

Joseph: Faithful unto Death

Kevin Freeman / General

Joseph / Faithful / Genesis 46:28–30; Genesis 50:15–26

After the death of his father Jacob, Joseph was surprised to learn his own brothers were still afraid he would seek vengeance. Joseph's response and request reveals how he - and we - could be faithful to the end.

Vengeance is mine?

June 4, 2004 brought one of the strangest and most disturbing events to the town of Granby, Colorado. A large bulldozer with custom-made armor plating rampaged across the town, demolishing several buildings. It plowed through a concrete plant, damaged city hall, destroyed part of a newspaper office, hit the mayor's home, and crushed a hardware store, where it came to rest. The armored dozer - dubbed the "killdozer" - was operated by Marvin Heemeyer, who owned a welding shop in the town. Why did Mr. Heemeyer rampage through town like this? His aggression stemmed from a zoning dispute.

Heemeyer had apparently sold some of his land to the concrete company so they could build their plant, but the zoning of the land meant Heemeyer's welding shop was blocked from access. Several appeals to the zoning commission were all rejected, leading Heemeyer to take a

drastic step. He spent a year retrofitting a Komatsu D355A bulldozer with two sheets of half-inch-thick steel reinforced with cement in between. He added three-inch-thick bulletproof plastic to protect the cameras he would need to use to navigate. He also brought guns aboard to fire through the gun ports he had fashioned.

Thirteen damaged or destroyed buildings and \$7 million in damages later, Heemeyer's killdozer got stuck, and Heemeyer took his own life. The authorities and traumatized public later learned that Marvin Heemeyer actually welded himself inside the cockpit. He had spent a year plotting his vengeance and never planned on coming out alive.

(<https://allthatsinteresting.com/revenge-stories/4>)

In a sense, this is true of anyone who seeks revenge. The more they plot it, the more they entomb themselves within the means that they think will satisfy their grievance. They shut themselves off to the world around them. I do not know the merits of the legal case that Marvin Heemeyer tried to present on the zoning problem, but I do know that eventually his appeals as a law-abiding citizen ceased as he began to hatch the plan of a vigilante. He was no longer operating in good faith in the rule of law; he began to break faith with every trip to his shop to nurse his grudge and plot his revenge.

The same possibility presents itself to each of us. The longer we live the more we see events take place that reflect what we perceive to be an injustice against us. Maybe, like Heemeyer, we see court decisions that appear as tragic perversions of justice. Maybe we lose loved ones or even children to a horrible disease. You might be the hard worker who has lost your job while others with less of a work ethic are promoted. Maybe the events of 2020 have piled on you so much that you can't imagine finishing the year with your sanity intact.

Marvin Heemeyer hit his breaking point. What's yours? Remember, God calls us to faithfulness. We are to remain faithful to the God who is in charge of everything we see around us. True faithfulness to God is maintained to the end. Faithfulness is required for all four quarters, all three periods, all nine innings. It continues to the last stitch. It carries through the last breath. Faithfulness is full time until the end of time. That may sound daunting. It is, but faithfulness is not meant to be carried out in your own strength. We have a God whose strength is available to work through us. God has given us examples in His Word of people who embody this trait of faithfulness.

One of those people is Joseph. We are finishing the series on the life of Joseph today, and we will see how Joseph embodied true faithfulness to God, which he maintained to

the end. To do that, we will look at two passages of Scripture. Turn to [Genesis 46:28-30](#), and have your finger ready a few chapters to the right at [Genesis 50:15-26](#). Last week Pastor Mark shared about Joseph's opportunity to take revenge on his brothers for their horrible treatment of him decades earlier. Although Joseph gave his brothers a bit of a hard time, testing them to see if their hearts had been changed, we know that Joseph did not plot his revenge. Instead he welcomed his brothers and the rest of his family to Egypt, saving them from the remaining five years of the famine. We pick up with the arrival of Jacob in Genesis 46:38-30. Please stand in respect for God's Word as I read.

[Genesis 46:28-30](#)

Genesis 46:28-30 ESV

He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen. Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive."

Jacob did die seventeen years later. We learn what happened next in [Genesis 50:15-26](#).

Genesis 50:15-26 ESV

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."' ' And now, please forgive the

transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father’s house. Joseph lived 110 years. And Joseph saw Ephraim’s children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph’s own. And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

We already know Joseph responded kindly to his brothers and brought them to Egypt. There was no sense that Joseph begrudged any of this. Even so, a crisis arose at the death of Jacob. Joseph’s brothers became aware that Joseph may have been plotting his revenge on them all this time, simply waiting for their father to die. Jacob had surely shared of the fallout between his brother, Esau, and himself after he defrauded Esau of both birthright and blessing. Esau had plotted to kill Jacob after their father, Isaac, died. Maybe this family history set off the alarm bells in their own minds, so they sent an appeal to Joseph to forgive their actions and spare them from seeking retribution. They didn’t come themselves; rather, they sent messengers to Joseph. Those

messengers delivered what we can conclude was a fake message. They said that Jacob gave a message before he died, ordering Joseph to forgive his brothers for their evil act toward him and not exact his revenge on them. Why would we say this message was fabricated? It's because the Bible records Jacob's final orders in the two prior chapters. He had already shared all of the things he believed to be important, and he was pretty thorough. It's hard to imagine Jacob forgetting to say, "Oh yeah, and Joseph, please don't slaughter your brothers after I die."

As Joseph receives this message, his response teaches us a lot about how to remain faithful to God's ways.

Retain your sensitivity

Joseph's initial response reminds of the need to **retain your sensitivity**. One of the most difficult things to do over time is to keep from growing calloused to the trials of this life. When life has us journey as though barefoot on rocky terrain, over knobby roots and the shattered pieces of broken dreams, we tend to develop skin so thick we forget to feel. Joseph - sold into slavery by his own brothers; Joseph - wrongly imprisoned for maintaining integrity; Joseph - left to languish in prison even after Pharaoh's butler could have put in a good word - had several reasons to become calloused.

But Joseph had the emotional sensitivity to weep. He wept, I believe, out of pity for his brothers. Almost forty years had passed since the brothers sold him into slavery, since they had welded themselves inside their “killdozer” of revenge, and they were still stuck inside. Their jealousy had subsided, leaving them trapped by guilt and fear. Joseph heard their message and realized that since reuniting with his family in Egypt, his relationships had remained superficial. Every family gathering, every meal, every time he bounced a niece or nephew - or more likely a great niece or nephew - on his knee, what was family bonding for him was a time of apprehension for his brothers. They expected the hammer to one day drop. Joseph may have reunited physically with his brothers, but relationally they were still separated.

You might forgive Joseph for exasperation here if he had shown it. He had already welcomed his brothers to Egypt, provided for them, and built a life with them. Their seventeen formative years growing up now had seventeen adult years together. When Joseph called the wrongs water under the bridge, his brothers thought he was sweeping them temporarily under the rug. When he said, “Let’s bury the hatchet,” they thought he was putting a skeleton in the closet, ready to drag it out at the right time. If you or I were in Joseph’s gem-studded sandals, we might have been angry enough to boil the Nile. We might say, “Seventeen

years on my dime - or shekel or rather, in ancient Egypt, *deben* - seventeen years of restored relationships and proven kindness, and they still will not trust me! Fine. Let them find their own money, land, and family.” Joseph could have responded in this way, but his response was compassionate.

This sort of compassion is embodied in a story I came across shared by a woman named Glynda Lomax. She writes of a resident in a Western Oklahoma nursing home, an elderly woman who was always negative and spiteful. She was the sort of nursing home resident who drained the staff so much that they had grown calloused to her frequent demands. Even those who were normally good at befriending the toughest of residents had written off this woman as a hopeless case of bitterness.

One night a tired nurse was summoned to the woman’s room by her loud yelling, and she received an earful about the fact that the woman could not sleep. The nurse dutifully procured a sleeping tablet prescribed by a doctor. She continued speaking kindly to the woman and was surprised when the woman suddenly looked up with terror in her eyes.

“I know I don’t have much longer to live,” the woman blurted out, “and I’m afraid.” Tears began filling the woman’s eyes and streaming down her cheeks. With

compassion, the nurse came over to the woman and hugged her, cradling her in her arms. “I’m afraid to die,” repeated the woman. “Would you stay with me?” Hearing the request, the nurse remembered when she was a little girl who often struggled with nightmares after the death of her own mother. She knew the terror of waiting to fall asleep alone in the dark, and her heart was filled with compassion. Tears filled her own eyes as she climbed in the bed and gently held the woman, not leaving her until she slept. Later during that graveyard shift, the woman checked in on the resident and learned she had passed away during her sleep. She realized that she was the last person to show the woman any kindness before she died.

(<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/83924/compassion-by-glynda-lomax>)

We are called to retain Joseph-level sensitivity so that we can show God-level compassion to people. It is the same sort of compassion God has shown us. Is there someone in your life who needs that sort of compassion? You may not feel like they deserve it, but God has shown much more compassion to you and me.

Remember your standing

Joseph’s response also reminds us to **remember our standing**. He quickly reminded them that he was not in God’s place. Following the messengers, they came and laid

down before him, declaring themselves Joseph's slaves. This kind of prostrate bowing in the Bible usually only happened when people found themselves in the presence of God. Perhaps this is why Joseph told his brothers the same thing the angel told the shepherds on the night of Jesus's birth: "Do not be afraid." He was, in fact, not God, and he went on to remind them he did not occupy God's place. Joseph remembered his standing.

Remembering our standing places helpful boundaries on our lives. We come to the limits of our responsibility and realize we need not go further. Joseph understood that he was not in God's place to pass judgment on the past. The crime was outside his jurisdiction, and its prosecution was outside his purview. Taking on roles you were not designed to handle is a recipe for bitterness and worry. Bitterness, because handling more responsibility than we were meant to leaves us exhausted and spiteful, and worry because we anxiety from shouldering more than we can possibly handle.

Joseph stopped all of it with a simple question. Am I in the place of God? This can put the brakes on seeking revenge or stepping on toes or overburdening ourselves with work. Understanding and accepting where our role ends helps us stay at peace.

Recall God's purpose

But Joseph's final reminder to us is to **recall God's purpose**. This singular factor may have the most impact of all, directing both his sensitivity and standing. Joseph is able to trace God's hand amid the tumult of his own life.

[Genesis 50:20](#)

Genesis 50:20 ESV

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Joseph had given the same assurance to his brothers the day he revealed himself to them. Here are some statements he made from [Genesis 45](#):

- “Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.” ([Gen 45:5](#))
- “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth...” ([Gen 45:7](#))
- “It was not you who sent me here, but God.” ([Gen 45:8](#))

Can you trace the arc of your life and see God's hand at work? If you can see how God has guided you, you can trust where God is leading you. Joseph demonstrated his faithfulness to the end in his final orders. He had his brothers promise they would one day bury his bones not in Egypt but in Canaan. I love that he asked his brothers. He

could have asked his sons, who were grown by then. Instead, Joseph invited his brothers to remember their shared future. Joseph was able to trace God's hand; he could see God's purpose. The same God who seemingly took a long time to bring Joseph through his turmoil would take a long time returning the people of Israel to the land He had promised them. Joseph could be patient. Whenever God chose to lead His chosen people out of Egypt, Joseph wanted to be carried along.

You may be surprised to learn that more than thirty years ago, archaeologists uncovered a significant find in the historical land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived in Egypt. In the middle of that area is a place called Avaris, a term without meaning in Egyptian but in Hebrew loosely translates to "The Hebrew Man." In Avaris a palace has been uncovered, and on that property is a small pyramid, normally reserved for a Pharaoh's burial but in this case crafted for a high-ranking non-Egyptian official. Within that pyramid stands a large statue, now vandalized, but that appears to have a colorful coat. The head of the statue depicts an odd hairstyle - one that matches someone from Canaan rather than Egypt. For this reason, secular scholars call this statue "The Asiatic," as in of someone from Asia and not Egypt. Of course, that tomb is empty. Assuming its

original occupant was Joseph, those bones were removed long ago at the time of the exodus.

(<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/statue-of-biblical-joseph-found-story-covered-up/>)

Joseph likely didn't move with his family to Canaan until he was six years old, and he was sold to Egypt by age seventeen. That means he spent only eleven years in that land of God's promise - just ten per cent of his life. Egypt was where Joseph found his career, got married, raised a family, and lived for most of his life. But Egypt was not truly his home. Recalling God's purpose for His people, Joseph wanted to be buried in Canaan one day. Joseph's empty tomb in Egypt reveals his steadfast faith in God's inheritance. Another Joseph - this one of Arimathea - lent out another tomb that also stands empty now, and that empty tomb helps us recall the glorious inheritance God has for us! God's heavenly kingdom is where we will one day live.

During the Great Depression, Ira Yates owned a large sheep ranch in Texas, but the economic downturn meant he and his wife, Ann, couldn't pay their bills. Yates was forced to live on government subsidy, which caused him to wonder how he would ever be able to afford his ranch in the future. One day, however, Ira was able to convince the Transcontinental Oil Company to try drilling a well on the Yates farm. At about a thousand feet, they struck oil. Well after well was drilled on the land, as Ira and Ann Yates became the owners of one of

the most productive oil fields in the country. By 1995 it had produced more than two billion barrels of crude, and it still yields oil today. The Yates had been living below the poverty level while they sat on land of inestimable value. Although they owned vast wealth, they didn't know it.

(<https://www.landmanblog.com/yates-oil-field/>)

Christian, let me remind you of God's purpose for His people: to bring them into eternal inheritance with Him. When we recall that, so many trials in this life just don't matter anymore. Disagreements with others no longer matter. Injustices we experienced fade in the brilliance of what God has in store. A contested election somehow seems a lot less important. Joseph reminds us to let go of the past, let go of the burdens and hurts and pains, to let go of our desire to control, and to simply embrace the future that awaits those who belong to Jesus Christ, who have placed their faith in Him.