

Dying Well

Genesis 50:15-26

Genesis 50:15-26 Exposition

The Burden of Guilt

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

The brothers were full of fear.

They knew what they had done.

And they lived under fear of the broken relationship.

Esau had sworn to kill Jacob once their father Isaac was dead.

Now the brothers fear Joseph will kill them because their father Jacob is dead.

And so in their fear they tell a lie.

When we are afraid, do we lie?

Do we become less authentic in some way?

This is the only place in the text where they ask forgiveness.

Where they personally confess their sins.

Until now the text is silent about their relationship.

Despite the fact that Joseph took care of them and loved them and forgave them way back.

They did not ask or accept that forgiveness.

That is what it is like to live with unconfessed sin.

It is to live in fear and denial.

They could not accept Joseph's love or forgiveness.

They think the only way to atone is to be slaves.

In the same way, when we hide things or do not confess we fear God in the wrong way.

We reject God's love and relationship.

Confession, contrition, brokenness are essential for the soul.

Do not delay in seeking forgiveness from God or others.

You will either let it eat your soul or free it.

Joseph weeps.

We are not told why but we can guess.

He loves his brothers but he sees y they remained distant.

He sees their fear.

And it breaks his heart.

By all rights he should hate them their actions condemned him to years of suffering.

The Heart of God

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The most often repeated command in the Bible is "Do not be afraid."

It is spoken by angels, the messengers and representatives of God and by Jesus himself.

God is awesome and is to be respected in holy fear, but he does not want us to be afraid.

Those who do not know him neither respect nor draw near to him.

In this simple phrase, the irony is intentional.

Joseph speaks in a way that identifies with God but in the same breath he acknowledges that he is not God.

And that is the beauty of his expression.

Joseph exemplifies what it means to be a mature person of God.

He is not God but he lives within the Kingdom of God and speaks as a servant of God.

This is in an Egyptian culture where the rulers are God!

Pharaoh is considered a God but this is not the God Joseph refers to or serves ultimately.

How aligned with God are you?

Do you live and speak in a manner that is mindful of God?

Then comes this profound phrase: you intended to harm me but God intended it for Good, saving many lives.

He fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant.

Instead of being a blight on the people of the earth - Eg. Shechem,

He saves thousands if not tens of thousands of people in Egypt and beyond.

But it was a difficult road.

Sold into slavery, imprisoned by a false accusation, forgotten and abandoned.

Joseph's faith developed in a hard place, not a soft place.

And that is the secret to the spiritual life.

Faith is exercised in places of hardship and it is within hardship and suffering that it blooms.

This is the way of the cross.

This is the way of God.

But here is the caveat - suffering for good causes life.

This is the example of Joseph and Jesus.

Suffering when your own plans go awry causes nothing but suffering.

Only the yielded life brings life.

Selfishness brings a suffering that does not redeem but destroys the self and others.

When we suffer, do we allow that to be an opportunity to rise or do we simply fall?

Does it lead us to confession and alignment with God

Or do we become mad at God and go further into darkness?

I want to say here that we should confess our anger with God - that is an act of authenticity.

But when we confess our anger, we do it with humility before God.

And we do not hold on to our anger, to our fear, to our distrust.

And so we contrast Joseph and his brothers.
The brothers are fearful, distant, guilt ridden, distrustful.
Joseph has the heart of God, taking all the hardship of his life and turning it into kindness.
It is human nature to let the darkness in us spread.
To let our bad experiences corrupt us even more.
It is the divine act of the Holy Spirit to take what is bad and redeem it for good.
Which path will we take?
It is as the poet Alexander Pope expressed it:
"To err is human, to forgive, divine." (*An Essay on Criticism*, Part 2, written 1711)

Legacy

²² *Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years ²³ and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees.*

And so, Genesis begins with creation but ends with redemption.
God is indeed at work and this is only the beginning.
Joseph is one of the most solid and consistent character in the Old Testament which makes him remarkable.
Others on that list would include Daniel and Boaz.
But God does not choose just these folk.
He chooses Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and a host of really messed up people.
He weaves each of them into the history of salvation - God's mission and work.
Just as he weaves us.

As for Joseph, he lived a long and blessed life.
Probably not without hiccups and sorrows.
But in the end, there is no greater joy than to see your children grow up.
To see their children's children.
In fact, Joseph lived to see his great great grandchildren.
This beautiful little detail of having a child placed on his knee, little Makir.
Even though there were 4 generations of dysfunctional family,
Joseph's Family turns out okay
His family is redeemed by his faithfulness and their relationships
are intact.

Look to your family.
In the end, although Joseph was a ruler of Egypt, this is the image that lingers.
Look to your spouse and to your children.
Look to your mother and father.
Repair those relationships if you can.
Joseph lived in a way where you know his family was close.
To have your great grand child put their baby on your knee means there is love here.
There is trust here.
Faith has a family legacy of its own.

And even if your own family is difficult - look around you.
This is the family of God.
We celebrate each birth, we eat together, we laugh together, we cry together.
As the family of God we invite one another and others into the life of God's family - the church.
You have a home here.

Dying Well

²⁴ *Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."* ²⁵ *And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."*

²⁶ *So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.*

Even at the last, Joseph is thinking of God's promise.
He believes God's words and he wants his bones to be buried in the promised land.
He wants to be there in the place he longs for but will never see.
Is that not the definition of faith?
"Being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see?" (Hebrews 11:1)
And so, he is placed in a coffin, an ark until that time.
Hundreds of years later, when the Israelites make their trek across the desert or wander in the wilderness,
 they do not carry one ark.
 They carry two.
Within one ark are the commands, promises and presence of the living God.
Within the other are the bones of a dead man who lived his life with God.

We will all die.
That is a certainty.
But what will be our last thought?
Will it be one of terror, resignation, regret or confusion?
Or will it be one of peace, joy, rest and hope?
You see, what you do today and every day will make that determination.
As the puritans once put it, "Our lives are a preparation for death."
May we each die well in the arms of Christ.
"I am the resurrection and the life.
The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;
and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)

[Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*, excerpt from Chapter 18 re. Ingersoll & Moody]
One year before he died in 1899, pastor Dwight Moody, preached these words,
"Someday, you will read in the papers that Moody is dead.
Don't you believe a word of it.
At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now."

What will be your last words?

What will be on your epitaph?

Give it some thought.

I already picked mine: Alive in Christ.

Live well.

Die well.

Christ be with you.