



<sup>3</sup> Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. <sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! <sup>5</sup> And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. <sup>6</sup> For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. <sup>7</sup> But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup> “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. <sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

He came from a family that was messed up, a family that was broken. 12 boys with the same father, Jacob, but 4 different mothers—Rachel and Leah, the daughters of Laban and their handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah. Jacob had not hidden his favoritism for his wife Rachel or for sons 11 and 12 that were born to her, Joseph and Benjamin. Not exactly one big, happy family.

Jacob showed his favoritism of Joseph by giving him a richly ornamented robe and by using him as an informer on his older brothers. By that he wasn’t really doing Joseph any favors. His brothers hated him for that and for the dreams he shared with them, dreams in which they bowed down to him.

When they saw this Dreamer coming to check on them, they decided to kill him, then, instead, to let him die in an empty cistern, and finally to take the opportunity to sell him to some passing slave traders. They returned home to their father with Joseph’s robe, torn and covered with blood and the story that some wild animal must have killed him. Their father’s ongoing grief would be a constant reminder to them of their secret, shared guilt.

We have come to the part of the story of Joseph’s dreams come true. A dream come true! Yet for the brothers it opens as a nightmare. Oh, oh, there’s the dreamer!

Consider what would have happened if, as they were waiting in line to buy grain, one of the brothers had recognized Joseph from a distance. The brother they sold into slavery before them in a position of great power. Imagine the whispered conversation. “No, it can’t be!” “But what if it is?” What would you have done? I certainly wouldn’t have prayed for the line to move more quickly. I can imagine dropping out of line and looking for another way to purchase the grain I needed.

They had broken something. Humanly speaking, this was beyond fixing. Humanly speaking, if they had snuck away, there would be no 12 tribes of Israel. And they would have missed something incredibly important:

### The Power of Forgiveness

This broken family could not have been fixed with the power Joseph had as second of command in all of Egypt, the power conferred on him by the pharaoh. Broken relationships can only be healed by the power of forgiveness, a power supplied to Joseph by the LORD, the God of the covenant, the God of faithful love.

**Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.** Maybe you can think of a time you ran into someone unexpectedly, someone you had treated shamefully years ago. That was the last time you saw them, the end of a friendship. It hits you in the middle of the chest; you look down at the memory. Joseph waits for an answer, but they are unable to speak.

**Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!”** “You sold me into slavery.” A scary reminder they didn’t need. The

slightest pause before his next words would seem like an eternity. Certainly these words come unexpected, out of nowhere. They are powerful.

**<sup>5</sup> And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.** These words have the power of forgiveness. They proclaim forgiveness. [We'll come back to that.]

Where did Joseph get such power? Can you imagine telling one of your siblings, "Don't be angry with yourselves for what you did to me?"

### **The Power of Forgiveness comes from the Gospel of forgiveness.**

The Gospel of forgiveness brings the gift of a new perspective. This new perspective drinks in the joy of knowing God's saving purpose, the promise of a great deliverance. **<sup>6</sup> For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. <sup>7</sup> But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.**

Joseph had the advantage of knowing how his years of slavery and prison would work out for good. When we deal with pain caused by family, we have the advantage of knowing the greater deliverance the LORD brought about through the descendants of Jacob. Ironically, that greater deliverance would come through the line of Judah. Judah, you see, was the one who saw the slave-traders and said, "Let's sell him." The Father would not spare his beloved Son, the lion of the tribe of Judah. He will not be stingy when it comes to our needs.

When Joseph forgave his brothers, he had no control over the outcome, over their response. His words and actions declared forgiveness without actually using the word. They show us something important about forgiveness. Here is Joseph's proclamation: "I know what you have done, but I will not let this stand between us."

And he wept for joy. **<sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.** Such is the power of forgiveness. Joseph forgave as God forgives. That is something you pray for every time you speak the Lord's Prayer. But now let's jump to the last chapter of Genesis, to what the brothers did when their father died. They sent word to Joseph saying their father's dying wish was that Joseph forgive his brothers. They came before Joseph and threw themselves down, offering themselves as slaves.

Do you remember what Joseph did at the realization that they did not trust his forgiveness? Did he take back his forgiveness? Did he wait to see if they would trust him again? No, he wept. He had not changed his mind. He spoke to reassure them: **<sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup> So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.**

The power of God's forgiveness is tied to the certainty of it. Now here's a memory from when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I thought, as all too many people still do and, in fact, as they are taught to believe, that God forgives when he sees that we are truly sorry and when he sees that we really trust his forgiveness. How, then, could I forgive my brother without knowing he really was sorry and that he would trust my forgiveness? That approach would fit with a forgiveness that only exists if we believe it exists.

That's not to say that believing doesn't matter, but to make it clear why unbelief matters. The brothers' doubts didn't change what Joseph had done. Their doubts robbed them of joy Joseph wanted them to have.

When Jesus took the guilt of the world to the cross and paid for it, he had no control over our response. But he sent out a powerful message: "I know what you have done, but I will not let this stand between us." That's the power of forgiveness. Take it home with you!