

Multi-Color Grace, Pt 11: A Death-to-Life Family Reunion (Gen 45-46)

From the SermonAudio website I have a news in focus story on *Unbroken*. How many of you have read the book *Unbroken*? It was #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and *TIME* magazine ranked it the top nonfiction book in 2010. It's about a man named Louis Zamperini and this recent news in focus story says it's going to be a big screen movie the end of this year, by Universal Studios/Walden Media: [Unbroken-A WW2 Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption](#).¹ Based on the secular producers, I'm guessing they won't make much of the gospel and his conversion, but it's clear in that book by Laura Hillenbrand, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *Seabiscuit*.

And they did speak of the gospel and salvation and even played a clip of the preacher he got saved under in a Fox News piece.² CBS did a longer special on Louie's life for '98 Olympics in Japan. You can watch both videos online and I'll put a link to both in the sermon notes online when I post them later.³ Why did they feature him in the 1998 Olympics in Japan? Zamperini was an Olympian in 1936 and roommate of Jesse Owens. Before that in his fame, Louie had envious runners injure him to keep him from winning, stomping on his shoes with cleats, kicking his shins so they were bloody, and hitting him so hard in the stomach he broke his ribs-all that during the race. Louie not only kept running bloody with cracked ribs-he set a new NCAA record!

Another older news article I have in front of me on his story explains more. At the '36 Olympics Louie finished first among the Americans, running the final lap of the 5,000 meters in 56 seconds. This got the attention of Hitler in the audience who asked for a personal meeting with the athlete and shook his hand in praise. Zamperini later got in trouble for climbing a 50 foot pole to take down a Nazi flag. Louie fought in WW2 and ended up as a POW in Japan, which is why they featured Louie's life at the '98 Olympics in Japan.

He'd enlisted and represented his country with equal vigor and tenacity as a soldier and proved a greater hero on the battlefield than the sports field, but he never considered himself a hero. Louie's survival can only be attributed to the providence of God, as on one occasion his plane was shot with over 594 bullet holes without touching him, one artillery hole the size of a door, and yet somehow he survived unbroken and even unhurt. Zamperini wasn't Christian then but later learned of God's sovereign control of bullets and all things. On a later Christmas, mom, dad, Pete, Sylvia, and Virginia wrote to 'you as well and safe. May God be with you + guide you.' They had no idea.

On a later flight another plane he was in did go down over the Pacific. 12 of the crew members died, and Zamperini by all accounts, should have died. In the book the chapter is called "Nobody's going to live through this" (Louie's last thought before the plane crashed in the ocean and blew apart). He didn't die on impact as most of the crew did, but wires from the plane around him dragged him down as the plane sank deep under the surface. He passed out and woke up thinking he was dead, but realized he was still alive and all the cords had somehow come loose. Swallowing saltwater, gasoline, and oil, he somehow got free of the sinking wreckage and made it to the surface. A life raft that had inflated was moving away from him and Louie swam as fast as he could but couldn't reach it. Another survivor recalls they looked at each other and gave up hope. But then the raft cord popped up 2 feet from Louie!

When they grabbed on the raft his friend noticed Louie had a bad cut on his finger but was otherwise unhurt. The survivors had no water and would be 47 days at sea, so they prayed. Often when they were about to die, God sent rain that kept him alive (even a secular book suggests 'divine intervention'). Capturing rainwater to drink, they also caught fish for food and even some birds that came out of nowhere to land on their raft. Sharks attacked the raft repeatedly below, and above a Japanese bomber strafed them several times, shooting at them. There were bullet holes all around the men who lay in the fetal position but they were unhurt and unbroken. On its last run the bomber dropped a depth charge just 50 feet from them. Somehow it never exploded.

Many days later a typhoon struck. History records that this typhoon caused great damage days later on the coast of China. Phil and Louie, the survivors at this point (Mac had since died), woke up shipwrecked by the storm 2,000 miles from where their plane went down. But what seemed like their great break was just the beginning of greater trials as the Japanese captured them and made them prisoners of war, torturing and tormenting them to the point of death, but again by God's preserving providence Louie remained alive by the skin of his teeth literally. The Army communications, though, presumed him killed in action and told the Zamperini family a year later he was dead. Evidence had been found of this, and a purple heart was sent to the family.

Now turn to Gen 45, and you may wonder how this story ties into Gen 45? Jacob is in a very similar situation to Louie's family. His beloved celebrated son has been missing, evidence was brought to him of his death. Providence though, kept Joseph alive as a prisoner. In Gen 45 his family hears he's still alive, like the Zamperinis years after they lost him heard 'Louie is still alive'

Gen 45:26 *They told him, saying, “Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” But he was stunned* ['his heart stood still' or 'became numb'], *for he did not believe them.*²⁷ *When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.*²⁸ *Then Israel said, “It is enough [i.e., I believe]; my son Joseph is still alive.”*

[dad comes alive, believing Joseph is alive from the dead]

The *L.A. Times* headline Sept. 9, 1945: 'Zamperini comes back from dead.' When the brothers saw each other again the book says 'Each felt startled by the sight of the other...[maybe a little like Joseph's story?] Pete had expected Louie to be emaciated...Louie was disturbed to see how the years of worry had depleted his brother. Pete was gaunt, and he'd gone largely bald. The brothers fell together, eyes shining.'¹⁴ They hugged and talked much together in Northern CA before he could get a flight down to his family in So Cal.

Gen 45:14 says the long-lost and presumed dead Joseph "*fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.*"¹⁵ *He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.*" [We're going to focus mostly on chapter 45 today, but look first at Gen **46**, v. 29] *Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time.*³⁰ *Then Israel said to Joseph, “Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive.”* ['still alive' is the key phrase]

When his family's hopes were realized that Louie was still alive, as they met Louie and Pete at the Long Beach airport] ... bursting from army cars, were their mother and father, and [sisters]. The moment the plane stopped, Louie jumped down, ran to his sobbing mother, and folded himself around her. "*Cara mamma mia,*" he whispered. It was a long time before they let go.¹⁵

It's a very moving experience to see families reconciled or reunified. There's an award-winning photo called "Burst of Joy" of a POW from Vietnam War as he reunites with his family after 5 years in a prison camp [SLIDE]. Gen 45-46 is the OT's greatest family reunion, arguably the greatest ever. We've been focusing on Joseph and Judah and the brothers the last 2 weeks, but in today's text the story turns to the family back home, and Jacob in particular. In the context, Joseph had been left for dead in a pit. But he was pulled out of the pit by Arabs and became a prisoner-slave to Egypt. His brothers gave dad his multi-colored coat (or whatever exactly it was, we're not sure) with blood on it as evidence Joseph had been killed. Dad mourned many years.

Meanwhile in Egypt, like Louie's big break washing ashore, Joseph's big break seemingly with Potiphar was actually the start of years as a prisoner. But to make his similar long story short, once he was free ... how would he respond to those who had tormented him and caused all his troubles? If he were to see again the faces of those that had so hurt him, what would he do? Joseph by grace had been made a new person by God, forgiven ... forgiving.

[it's what I've been describing as multi-color grace in this series]

Here's how Laura Hillenbrand describes the change in Zamperini: 'When he thought of his history, what resonated with him now was not all that he had suffered but the divine love that he believed had intervened to save him. He was not the worthless, broken, forsaken man [his tormentor] had striven to make him. In a single, silent moment, his rage, his fear, his humiliation and helplessness, had fallen away. That morning, he believed, he was a new creation ... He felt something he had never felt for his captor before. With a shiver of amazement, he realized it was compassion. At that moment, something shifted sweetly inside him. It was forgiveness ... war was over.'⁶

The severe PTSD, alcoholism, and nightmares stopped destroying his life and marriage, but by grace his wife was saved and stopped divorcing him and they stayed married 55 years till her death (Louie is still alive, age 96). Louie with his wife was saved in 1949 and soon went back to visit 'many of the guards from his POW days to let them know that he has forgiven them. Many of the war criminals who committed the worst atrocities were held in the Sugamo prison in Tokyo. In October 1950, Zamperini went to Japan, gave his testimony and preached to them through an interpreter-missionary ... The colonel in charge of the prison encouraged any of the prisoners who recognized Zamperini to come forward and meet him again. Zamperini threw his arms around each of them. Once again he explained the Christian Gospel of forgiveness to them. The prisoners were somewhat surprised by Zamperini's genuine affection for those who had once ill-treated him. Most of the prisoners accepted copies of the New Testament which had been given by the Gideons. For his 81st birthday in January 1998, Zamperini ran a leg in the Olympic Torch relay for the Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan [near the camp of his abusers]. While there, he attempted to meet with his chief and most brutal tormentor during the war, Mutsuhiro Watanabe, who had evaded prosecution as a war criminal, but the latter refused to see him.'⁷

He wrote him a letter: 'The post-war nightmares [of you] caused my life to crumble, but ... I committed my life to Christ. Love replaced the hate I had for you. Christ said, "Forgive your enemies and pray for them." ... I also

forgave you and now would hope that you also would become a Christian [as some former guards did⁸]. The meeting was not to be. CBS contacted Watanabe ... the answer was no...[one took the letter], promising to get it to Watanabe. If Watanabe received it, he never replied...[he] died in 2003.⁹

Louie Zamperini never got to see him come to faith, but in Gen 44 Joseph does get to see Judah come to faith, the brother who had betrayed him and sold him 22 years earlier. Louie forgave enemy combatants; Joseph forgave wounds that probably hurt even deeper because they were from his family who had betrayed and brought on all his troubles as an enslaved prisoner. In v. 15 Joseph throws his arms around and embraces them. On that level, it seems Joseph's family reunion is even more amazing than the Zamperini's. Louie is more famous after his ordeal but Joseph became far more famous.

How can someone forgive such hurt? Hollywood won't and can't capture it:

- trusting the providence of God (Gen 45:5-8, where He says "God sent me" 3x, i.e., He is sovereign and good, our first point last week. Think of God's sovereign control over Zamperini's life and Joseph's)
- trusting the purposes of God (also in v. 5-8 '...to preserve your lives.' Newton: 'through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come...grace has brought me safe thus far and...will lead me home')
- trusting the power of God (in v. 8 God's power gave him this power)

But there's more here today and more he wants, his whole family reunited:

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 delay."* ¹⁰ *"You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have."* ¹¹ *"There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished."* ¹² *"Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you."* ¹³ *"Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here."*

I've read v. 14-15, next time we'll come back to v. 16-22 with Pharaoh and his interactions with Israel that continue into chapter 46, but for today, v. 23 ²³ *To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey.* ²⁴ *So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey."*

He wants a unified family. And he has a revived father in v. 28: *Israel said, 'It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.'*

The great preacher of the early church John Chrysostom wrote on this point: 'Just as the light of the lamp, when the supply of oil runs out and the light is on the point of going out, suddenly emits a brighter flame...when someone puts in a little oil, in just the same way this old man on the point of expiring from disappointment...learned that Joseph was alive and was in charge of Egypt...From being old, Jacob became young; he put aside the cloud of disappointment; he repelled the storm in his mind and then found himself at peace, with God disposing everything so that the good man should enjoy relief from all these awful trials and share the happiness of his son.'¹⁰

46:1 *So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac* [probably thank offerings]

[Jacob leads his family in worship as they did in their day]

When the Zamperini family found out that Louie was still alive, the first thing they did was rush to church to give thanks, then they prepared. That's essentially what Joseph's father also did as we come to the start of Gen 46. He worships and thanks God. How should we respond in light of this great section of God's Word? I think this verse tells us: we should respond like Jacob. Not just trusting as we saw last week but thanking God as Jacob does

Application for Families and Individuals: Thank God for His Provision

At the end of 45:5 Joseph made clear God is actually doing this to provide for them and preserve them. He says again in v. 7 God sent him to Egypt to preserve His remnant, to keep alive His people. They were able to survive the famine because of God's provision, just as Louie was able to survive the concentration camp that starved many to death. And in v. 9-10 Joseph wants to let his father know God provided Joseph this position to provide for them

Gen 45:11 *"I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished"* [or 'come to poverty' or 'become destitute' but God provides]

When this message was relayed to Jacob, I wonder if it triggered a memory of the story of his father Isaac that Jacob must have heard his dad tell at bed time many times, that story of what happened near the very land Gen 46:1 mentions. I can picture little Jacob being tucked in with his twin brother at night saying "dad, tell us the story again about how the Lord will provide."

"It's late, son, I've had a long day with the sheep." "Come on, Abba." "Ok, son," Isaac might relent. "Long ago Father Abraham and I went up a mount to worship and I noticed there was no lamb, so I asked my dad where it was. And what did Father Abraham say, boys?" "Ooh, I know!" Jacob and Esau both say, their hands raised. Dad can't choose so he says "all right, both of you say it." Jacob and Esau say "Grandpa Abraham then said 'Jehovah will provide the lamb, my son. So we call that Jehovah-Jireh, He will provide.'" "That's right my sons, now go to bed and remember, Jehovah will provide." Now decades later Jacob is hearing from his sons that Jehovah will provide. When Jacob sees God's provision in the welcome wagons, He praises Him.

[seeing God's provision in v. 27 breathed new life in his depressed soul]

So in Gen 46:1 he goes to the very land Abraham was living in when that great story happened, that great gospel picture of a father offering up his son on an altar, the land of Beersheba (21:33, 22:18). It's the place where God appeared to Abraham's son in Gen 21 and provided for Isaac so he wouldn't die, and it's also where Abraham made a covenant and called on the Lord's name in worship (21:22-34). It's where the Lord appeared to Isaac and spoke audibly to him and Isaac built an altar for worship of the Lord's name with his family (26:23-25). The same Beersheba of Gen 46:1 was also where Isaac gave God's blessing to this same Jacob, to make him a company of peoples (28:3, 10). Now in Gen 46 a 3rd generation continues this multi-generational family worship pattern in this same place, and God will again appear here and audibly repeat covenant promises and provision.

Jacob presents his thank offerings to God here. How does it apply for us? Hebrews 13:8 says "*Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever ...*"¹⁰ *We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right ...*¹⁵ *Therefore by Him [Jesus] let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*" (NKJV)

Thanksgiving is to be a regular part of our family worship and personally. The unchanging Lord is the same, He is our altar, He is our sacrifice, He is Jehovah-Jireh my provider whose grace is sufficient for me. Do you believe that? Do you believe '*my God shall provide all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*'? If so, then trust Him and thank Him (Phil 4)

[on your note sheets are some helps to apply this further]

What are some of the needs God provides for Jacob and his family (and us):

1. a place to live in (v. 10 (he says '*you shall dwell in the land of Goshen...*')
2. family close by (v. 10 says of their families '*...and you shall be near me*')
3. clothing (v. 22 says '*to each and all of them he gave a change of clothes*')

4. provisions for journeys ahead (ESV uses the word *provisions* in v. 21-23)

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 ...*** 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.***

5. provision beyond what's needed (v. 22 adds lavish grace to Benjamin, it says he received 5 times more clothes than needed and 300 silver pieces!)

God has done the same for our needs, too, above and beyond, as Eph 3:20 says. Jacob's wish when these boys left in Gen 43 was that they might receive mercy from this man and Benjamin back alive (43:14) but God is doing abundantly far beyond all Jacob could ask or think!

#6. provision for all we need spiritually in God's Word (God speaks in 46:2)

² *And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said "Here I am." Then he said "I am God, the God of your father. God's Word provides us all we need spiritually. Some examples/sub-points:*

1. providing what we need to know about God (the unchanging 'I Am', who always was, is, and will be, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob)
2. providing for our fears (look at v. 3 again *I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt...*) Knowing the God of Genesis in these OT stories is to help us with our anxieties and fears.
3. promises (v. 3 adds '*there I will make you into a great nation*')
4. presence of God (v. 4 '*I myself will go down with you to Egypt...*')
5. personal care to the end (v. 4c '*...Joseph's hand will close your eyes*')
6. provision of salvation (middle of v. 4 '*I will also bring you up again*)

Beyond the life of Israel God looks ahead to Israel's future redemption and deliverance in the Exodus also when God would bring Israel up again to the Promised Land, saving them from Egypt. There may be a hint in Gen 45:22. Some suggest 300 pieces of silver 'was a kind of redemption payment from an offended party to say that everything was now forgiven and the matter was never to be brought up again (Gen. 20:14–16).¹¹ 30 x 10 brothers? We have some hints or shadows in OT stories, but the reality is found in Christ.

The greatest reason to thank the Lord is for paying the full redemption price of all His brothers to adopt, forgive, and fully accept them (Eph 1:5-7). He not only provides you with food and family, clothing and closeness to ones who love you, a place to stay now and provision for what's ahead, He gives us more than we need and more than 80-90% of the world as Americans ...

- Hebrews 11:40 says "*God had provided something better for us...*"
- Galatians 3:15 He gives Himself, He "*provides you with His Spirit*"
- 1 Cor 10:13 says in every temptation He "*provides a way of escape*"
- 2 Pet 1:11 adds "*there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"

If that doesn't make you want to thank God, I don't know what will and I don't know if you're alive spiritually. Take your spiritual pulse. Rom. 1 says the mark of unbelievers is they know God intellectually but they don't thank Him. If you never or rarely do, you may not have a new heart to stir, but if you know Christ, you of all people must thank God for providing His Word:

- for His Word providing all spiritual needs (2 Tim 3:16-17, 2 Pet 1:3)
- providing what we need to know about God (Jn 1:18, 8:58, 14:6)
- providing for our fears (365x it says 'do not fear'-every day of year!)
- promises for us (made into a great people, too - 1 Pet 2:9, Jer 33:3)
- God's presence is with us also wherever we go (Josh 1:9, Mt 28:20)
- personal care to the end (Isa 46:4: *to your old age I will be the same*)
- provision for salvation -> if you haven't accepted Christ's provision for your soul yet, Lk 15 is another NT story of death-to-life reunion

It's another story where a father believed his long lost son to be dead. It was also a famine that drove father and son back together from a faraway land.

It uses very similar language, and Jesus said this parable pictures the greater rejoicing in heaven when one sinner comes home repentant as a son of God.

Lk 15:20 (ESV) *And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'* ²² *But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and **is alive** again; he was lost, and is found.'* And they began to celebrate ... [he tells the brother] ³² *It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother **was dead, and is alive**; he was lost, and is found.'* "

Listen, sinners who have not yet confessed your sin and unworthiness like Jesus taught, come to the Father through His Son. God doesn't just think of you as dead, you *are* dead in your sins, but you can be alive! The Father is eager to receive you if you will repent, His arms of compassion are open wide, and He will run to you as His son when you repent! He will embrace you and kiss you! The point of the story, Jesus says in v. 10, is that there's more joy in heaven than any earthly family reunion when a sinner repents!

Greater than the daughters running in a burst of joy to their dad who was a POW in Vietnam. Greater than Louie Zamperini and his mother embracing. A greater homecoming and celebration happens in heaven than they knew. Greater even than Joseph and his father and brothers in this story is the joy of God the Father in the presence of heaven's angels when a sinner repents! Come to Him as that son saying "father I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, I'm not worthy to be your son, but please let me be your slave." If you come in that way, God welcomes you to the tune of a heavenly party.

Joel Beeke tells the story of a son who had left home rebellious but wanted to come home to his father and wasn't sure if he would take him back. So he wrote a letter saying I'll be riding back into town Saturday, and if you could find it in your heart to forgive me all my sins against you, please just leave a sheet out on the house somewhere and if I see it as the train passes I'll know you'll have me. As the train rolled near the house, he looked and didn't see 1 sheet on the house...he saw many sheets on the house all over the house, on the roof, on the phone lines, sheets everywhere! That's God love to sinners!

There is a greater Son, God's Son, who was dead for us and He is still alive! He is the Lord, not just of Egypt, but of an eternal kingdom of heaven and earth. He's the One who truly was dead on the cross, and came back alive, and like Jacob and his sons in Gen 45, the family of Jesus didn't all believe at first He was alive. But Jesus provided words to overcome the doubts and fears of His disciples. He provided for them in every way we talked about today. My unbelieving friend, How can you not come to this Lord? And my believing friend, how can you *not* thank Him? Let's pray and sing our praise

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/audrey-van-petegem/louis-zamperini_b_4203507.html

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9Hlu0yHb9Q>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVFsx9fA19w>

⁴ *Unbroken*, by Laura Hillenbrand, p. 329.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Online source.

⁸ Robert Boardman, who led Navigators mission work in Japan wrote: 'In 1951...I attended a Youth for Christ rally. Louis Zamperini...told of his torturous personal ordeal. Shot down in the South Pacific, he was a Japanese prisoner of war for many months. In the midst of many hardships and much suffering, he prayed that if God would deliver him he would serve him the rest of his days ... [in 1950 he] returned to Japan on a gospel team. He preached to the confused masses who had just suffered their first defeat in history. He also looked up some of the guards who had mistreated him in prison, forgave them, and led one or two to know his Savior.' *Discipleship Journal, Issue 25 (January/February 1985)*

⁹ *Unbroken*, p. 397.

¹⁰ As cited by Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, p. 522.

¹¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Authentic*.