

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS Sunday School- January 22, 2012

Unifying Topic: JOSEPH TRANSMITS ABRAHAM'S PROMISE

Lesson Text

I. The Way Of Forgiveness (Genesis 50:15-21)

II. The Death Of Joseph (Genesis 50:22-26)

The Main Thought: But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. (Genesis 50:20, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Even though some people commit acts of faithlessness, they may be overcome by acts of others' faithfulness. Who can forgive acts of faithlessness? Because Jacob and Joseph were both faithful to God, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers' treachery from so many years before.

Lesson Aim: To examine the acts of faithlessness and faithfulness in the story of Joseph and his treacherous brothers after their father's death.

Life aim: To understand that acts of faithlessness do not have to be the final outcome, and that one can find hope in taking corrective action.

- 50:15 And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.
- 50:16 And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,
- 50:17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.
- 50:18 And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants.
- 50:19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?
- 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.
- 50:21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.
- 50:22 And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years.
- 50:23 And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees.
- 50:24 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.
- 50:25 And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.
- 50:26 So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

HISTORY:

Mourning for and burial of Jacob in Canaan (50:1-14)

The book of Genesis concludes with (1) the burial of Jacob in verses 1-14; (2) Joseph's brothers then seek pardon in verses 15-21; and (3) we see Joseph's death in verses 22-26. ¹Jacob knew that he was sick and dying. He asked Joseph to bury him not in Egypt but in the burial place of his fathers, in the cave of Machpelah (49:50). Before he passed away, he gave an extra portion of his inheritance to Joseph, a custom usually reserved for the first born. Jacob then blessed Joseph's sons and all of his own sons, saving the longest blessing for Joseph.

Jacob's burial wishes were honored. This is one of the most detailed accounts of burial in Scripture. Note how carefully Joseph saw that his father's burial instructions were carried out.

1. The moment Jacob died, Joseph leaned over to his father's face and wept over him and kissed him (V1). The picture is that of embracing his father and being face to face with him. Jacob wept and kissed him. This shows the great love and tenderness of Joseph for his father; and it has stood in the forefront of the narrative especially since Jacob's coming to Egypt.
 - a. Joseph had his own physicians embalm his father (V2). The embalming took forty full days (V3). The physicians seem to have been particularly adapted to such a task as embalming the dead, perhaps even more so than the professional embalmers.
 - b. Joseph also followed the Egyptian custom of mourning for the dead for seventy days (v3b) including, of course, the forty days during which the embalming took place.
2. Joseph saw that his father was buried according to custom.
 - a. Joseph then proclaimed his father's faith (V4-13). Joseph asks the "household" to present his request

¹ <http://www.answers.com/topic/joseph>

to Pharaoh; he had some officials seek Pharaoh's permission to bury him in Canaan (V4-5). Why did Joseph not make the request himself? Did Egyptian custom consider relatives of the dead to be ceremonially unclean for a number of days? Or was there danger of Pharaoh fearing that Joseph might not return if he made a trip to Canaan? Remember, the famine had been over for years. The household of Israel had, no doubt, become valuable to Pharaoh in looking after his livestock and personal holdings. Perhaps, all of the above, and by having other officials present the request would assure Pharaoh that Joseph was not secretly plotting to leave Egypt to return permanently to Canaan. So important a man as Joseph, ranking second only to the reigning Pharaoh, had to guard himself lest he create the impression that he no longer needed to consult his king. Joseph knew his place in this respect. However, we learned that Joseph had told Pharaoh that he would return to Egypt (V5).

- b. Joseph secured the royal permission from Pharaoh. He and his family could travel to Canaan to bury their father (V6).
- c. Joseph unashamedly organized a large funeral procession to demonstrate his father's faith (V7-9).
 - i. All the officials of Pharaoh's court went (V7).
 - ii. All the household of Joseph and his brothers, all except the children and the workmen (V8).
 - iii. Some chariots and horsemen, referring to the military guard of Pharaoh's court (V9).
- d. Joseph completed his father's faith; he buried him in the promised land of Canaan (V10). They came to a standstill at "*Goren Atad*." Now *góren* is a "*threshing floor*," and '*atadh* signifies "*bramble or buckthorn*." For the threshing floors were level spaces preferably on hilltops and situated outside of villages, and naturally were not roofed over. "*They mourned with great and very sore lamentation*" for seven days after reaching the burial site in the Promised Land.
- e. Joseph demonstrated the greatness of his father's faith publicly: the grieving was so intense and so unusually displayed on the part of an assembly largely Egyptians that the Canaanites symbolized it as a "heavy mourning." (V11). They began to call the valley or meadow Abel Mizraim—the meadow of the Egyptians which is beyond Jordan.
- f. Joseph led the family in acknowledging and fulfilling their father's faith (V12-13). Joseph and his brothers—Jacob's sons—now took over the funeral procession. They buried their father just as he had requested: (in Canaan, in the cave of Machpelah), the very cave that Abraham had bought (V10). Remember, Abraham had bought the burial site as a testimony to his faith in the great promises of God. Now Jacob was buried with Abraham (that great father of faith himself).

If we love our parents, we will carry out their burial wishes. Joseph is a dynamic example for us. Joseph was a man of his word, he, his brothers and all that went up with him to bury his father returned to Egypt.

LESSON:

Genesis 50:15-21 The Way Of Forgiveness

50:15 And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. The Hebrew says "*they saw*" that their father was dead. This meant they "*realized*" it and began to see that the restraining influence that the father may have exercised upon Joseph was now at an end. NIV translation says, "*what if*." The brothers had witnessed that Joseph had confronted them and truly forgiven them. You know what happens when we start to second guess. But now, since their father had died, the brothers began to fear that Joseph might seek vengeance against them. As long as their father was alive, he was somewhat of a covering for them; a protection; a restraining force. But now there was nothing standing between Joseph and the brothers, nothing to keep him from taking vengeance against them—except God and a true spirit of forgiveness. True, Joseph had said that he had forgiven them, but the evil against Joseph had been a terrible one. Nagging questions began to arise in the thoughts of the brothers:

- Had Joseph really forgiven them?
- How could a person forgive so terrible a wrong? Joseph was only human after all.
- How deeply was Joseph committed to God? Enough to forgive the worst evil imaginable?
- Was Joseph really committed to the family of Israel? Committed to the promised seed and people of God? Was he committed enough so that he would not harm them but help them survive and return to the Promised Land?

All kinds of questions began to flood the minds of the brothers, and eventually a spirit of fear and apprehension gripped their souls. They began to fear that Joseph might seek vengeance against them.

50:16 And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, Eventually the fear and pressure got the best of them, and when they could bear it no longer, they acted. The brothers

sent a messenger to Joseph, and they claimed that the instructions were from their father before he died. The messenger was most likely Benjamin or Judah.

50:17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. The message was:

- Their father wanted the sons to confess their sin to Joseph and to ask for forgiveness.
- The brothers asked Joseph to forgive them.

When Joseph got the message, he broke down and wept. What was it that touched Joseph's heart?

- The brothers were showing a true repentance; they were truly converted. They had no trouble whatsoever in asking forgiveness. Joseph could rest assured that his brothers were genuinely following God, and they wanted the family to be truly reconciled.
- The brothers called themselves the servants of the God of your (Joseph's) father. They were declaring their testimony, their commitment to God. By this declaration Joseph knew that his brothers were committed to the call of God. He knew that his brothers would follow God and His great promises. And he knew that God could use them to fulfill His great purposes for the world.
- Joseph was touched and broken because he saw that his own life had been used by God to the fullest. His life had not been lived in vain. God had used him to save his family, the family of believers whom God had chosen to bear the promised seed, the Savior of the world, and to inherit the Promised Land.

Joseph was now approachable to them.

50:18 And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants.

But note what happened after the message had been sent to Joseph. The brothers themselves went to Joseph, offering themselves as his servants. This too demonstrated a true repentance and commitment to following God. In fact, it demonstrated a spirit of restitution. They had sold Joseph as a slave; now they offered themselves to be his slaves.

50:19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: Of course, this is difficult to accept, especially if we are the guilty party upon whom vengeance can fall. This was the problem the brothers were having. But Joseph wanted to assure them: he had forgiven them. How does God assure His children that He has indeed forgiven them and forgotten their sins? The same way Joseph assured his frightened brothers. He speaks to us from His Word. He could do nothing less, for he was following God to the end. Twice Joseph will say, "*Fear not (Don't be afraid)*" (vv19, 21). He comforted them and spoke kindly to them. ...**for am I in the place of God?** These words may be understood either as a question, or it could be an affirmative statement. Note two things:

1. Joseph declared that it was God's place to judge, not his. He was, therefore, leaving the judgment up to God.
2. Joseph may be also saying God has furnished him with means, and made him a distributor of His bounty, "*...for God did send me before you to preserve life!*" (45:5). He's saying God owns everything, Am I not under God, subject to Him, a servant of His? Joseph, being under God not only nourished them, but also their little ones (50:21).

50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Joseph's response continued. He declared that God had ruled their evil and worked it out for good. This was the same declaration Joseph had made to his brothers seventeen years earlier. He had seen God's hand taking all the terrible circumstances of his life and working them out for good. God had used all these terrible trials to strengthen him and to teach him to endure through the hardships. Thus, God was able to exalt Joseph to be the ruler of Egypt so that he could save the world of his day from utter catastrophe, but especially his people, Israel, the believers of the earth—to save them from total economic collapse and starvation due to the seven-year famine that had struck the known of that day.

50:21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. Joseph's response continued with fear not. He declared that he must repay evil with good. He was going to provide for them and their families. Note how he did all he could to reassure his brothers. He spoke only kind and comforting words to them. What a dynamic example of forgiving others! If Joseph could forgive his brothers, we can forgive any person for anything. No matter how terrible the wrong or evil done against us, we can forgive the person. In fact, we must. God demands that we forgive them!

Genesis 50:22-26 The Death Of Joseph

50:22 And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years.

Note two things about Joseph.

1. Joseph stayed faithful to God.

Having honoured his father, his days were long in the land. He lived to be 110 years old. ²This was considerably younger than the age at which Abraham (*a hundred and seventy five years*), Isaac (*a hundred and eighty years*), and Jacob (*a hundred and forty seven years*) had died. Man's longevity was still declining after the Flood.

1. God had raised Joseph up for two primary purposes.
 - a. That of saving the world from total economic collapse and starvation during the seven-year famine.
 - b. That of bringing Israel down to Egypt in order to save them.

Egypt had been his home since he was 17 years old, 93 years ago. He had the nice executive position there for 80 years. His family had been under his care for just over 70 years. Scripture takes over twelve full chapters to cover how God prepared and used Joseph to save the world and Israel.

- He was 17 when he was sold into Egypt
- He was 30 when he was made overseer
- He was 39 when his brothers first came to Egypt (second year of the famine, or nine years after being made overseer)
- He was probably 41 or so when the brothers came a second time and Jacob comes to Egypt.

This was a period of thirty-nine years, beginning when Joseph was seventeen years old and ending when he was fifty-six (Gen.37:1-50:21). Now the next fifty-four years of Joseph's life are covered in only five verses. The point is this: God had completed His primary purpose for Joseph by the time Joseph was fifty-six years old. He kept his brothers together and all of Israel. We know because Israel never left Egypt, not until four hundred years later. And he lived a godly and righteous life before the world of his day. Joseph did this!

50:23 And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees.

2. And lived a fruitful life:

He lived to see the third generation of his family. This probably means that he lived to see his great-grandchildren. *The point is this:* Joseph was witnessing the growth of Israel. As children were born into the families of Joseph and his brothers, they were no doubt bearing witness and leading them to follow God and His great promises. We must witness to our children and grandchildren; do all we can to lead them to follow Christ and His great promises. Joseph was following God to the very end of his life, following God faithfully. The result was a wonderful blessing from God: God was giving fruit to Joseph's grandchildren who were to become the future believers and followers of God upon earth.

He became a grandfather and then a great-grandfather. Joseph adopted Manasseh's grandchildren just as Jacob had adopted Joseph's children. How this affected their future isn't explained.

50:24 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Joseph hung on to the great promises of God. When Joseph was 110 years old, he faced death. Obviously, his brothers had been called to his bedside. How many of them were still living is unknown. Three significant events happened.

1. Joseph declared great deliverance of Israel from Egypt.
 - a. Joseph declared that God was going to visit Israel; that is, He was going to look after them and take care of them. His promises are yea and amen. He was going to see that Israel survived no matter what trials and affections might come their way.

In saying this, was Joseph thinking of the prophecy that God had given to Abraham years earlier: the prediction that Israel would suffer affliction at the hands of some nation for four hundred years?

- b. Joseph declared that God was going to deliver Israel out of Egypt and take them back to the Promised Land. They must not hope to settle there, nor look upon it as their rest for ever; they must set their hearts upon the land of promise, and call that their home. They must not fear sinking, and being ruined there.
 - i. Joseph believed in the *promised seed*, that God was going to bless Israel by making them into a great nation of people and by sending through them the very seed, the Savior of the world.

² <http://jaymack.net/genesis-commentary/Lu-The-Death-of-Joseph.asp>

- ii. Joseph believed in the *Promised Land*, that God was going to give Israel the land of Canaan as their own inheritance upon earth.

As he was dying, Joseph wanted his brothers and all their households to know that the promises of God were true. God was going to help them and keep them through all their trials and afflictions, and then eventually he was going to take them back to the Promised Land.

50:25 And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.

2. Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel and he makes them promise him... He tells them again: "*God will surely visit you.*" he does not let them forget, however letting them know in this oath that they are to bury him in Canaan. It was very significant, so significant that Joseph demanded it not just from his brothers but to all of Israel. He made them swear that they would carry his bones back to the Promised Land when they returned. This was one of the greatest declarations of faith in the promises of God ever made by a person. Remember: it was to be four hundred years before Joseph's bones could be buried in Canaan. But no matter how long it was to be, Joseph wanted to declare his faith in the most significant way he could: this he did by having the children of Israel swear. This was a significant fact mentioned about Joseph in the New Testament (Heb.11:22).

50:26 So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

3. Joseph's body was embalmed and put into a coffin. At 110 years old, Joseph died. He was not placed in some state tomb or pyramid reserved for the great officials of Egypt. He could have been, for he had been the second highest official in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. But Joseph's desire was to follow God to the end, the very end. He wanted his bones to declare his faith in the great promises of God. Joseph's body was not buried. It was simply embalmed and kept above ground in a coffin. His body—his coffin—was kept by various believers, probably within the families of his own descendents, for over four hundred years. And note, the testimony of his faith in the great promises of God is still being remembered today.
 - a. Israel did inherit the Promised Land and did carry the bones of Joseph back with them, burying them in Shechem. But remember, the Promised Land had a double reference. It referred to Canaan, but it also referred to the Promised Land of heaven.
 - b. Israel did give birth to the very special seed, the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ who was to come. Jesus Christ is the promised seed, the great Deliver and Savior promised to Adam and to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—promised throughout the entire book of Genesis to all believers throughout all generations.

SUMMARY:

³Upon Jacob's death, the brothers feared that Joseph would finally take his revenge on them. They tried to convince Joseph that, before he died, Jacob had told them to tell Joseph that he wanted him to forgive them. They even offered to be his slaves. But the ruse and the offer were both unnecessary. Joseph told them that God had always intended that he go to Egypt, to save many people. Therefore, he intended to take care of his brothers, their children, and his father's household.

Joseph reportedly lived to be one-hundred-and-ten years old. He resided in Egypt with his brothers and their families until he died. He had many grandchildren and great-grandchildren from his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Before Joseph died, he told his brothers that God would raise them up from Egypt - meaning the Jewish people - and take them to the "*Promised Land.*" When Joseph died, his body was embalmed according the Egyptian custom but then placed in a coffin in Egypt. According to accounts, when the Jews finally left Egypt, about four hundred years later, Moses carried out Joseph's bones. Eventually, Joseph was buried in Shechem, on a piece of land that Jacob had once owned.

His power of forgiveness was shown to the nation of Israel as well as to Egypt.

APPLICATION:

There is no holding you back when you can forgive. If that's a good trait to have, we can't be emotional yoyos.

³ <http://www.answers.com/topic/joseph>