

Where Sin Abounds, Grace

- Genesis 50:15-26
- Jacob has died and Joseph and his brothers will live in Egypt for many more years. In fact, Joseph will live another 54 years, but we know nothing about that time. Well, almost nothing. We do know what happened right after Jacob's burial was complete and the entourage who had traveled to Canaan had gotten safely back to Egypt. How it unfolds, and Joseph's responses to his brothers' fears, is such a beautiful picture of the Gospel. Let's look at this passage under three main points: The brothers' fears, Joseph's reassurance, and final promise.
- **The brothers' fears (verses 15-18)**
- Suddenly the brothers realize their father is dead. That's the way it reads, and it would be funny if it weren't so sad! Because this triggers in their minds that only one possibility awaits them: they will be punished, maybe even put to death, for their sin against Joseph 39 years earlier. In their muddled thinking, stoked by fear, Joseph has been patiently biding his time for years, while his hatred boiled just beneath the surface, waiting until the day that dear old dad is out of the picture so he could execute his wrath on these wicked men. Oh, and at the same time, he has been generously providing for his brothers for 17 years. So they send a messenger to Joseph with a made-up story about their father Jacob giving a command that Joseph should forgive his brothers for their sin. And, the messenger adds, your brothers ask that you forgive their transgressions as they are the servants of the God of your father.
- It reminds me of the parable of the unforgiving servant that Jesus told in Matthew. A servant owed, let's say, 5 billion dollars, to the king. No way he could ever repay it, so the king ordered that he and his family and everything they had be sold. The man went to the king and begged for mercy. And the king forgave his debt! Completely forgave him, no strings attached. The servant went out and happened upon a man who owed him \$5. He seized the man, began to choke him while demanding payment. The servant begged for patience and promised to pay, but the man who had just been forgiven 5 billion dollars took the man who owed him \$5 and put him in prison. The only way to understand that parable is to see that the man who had been forgiven by the king did not receive the grace he had been given. He still saw himself as someone with an unpayable debt and therefore had no mercy with anyone who happened to be in *his* debt.
- Tim Keller writes this in his book entitled, *Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?* "When something happens that reveals your sins more clearly than you have ever wanted to see or admit, does it move you away from God or closer to him? If it makes you want to stay away from God and prayer and church—that shows you don't understand what Jesus did for you. If you grasped it, your inner dialogue with God would sound more like this: 'Lord, I knew before that you died for me and accepted me, but I didn't know I was this foolish or this sinful—so now I realize your love is greater than I thought. Your mercy is more free and undeserved than I thought!'"
- The brothers were afraid of Joseph because their understanding of a gracious and forgiving God was stunted. Again, Keller writes, "If you have a God who is nothing but wrath, and if you have little understanding of what happened on the cross, you'll be a driven person. You'll try hard to be moral. You'll try hard to be good, but you will always feel unworthy. It will be hard to grow into a loving person, because fear cannot awaken love. Only love can awaken and grow more love."
- Joseph wept when he heard the messenger plead with him for his brothers' forgiveness, perhaps because these brothers he had already forgiven and loved and provided for were so bound up by their own fear and mistrust. This leads us to...
- **Joseph's reassurance (verses 19-21)**
- This is as clear a picture of the Gospel as anything we have seen in the book of Genesis. Joseph, who is a type of Christ, was mistreated by his brothers and suffered a great deal because of their sin. His hope

was not in man but in the God of his fathers, and he received the favor of God in the pit and in Potiphar's house, and even in the prison after being falsely accused. He was raised from the prison cell and exalted to the place of preeminence in Egypt so that he could save his people from the famine that was revealed to him through Pharaoh's dreams.

- What Joseph speaks to his brothers in this last chapter, three truths, are pinnacles of Old Testament and New Testament faith. Let's look at them in turn.
- First, Joseph says, **"Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"** One of the most important revelations we get from Scripture is that there is one God, and we are not him. The Copernican revolution took place when scientists understood that it is the sun, not the earth, that is the center of the universe. That same revolution takes place in our hearts when we accept the revelation clearly stated in the Bible, that it is God, not man, who is the creator, the center, the king, the Lord of all there is. The brothers saw Joseph as someone who had authority to punish them for their sins, and in human terms, he did have such authority. He was the vice regent of Egypt. Their fears are misplaced, however. Joseph knew that he was just a man, and that only God has the authority to punish sin. What the brothers were finally doing for Joseph, acknowledging their sins, should have been done years earlier, and not only to Joseph but also and especially to God. Joseph gently points them to the Lord. Pinnacle of faith number one: God alone is just and sits in the place of judgment.
- Second, Joseph says, **"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."** Another of the most important revelations we get from the Bible is that ultimately our lives are in the hands of God, not man. Joseph's certainly was. Yes, you are guilty, Joseph said to his brothers. But God is sovereign. Remember, Joseph said to them 17 years earlier, "You sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life...So it was not you who sent me here, but God." This is as clear an Old Testament pronouncement of Romans 8:28 that we could possibly see. Paul wrote, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."
- Genesis is the beginning of God's great plan for the earth, and particularly for his people. It is the story of creation, the fall, and the plan of redemption. We see the fall very early, in Genesis 3, and then the plan of redemption was announced by God when he said to the serpent, the enemy, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." We see the plan of redemption continue through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God keeps them, protects them, and blesses them. We know there will be a great deliverer raised up from the Pharaoh's own household who will deliver by God's mighty hand the people of God from bondage. How will that deliverer be in Egypt? Because God used Joseph to bring his people to Egypt that they might be saved alive through the famine. Joseph's provision for God's people and Moses' deliverance of God's people is amazing, but pales in comparison to the deliverance that will be given to God's people through Jesus, the Son of God, the offspring of the woman who will crush the serpent's head by giving himself up for us, the perfect sacrifice for our sin. More on that in a moment.
- Third, Joseph says, **"Do not fear; I will provide for you."** Another great pillar of faith is that we who belong to God can afford to do good to those who have harmed us. Joseph didn't say this, but he could have said, "You sold me. I will provide for you. You did evil against me. I will believe and do good things for you." Jesus taught that truth himself before he demonstrated it on the cross. "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Luke 6:27-28) Love is action, and nothing says that better than the cross.
- John Stott wrote, "The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be. God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone. God accepts penalties which belong to man alone."
- **The Final Promise (verses 22-26)**

- We believe Joseph was 56 when his father died, and if so, then as I said it means he lived 54 more years in Egypt. Moses chose not to reveal anything about those years except the event we just talked about, right after Jacob died, and the words of Joseph before his death. But what Joseph said to his brothers before his death is so significant that it put Joseph in the hall of faith.
- He said, **“God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land (of promise).”** Then he said it again as he made them swear: “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry my bones from here.” This promise would not be fulfilled in their lifetime, but it would be fulfilled. Joseph spoke with faith that God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would come to pass. So the writer of Hebrews added him to the hall, saying, “By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.” (Heb. 11:22) Again, notice the repetition of Joseph here. God will visit you...God will surely visit you. It’s a crucial promise.
- The visit of God with his people, mentioned twice by Joseph in his final words to his brothers, is significant throughout all of time. It was significant for the exodus of Israel from Egypt, from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom. But that points to the greatest exodus of God’s people from sinfulness to salvation, which would be accomplished by the visitation of God through His Son. Zechariah prophesied this after his son John the Baptist was born who would be the forerunner of the Messiah, saying, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...” (Luke 1:68-69). And the final visitation is still coming, as John ended his book of Revelation with these words from Christ: “Surely, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”
- Joseph died looking forward to God’s unfolding plan of redemption. That is how Genesis, the book of beginnings, ends. And you and me? We live, still looking forward!
- Prayer
- Greet One Another