

JOSEPH'S FAITH AND STEWARDSHIP

Genesis 45:1-50:26
(45:1-26; 46:26-47:27; 50:15-26)
Key Verse: 50:20

Lesson 16b

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Joseph is the fruit of Genesis. He was a man who lived in a fallen world. He lived as a slave on the bottom of society--with no friends and no clout. He could not but live in hopeless despair, the prisoner of fatalism, wearing the chains of a slave mentality. But Joseph had faith in the Creator God--the God of Genesis. He kept creation order in his heart. He believed God's almighty power and he never doubted God's love. God was with Joseph in his father's house; he was with Joseph in the house of Potiphar; he was with Joseph in the dungeon; and he was with Joseph when he ruled all Egypt. Joseph never forgot that God was with him. With this kind of faith, and with the help of almighty God, Joseph could overcome the world. By faith, he could rule over and subdue his environment--he even ruled the mighty world power, Egypt. He became Pharaoh's shepherd and spiritual father. And God used him to preserve a remnant of God's people alive on the earth.

1. Joseph's faith (45:1-28)

Joseph listened to Judah's plea for Benjamin and was so deeply moved that he could no longer control himself. He sent all of his attendants out of the room. Then he revealed himself to his brothers. He said, "I am Joseph. Is my father still living?" His brothers were speechless. They were overwhelmed by fear. But Joseph quickly reassured them that he had no grudge against them. He said, "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.*" Joseph could love his brothers and forgive them for what they had done because he had God's mission in his heart. His coming to Egypt was not the result of a mischievous and evil prank. It was the act of the Holy, Sovereign God. Joseph believed in the sovereignty and love of almighty God. For this reason, he could love and forgive his brothers.

He told his brothers that God had a great purpose in sending him to Egypt ahead of them. There would be 5 more years of famine in the world. They could not possibly survive such a severe famine in Canaan. Verse 7 says, "But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

Joseph had lived as a slave for many years, but he had no vestige of slave mentality. His faith enabled him to live before God, and not before

men. He had gone to prison rather than sin against God and compromise his purity. His mission had made him great. He said, "It was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt."

2. Joseph's stewardship (47:1-50)

Joseph did not use his high position for his own personal benefit. He was Pharaoh's shepherd, but he was not presumptuous. He wanted to bring his family to Egypt, but he waited on Pharaoh's direction. Pharaoh sent him word to send for his father and for his brothers' families. So Joseph sent his brothers back to bring his father to Egypt. He gave them one word --"Don't quarrel on the way!" There was no need to argue and blame each other for their past sins.

First, His dealing with his family. When his family arrived, he did not give his brothers high-paid government jobs. He provided for their needs, but he did not make them proud or dependant on him or on the Egyptian government. He told Pharaoh that his family had come to Egypt. He made it clear that they had herds and flocks and were able to make their living as shepherds. 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." (46:31-34) This also enabled them to live in Goshen and remain separate from the Egyptians. They maintained their own identity as the descendants of Abraham, and did not mingle with the Egyptians.

Second, His dealings with the people of Egypt. Joseph was a thorough-going steward. Chapter 47 describes how he dealt with the famine. He did not put the people on welfare. Rather, he made them pay for the grain they used. First, they paid in money; then, with their livestock; finally, they sold their bodies and their land and became slaves of Pharaoh. In 47:25 the people express their thanks to Joseph: "You have saved our lives. May we find favor in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh." The people were not rebellious or full of complaints at his policies--they were grateful. They pledged their loyalty to Pharaoh. Joseph did not take advantage of their helpless situation to exploit them. He made them recognize their debt to Pharaoh, and become loyal subjects to him. He then told them that they could keep 4/5 of the produce of their land, giving 1/5 only to Pharaoh--less than we pay for taxes. Joseph did not seek personal gain or personal power. He never forgot that he was a servant of Pharaoh--in fact, he regarded himself as Pharaoh's father. He did not try to usurp Pharaoh's power or allow human ambition to motivate his actions in any way.

He 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.

3. Joseph's place in history

Joseph was used as the bridge into Egypt. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign country for 400 years--God would use this as a crucible to melt and mold them into a nation of people with a common history and a common destiny. Egypt was that crucible and God used Joseph to bring his people there. God promised Jacob, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again." God used Joseph to bring the people of Israel to a place where they could grow into a great nation. Joseph was not the covenant son--Judah was. But God used Joseph to change Judah into a man of faith and love. That unfaithful man became a very faithful man. Joseph is not the covenant son, but his life points to Jesus more clearly than almost any other Old Testament man. His faith in God's sovereignty is like Jesus' faith. His participation in God's redemptive love to bring men to repentance is like that of Jesus. His life of suffering reminds us of Jesus and his life of victory also reminds us of Jesus. Indeed, he bears the image of Jesus more closely than any other man of the Bible.

After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers became fearful. They still could not understand the faith and life of a man who held no grudges. This meant that they themselves were still unchanged in some respects (50:15). They sent word to Joseph in the words of their dead father, "Please forgive your brothers the sins and wrongs they committed in treating you so badly." Then they added their own sincere plea for forgiveness, "Please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." It was necessary and good for them to personally ask Joseph's forgiveness. This was a sign of real repentance. Perhaps their fear of Joseph led them to do this, but more than this, they needed to ask for and receive his forgiveness for the sake of their souls.

How did Joseph respond? See verses 17-21. Joseph wept when he read their message. Then he responded with words that teach us the depth of his faith. "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..." (20) Joseph believed that "...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Ro 8:28) So he was able to live before God without any grudges and with a thankful heart toward God. This is God's will for every man (1Th 5:16-18).

The death of Joseph is recorded in 50:22-26. Joseph served the will of God in his death as he had in his life. He said in 50:24, "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." Then he instructed the Israelites to carry his bones with them back to the Promised Land when God visited them to lead them out of Egypt. Moses remembered Joseph's request and when, 400 years later, the Israelites left Egypt, they took the bones of Joseph with them. (Ex 13) Thus Joseph planted in the hearts of the Israelites a sure hope, and firm and confident faith in God who keeps his promises.