

The Rock: 07-12-2020

Long-term faithfulness:

The journey of Joseph

First reading: Genesis 45:4-9

Title: The reunion

Scripture: Multiple (Genesis 43,44,45)

Theme:

After all these years, brothers are reunited. The restoration of a family fractured by sin and bad choices launches once again the salvation plan for all peoples.

Introduction:

Just an observation for us all this morning. Fully one third of the book of Genesis is devoted to the life of this Joseph. It seems clear that the events of this man's life were important enough to Moses to capture for us to study.

We were first introduced to him in chapter 37 as a 17-year-old favorite of his Dad, and we are one week away from saying goodbye to him as the man who is second only to Pharaoh in Egypt.

These past few weeks we have wrestled with the painful journey his brothers have had to take through their life defining choice to get rid of their own brother.

Nothing is more painful than a family torn apart. Torn apart not because of an unexpected death, although his dad thought so.

But torn apart because of anger, jealousy and a split-second moment in time which affected a lifetime. Close to 29 years in fact, by the time the brothers are reunited.

During that time there has been a frightening transition to a foreign land, success as an administrator, prison time, an audience with the Pharaoh himself, and ultimately Joseph becomes second in charge in all of Egypt.

A pattern we see throughout the Bible when God's people are sent into exile. Faithful to God and to those whom they serve, his people are persecuted all the way to the top.

Mordechai, from Esther's story. Daniel during the time of the exile in Babylon. His friends as well, Shadrach, Meschech, and Abednego.

All for another time, but wonderful examples of how God uses His people in every situation and circumstance to make His name known among the nations.

The Story:

Picking up where we left these guys last week, we find that God has fulfilled the request of Jacob, their father.

"May God almighty grant you mercy..."

-Genesis 43:14a ESV

They have received mercy, blessing, and restoration as they discover that this man who has been providing for and testing them, is their long-lost brother.

I leave this for you to read through, as there is much here that we won't look at, but will be very beneficial for you.

Joseph, in chapter 43 prepares and serves a feast to his brothers, giving hints once again that he knows much more than he is letting on. Simply be the way he orders their seating at table by their age.

Asking about his father and seeing his brother again for the first time in almost 30 years becomes a bit too much:

"They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed

their heads and prostrated themselves. And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there."

-Genesis 43:28-30 ESV

I wonder quite often if any of you have ever dealt with, or suffered this kind of separation. Either by choice or forced because of another's choice.

I have dealt with these types of things my entire life and wouldn't wish that empty feeling upon anyone. The sadness, as well as the bitterness that grows, if it is not left in the Lord's care becomes unyielding.

Perhaps that is why I love this story so much. The picture of Jesus and His sacrifice for me and for you is seen here in the patient, grace-filled attitude of Joseph.

Having spent a lifetime working on his issues, all in order to help his brothers work out theirs, to me is so beautiful. In all the ugliness of a genuinely messy

human family, God's love and mercy shines.

Their confronting of what they did finally comes out as Joseph once again sets them up:

"Then he 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."

-Genesis 44:1-2 ESV

Why on earth is he doing this? It seems like a cruel game. And it would be if it wasn't so purposeful in God's eyes. This sets up the moment of confession and admission.

I know at times, in fact most times, we get tired of hearing this over and over. Because God is in the business of restoration and reconciliation, that means He will in love, discipline us until we repent before Him. Why? Because the things we do wrong, grieve Him and harm us.

His desire is for us to be whole and to shine brightly into a dark world. That

can only happen if we have the courage to confront ourselves in light of Jesus.

Back to our story. Benjamin is now in danger of being taken away from them, the very thing his dad was afraid of, and Judah promised would not happen.

In the words of the great Paul Harvey, now: "The rest of the story." Because Judah begins to tell Joseph about their conversation with their dad while they were back home in Canaan.

Listen, we told our dad that we weren't allowed to come back down here unless Benjamin was with us. And he wouldn't have any of that! He'd already lost one son, years ago and a second the last time we came here.

"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.'" "

-Genesis 44:27-29 ESV

These boys had allowed their father to believe the lie that he created. That Joseph had been eaten by animals. I wonder, based on verse 20:

"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.'" "

-Genesis 44:20 ESV

if they themselves began to believe the lie. I wonder..

Is that how they coped? You see, after a while, a lie told enough as the truth, becomes the truth. At least in the mind of those telling the story.

Only courage and commitment will peel away the layers of denial can bring a person to the place where they can finally say:

"No, this is what really happened."

That moment when we stop looking to find anyone and everyone to blame and admit that we are our own worst enemy. Frankly, more often than not, we behave in this way because we haven't, in some way, gotten what we want.

The others sons of Jacob weren't the favorite, Joseph was. Petty jealousy in the midst of family disfunction led to this lifetime of pain.

YET- God's sovereignty and His providential care is all over this. Because this is the tipping point for Joseph. Why? Because the brother (Judah) who had hatched the scheme to get rid of him tells him:

"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."

-Genesis 44:32-34 ESV

My life for his. In other words, I am not going to make the same mistake a second time. I would rather give myself over to keep my father from the grief and pain of losing Benjamin.

Joseph cannot take anymore and he clears the room so he can talk to his brothers:

"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."

-Genesis 45:1-3 ESV

Now, I don't know about you, but I can't read this ever without feeling the emotion of the moment. The pain, joy and unsettledness all at the same time.

All the things they felt, I am certain of it. And perhaps it's because of personal circumstances in my life, as I've said, that make moments such as this all too real.

Perhaps you do too. I don't know, but this world of ours is broken and messy. Families are torn apart, or struggling deeply, trying to navigate life and all its ups and downs.

Sometimes we have a great set of tools to use when dealing with hard and complex issues. Sadly, and all too often, we muddle along with very few tools in our kit to handle what comes our way.

That is why grace-filled brothers and sisters in Christ, and the gathering together of His people is so critical for us all.

We are to help each other, encourage one another, and love one another just like Jesus loves us. In all of our brokenness and short-comings, we are His bride.

It's not a coincidence that he likens our relationship with him to a marriage. Because it is, and that is the best example in this world of how it ought to be.

That's also why it is so important to have healthy marriages and families, because it shows the world what our relationship with Jesus looks like.

But that too is for another time. As the elders and I continue to pray about how to disciple this community of believers, marriage and family is an area we wish to focus on.

A healthy church is only as healthy as the families and individuals who are part of that community.

But we are fast running out of time. Joseph, who at this point is around 46 years old, responds to their panic in a way that defies the ways of this world. Karma, remember, will not win the day.

"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."

-Genesis 45:4-5 ESV

46 years old. All those years in "exile", at least 29 years have led to this moment.

He is letting them know that even though they were wrong in what they did, it was actually God who had His sovereign hand on him all along:

"And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God."

-Genesis 45:7-8a ESV

So it was not you, but God..

Now, the understanding of God's sovereignty, and the very real question of, "Why does God allow bad things to happen to 'good' people?", has to be addressed.

It is a very genuine and real question. When you deal with someone who doesn't know Jesus, this is something that is often the reason why people don't believe.

Hey, even those of us who do believe struggle at times with this one. Now, I can't tackle this today in a way that would do justice to it, but to simply say this:

It is a legitimate question, albeit asked for illegitimate reasons. It is usually asked by someone whose mind is already made up.

That God cannot be God, or He doesn't exist because bad things do exist and happen to good people. Only the Biblical world view could ever allow for such a question and statement.

Why? Because anyone who asks or struggles with such a question believes that there is a good. Otherwise evil wouldn't exist.

No other world view or religion confronts evil in this way. So, when we find this story of Joseph, and are confronted with this question, we actually see that bad things happened because humanity made bad choices.

And we only know that because we have a reference point for good, and that is God and his holiness. If we do not see this, then everything thing in the world becomes subjective.

In other words, each of us gets to define what is good and moral. In fact, that is

the very problem with our world. We are trying to define, each one of us, our own good, our own evil.

Having our feet firmly planted in mid-air we have zero reference point for absolute right and wrong, all the while we try to define what that is. It is no wonder we are so confused and tearing ourselves apart. Thus leaving the question unanswered, because outside of Christ, it can't be.

His word tells us that no one is actually good, but that in Him (Christ) we are made righteous. That His goodness and grace is what makes us "good".

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside."

-Romans 3:10b-12 ESV

That is why Ephesians 2, in my mind is such an awesome chapter. Paul reminds us:

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."

-Ephesians 2:4-5 ESV

Paul ties the bow around his entire case for the grace of God toward us in Jesus:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

-Ephesians 2:8-10 ESV

This is exactly what Joseph's brothers are experiencing. Do not stress out or be angry with yourselves because you sent me here.

No, God sent me before you, in order that you will be preserved as the remnant. The gospel right there. Again, God so loves the world that He gave...

Why? Because he is making a people for His own, united in Christ, operating under grace and in love. Treasures in jars of clay...that broken clay pot made righteous because of Jesus.

The reunion, the restoration and reconciliation bathed in grace and mercy. In just the same way, in this world of confusion and anger and strife, God holds out His hand to you, to me, and says:

Come home. Be reconciled, be restored..

To me and to one another. There is nothing you could do that would cause me to take this offer off the table. Simply come home to me..