

## The Joseph Story | Broken Family/Beautiful Plan

### I Am Joseph!

Genesis 44 & 45 (44.18-45.15)

October 20, 2013

*Then Judah approached him, and said, "Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh...<sup>25</sup> Our father said, 'Go back, buy us a little food.'<sup>26</sup> "But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us, we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'<sup>27</sup> "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons;<sup>28</sup> and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn in pieces," and I have not seen him since.<sup>29</sup> 'If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.'<sup>30</sup> "Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life,<sup>31</sup> when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow.<sup>32</sup> "For, I, your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.'<sup>33</sup> "Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers.<sup>34</sup> "For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me -- for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?"*

*Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.<sup>2</sup> He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it.<sup>3</sup> Then 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.<sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.<sup>5</sup> "Now do not be grieved 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 still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.<sup>7</sup> "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.<sup>8</sup> "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.*

*<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 delay.<sup>10</sup> "You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have.<sup>11</sup> "There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished."<sup>12</sup> "Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you.<sup>13</sup> "Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here."<sup>14</sup> Then he fell on his brother*

*Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. <sup>15</sup> He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.*

We've been looking at the story of a broken family...the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Patriarchs of the Old Testament Church, *the People of the Covenant*. This year we've looked at the especially damaged family *of Jacob and his hooligan sons*. The family began with multiple marriages, four wives and twelve sons...terrible in-law relationships...really got off on the wrong foot!

One wife was the TRUE LOVE of Jacob (in some sense, he seems to consider her his ONLY wife 44.27) and this wife, Rachel, bore two sons. Joseph was the first and he was Jacob's favorite son (and that favoritism really contributed to the strife in this family). And then Rachel bore another son and SHE died in childbirth...AS she died *she named this second son "Ben-yani" (son of sorrow)* but Jacob then changed the name to "Ben-yamin" (Benjamin, son of my right hand). The favored son, Joseph, was envied by his brothers ...and later they despised him because of the dreams he related to them: his whole family was bowing to him in his great splendor. And finally the brothers kidnapped him and sold him for a bag of silver into slavery in Egypt.

Through a series of seemingly mundane events Joseph became a counselor *to the Pharaoh of Egypt* and then Prime Minister, like the Secretaries of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security all rolled into one. He was in charge of distributing food during a region wide famine...and that's when his brothers came to Egypt starving and looking for food. It had been 22 years and they supposed that he had died...and they didn't recognize him...and that's when the fun began!

When we left off last week, Joseph had sent the brothers back to Canaan to retrieve the missing son – Jacob had refused to send Benjamin with the hooligans. And Joseph (in disguise) he says, "Unless I see the youngest son...NO GRAIN FOR YOU!"

Father Jacob hears the story of the Prime Minister's demands but he can't do it...and that's when Judah said, "Dad...I'll take full responsibility...I'll be surety, i.e. I'll substitute for Benjamin; if anything bad happens it's ON me!" And Jacob is JUST desperate enough to let Benjamin go...it's like parting with his own heart... "but what choice do we have? Judah...it's on you!"

Now when they returned and the Prime Minister (who is really Joseph, in disguise) *when he sees that Benjamin is alive and is there...*that the ruffian brothers didn't kill Benjamin and that they WERE telling the truth...Joseph is very kind and generous and celebrates with these Canaanites and THEN sends them back with lots of grain. And ...also... sneaks his own silver cup into one of the grain sacks... into the bag that belongs to Benjamin. And after the brothers...feeling SO fortunate...when they hit the open road...Joseph has his TSA agents catch up with the brothers and say, "We've had a report of a theft...Someone stole the Prime Minister's personal silver cup...that he uses to tell the future...because he has superpowers and is the Great and Mighty Oz!"

And the brothers say, "Sir! Yes Sir!...Go right ahead and search us...we would NEVER commit such a heinous crime...taking silver from Egypt!" (though, they had indeed, once upon a time, taken silver from Egypt...a whole bag of silver...for the sale of a slave!)

So, the TSA agents get out their metal detectors and go from oldest to youngest and... they find the silver cup, the sacred fortune-telling cup in the suitcase that belongs to Benjamin!...And they ALL get hauled in to the embassy...and they're ALL in deep, deep trouble!

I'm sure Benjamin is saying, "I didn't take it!...It's NOT what it looks like...I don't know how it got there!" And the brothers are wondering, "How could you do this?! Are you THAT crazy? You've ruined everything!"

And when they stand before the great and terrible Oz (who is really Joseph in disguise!) HE is MAD... "Don't you know I have magic powers and am great and terrible...and I can tell YOU'RE guilty?!"

And Judah says, "With all due respect Sir...this is God getting back at us...giving us what we deserve. See, there's stuff about this family you don't know...and now God has exposed us! We are all your slaves!"

But the mighty magic Prime Minister says, "I don't want you ALL as slaves...only the guilty one! Whom you call, Benjamin. The rest of you be gone!"

And the brothers must be thinking, "Nooooooo! Not Benjamin! This is the worst thing that could possibly happen!" (They tear their clothes!)

And what follows is two speeches (which we read) the first is a long defense by Judah. He recounts all that has happened in their attempts to get grain from Egypt. He tells how their father wouldn't send Benjamin and that the father's very LIFE is bound up in the lad's life... if Benjamin doesn't return, our Father's heart will never recover...he'll DIE!"

"But I", says Judah...once the abdicator and the one who JUST wouldn't be the leader God had called him to be and who just didn't care for his family or for the church or for anything but HIMSELF... "But I" says the transformed Judah, "I swore to my Father that I would lay down my life...be the surety...the collateral ...the stand-in if anything happened to his Beloved Benjamin...so now I beg you Mr. Prime Minister ...so my Father's heart isn't shattered in grief...I beg you...take ME instead of him...for my Father's sake, Benjamin MUST and SHALL go free! I must save the Beloved Benjamin!"

And the thing is...the CHURCH is Benjamin...I am Benjamin... and our Father in Heaven loves me...loves us...loves His Church so much (we are the son of his right hand) and if He loses us...it will shatter His heart (Zeph 3.17; Isa 63.9) ...AND MY OLDER BROTHER knows that...our

Judah...the better and Best Judah, *the Lion of the Tribe of Judah*, not wanting His Father's heart to break, Jesus Christ has "interposed His precious blood" (The Eternal Covenant).

He has said, "I will die in place of the guilty...the ones who did indeed STEAL the world's silver cup...and were enamored with its fake magic and smoke and mirrors... THE UNFAITHFUL CHURCH who loved the world and sold herself into slavery to this world...Benjamin was framed...but we are actually guilty. Still, the Father loves us. And in order to win us and buy us for the Father, our older Brother, Jesus Christ, the Lion of Judah has become our substitute.

And unlike THIS story...which prefigures the bigger story...unlike THIS story where Judah was spared and never actually paid that ultimate price...But in the bigger story, God did NOT spare the final Judah...but freely gave Him for us...and Jesus Christ ransomed us by actually suffering the infinite pain of justice...HE ACTUALLY REPAID what WE ACTUALLY STOLE.

He did that NOT for the whole world...but ONLY for the contrite...You must see about YOURSELF what only God can make you see...You must see that YOU are a real sinner and JESUS CHRIST is a real Savior.

The passage we read at the start today from the last chapter in Isaiah puts it so starkly: "Thus says the LORD, 'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where could you possibly build a house for Me? And where is a place that I may dwell? For My hand made all these things, that's how they came to be,' declares the LORD. 'But to *THIS ONE* I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.'" (Isa 66.1-2)

See, God is saying, "YOU look up at the stars through the Hubble Space Telescope and you're impressed and fascinated...AND YOU SHOULD BE... *But what impresses Me even more than My heavens and what attracts Me...what gets God's attention even more than the stars and the supernovas and galaxies and nebulae* is the HUMAN HEART that sees its own failings and SEES My holiness and instead of blame-shifting or rationalizing or excusing itself is instead humbled and contrite... That's what gets My attention says the LORD... "To *THIS* one will I look..."

Look, if you're not a big sinner...you don't need a Big Savior. Jesus Christ didn't come to tweak us or make a few minor adjustments for people who are basically good but with a few little innocent mistakes.

His is the STORY of real sinners in need of a real Savior and a God who loved at INFINITE cost to Himself.

The god who is just a nice guy in the sky and for whom sin is no big deal...just a little shortcoming for creatures who can't be perfect...no big deal...What does it cost that God to LOVE? But the God and Father of Jesus Christ – it cost Him everything! 1 John 4.10: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins."

Charles Wesley put it this way in the old hymn: Jesus!--the name that charms our fears, That bids our sorrows cease; 'Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'Tis life and health and peace.

When Joseph saw this vivid display of grace...that the transformed Judah, who once sold Joseph into slavery was now willing to BE enslaved in order to save the Beloved Benjamin, *Joseph begins to sob out loud and is out of control and out of his mind and bawling and wailing and he motions to clear the court...*and with only the brothers present, he says words that are so infinitely comforting and awful the brothers can't even believe them, "I am Joseph! Is my Father still alive?"

And they must have looked at each other and asked, "I couldn't hear what he said... 'I am what'...? Did anyone hear...it must be some Egyptian phrase?"

And the whole palace can hear him wailing, "Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come closer to me.' And they came closer. And he said, 'I AM your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.'

It's the sound of amazing grace – that which was absolutely IMPOSSIBLE and totally outside of our thinking...what eye has not seen nor ear heard and what hasn't even entered our imagination is NOW HAPPENING right before our eyes. God has made everything that is bad come Un-True. Joseph has been, as it were, resurrected...and their sins erased.

All their envy...even though it really was evil...and caused unimaginable pain to this broken family... God has somehow turned it all for good.

And it's this amazingly moving, tender display of love and reconciliation and true repentance leading to true joy. The brothers are reunited and they will come into a land of incredible abundance and safety.

It's a rags to riches story...this family on the brink of starvation is now moving to Beverly Hills! And this family that was SO emotionally and morally and relationally bankrupt is now hugging and kissing and filled with genuine affection and happiness and shalom – that true well-being that comes from God.

Two speeches: Judah is the voice of the Substitute and Joseph is the reply of Providence and Love, Forgiveness and Grace.

Is there hope here for broken families today? I think so.

I like what Eugene Peterson says about the overuse of the word "dysfunctional". "Dysfunctional is not a personal word, it is mechanical. Machines are dysfunctional but not souls; bicycles are dysfunctional but not children; water pumps are dysfunctional but not spouses. The constant,

unthinking use of the word erodes our sense of worth and dignity inherent in the people we meet and work with no matter how messed up they are.”

And IF we misname the problem, we may also be seeking the wrong solution. We don't move from dysfunctional families to functional...but from broken...sinful...fallen families and people to redeemed. This is a picture of a family in the throes of redemption. God is buying them back from their self-inflicted damage.

This is a portrait of a family ravaged by envy and hate and multiple marriages and immorality and too many harsh, unkind words and sentiment. And it ends up a family that's a glimpse of heaven.

Warren Gage in his study of this episode reminds his readers that the City of God in the Book of Revelation...That City is a symbol of reconciliation and flourishing and it is the fulfillment of this scene in Genesis. Revelation 21.12 says “The City had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names *were* written on them, the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

As the brothers embrace in a big circle...so their names embrace and encircle The City of God...This story is a preview of the time when God will reconcile all things to Himself in Jesus Christ.

Between now and then, we live in families with varying degrees of brokenness... and we need the God of grace to redeem us and turn our envy and hurts and unkindness and selfishness into opportunities for repentance and faith.

C.S. Lewis said, “The good man is sorry for the sins that have increased his need. But he is not entirely sorry for the fresh need they have produced.” If Jacob's people had been a nice, functional family they would never have experienced their need for deep reconciliation, grace and redemption. If our broken families help us see our need...they can also be the arena where God's grace meets us and where we meet God.