

## SERMON TRANSCRIPT

08.25.2024 | God Meant It for Good | Genesis 50:15-21 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

And if you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 50. Genesis chapter 50, it's the last chapter in the book of Genesis. And as I mentioned, as we began the service, we are ending our study of Joseph's story today. This study has been a real blessing for me to study and to preach through. And I pray it's been a blessing to you as we've considered the life of Joseph and how it is instructive for us. Today, as we come to the end of the series, we're really going to kind of conclude in a similar way to how we began the series. If you were here a couple of weeks ago, when we began to look at Joseph's story, we used the introduction to kind of see how Joseph's story is connected to the greater story about the Bible and really all of history. The themes that we see in Joseph's story are themes that are true in all of scripture and in God's redemptive history. And today we'll kind of close in a similar manner as we look at the conclusion of Joseph's story. We're going to see these themes show up once more, but I think today we'll get to see particularly how these themes apply to our lives and how we can live them out. So just as to kind of catch us up where we're gonna pick up in Genesis chapter 50, we last left off in Genesis 48 and 49 as Jacob or Israel was coming to the end of his days here on earth and he blessed his sons and he blessed the sons of Joseph, his grandsons. We saw in that a picture of a trust in God and a display of God's grace. But here today, as we come to Genesis 50, now Jacob has passed away. In fact, the beginning of Genesis 50, Joseph and the brothers take Jacob's body back to Canaan, to that promised land and they bury him there as it was promised and prophesied, but then they return to Egypt. That's where we pick up in Genesis chapter 50, starting in verse 15.

Genesis 50, verse 15 says that when Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It made me 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.

You know, this short passage that concludes Joseph's story is really one that speaks to a topic that's important and applicable to each one of us. It's really, I think, a focus on reconciliation, focus on seeing relationships restored. That's what we have here. And I think it's something that is applicable to each one of us, because each one of us at times will experience brokenness in our relationships. Each one of us at times will have family members who hurt us, will have friends who turn on us, will have church members who gossip about us. I mean, not in this church, thank goodness, but you know, like other churches, that type of thing happens, right? Like there will be hurts between us and other people. There's going to be need for forgiveness. And there's going to need to be movement towards reconciliation, seeing a relationship restored. That's really what I think we have displayed here. We saw it touched upon a little bit earlier in the story, but here in this kind of culminating act, you've got really a seeking of reconciliation. Now, one thing that we'll have to keep in mind, both in life and as we read this passage, is that true reconciliation takes two parties, if you will. For a relationship to really be restored, it has to come from both sides.

I think we see that somewhat here in this passage because it seems to be that part of the obstacle to the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers is the brothers wondering whether or not Joseph has really forgiven them. Whether or not Joseph is really going to love them or if he was just waiting to get his revenge. You notice that the passage picks up by Joseph's brothers saying that they, kind of saying they realized that Jacob was dead. Well, they didn't just realize it. I mean, they had been part of taking him back to the land of Canaan and burying him. They knew that it was dead, that he was dead, but what set in was a reality that now dad is gone. And they started to think, I wonder if Joseph really has forgiven us or was he just being nice to us for dad's sake? Did he just not want to cause dad any more grief and so to appease him, he was being nice to us, but now he's going to get his revenge. And so they first send this message to Joseph. And basically the message is that dad said, you have to be nice to us.

You ever heard a kid say that to their brother or sister? Hey, mom said, you have to share that with me. She said, you have to be nice with me. Nice to me. That's kind of what Joseph's brothers are saying. They said, you know, before dad

died, he said that you have to forgive us. Now we don't actually know if Jacob said this. I tend to think he probably didn't or he probably would have just told Joseph himself, but no matter what we know, we know that this is their message to Joseph. They seem to realize that they are guilty. They speak about the great evil, the wrong things that they've done. They said, you really need to forgive us for dad's sake. We are servants of God. And then they even come and bow down before Joseph and they say, we are your servants now. Notice that they're not trying to reconcile as brothers, more they're just trying to keep the peace as coming as servants. And it says that Joseph weeps. You kind of have to wonder why Joseph weeps in this moment. We kind of had lost over part of this story, but if you read earlier in all the interactions with his brothers, Joseph often wept, often overcome with emotion of all that has happened and all that he's experiencing. But I have to think that in this moment, Joseph probably weeps because he realizes that this relationship hasn't been restored. That as much as he's forgiven his brothers, I mean, it's been years and he has spoken kindly to them and he has provided for them. He has made a place for them in Egypt, but yet they still wonder about this relationship.

And Joseph, I think, gives us a picture of here of what does it look like to pursue reconciliation. And that's the example that we have to follow because while reconciliation does take both sides and we can't always control what someone else does, we, I think, need to follow Joseph's example and pursue reconciliation to see relationships restored. And Joseph instructs us by making these three statements in verses 19, 20, and 21. And they're really profound words. In fact, I love the way that one commentator put it. There's a guy named Derek Kidner who's written a lot of commentaries on the Old Testament and he wrote a pretty brief commentary on the book of Genesis, but he said this about these closing words from Joseph to his brothers. He says, "Each sentence of his threefold reply "is a pinnacle of Old Testament and New Testament faith. "To leave all the writings, writing of one's wrongs to God, "to see his providence in man's malice, "and to repay evil not only with forgiveness, "but also with practical affection, "are attitudes which anticipate the adjective Christian "and even Christlike."

What Kidner is saying is that thousands of years before Jesus would come, Joseph is showing us what does it mean to be Christlike? By speaking these words and treating his brothers in the way that he does. So what I wanna do this morning is I just wanna consider these three statements as part of Joseph's reply and to consider the comments that even Kidner made as to how we can be guided to forgive, to pursue reconciliation, how we can see relationships restored. To begin, you'll notice that Kidner said this first statement was really all about trusting God for the writing of one's wrongs. So here's the way I would put it in my words. Because God is sovereign, let him be in control. Because God is sovereign, let him be in control. If we're going to see relationships restored and see there be reconciliation, we have to let God be God.

We talk about God's sovereignty, we're talking about the fact that God is over all things. God is over all the things of this world and he's over all that happens in this world. And Joseph recognizes this. I mean, God's sovereignty is really clear throughout Joseph's story. God is the one who brings dreams and interpretations of dreams and God's even the one who brings famines. God is sovereign over all things but maybe just as important, it's not just the fact that God is sovereign, but the fact that Joseph seems to recognize the fact that God is sovereign. He knows it as God who is with him, God who is giving interpretations, God who is putting him into certain positions. And now he asks a kind of rhetorical question about his position compared to God. He says this in verse 19. He says, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?" That's a rhetorical question with the obvious answer being, no. Joseph isn't in the place of God. And Joseph recognizes this. Now, what does it mean that Joseph does not want to be in God's place? What does it mean when he says, "Am I in the place of God?" Well, it seems to probably mean that he is not going to be the one who judges his brothers. He's not gonna be the one who needs to be the one who figures out the best way to punish and right the wrongs of his brothers. It seems that he is so trusting God to be in control that he's even going to trust God to work out whatever needs to be done with his brothers and the wrong things that they have done. He recognizes that getting revenge, getting payback is not his responsibility. Joseph is content to let God be God.

And we're specifically called to do the same thing. In the Bible, we receive instruction about letting God be God in all sorts of situations, but specifically in a situation where someone has wronged us. You know, in the Bible and in the book of Romans, which we've read from a couple of times this morning in the service, the first 11 chapters of Romans are really an explanation of God's grace and mercy towards sinners. And then in chapter 12, Paul says, "Well, in view of God's grace and mercy, "this is how you should live." And one of the things he says in Romans chapter 12 is in verse 19 when he says, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, "but leave it to the wrath of God. "For it is written, vengeance is mine, "I will

repay," says the Lord. In other words, I think Paul is telling us, follow Joseph's example. When someone wrongs you, let God be God. Believe that God is the one who is in control and let him be in control of the situation. Don't be the one who needs to judge someone, their motives, their actions. You don't need to be the one who writes every wrong or make sure there's always a punishment. Leave that up to God. Now, some people hear that verse and they think, okay, well, I won't get back, but I just can't wait for God to punish them. You know what I mean? Like, vengeance is mine and he is going to punish them better than I even could. So let's just let God do that. But notice in some ways that might not even let God be God. Like, if you want God to carry out your specific plan, if you want God to treat people how you would treat them, you're not actually letting God be God.

What if God wants to be merciful to this person who has wronged you? What if God wants to be gracious and to forgive them? What if he wants to say, my wrath has been satisfied by the body and blood of Jesus, and I am not going to hold this sin against them. Would you be okay with that? This is the way that we must let God be God in this situation, not just that we would hope God would do what we want to do, but that we would trust that God is in control. That it's not just about trusting that God's in control of their life and the situation, but it's also about letting God be in control of your life. You know, not letting God be God and you trying to take the place of God is really at the root of all sin. That was really a commentary about this portion of Genesis. And they said it's really interesting that the book of Genesis ends with basically Joseph saying, I'm not in the place of God. But the book of Genesis began with Adam and Eve saying, well, we'll be in the place of God. I mean, they wanted to take God's place. They wanted to be like him. And really that's at the root of all sin. That's why all the things that happen in Genesis, all the brokenness and the hurt relationships happen is because of sin. But Joseph is giving us an example that we are to let God be God, even over our own lives. What does that have to do with this whole situation? Well, if we're trusting God, not just to be over the other person and the relationship and the situation, but even over our own lives, then we're going to let God's word and God's will shape what we do.

But what does God tell us to do to those who hurt us? What did Jesus say that we should do to our enemies? He doesn't say that we should only just be indifferent to them and not hate them. He doesn't say just wait for God to get them. He says you should actually love them and pray for them. Paul even says in Romans chapter 12, after he says, don't get back at them, let God take care of it. He then says in verse 20, to the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will keep burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. We don't overcome evil with good by just allowing relationships to remain broken. We don't overcome evil with good by just pushing people away and saying, I'm just better off without them. We overcome evil with good by pursuing reconciliation the same way that Joseph is here. We overcome evil with good by loving those who have hurt us, by letting God be God even over our own lives.

This isn't something that's easy to do. It's not for the faint of heart, but it's also not something we do in our own strength. You see, really it is about letting God be in control. It's actually just a very humble posture. It's not saying, do you have the strength to forgive? Do you have the power to pursue reconciliation? The question really is, are you humble enough to let God be God? Are you willing to humble yourself and say, I'm going to let God be in control of this situation end of my life and I'm going to follow him and his will? I'm going to let God be God. It's a very humble posture, but really at the same time, if you're really going to pursue reconciliation, you can't just be humble. You actually also have to be confident. You have to be humbled under God, but also confident in who God is and what he's doing. And that actually leads to the second step that Joseph shows us here. That because God is sovereign, we would let him be in control, but also the fact that God is providential. So trust that he is at work. Because God is providential, trust that he is at work.

But if you were here at the beginning of this series, we kind of talked about a definition of God's providence. And I would just say the difference between God's sovereignty and his providence is the fact that not only is God sovereign, meaning he is over all things, but his providence says that he is actually working all things together for our good and for his glory. That's not just the fact that God is over all, but that he is working in all to accomplish his good purposes. And in many ways you would probably say that the providence of God is the major theme of Joseph's story. And in many ways you could probably say Genesis 50 verse 20 is the theme verse of Joseph's story. When Joseph looks at his brothers and he says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring about that many people should be kept alive as they are today." Notice that Joseph does not try to excuse what his brothers have done. He says, "You have meant evil against me." If we're really going to forgive people and pursue reconciliation, it won't happen when we just

sweep things under the rug or act like hurts and harms and sins are no big deal. He says, "You have done something terrible, evil against me." But what Joseph recognizes is they weren't the only ones at work. He doesn't try to excuse their sin, but what he recognizes is that when they were sinning and all this evil was happening, God wasn't just passively standing by saying, "Oh, I hope this all works out for Joseph." God was at work as well. Not that God was causing the sin. God doesn't tempt anybody. He doesn't make anyone sin, but he does work in spite of, and many times even through sinful actions to accomplish his good purposes. What Joseph is expressing here is a confidence that God had a plan in all of this, that none of this was wasted.

Now, I mentioned before, Joseph's story is quite dramatic. So many times you can see very clearly here, God had a purpose and a plan to bring Joseph into this position to save many people. Many times God's purposes and plans may not be quite so clear in your life. So if you can always just see the direct reasons why. But what we see here is a reminder that because God is providential, nothing is wasted. It doesn't always mean that every bad thing that happens, that God's trying to teach you a lesson, or God's bringing every hard thing into your life, or maybe a specific reason that you've got to learn something or do something. I think it's rather a general approach to recognize nothing in life is wasted. You know, in 2 Corinthians chapter four, Paul speaks about suffering. And that could be suffering that's related to sin that is done to us, or maybe just the suffering that comes with living in a broken world. But he says the suffering that we experience, it is light and it is temporary in comparison to eternity, meaning it is much lighter, not as weighty and shorter than what eternity will be. But he also says it is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. In other words, what I think Paul is saying is no suffering in life is wasted.

I mean, if you think about it, if there is no God, if this material world is all that there is, there's really no purpose to anything in life. I mean, good things happen, bad things happen, whatever. It's just kind of, it's all happening. It's kind of a bleak picture. And I think it's why we see so many people today searching for purpose and finding God. Because the reality is if there is a God who's not just overall things, but he's a providential God working all things together for good, then it means that actually no suffering is wasted. No harm done against you is just excused or if it didn't matter, no, it really happened. Evil was done against you. But notice that the evil wasn't the only thing at work. God is working for good. And sometimes it can be really hard to believe this. I mean, sometimes there are certain suffering that we experience and we would say, how could God really be good and let me go through this? Sometimes we could have a sin done against us so much that we would say, how could God really be loving and have brought this into my life? But if you ever struggled to believe that God is at work and working even the evil things of the world for good, just look at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Just look at the table that we come to today. I mean, we come here today expressing our hope in the fact that Jesus' body was broken and his blood was shed. What that means is we come here today expressing our hope in the fact that people took an innocent man. I mean, a man who had done nothing but just heal people and love people. He had not done anything wrong. And yet they mocked him and they beat him and they killed him in one of the most painful ways possible. But yet the Bible says that in that sinful action, God was at work. This is what Peter proclaimed to the people at Pentecost when the Spirit came. He says in Acts chapter two, verses 22 and 23, "Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, "a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders "and signs that God did through him in your midst "as you yourselves know. "This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan "and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed "by the hands of lawless men."

Notice Peter is not trying to sweep things under the rug. He puts their sin directly before them, but yet he says, it was according to the plan of God. God was working the sinful action for good. Could you believe that God's even doing that in your life? That when someone has hurt you or wronged you, when there's a break in your relationship that God is even doing something in that for good. It actually gives you a great confidence to be able to say that no suffering in life is actually wasted. It gives you a great confidence to say, no sin done against me will actually thwart God's plans and purposes for my life. God is working in all of this. You see, we have to be both humbled and confident. We have to be humble enough to say, God is God and I'm not. I'm going to let him be in control of this situation in my life. We also have to be confident in the fact that God is at work. And even the things that people have meant evil, even the suffering that we experience in this world, he is working for good. When you are both humbled by God, but also confident in God, you're actually prepared to take the third step.

And that's the step that Joseph displays for us when he realizes that God is gracious. And so he extends forgiveness to his brothers. So that's our last point this morning, because God is gracious, extend his forgiveness to others. Because God is gracious, extend his forgiveness to others. Now, if we were reading Genesis 50, you started to think, hey, didn't we already cover this? Didn't we already hear like of a time when Joseph said, don't worry, God was at work and all this, I'm not going to harm you. I'm going to actually provide for you. We become a right in Genesis 45, Joseph has already spoken these words. In many ways, he's already said the things that he's saying in Genesis 50. But yet as we see the brothers struggle to actually know that they've been forgiven. And actually that'll happen a lot of times in reconciliation and forgiveness. So many times we'd like to say, we'd like to forgive and forget, but the reality is none of us forgets. We continue to remember what's been done to us. People continue to remember what they've done against us. So many times for there to be true reconciliation, we've got to continue to forgive. We've got to continue to express forgiveness. Joseph here is once again expressing forgiveness to his brothers.

And I think he is giving us a good picture of what forgiveness looks like. You notice the beginning of this passage, the brothers say, oh gosh, what if Joseph is still mad and he pays us back for all the evil that we've done against him? That idea of paying us back is actually a good picture of what it means to get even, to get payback, right? And it also, the flip side gives us a picture of what it looks like to forgive. To forgive actually means you refuse to pay back, which means you bear the cost. You think about it, when someone has maybe borrowed some money from you, and then all of a sudden they say, you know what, I'm actually not going to be able to pay that back. For you to forgive that debt means you're going to pay that cost. You're going to have to write it off as a loss on your behalf. That's what it means every time we forgive someone. When we refuse to pay back what they've done to us, we are bearing the cost.

But actually, I think the Bible says we go one step further. That whenever you forgive someone, you not just refuse to pay back, but you actually, Paul told us, you do good for them. As Jesus says, you love them and you pray for them. That's what Joseph does here. He says, do not fear, I will provide for you and your little ones. Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. He says, I'm not only not going to pay you back for all the evil, but I'm actually going to go above and beyond, I'm going to provide for you. Not just providing physically, but he is providing comfort. He is speaking kindly to them. He wants to see this relationship restored. And so it must be for us as believers. We must be people who are not going to pay people back, but also we need to go above and beyond and being gracious to see relationships restored. I think the call for us as children of God is to be people who pursue reconciliation.

Remember that Jesus told us, if you remember that someone has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go be reconciled with them. He also said, if you remember that your brother has sinned against you, go and bring it to them. Matthew chapter 18, bring it to them, not so that you can just air your grievances or make them feel bad, but so that you may gain your brother or sister. Joseph is giving us an example here of Christ's likeness, of what Jesus called us to do. That we would not just be people who would not get back at people, who would just kind of say we forgive, we don't keep it from afar, but we would actually pursue reconciliation.

Now there's all sorts of caveats that you have to mention that we can't get into today. Reconciliation, pursuing that, doesn't mean you always trust the person in the same way that you maybe did before. Doesn't mean the relationship looks exactly the way that it did before, but it does mean we're not content to just be neutral in our relationships or to just push people away, but that we would actually take the step towards reconciliation, because that is what God has done for us. You see, God has been gracious to Joseph. God could have used any way that he wanted to provide for people during this famine. He didn't have to bring Joseph into this position. As far as we know, Joseph might've been kind of a spoiled brat at the beginning of the story. I mean, it's hard to tell, but he was the favored son. He was bringing bad reports of his brothers. We don't know what Joseph was like, but we know he didn't do anything to deserve all that God had brought into his life. Just as he didn't necessarily deserve the evil done against them, he didn't deserve the grace of God to be in the position that he's in now.

And isn't this what we confess when we come to the table? That God has graciously forgiven each one of us. That Jesus bore the cost in his body and in his blood. That he not only refused not to pay us back, but he's also been gracious to provide for us in so many ways. That we did not earn it. We didn't have to do anything to deserve it, but yet God has reconciled us to himself. I hope that as we come to the table this morning, we would remember how much we have been forgiven. Do you remember that parable that Jesus tells about the servant who's been forgiven a great debt, but then he

refuses to go out and forgive just the small debt that someone else owes him? This is a picture of Joseph's story. It's a picture of our story. How great a debt have we been forgiven? That we would sing our sins are greater, but his mercy is more. How much smaller the debts to other people owe us that we would be able to bear that cost because of the cost that has been born on our behalf.

I pray that we would walk away from the table this morning, ready to pursue reconciliation and other relationships because we have been reminded of God's grace towards us. This is what Joseph gives us as an example. That he has experienced God's grace and now he is extending God's grace. And so it is with us. Those of us who have experienced God's grace, we need to be ones who extend God's grace to others. And in doing so, we get to represent God in those relationships. We get to give a picture of his love and his character. I mean, I've mentioned before how Joseph really seems to be an example of God's heart and character and nature. He displays God almost as an ambassador. I mean, you almost think about this picture when the brothers are coming saying, "We don't even want to be your brothers, "we'll just be your servants." Does it kind of remind you of the prodigal son coming home saying, "I don't even want to be called your son anymore, "I'll just be your servant." And here's Joseph like the loving father, picking them up, embracing them, saying, "I just want this relationship restored." Joseph here is being an ambassador of God, showing God's character in his nature. And we have the call to do the same.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul talks about the ministry of reconciliation. What he's primarily meaning is seeing people reconciled to God. But he says this in verse 20, he says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. "God, making his appeal through us, "we implore you on behalf of Christ, "be reconciled to God." We have the chance to represent God, if you will, be ambassadors for God, to see people come to be reconciled to him. But I think that will only happen when we not only say that with our words, but also with our lives. Imagine how confusing it must be for people to hear that you're a Christian. And for you to say, "Well, God forgives people who don't deserve it." But then they come to find out that you're not going to forgive someone, just because they don't deserve it.

How confusing must it be for you to talk about the fact that God has reconciled you to himself, but you're not willing to pursue reconciliation in these other relationships? We can't just talk about the gospel. It has to be displayed in our lives. And it comes when we come back to the gospel regularly, we come to the table regularly, and we are shaped by what God has done for us. His graciousness towards us, his sovereignty over all things, his providence at all things, and his graciousness towards us, equips us to live out the gospel, to be ambassadors, to seek reconciliation in relationships that others might see what God is not doing, and they might be reconciled to him.