

## Family Reunion Genesis 42-46

Well friends – things certainly seem to have come full circle in the story of Joseph this morning, haven't they? For all the hardship that has gone on in this story – today things come to a happy resolution and there is reconciliation and a family is reunited - what a great story!

But our conviction, and our confession that all scripture leads us to put our faith in Jesus Christ reminds us that we can't simply gloss over the events in today's chapters which lead to this resolution and reconciliation and treat them as incidental to the outcome.

The details of these chapters have much to teach us, and we want to approach them this morning with the additional expectation that the Holy Spirit will speak through them - to encourage our belief and faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

So let's go back to that moment where Joseph would have been presiding over the distribution of grain, immersed and

focused on his task, pretty much having forgotten his previous life and trials and enjoying the blessings of what God had given him in Egypt.

As you may remember from last week, he named his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh to reflect this outlook he now had on life.

So - there's Joseph content with his life, at peace with the world, standing there, overseeing the distribution of grain, looking over the crowd of people who are waiting in line, absent mindedly scanning back and forth when suddenly he has to do a double take!

Is that who I think it is??? Could it be??? I don't believe it but it is! Joseph recognizes his brothers standing among the crowd of people come to buy grain.

Now there's a line from the movie Casablanca which comes to mind here where the Humphrey Bogart says "*of all the gin joints, in all the towns, in all the world, she walks into mine!*"

I can imagine Joseph may have thought something similar.

*“Of all the grain depots, in all the cities of Egypt, they just happen to come to buy grain from the one where I happen to be at today!”*

And just like that, all those painful old memories, which Joseph had seemingly moved past, suddenly resurface with a powerful intensity, as if they had occurred only just yesterday.

The jealousy, the betrayal, the hatred, being torn away from his family, the indignity of being sold as a slave, being falsely accused and thrown into prison and forgotten there...

All that hardship and suffering he had endured – and now those who were responsible for all of it were standing just a few yards away from him... and even though it had been about twenty years since he had last seen them, he recognized them – he knew their language, their style of dress, their voices and mannerisms...

Sure they may have looked twenty years older now – but he recognized his brothers, his hateful, spiteful, backstabbing brothers...

Friends have you ever had the past suddenly confront you like this? Have you ever moved on from something traumatic or painful – and then years later bumped into the person or persons who were responsible for that?

And suddenly all those old feelings and memories come rushing back and you go right back to that painful or traumatic situation – like you never even moved on from it.

Well friends, what God is doing for Joseph – and what this brings up for us – is showing us that the past has to be resolved, it can't just be forgotten, stay buried, or left behind.

Meeting his brothers in line to buy grain is no coincidence, it God's providential hand is at work once again.

Throughout this story we have been pushed to see that God is at work, using Joseph to accomplish his plans, in His ways, in His times, so that all the glory goes to Him – and rightfully so... that's what comes with the territory of being God!

And we've seen how God plans involve taking Joseph through hardship, suffering, being abandoned and so on and in the end it leads to immense blessing and exaltation for Joseph.

And friends this is where God is just so amazing. This story reveals so much of God's awesomeness to us.

God is able to use what others intend for evil and accomplish His good plans with it. He is able to arrange for things to turn out in such a way that He gets all the glory – and Joseph is blessed immensely... and then through that blessing He can prepare Joseph to be ready to face the past – so that God can bring about healing and reconciliation for his servant Joseph.

I'm not sure my description can do justice to the intricate and elaborate way in which all of this is coming about in this story,

but the point in all of this is that God doesn't forget or overlook anything as He brings his purposes to completion.

Joseph has suffered abuse for God's purposes. He has wounds and scars from going through the circumstances which God ordained for him, and it's not enough – no, it's not just – that God would simply expect Joseph to be fine with receiving power, and wealth and honor to compensate for his wounds and injuries.

But what these all blessings actually do is bring Joseph in a place in life where he is secure enough in his relationship with God in order to confront the past in order to receive healing and experience reconciliation.

Does that make sense? God doesn't want Joseph to just get over the past because now things are all better; rather He intends to help him make peace with it.

And friends the same applies to us. If you have gone through difficult times and circumstances in your past and things are

better now, or getting better now – God might be working to put you in a position where you are secure enough to revisit what happened, to receive healing from that.

God doesn't tell us to simply get over our hurts and wounds just because life is better now, and we shouldn't tell that to others either.

The platitude which we so easily tell people that *"every dark cloud has a silver lining"* is not biblical wisdom, and neither is *"time heals all wounds."*

That's why when you bump into that old high school jerk or mean girl who used to make your life miserable for the first time since high school you still see them as the jerk or the mean girl until they prove they are different.

And so, as God arranges this "chance" meeting between Joseph and his brothers, Joseph needs to determine if in fact time has made any difference at all in his brothers' character

and so in with his characteristic wisdom and cleverness, Joseph puts them through a series of tests.

Because friends, approaching reconciliation must be done with wisdom, it is one thing to forgive people the wrong which they have done to you – but if they have not changed, it is not wise for you to *"throw your pearls before pigs"* and make yourself vulnerable by working for reconciliation, or as Jesus says *"they may turn and tear you to pieces."* (Matt 7:6)

So Joseph sets about testing his brothers to see if they are still the same murderous backstabbing bunch who sold him into slavery or if they have indeed changed after all these years.

First, Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies. They protest their innocence and reveal to Joseph all their background information about their family including that Joseph's younger brother is still alive – which Joseph probably wanted to ask them anyways but couldn't because it would risk making him look too curious and revealing who he was.

Joseph pretends not to believe any of it but he's willing to let them to prove they are not spies by allowing one brother to go back to Canaan and bring Benjamin back. Then he detains them for three days.

It would have been interesting to be a fly on the wall listening to the brothers fight and argue about who should have the privilege of being set free to go back home... Joseph is testing them.

Then once they probably had it figured out, Joseph comes to them and changes things up. "Actually" he says "I'll let all of you go back home, except one – come back with your brother and I'll release the one who stays behind"

Oh boy, now the discussion has to be about who will stay back!

Of course they argue and discuss in their own language which they assume Joseph can't understand – but he does and he's listening.

Interesting enough no one volunteers... so Joseph selects Simeon and has him bound in front of the rest of them and put in prison. Then without their knowledge he has their silver put back in their grain sacks, which they will discover later, on their way back home.

And the similarity to how the brothers had bound Joseph and sold him for 20 pieces of silver all those years ago is not lost on them.

When they discover the silver has been returned to them text says *"Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?"* (Gen 41: 28)

So, Joseph isn't the only one whom God is preparing to face their past – the brothers have a reckoning coming to them for the dark secret they've kept hidden all these years.

A word to the wise here friends... God has a way of bringing our dark secrets out into the light, I can personally testify to that!

So, it's best to keep short accounts with God by confessing your wrong doing to him, and having some close Christian friends that can keep you honest and accountable as well – and save God the trouble of having to do that with you when it might be embarrassing.

Now friends, at this point we need to remember and keep in mind that God is setting things up to bring about restoration, healing and reconciliation.

So, it's important for us to remember that everything which is happening in Genesis 41-46 is working towards that end goal and not towards punishment or revenge – and this is also very important to keep in mind for when God moves us towards restoration, healing and reconciliation.

Because it's easy for our sinful nature to either misuse the circumstances in order to take revenge and punish those who hurt us, or if we are the ones being tested or reckoned by God to doubt the truth of scripture that says *"In Christ there is no condemnation!"* (Rom 8:1)

Friends, it's all about the testing – not punishment or revenge, and up to this point the jury is still out as to whether the brothers have changed.

In fact the only thing that makes them to return to Egypt and risk facing Joseph again is the fact that they have run out of food, it wasn't an overwhelming concern for their brother who had been detained.

So, they go back to Egypt – bringing Benjamin with them, in order to prove to Joseph that they are not spies, and the test continues...

When Joseph sees that they have brought Benjamin along, he instructs that they be taken to his home in order to feast with them.

Joseph is keeping the brothers off guard here, so they can't predict him. On their first trip he was severe with them, now he appears to be benevolent – but aloof, observing how they react to this unexpected favor they are receiving.

Now the feast provides the setting for Joseph to see they harbor the same kind of resentment for Benjamin as they did for him.

So Joseph has his servants give Benjamin preferential treatment, five times the amount of food, to see how his brothers will react.

Joseph also makes sure their wine is topped up and that they can drink freely – because nothing else reveals family dysfunction like a little too much wine at the dinner table...

But – the brothers pass the test!

They are not in the least bit jealous or resentful of Benjamin the way they had been of Joseph.

Still... Joseph needs more convincing – maybe they were no longer jealous, but would they sell Benjamin out if he was in danger? Would they treat him as a brother or would they abandon him?

So Joseph sets up the situation by having his personal silver cup planted in Benjamin's sack of grain and sends his steward chasing after the brothers as they leave for home.

And as you saw in the drama this morning when the steward finds the cup in Benjamin's sack – they brothers are dismayed!

They all return to Joseph, no one blames Benjamin... no one questions Benjamin – they are **all** concerned that if they return with their youngest brother it will send their father to the grave.

Twenty years before they could have cared less about how their father would take the news of Joseph's death – but now they've changed.

They don't want to abandon their brother and they don't want to send their father to his grave by losing Benjamin in Egypt.

And most importantly – Judah, the one who had the idea of selling Joseph in the first place – steps up and personally offers to take Benjamin's place in order to spare their father the grief of losing his favored son.

Judah has learned a thing or two over these past years about the grief of losing sons, and the fear of losing his only remaining son and God has used that to change him.

Finally, Joseph is convinced that his brothers have truly changed.

He sends out his servants, and with a great display of emotions he reveals his true identity to his brothers. "I am Joseph!" he says.

The brothers are shocked, afraid, they know in that instant that the tables have been turned and they are at their brother's mercy.

Whereas before, it was Joseph wondering if his brothers **had** changed, now his brothers are hoping that Joseph **hadn't** changed.

Joseph had always be so good and upright, incorruptible and loyal to their father... was He still that good son who would spare them because that was the right thing to do? They were still his brothers...

Or, had their betrayal finally broken him and turned him into a bitter and vengeful man – and now as the crowning act in his plot to take revenge, Joseph had revealed himself to them in



order to see the look on their faces as they realized what was happening to them.

Which Joseph stood before them?

Well we know what transpired in Joseph's life – and how God had blessed him and raised him up for God's purposes... and as I said part of that was to prepare Joseph to one day face his brothers and be able to reconcile with them. And that's what Joseph does.

Now friends – please note it is Joseph who proclaims the truth of what God has done and releases his brothers by saying *“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... so then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.”* (Gen 45:5, 8)

And I flag this because so often it is ourselves as perpetrators, or external observers who try to speak this sort of perspective

into the lives of those who have been victimized as Joseph was.

When we are witness to someone working through the anger and the pain of their past, or maybe we're being confronted with how we were a part of that, and their anger and pain is making us uncomfortable – we often try to spin it and say something like *“well look at the good that happened in spite of all that...”*

And we've all done it haven't we friends... but that's not how we help bring restoration or reconciliation.

It is the privilege of the one who has been hurt, it is Joseph's privilege to proclaim how he has seen and experienced God working through the genuinely evil things that his brothers had done – to bring good out of it.

And he says as much to his brothers later on after their father had passed away *“You intended to harm me, but God intended*

*it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” (Gen 50:20)*

All the brothers can do is own up to their own faults and failings, and because of God’s great love and blessings - Joseph has been positioned to be able to extend grace and mercy, and he does so! He and his brothers are reconciled and then the family is restored.

And friends that’s all we can do as well – own up to our faults and failings and how we have contributed to the breakdown of relationships, both between us and our family and friends... those horizontal relationships... but also, and perhaps most importantly how we have contributed – even unintentionally – to the breakdown of that vertical relationship between ourselves and God.

You know friends, I sometimes have people ask me why God lets certain things happen to them? That’s never easy to answer because God doesn’t always fill me in – He’s God, I’m not and His ways are higher than ours.

However, I think that something has been revealed to us in the story of Joseph about that and it has to do with God testing us – not so much because He needs to see who we really are – God knows us better than ourselves, and that’s precisely the reason.

God allows difficulties, hardship, and suffering, even disasters into our lives, to test us – so that we can step back a bit and watch how we react to them, and then come to realize how our reactions reveal to us, who we truly are.

And again – this is not part of some elaborate plot by God to take revenge on us or punish us, or take a perverse delight in squashing the illusions of goodness that we hold about ourselves.

No, it’s to position us to be able to see the need that we have for Jesus Christ as our substitute.

And as we see that need, and we turn to Jesus and put our faith and our trust in him and receive forgiveness and mercy

from Him – God raises us up, blesses us, makes things well with us – and in doing that He positions us so that we can face whatever situations or horizontal relationships in our life might need some reconciliation and restoration.

And he arranges for us to face those situations or people – and that can be a test for us as well, to show that we’ve changed, not only so that others can see this but also for ourselves, so that we are encouraged that God is working in us!

By setting us up to face the past God gives us opportunities to show we’re not the same people we used to be.

That we’re not going to go after revenge or extract payback from people for what they done to us. How can we? When we know that God has forgiven us!

As Paul says in Colossians 3:13 *“forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

And then friends – when we have to face the past, when it is time to come to terms with our wounds and our brokenness – we can say for ourselves – not for others, but for ourselves... *“You may have intended it for evil, but God has used it for good”* and with those words friends, we can bring about reconciliation, healing, and restore peace.

Friends, God has blessed us beyond measure in Christ - and that blessing positions us, prepares us now to be able to face whatever or whoever it might be from our past.

So that our hurts and wounds might be healed and we can be restored and be fully at peace.

Be ready friends – be ready to reconcile with whomever God sees fit to bring across your path.

Amen.