

“I am your brother!”: Sovereignty and Forgiveness

Genesis 45.1-15

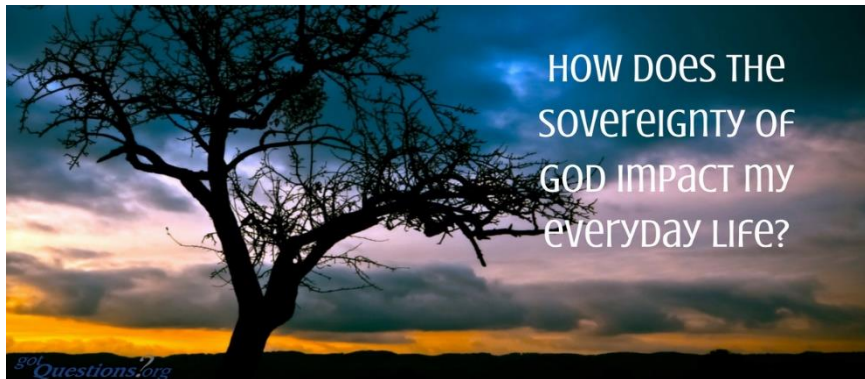
The tension that has been building since Joseph’s brothers first came to Egypt is released as he reveals who he is! They are frightened, but need not be: Joseph sees God’s sovereign hand at work, preserving a nation, and restoring a family. *This is what God can do!*

Joseph’s speech: Because God is sovereign, forgiveness is possible

- Understanding God’s sovereignty enables us to forgive (1-8)
- Forgiveness of others enables us to enjoy reconciliation (9-15)

What this means for my life

- *God is ‘bigger’ than my problems – He is able to use them to bring about good.*
- *I can trust God even when my life doesn’t make sense, because He knows more than I do.*
- *I can forgive others even when they wrong me, knowing that God is working in my life.*



Genesis 45.1-15

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. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. 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. 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. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 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. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. 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. 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. 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. 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.” ’ Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. 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.” Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

Don't you love happy endings? Hollywood does. In fact, that's what keeps us coming back – in lives that are often filled with problems that seem to never get better, in the movies, in two hours or so, huge problems are overcome, the good guy gets his girl, and they live happily ever after.

Genesis 45 is one of those wonderful times when in the midst of all kinds of trials – and there are more to come – the good wins, and God's blessing outshines the darkness of sin in this world.

A quick reminder of what had just happened: Joseph has been testing his brothers, who sold him into slavery 22 years before, and have no idea that he is even alive, much less the ruler of Egypt (!). He wants to know if they are still jealous and hateful, or if their hearts have changed.

To find out, Joseph sets up Benjamin, their father Jacob's favorite son, to be accused of stealing his silver cup. Now what will the brothers do? Will they abandon him? They don't! They admit their guilt, and where they once sold a brother into slavery, Judah offers to become a slave in Benjamin's place.

Joseph's speech: God is sovereign, forgiveness is possible

- Understanding God's sovereignty enables us to forgive (1-8)

Joseph immediately cleared the room of all his servants and ministers (1). He begins weeping and wailing so loud everyone in the whole palace complex can hear it (2)! In v3 he blurts out, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

His brothers are speechless; first, they are dumbstruck to think that he is alive. They have been told their father and convinced themselves for more than twenty years that he was dead. Secondly, they are petrified: The Hebrew word translated 'dismayed' literally means to tremble in terror.

Joseph is the most powerful person they will ever know. He could have them put to death instantly! Their brains simply can't grasp that it is him! Joseph sees the fear in their eyes, but all there is in his heart now is forgiveness. In v4 he tells them to come closer – I imagine they were a little reluctant to get close to him – and he says again, "I am your brother, whom you sold into Egypt." But if it is him, why doesn't he have them killed immediately? In verses 5-8, he explains why.

In these verses, Joseph turns the spotlight on God. In v5 he says, "God sent me before you to preserve life." In v7 he says, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth" – in other words, so that you and your children would survive. In v8, he is explicit: "It was not you who sent me here, but God!"

How is Joseph able to forgive his brothers after they did such a horrible thing to him? The answer *isn't* because he has a big heart and just loves them so much. He *isn't* just going to forget what they did to him either by blocking it out. The answer he gives is the sovereignty of God. *God had a plan for me.*

Now we have to be careful here. Some people who call themselves Calvinists teach the sovereignty of God means He *determines everything that happens*. If you fall down

the stairs, God determined that you would. If your father abused you, that's because God determined he would. If you get in a car accident, it's because God determined it would happen. God is in absolute control of everything.

But this idea isn't reflected anywhere in Scripture, and it is silly to boot. If God decided in eternity past everything that would happen in your life, including where you will spend eternity, then life is meaningless. God is capricious and heartless. Baylor University professor Roger Olson says: "The God of Calvinism scares me; I'm not sure how to distinguish him from the devil."

But when Joseph says God sent him to Egypt to preserve life and preserve his family, he is not saying that God made his brothers sell him into slavery. That was a sin, and his brothers have admitted their guilt and agreed that God is just to punish them. Scripture tells us that God doesn't sin, and doesn't cause others to sin either (James 1.13). What God's sovereignty means is that no matter what we do – no matter how evil the world is, God's plan can never be thwarted – He fulfills His purpose.

How many times have we seen this already in Genesis?! Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, and God provides a covering for them. Cain kills his brother Abel, but God enables the family to grow. The world becomes so filled with wickedness that God destroys it with a flood, but He preserves Noah and his family in the ark. When sin again fills people's hearts and they build a tower declaring that they are their own god, God confuses their languages and the nations are born, and He chooses the Jewish nation as the one through which He will save the world.

Over and over, man sins, and God sovereignly turns the result so that it fulfills His purpose. It is *this* truth which Joseph understood: Because He understood that God was able to use his brothers' sinful action to bring about good, he was also able to forgive them.

- Forgiveness of others enables us to enjoy reconciliation (9-15)

The end result of that forgiveness is reconciliation. In vv. 9-13, Joseph tells his brothers to get their father, tell him that he is alive, and bring him to Egypt, where Joseph will take care of him.

The passage ends with an unthinkable scene: Joseph hugs and weeps for joy with his brothers, then talks with them, catching up on all that has happened at home, and telling them about all his experiences after they sold him into slavery. The past is not forgotten – in fact, it is recalled and shared together. But the past sins are not going to define their future lives. Instead, forgiveness heals the wounds of hate.

What this means for my life

I suspect that many of you are beginning to see how this story of Joseph really impacts our lives today. This is not just a neat story of a man who became rich and famous, and did a lot of good in the world. This is a blueprint for our lives, displaying truths that can supernaturally enable us to not just 'live under the circumstances' like everyone else...but rise above them. These truths can change a life, so that as Romans 8 puts it, while there are 'sufferings of

this present time' and 'all creation groans,' we can know that 'all things work together for good to those who love God,' and we can be 'more than conquerors through Him who loved us' (cf. vv.18, 22, 28, 37).

Let's quickly isolate the three major truths that the story of Joseph teach us. First:

- *God is 'bigger' than my problems – He is able to use them to bring about good.*

Please note: Scripture doesn't teach that God will never allow bad things to happen to us; that's crazy. The heroes of the Old Testament listed in Hebrews 11 faced all kinds of trials, and some were tortured or martyred for faith. But God was working out His plan through their lives, like He did with Joseph, and we can still see that today.

In the same way, God is working in lives of Christians today – in many parts of the world, even through severe suffering – to bring about His purpose. And what about your life? Is it true for you?

I've lived long enough to be able to look back on a lot of hard times. I have experienced the valley of the shadow of death. I have known rejection and loneliness. I have experienced pain and loss. And I know many of you who have experienced the same thing will agree with me when I say that looking back, I recognize those as times when God became the most real to me, and I grew closer to God. This leads to a second truth:

- *I can trust God even when my life doesn't make sense, because He knows more than I do.*

As we go through 2020, none of us knows what we may encounter. It may be unexpected sickness, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, a broken relationship. Sin is a constant reality in this world; Satan is doing his worst to bring misery and destruction, and just because we know God doesn't mean we feel it. In fact, Scripture tells us he will go out of his way to inflict whatever anxiety or pain he can in our lives.

But the knowledge that God is sovereign gives us a new perspective: He is all-powerful, and He knows more than I do, so even when my life doesn't make sense, I can put my trust in God.

Let me just add something here – something we forget in our instant-gratification world. God is patient. If you're struggling with questions or doubts today, keep pursuing God, reading His Word, doing His will. Don't fight Him. There were 22 years of unanswered questions for Joseph, and all that time, God was working out His purpose. His brothers had no idea till the very end. You and I may not know what God is doing, but He does, and that's enough.

- *I can forgive others even when they wrong me, knowing that God is working in my life.*

Finally, this means I can forgive others who do wrong to me – not excuse them for what they have done, not tell them that God wanted them to do it. Remember, God is never the author of sin, nor does He get us to sin.

This forgiveness and reconciliation happens every day in our country and around the world. Recognition that God is sovereign – that our God is bigger than the problems of this life – enables Christians to forgive others, and even be reconciled to those who have done them wrong.

Sometimes it is displayed graphicly. I want to show you a couple of videos this morning. In these videos, Christians – relatives of people killed at a church prayer meeting in S. Carolina, and the brother of a young man killed by a police officer here in Texas – come before the person who took the life of their loved one. This is what it looks like when a person who believes in God gives forgiveness to one who has wronged them. (Play video.)

That's amazing forgiveness. I wish I could say it was always displayed by Christians, but it's not. Sometimes we lose sight of God – circumstances cloud our view of Him, and we hold onto our grudges or hard feelings. After all: We've been wronged, and they don't deserve forgiveness!

I'm so glad God didn't act that way. *God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us Rom 5.8*). Billy Graham once said that if the gospel were written in a newspaper headline, it would read: God forgives his son's killers, invites them to come and live in His home forever. If God so loved us, ought we not to love each other that way, too?

Years ago the Gaithers wrote a song little sone entitled *I Am Loved*, with these lyrics:

*I am loved, I am loved
I can risk loving you
For the One who knows me best
Loves me most*

*I am loved you are loved
Won't you please take my hand
We are free to love each other
We are loved*

We have a sovereign God who loves us. He showed that love by patiently waiting for us until we trusted in Him. Let Him bring the gift of forgiveness into your life. Who is there in your life who needs to know that forgiveness?

Digging Deeper

1. Genesis 45 is the climax of the encounters between Joseph and his brothers that began in Gen. 42 with their first trip to Egypt. The combination of famine and Joseph's shrewd dealings with them aroused their guilty consciences, leading them to repent of their sinful deeds and accept their suffering as just judgment from God. *This is the context of all that happens in chapter 45.* Remember this: Forgiveness can be given, but for reconciliation and a restoration of fellowship, repentance for wrong is needed. Have you experienced this – forgiving someone for wrong they committed against you, but only later restored fellowship with them after they confessed it? How does 1 John 1.9 reflect this truth for our restoration of fellowship with God?
2. Gen 45.3 records Joseph's brothers' first response to learning who he was. Some translations say they were "stunned;" most say they were "dismayed." The Hebrew word used here, *bahal*, indicates that they were terrified to the point of trembling. Why do you think they would have reacted this way?
3. In verses 5-9, Joseph turns the spotlight on God: *God* sent him to Egypt to become the ruler, to preserve life and preserve their family line. Navigating our way through this truth can be tricky: Does this mean the brothers didn't need to be sorry for selling Joseph into slavery? Does God 'promote' sinful actions for His own purposes (see James 1.13)? At stake in questions like these is our understanding of God's *sovereignty* – His absolute power and authority. How would you explain it?
4. At the beginning of the Joseph story in Genesis 37, his brothers hated him so much that they *couldn't speak to him on friendly terms* (v4), and sold him into slavery. 22 years later, they weep and hug, and *his brothers talked with him* (Gen. 45.15). What a change! Have you ever experienced this kind of reconciliation in a relationship? Is there someone who you have no fellowship with today because of some wrong that was done? What change could God make in your heart to bring healing? Are you ready to trust Him as your sovereign God?