We Are Family: Joseph’s Forgiveness

Genesis 37: 1, 3-4, 45: 4-8, John 17: 20-23

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This is a series with the theme of **unity in the Body of Christ**. After the difficulties of 2020, it seems important to invite the church to come back together.

Jesus prayed for this unity in John 17: 20-23

 I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **21**that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22**I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— **23**I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Using some **awkward family situations** in the Bible we can uncover several themes that are **essential for unity**.

* Joseph’s brothers leave him for dead.
* Jesus’ mother and brothers show up at a gathering and Jesus won’t let them in.
* The mother of James and John has the nerve to ask Jesus if her sons can be his right and left-hand guys.

Turns out there are quite a few awkward family stories in the Bible…

[Awkward Family Photos]

We will approach the scriptures this series by asking this question:

**What do these stories teach us about unity in the family of God?**

**Genesis 37**

[Joseph’s Story]

**Joseph** was **beloved** by Jacob/Israel because he was the **youngest** son, born in Jacob’s old age.

* Israel doted on him and gave him an ornate **robe**.
* Joseph had **dreams** that offended his brothers and they **hated** him.
* When he went to check on them near **Dothan**, they plotted to **kill** him.
* Reuben persuaded the brothers not to kill him, only to **abandon** him to a **cistern**.

When a group of **Ishmaelites** happened by en route to Egypt, Joseph’s brothers sold him as a **slave**.

* They then soaked his robe in **goat’s** **blood** and convinced their father, Israel (Jacob), that he had been killed.

Joseph then became a **slave** again, this time to the house of **Potiphar**, one of Pharaoh’s officials.

* God **prospered** Joseph there and Potiphar put him in charge of everything in his household.
* **Potiphar’s** **wife** tries to seduce Joseph, but he was righteous and refused.
* She then **framed** him, accusing him of trying to seduce her.
* Potiphar fell for it and put Joseph in **prison**.

The Lord was with Joseph in prison, gave him **favor** with the **warden**, and Joseph became a leader in the prison.

* Joseph then **interpreted** the dreams of the **Pharaoh’s officials** who were imprisoned.
* Despite Joseph’s kindness to them, they did not speak on his behalf to the Pharaoh.

**2 more years pass**, and **Pharaoh** began to have **dreams**.

* **No one** could interpret them and finally the cupbearer who been imprisoned with Joseph remembered Joseph.
* **The dream that Joseph interpreted with the help of God predicted the famine in the land of Egypt.**
* Pharoah put Joseph in charge of preparing for the famine, and Joseph’s work **saved the land of Egypt**.
* **Joseph was promoted to running the entire kingdom of Egypt on behalf of the Pharaoh.**

When the famine came, Joseph not only **saved Egypt, but saved the surrounding world** as they came and bought grain from Egypt increasing the power of the nation.

**Jacob/Israel and sons were starving.**

* Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain.
* Joseph recognized his brothers, **but they didn’t recognize him.**
* Joseph falsely accused them to get them to admit who they really were and that they did away with him long ago.
* **If you don’t know the story, it isn’t clear yet whether Joseph will destroy them or forgive them.**

Through the course of several brilliant moves by Joseph his brothers are forced to **own up to their sin and fall at the mercy of the brother they left for dead.**

* Eventually real brokenness and **repentance** takes place.
* **There is nothing left but to beg for mercy.**

**45- Joseph reveals his identity** to his brothers.

* His brothers are dumbfounded
* Joseph tells them that It was to save lives of others that God sent him to Egypt
* He deems God as responsible, not his brothers.
* **(Genesis 50:20) “You intended to harm me...but God...”**
* **He reconciles his whole family and brings them to live with him in plenty in Egypt.**

What kind of person can forgive like that?

**How was Joseph able to forgive?**

I. Joseph came to understand that unity is the heart of God because God is about restoring right relationship with God and with others.

* I don’t think Joseph instinctively knew this
  + nursing his wounds in a putrid cistern,
  + breaking rocks as a slave,
  + or languishing in an Egyptian dungeon
* A perspective like Joseph’s is not immediate, it is born from **reflection**, and Joseph certainly had time for that
* Over time, the **God of his great grandfather, his grandfather, and his father** (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) helped Joseph **see God’s true character**
* **What is God’s true character? Love. Restoration. Forgiveness. Unity.**
* How did Joseph understand this?
* God did not abandon Joseph. God came to him in **presence** and **mercy**.
  + **“God was with him…showed him kindness…” (Gen. 39:21)**
* Jacob learned to love his faithful God and that love inspired him to **emulate** God.
* **Emulating God meant that Joseph must be characterized by love, restoration, forgiveness, and unity.**
* Remember Jesus’ prayer in John 17?
  + Jesus didn’t invent those concepts.
  + In his prayer, Jesus reveals the very nature of God
  + “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **21**that all of them may be one, Father**, just as you are in me and I am in you**. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—** **23**I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. **Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”**
  + Jesus is revealing the very nature of his relationship to the Father
* **Unity with God and unity with others is the heart of God**
* When we pursue God, unity with others is a natural result.
* **In our quest for unity in the church, we don’t ever start with the disunity**
* [like thinking we’ve solved the **dandelion** problem in our yard because we pulled all the yellow tops off]
* **In our quest for unity in the church we start on our knees before God asking God to form his very nature (love, forgiveness, restoration) in us**
  + Jesus’ death and resurrection makes our forgiveness possible
  + The Holy Spirit empowers us to forgive
  + Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our sins…even as we forgive those who sin against us.” (Matt. 6, The Lord’s Prayer)
  + **Though Joseph lived many years before Jesus would say these words, Joseph embodied Matt. 6: 14-15, “If you do not forgive your brother from your heart, God will not forgive you.”**
* What else motivates Joseph to forgive his brothers?

II. Joseph came to understand that he was a part of something much larger than he could see in the moment.

* God had promised a great nation to the **descendants of Abraham.**
* God **reaffirms** the promise to **Jacob** (Joseph’s father) in **Gen. 46**
* Joseph is in the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as Jacob’s son
* **To break with his family was to break with God’s purposes.**
* **If want to embody Jesus’ prayer in John 17, we have to remember that we are a part of something much larger than what we can see in the moment.**
  + We can so easily get sidetracked by petty differences or misunderstandings
  + There is no shortage of things to divide us today
* Satan loves to sow the seeds of dissention in churches like this—effective and healthy congregations with limitless potential
* We cannot lose sight of the fact that **God is up to something that is much larger, grander, more long-lasting than whatever threatens to divide us.**
* You and I are an integral part of God’s plan for the redemption of the world
* **Remember Jesus’ prayer: “Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”**
* **We must realize, like Joseph, that to embrace disunity in our midst is to break with God’s purposes for this church and the world.**
* **We cannot permit anything to get ahead of God’s vision for our church, not even the myriad differences that 2020 unveiled.**
* The work of God depends on our forgiveness and our unity!

III. What God did through Joseph for his brothers, God now does through Jesus for the church.

* Old Testament scholars across the ages from Wesley in the 18th century to Bruggeman in the 21st invite us to read Joseph’s story with Gospel Lenses
* [picture of Joseph before his brothers, arms stretched out like a cross]
* Joseph had a kind of **resurrection** as far as his brothers were concerned, right?
* Because he was alive, **reconciliation** could happen
  + Jesus was **resurrected** and because of that there is **reconciliation**
  + With God
  + With others
* **Joseph’s power/position** made it possible for him to create a **new life** for his estranged family.
  + **Jesus’ power/position** makes it possible for him to create a new life for us and ultimately for the church.

**Close**:

[Picture of DeNiro with pulling the bag]

Rodrigo Mendoza, Slave trader turned Jesuit pilgrim making penance for murder. His penance is to carry the tools of his slave-trading back to the very people he enslaved and seek forgiveness.

[The Mission: Every wound we carry, every grudge we nurse, every offense we hold on to…all of these don’t do a thing to punish the ones who hurt us, they only become a giant bag full of pain that we drag around with us. We suffer more and more the longer we lug that stuff around.]

If only there was one who could help us get free…

[picture of DeNiro being set free by the chief]

[The Mission the one who was chief, who represented all those offended, set the priest free…he cut away the load]

Jesus took on our sins, our wounds, our offenses.

Jesus has made it possible for you to be free of that pain

Ask him to set you free today.

**This is the first step toward Unity in the Family.**

Prayer:

**Communion:**

*Those present today: Please take a moment and adjust or remove your mask so that you can partake of the elements. Also take a quick moment and familiarize yourselves with these individually wrapped communion elements. There is a thin layer of plastic covering the wafer, then another layer that opens up the cup for drinking. Take a moment and get all of that ready.*

***Some of you may have the homemade bread, we thank the Kinney family for providing this for us, if not please use the wafer provided with the cup.***

Communion, instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is a sacrament, which proclaims His life, His sufferings, His sacrificial death, and resurrection, and the hope of His coming again. For more than 2,000 years, in spite of nationality, ethnicity, or principality, the followers of Jesus have practiced this meal in obedience to Jesus’ command. In communion, we physically remember the beautiful extent of God seeking us and demonstrate our unity with all people who name Jesus as Lord.

Communion is a means of grace in which Christ is present by the Spirit. It is to be received in reverent appreciation and gratefulness for the work of Christ. It is a foundational expression of the fact that We Are Family.

All those who are truly repentant, forsaking their sins, and believing in Christ for salvation are invited to participate.

**Prayer:**

Holy God,

We gather at this, your table, in the name of Jesus your Son, who by your Spirit was anointed to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, set at liberty those who are oppressed. Christ healed the sick, fed the hungry, ate with sinners, and established the new covenant for forgiveness of sins. We live in the hope of His coming again.

And so, we gather as the Body of Christ to offer ourselves to you in praise and thanksgiving. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these your gifts. Make them by the power of your Spirit to be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the Body of Christ, redeemed by His blood.

By your Spirit make us one in Christ, one with each other, and one in the ministry of Christ to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **Amen**.

**Song: Thank You Jesus for the Blood**

**Before the partaking of the bread, let the minister say:**

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, broken for you, preserve you blameless, unto everlasting life. Eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and be thankful.

**Before the partaking of the cup, let the minister say:**

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for you, preserve you blameless unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and be thankful.

**Song: Thank You Jesus for the Blood**

Benediction:

