

# Joseph and his brothers reconciled

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Let's open our Bibles now to the book of Genesis 44. We begin reading at verse 18 and we read through chapter 45, verse 15.

18 Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh. 19 My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother? 20 And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. 21 And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. 22 And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die. 23 And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. 24 And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. 25 And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food. 26 And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us. 27 And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons: 28 And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since: 29 And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. 30 Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; 31 It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. 32 For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. 33 Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. 34 For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.

1 Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. 2 And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. 3 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. 4 And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. 5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. 6 For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. 9 Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: 10 And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: 11 And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. 12 And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. 13 And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. 14 And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

Thus far we read in God's fully inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

The text that we consider this afternoon is the passage that we read, I introduced that passage, Genesis 44:18-45:15 by reading Genesis 45:4-5,

4 And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. 5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

Beloved congregation, in our Lord Jesus Christ the text that we consider this afternoon is a text about reconciliation. Are you involved in a relationship that is less than ideal? Maybe you can't stand the brother or a sister. Maybe you don't have a proper relationship with your parents or with your children. Maybe you have difficulties in your marriage. Maybe you don't get along with someone in the church. Maybe you have trouble in the workplace with your boss or a co-worker.

Then the next question is: are you willing to be reconciled? If someone had zero respect for you, would you want to be reconciled? If someone had physically or emotionally abused you, could you forgive them? What if someone hated you so much they wanted to kill you or they sold you into slavery? Human trafficking, in fact, is an issue in today's world. What if? As much as lies in us, God calls us to live peaceably with all men but if we are going to live peaceably with all men, then reconciliation has to happen and that's what our text is about this afternoon.

Recall Joseph's brothers returning from Canaan. They came back to Egypt with Benjamin and the steward, Joseph's steward restored Simeon to them. That day the steward set a feast before them. He gave Benjamin five times as much as the other brothers and then the next day Joseph sends them on their way but secretly putting that silver cup in Benjamin's sack so that when the steward caught up with them and found the cup with Benjamin, they all returned to Egypt and Judah confessed, "God hath found out the iniquity of thy servant." He wasn't talking about the iniquity of the silver cup but the iniquity that they had done against Joseph years before. "Behold," says Judah, "we are my Lord's servants."

We saw last time how God used Joseph to lead the brothers to repentance. How did they show their repentance? I want to quickly summarize those points that we brought up last time. They avoided words that would have destroyed the credibility of their repentance. They didn't say if or but or maybe. They admitted specifically that they had sinned against Joseph. They say, "We verily are guilty concerning our brother." They acknowledged the hurt that they had brought to Joseph. "We saw the anguish on his face when he besought us and we would not hear therefore this distress come upon us." They accepted the consequences for their sin by agreeing to be slaves in Egypt now. And last but not least, they showed their repentance by having altered their behavior. They no longer were angry about the favoritism that their father showed. They manifested their altered behavior with Benjamin. God was working in the hearts of the brothers to bring repentance and reconciliation.

Today we want to look at how God was working in Joseph's heart. What a wonderful example of someone who sought to be reconciled with his brothers despite their sin against him. So we want to treat the text under the theme, "Joseph and his brothers reconciled." I want to note in the first place Judah's pleading. Secondly, Joseph's response. And then the brothers' reconciliation, really the possibility for that reconciliation. Joseph and his brothers reconciled.

Judah and his brothers were standing before the Egyptian ruler not knowing it was Joseph and as they stood before the ruler, they felt their guilt. They knew they were guilty concerning Joseph so they declared, "God hath found out the iniquity." God always does. We cannot hide our iniquity from God. Then in response Judah says to the ruler, "We are my Lord's servants." He resigned himself and his brothers to be slaves in Egypt but Joseph is still testing his brothers. One final test. The ruler insists, "Only Benjamin will stay. The rest of you can go home in peace." What would the brothers do? Given the

perfect opportunity if they harbored hatred against Benjamin for the favoritism that Jacob evidently showed him too, would they leave Benjamin in Egypt? They wouldn't have to lie this time; they could say, "The ruler found his cup in Benjamin's sack and the ruler kept Benjamin as a slave." But here's where Judah exhibits a wonderful Christ-like behavior as he intercedes for Benjamin.

I want to start by noting that not the Judah of the past. In the past, Judah was one of those who hated Joseph with the rest of his brothers. It was Judah's idea to sell Joseph into slavery and Judah evidently with the rest of his brothers, hated Jacob too. They didn't care about Joseph's tears when they sold him and they didn't care about Jacob's anguish when they told Jacob, "Here's your son's coat. Is this it?" and letting Jacob think that Joseph was dead.

No doubt Judah, like we all do, tried to justify his sin by pointing to Jacob's favoritism and by pointing to Joseph's pride, at least what Judah perceived as Joseph's pride. Judah used to be callous and cold and we can be that way too. We all do that, beloved, even with the closest of our neighbors. We justify ourselves. We justify our cruelty perhaps to our children or our spouse or our brothers or our sisters by pointing out some fault with them, "Well, they deserve it. He doesn't deserve my respect. She doesn't care about me, why should I care about her?" So it was with Judah as regards Joseph and Jacob.

That was Judah in the past but now Judah evidently has changed and we don't have time to go into all the details but sometimes it takes God bringing us through our own hardships to see our sins and sinfulness. If you read Genesis 38, you will see the trouble that Judah had gone through himself. Judah had two wicked sons, Er and Onan, whom God killed and later Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, humbled him for his own sin. God was working in Judah's heart.

Now Judah begs the ruler not to keep Benjamin because of the grief it would cause to his father. Now Judah cares about his father. God has been working in Judah's heart so that he also cared for Benjamin that he would even offer to take Benjamin's place. Notice Genesis 44:33, "Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father." You can almost hear the anguish in Judah's words. Judah is willing to give up everything to go into slavery so that Benjamin can return home.

That's not the same Judah that sinned against Joseph 20 years older. In fact, some commentators question whether the brothers had yet been converted at that point. Where does that kind of love come from? Evidently the Spirit of Christ for the Spirit of Christ was also in the Old Testament, the Spirit of Christ was working in his heart. God's grace had convicted Judah of his sin. God had found out the iniquity of thy servants. He had confessed that God had shown him his sin and God had also worked in Judah's heart a love for his father and a love for his brother. Beloved, that's the kind of humility and the kind of love that we need in our own relationships. In humility we need to acknowledge

that we have sinned against our neighbors and in love we need to be willing to make the greatest of sacrifices for the good of others.

Judah was willing to give up everything. He was willing to give up his place in Canaan so that Benjamin could return and so that his father would not die from grief. I say we need that kind of humility and love. We live in a society where selfishness is rampant. In our pride, we refuse to confess our sins and in our selfishness we won't make substantial sacrifices for the good of others no matter what relationship we talk about. We have the old man of sin. We need to pray for humility and love that God would work that also in our hearts.

But now think about Judah. We talk about a work of God's grace in his heart but that, what Judah was manifesting, that's nothing compared to what Jesus Christ did. Judah was going to take the place of Benjamin because he loved his father and he also loved Benjamin but how much greater was Christ's love, beloved? Judah was willing to give up his place in Canaan and to be separated from his family but Jesus Christ gave up his place in heaven. He gave up the glory of heaven. He took on the form of a servant. He took on a human nature so that he could take our place, suffering far more than Judah would have suffered as a slave in Egypt and Jesus did that for those who hated him, suffering the torments that we deserved on the cross. Why would Jesus do that? The answer is out of love for his Father and out of love for his brethren that the Father had given to him. He loved us more than we could ever know.

Judah is only a dim reflection of the love of Christ for his people and it was Christ's love working in Judah that was the ultimate reason why Judah himself could manifest those Christ-like qualities because it was the Spirit of Christ in him and so it is with ourselves, is it not, beloved? Only if Christ loves us will we in humility confess our sins and only if Christ has loved us will we love one another.

Judah makes his plea and finally Joseph responds. Genesis 45:1, "Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren." Joseph now knows all that he needs to know about his brothers. He has seen repentance in them. He has heard, though they didn't know it, he has heard their confessions of guilt and then what follows is a moving description of Joseph's reconciliation.

Verse 2, "And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence." Imagine the shock when the brothers recognized it was Joseph. They were terrified at his presence. Why were they afraid? Because they remembered what they had done to Joseph and they wondered, "Is now Joseph going to get back at us for all that we did to him?" Even though Joseph was weeping for joy, the brothers could not imagine Joseph forgiving them.

They wondered what he might do. What did Joseph do? Well, he forgave them. That was his purpose all along. If you go back and read the story of how Joseph interacted with his brothers, he had that purpose to bring about reconciliation even after they did what they had done to him. Even after they sold him as a slave. That doesn't just happen, beloved, that's a work of God's grace in Joseph's heart. Just as God by his Spirit was working in Judah's heart, God was working in Joseph's heart.

God had a purpose too throughout history to reconcile us to himself through Jesus Christ. He manifested his love toward us not because we were lovable but simply because he loved us. Herein his love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. You know, sometimes like Joseph's brothers we can't imagine that Christ would forgive us. Even after all that he had done, we wonder, "Can he really, will he really forgive us or is he still angry?" But then Christ says, "Come unto me. Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." He seeks reconciliation. When the Spirit of Christ works in our hearts, we will manifest that love to others in the form of forgiveness even to those who we think in our hearts, "They don't deserve it."

There are four things, at least four things about forgiveness that we can learn from Joseph. In the first place I want us to note how when we choose to forgive, notice I say when we choose to forgive, when we make a decision, a commitment to forgive. When we choose to forgive, we will not deliberately dredge up bitter thoughts about a person or their sin against us. If we choose to forgive them for that sin, we won't constantly dredge up bitter thoughts. Now, I'm sure Joseph struggled with bitter thoughts about his brothers. He must have. When he was on his way to Egypt bound by the Midianites, he must have had bitter thoughts towards his brothers. When he was in prison after the incident with Potiphar's wife, he must have had bitter thoughts also again towards his brothers. But notice the lack of bitterness in what Joseph says to his brothers. He says, "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither."

Now obviously if Joseph is saying to his brothers, "Don't be grieved. Don't be angry with yourselves for what you did," then Joseph himself is not grieved and angry for what his brothers did. Joseph is not carrying that bitterness in his heart towards his brothers. That's one of the most difficult things, beloved, not to dredge up bitter thoughts. We're good at that. I'm good at that. When someone has sinned against you, we want to keep rehearsing it over and over and over and over. How important it is that Joseph has come to understand then that the brothers truly had repented. How important that he heard from their mouths. They saw the anguish. They knew that they had sinned against Joseph. It was important that Joseph hear those things but especially God had to be gracious to Joseph to grant that spirit of forgiveness to him.

Forgiveness means that we make a conscious decision not to dredge up those bitter thoughts. That's what it means when people say, "Forgive and forget." It doesn't mean that we will absolutely never remember that sin again, sometimes that's impossible. There may be times when a memory can never be completely erased but the point is we're not

going to dredge it up. I'm not going to dwell upon it with bitterness. Instead I'm going to start thinking good thoughts about that person.

In the second place, forgiveness means not bringing up someone's sin against them. Not dredging it up in our own hearts but not bringing it up against them. Joseph when he revealed himself to his brothers, he could have gone on and on and ranted against them. He could have said, "How could you do such a thing? Now what do you think of your taunts against the dreamer boy? What do you have to say for yourselves, you scoundrels?" He could have gone on and on but Joseph doesn't do that. He doesn't bring up their sin against them. It's true, he does mention their sin but it's in the context of forgiveness. "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither." He does mention that they sold him but he says, "Don't be grieved. Don't be angry," and so too when we forgive somebody, we don't bring up that sin against them again. We're making a promise not to do that. That's what forgiveness is.

Then in the third place, forgiveness first means not dredging it up in our own hearts; secondly, not bringing it up against them; but also not bringing it up in the presence of others. Not gossiping about that sin to others. There are times we have to qualify that, there are times when we ought to take one or two along with us and eventually tell it to the church when someone refuses to repent and in particular instances, there may be forgiveness and yet others ought to be told. Wisdom dictates that. I'm thinking of the extreme case, for example, of a sexual offender of some sort. But generally speaking, when we commit ourselves to forgive, when we want to forgive, we don't go around and tell others, "Do you know what So-and-so did to me?" Why? Why do we not speak to others about their sin against us? Because in love we want them to be restored to fellowship in the body of Christ and gossiping only harms that process.

Joseph shows that he wants to preserve the good name of his brothers. He doesn't want it to be told to the world. What does he do when he goes to reveal himself to his brothers? He sends all the Egyptians out of the room. He doesn't want them all knowing about the horrible sin of his brothers against him so he keeps it as private as possible. That's the way it ought to be in the church, as private as possible. Just because a pastor or an elder knows about some sin doesn't mean they have to go and tell others. They don't have to tell the consistory unless they go through the way of Matthew 18. Keep it as private as possible.

Lastly, forgiveness means not allowing the sin to hinder our personal relationship with the person who sinned against us. Joseph does not say, "I forgive you but I don't ever want to see your face again." That's not forgiveness. No, he says, "Come near to me." You see how Joseph wants to restore that fellowship, "Come near to me." Joseph kisses them. He weeps upon them. He talks with them. Forgiveness implies a reconciliation in a relationship. It means making that commitment, "I'm not going to let that person's sin get in the way of my relationship with them," so we ought to have that fellowship restored to the same degree at least, the same fellowship that we had before there was a breach. If that's not the case, then we really haven't forgiven someone. "Yes, I have forgiven them but I don't talk to them anymore." Then that's not forgiveness.

Joseph truly had forgiven his brothers therefore he wants to fellowship with them and sometimes that takes great effort. Are we willing, beloved, to be reconciled with those who have sinned against us? Then if the answer to that is no, then the question is: why not? Have they not repented? Then maybe they have not realized the extent of their sin. Have they repented and we still refuse to forgive them? Then we need to repent ourselves. Knowing what Christ has done for us, who has forgiven us much and we cannot forgive what someone has done against us?

Perhaps we look at our circumstances, beloved, and imagine that forgiveness and reconciliation is impossible. That happens all the time in the world. Marriages turn sour, "It's impossible. Forget it." And they part ways and humanly speaking that may well be true but only humanly speaking because the truth is, beloved, reconciliation is possible in the strength of Christ. Somebody says, "But Pastor, you don't know what they did. You don't know." God says, "All things are possible." With God nothing shall be impossible. Do you believe that?

How could Joseph possibly forgive his brothers after what they did? That was a horrible sin. We may not minimize that. And the answer, of course, is in the strength of Jesus Christ. By God's grace, Joseph had come to understand and here's his motivation: Joseph had come to understand God's goodness to himself. Joseph had a proper view of God. Notice how many times, I want to point those out, how many times Joseph mentions God working in his circumstances. Genesis 45:5, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." God is working out a good purpose. Verse 7, "And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." Then verse 8, "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."

Joseph saw that God was working in his life. All things for good. In other words, Joseph knew that God loved him. That was his motivation also to show love towards his brothers and if Joseph had chosen to remain bitter against his brothers, in fact, it would be that he was still bitter against God because he saw that God was sovereignly directing that. If God had been so good to Joseph, thankfulness demanded that he also show goodness to his brothers. If God had been so good to us, beloved, to send his only begotten Son to die for us, that he would give us the greatest good, are we not willing to forgive others and to reconcile with others?

God works when his people pray. God works in us so that we do pray for that grace and then he works. God is faithful and when we ask God to work that in our hearts, he will work to the glory of his name. Amen.