

## GETTING EVEN GOD'S WAY Genesis 50:15-21

**Genesis 50** begins with the death and burial of Jacob, the father of Joseph and his eleven brothers. In **Genesis 49**, Jacob blessed his sons before he died. Joseph organized a proper burial and mourning period for Jacob. Then he returned to Egypt to continue his official duties as vice-Pharaoh. The end of **Genesis 50** fast forwards to the death and burial of Joseph. But in between the deaths of Jacob and Joseph, our text records one final scene from Joseph's life. Verse 15 says: "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead they said, 'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.'"

The back story to this begins in **Genesis 37**. Young Joseph was favored by his father, because he was the son of his old age. And Jacob expressed this favor by giving Joseph a beautiful and expensive multicolored coat. This caused his brothers to hate him. Likewise, Joseph was favored by God, who revealed through dreams that Joseph would occupy a position of great authority in which his brothers would bow before him. This caused them to hate Joseph even more. When Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers one day, they threw him in an empty well, intending to kill him. Instead, they sold him into slavery - telling their father that a wild animal had killed him. So Joseph was taken to Egypt as a slave. But God was with him. His master's wife falsely accused him of rape and had him imprisoned. But God was with him. Pharaoh's personal assistant promised to help him; then forgot him. But God was with him. And when Pharaoh had a mysterious dream, God used Joseph to interpret it. A famine was coming. And Pharaoh appointed Joseph to oversee all the resources of Egypt. During this period, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to find food, which ultimately led to a family reunion.

When Jacob died, the entire family had lived with Joseph in Egypt for 17 years. But now the brothers feared that Joseph would get even with them. So they sent a messenger to Joseph, claiming their father's dying wish was that Joseph would forgive them. There is no record that Jacob actually gave this command. The boys probably invoked the name of their dead father to gain sympathy and avert Joseph's wrath. Verse 17 says: "Joseph wept when they spoke to him." And verse 18 says: His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." This act was the final fulfillment of the Joseph's dreams for which they hated him. Most likely, his brothers never acknowledged the significance of the moment. They were too overwhelmed by guilt.

The conduct of Joseph's brothers warns us of the binding effects of unaddressed guilt. Joseph had forgiven them long ago. But their lingering guilt made them afraid. And guilt can have the same binding effect in your life. Or as JOEL GREGORY has said, "**Either you deal with your guilt; or your guilt will deal with you.**" But it is not the guilt of the offender that I want to deal with as much

as the forgiveness of the offended. Verse 15-18 record the guilt-induced fear of Joseph's brothers. But verses 19-21 record the complete forgiveness Joseph extended to them. Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because of his absolute confidence in the power, goodness, and wisdom of Almighty God. This is the point of the story: **Your faith in God is authenticated by your forgiveness of others.** Your forgiveness of others really is not about you or others. It's about God. If you trust God you will be able to forgive others. In our text, Joseph's response to his brother's appeal for mercy teaches us three ways to get even God's way.

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## I. DON'T PLAY GOD.

Verse 19 records Joseph's initial response to his brother's appeal: But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?" God is good, holy, just, righteous, and sovereign. In short, God is God. Consequently, he has the right to pay back evildoers. Joseph recognized that. But he also recognized that he was not in the place of God. He was able to forgive his brothers because he recognized that God is God and he was not. MAX LUCADO has written a wonderful beatitude: **"Blessed is that man who discovers that there is only one God and stops applying for the position."** This is the first step you must take in order let the past be the past: God is God and you are not.

**Abraham Lincoln once listened to the pleas of the mother of a soldier who'd been sentenced to hang for treason. She begged the president to grant a pardon. Lincoln agreed. Yet, he's reported to have left the lady with the following words: "Still, I wish we could teach him a lesson. I wish we could give him just a little bit of hanging."**

We often feel like that when we have been wronged. We know that it is wrong to get revenge. But we sure wish there was a way to give people a little bit of hanging to teach them a lesson. But Joseph reminds us that we must not play God in other peoples' lives. R. KENT HUGHES comments: **"How much of our relational troubles come from our attempting to be God in other people's lives. Oh, if were only God for a day - we would set so many evils right! In our bad moments we imagine that we know what God ought to do with others. And at our very worst moments, we take correction into our own hands - because God apparently has not had the wisdom to do so."** But we must not do this. We must remember that God is God and we are not. **Romans 12:19** says: Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

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## II. VIEW LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF GOD'S GOOD PROVIDENCE.

Verse 20 says: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” This is one of the great statements of faith recorded in the Bible. And it is all the more remarkable in that it is the grounds for Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers. And if you are going to move on with your life, you must view life through the lens of God’s good providence. What does it mean to view life this way? Two things:

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#### A. COME TO GRIPS WITH THE REALITY OF EVIL.

When you experience any interpersonal conflict, it’s important that you give other people the benefit of the doubt. But that does not mean that you should be naïve, foolish, or undiscerning. As you give people the benefit of the doubt; you must also come to grips with the reality of evil. That’s what Joseph did. Joseph didn’t play God. But he didn’t play dumb, either. In verse 19, he says, “As for you, you meant evil against me.” Joseph did not deny or diminish what his brothers had done. He directly confronted them with their evil intentions.

Now, Joseph’s brothers were not the only ones who wronged him. Potipher’s wife wronged him. But she didn’t mean it. When Joseph resisted her sexual advances, she accused him of rape. That was wrong. But she didn’t mean to hurt Joseph. She was just angry because he rejected her. And, as the saying goes, hell has no fury like a woman scorned. Likewise, Pharaoh’s cupbearer wronged Joseph. In prison, Joseph interpreted his dream. But when he got out, he forgot Joseph. That was wrong. But he didn’t mean it. He just made the common human mistake of forgetting people we ought to remember. But it was different with Joseph’s brothers. They hated him without cause. And they plotted evil against him. When they saw him coming, they said, “Here comes this dreamer. Let’s kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a wild animal killed him.” (**Genesis 37:19-20**) They meant evil against Joseph. Yet Joseph forgave them in spite of their evil intentions. This teaches us that you don’t have to deny or diminish the reality of evil in order to move on with your life.

- You don’t have to pretend that it didn’t really happen.
- You don’t have to pretend that it didn’t break your heart.
- You don’t have to pretend that it didn’t cause you to suffer loss.

You don’t have to pretend that evil isn’t evil in order to forgive. To the contrary, you must come to grips with it. Suppressing painful experiences is not a legitimate solution. You may bury it in the sand. But that doesn’t get rid of it. The only way you can get rid of it is to dig it up. Acknowledge it. Deal with it. Forgive it. And then move on with your life. The line, “It’s all good,” is cool slang; but bad theology. It’s not all good. Some things are downright evil, wicked, and ungodly. And you must come to grips with that if you are going to move on with your life. Then, once you come to grips with evil, let it go. You have been wronged. Bad things have happened in your life. You have suffered

without an apparent cause. You have two options for moving on. You can get even your way. But that will only keep you in the bondage of bitterness. Or you can get even God's way. You can forgive. And you can forgive the evil that you have experienced when you...

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## B. TRUST THE OVERRULING PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

In contrast to his brothers' evil intentions, Joseph declared, **"But God..."** This contrasting conjunction affirms the sovereign providence of God. **Ephesians 2:4-5** says: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved." Praise God that he can reach into your circumstances and transform evil into good. **WILLIAM COWPER** was right:

JUDGE NOT THE LORD BY FEEBLE SENSE,  
BUT TRUST HIM FOR HIS GRACE;  
BEHIND HIS FROWNING PROVIDENCE  
HE HIDES A SMILING FACE

Joseph says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." What did God mean for good? God meant for **good** the very things that Joseph's brothers meant for **evil**. It was not that his brothers intended evil against him, but God intercepted it and ran it back for good. Speaking of the same events, Joseph said...

- You had intentions; God had intentions
- You were up to something; God was up to something
- You had a plan; God had a plan
- You meant it for evil; God meant it for good

The bottom line is that God's meant was bigger than his brother's meant! Joseph explained this when he first revealed himself to his brothers in **Genesis 45:5-8**: And now do not be distressed 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 yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Here's the good news: You can let go of the past because God has the last word – not people. **TERRY L. JOHNSON** writes: **"Many times, even most times, we won't know what good God is bringing from adversity. This is not the critical thing. The critical thing is knowing that God is good and he meant it! When you love your loved one, he meant it. When you were afflicted with disease, he meant it. When you were hit with financial reversals, God's meant it. He promises to bring good from it. Now you must trust him."** God has the last

word. And he is able to transform evil into good. **Romans 8:28** says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

The ultimate demonstration of the overcoming providence of God is seen in the cross of Jesus. The cross demonstrates both man at his worst and God at his best. God took the worst act of human history and used it as the means to redeem sinners. **Acts 2:22-24**, Peter says: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it."

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Verse 19 declares the sovereign **power** of God's providence. But it also declares the saving **purpose** of God's providence. Joseph says, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, **to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.**” God used Joseph's suffering to save many people during a time of famine. He saved his own family. He saved the nation of Egypt. And he saved the nations that came to Egypt looking for help during the famine. God used what Joseph experienced to save others. This reminds us that what God does for you is not just about you. It's about others. God's sovereign power is connected to his saving purpose. And when God brings you out or brings you through; he doesn't just do it in order to bless you. He does it so that he can use you to be a blessing to others.

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### **III. TREAT THOSE YOU HAVE FORGIVEN AS IF THEY HAVE TRULY BEEN FORGIVEN.**

In **Matthew 18:21-35** records a parable of Jesus about a king who settled accounts with her servants. He called in one servant who owed him ten thousand talents. And when the servant couldn't pay, the king order that his family and possessions be sold in slavery. But the servant cried out for mercy. And the king freely forgave the entire debt. Later, that same servant saw a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii. And he grabbed him and tried to choke the money out of him. Then he had that servant imprisoned until he could repay the debt. When the king heard about this, he called that servant back in. And because this wicked servant refused to show mercy to his fellow servant, the king revoked his forgiveness and had the servant arrested until he could repay the entire debt he owed. In **Matthew 18:35**, Jesus closes with this comment: “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Jesus teaches here that the grace you receive is connected to the grace you extend. In other words, if you want God to let you off the hook; you must be willing to let others off the hook. You must forgive. And note how we are to forgive: "from the heart." **1 Samuel 16:7** says, "For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." So we must forgive from that heart. That is, pretended forgiveness is unacceptable to God. You must forgive from the heart. But how can you know if you have forgiven from the heart? How can others tell if you have forgiven from the heart? There's really only one answer: You must treat those you have forgiven as though they have truly been forgiven. That's what Joseph did in verse 21. And his actions give us an example for how to treat others as if they have truly been forgiven.

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#### **A. DO NOT GIVE THEM ANY REASON TO BE AFRAID OF YOU.**

In verse 15, Joseph told his brothers, "Do not fear." And in verse 21, he tells them again: "So do not fear." Joseph wanted to make it clear that his brothers had no reason to fear that he would retaliate against them. In so doing, Joseph shows us that when you have really forgiven, the one who offends you should have no reason to be afraid of you. They should not fear how you are going to respond to them. They should not fear what you are going to say to them or about them. They should not fear what you are going to do to them. Am I suggesting that you should become best friends with the people who hurt you? No. But I am saying that you should give them no reason to fear that you will try to take matters into your own hands to pay them back.

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#### **B. EXPRESS YOUR FORGIVENESS BY DOING WHAT YOU CAN TO HELP THEM.**

Again, verse 21 says: "So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Not only did Joseph tell them not to fear; he also pledged to take care of his brothers and the families, including their little children. He was willing to do what he could for them in practical ways to show them that he had truly forgiven them. And that's what God expects from us. **Romans 12:19-20** says: Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

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#### **C. GIVE THEM ASSURANCE THAT YOU HAVE TRULY FORGIVEN THEM.**

Verse 21 says, "So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them." The closing comment of this verse says that Joseph comforted his brothers. I imagine he got off of his throne and went to his brothers to comfort them. He must have hugged and embraced them. He must have kissed them and assured them of his love. And then he "spoke kindly to them." Literally, he spoke to their hearts. With words and actions, he sought to give them assurance that he had truly forgiven them.

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#### **D. REMEMBER THAT GOD HAS COMPLETELY FORGIVEN YOU BECAUSE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

You may be thinking, "That was Joseph. I don't think I could do that." But remember that Joseph's story is an illustration of the way God has treated you for Jesus' sake. Joseph is a type of Christ. That is, the story of Joseph points to the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. Jesus was hated for because he was favored by his father. Jesus was hated by people without a cause. Jesus was the victim of the ultimate act of evil. Yet, while he hung on the cross, Jesus declared, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus has comforted our fears. Jesus has given us his word to assure us that he has forgiven us. And Jesus has treated us with kindness so prove that he truly loves us. Did you get that? They throw Joseph into a pit; but they hung Jesus on the cross.

- Because of the cross, God has given you another chance.
- Because of the cross, God has forgiven you.
- Because of the cross, God has cleaned you up.
- Because of the cross, God has set you free.
- Because of the cross, God has given you a new start.
- Because of the cross, God has cleaned you up.

**ALAS! AND DID MY SAVIOR BLEED? AND DID MY SOVEREIGN DIE?  
WOULD HE DEVOTE THAT SACRED HEAD FOR SUCH A WORM AS I?**

**WAS IT FOR CRIMES THAT I HAVE DONE HE GROANED UPON THE TREE?  
AMAZING PITY! GRACE UNKNOWN! AND LOVE BEYOND DEGREE!**

**AT THE CROSS, AT THE CROSS WHERE I FIRST SAW THE LIGHT,  
AND THE BURDEN OF MY HEART ROLLED AWAY  
IT WAS THERE BY FAITH I RECEIVED MY SIGHT,  
AND NOW I AM HAPPY ALL THE DAY!**