

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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JOSEPH: Our God Is Always Faithful (Forgiveness & Restoration)

Genesis 45

In the Fall of 1945, Glenn Frazier, known as “Dowling,” to his family, called home. It was a miracle. Glenn “Dowling” Frazier had been dead for over 3 years or so his family believed. In the Summer of 1941, a 17-year-old Glenn Frazier ran away from home, lied about his age, and joined the United States Marines. He was stationed in the Philippines and, by early 1942, was captured by the Japanese and spent nearly the entirety of WW2 as a prisoner of war.

His military ID had been found in a mass grave, causing the US government to conclude he was one of the dead. His family was notified and spent the ensuing years grief-stricken like so many families at that time.

Then, in September 1945, the phone rang in the kitchen of a modest home in Fort Deposit, Alabama, just south of Montgomery. Mrs. Frazier answered the phone. On the other end, the first words she heard were, “Hi, mother. It’s me – Dowling.”

The phone went silent. After a moment, another woman picked up the phone. It was his aunt Ruby. She frantically asked, “Who is this?” The reply came, “This is Dowling.” Again, there was no reply, only silence. Then, he heard his oldest sister’s voice. He said, “Hi...it’s Dowling.” No joke, the phone went silent again. Then, the strong voice of his father came on the line. He demanded to know who was on the line and what was going on that would cause three women to faint in the kitchen of his home. Mr. Frazier heard a voice he was never supposed to hear again...” It’s me, Dad. It’s Dowling.”

Mr. Frazier replied, “I knew you weren’t dead. I knew you weren’t dead.” Then he said, “But I think I have three women on my hands who look like they are dead.” And so it was that Glenn “Dowling” Frazier was restored to his family once again, as though liberated from death itself.

And our text for this morning presents us with a no less dramatic scene. At this point in the life of Joseph, he has been separated from his family for over 20 years. His brothers had sold him as a slave to Egypt when he was just 17 years old. They convinced their father that he had been killed by a wild animal. And for over two decades, an entire family lived as though Joseph was dead.

But Joseph was very much alive. By God’s providence, he didn’t die in Egypt. He thrived. By the mercy and grace of God, he rose from a slave in prison to the prime minister.

For the last several chapters of our study, we have seen the brothers coming to Egypt during a time of severe famine. He knows who they are, but they have no idea that the man standing before them is their long, lost brother. Until today. So, let’s read our text for this morning in Genesis 45.

Genesis 45:1–28

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. ² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ And 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. ⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And 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 yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And 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 tarry. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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.’ ¹² And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him. ¹⁶ When the report was heard in Pharaoh’s house, “Joseph’s brothers have come,” it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. ¹⁷ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, ¹⁸ and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.’ ¹⁹ And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, ‘Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰ Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’” ²¹ The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. ²² To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes. ²³ To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. ²⁴ Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, “Do not quarrel on the way.” ²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. ²⁶ And they told him, “Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ And Israel said, “It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

What a scene! Twenty years in the making, our text is the culmination of a series of God-ordained events in the life of this family that had lived so long at war with one another. It’s one of the most powerfully moving scenes in all the Bible – a real-world masterclass on what forgiveness and reconciliation can look like in the lives of people who respond to God’s mercy and grace.

In order to interpret our text correctly, we can’t forget that God has been graciously working in the lives of Joseph and his brothers in the chapters leading up to our text.

Over and again, we have read the phrase, “the Lord was with Joseph.” In mercy and grace, God was preserving Joseph’s life, blessing him, and filling him with the Spirit of God. And Joseph has humbly responded to the God’s grace by trusting Him and remaining faithful to Him.

God has also been graciously working in the lives of Joseph’s brothers. Over the last few chapters, we have seen God graciously bringing them to the place of genuine, humble repentance. They have been changed by God’s grace, and Joseph has been witnessing that change. Through a series of tests, he has given them the opportunity to demonstrate that their repentance is genuine.

Our text is the extension of those dynamics. It's the culmination of what happens when broken people respond to God's mercy and grace. And what do we see? Simply put, we see forgiveness and reconciliation. And that forms our big idea for today:

Big Idea: Forgiveness and Reconciliation are enabled by responding to God's Gracious Work in Us

Genuine, biblical forgiveness and genuine, biblical reconciliation are not things we manufacture on our own. They are enabled by the powerful grace of God. Now, let's look at our text through that lens, starting with forgiveness.

- **GOD'S GRACE ENABLES FORGIVENESS**

Even though the word forgiveness isn't explicitly found in our text, it's clearly here. And it's important that we think biblically about forgiveness because many of us don't hold biblical definition of it.

- Forgiveness is not a feeling, even though it often deeply impacts our feelings.
- Forgiveness is also not forgetting. Joseph clearly remembers and talks about the sin committed against him.
- Forgiveness is not the same as showing patience or forbearance towards others.
- Forgiveness is not an elimination of all consequences. Forgiven people may still face the natural consequences of their sin. Kids who cheat on their tests in school can be forgiven by their teachers and get a zero on their test score.
- Forgiveness offered isn't the same as forgiveness received. We'll talk more about that in just a minute.

We could go on and on about what forgiveness doesn't mean, but what does it mean? The New Testament term that is translated "forgiveness" means "to release or let go." Forgiveness is what happens when someone sins against us and we release or let go. Let go of what? We see several things in our text.

Forgiveness lets go of debt, like forgiving a loan. We don't live like they owe us. We forgive the relational deficit that comes as a result of sin when someone doesn't live up to their end of the agreement. This is the picture Jesus uses in Matthew 18 when he talks about a servant who was in great debt to his master who was forgiven. The debt was canceled.

Forgiveness lets go of punishment. Ultimately, the punishment for sin is eternal separation from God in hell. Only God can forgive that punishment through the work of Jesus. But, within our human relationships, forgiveness means we no longer seek to punish people for their sin. An unforgiving heart looks at the people who have sinned against us and says deep inside ourselves, "I'm going to make them pay." Forgiveness releases that debt and desire for punishment. It wants something good and is willing to seek that good for the one who has sinned against us.

⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And 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...

Joseph had the power to make his brothers pay for all they had done to him. He could have rightfully made them pay the debt for their sins by having them rot in prison. No doubt, he could have punished them by having them put to death. But he doesn't do that. He reassures them. He forgives them. He lets go of debt and punishment. He even desires their good.

10 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. 11 There I will provide for you,

Forgiveness lets go of self. This isn't the definition of forgiveness, it's a by-product of forgiveness. Here's what I mean by that – unforgiveness is a prison that holds us captive. Our hearts are never freed so long as they are held captive to the bitterness or anger. But forgiveness releases us from prison.

14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Joseph is not a captive to bitterness or anger. His heart is filled with love and joy.

When Glenn Frazier came back from the war, he soon came to realize that he was still a prisoner. He hated the Japanese for what had happened to him and his fellow soldiers in those prison camps. For over 40 years, his heart boiled with a seething hatred for the Japanese. As he sought help, he found himself coming to God, asking Him to do something that he couldn't do for Himself. And the grace of Jesus in Glenn began to transform him from a man held captive to bitterness and anger into a man who was able to let go and love those who had caused him so much pain. Though he would never meet his captors again, the disposition of his heart had changed in such a way that if they had come to him for forgiveness, he was ready and willing to give it. At 65 years old, 4 decades after WW2 had ended, Glenn Frazier was finally free. Like Joseph, his willingness to forgive released him from the prison of bitterness and hatred.

So, what about Joseph? Do we see that same kind of Gracious work of God enabling him to forgive?

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 yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And 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.

What is the basis for Joseph's power to forgive? It's the gracious work of God. Joseph focuses on the gracious work of God exponentially more than the sinful acts of these men.

And notice there are two aspects of God's gracious work that Joseph specifically mentions.

1. Salvation. He says God was graciously doing a work that would result in the salvation of Joseph and his entire family.
2. Transformation. He says God was graciously doing a work that transformed Joseph into something he could never have been if he hadn't come to Egypt. Verse 8 says he had become a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land. In other words, the power of the King was flowing through Joseph as a result of God's gracious work. And it was on the basis of that reality that Joseph was empowered to forgive.

And the same is true for us. God desires to do a work in us the way He worked in Joseph.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

We are called to forgive just like we have been forgiven by God in Christ...letting go of debt and punishment by showing kindness and tenderheartedness. Taken in isolation, this command seems impossible. How can someone like Joseph - the victim of abuse and betrayal by those who should have loved them – how can someone like that forgive the way God calls us to

Ephesians 4:20–24 (The entire foundation for verse 32...)

But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

The only way for us to live out the kind of forgiveness God calls us to is as our lives are renewed and transformed by the power of Christ in us. God has to graciously do a work of salvation and transformation in us. He has to save us from sin and self and transform us into something we could never be on our own, a new person with a new power, namely the power of King Jesus flowing through us.

So, is there unforgiveness in your heart today? Is there anger or bitterness or a desire for revenge? Do you need to let go today? Then turn to Jesus. Ask for His power to flow in and through you so that just as you receive forgiveness through Him, you might be able to forgive those who have sinned against you.

But forgiveness is only one part of what we see in our text for today. The other part is reconciliation. And, like forgiveness...

- GOD'S GRACE ENABLES RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation comes from a word that means change or exchange. Reconciliation involves a change in relationship, from being at odds to being at peace. While reconciliation is connected with forgiveness, it isn't the same as forgiveness. Reconciliation is what happens when the willingness to forgive on the part of the one who has been sinned against is meets the willingness to repent on the part of the one who has sinned.

Think about Ephesians 4 and our relationship with God. Through the work of Christ at the cross, anyone and everyone can be forgiven of their sin and restored to God. But, that reconciliation, that change in relationship doesn't occur without repentance on the part of those who have sinned.

And what we have seen in the study of Joseph is that God has been graciously working in the lives of Joseph's brothers, bringing them to a place of repentance. And, since they are repentant and Joseph is forgiving, reconciliation can occur...

And let me show you several things we see about reconciliation from our text. I won't go into much detail; I just want you to see them.

Reconciliation restores honesty and openness.

² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

³ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

As Joseph is restored to his brothers, he is able to be completely honest and open with them. He tells them his heart, who he is. This is the first time in these encounters with his brothers that Joseph

has been able to use the phrase “my father.” In verses 4-5, he’s able to talk about how they sinned against him with him being angry or them being threatened.

Reconciliation renews closeness and intimacy.

4 So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near.

14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck.

15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Notice that Joseph is inviting his brothers into this. He’s the one who has been sinned against. He is the one who is having to rebuild trust and gauge whether or not these men are truly changed. That’s important to see because every process of restoration is going to be unique. I’ve sat with individuals who have been abused as children or people who have had loved ones killed because of the actions of someone else, spouses who have forgiven serial infidelity over and over again who don’t know how to discern if this is the time that they can actually believe that their partner is repentant because they are using the same words they’ve used for years that have never actually proven true.

Every process is unique and comes with unique challenges in discerning the best path toward closeness. But what I really want you to see is that the reconciliation that comes as a result of God’s grace actually allows for a closeness that is better than it ever was before. These brothers enjoy a fellowship and affection that they never had before. They aren’t just restored to the place they left off; they are taken to a place in their relationship that they never had.

Reconciliation reverberates throughout our relationships.

Because God brought Joseph and his brothers back together, their family trajectory was forever changed. Their reconciliation impacted their children and their extended families. The entire history of Israel was dramatically changed. Countless people felt the impact of their restoration, not least of all, their father.

25 So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. 26 And they told him, “Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. 27 But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28 And Israel said, “It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

It’s hard not to get emotional when you think about this moment in Jacob’s life. He begins to feel parts of his heart that died years before. He has hope, fulfillment, joy. He’s about to welcome his son back from the dead. And it all came about because Joseph and his brothers responded to God’s gracious work in them through repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Reconciliation is beautiful and powerful. It restores God’s good design for openness and intimacy. It changes the trajectory for generations of in our families. And, like forgiveness, it only comes through the gracious work of God in us through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17–19

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.