

God Sent Me Here

HN 19/09/04 pm

Reading: Genesis 45, Luke 23:26-56

Study: Genesis 45

Psalms: 118:24-29, 103:1-5, 128, 107:41-43

A woman called me to discuss a failed marriage. “It was a big mistake,” she said. “We never loved each other. I just want to be free.”

We have all made mistakes and wish we could change the past. We keep saying if only I had not done that, or if only I had done this – things would be so much better now.

Or it may be that we have been wronged in the past. Maybe we have been hurt, or let down by someone. We look back with bitterness towards that person. Sometimes children feel bitter towards their parents for things they have done or not done. Sometimes relatives carry intense bitterness towards one another.

Joseph had every reason to be bitter towards his brothers. They had sold him into slavery when he was just 17. He was taken off to a foreign land and had not seen his father since. He was falsely imprisoned in this strange land – an experience not quickly forgotten. His brothers hated him and wanted to harm him.

Now they were pleading with Joseph for mercy. They were indeed at his mercy. Would Joseph ever be able to forgive them? Or would he exact revenge. Would he emerge as an emotionally scarred and bitter man from all his experiences? Would he need ongoing counselling and support all his life? Was reconciliation possible?

In this chapter, we see an amazing thing happen. We see Joseph forgiving his brothers for the terrible thing they did to him. The question is how was he able to forgive? How was he able to overcome all the bitterness? Joseph could not restrain himself the chapter begins. He was not restraining himself from lashing out at them but restraining himself from weeping over them.

Right from their first visit, maybe a year earlier, Joseph recognized his brothers. But he did not reveal himself to them at the time. Rather he spoke to them through an interpreter and treated them harshly. He was led by the Holy Spirit to test them, to bring them to acknowledge their sin, to feel guilty and repent, even though it was over 20 years before.

Remember how he had to go off and weep privately even as he treated his brothers harshly. Joseph's heart was so full of grace. Now that they had repented, he could control himself no longer. He cleared the room of all but his brothers and wept loudly in their presence. The Egyptians still heard and soon Pharaoh got to hear of Joseph's weeping.

Joseph was able to speak to his brothers directly for the first time- in their language. *I am Joseph he said – does my father still live?* They had just told him about their father, but he wants to hear it again – this time from them as his brothers not his prisoners. He was deeply concerned for his father and did not want him to come to any harm through this testing of his brothers.

The brothers were dumbfounded and could say nothing. *I am Joseph whom you sold into Egypt* he went on to say. He was not covering up the past. He did not say 'let's not talk about the past'. Reconciliation could not be based upon a lie, a pretence that this never happened. Rather we see here that the past had been dealt with. The brothers had repented and Joseph was ready to forgive.

Nor was he reminding them of what they had done in order to make them feel bad. He does not want them feeling guilty any longer. He has forgiven them. *Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here.* Things had been set right. The matter had been dealt with by the grace of God. They have repented and they have been forgiven. They were not to go on grieving.

Before we look at how Joseph could forgive them let us note that it is not necessarily our responsibility to bring those who sin against us to repentance. Sure God used Joseph to test his brothers but his forgiveness was not conditional upon their repentance. He forgave because of the grace of God, because he saw the hand of God in all that happened. He saw beyond the evil hand of his brothers.

Some years ago, a Christian brother said to me I cannot forgive that man (another brother) because he has not said he is sorry for what he did to me. I tried to point out to this man that our forgiving one another is not conditional on the repentance of the other. See Matthew 6:15 – *if you do not forgive men their sin, neither will your Father forgive your sin* said Jesus. I heard just the other day a similar thing – a brother carrying bitterness for something done to him in the fellowship many years before.

Sure, we are told to go and point out to a brother his sin against us and to take the matter to the church eventually if he refuses to listen (Matthew 18:15f). But note that this is for his restoration; it is that you may gain a brother, not that you might be vindicated, not that you might be able to forgive him.

Joseph tested his brothers in order that they might be restored, not in order that he might be vindicated. It was hard for him to carry out this testing – it was not a pleasure. He was greatly relieved when it was all over and he could embrace them and weep over them.

Joseph forgave them not on the condition of their repentance but in the grace and power of God. He saw the hand of God in all that had happened. He saw God working for good even if they intended it for evil. What a tremendous faith this man had. Can you look back and say the same about everything in your life?

God sent me before you to preserve life. v.5

God sent me before you to preserve a remnant for you in the earth and save you lives by a great deliverance. v.7

It was not you who sent me here but God. v.8

The Lord was with Joseph all along, even when he was in prison. Joseph knew this. He trusted in God even in those dark moments. God lifted him out of the dungeon and gave him great power. When the Lord revealed there would be famine for 7 years, he was concerned for his family. They

came down to buy grain and he was able to help them. He knew that there would be five more years without sowing or harvest. *God sent me here to preserve your life*, the life of God's chosen family.

Joseph rose above personal hurt and bitterness. He was able to see things from the heavenly perspective. He saw his life in the context of God's plan of salvation. He saw his life from the perspective of eternity. By the grace of God, he could see what God had done through him, even if it was wicked men who sold him as a slave into Egypt. He saw that God was continuing to use him to preserve his people.

Someone greater than Joseph, similarly saw his suffering from the divine perspective. When arrested and imprisoned on false charges – when mocked and beaten by men – he did not revile. *He did not threaten but committed himself to him who judges justly* (I Peter 2:23). When cruelly nailed to the cross he did not call down curses on men but said *Father forgive them for they do not know what they do*. Jesus committed himself into the hands of the Father. He committed himself to doing the will of God, not his own. It was God's will that he suffer and that he die in order that we might live.

Christ suffered for us leaving us an example, that you should follow in his steps (I Peter 2:21). Joseph, a human being just like us has given us the same example. Are you following this example? Are you trusting in God, such that you see his working all things together for good in your life?

What is good you ask? Well Joseph did end up with earthly glory but our Lord Jesus certainly did not. The good that we see must become the same as the glory of God. May it indeed be true in our lives that we see this good as being his glory! May we see more and more that the things, which happen to us in our life, are the will of God. May we see our life from the heavenly perspective and be more and more looking unto Jesus and less to our self.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon