

Home Study, Wednesday 12th August 2020

Pray: that the Holy Spirit will enlighten your mind and give you understanding as you study God's word. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to discern and hear any special message that God has for you this day.

Read: Genesis 45.1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.



4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom

you sold into Egypt. 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. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to

keep alive for you many survivors. 8 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.

9 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. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there — since there are five more years of famine to come — so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

NRSV

Study Discussion

Last week, we read the account of Abraham's great-grandson Joseph being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He was taken to Egypt by some traders where he endured hardship as a slave followed by good fortune.

As we pick up Joseph's story this week, we think that he would now be about forty years of age and has become

prosperous and powerful. Joseph has risen to the position of Vizier, the highest position of rule in Egypt under the Pharaoh. You may wish to read Chapters 39-41 of Genesis to see how God had brought this about.

Importantly, Joseph has also grown spiritually, and he is finally ready to reconcile with his brothers who had treated him so badly. God is working to bring some ultimate good out of Joseph's experiences.

Remember from our study of Paul's theology in Romans 8 two weeks ago that we discussed how God works in people's lives to bring about his purpose for their life: Rom 8:28 *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.* In Joseph, we see a practical, real-life example of God doing this.

As I look back upon my life, I can (in hindsight) see how God had been preparing me for the things he had for me to do.

1. Think back over your life and see if you can see God at work changing and preparing you according to his purpose.

Famine then came upon the land and Joseph's brothers were sent to Egypt by their father Jacob in search of food aid. They didn't recognise Joseph – this powerful Egyptian official who had the power of life and death over them.

2. Considering how Joseph's brothers had viciously abused him and sold him into slavery when he was

young, what do you think Joseph's brothers would have thought had they recognised him?

Joseph's response as he revealed himself to his brothers was quite remarkable. Re-read verses 1 & 2.

3. What does this reveal about Joseph's character at this point in his life?
4. Contrast Joseph's character now with his character when he was a seventeen-year-old favourite son of his father, Jacob. (Think back to our study last week or read Genesis 37:2-4.)
5. Psychologists would say that it is not possible to change our personality. What do you think about this? How can we account for the apparent change in Joseph's character?

God enabled Joseph to see how God had been working to prepare for difficult times. After revealing his identity, Joseph reinterpreted his brothers' original evil intentions as being part of God's plan.

In verse 4 we read that Joseph said to his brothers, "*Come closer to me.*" *And they came closer.*' This is a story of forgiveness, reconciliation and rebuilding of relationship.

I suggest that it speaks to the importance of family. Remember that last week we noted how dysfunctional Jacob's family was when Joseph was a boy. Yet God is

unifying them to become the beginning of God's people. Today, you and I are part of God's family that has grown from these beginnings.

Sadly, members of some families today still fall out with each other, including those members of the Christian family, the church. Unlike Joseph, some refuse to forgive and be reconciled. Many of us have experienced this, either as the unforgiven or unforgiving.

6. What do you think prevents some people from reconciling with members of their family with whom they have fallen out?

To reiterate, Genesis 45 is a story about forgiveness, reconciliation and rebuilding of relationship.

7. Can you see any parallels with the story of Joseph and his brothers and what the bible tells us about God and humankind? How could you describe this?

God invites us to "come closer".

8. How has God come close to us?
9. How can we come close to God?
10. What can you learn about forgiveness from Joseph's example in this passage?

There are two sides to forgiveness. One is to forgive those who have sinned against you. The other is to admit that you have sinned against someone else and to accept that person's forgiveness. We see this in the Gospels. Having recognised that we have sinned, we seek God's forgiveness; and as Christians we are exhorted to forgive those who have sinned against us. So we pray, "forgive me as I forgive those who have sinned against me".

11. When have you experienced God's grace in forgiving or being forgiven?

12. Do you think that Joseph's brothers retained any responsibility for their past actions?

13. How were those needing forgiveness still held responsible for their actions?

Likewise, the grace of God through which we receive forgiveness and reconciliation with him is not a moral loophole which absolves us of all responsibility for our past and future bad decisions and wrong actions. Rather, God, in his grace, enables us to recognise our sins and to humbly seek to make amends.

Finish with this prayer:

Gracious God,

Thank you that I can be reconciled to you through Jesus Christ. Enable me to come ever closer to you. Help me to forgive and be forgiven, and to be reconciled with the ones I love. Amen.