**JOSEPH’S FAITH AND STEWARDSHIP**

 June 17, 2018

Genesis 45:1-50:26 (45:1-11; 46:26-47:27; 50:15-26)

Key Verse 50:20 “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Last week we learned how Joseph practiced what is commonly referred to as tough love with his brothers to help them to repent. When we repent or when another person repents, what should we expect? Forgiveness and God’s blessings. Jesus taught: “I tell you that in the same way there will

be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” (Luke 15:7) In these last six chapters of Genesis we will see Joseph’s life is like that of Jesus Christ. He forgave his brothers’ sins when they repented. He invited them to live with him in his kingdom. Pharaoh promised to give them the best of the land. Today let us be reminded of Jesus’ grace to forgive sins and his grace to give us the best of His kingdom.

I. You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.

At the end of Genesis 44 we find Joseph’s tough love helped Judah to make a complete act of repentance. Judah tells Joseph; “Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy…” With this life changing act of repentance chapter 44 ends. What a dramatic moment! What Joseph will now do is the big question. Will he pay back harm for harm? Slave life for slave life? Look at 45:2,3. At the sight of Judah’s repentance, he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it. Then he announced: “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” Joseph’s loud weeping is the first sign he had completely forgiven his brothers for their many wrongs. Even with this show of sincere forgiveness, we find it would take many years for his brothers to completely accept Joseph’s forgiveness. Instead of being relieved by his weeping and his gracious announcement that he was Joseph, they became paralyzed with terror. Why did these brothers become paralyzed with terror? It is because these brothers had always lived by the philosophy that if someone wrongs you even in the littlest way then you should retaliate massively. These brothers had never experienced forgiveness or practiced forgiveness. They had only seen and practiced vengeance. It was beyond their comprehension that Joseph would actually forgive them. The important question for all of us is, how could Joseph completely forgive his brothers?

First look at what he says to them in 45:4,5: “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.” This is not the only time Joseph would share these words. Seventeen years later Joseph would be having the same exact conversation with his brothers after his father’s death. The brothers were still guilt ridden for all the wrongs and sins they had committed against Joseph. In chapter 50:18 they threw themselves down before him and said; “We are your slaves.” Joseph could have gloated over his brothers’ pleading for their lives. He did not. Instead this time he gave them even stronger words of reassurance. Look at 50:19-20. “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” First Joseph reassured his brothers that he had completely forgiven them because he is not in the place of God. Joseph was saying he was not going to put himself in God’s place to take vengeance. In Deuteronomy 32:35 God says, “It is mine to avenge, I will repay.” Joseph could forgive because he didn’t try to put himself in God’s place to take vengeance. Taking vengeance is the number one cause of the endless cycle of violence found all over the earth. Joseph had the power and authority of Egypt to repay his brothers for their many wrongs and sins against him. He didn’t because he denied himself and would not allow himself to take God’s place in the matter of vengeance.

Secondly Joseph could forgive his brothers because he believed God was sovereign over his brother’s harmful intentions in his life. In verse 50: 20, he says, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” This is one of the best illustrations of a person’s faith that believes that God is sovereign in all events; even those events where people intentionally try to harm us. We see that the very clear intentions of harm on his life by his brothers were then 180 degrees redirected by God. God took intentions of harm and turn them into intentions for good which resulted in the saving of many lives. Romans 8: 28 says, “Now we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.”

Joseph didn’t just forgive with his mouth. He forgave with action. He brought his family to Egypt to live in Goshen, the most fertile land in Egypt, so he could help provide for them during the next five years of famine. He warned them: “Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.” The blessings offered to Joseph’s brothers who repented only become better. Pharaoh said: “Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.” This is the same offer God gives all people who accept forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ his Son. God says the same to us as he invites us to his heavenly Kingdom: “Never mind about your belongings in this world, because the best of My Kingdom will be yours.”

Joseph’s brothers followed his direction. They went back to Canaan and told their father that Joseph was still alive and invited him to come and live in Egypt. In chapter 46:3 God spoke to Jacob in a vision. He told him not to be afraid to go down to Egypt. He reaffirmed his promise to make him a great nation. As long as we go where God wants us to go, we never have to be afraid. For Jacob the best day of his life is yet to come. Verse 27 tells us 70 members of Jacob’s family went with him to Egypt. When he arrived in the region of Goshen, verse 46:29 reads: “Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.” Twenty long years earlier was the last time Jacob had seen his precious son Joseph. Then one day after he sent him out to check on his brothers Joseph vanished from existence. The only information Jacob was ever given of what might have happened to him was Joseph’s torn and bloodied ornamented robe. Those who have children can imagine how sick with grief they would feel if their child vanished with only bloody clothes remained behind. We can imagine how Jacob at this reunion with Joseph thanked God and praised God. This is a strong encouragement to everyone that we should always persevere to keep our faith in God even in life’s worst trials. God is able to turn the worst of times into the best of times. This is exactly what he did for Jacob when he reunited Jacob and Joseph.

II. Joseph’s Stewardship (46-50)

Joseph could become very emotional now that his father’s family is safe and sound under his protection in Egypt. Since he was lord of all of Egypt, he could easily give special privileges to his family members. He could appoint one brother to be the defense minister. Still another he could appoint him to be finance minister. Is this the kind of special favors Joseph provided for his father’s household? Absolutely not. We find Joseph put none of his family on the Egyptian government payroll. He provided for their needs, but he did not make them proud or dependent on the Egyptian government. He told his brothers, “When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, ‘What is your occupation?’ you should answer, ‘Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.’ Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.” It is amazing that Joseph let his brothers remain as shepherds even though those jobs were most despised by the Egyptians. This enabled them to remain separate from the Egyptians. They maintained their own identity as the descendants of Abraham, and did not mingle with the Egyptians.

Once Joseph settled his family in Goshen as shepherds, he next focused on feeding the masses of people who were without food. In our day we think the way to help starving people in time of famine is to send them plane loads and ship loads of free food. This was not the kind of wisdom God gave to Joseph. First 47:14 shows Joseph collected all the money found in Egypt and Canaan in payment for food. Joseph made people who had no food pay for their food. Then look at what he does with all the wealth he collected from selling food. He doesn’t use it to make himself a millionaire. Nor does he use it to buy a summer home along the Mediterranean Sea. Joseph collected every cent and brought it to Pharaoh’s palace. It is no wonder Pharaoh placed Joseph in charge of all Egypt. Joseph could act in this way because he had creation order in his heart. He acted out Genesis 1:28—God’s command to subdue and rule over and to take care of. He shows us how a man can live in a fallen world on the bottom of society and by faith live in obedience to God’s word and become a blessing to the whole world.

Look at 47:20-21. “So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one and all sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh’s, and Joseph reduced the people to servitude, from one end of Egypt to the other.” Joseph reduced all the people of Egypt to servitude. He could easily have used people to please his own desires. He could have gouged them, by selling one loaf of bread for $20. But he was fair. Once he reduced them to servitude he then generously rented back to them their land with seed so they could work to plant their own crops. He did this with one stipulation. 47:24 says, “But when the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children.” It is less than we pay for taxes today. The people felt that Joseph treated them fairly. They were not rebellious or full of complaints at his policies—they were grateful, saying, “You have saved our lives. May we find favor in the eyes of our Lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh.” Without a doubt, of all African nations, Egypt has the most glorious history. This can be contributed in a large part to the work ethic Joseph instilled in the Egyptians during those seven severe years of famine.

Finally Genesis closes out with the account of Joseph’s own death. Look at 50:24-26. Twice in Joseph’s final hours of life he shares with his brothers how God will come to Egypt to give aid to Israel by taking them out of Egypt and bring them back to Canaan the land he promised to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God used Joseph to bring the people of Israel to a place where they could grow into a nation. It would not be a short stay in human years. They would be there for 400 years. Nor would those years be pleasant years. They would be forced to become a nation of slaves without any human rights. During the darkest days of slave life, Joseph’s promise that God would come to their aid burned within them as God’s light of hope. As for their harsh slave life, God would use what the Egyptians thought would ruin them to actually mold them into a nation with a common history and a common destiny.

Joseph himself would not be the son of Jacob God would use to bring Jesus Christ into the world. This honor belongs to Judah, the man Joseph helped to lead to repentance. Nevertheless, of all Jacob’s sons, Joseph’s life most foreshadows the life of Jesus Christ. His faith in God’s sovereignty is like Jesus. His participation in God’s redemptive love to bring men to repentance is like Jesus. Joseph’s life of suffering under the evil intention of men for the purpose of saving lives reminds us of Jesus’ death on the cross to save us from our sins. Indeed more than anyone else in the Bible, Joseph bears the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I thank God for Genesis Bible study. We learned the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Joseph believed that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Let’s have the faith of Joseph so that we may also be a source of blessings to the whole world.