

## **RECONCILE**

Genesis 45:1-15

After Joseph had risen to power in Egypt, he married an Egyptian woman. Joseph named his firstborn son Manasseh which means “God has caused me to forget all my troubles and my father’s household.” Soon after that happened, his brothers showed up in Egypt looking for food. Joseph just thought he was prepared to move on in life without regard to Jacob’s family, but God had other plans.

We recall that Joseph had been through a series of tests that had helped prepare him for what God had planned for his life and these tests had revealed his inner character. When he was confronted with the possibility of being reunited with his family from Canaan, he used several tests to try to learn if the character of his brothers had changed in the past two decades. The first test was to see if the brothers would trade one of their own brothers (Simeon) for food. This test was similar to what they had done with Joseph in trading him for twenty pieces of silver. When confronted with this situation, they were immediately reminded of what they had done. They even saw what was developing as divine judgment for selling Joseph into slavery and they discussed it among themselves in Hebrew not knowing that Joseph could understand what they were saying. The uneasy consciences of the brothers interpreted every development as an indication of judgment for what they had done two decades before.

They were provided with grain and Joseph had told them that if they wanted more grain and wanted Simeon released that they would have to bring their youngest brother with them the next time they came. The fact that all their money was returned to them in the mouth of the sacks of grain caused Jacob to think that they had traded Simeon for the grain. Jacob may have been suspicious that his older sons had done something to cause Joseph’s death or disappearance. Now he was thinking they did the same thing to Simeon and he wanted no part of putting Benjamin at risk. It was important for all of the brothers to come to Egypt for the dream of the sheaves to be fulfilled where all eleven of Joseph’s brother’s sheaves would bow down to his sheaf.

Jacob finally relented to let them take Benjamin to Egypt but only after the food ran out and Judah had promised to sacrifice himself for Benjamin if needed. Jacob remembered how he had prepared for the meeting with Esau. He had sent gifts to Esau as a gesture of respect and so he wanted his sons to take a gift of something valuable to the important person with whom they had dealt in Egypt.

When they returned to Egypt, the welcome mat was out for them and a grand meal with the vizier of Egypt was prepared for them. The brothers told Joseph’s steward about the returned money and he assured them that he was aware they had paid for the grain but their God had given them treasure in the grain sacks. Simeon was then reunited with them and they prepared themselves to join the vizier for the noon meal. They had a separate table from Joseph and the Egyptian attendants in Joseph’s household were at a third table because the Egyptians would not eat with the likes of these Hebrew shepherds.

When Joseph came in, all eleven of the brothers bowed down to him. Joseph inquired about their health and specifically about their aged father. He then pronounced a blessing on Benjamin before leaving the room to conceal that he was overcome with emotions. After he composed himself, he returned and the meal was eaten.

They were then ready to go back to Canaan with the grain. However, they did not know that Joseph had one more test for them and that involved having a steward put Joseph’s silver

cup into the mouth of the sack of grain assigned to Benjamin. As they left the next morning to return, Joseph sent his steward to stop them and accuse them of stealing something from Joseph. Of course, they denied it to the point of saying that the person who stole the object should be executed and the rest of them would become Joseph's slaves. They had no way to know they had been set up as part of the test of their character.

The missing cup was found in Benjamin's grain sack and all of them were brought back to face Joseph. Joseph claimed to have divine power of knowing what had happened and they should have known they could not get away with stealing from him. The brothers were at the point of seeing what was unfolding as God's judgment on them for what they had done to Joseph. Then Joseph unfolded the second part of this latest test. He said that instead of executing Benjamin and keeping all of them as slaves, he would just keep Benjamin as a slave and let the rest of them go back to Jacob in Canaan. Of course, the question was "were they willing to save themselves at the expense of a younger brother going into slavery?" This was a test they failed two decades ago. The answer to this question would show if they were the same cruel selfish people they used to be or if there had been a change.

Judah stepped up and intervened to offer himself in place of Benjamin and the rest of his brothers so that no harm would happen to Benjamin and his father would be spared the grief of losing another son who was so close to him.

These actions of his brothers showed Joseph that they had indeed changed and that the forgiveness he wanted to extend to them would not be in vain. They were truly contrite and repentant which is what a person must be in order to be able to receive and possess such grace as Joseph had to offer to them.

It is interesting that the motivation for their being willing to make personal sacrifices was the love for their father. The lesson for us is that it is our love and respect for God our Father that must be our motivation for our actions. Even when we do what we know is right and it is something that will benefit us, the motivation needs to be our love for God and not just because it is something that benefits us.

### I Am Joseph – 45:1-3

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. <sup>3</sup> 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. Genesis 45:1-3 (ESV)

All the pent up emotions that had been restrained for the past twenty two years were about to be released. No where in the account of all that Joseph had been through did we ever see anything that would indicate that Joseph wanted to take revenge on his brothers. Apparently, Joseph wanted to be reconciled to his brothers so he could be reunited with his family. However, that reconciliation could not occur until there had been a significant change in the character of his brothers that would show itself to be real by the actions they would take.

In a similar way, God desires that His forgiving pardon that comes from His essence be abundantly poured out on sinful humanity. However, God (in His infinite wisdom) knows that such pardon will harm the sinner since forgiveness apart from contrite repentance simply causes the non penitent perpetrator to be emboldened to sin all the more. God has done His part in making the pardon available but it is impossible for a truly unrepentant person to receive and possess it. Some who have not changed (confessed and repented) will assume that they have been pardoned. However, to claim to have what we cannot possess is presumption.

With the confirmation of their changed character, there was nothing to hold back the tears of joy of being reunited with his family. However, we notice that Joseph had all the Egyptians leave the room before he displayed the raw emotions that resulted in the tearful embrace of his brothers.

In a commentary on this passage, Alexander MacLaren made the following observation: “The deepest feelings are not to be flaunted before the world. The man who displays his tears, and the man who is too proud to shed them, are both wrong; but perhaps it is worse to weep in public than not to weep at all.” These thoughts are not telling us that a display of emotions is either right or wrong, but they are telling us that the time, place, and circumstances for such intimate sharing are important. I think all of us know this and we often practice “keeping a stiff upper lip” as the British might say when we are among those who do not know us well. However, we have all likely experienced a lack of such “control” when we are around those whom we know have empathy for us and share the same values.

When the non family members had left the room, Joseph’s was able to let down his guard and reveal his identity with the brothers whom he loved. Now that he had seen the change that years of conviction had worked in their lives, he could let himself be vulnerable in their presence and, in this display of emotions they could see into his soul. This was their brother whom they had harmed but also it was their brother whose primary concern was the welfare of their father. They had already shown by their willingness to make sacrifices that they too were primarily concerned for Jacob’s welfare. This common focus of their love was a beginning point for reuniting their family.

When we are attempting to bring peace into the world in which we live, it is becoming more and more obvious that the only way that is going to happen is when all will embrace the Prince of Peace and all of us can find our unity in him. This may not happen in the broader area of the world, but it should certainly be true for us in the church and especially at the level of a local body of believers.

#### God Sent Me – 45:4-8

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup> 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. Genesis 45:4–8 (ESV)

From the reaction of the brothers when Joseph announced his identity, it was obvious that they were shocked and uncertain as to what might be next in this unfolding drama. Joseph quickly encouraged them to not keep condemning themselves for what they did more than two decades before. A great benefit of being forgiven is that the heavy burden of guilt can be lifted and taken away.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out the following: “The certainty that God’s will, not man’s, is the controlling reality in every event shined through as the basis for reconciliation. No doubt, Joseph had consoled himself many times with this principle of faith. He who is spiritual can perceive the hand of God in every event, and therefore is able to forgive those who wrong him.” This realization was a significant part of what enabled Joseph to be reunited with his brothers.

Sometimes, we do not see the reason various things happen in our lives and we have to walk by faith that “God is in control” in spite of all that may appear to be going wrong. It is a

blessing when we can finally see what the events of the past several years were leading to. Joseph was able to see that it was God who brought him to Egypt for a specific purpose that was tied to the promises that God had made to Abraham more than 200 years before his being reunited with his family.

In Joseph's situation, the outcome had resulted in his being honored and respected by many people in his lifetime. It doesn't always work out that way for everyone whom God calls to do the work of the Kingdom of God.

### Settle in Goshen – 45:9-15

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.' <sup>12</sup> And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. <sup>13</sup> 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.'" <sup>14</sup> Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. <sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him. Genesis 45:9–15 (ESV)

After an initial reassurance that Joseph who was so powerful in Egypt did not hold them responsible for what they did to him, he returned to his main concern of making sure that all was going well for his father Jacob. Jacob had been grieving for the loss of Joseph for two decades and was at that time unsure of what was going to happen to the rest of his sons since they had left to go to Egypt.

Joseph not only wanted to be reunited with his father and to take care of him in his later years, he also wanted Jacob to have confidence that moving from Canaan to Egypt would not be a danger to him and his family. Jacob may have been concerned about what it would mean for him to leave the land of Canaan since God's promise to him when he left to go to Padan-Aram was that God would bring him back to this land and it would be his. There was no mention in the promises that he might need to leave Canaan again and that the promises would not be fulfilled during his lifetime. The mention of the high position that Joseph had in Egypt was likely for the purpose of reassuring his father that all would go well for him and his extended family of about seventy people when they moved to Egypt.

Lest there were any lingering doubts that this really was Joseph, he pointed out to them that they not only saw him with their own eyes, but they had also heard him speak to them in their native Hebrew language.

As we know, everything did go well for Jacob's family for many years. However, after Joseph and all his brothers passed away, a new Pharaoh came to power in Egypt and he did not know about all that Joseph had done to save Egypt nearly ninety years before his time. It is quite easy for people and rulers to forget the values that were important to a nation even in a shorter period of time. Consequently, the descendants of Jacob found themselves in a situation of slavery and the reassurances of Joseph no longer carried any weight. It is unsure how aware these Hebrews were of the promises that God had made to Jacob to give him the land of Canaan.

A lesson for us is that even though we can place our hope in God's promises and we have our confidence in Him, there is no way to know when and how those promises will find their fulfillment. It is therefore important that we walk by faith and not by sight especially when we realize that we don't have it all "figured out."

It was only after all the reassurances had been given that had removed the fear of the brothers for any retribution that might come from Joseph that they could let down their guard and

embrace Joseph. Joseph had singled out Benjamin as the object of the tests that he had given to the other brothers and he had treated him with extra food in the meal they had eaten. In addition to this Joseph had referred to them in terms of “you and my brother Benjamin.” Now as the reuniting entered the phase of physical embraces, Benjamin was the first to receive the embrace of affection from Joseph. This was followed by embracing the others with confirmation of the pardoning love that he had for his half-brothers.

We cannot miss the fact that if reconciliation was to happen that it was Joseph who needed to initiate it. This seems to be the way it is with most situations where abuse or persecution causes a break in relationships. The injured party needs to take the first step. This is exactly what God did for humanity in sending His Son to bring about reconciliation. If we are waiting for the abuser to take the first step, then the rift in the relationship will likely be permanent.

After the hugging and weeping had concluded they had a lot of catching up to do and they talked as would be the expectation following such a reunion.