

Week 9 – A Brother Revealed– Genesis 45:1-28

Scripture Reading: Psalm 105:1-17

Introduction

Anyone who is gifted in the art of storytelling knows that a story has to contain certain elements in order for it to be interesting to an audience

The background of the story needs to be established – otherwise, the audience will be confused

There has to be some compelling motivation that drives the story – otherwise, the audience will be bored

A crisis of some kind has to be established in order to introduce tension that causes the audience care and be invested

And then, at the point of maximum tension or the climax, the tension must be relieved so the story can be resolved

If any of those elements are missing or misplaced the story becomes flat, dull, or even confusing to the audience

Last week we saw how Joseph orchestrated the circumstances that brought his brothers to the point of peak crisis

No longer could they deny their sin against their brother or keep it secret

They finally knew without a doubt that God was aware of what they had done and that they were now going to have to face the consequences of their decades old sin

And as the brothers stood in solidarity with Benjamin, Judah confessed before Joseph that God had discovered the guilt of the ten older brothers and that they and Benjamin would now be slaves to the Egyptian as a result

And when Joseph declared that only Benjamin would be required to remain as a slave while the rest of them would be allowed to return home, Judah made his impassioned speech asking to be allowed to take Benjamin's place

This is the point in the old-time movie serials where the car with the hero trapped inside would be careening over the cliff and the audience was holding their collective breath in anticipation only to have the message: "To be continued..." appear on the screen

And as Chapter 44 came to a close we were left to wonder what Joseph would do next and what the outcome would be

Clearly, Joseph saw that his ten older brothers were changed men

Before, they had been hard, godless, self-absorbed men who cared not at all about the consequences of their actions and how others would be affected by the things they did

But now they recognized their guilt before God concerning Joseph and were willing to accept the consequences for it

Not only that, they were also exhibiting sincere love for their youngest brother and their aged father not wishing that either of them should suffer as we see in the final words of Judah's plea recorded in **Genesis 44:33-34**

"...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."

God's working in their lives had achieved its desired end and the brothers were changed men

And as Chapter 44 ends the tension is thick as the reader is left to wonder, "What will Joseph do now that his brothers have confessed their sin and shown that they've changed?"

Thankfully, the answer comes quickly and the tension is resolved as we pick up the account in Chapter 45

The eleven brothers who were standing before this Egyptian official waiting to see what his response would be never in their wildest imaginations saw what was coming

On their first visit he had treated them very harshly, had accused them of being spies, and in spite of their protests and assurances to the contrary, he had imprisoned them for three days and then kept Simeon in bondage awaiting their return with Benjamin

On this second visit, he had treated them warmly and honored them beyond their wildest dreams and sent them on their way with an abundance of food

Now they had been dragged back before him, stripped of self-confidence, without any plausible explanation or defense for his cup having been found in the possession of the youngest brother, and pleading for his consideration

As we open our Bibles to Genesis 45 we will see in the opening verses that the official's response was not at all what the brothers expected

Follow along as I read verses 1-2 (**Genesis 45:1-2**)

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.

All at once, as soon as Judah had concluded his impassioned speech, the Egyptian suddenly ordered all of his attendants to leave the room

And they had no sooner cleared the room than he began to cry so loudly that those same attendants heard him Joseph had spent the last 22 years in Egypt and he had become very Egyptian in his mannerisms

And if there's one word that would describe the ancient Egyptians it would be "inscrutable"

The ancient Egyptians were masters at hiding their thoughts and feelings

The enigmatic images of Ramses II (**Ramses.jpg**) or the Sphinx (**Sphinx.jpg**) reveal little if anything at all concerning what might have been going on behind those mysterious faces

And, unlike the Hebrews, Egyptians were reluctant to show their feelings and emotions openly

So when the attendants heard the outburst of wailing coming from their prime minister they were greatly disturbed and news of it soon reached even the household of Pharaoh

There was no way the brothers could have anticipated this response!

Neither were they prepared in any way for the **unexpected revelation** that came next

I. Unexpected Revelation

As we see Joseph finally revealing his identity to his brothers in verse 3 (**Genesis 45:3**)

"I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

Imagine how that announcement must have hit the brothers!

I have received shocking, unexpected news in the past and perhaps you have too

If you have then you know that all kinds of thoughts run through your mind seemingly all at once

First, you try to process what you just heard then you try to reconcile it to what you thought you knew

And, if the news is serious enough, it can lead to a kind of psychic destabilization that causes you to disbelieve what you just heard

For the past 22 years the brothers had lived with the guilt of selling Joseph into slavery and they never really expected to see him again – and most definitely they never expected to see him ruling all Egypt

But there must have been something about him that made them recognize him and realize that what he said was true

Our passage says Joseph "*made himself known*" to his brothers

Perhaps he did so by some other means beyond the bald statement, "*I am Joseph*" like sharing a fact that only Joseph could have known

Of course, we would have to assume that he spoke to them in their native Hebrew language for the first time since there would have been no interpreter present maybe that convinced them

But, the point is that the brothers knew for certain that the man who they stood before truly was their brother

And they were terrified to the point of being unable to speak

Our text says they were “dismayed” at his presence

And to be dismayed means to be disabled with alarm or apprehension; to be rendered lifeless or subdued

Their heads and hearts had to be swirling with a mixture of wonder and terror

Based on his position alone they knew him to be an authoritative man who wielded the power of life and liberty over others –after all, they had already been imprisoned and set free according to his command alone

So from their experience they knew that he could be a harsh and unyielding man

And now they were suddenly confronted with the undeniable fact that this same man was the brother who they had so grievously wronged – who could say what this sort of man might do when motivated by revenge

If their guilt was strong before it had to have become overpowering in that instant and the recognition of their reality had to have resulted in a tidal wave of apprehension as to what he might do to them

It’s not hard to imagine their mouths falling open with an audible gasp as they instinctively recoiled away from him and what he might do to them

But rather than becoming Joseph’s defenseless victims, they very quickly found themselves to be the recipients of his **underserved mercy**

II. Underserved Mercy

Joseph had already sought to temper the blow of the revelation of his identity by asking whether his father was still alive

Since he had already inquired about Jacob’s status the question seems out of place and unnecessary

Unless, of course, we understand that it may have been intended to redirect the brothers’ thinking in order to lessen the shock of his unexpected announcement – to get them talking about something else

And looking at verse 4 (**Genesis 45:4**) we see Joseph’s entire attitude becomes one of sincere kindness and approachability as he entreats his brothers to come close to him

When I read those words I don’t hear them being uttered in a commanding tone but in the soft, soothing tone of someone who is trying to coax the reluctant and fearful into coming nearer

Speaking to them kindly was the first act of mercy on Joseph’s part

Perhaps despite themselves the brothers found themselves coming nearer because disobedience didn’t even cross their minds at that point even though they were still filled with trepidation

And Joseph let them off the hook as he related the details of their sin against him in the last half of verse 4 so they didn’t have to

That was his second act of mercy – he didn’t grill them or force them to confess – he simply and softly stated the facts of what they had done without resorting to belittlement or blame

Now any lingering doubts had to have been erased and they had to know with absolute certainty that he was indeed Joseph because Joseph was the only other person on earth who knew what they had done

Then, knowing the thoughts that were about to overwhelm his brothers, Joseph hurried on to tell them to go easy on themselves

Look with me at verse 5 (**Genesis 45:5a**) where Joseph says, “*And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here...*”

The ringleaders among the brothers who had conspired to sell Joseph to the Midianites could well have become so overwhelmed with sorrow over their guilt that their lives might well have become burdened with self-loathing

While those who were relatively innocent, like Reuben and of course Benjamin, could have become angry with those, like Judah, who had perpetrated the crime

Joseph understood that the situation could easily and quickly devolve into a circular firing squad that would tear the family apart just as it was being put back together

Any grief or anger that Joseph had felt had long ago been put to rest and he wanted his brothers to move beyond it too so he not only showed them mercy but counseled them to show mercy both within and amongst themselves

I'm reminded of a story of undeserved mercy that was extended recently in Texas when a young, 18-year old man expressed his forgiveness to his brother's killer in open court

Brandt Jean told former police officer, Amber Guyger, "I hope you go to God with all the guilt. If you are truly sorry, I know I can speak for myself – I forgive you. And I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you."

He went on to say that he wanted only the best for her and he hoped she would give her life to Christ and asked the judge if he could give Ms. Guyger a hug

The judge permitted the hug and even wound up coming down from the bench herself to hug the defendant, pray for her, and give her a Bible

In a world that tends to live by the motto "I don't get mad I get even" it was a refreshing display of undeserved mercy

And it appears obvious that Brandt Jean forgave because he knew that he had been forgiven

Joseph was able to extend mercy to his brothers because he engaged in **unselfish reasoning** as we are going to see next

III. Unselfish Reasoning

As we've looked at the life of Joseph one thing we've noticed repeatedly is how Joseph kept his eyes on God at all times and to relate everything that happened to him to God

And that's still the case as he explains that it wasn't really they who had sent him to Egypt but God

Look with me again at what Joseph says in verse 5 (**Genesis 45:5**) – "*And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, **for God sent me before you to preserve life.***"

Because Joseph kept his eyes on God and continued to commune with God he was able to recognize God's working and purpose in his life and he ascribes all that has happened to him to be the result God's overruling sovereignty

Joseph now tries to get his brothers to also see things from God's perspective and to recognize the providential nature of his being sent to Egypt for a purpose

And that purpose was the preservation of life

Follow along as I read verses 6-8 (**Genesis 45:6-8**) –

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. 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.

Joseph had the ability to look past the secondary causes to God who is the first cause of all that happens as was, therefore, able to have a stabilizing perspective on life

And that's also why he was able to forgive his brothers and extend mercy to them and seek to reassure them

We need to understand that Joseph didn't discount or ignore the evil that was done to him by his brothers

He was acutely aware of their evil intent and their need to repent of it

But he was also able to see clearly that God is in charge and uses even the evil intentions and actions of men to accomplish his purposes

Notice how many times in verses 5-9 Joseph mentions God:

God sent me before you to preserve life

God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant

So it was not you who sent me here, but *God*

He [*God*] has made me a father to Pharaoh

God has made me lord of all Egypt

Joseph was not being an egomaniac here

Rather, he clearly saw that his exalted position had been arranged by God for the benefit of his people

Think of all that Joseph had been through since that fateful day when his father sent him to check on his brothers' welfare

Then recognize how wonderful it is that Joseph was able to see that all of the mistreatments, injustices, hardships, and exaltations had been for a purpose – for God's purpose

And to recognize that God had used all of those things to preserve Jacob's family and to provide the conditions that would allow it to grow into a nation free from corrupting pagan influence

That's the kind of perspective that every believer should have

The reason bad things happen to "good" people is because God decrees it for his purposes

And we should always be seeking to discover, understand, and accept God's activity in our lives even when it is less than desirable, downright bad, or an act of evil from the hands of men

We need to attempt to see those things as part of God's providence; see his hand in it; and try to see the good that he is accomplishing through them

Joseph's God-focused perspective allowed him to reason unselfishly and see that his suffering was being used by God for the good of others and that allowed him to not only forgive his brothers but to shower them and the rest of his family with **unrestrained grace**

IV. Unrestrained Grace

Look with me at verses 9-15 (**Genesis 45:9-15**) –

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.

First we see that Joseph promised to graciously provide for his entire family, including his brothers and their families. He says, "Hurry and go get dad and tell him to come down to Egypt where the famine can't win over you and I will provide all that you need"

And we see a bit further along that Pharaoh gets into the act and ratifies what Joseph has promised as he commands that carts be provided to carry goods to Canaan and to carry Joseph's entire family back to Egypt

Then Pharaoh promises to settle Joseph's family in the best part of Egypt where they will eat from the fat of the land. Joseph had already shown mercy to his brothers in not seeking revenge against them and now he abundantly blesses them

See, mercy is when we don't receive the punishment we deserve and grace is when we receive blessings we don't deserve

And Joseph certainly demonstrated grace by blessing his brothers materially far beyond what they deserved

But perhaps the greater blessing he bestowed upon them was of a more personal nature

To this point he hadn't lashed out at them in anger or retaliation but notice how he goes even further and embraces each of them in love and forgiveness

Our text says he first fell upon his the neck of his full brother, Benjamin as they wept together in the joy of reunion

And then we are told that he did the same with each of his older brothers in turn

Joseph didn't exclude those who had particularly cruel to him but welcomed them all into his embrace equally and fully

And then they all sat down and had a nice, long, brotherly talk

They had a lot of catching up to do – they had to get to know one another again

And Joseph wisely recognized that his brothers would need to be assured and reassured again of his genuine favor toward them – they had to know that his forgiveness and his love for them was real and permanent

We aren't told the details of that conversation and I think that is perfectly fitting

What those brothers had to say to one another was family business and we have no more right to know what it was than the Egyptian attendants who had been sent out of the room

As the chapter continues we see that what Pharaoh commanded was carried out and the brothers were sent on their way with the wagons, donkey, clothing, silver, and all manner of goods from Egypt

But I want you to notice what Joseph tells his brothers in verse 24 (**Genesis 45:24**) as he sends them on their way he says, *"Do not quarrel on the way"*

The brothers had one more rather huge hurdle in front of them – they had to reveal to Jacob what they had done

And Joseph knew that once his brothers were beyond his influence they would likely begin to think about that and who had played what role in their mistreatment of Joseph and the lie they let their father believe

Reuben might well have pointed out that he was the one who protected Joseph because they wanted to kill him and he said just throw him into the pit because he intended to come back later and rescue him

Judah might have chimed in as to how he was the one who suggested that since he was their brother they shouldn't just leave him in the pit to die

And Benjamin could have protested that he didn't have any part in it at all causing them to accuse him of being just like Joseph in thinking he was so much better than they were...

There's nothing to suggest that anything close to that happened but perhaps that's because Joseph wisely headed it off

And when they finally arrived back home to Canaan and told their father that Joseph was not only alive but was in fact the ruler over all Egypt, he didn't believe them

I have to believe the brothers understood his unbelief because not so long ago they had gone through the same thing

But after they shared with him what Joseph had said and showed him the wagons he had sent, Jacob finally believed

And we see Israel make another appearance as the promise of provision and protection faded into the background as the promise of seeing his favorite son filled his thoughts

We talked earlier about Jacob personifying the cartoon character, Eeyore, **[picture]** who was always a gloomy pessimist

But with the realization that his son is alive he has gone from Jacob who complained, "All this has come against me" to Israel who exclaimed, "It is enough"

Conclusion

It probably hasn't escaped your notice that each of our four main points from this chapter in Joseph's life parallel what Jesus has done for every believer

Jesus knew us before we knew him but he was faithful at the right time to reveal himself to us

Jesus loved us even though we did not love him and in spite of the fact that we acted as enemies against him

And because of the deep love he has for us he acted unselfishly and condescended to be born of a virgin and died for us

He made us aware of our sin and our guilty state and then called us to come close to him so that he might shower us with mercy and grace

And the overall theme of the chapter is how God in his sovereignty controls everything that happens to his children and uses even the most evil intentions and actions to prosper them and achieve his ends

We have seen how God over-ruled the hatred, jealousy, and envy of wicked men to place Joseph on the throne of Egypt in preparation for bringing the whole family of Israel to dwell there in relative safety

And I believe God caused this account to be recorded and preserved so that when we are tempted to despair we might remember Joseph and fix our eyes on our all-powerful God and ask him to reveal just what it is that he is doing in the midst of our suffering

But in all cases, whether God ever reveals his plans to us, we can be assured that we are in his hand and nothing happens that is outside of God's control and trust in his providence

And that realization should help us in several different ways:

First, we should always try to discern what God is doing in our lives by allowing the difficulty and seek to grow by it

Because we know that God wants us to become better and not bitter through the trials we face

Second, we should possess the peace that transcends all understanding that comes from the confident knowledge that we are in God's care and nothing can happen to us that he does not permit and go through beside us

That should be our go-to position – not anger or despair or worry

Third, should be able to endure the actions of other people without blame or recrimination

When we are able to view even the injustices from the hands of other people as fulfilling God's plans we are better able to forgive those offenses and see the good in them

I'm sure Joseph didn't enjoy all of the things that happened during his years in Egypt

I'm sure the betrayal of his brothers, the false accusations of Potiphar's wife, being imprisoned and forgotten were just as unpleasant for Joseph as we know they would be for us

But through it all, Joseph kept his eyes on the Lord and was not only able to endure but to see the good, accept what God was doing, and even thrive

May the same be said about us

Next week we will be looking at Chapter 46 when Jacob and the rest make their way to Egypt

Let's pray