

By a Great Deliverance

Genesis 45: 3-8

Arkansas Loving Church, Pastor Sungtae Hong, 6/7/2020

In Genesis chapter 45, Joseph takes off the mask of 'prime minister' and reveals himself to his brothers. Joseph has already had several opportunities to disclose his identity, but he has let each of those opportunities pass. Only after committing muddling acts such as framing Benjamin does he finally reveal himself. This is because it was incredibly difficult for Joseph to face his past--he had to see his brothers and ultimately forgive them. On the surface, Joseph was the great prime minister of the great empire, Zaphenath-Paneah, who was the wisest ruler. However, behind the mask, there stood a wounded 17-year-old who was at a loss due to his trauma.

[Genesis 45:1-3] ¹ Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Joseph actually had the authority to keep his past buried. He could have kept Benjamin and cast the rest of his brothers away to Canaan. He had the option of telling the truth only to Benjamin and having him secretly bring his father to Egypt. It certainly would have been easier than forgiving his brothers. However, Joseph chose the difficult path. He exposed his tearful pain and agony, a side of himself that he had previously withheld from others. Why did he do that?

[Genesis 45:5] 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.

The only reason was because of God. He realized that God used him in His amazing plan for salvation. Only through God was he able to endure the life of a servant and the life of a prisoner. Now, he understood that it was time for him to face his brothers and forgive them. He just needed some time, though. God patiently waited for the things Joseph knew in his mind to be acted upon and felt in his heart. The only reason why he could forgive his brother's sins was God. God consoled, encouraged, and challenged Joseph until he executed His plan. Through God's consolation and encouragement, Joseph could fulfill the amazing but difficult challenge, forgiving his brothers.

It is very difficult for all of us to unmask and face the past. Forgiving someone is never easy. Even with God's comfort and encouragement, it took some time and was very painful for Joseph to overcome his challenge. But if Joseph could do it, shouldn't we be able to do it as well? If we use God only for our own comfort and encouragement, we cannot experience the true power of the Gospel. If the reason of our salvation is God, God should also be the reason of our change and forgiveness.

If Joseph had known of God's redemption plan but had still been unable to forgive his brothers, God would have used another route to deliver the household of Jacob, would have found another way to make the nation of Israel, and would have used a different path to send His Son to this world. In fact, we would be in the same scenario of Joseph's. God saved us. Thus, as long as we willingly obey His due demand of forgiving and face the past, we will be utilized as a tool of God in more expansive domains.

Joseph forgave his brothers under the comfort and encouragement of God. How did his brothers respond? When they faced Joseph, his brothers assumed 'revenge' instead of 'forgiveness.' They looked at Joseph with worry and fear. Surprisingly, Joseph knew how they felt. "Don't worry," he told them. Of course, that was easier said than done, and they could not easily let go of their apprehensions. They were still afraid of Joseph and could not believe the proclamation of his forgiveness. When Joseph told them to come closer, they were terrified.

In Joseph and his brothers, we can see the sinners who cannot believe in the forgiveness of Christ. Jesus told the sinners, "whatever sins you may have committed, don't worry. Come closer to me. I forgive you. I came to die for you according to my Father's plan. I died for you and was resurrected. I am your savior." However, we as sinners always keep our distance from Him. When we hear "come closer," we feel fear instead of peace.

[Genesis 45:15] And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

God does not want us to live our lives at a distance from Him. Rather, He wants us to live a life that accepts His forgiveness and returns to His embrace. Jesus endured the unbearable burden of the cross and allowed our sins to be forgiven. He made us be at peace with God. However, how often do we find ourselves as sinners hesitant to believe the proclamation of complete forgiveness? Just like Joseph told his brothers, our Lord always tells us, "Come closer to me! Embrace me! Don't worry! I forgive you!"

The name of Jesus is the name of our forgiveness and the name of our change. I bless you all to live the life of forgiveness and change that comes through Jesus!