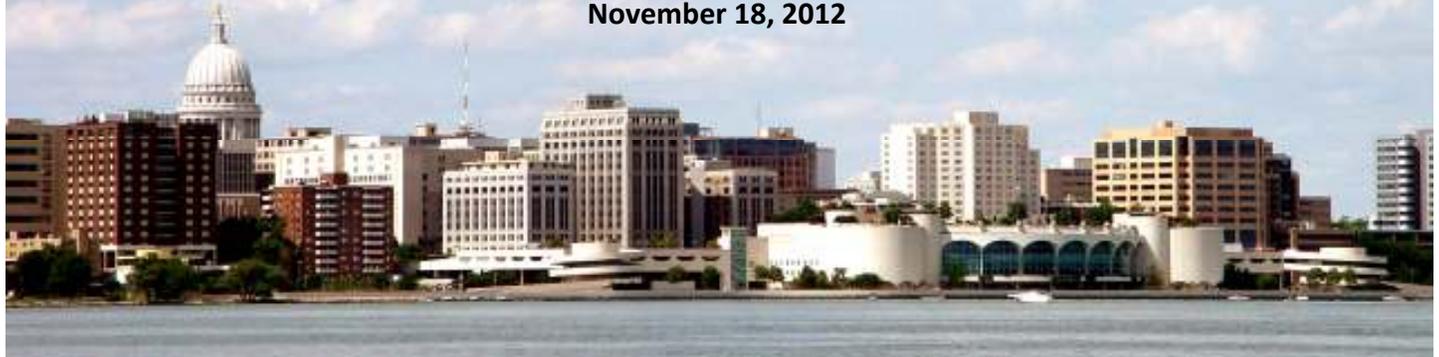


“Joseph: Dealing With Reconciliation”

GENESIS 42-45

**Baxter T. Exum (#1190)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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If you have been with us over the past several weeks, then you know that we have been studying a series of passages on the life of Joseph from the Old Testament. This morning I would like for us to study the next to the last lesson in this series by looking together at how Joseph dealt with RECONCILIATION. And for this lesson, we are dealing with a rather large section of scripture, so it will not be possible to look at every single verse, but as we look at Genesis 42-45 we at least see quite an overview concerning what it takes to rebuild some broken relationships. And really, it is amazing to me how God can take even the most painful of experiences and can bring out of it something that is actually beautiful. This morning, then, I would like for us to think about some of the broken relationships that maybe we've experienced in the past (or maybe that we're experiencing right now) – either with family or friends or maybe even in our Christian family, and I would like for us to look at the story of Joseph as a bit of good news as we try to learn from how Joseph dealt with his own family issues.

- I. **We will go through this section a little bit at a time, but I'd like for us to start by looking back very briefly at something we passed over rather quickly right at the end of Genesis 41, and that is: THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION ACTUALLY BEGAN AS JOSEPH REFUSED TO BE DOMINATED BY BITTERNESS.**

If you will, please look with me once more at Genesis 41:50-52, ***“Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, ‘For,’ he said, ‘God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.’ He named the second Ephraim, ‘For,’ he said, ‘God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”*** So, these two sons are born during the seven years of plenty, several years before Joseph ever meets his brothers again. And I believe that is significant. Years before having a chance to work it out, Joseph looks back at the pain of his previous life, Joseph looks back and says, ***“God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.”*** Obviously, Joseph did not literally forget about his trouble. Joseph did not literally forget about his family. But the point here is: Joseph did not allow himself to be dominated by bitterness. Sometimes when somebody does something to us, when we've been cheated or mistreated, it is so easy to just think about it – over and over again – and over time we get bitter, we get resentful, and the tension has a way of eating us up on the inside. With God's help, Joseph was able to put those painful memories aside. He did not dwell on all of the ways that he had been abused and mistreated in the past.

In a sense, Joseph forgave those who had sinned against him in the past, even though they had not yet had a chance to work it out. Some people might say, "Oh, but you can't forgive people until they repent." And in a sense that is true. However, in the meantime, as I wait for someone to come apologize to me, I have to realize that there are some things (for the sake of my own sanity) that I just need to not worry about. I know there are some people who have wronged me in my past, but if I dwell on that, if I allow those wrongs to dominate my life, I will become bitter and miserable. There are times, then, when we need to turn some of those struggles over to God. And I realize that if I forgive someone in my own mind, that certainly does not mean that that person is forgiven in the eyes of God. And I hope that makes sense. For my own good, I may need to drop an issue. If someone has sinned against me, I can say: I will not allow that situation to dominate my life. But I also know that that person is still accountable to God. We remember what Paul said in Romans 12:18-19, ***"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."*** For the rest of his life, then, Joseph would have remembered this as he loved his own children – Manasseh, ***"God has made me forget,"*** and Ephraim, ***"God has made me fruitful."*** Joseph is the perfect example of someone who refused to hold a grudge. Of all people, Joseph had a right to hold a grudge – against his brothers, against Potiphar's wife, against Pharaoh's cupbearer who had forgotten him for those two years – Joseph had every right to be bitter and angry, but with God's help he managed to put those thoughts aside. Joseph was living those words that Paul would write hundreds of years later, ***"Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity"*** (Ephesians 4:26-27). Joseph refused to give the devil an opportunity, and so he refused to give in to bitterness. What a reminder for us today! In the same way, we are not to obsess over all of the ways that we have been wronged in the past, but with God's help we can put many of those things behind us. Here's a thought question: Are you mad at somebody right now? Is anyone here harboring bitterness or anger toward another person? If so, Joseph and the apostle Paul would both encourage us to either work it out or drop it before the sun goes down today. By the way, sunset in Madison today happens at 4:31 p.m. – that gives you roughly 5-½ hours from right now, so I would encourage you to get started!

II. There is a second basic idea that should help us in working toward reconciliation, and that is: As the situation progresses, we find in the opening verses of Chapter 42 that JOSEPH HANDLES THE SITUATION WITH THE UTMOST OF RESTRAINT. **PPT**

In the New Testament, we refer to this as ***"gentleness"*** or ***"meekness,"*** the idea of power under control, and Joseph serves as the perfect example of having tremendous power but being able to harness it, being able to control it. Again, if we were in his position, where without his permission no one would be able to lift a hand or foot, if we were in that position of power, it would have been so tempting to send a special forces team up to Canaan to bring his brothers down for some kind of horrible punishment. But let us please notice what happens next – Genesis 42:1-8,

1 Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?" 2 He said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die." 3 Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "I am afraid that harm may befall him." 5 So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. 6 Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. 7 When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself

to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." 8 But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him.

Now, I don't know if it's just me, but it seems (based on what Jacob had to say in verse 1) that Joseph's brothers were at least a little bit hesitant to go down to Egypt. I can kind of guess why! There might have been maybe just a little bit of fear that they might run into Joseph as a slave. At least that would be in the back of their minds. So, Jacob has to tell his grown-up sons that they need to stop staring at each other and that they need to get moving.

I would point out something else here, and that is, it is extremely clear to me that the favoritism continues. Notice: Jacob refuses to let Benjamin go, because he is afraid that something bad might happen to him. So, he is willing to let the ten other brothers go down there in harm's way, but Benjamin is exempt. So the favoritism in the family continues. And I would point out here: More than 20 years have passed! Remember: Joseph was 17 when he was sold into slavery and 30 when he first stood before Pharaoh (that's 13 years), and now they've gone through seven years of abundance, and we are at least partway into the seven years of famine. So we are talking about a gap of 20 years. A lot has happened in those 20 years. But one thing has not changed – Jacob's favoritism towards one of his children over the others.

But notice what happens when they get to Egypt: They make their way straight to Joseph (Joseph was the one responsible for distributing the grain), and when they get to Joseph, his ***"...brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground."*** At this point, Joseph knows exactly who they are, but he stays calm, he conceals his identity, and he starts asking them some very pointed questions. So we find Joseph in a position of total and complete power over his brothers, but they have no idea who he is. Some have asked, "How is that possible?" But I would remind those of you who have attended your 20-year high school reunion: People can change a lot in 20 years! We add to this that Joseph was in a position they never could have imagined – he was dressed not as a shepherd but as the ruler of Egypt. Not only that, but these brothers were completely out of their element – here they were as backcountry shepherds having traveled to the big city and now standing in some kind of foreign palace. Not only that, but we will find out a little bit later that Joseph was speaking through an interpreter. Joseph was speaking Egyptian. He could understand them, but they didn't know it. So we certainly understand how it was possible for these men to not recognize their own brother.

As we get into what happens next, I would just emphasize here (and through the whole process) that Joseph demonstrates exactly what it means to have power and to keep that power under control. How easy it would have been to jump up at this point and say, "I am Joseph, and now you're all going to die!" But instead, Joseph has a plan, and he uses his power to accomplish something. There is something much greater than revenge at work here, and Joseph was able to accomplish something only because he kept his great power under control.

And that right there is another good reminder as we deal with situations from our own past. There are times when we might have the power to take some awesome revenge, but the Bible tells us that vengeance belongs to God. Our job is to put the past behind us and to reconcile if possible.

III. We now get into an extended section where we find that JOSEPH TRIES TO DECIDE WHETHER HIS BROTHERS HAVE REALLY CHANGED.

And as he tries to make this decision, we see a series of tests where he tries to figure out his brothers' attitude. At no point does Joseph say, "Oh, well, let's just forget about it. It's no big deal." But instead, Joseph

knows that time alone does not somehow magically fix sin, and so he wants to know: Are these the same jealous self-serving brothers who would sell one of their own into slavery, or have they changed over the past 20 years? Notice the first test in Genesis 42:9-28,

9 Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land." 10 Then they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies." 12 Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!" 13 But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive." 14 Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies; 15 by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 16 Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." 17 So he put them all together in prison for three days. 18 Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die." And they did so. 21 Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us." 22 Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.'" 23 They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. 24 He turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. 25 Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them. 26 So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there. 27 As one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. 28 Then he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack." And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

I find it interesting that Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies. If you remember, that was one of the reasons why the brothers were so mad at Joseph 20 years earlier – Joseph was basically spying on them and bringing reports back to their father. So he accuses them of being spies, and then he puts them in jail for a few days. In my mind, I wonder whether this was the same jail cell Joseph was in. But can you imagine the conversations they must have had during those three days in prison? When they get out, they hash out the details: Simeon will basically be held hostage while the other brothers go back home to get Benjamin. As they get ready to go, Joseph overhears a part of their conversation. In verse 21, they said to each other, ***"Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us."*** And that is a new detail. Up until this point, we didn't know that Joseph had begged for his freedom. But now we know that the guilt has stayed with the brothers constantly over the past 20 years. Reuben then speaks up and even suggests that this is happening as punishment from God for what they had done earlier, that this is the ***"reckoning"*** for Joseph's blood. Joseph, of course, overhears this, he is overwhelmed with emotion, and he leaves the room as he breaks down in

tears. For the first time in 20 years, he hears his brothers admit that they are guilty for what they had done. Taking responsibility is one of the first steps in dealing with guilt, and Joseph sees that they are at least heading in the right direction.

The next test takes place in Chapter 43. Some time later, the brothers eventually come back with Benjamin. They come back with the original money that had been placed in their sacks along with more money to buy more grain. They are reunited with Simeon, and then they find that they are all to eat the noon meal with Joseph. At this point, the 11 brothers are together again, and when they see Joseph they bow down. Remember: This is the dream that Joseph had as a teenager. This is now the first time that all 12 brothers had been together in more than 20 years, but Joseph is the only one who knows it at this time. He asked about their father. And then Joseph is introduced to Benjamin. Once again, Joseph is overwhelmed and leaves the room to weep. He comes back out, they eat, and notice what happens in Genesis 43:33, ***“Now they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him.”*** So, they are seated in birth order, which was amazing in and of itself. One commentary pointed out that there are no less than 39,917,000 different orders in which eleven individuals could be seated – so this was amazing, that they were seated in the proper order. However, in that culture the first-born should have received the greatest honor – Reuben should have been honored; so it’s not as if Joseph didn’t know, but instead, the piles of food went to Benjamin. All of this was leading up to the next test – the test of whether favoritism toward Benjamin would allow them to leave Benjamin behind. Would they do to Benjamin what they did to Joseph?

So, starting in Chapter 44, they load up the donkeys so all 11 brothers could go back home, and like before, Joseph’s servant put their money back in their sacks, but he also put Joseph’s favorite silver cup in Benjamin’s sack. Once they had a little head start, Joseph sends his servant after the men to ask, ***“Why have you repaid evil for good?”*** (verse 4), along with an accusation of stealing his master’s favorite cup, the cup that he uses for ***“divination.”*** Divination, of course, was a method by which people would make decisions based on input from the gods. But in this context, Joseph was using the cup for another kind of divination – he was using this cup to make a much different kind of decision: How to handle his brothers. So, the brothers make a promise to the servant (in verse 9), ***“With whomever of your servants [the cup] is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves.”*** The servant says: No, I’ll just take the cup thief as a slave, and the rest of you guys can go free. That sounded good, so they start going through the bags from oldest to youngest, ending with Benjamin. They find the cup, of course, in Benjamin’s bag. But notice what happens next (verse 13): Instead of making a run for the border while leaving Benjamin behind, all 11 brothers are torn up, and they all go back to the city together. They are taken before Joseph, and they have a very dramatic conversation. Judah is the one who speaks up, and I would point out something interesting Judah says in verse 16 as he starts, ***“What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lords slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found.”*** Remember: Judah knows that they are innocent with reference to stealing the silver cup, and yet he says, ***“God has found out the iniquity of your servants.”*** In other words, it’s clear there’s something else going on here! Judah continues begging for mercy, and then at the end of Chapter 44, Judah has a final request (in verses 33-34), ***“Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me—for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?”*** Twenty years earlier, Judah didn’t care what happened to his father, but now, out of concern for his father, Judah was willing to spend the rest of his life as a slave so that Benjamin could go back home. Twenty years earlier, Judah convinced his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery, and now Judah is offering himself into slavery to save his brother.

At this point, then, Joseph is convinced that the change is real. Someone has said that reconciliation without repentance is like painting over mold on a wall – it might look good for a little while, but it is not a permanent solution. In the same way, Joseph understood that getting back together with his brothers would be pointless without evidence that they had really changed on the inside. We need to briefly tie this in to life under the New Testament. Yes, it applies to personal relationships – we cannot truly reconcile without repentance – but it applies so much more to our relationship with God.

Over and over again, the New Testament tells us that we need to repent. The word refers to a change of mind that results in a change in the way we're living. Sometimes we might be tempted to think that repentance is saying we're sorry for something. That's not repentance. Repentance is feeling bad enough about something that we stop doing it. And that's the role of guilt. For a person with a properly educated conscience, guilt is that nagging feeling that we need to change. Repentance is the actual change that takes place. As Peter said in Acts 3:19, ***"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."*** Based on Joseph's example, then, we have a reminder here about the role of guilt and the importance of repentance.

IV. With that, we come to the last step in this process as JOSEPH EXTENDS FORGIVENESS AND GRACE TO HIS BROTHERS.

Let us please look at Genesis 45:1-15,

1 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. 3 Then 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 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 Now do not be grieved 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 still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. 8 Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household 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 delay.' 10 You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. 11 There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished. 12 Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. 13 Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. 15 He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

What an awesome passage! There is no rebuke here. The brothers are speechless as Joseph begs them not to be angry with themselves. Yes, they sold him, but God sent him to Egypt to ***"preserve life."*** They meant it for

evil, but God took that evil act and used it for good. And with that, the broken family was brought back together. Forgiveness was offered. Relationships were healed.

I love verse 9. Joseph did not say, "Hey, go tell dad what you really did 20 years ago!" But instead, Joseph said, tell dad, **"Thus says your son Joseph, 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay.'"** We also see something interesting in verse 24 – as they are all packed up and ready to go, Joseph says to his brothers, "Do not quarrel on the journey." Can you imagine? What would they have to quarrel about? Joseph knew his brothers! This story, then, ends with good news. Even though relationships might be broken, God can take something very bad and can make something good come from it.

Conclusion:

This morning, we have studied an amazing example of some horribly mangled relationships getting put back together. Earlier this morning, we looked at Ephesians 4:26-27, **"Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity."** Just a few verses later, Paul would go on to write, **"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you"** (Ephesians 4:32). We have seen these words demonstrated in the life of Joseph. But we can't leave it as a nice story. As we close, we need to think about our own lives. As we have been forgiven by God, is there something between us and another person that still needs to be worked out? Do we have some kind of a problem with another person? Is it something we can do something about before the sun goes down this afternoon? Based on what we've learned from Joseph, I would suggest that we not be overwhelmed with bitterness, that we restrain ourselves from lashing out, that we seriously consider whether they have had a change of heart, and that we extend forgiveness if at all possible. If God can work through a teenage slave thousands of years ago, then He can also work through us today.

If we as a church can help in some way, let us know. If you are not yet a Christian, we would be honored to help with that as well. The Bible teaches that we must repent and be baptized. We have to turn away from sin as we allow ourselves to be briefly buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you would like to study it further, let us know, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can come to the front as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com