was happening. Then between Joseph's sobs, for the first time they heard him speak Hebrew. *"I am Joseph! Is my father still living?"* The brothers were terrified. Dazed and utterly confounded they stood speechless; their world had just been turned entirely upside down.

Then Joseph spoke again in Hebrew, *"Come close to me."* ... Was he going to strike them, pull out a sword and kill them, had this ruler of Egypt lost his mind? They feared doing anything other than obeying and so they crossed the room and stood trembling before him. *"I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!"* They must have thought, "We're dead!"

He read their faces and quickly added, *"...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."* What? No animosity? No retribution? "Joseph's forgiveness had been encouraged and enabled by his knowledge of God's providential care."(R. Kent Hughes)

Commented [notes1]: Genesis by R. Kent Hughes pg 520

What does he mean that God sent him to save lives? The brothers have never had anyone explain to them that they are just at the beginning of the famine. They don't know the story of Pharaoh's dream and Joseph's exaltation to power yet. It may have just begun to dawn on them that the dreams they once mocked had come to pass.

Joseph began to explain. ⁶ *For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping.* That alone was a lot to take in. Imagine hearing that you would be unemployed for the next five years! What uncertainty and fearful anticipation would you feel? Add to that the reality that the only one that can sustain you and your family is a brother you once sold into slavery!

⁷ *But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.* Joseph again gives the credit (without any blame for hardship) to God for putting him in the position he is in. This is why I have spoken in past sermons on the remarkable fact that Joseph was able to trust God and look forward even in the worst conditions. He knew God is always faithful. He knew God is good. Even if He didn't understand the "whys", he did know the character of God. Only now, with hindsight, he could understand why he was sold as a slave and incarcerated unjustly for years. It was God saving his family as well as so many others.

⁸ *"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.* It could only be God! Joseph has referred to all this as an act of God four times in this passage. The world looks on all those details and talks about coincidence, but coincidence merely declares events coincided. It doesn't explain why they coincided! Joseph had no doubt why they did. God willed it so! God willed to set him in such a position of power to preserve the promises given to Abraham, to keep his family and so many others alive, and to pass on to future generations a story that shows us so many important life lessons.

⁹ *Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.* This was the moment Joseph was waiting for. Go tell Dad... How Joseph longed for the father that loved him so much to not only know he was alive but also to know that God had fulfilled the dreams and used him in such a wonderful and dramatic way. Stop right here for a moment and consider that you have a heavenly Father who loves you even more than Jacob loved Joseph. How He delights in us when we walk in His will!

Do you wonder why Joseph didn't saddle up a camel and head off with them to see his father? He had great responsibility. He was the one that saw to it that the world did not starve. Hundreds of thousands if not millions of lives were in his hands. As much as he may have wanted to take off, his God given calling was of first importance.

Joseph told them to tell Jacob, ¹¹ *"I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute."* "If you don't come to Goshen, you will lose all your herds." Joseph was concerned that his father might not see the importance of leaving at once and settling in Egypt. He certainly had the authority to speak of the future, for his other predictions have all come to pass.

¹⁴ *Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping.* ¹⁵ *And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.* After he had made it all clear to the brothers, he was free to let out rest of his pent up emotion, hugging his younger brother Benjamin. And then, one by one, he kissed his brothers and wept over them. They had endured so much anguish, keeping their sin a secret, wondering if they had sent their brother to his death, remembering his pleas for mercy, and seeing the anguish their father lived with. Sin torments those with any conscience, and Joseph had read it on their faces, just as he read the faces of the butler and baker.

What a godly reaction Joseph had! He had the power to do anything to those men, but he wept over them. Does it remind you of someone else, someone who was entering Jerusalem to cheers but knowing the crowd would turn to jeers of "Crucify!?" Jesus could have done anything too, but He wept over them.

That last verse ended, *Afterward his brothers talked with him.* What a conversation they must have had. Did they discover they had been held in the same pit Joseph labored in for years? Did Judah wonder at Joseph's ability to say "NO!" to sexual temptation? Were they surprised at how God used the prisoners' dreams to set up an opportunity to free Joseph, but then two years passed until it took place? And surely they told one another about their children, the nephews and nieces. They had a lot of catching up to do.

Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased to hear about the reunion. There is a lot hidden in that statement. It implies that they all really enjoyed Joseph running things. What does that tell you about Joseph's demeanor and people skills? He really was one exceptional man. He must have had the wisdom of God to end power struggles without making enemies.

Pharaoh told him, ¹⁹ *"You are also directed to tell them, 'Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come.* ²⁰ *Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours."* Egyptians must have thought that if Joseph was such a man, surely his family would be a blessing to Egypt. Good thing they didn't know the family history! They surely wanted Joseph to be blessed by the presence of his family. Pharaoh wanted to repay Joseph for all he had done for him, his household and his country, so he offered the best of the land to Joseph's family.

Goshen was the perfect spot for shepherds. The Nile Delta had an abundance of grasses for grazing animals. Their herds could survive there, even in a time of

famine. Pharaoh wanted the best for Joseph and his family. He told him not to worry about all their belongings because the best of Egypt would be theirs.

There is a type and shadow in this as well. Do you see it? If we see Joseph as a type of Christ, his family is then a shadow of believers. Where did Jesus go before us? (Hebrews 6:20) He is the firstfruits from among the dead and has entered into heaven before us to the very throne of God. His purpose was to atone for our sins with his own blood, making a way for us to be there with Him.

Commented [notes2]: Hebrews 6:20 (NIV) 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Now when it is time for us to leave this earthly home and go to the One who has gone before and is Himself the way to get there, He will provide our transportation. We don't need to worry about that. But that isn't all we need not worry about. He tells us to forget about our possessions, for the best of the land is ours. I like the way the KJV puts this verse. ²⁰ *Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours.* Forget about your "stuff". What would we include in that category of stuff? Well, stuff includes, your house, clothes, collectables, photo albums, certainly Christmas ornaments, and everything in my garage including the car (if you can still get it in your garage). Forget about it. The best of heaven is yours! We spend our whole life filling up our garage and storage rooms, and God just says, forget that stuff! Heaven is incomparably better.

Joseph gave gifts to his brothers with extra gifts going to Benjamin of course. Part of his reconciliation gifts included a change of clothing for each brother. This had all begun with their jealousy over the special cloak he had been given by his father. Now they all have their own special set and Benjamin has five. Joseph also sent a load of gifts for his father. They had more than they could possibly need for the journey. And then comes this verse that made me laugh out loud. ²⁴ *Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Don't quarrel on the way!"* Can you see them all loaded to the gills, grinning from ear to ear with relief as they are headed north, and Joseph yells out from behind them. "Hey, don't let me hear about you fighting on the way back!"

Gee, I wonder why he said that? After all the changes he had seen in his brothers, he knew the old nature was there, just waiting to rear its ugly head. Sound familiar? Let me drastically paraphrase one of Jesus last prayers, "Father, don't let them quarrel on the way home." John 17:20-21 (NIV) ²⁰ *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."* I did say it was a drastic paraphrase, but isn't that the gist of it. Don't quarrel on the way home or people won't believe the message. Jesus knows us like Joseph knew his brothers. For the last 2000 years we've been quarrelling over doctrine and ritual.

Joseph may have been worried about them fighting over the story of what happened when they sold Joseph, who said what, and who was responsible, etc. I don't know what Jacob did when they had to tell him the truth, but I think I'd have gotten out the whipping stick and given them all a good switching even if they were 45 years old.

Jacob was probably waiting on a hilltop for them with some sharp-eyed grandson watching the southern trail to see if Benjamin was returning. When he knew Benjamin was safe, he probably breathed a big sigh of relief. But then the caravan was much bigger than expected. "What is all this?", he must have thought. ²⁶ *They told him, "Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt." Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them.* Ah hah! So they didn't tell him the whole story yet. I would have put it off too, if I were in their shoes. Joseph would probably have to explain later. But what did they say? "What do you know Dad! Joseph must have escaped that wild beast and decided to go job hunting in Egypt. The boys done really well for himself." Would you have believed a story like that? I wouldn't have either!

²⁷ *But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.* It is as if Jacob had been living in a slump of depression since Joseph disappeared. Suddenly, he believes Joseph is alive and a spark of life comes back in his eyes. I wonder if he thought, "You mean, I've been misinterpreting my whole life. Everything isn't really against me?"

²⁸ *And Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."* He didn't see him yet, but he saw the evidence. Because he saw the evidence, he was convinced that he would see what he longed for.

The Apostle Paul used the same idea in the end of Romans 8. He said the life of Christ convinced him that he would see the love of God throughout his life and face to face in eternity. ³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

You haven't seen the One your soul longs for yet, but you've seen His goodness in the land of the living as He delights in your joy. Even in sorrow and loss, He is there suffering with you, guiding and helping you through. Like the effects of the wind, you've seen the effects of His presence in your life, and I hope you are convinced. (John 3:8)

One day He will reveal Himself and call for us like Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. It's a Greek word the lights up the New Testament, the *parousia*, or unveiling. (Matthew 24:30-31); (2Thessalonians 1:7) We will see Him in all His glory. (1Corinthians 3:12) We will be on our faces like the brothers were before Joseph, knowing how we have betrayed Him and deserve justice. But then He will share with us the Father's wonderful plan to save us from the famine of the human condition. It will be time to move. Do you know what His message to you will be then? Forget about your stuff. The best of heaven is waiting for you. Yes, our eyes will see the King of glory! (Isaiah 33:17) One glimpse of Him and all the things of the earth lose their attraction. Forget about your stuff. The best of heaven is waiting for you.

Commented [notes3]: John 3:8 (NIV)
8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Commented [notes4]: Matthew 24:30-31 (NIV)
30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.
31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Commented [notes5]: 2 Thessalonians 1:7 (NIV)
7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

Commented [notes6]: 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV)
12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Commented [notes7]: Isaiah 33:17 (NIV)
17 Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar.