

GOD SENT ME HERE, NOT YOU

Genesis 44: 1 to Genesis 45: 15 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Ernest Gordon in his book, *Miracle on the River Kwai*, told the grim story of Scottish soldiers, forced by their Japanese captors to labor on a jungle railroad. They worked with consigned shovels, counted at two check points each day. At check point one, one shovel was missing. The officer in charge became enraged. He demanded the missing shovel be produced, or admitted they stole it, or he would kill them all on the spot. Nobody in the squadron budged. Threatening with his gun to shoot them all on the spot, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the Scottish soldiers picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time, no shovel was missing. There had been a miscount at the first check point. Word spread like wildfire through the whole camp. One loving innocent man had been willing to sacrifice his own life for them all, and die to save the rest! The incident had a profound effect. Those nearly barbarous Scottish soldiers began treating each other like brothers. When the Allied army swept in, those survivors, now human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors. What would they do? They insisted: "No more hatred. No more killing. What we all need is forgiveness." One man's sacrificial love brought transforming power.

In our magnificent Joseph story, what is needed is forgiveness. Will it happen or will there be retribution? Some of you may know the amazing story of Elizabeth Barrett. A childhood accident caused this young poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of semi-invalidism, before she married Robert Browning in 1846. In her youth, Elizabeth was watched over by her tyrannical father. When she and Robert were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding, the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived the rest of their lives. Their parents disowned her, but Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly, she wrote them letters. Not once did they reply. After 10 years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside it, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! Today those letters are among the most beautiful love letters in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth could have been restored.

Today, the Joseph story begins with the apparent beginning of a disastrous end to the Joseph story. In Genesis 44: 1-13, we see what looks to be the beginning of the end for Benjamin, his father Jacob, and Jacob's ten sons. "Joseph commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did

as Joseph told him. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, “Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good? Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this.’” When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. They said to him, “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord's servants.” He said, “Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent.” Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city. When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?” This mighty story of Joseph prefigures how Christ forgives us as guilty sinners. There are 3 responses to 3 circumstances that amaze me. They will amaze you as well. This story opens up floodgates of tears.

WE ARE SPOKEN FOR BY AN ADVOCATE WHEN WE'RE HOPELESS.

(I.) This is what happens in the face of our hardest tests in coming to full repentance. Notice Judah's advocacy as he becomes for us a type of Christ who is our Advocate in our hopelessness as we stand before God. See Genesis 44: 16-34. “And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.” But Joseph said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.” Then Judah went up to him and said, “Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father, or a brother?’ And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.’ Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’ We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.’ “When we went back to

your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One left me, and I said, "Surely he has been torn to pieces," and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.' "Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.' Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father."

In this final episode, God used Joseph to test his 10 older brothers. Joseph framed Benjamin, claiming Benjamin as his slave, in recompense for apparently stealing his silver cup. When Joseph demanded that the brothers return home to Jacob without Benjamin, Gen. 44:17, Judah stepped out of the shadows. He emerged as his brother's spokesman. What gave him the standing or ability to take on this role? Judah had broken faith with his family by marrying a Canaanite woman, (38:2), he had fathered and raised two wicked sons that the Lord put to death, 38:7, 10, he had treated his own daughter-in-law, Tamar as a prostitute 38:24, and he was the author of the plan to sell his own brother, Joseph as a slave 37:27. Who is this changed man? He became in this tragic setting, a type of our Lord Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Joseph opened his mouth, and went up close to Joseph to plead for the life of Benjamin. It's heart-wrenching and his compassion is unmatched. There was no jealousy of Benjamin at all. Judah exhibited an undying love for his little brother, Benjamin for his father, Jacob. Judah became an advocate for Benjamin, for Jacob, and for his brothers. What a speech he made! He begged the lord of the land not to let his old 130-year old father die in utter sorrow. Then, in an ultimate expression of love, and broken-hearted compassion, Judah offered to sacrifice himself—to substitute himself in place of Benjamin! He pled with Joseph to keep him in Egypt for the rest of his life—separated from his family, as the Prime Minister's slave if only you will let Benjamin go back home to his father, Jacob, 44:33-34.

What a picture this is of Jesus who is our Advocate with the Father. I John 2: 1-2 states, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation/satisfaction before God, for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Beloved, I have personally observed over and over when I have been falsely accused over the past 50 years of ministry, that I, like Benjamin, am provided by God with defenders, advocates who have stood up to defend and protect, and literally to sacrifice themselves for me. We have in Jesus, in Glory, our own personal Advocate, and within us, we have the Holy Spirit as our wonderful Counselor to reassure us, and then, so often, God brings us a type of Christ, an earthly advocate, to speak up for us and defend our cause, our person, and our integrity. When we are attacked, falsely accused and shunned by others, God sees it as Himself being attacked. When Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the church of Jesus Christ, killing and imprisoning many, and scattering the Christians by his actions, Acts 8: 3 tells us “Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, dragging off men and women and committing them to prison.” But those believers in the first century, like us today, had an Advocate who struck Saul blind on the Damascus road as he was breathing threats and murder against the Lord’s disciples. Acts 9: 4 states God knocked Saul to the ground and spoke to him saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me.” Beloved, we have an Advocate who takes it personally when we are falsely accused and spoken against whether in public or private. In our hopelessness, we have an Advocate, as Benjamin and his brothers had an advocate in Judah. 2ndly,

WE ARE SPEECHLESS IN THE PRESENCE OF UNDESERVED LOVE.

(II.) What happens to us when we stand in the presence of undeserved forgiving love in full repentance? Notice Genesis 45: 1-7. “Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, “Make everyone go out from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.” Seeing the change in Judah, speaking for all his brothers, Joseph was able to bless him and his brothers as God intended. He disclosed to them the full truth: “I am Joseph” (45:3) Joseph’s brothers could be trusted—their repentance was a God-given repentance, with a new loyalty to their father, to Benjamin, their family member in need, even though

he looked guilty, with the silver cup in his sack. Judah spoke for them all and he gave glory to God by owning up to their sin against Joseph and its consequences, overlooking favoritism and Judah offered up himself to save his brother, Benjamin.

Joseph revealed himself to his brothers because they evidenced true repentance, which made reconciliation possible. It was time to reveal himself. Joseph must do this alone with his brothers. It was an intimate family matter. Outsiders must not witness it. Joseph needed privacy for the full release of his emotions, held in check for 22 years. Yet, the Egyptians and Pharaoh himself, could hear Joseph sobbing. Put yourself in the brother's shoes. They'd been shown incredible hospitality by the prime minister, given provisions to bring back to their father, until the silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack. This became the pivot moment. Joseph's brothers heard Judah's advocacy. Now what would the verdict from Joseph be? It would affect the rest of their lives. They didn't know who Joseph was, or what he intended to do, when he sent out all the Egyptians out. The brothers now could see this lord of the land, this potentate, had tears flowing down his cheeks. His chest must've been heaving in great emotion. Why? Was he that angry? In disbelief, they heard Joseph blurt it out in Hebrew, "I am Joseph." He needed no interpreter. This Egyptian was speaking their own language and dialect.

That must have been the worst news they could ever have hoped to hear. It brought them no relief, but only terror and anxiety. To stand before this powerful Egyptian lord angry at the theft of his silver cup was bad enough, but to realize this lord was their brother whom they sold into slavery—it couldn't be! They'd hoped for an impartial judge, but this man was their enemy, their judge, and they were not only speechless, but petrified with terror. The Hebrew word for dismayed in 45: 3 is a clinching description. It is **bahal**. It means to tremble, with sudden alarm and a palpitating heart. Fear and guilt and shame must have been written on their pale and ashen faces. Their silence spoke volumes to Joseph. What could they say? Every word here is spoken by Joseph. Not until Joseph demonstrated he had forgiven them and that he loved them dearly did they dare speak. Joseph's first words in Hebrew to his brothers declared his identity, followed quickly by Joseph's concern for his father. For Joseph to imagine occasioning the death of his father was too much for him to take. They must have shrunk back from him in horror and terror. Yet, Joseph said, "Come near to me." Joseph never minimized their sin, but those words, "come near to me" made them look beyond their sin to the only One who could forgive them and give Joseph strength to forgive them too. When Joseph called them near to him, he said, v. 5—"You sold me, but God sent me. Your purpose was to destroy me, but God's purpose was to use me to save your and your families' lives in this worldwide famine." What a type of Christ, as we read "Peter's words to the men of Israel on Pentecost as he preached to them.

Acts 2: 23—“You crucified and killed the Lord of glory, but you only delivered Him to the cross by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. Every time I read that, it leaves me speechless too. Thirdly and lastly,

WE ARE FORGIVEN IN SPITE OF DESERVING DEATH. (III.) This is what happens when we carry in our bosoms the knowledge that we deserve death in the face of a just judge. Notice Genesis 45: 8-15. “So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 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 tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.” Forgiveness often is shown not in words only, but in deeds and truth. Forgiveness embraces, & weeps over those who hurt us or who we’ve hurt.

What lessons can we learn in Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers? 10 pointed thoughts! **1-Forgiveness can be a long process.** We may have to repeat it over and over—Joseph repeated himself in Genesis 50:20, 13 years later saying, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. **2-Forgiveness is not dependent upon a perfect confession.** All the brothers did not confess, nor was it a perfect confession they all agreed to. **3-Forgiveness does not require an agreed version of the past.** Arguing over who said what and who replied in which fashion destroys the process of forgiveness. **4-Forgiveness means letting go of my right to revenge.** **5-Forgiveness does not mean forgetting.** God promises that He will remember our sins no more, but this is an ability which He has not given to us. **6-Forgiveness means not bringing it up again, forfeiting my right to repeat it over again, but letting it be finished.** Others may speak of it, but if we forgive, we cannot use it as power over the one we once forgave. **7-Forgiveness does not mean excusing the behavior of the other person.** **8-Forgiveness is easier when we rest in God’s providence.** Notice v. 8--“So it was not you who sent me here, but God.” **9-Forgiveness is one thing; re-trusting is another.** Joseph never abdicated his job and said, “Let’s go back to Dothan and try this all over again 22 years later. **10-Forgiveness has a positive, active side to it.** Notice v. 11. “I will provide for you, for there are yet 5 years of famine to come. Repeat 1-3. Amen.