

SESSION #21

Now we come to the climax of Joseph's story!

B. The Double Disclosure

... Joseph finally bursts out with the truth of who he is:

Gen 45:3-5

³ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I *am* Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. ⁴ And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I *am* Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

- Joseph, the *dead-one-now-alive*, discloses his **identity**
 - and the result among the brothers is similar to that of the early disciples when the resurrected Jesus revealed himself to them (fear & astonishment)
- the problem of the brothers has been a terrible **guilt**
 - for years they have been bound by "*the power of an unforgiven past, immobilized by guilt, and driven by anxiety*" (as Brueggemann puts it)
 - guilt always has this kind of detrimental effect on us
 - but Joseph's personal forgiveness makes it possible for the brothers to begin to deal with this guilt problem
- and his disclosure of **God's purposes** also addresses their guilt issue, enabling the family to close the door on the past and look towards a new future

Gen 45:7-8a

And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

⁸ So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here, but God...

- some 17 yrs later Joseph reiterates the same truth:

Gen 50:20

But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.

- the **Sovereign God** does his own work and nothing will derail his purposes
- at the same time, his purposes are worked out within the arena of **human choices**
 - God's sovereignty and man's free will are not contradictory; in the mystery of God's economy they work together
 - Bill Arnold tells us that the Joseph stories clearly teach us that God blesses those who make the choice to seek first His lordship in their lives above everything else, including personal comfort, promotion, or safety

- **God's purpose** is ultimately sovereign
 - ...but it is also utterly **gracious** – He purposes life for his people, and works against all that would thwart that life
 - 50:20 uses the word “good” which reminds us of Gen. 1:31
 - where God's **creation** was pronounced by him to be “good” – against the tide of sin which surges throughout the entire Genesis record, the God of creation and the God of Israel works his purposes to produce “good”
- ...God's purpose is hidden and **mysterious** – here, even Joseph didn't seem to know what God was doing until late in the story; and the Bible doesn't *explain* the workings of God's purposes, it simply declares them
- ...God's purpose is sovereign, gracious, hidden & mysterious;
 - and it is also worked out in **concrete history** through the actions of real people – people like Joseph; people like you and me

Now let's see...

C. How Forgiveness Brought Reconciliation

- one of the ways God's purposes were worked out through real-life action is Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers, leading to reconciliation
- C.S. Lewis wrote: “**Forgiveness** is a beautiful word, until you have something to forgive.”
 - this is one of the most difficult things for any of us to do – so we need to be realistic here
 - Kenneth Chafin said, “Forgiveness isn't pretending nothing has happened, or pretending that what happened didn't hurt. It isn't even forgetting it completely, and it isn't going back and starting over as though it hadn't ever happened. Instead, forgiveness is *refusing to let anything permanently destroy the relationship.*”
 - as you review the story of Joseph & his brothers perhaps the Lord will remind you of something for which you need to *ask* forgiveness, or to *offer* forgiveness to someone who wronged you
- Joseph valued his family relationship & his obedient walk with God enough to forgive even the treacherous behavior of his brothers;
 - and their eventual acceptance of this forgiveness brought family reconciliation

How did Joseph do that? – notice 5 important truths about **forgiveness** from this Genesis record:

1. **personal word** – he spoke to them
 - ...forgiving someone will require talking to them or writing to them; you cannot just assume that “they'll *know* I've forgiven them”
2. **practical concern** – he showed them concern
 - Gen 45:10-11
 - You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for *there are* still five years of famine.”

- Rom. 12:20 instructs us how to show practical concern: *“Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he’s thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness.”*

3. act of **affection** – he showed affection for them

Gen 45:15

Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them...

- Matt. 5:44 says, “love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you”

4. there was a recognition of **God’s role** – Joseph affirmed that God was the Judge, not Joseph

Gen 50:19

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God?"

- Rom. 12:19 in the Message translation reads: – “Don’t insist on getting even; that’s not for you to do. ‘I’ll do the judging,’ says God. ‘I’ll take care of it.’”

5. And there was a recognition of **God’s work** – Joseph underlined the great truth he had already learned: that God worked out His good purposes even in the ‘bad’ events of Joseph’s life

Gen 50:20 again:

But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.

- with this assurance Joseph could be *grateful*, not *hateful*

- of all people, we who are Christians – who have experienced the amazing grace of God toward us in spite of wickedness & unworthiness – should be people of forgiveness

- a well-known British secular humanist, the novelist Marghanita Laski, said shortly before her death:

“What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me.”

A Spanish father and son had some sharp disagreements, breaking their relationship. The son ran away, and the sorrowful father set off to find him. He searched for months with no success. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: *“Dear Paco, Meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father.”*

On that Saturday 800 boys with that common Spanish name “Paco” showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

- in the kind of world we live in, there are many people starving for real love, dying for a word of forgiveness

- there may be people in *your* life who are longing to know forgiveness from *you*
...if so, be a ‘Joseph’ this week

Let's wrap up our study in Genesis with...

D. The End of the Beginning

- at the **end of Genesis...**

- Jacob has been buried in the Promised Land, awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises
- Joseph dies leaving instructions that his bones are to be carried back to the Promised Land when the people of God leave Egypt, again recognizing that the focus of his future is not Egypt but the land of Promise

Gen 50:24-26

²⁴ And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." ²⁵ Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." ²⁶ So Joseph died, *being* one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

- the "**coffin**" of the final verse is on one hand a grim comment on the downward direction of man's sinful ways since the Garden of Eden;
 - on the other hand it is also a reminder of hope in the promises of God because that coffin is headed for the Promised Land some day
- for Christians, the **cross** of Christ has a similar two-fold function
 - it reveals how terrible **sin** really is, causing the death of the Son of God
 - but paradoxically it also is our symbol of **hope** because we know that His death alone makes forgiveness of sins & eternal life for us possible; moreover, Jesus who died on that cross rose again, thereby conquering death and providing proof of all the promises of God which include a **Promised Land** for those who trust him
 - Joseph's statement in 50:20 applies most fully to the cross: wicked men "planned it for evil, but God planned it for good"
- Genesis is the book of **beginnings** – the beginning of creation, humanity, sin...
 - ...but it is also the beginning of salvation
 - God's plans for the fallen helpless human race are "for good" – so he designed a plan of salvation, beginning especially with the covenant of promise made with **Abraham**,
 - affirmed to **Isaac & Jacob** and
 - preserved through the work of **Joseph**
 - this covenant begins in Genesis but focuses on **Christ**, the ultimate descendant of this family of promise; by his **death on the cross** and his resurrection to new life Jesus would provide salvation for a world lost in sin, making possible reconciliation with the Holy God once more
- the story of Genesis lands in a **coffin**
 - but Carlo Carretto reminds us that "*Jesus' resurrection makes it impossible for man's story to end in chaos – it has to move inexorably towards light, towards life, towards love.*"

- for those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, the end of *our* story is *not* a coffin – it is a new *Genesis*, the new heaven & new earth promised by the God of Promise
- He is at work today in YOUR life, to produce *good* for you; and to fulfill all His promises, making you more like Christ...
...and preparing an eternal future for you that will be absolutely beyond imagination!
- I trust that this *Genesis* journey may have been a means God uses to strengthen your faith for *your* journey! Go with God – and may His blessings light up your life and all those around you!