

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

We come to the climax, or denouement, of the life of Joseph, and really of the whole book of Genesis tonight. Here in Genesis 45, all the tension that has been building in the preceding weeks, and really all the way through the whole book of Genesis, comes to a dramatic and emotional resolution. All the way back in Genesis 3, the promise of God to mankind, in the curse pronounced upon the serpent, was that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, while the serpent would bruise his heel. Tonight, we will see a dim shadow, or type, of the ultimate fulfillment of that promise. As Christians, we know that the ultimate fulfillment of that promise to mankind was the incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and abiding priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternally begotten Son of God, the Word who became flesh. But in the Old Testament, we find numerous and varied foreshadowings of Christ's coming in the flesh to be the Savior of the world, the seed of the woman who crushed the head of the serpent. We saw one in Judah last week, who offered to take Benjamin's punishment upon himself. Tonight, we will see Joseph overcome the malice and enmity that Satan has put in the human heart, and become a man of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Joseph, through the fires of testing and affliction, has come out on the other side as a godly man, refined, rather than embittered, by the unjust sufferings he endured. We ended last week on a bit of a cliff-hanger at the end of chapter 44. Judah had offered to take the punishment of Benjamin, who had been accused of stealing a silver cup from the lord of Egypt. Tonight, we see what Judah's sacrifice caused in the heart of his brother Joseph.

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. (Genesis 45:1-3)

Joseph could not control himself the emotions were so intense. Have you ever been so overcome by emotion that your body begins to tremble? That is what Joseph was experiencing here. Why was he so overcome with emotion? In a word, love. It was his love for his family that caused him to shake and weep uncontrollably, so loudly that all the household of Pharaoh could hear it. These are loud cries. They are the cries of love. I am reminded of another man who offered up loud cries for the ones He came to save.

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. (Hebrews 5:7-9)

Joseph's cries were heard by the lord of the land of Egypt, and Jesus' cries were heard by the Lord of all creation. Joseph learned obedience through what he suffered even though he was a

son of Israel. He became the source of *temporal* salvation from a famine to all who obeyed him, but Jesus has become the source of *eternal* salvation to all who obey Him. The word obey is a compound word in Greek that literally translates “under hearing.” It means those who hear the words of his mouth, and place themselves under the authority of his words. It is a voluntary placing of oneself under the authority of another’s words. Joseph’s brothers voluntarily placed themselves under Joseph’s orders, and we are called upon to voluntarily place ourselves under the authoritative words of Jesus.

Why do you think Joseph sent everyone other than his brothers out of the room? This is a beautiful example of how we should treat those who have wronged us. He is about to reveal himself to the very men who had sinned against him, and so discover their sins in a very personal and painful way, and he does not want anyone to overhear as he speaks to them about the evil they committed against him. He only wants to deal personally with them, not to spread the rumor of their evil acts abroad in the land. He doesn’t want anyone else to know about the sins they committed. Brothers and sisters, we are called upon to deal with one another’s sins in the same way. When we discover the sins of others, we ought to be eager to keep them covered, rather than to spread the news of them abroad. This is what Peter means when he says, “Love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

God is not quick to publish our sins to others. When the adulterous woman was brought before Jesus, he did not deal with her sin until everyone else had been sent away. God deals with our sins personally. We are not behaving in a godly manner when we are eager to publish the sins of others. God has gone to such extreme lengths to cover our sins in sending His only-begotten Son to die in our place, and would we be eager to uncover the sins of others?

Our goal is the goal of the gospel. It is to make peace, and to reconcile with the one who has wronged us. That is what God has done for us, and it is what we who believe the gospel should be eager to do for one another. We should forgive as we have been forgiven. The Bible does not record an instance of Joseph telling anyone else, other than his brothers, what they did to him. That is astounding! How quick are we when someone does something to hurt us to immediately go and broadcast that sin to someone else. That is not the godly response. The godly response is to seek to cover their offense, and to make peace as far as it depends on you.

Joseph revealed himself with the simple words, “I am Joseph!” Don’t miss the power of those simple words. His identity was something powerful in the hearts of his brothers. Why? Because he was the one they had treated unjustly. He was the one they had condemned, though he didn’t deserve it. Contained in the words, “I am Joseph,” is the guilt that haunted them for all these years. They were dismayed (bahal) at his presence. That word dismayed can mean disturbed or terrified. I think that captures their emotions well. They were overcome with terror before his presence. The terror of the punishment they knew they deserved awakened inside their hearts. They were bracing for the inevitable. Surely his wrath would come down swiftly upon them. They were afraid of him when they thought he was the lord of the land of Egypt, but now that they know he is Joseph, their brother, they are trembling with fear.

You know what I was reminded of when I thought about this simple statement of Joseph? I thought about Jesus' simple words to Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus. I couldn't help but see the parallel between those two situations. Remember what happened. Saul was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians and to bring them back to Jerusalem to be tried and executed. On his way, he was unexpectedly stopped in his tracks as he was met by the very one against whom he was sinning, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in all His dazzling glory and brightness. He was knocked to the ground, probably flat on his back, at the appearing of Jesus. Listen to their exchange.

⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." (Acts 9:4-5)

"I am Jesus." Never more powerful words have been spoken than those. When Jesus reveals Himself to a sinner in this personal way, He reveals Himself as the one against whom we have sinned. All of us have sinned against Jesus. We look upon Him as the one whom we have pierced, says Zechariah (Zechariah 12:10). You say, "I didn't pierce Jesus! I didn't nail Him to a cross. Had I been there, I would have never done such a thing." Never say never, my friend. Every time we sin, we are driving the nails into the hands of Jesus. Our sins nailed Him to that cursed tree. He was crushed for *our* iniquities. He was pierced for *our* transgressions. Have you wept over what your sins cost Jesus? Have you grieved and mourned over the wages of your sin, knowing that Jesus received the just penalty for you in your place? He says to you, to each and every sinner in this world, "I am Jesus," we should be struck with the same terror and dismay that Joseph's brothers felt when he said, "I am Joseph," for with those words, we all stand guilty and condemned.

But what is amazing, what confounds reason and blazes with the holy fire of heaven, is the fact that the One before whom we all stand condemned, does not condemn us. He says, "I did not come to judge the world, but to save it." (John 12:47) This is the burning heart of God. He doesn't cast us out, but He invites us in. He invites us to come near to Him, and to be wrapped up in His loving embrace, just as Joseph did for his brothers.

⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. (Genesis 45:4)

Joseph made himself known to his brothers not to condemn them, but to invite them into loving fellowship with himself. He desired to free them from the guilt of their past sin, and to forgive them and be reconciled with them. Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus not to judge Him, but to save Him and to invite Him into fellowship with Himself. He is ready to do the same for each and every one of us.

Watch how Joseph assuages the fears of his brothers with his forgiveness.

⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.' ¹² And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him. (Genesis 45:5-15)

In these words, Joseph reveals the key to becoming a person who is capable of forgiveness. What gave Joseph the power to forgive? Here are the words which reveal the secret of forgiveness, "It was not you who sent me here, but God." Four times, Joseph states that God sent him to Egypt. He says, "you sold me here, but God sent me here." Which one is it? Did his brothers sell him to Egypt or did God send him to Egypt? And the answer is, "yes." They sold him, *and* God sent him. But do you see what a difference Joseph's faith made in his life? It raised his perspective above the smallness of his brothers' offense, and above the smallness of his own pain and hurt, and helped him to see that the "little while" of his suffering served a much larger purpose in the grand plan of divine wisdom.

If all that we have eyes to see is the pain and hurt that has been caused to us in this life by other sinful people, then we will never find the power to forgive them, and we will end up as bitter people. The trespasses that they commit against us will loom very large in our lives, so large that we may never move past them. Their power over us might just grow and grow until the pain of our past is a giant of malice, resentment, and spiteful anger. Satan wants us to stew on the offenses that have been committed against us. He wants us to wallow in the misery and rub salt in the wound and let it fester and become infected with the malignancy of hatred and vindictiveness. Without faith in God's power to bring good to pass through the wicked acts of sinful men, we will never find the peace in our own heart that is prerequisite to forgiveness. Joseph had the peace that transcends understanding on account of his faith in God's overruling providence. That peace then flowed down to his brothers in the form of forgiveness.

Here's the equation to forgiveness. Faith in God's goodness → Peace that transcends understanding → Forgiveness

Somehow, somehow, Joseph held onto his faith that God had a purpose and plan even in the midst of his unjust suffering. He let go of his hold on his brothers' offense, and he held firmly to

the truth that God had a bigger purpose for sending him to Egypt. That purpose was to be a blessing to the very ones who sold him there. God's purpose is a merciful and gracious one. He means for good what sinful men mean for evil.

We are blessed with an even greater incentive than Joseph to trust in the goodness and grace of God through the unjust suffering that sinful people bring into our lives. We have the greater revelation of God's sovereign goodness reigning over the sinful deeds of mankind. We have the cross of Jesus Christ in view. Jesus is the ultimate example of this process of forgiveness. He is the ultimate example of someone who was unjustly treated with hatred, scorn, and violence even unto death, but who through it all trusted the will of His Father to bring good to pass through the unjust treatment he received from sinners. Though perfectly and completely innocent, He endured all the enmity and malice of hell to its fullest extent because He knew it was His Father's will to open the floodgates of mercy and grace to undeserving sinners through the once-for-all-time sacrifice of His only Son. He offers peace to those who believe in Him because through His death all our sins are forgiven. Forgiveness flows from the fountain of faith. We are incapable of true, godly forgiveness if we do not have faith in God's sovereign goodness ruling over the evil actions of sinful creatures.

Do you have this faith? Has God's goodness and grace warmed your cold and embittered heart? Has He given you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, so that you can see the unjust treatment you've received as a small part of His good and glorious purpose for your life? His love is like springtime, melting away the cold frost of winter for our dead, resentful hearts and bringing to light the glorious power of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is alive! He is risen! Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, the power of forgiveness and reconciliation lives within me.

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:10-11)

The life of God in your mortal body means that you have the power over sin, death, and the devil. That power lives inside of you. You have victory over the devices of the devil. You have power to conquer resentment and hatred. The same God who lavished His grace and love upon you, gives you power to lavish His grace and love upon others. This life can only be received by faith.

Joseph lavished his love upon his undeserving brothers. He kissed them all and wept upon them and talked with them. That is fellowship. That is the kind of relationship Jesus into which Jesus invites you. He beckons you tonight to come near to him so that He can kiss you and pull you into His warm embrace and talk with you. You have heard the very words of His mouth tonight. Now that he has been reconciled with his brothers, all that remains is to bring Jacob and the rest of the family back to Egypt.

¹⁶ When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. ¹⁷ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, ¹⁸ and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.' ¹⁹ And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰ Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

²¹ The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. ²² To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes. ²³ To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. ²⁴ Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the way."

²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. ²⁶ And they told him, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ And Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die." (Genesis 45:16-25)

Pharaoh gave the command to Joseph to tell his brothers to bring enough wagons back home to carry the whole family back to Egypt, with the promise that the best of the land would be theirs. Pharaoh loved Joseph. This is how God provides for His own. He abundantly and lavishly provides every need for His faithful ones.

Let's talk about Jacob's response to this shocking, too-good-to-be-true revelation. We are told that initially, his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. Notice the order of that statement. It is not his heart became numb; therefore, he did not believe. No, the numbness of heart came as a result of his unbelief. This is much like what we read of the disciples' response to the news of Jesus' resurrection.

¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. (Luke 24:11)

That is the condition that will make your heart numb, unfeeling, cold, and dead. If the good news of Jesus' resurrection has not hit your ears and been mixed with faith, you are numb to the most glorious, life-changing reality of all time. This numbness is the cause of your troubles.

How can this unbelief and numbness be overcome? The answer is right there in the text. Words and wagons. Watch it.

27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. (Genesis 45:27)

First, all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them. There is an emphasis in this passage on the words of Joseph's mouth. He told his brothers, "It is my mouth that speaks to you." Why this emphasis on his mouth and the words that he spoke. Well, because the words of his mouth are the expression of his heart. They reveal him. They reveal what is deepest within him. The same is true of God. God's words, the words of Jesus' mouth, are the deepest reflection of His heart. The first step to resurrection is to hear all his words and truly believe that they come directly from God's mouth to your ears. Jesus is the logos, the Word of God. As the author of Hebrews puts it, **"³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."** (Hebrews 1:3) All that Jesus did, all that Jesus said, all that Jesus is as the Son of God and Son of Man, that is the deepest and fullest revelation of God's heart to you.

I have to emphasize the *all* here. The whole Bible is the revelation of Jesus Christ to you. Old Testament and New Testament. Have you noticed just how much this story of Joseph is about Jesus? How does that happen? How does the story of a man's life who lived well over a thousand years before Jesus was born perfectly prefigure and shadow forth the glory of the One who was to come so long after him? God. That's how. These are God's words, and therefore they are all about Jesus. The Bible is about Jesus, from beginning to end. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. How did Jesus reveal his glory to His disciples after He was raised from the dead?

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

He interpreted to them all the words of His mouth, all the words He had already spoken to them, which were contained in the writings of Moses and all the Prophets. That's the Old Testament. Have you heard all the words of His mouth? Do you know what happens when you hear them and believe them? Your numb heart is strangely warmed. That's what happened to the disciples.

32 They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32)

What about your heart? Is it still numb because you do not believe the words. Do they just seem like some idle tale. Is it just some make-believe fairy-tale to you? Is it just the words of deluded people who don't really know what they are talking about? Or, does your heart burn with desire and longing because you know they are the very words of God? They are the words of His mouth.

Second, Jacob saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him. What was the purpose of the wagons? The text tells us. They were sent to carry Jacob, who could not have possibly made the journey without the wagons. They were sent to carry the little ones and the wives of Joseph's brothers. The wagons were Joseph's provision for a journey they could not have otherwise made, a journey back to Joseph.

Jesus has not left us without a Way of getting back to Him, either.

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:3-6)

Jesus Himself is the wagon according to the gospel. He is the wagon who carries us to God. He promised He will come again and take us to Himself and to His Father. He is the Way, the only Way, He carries us on a journey we could not possibly have made on our own. He brings us to His Father.

When Jacob heard the words and saw the wagons, his spirit revived. Quite simply, what was dead and numb came to life. This was a resurrection. This is what happens to all who hear the words of Jesus and believe that He is the Way. Our dead hearts come to life. Our spirits revive. We are born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We are new creatures; the old has gone, behold, the new has come. Resurrection life now lives within us. Jesus is alive! It is enough! That is all we need!

One last closing thought and exhortation for those of us who have been raised to this newness of life through our faith in Christ. Joseph sent his brothers with the wagons to carry their father and the rest of the family back to him. Jesus has sent us with a wagon for others as well. After His resurrection, ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (John 20:21) He also said,

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

We have been commanded go and bring others to Jesus with us. We have been sent with wagons as well. As Paul says, having been reconciled to God, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation.

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are

ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

Remember earlier the verse from Hebrews. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. (Hebrews 5:9) To all who obey Him. To all who place themselves under the authority of His words. Just as Joseph's brothers heard the words of his mouth and then obeyed his orders to go and carry the wagons to bring the rest of the family back, so we must obey Jesus' orders to go and make disciples. He didn't just come to save me. He came to save the whole world, people from all nations! And the way in which He is doing it is by sending us with His words. May we be wagons to carry others back to Jesus!