

## Lesson 8 – 20 June 2010

### Joseph Forgives His Brothers

**Lesson Scope:** [Genesis 45](#)

#### Lesson Focus

Joseph's unfair treatment at the hand of his brothers many years earlier had brought him untold suffering, lesser men would have leaped at this unparalleled opportunity for revenge. Joseph chose rather to forgive fully.

Jacob had deceived Isaac, and now was deceived by his own sons. Joseph's brothers were suffering for their ill treatment of Joseph and for having deceived their father. Had Joseph spitefully retaliated, a vicious cycle would have been repeated. Joseph's forgiveness allowed him to live his remaining years free from the bitter reaping his relatives experienced.

Joseph's brothers were grown men with extended families by this time. Though they had failures, they had over the years coalesced as a family with their father Jacob at the center. This family loyalty laid the groundwork for the events of this lesson. Ultimately, had Joseph not forgiven his brothers and had he identified with the Egyptians instead of with his family, he would have been outside the promises God made to Abraham and his seed.

Joseph's forgiveness was so complete that it cannot be gainsaid in any way. Being human, he likely struggled with bitterness. But it is apparent that he had forgiven his brothers long before they came to Egypt. Years later he still manifested the same forgiving attitude (Genesis 50:15-21). Certainly some will lose their salvation by failing to forgive far smaller offenses than Joseph forgave.

The New Testament holds us to a higher standard than the Old. We are to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:19) and forgive as Christ forgave (Ephesians 4:32).

*Jealousy, hatred, and mistreatment mar good relationships. A forgiving spirit, however, opens the way for healing and restoration.*

**Lesson Aim:** To see characteristics of a forgiving spirit.

**Theme Verse:** [Ephesians 4:32](#): “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

## Lesson Text

### "Joseph Made Himself Known"

#### Genesis 45:1-8

Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. <sup>2</sup>And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. <sup>3</sup>And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup>Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup>For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup>And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup>So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

### "He ... Wept Upon Them"

#### Genesis 45:9-15

Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: <sup>10</sup>And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: <sup>11</sup>And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. <sup>12</sup>And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. <sup>13</sup>And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. <sup>14</sup>And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. <sup>15</sup>Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

## **"Joseph Gave Them ... Provision for the Way"**

**Genesis 45:16-17**

And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants. <sup>17</sup>And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye; lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan;

**Genesis 45:21-24**

And the children of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. <sup>22</sup>To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment. <sup>23</sup>And to his father he sent after this manner; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way. <sup>24</sup>So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **"Joseph Made Himself Known"**

1. Why did Joseph "cause every man to go out" when he made himself known to his brothers?
2. List the ways that Joseph showed that he had forgiven his brothers himself. Explain.
3. Should a sinner be angry with himself? (Gen.45:5) Explain.

#### **"He ... Wept Upon Them"**

4. How did Joseph's view of divine Providence affect his outlook?
5. What are our responsibilities to our brother after reconciliation has been effected?

#### **"Joseph Gave Them ... Provision for the Way"**

6. How should we relate to the danger of "falling out" with our brother?
7. What is wrong if we cannot forgive another?
8. What blessings follow restored relationships?

### **Analyzing the Passage**

Joseph's tears released a dam of pent-up emotions that he had successfully hidden to this time. Very likely the Egyptians never knew the details of his separation from his family. In a manner that did not implicate his brothers. Joseph explained how he came to Egypt Gen. (40:15).

"I am Joseph" (Gen.45:4) was uttered in the brothers' native tongue. By us-

ing his Hebrew name, he was identifying with his family. Egypt was not his home.

Troubled (Gen.45:3) means "to be disturbed." The brothers certainly had reason to fear when they realized that Joseph had power to bring retribution.

'See that ye fall not out by the way" (Gen.45:24) was a warning against disagreement or quarrels. Joseph certainly understood how easily the brothers might begin assigning blame or quarreling over who should confess their wicked deeds to Jacob.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **"Joseph Made Himself Known"**

1. A forgiving spirit longs for reconciliation. (Gen.45:1) Joseph tested his brothers only long enough to determine if their attitudes had changed. Through it all his "bowels did yearn" for reconciliation. We should never have a spirit that rejoices in conflict with others. How much one desires reconciliation is the single most important factor necessary to bring peace.

2. A forgiving restricts his communication to those who are directly involved (Gen.45:1). Matthew 18:15 instructs us to discuss trespasses between us and our brother alone. How much havoc has been caused in the church by failing to apply this principle! If we are intent on telling as many as possible about our injuries, we are compounding the problem. We should not be easily swayed when others try to enlist our support by telling their side of the story.

3. True forgiveness shows consideration for the feelings of the other person (Gen.45:3-5). Joseph understood his brothers' terror at the sudden realization of who he was. He immediately allayed their fear and assured them that he held no grudges. Many times difficulties are caused partially by differing perceptions of events, and a misreading of the motives of another. We should ever try to put ourselves in the other person's position so we may empathize with him.

4. Restoration requires dealing with sin for what it is (Gen.45:4). Honesty means that we confess our error without reserve. Some statements that indicate a wrong attitude are "I will admit to wrong if my brother does too" and "If I have done anything wrong, I am sorry." We cannot confess another's sin for him, but we are accountable before God to confess our own.

5. A forgiving spirit rests on faith in the sovereign purposes of God (Gen.45:5-6, 8). God could have preserved Jacob's family in many other

ways than this, but God worked through the failures of men to bring about His Purposes (Gen.50:20). Joseph was content to allow God to order events as He saw best. Trust in the sovereignty of God gives calmness of spirit because we know the events of time are in larger hands than our own.

### **"He ... Wept Upon Them"**

6. True forgiveness includes a commitment to contribute the ongoing needs of the forgiven one (Gen.45:9-11). True forgiveness will not act as though reconciliation is a once-and-done business transaction. Just as Joseph provided for his family, so we must continue to look for ways to help those we have forgiven.

7. Tears of compassion contribute to healing and restoration (Gen.45:14-15). It is not our responsibility to make others feel as guilty as possible. Tears or other heartfelt gestures assure our brother of our forgiveness and help him to experience God's forgiveness as well.

Sometimes we forgive because we know it is right rather than because of an overwhelming emotional impulse to do so. We should then pray that God will change our feelings so that we can forgive genuinely and not just intellectually.

### **"Joseph Gave Them ... Provision for the Way"**

8. A forgiving spirit spreads a positive influence beyond those who are directly involved (Gen.45:10). Good brotherly relationships encourage the oncoming generation to develop right attitudes toward others. We should be known in our communities as peacemakers. Others will then be shown a higher plane of living that does not succumb to petty rivalries and revenge.

9. A forgiving spirit spares nothing for the welfare of the forgiven. (Gen.45:21-22). Joseph treated his brothers better than they deserved to be treated. After we have been reconciled, we should not act as though the other person is on trial. Deliberate coolness indicates that we have not freely forgiven.

10. True forgiveness includes the desire to avoid repeated failure (Gen.45:24). When relationships deteriorate we do well to analyze where we have failed so we can avoid repeating the same mistake. We should especially look inward if we continually move from one conflict to another. Learning our own weaknesses can help us by God's grace, to rise above our native tendencies.

## **Important Teachings**

1. A forgiving spirit longs for reconciliation (Gen.45:1).
2. A forgiving person restricts his communication to those who are directly involved (Gen.45:1).
3. True forgiveness shows consideration for the feelings of the other person (Gen.45:3-5).
4. Restoration requires dealing with sin for what it is (Gen.45:4).
5. A forgiving spirit rests on faith in the sovereign purposes of God (Gen.45:5-6, 8).
6. True forgiveness includes a commitment to contribute to the ongoing needs of the forgiven one (Gen.45:9-11).
7. Tears of compassion contribute to healing and restoration (Gen.45:14-15).
8. A forgiving spirit spreads a positive influence beyond those who are directly involved (Gen.45:16).
9. A forgiving spirit spares nothing for the welfare of the forgiven (Gen.45:21-22).
10. True forgiveness includes the desire to avoid repeated failure (Gen.45:24).

## **Answers to Questions**

1. Why did Joseph "cause every man to go out" when he made himself known to his brothers?

This sacred moment was to be shared with no one else. He did not want the Egyptians to know the details of his brothers' transgression, which was barbaric even by Egyptian standards. He had a vested interest in Pharaoh's providing a place in Egypt for his family; therefore he protected his brothers' reputation.

2. List the ways that Joseph, showed that he had forgiven his brothers.

He wept uncontrollably. He asked his brothers to come near, removing the barrier they felt. He kissed his brothers and talked to them, showing his identity was with them. He shed the most positive light possible on their sinful deed. He invited them to Egypt, and promised to provide for them through the famine. He sent plenty of provisions along to transport them back to Egypt.

3. Should a sinner be angry with himself (Gen.45:5)? Explain.

The first step in repentance is to acknowledge failure. This includes revulsion for the deeds we have committed. But if we continue in self-

flagellation, we lack faith in God's forgiveness.

4. How did Joseph's view of divine Providence affect his outlook?

He believed that God was in control of events and working for the ultimate good of His children. Perhaps this is the secret to his proper response in adversity. He believed God would bring justice to all situations and did not concern himself with events that were out of his control.

5. What are our responsibilities to our brother after reconciliation has been effected?

He needs to know that we hold no lingering resentment. We should work to remove all awkwardness from our relationship. He should be restored to a full brotherly standing just as Joseph did to his brothers.

6. How should we relate to the danger of falling out" with our brother?

We should diligently deal with the wrong attitudes that creep into our own hearts. For example, if Joseph's brothers had conquered their envy of Joseph, they would not have resorted to selling him into slavery. We must rise above justifiable grievances and not allow injustices to turn us bitter.

7. What is wrong if we cannot forgive another?

We have lost sight of our own need of forgiveness both from God and from others. We have become focused on self rather than on the needs of others. We do not have the Spirit of Christ controlling our actions.

S. What blessings follow restored relationships?

Our own spiritual life will be strengthened. The witness of the church will be enhanced. Our spiritual energies will go toward fighting spiritual battles rather than our own brethren whose help we need to make it through this wicked world.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

We all need God's forgiveness, and we all need to forgive others. All these areas are interrelated. Only as God forgives us can we forgive others and only as we forgive others can God forgive us. Therefore our own personal salvation depends upon forgiving others. How tragic to miss heaven because of an unforgiving attitude! May Joseph's example challenge us to forgive - fully and freely—from our heart (Matthew 18:15).

### **Research Guide**

Study the New Testament references to forgiveness.