

A Happy Reunion

Genesis 45:1-46:30

Introduction

Please turn in your Bibles with me to Genesis 45.

Joyce Landorf has written a very good semi-historical account based on the life of Joseph, called simply "JOSEPH: A NOVEL." These are her words as she depicted for her readers what the scene in the first three verses of Genesis 45 might have been like.

"Asenath [Joseph's wife - DR] lifted up her head suddenly and heard it before the others. It was a low moaning sound, which wrenched itself from the depths of Joseph. It finally split the air as Joseph shouted to the ...servants, 'Out - all of you! I would be alone with my brothers!'"

"Then the moaning of Joseph crescendoed into cries, and still seated in his regal chair, he began to weep violently. Asenath sensed that the earnest and remorseful, even eloquent pleas of Judah had stabbed the vital parts of her husband's heart. Whatever Judah had been before, he was not now. It was no secret that this brother had grown into a man of godly character for Judah's compassion toward both Benjamin and his father had just been clearly revealed."

"She knew...that Joseph had given his brothers the severest of tests; and they had passed them beyond his expectations. His tears were the joyous outpouring of relief for a thousand-pound weight of hurt, which had just melted off his soul.

Joseph's sobbing shook his body, and it could be heard throughout their whole house. Asenath moved closer to him, but he held her back. He struggled to his feet and cried out in Hebrew, 'My brothers! My brothers! I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?'"

This morning as we continue our study of the life of Joseph, we have come to that place where the whole family of Jacob can be reunited. I have called this sermon "A Joyous Reunion." That it most certainly was!

We'll begin in Genesis 45:1, right in the middle of that emotionally charged time when

I. Joseph Reveals His Identity.

Let's read the Bible's description of it. (Read 45:1-3)

What a moment of intense feeling! Folks, this is high drama! Joseph's brothers were at once terrified and totally bewildered. Fear - disbelief -

shock. Who can adequately describe what flashed through their minds? All these years they thought their brother was dead!

(Read v. 4-7)

"God sent me before you to preserve life..." it says in verse 5.

Joseph has had a chance over the several months since he first laid eyes on his brothers in one of the Egyptian food lines to think over the events of his life. From the time he had his childhood dreams, through the nightmare of his being sold by his own brothers, to his exaltation in Pharaoh's courts, right on down to this very moment, suddenly it all became clear.

What he sees as he looks over that extra-rough terrain of what his life has been for the last twenty-three years is the providence of God. Now it all makes sense. Now he understands! "God sent me here before you to preserve life...it was not you who sent me here, but God..."

Webster's Random House Dictionary defines providence as "the foreseeing care and guidance of God..."

It is, as Romans 8:28 says, God causing "all things to work together for good to those who love God, and those who are called according to His purpose." Joseph's life is a living, breathing example of God's providence.

It is appropriate for us to stop and note something. If you were to pause Joseph's life any point up until this one and look at it from human perspective (sort of like you might pause a video tape), you would probably wonder about God's goodness. You might even wonder if God had deserted

Joseph or was ignoring him. But upon reviewing the entire tape, you would find that not only was God there, but that He was all the while working out the plan that would be the ultimate best for Joseph, his family, and God's purpose.

Let me tell you plainly what that means to you and me. It means that if we are Christians who truly love God and are striving to live our lives to the best of our ability according to His purposes, nothing good or bad can come into our lives unless it has first been determined by God to be for our ultimate good and His good purpose.

That is what we see in Joseph's life. His brothers hated him. That was bad. His brothers sold him. That, too, was bad. He was falsely accused by Potifar's wife and thrown into jail. That was bad. But God used all of that bad to produce good! What good? To exalt Joseph to second in command in Egypt. To make a way that his family could survive the famine. To

ultimately bring the brothers around so that they could repent of their wickedness and be reconciled to Joseph. To unify the fragmented family of Jacob. To test Joseph to see if he really meant business for God. To caseharden Joseph's faith. Need I go on? To continue the plan that would ultimately deliver the Messiah to the world so that salvation would be available to all who want to come to God.

Skip ahead with me to Genesis 50:20. We will be covering this soon, but notice what Joseph ultimately says to his brothers.

(Read Genesis 50:20)

Can you look at things in your life that appear to be bad and say that? Is your faith that strong? God wants it to be that strong. That's why He preserved this story for us to read. May I say it again? Nothing good or evil will happen in the life of a true Christian that does not ultimately have a good outcome.

Did you lose your job? God has good purpose in allowing it to happen. Did someone double-cross you? God will see it to a good purpose if you will continue to serve him faithfully. Are you stricken with a serious illness?

God will use it to bring good in your life. That is what the life of Joseph teaches us.

Joseph continues to speak to his brothers in verse 9.

(Read v. 9-15)

What a remarkable time it was there with Joseph and his brothers!

Next, we see that...

II. Pharaoh Hears of the Brothers' Arrival.

(Read v. 16)

I don't know about you, but I get the distinct idea from that verse that Pharaoh knew about the estrangement between Joseph and his brothers. Perhaps

Joseph had shared his story with him and what was going on as he put his brothers to the test. Now he gets the good news about the reconciliation that has taken place and he is quite pleased.

Joseph's face must have been beaming as he came into the presence of Pharaoh and bowed before him. He is happier than he has been in more than 20 years!

Isn't it great when, after much trial and affliction, things finally begin to come together in God's purposes for your life? Suddenly you know that it was worth it all. That is the way Joseph feels right now.

Pharaoh was also anxious to share in Joseph's joy.

(Read v. 17-20)

That word "goods" in verse 20 is literally in the Hebrew, "vessels." Pharaoh is telling Joseph, "Tell your family not to bother with their household items like dishes and cooking utensils. I'll have my servants take care of that. I'll get new ones for them! We'll make sure they have the best accommodations Egypt has to offer."

(Read v. 21)

I like these next two verses because they show us a Joseph still caught up in the euphoria of the moment. He just couldn't wait to begin sharing all the blessings of Egypt with his family.

What a difference between Joseph's attitude here and the attitude of many who have been forced through difficult circumstances as a result of mistreatment! Many who have gone through things like Joseph went through are bitter and cynical, hating God, no longer capable of joy. The only joy they can imagine is hateful revenge. But not Joseph! He wants only to see his family reconciled and blessed. What an attitude!

(Read v. 22-23)

Out come the new tunics and new sandals and choice food. The pack saddles on

20 donkeys are bulging with the best things of Egypt. Other animals are hooked to carts, probably with Egyptian drivers and loaded with provisions for the journey back to Canaan. Finally, the whole caravan set out for the home of Jacob, as we see...

III. The Brothers Return Home.

As the brothers got on their donkeys for the trip home, Joseph said something that might surprise you.

(Read v. 24)

The KJV here, instead of "Do not quarrel" says, "See that ye fall not out by the way." Joseph is saying, "You guys don't have a falling out with one another on the way home now! Don't pick a fight."

What would there be to fight about? Remember, Benjamin got 5 suits of clothes and the others had gotten just one - he had gotten 300 pieces of silver, they had gotten none.

Wait a minute! Hadn't these fellows passed the tests Joseph had given them?

Indeed, they had. So, why doesn't Joseph trust them? Why does he warn them?

Has he forgotten their repentant attitude? Let me see if I can't answer that with an illustration.

I remember back in my days at home with my parents, during my adolescence especially, when they would sometimes say, "Be careful" or "We want you back by 10," and I would respond out of the typical immature frustration of adolescence with that classic plea, "Don't you trust me?"

I realize today, having had teenagers of my own, that what I was asking was not a fair question. My parents weren't questioning my motives or intentions. They were questioning my ability to keep my actions within the bounds of my motives and intentions. They knew all too well the weakness of the flesh and the temptations that present themselves to young people – even young people with perfect records like mine! (Ha!).

For Christians, this principle is even more clearly definable. These brothers had manifested true repentance for the wrong they had committed in the past - there is no reason to question that. However, Joseph knew just as we should realize, that sometimes good intentions are sidetracked by the flesh - especially in an area where the flesh has recently had the upper hand.

What we need to realize is that the battle isn't over after we've repented of sin. The battle isn't over until we have put to death the habits and tendencies we have toward that particular sin.

Let's say a person commits adultery. When confronted with that sin, he or she genuinely repents and is forgiven. Does that mean they're out of danger and that everything is back to normal? No! In a case like that there has been a failure of self-discipline. Self-discipline is now weakened by sin.

That person is going to need to walk very carefully for some time before he or she can ease up and drop their guard. There will need to be help from others in the area of accountability so they can build up their resistance once again. In submitting themselves to that help, trust can be built up again. Whenever I encounter someone who has fallen into such a sin and

they are not interested in such help and accountability, I find myself seriously questioning their repentance. Why? Because a person who is truly repentant will want to do everything in his or her power to avoid going right back into sin.

Paul said it this way: "Therefore, let him who thinks he stand take heed lest he fall." (I Corinthians. 10:12)

If you have fallen into sin and repented, and your brethren are still checking up on you and cautioning you, don't despise it! Rejoice that they care enough about you to help you stay out of sin!

That is the spirit in which Joseph says, "Do not quarrel on the journey."

Picture with me the scene as these brothers caravan their donkeys, carts, and assorted other things across the deserts of western Egypt and then north, back to Canaan. It would be quite a sight to see all this evidence of riches against the bleak backdrop of a famine-ravaged land. Perhaps they passed the rotting carcasses of animals that had died of starvation. Maybe they trekked across dry lakebeds. Finally they pull up outside their father's black goat hair tents. Animals baying and bleating, children staring, curious relatives coming out of their tents and looking, and then... they stand before their aged father Jacob.

(Read v. 25-26)

"What are you guys telling me? My son Joseph is dead! Are you trying to finish me off?"

I imagine it must have taken quite a bit of explaining that is not recorded here, not to mention perhaps a confession of their wrongdoing.

Jacob didn't believe them. Finally they brought him out of his tent into the sunlight where all the loaded donkeys and carts were standing. By this time

Jacob is bent and old. Squinting into the sunlight, he takes in the scene...

(Read v. 27-28)

The cloud of 20 years of gloomy depression lifts from Israel like the disappearing of a morning fog. Apparently there was little time wasted between verse 28 of chapter 45 and verse 1 of chapter 46 as soon...

IV. Jacob Sets Out For Egypt

Tents are rolled up, goods are packed, children, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, cousins are all gathered to make the trip. What a sight it must have been. Like the Grapes of Wrath! Seventy half starved people loaded in wagons, ox carts, donkeys, camels, headed out across the desert, dust flying, sheep bleating... the whole clan headed for Egypt. To show you where Jacob's heart was, notice where he stopped.

(Read 46:1-4)

Jacob may have had some reservations about leaving Canaan since that was the land that had been promised to his grandfather, Abraham. God removes any doubts by appearing to him. Notice in passing that though this prophecy of the Exodus would take place 430 years in the future. God could see it clearly.

(Read v. 5)

Let me pause here for just a moment and speak to you men. You should be taking care of the women, the children, and the aged in your family. It is God's expectation of you. In this day of mixed up gender roles, this needs to be clarified. A woman is made by God to be cherished and protected, not used and abused. Contrary to what many say today, the Bible says she is the weaker vessel. That doesn't mean she isn't smart or capable. It means she is not as strong physically. Be sure you treat her that way. Notice here, the wives, children, and the aged rode in the wagons. The men walked. Did you get that? The men walked! So I say to you men, walk like men. If you are the leader (and you are supposed to be) get out there and lead your family. Don't drive them. Lead them! Leaders don't exist to be served. They serve.

("Let him who desires to be great among you become the servant of all.") So serve! While you're at it, open her car door. (No, that is not a gesture of necessity. It is a gesture of respect.) Lift that heavy stuff for her. If you have nasty bill collectors to deal with, you deal with them. You walk. She rides. Enough said?

So the family went to Egypt.

(Read v. 6-7)

Though we are nearly out of time, the best is yet before us, so please bear with me. We're going to jump ahead to verse 28 to get it. You can read the intervening genealogies in your spare time. What we're going to see is that at long last...

V. Joseph Meets His Father.

(Read v. 28)

OK. Here it is. Joseph has been waiting for this day for 20 years. I imagine that he probably had scouts out there watching for the approach of his family. He just can't wait for his father's arrival. He's washed the whitewalls on his chariot, windexed the chrome, turtle-waxed the fenders.

Everything is ready. As soon as he gets word that they have entered Goshen, he climbs aboard his chariot, punches the horses, and flies down to meet them in a billowing cloud of dust.

(Read v. 29)

Again I quote from Joyce Landorf and her JOSEPH novel:

"A large cloud of sand swirled behind a great host of people. 'There!' Joseph cried above the clamor and noise of the chariot wheels and hoof beats.

"Gradually, as they came closer, Asenath could see that the wagons were filled with women, children, and possessions while the sons and older grandsons walked and rode on donkeys. They were followed by all their flocks of sheep, goats, cows, and camels. A quick head count of the main body of people turned out to be about seventy persons... 'So these are the children of Israel,' Asenath thought as Joseph reined his horse to a stop.

"She never had to ask which man was Joseph's father. Asenath found him immediately. He had ridden in one of the wagons, and during the last mile of their journey he had stood, holding on to the front of the wagon - his white hair flowing off his face in the wind and his tall frame, stooped slightly by age - looking like the magnificent patriarch that he was. Asenath loved him instantly.

"Joseph left the chariot and ran through the last feet of sand to help his father down from the wagon. When Jacob was finally standing before his son,

Joseph threw his arms around his father's neck, and the silence of twenty two years was broken only by sounds of weeping."

Whether it happened exactly that way, I do not know. Jacob was the first to speak.

(Read v. 30)

What a joyous reunion!

Conclusion

There is a reunion much like this one being planned right now in heaven for all of God's people. The chances are good that we will all be separated by death for a span of time that will arrive much sooner than most of us imagine. If we are not a part of that last generation alive on earth when Jesus returns, each one of us will go to the grave for a time and be separated from those we love on earth. But that separation is only temporary!

James Black, the songwriter, put it this way:

When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, And time shall be no more, And the morning breaks eternal, bright and fair, When the saved of earth shall gather

Over on the other shore, And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

Will you be there? That reunion will last for eternity. Jacob said, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face."

On that day, the redeemed will say, "Now let me live, since I have seen Your Face..."

I hope you are planning right now to be a part of that joyous reunion. If not, I implore you to start thinking about it right now...