
Repentance and Reunion

Genesis 45:1-46:27

Broken family relationships are difficult and painful. Arguments, differences and sometimes divisions wreak havoc on family peace. When these come as a result of distance or differences in lifestyle, they are easier and more understandable. But when these are the result of jealousy, anger, jockeying for power, position, and privilege – when they come as a result of sin and being sinned against, resolution sometimes seems almost impossible.

Many of you experience what I am talking about. You know relatives that you just hate to see at family reunions. It is awkward if not outright hostile. Some of you have been terribly sinned against by family with all the hurt, pain and division that comes with it.

But imagine the story we have been following in Genesis. Has there ever been such awful pain? Has there such a grand reversal in personal fortune? Has there ever been such an opportunity to take revenge or at least exact the pound of flesh? Has a family faced such an awful and awesome moment as this?

Many television shows now have plots so complicated that the first few minutes of each show go back to do quick snapshots to set this week's scene. The engaging drama that has been unfolding for us in the Joseph narratives is like that. Where are we today in this story when the narrative opens with a great Egyptian lord standing before 11 brothers one of whom is in front of the others, arms outstretched in a beseeching posture?

These are all brothers, sons of the Patriarch Jacob. They had, many long years ago, sold their brother into slavery out of jealousy and hatred. Through much travail and in the providence of God, this slave has now become the second most powerful man in Egypt. He controls vast stores of food set aside during 7 years of great harvests for the now unfolding 7 years of dire famine. His brothers came to Egypt the first time to get food. He recognized them; but they did not know him. He tested them by taking one brother hostage, sending the others home and warning them that if they came, they must bring their youngest brother, the prize of their father's heart, with them.

The famine has deepened all across the mid-east. So the father, Jacob, sends the brothers back, finally agreeing to send the youngest, Benjamin. Joseph, their brother, and Egyptian leader, honors them with a banquet, loads them up and sends them home returning the hostage brother to them. But, he has again returned their money in their grain bags and had his steward hide his silver cup in Benjamin's bag. The steward is sent after them, finds the cup and now they are in fear of their lives before this powerful man. The brothers are repentant, contrite, and transformed. Judah, from whom the future kings and the great King Jesus will one day come, now offers to be the substitute, and take the punishment for Benjamin.

And now our story continues...

Reconciliation: the Progress of Souls (45:1-28)

There Judah stands, open arms, great hearted, the shadow of our Lord Jesus willing to die for the safety of his little brother and the sake of his beloved father.

From a Startling Confession (v.1-3)

And Joseph can contain himself no longer.

45 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. ²And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³And 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.

He sends all the Egyptian attendants away. Alone with his brothers, he weeps and cries so loud he is heard all over the palace. Sobbing he makes a startling revelation, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

Moses, with droll understatement records two things: the brothers are dumbfounded and dismayed. Ah, this is high drama. They are shocked into stunned silence. They don't know what to say. They are dismayed. There has to be fear and wonderment. You can almost hear the, "O, no!" in their heads. Not in their worst nightmares could they have imagined themselves being so utterly vulnerable and exposed to the one they had so mightily wronged and sinned against.

With a Humble Reunion (v.4-15)

But Joseph moves in reconciliation.

⁴So 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. ⁵And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For 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. ⁷And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So 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. ⁹Hurry 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. ¹⁰You 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. ¹¹There 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.' ¹²And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

He invites them to approach him. He moves toward them in love and mercy calling on them to respond to him with repentance and love. In the midst of real fault, offense and sin, Joseph lovingly instructs them to move toward him in a humble reunion.

The elements of that reconciled reunion are very important.

There is an admission of the reality of sin (v.4).

He is their brother and the one they did sell. There is no minimizing or denying their sin. It was real. It is not even being overlooked. It has been forgiven.

There is true repentance not vain regret (v.5).

Two impotent emotions are addressed here, distress and self-anger. These are futile at this point. They can mar the reconciliation and can become a denial of having been forgiven. When forgiven, do not hold the account against yourself when the offended person is not, having forgiven you. Experience the joy of having been forgiven.

There is an acknowledgement of the purposes and providences of God (v.6-8).

We acknowledge our sin. We acknowledge the hand of God. He is at work. He sent Joseph to Egypt through the brother's sin and elevated him to the Vice-Regency so that he could take care of his family. It is a great mercy and encouragement when we begin to see some of what God is doing in every circumstance. It is a wonderful heart shaping truth and affection sending certainty when being reconciled to those who have sinned against us.

There are practical deeds of loving care within his power (v.9-11).

Joseph will take care of them. He will bring them down, set aside a place, provide for their welfare, and see that they do not come to poverty. These are great deeds of sacrificial love attendant to a forgiving heart.

There are personal expressions of affirmation and affection (v.12-15).

Changed hearts are overflowing will experiences and expressions of affection. This is not a cold and calculated attempt to restore an undesirable relationship. This is warm and full. Here are tears and hugs and upsurges of trust.

In a Generous Proposition (v.16-20)

The noise of this great reunion reached the ears of the Pharaoh.

¹⁶When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. ¹⁷And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, ¹⁸and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.' ¹⁹And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.' "

The Pharaoh and all his servants are glad to hear that the family is being reunited. He makes a generous offer and proposes that Joseph bring his whole family down to live in Egypt. He will provide the wagons for transport. He will make provisions for the journey. And he will ensure their prosperity wherever they settle in the land. God's power is at work in the heart of this pagan ruler so that he will rejoice in the good of his servants.

By a Gracious Direction (v.21-28)

With this invitation, Joseph instructs his brothers to go and bring the clan down.

²¹The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. ²²To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five

changes of clothes. 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. ²⁴ Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the way."

²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. ²⁶ And they told him, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ And Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

He takes all that the Pharaoh has provided and gives it to them. He loads them up. He ensures that they are provided for the whole round trip. And then, knowing them as he does, he reminds them not to quarrel on the way.

What news they have as they arrive home. "Father, Joseph is alive. I know this is hard to believe, but he is the ruler over all of Egypt." In an interesting turn of phrase, his heart is numbed because he does not believe them. He is suspicious. He is doubtful. It is impossible.

But then they tell the story Joseph had related. They tell of the fulfillment of God's purposes and promises. They surely acknowledge their own fault. And they bring their skeptical father out to see all that Joseph through the Pharaoh's beneficence had sent. Surely the Pharaoh's standards are emblazoned on the wagons. There are all the provisions. Could it be true? Yes, it is! His heart is revived. He stirs himself up. He rises up out of his being downcast and self-focused. Hope surges and satisfaction settles. He is complete. He is ready to see the end of life if he can be granted the sight of his son.

Restoration: the Provision for Souls (46:1-27)

So, preparations are made. The wagons are loaded. The tents are struck. All the family goods and persons and livestock are gathered up in a long train. The tribe begins its long trek down to Egypt where, over the next four hundred years, they will become a nation.

By a Divine Assurance (v.1-4)

On their journey, they travel through Beersheba and stop there for a night.

46 So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ² And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." ³ Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. ⁴ I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."

In gratitude and worship to God, Israel (note the change in his name) offers sacrifices to the Lord. But his heart is trembling. This is still a hard journey. His son is in Egypt. But to go there he must leave the Promised Land. In doing so, is he moving away from the God of the Covenant?

God appears to Israel (Jacob) to assure him that this too is in His plan and purposes. Israel is not to be afraid to go to Egypt. There in Egypt God will shelter them during the rising tide of Canaanite wickedness and depravity. There God will protect them so that they may increase in number and become a nation. There God will prosper them so that when they depart, they

will be rich. But most important of all, they can go down to Egypt because God is going with him. God will bring him up again. And what a sweet phrase – the gentle hand of his much loved son will tenderly close his eyes upon his death.

Upon a Grand Arrival (v.5-7)

⁵ Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶ They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, ⁷ his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

With God's assurance, Jacob arises in the morning and travels with confidence down into Egypt. What a grand caravan this is. All these souls preserved alive. All the pain and trouble and suffering washed away as Joseph stands in the bulwarks of the Egyptian capital and watches the grand arrival. Suddenly, breaking out ahead, rides Judah. Joseph runs down to meet him. Judah will lead them to Goshen and Joseph will meet them there (v.28).

With a Significant Enumeration (v.8-26)

All of Jacob's sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters arrive in Egypt with him. It is a great procession of souls. To ensure that the census is true and accurate, Moses lists by name and enumerates by number all those who went down into Egypt.

For the sake of our time and my tongue, we will not read this list. But this listing of seventy people arriving in Egypt is significant.

⁸ Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, ⁹ and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰ The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹ The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. ¹² The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. ¹³ The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Yob, and Shimron. ¹⁴ The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. ¹⁵ These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.

¹⁶ The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. ¹⁷ The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, with Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. ¹⁸ These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons.

¹⁹ The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰ And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the priest of On, bore to him. ²¹ And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. ²² These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all.

²³ The son of Dan: Hushim. ²⁴ The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. ²⁵ These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all.

Moses alludes to this in both Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22.

²⁶All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all. ²⁷And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.

The number seventy is important. Earlier in Genesis, the table of the nations enumerates seventy nations (Genesis 10-11). From one, Noah, had come the many, seventy nations. From the many, seventy persons, would come the one, the nation of Israel.

In the New Testament, Jesus calls the twelve to be His disciples. Like the twelve tribes, they are now the New Israel's representatives. Interestingly, Jesus also sent out the seventy to go before him and witness of Him (Luke 10:1,17 - see ESV footnote on "seventy"). Under the New Covenant, in the one, the New Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ, many from all the nations will be gathered, the reconciled and restored.

Reflect and Respond

The sending of Israel down into Egypt sets up the great story of the Exodus. Israel will come up out of Egypt and move towards the land promised. But that will be a shadow of the new Israel, the Lord Jesus, who will one day go down into Egypt for safety and will come up out of Egypt the true Israel, the son of God. In the Exodus is the great story of our own coming up out of the world, the realm of sin and our journey through to the land of promise, the new heavens and new earth.

Much shallowness in modern Christianity comes because we are ignorant of or even deny the graces in conversion. The movement of our souls toward God is in this narrative.

There is an open disclosure to our souls of who God is and our true relationship to Him. He shows Himself to our souls in His Word and we see by faith.

There is a deep awareness of our own sinfulness and guilt before the Lord. In that light we understand and feel, we are sensible of our visibility and vulnerability before our God. We know the deep reality of our sin - we do not deny it, diminish it, or dress it. It is plain and painful in our hearts.

There is a movement by God who initiates our reconciliation and welcomes us based on His forgiveness. He moves toward us in mercy and we, in response, draw near His throne of grace.

There are great assurances in our souls that we have peace with God. Through words and deeds, God speaks His peace and shows our union with Him. We acknowledge the mighty movements of His grace and the weaving of His purposes.

Finally, there are experiences and expressions of the reality of a restored relationship. We come under His father tutelage, His parental care. We receive His good provisions and gifts. We are guided by His heavenly wisdom. And we are all brought safely home with all the family and all we need.

Here are the characteristics and aims of true repentance and reconciliation:

AN ADMISSION OF THE REALITY OF SIN. We will be reconciled when sin is acknowledged and addressed.

TRUE REPENTANCE NOT VAIN REGRET. We will reject self-focused emotions and enter into the joy of forgiveness.

AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE PURPOSES AND PROVIDENCES OF GOD. We will gladly bow under the hand of a sovereign God moving for our good and His glory.

PRACTICAL DEEDS OF LOVING CARE WITHIN OUR POWER. We will do deeds of sacrificial love attendant to a forgiving heart.

PERSONAL EXPRESSIONS OF AFFIRMATION AND AFFECTION. We will engage one another with real affection and affirmation.

Why? Because our Redeemer and Ruler has reconciled us and restored us just like this! To Him be all the glory.