

Genesis 45:1-11

**1** Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

**2** And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.

**3** Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence.

**4** And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

**5** But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

**6** For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

**7** And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

**8** So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

**9** 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 tarry.

**10** You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have.

**11** There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine."

Luke 6:27-38

**27** "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **29** If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. **30** Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. **31** Do to others as you would have them do to you.

**32** "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. **35** But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

**37** "Do

not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. **38** Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

I WAS LOOKING THROUGH POEMS ON THE INTERNET LAST WEEK AND I CAME ACROSS ONE WHICH PROVIDED THE TITLE FOR THIS SERMON.

IT IS CALLED "HEART-PRINTS". HERE IS SOME OF WHAT THE PRAYERFUL POEM, BY AN UNNAMED AUTHOR, SAYS ABOUT THE GOOD WE CAN DO.

"WHATEVER OUR HANDS TOUCH-WE LEAVE FINGERPRINTS. ON WALLS, ON FURNITURE, ON DOORKNOBS, DISHES, BOOKS; AS WE TOUCH WE LEAVE OUR IDENTITY.

OH PLEASE WHEREVER I GO TODAY, HELP ME LEAVE HEART-PRINTS!

HEART-PRINTS OF COMPASSION, OF UNDERSTANDING AND LOVE; HEART-PRINTS OF KINDNESS AND GENUINE CONCERN.

MAY MY HEART TOUCH A LONELY NEIGHBOR, OR A RUNAWAY DAUGHTER, OR AN ANXIOUS MOTHER, OR PERHAPS A DEAR FRIEND.

I SHALL GO OUT TODAY TO LEAVE HEART-PRINTS, AND IF SOMEONE SHOULD SAY 'I FELT YOUR TOUCH TODAY', MAY THAT ONE SENSE YOUR LOVE TOUCHING THROUGH ME...."

IT COULD BE SAID THAT JESUS CHALLENGED US TO GO THE EXTRA MILE TO LEAVE HEART-PRINTS OF HIS LOVE, EVEN IN OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH ENEMIES.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY HE WAS IN FAVOR OF ALLOWING PEOPLE TO BE VICTIMIZED. HE WAS NOT IN FAVOR OF THOSE WHO ACTED VIOLENTLY TO STEAL FROM, OR OPPRESS OTHERS.

BUT JESUS WAS ASKING US TO MAKE A SPIRITUAL CHOICE TO NOT USE THE POWER WE HAVE- TO STRIKE BACK IN ANGER OR HATE, BUT TO ACT IN LOVE.

FOR EXAMPLE, GOING THE EXTRA MILE, WAS DRAWN FROM THE FACT A ROMAN SOLDIER OR OFFICIAL COULD COMMANDEER A CIVILIAN TO CARRY THINGS UP TO ONE MILE.

JESUS WAS SAYING RATHER THAN DOING SO IN A SPIRIT OF ANGER OVER THE UNFAIRNESS OF IT, DO SO IN A SPIRIT OF LOVE, AND THUS GO BEYOND WHAT WAS ASKED.

IT IS BY THAT CHOICE TO DO OR GIVE MORE -THAT WE CAN TAKE BACK THE POWER STOLEN FROM US BY THE WRONG OR OPPRESSIVE ACT.

AGAIN, JESUS DID NOT SAY HIS FOLLOWERS SHOULD NOT ESCAPE OPPRESSION IF THEY ARE ABLE, ONLY TO SEEK TO DO GOOD WITHIN A BAD SITUATION, UNTIL YOU ARE FREED OR ESCAPE.

THE STORY OF JOSEPH IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS OFFERS US AN EXAMPLE OF THIS.

IT TELLS A STORY ABOUT THE DAMAGE THAT PRIDE, ENVY, AND ANGER CAN DO, EVEN WITHIN FAMILIES.

IN A FIT OF ANGER, OVER JOSEPH'S ARROGANCE HIS JEALOUS BROTHERS SOLD HIM INTO SLAVERY.

NATURALLY, IF HE COULD HAVE ESCAPED FROM HIS CIRCUMSTANCES HE CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE.

BUT SINCE JOSEPH COULD NOT ESCAPE THE SITUATION HE SERVED FAITHFULLY WITHIN IT, AND HE LEARNED TO TRUST GOD.

HE ALSO LISTENED TO GOD, JOSEPH MATURED, REPENTED OF HIS FORMER PRIDE, AND BECAME A BETTER MAN.

THE TIME CAME WHEN JOSEPH SAW THAT GOD HAD SENT HIM INTO EGYPT TO SAVE THE LIVES OF MANY PEOPLE.

HE ROSE TO POWER TO BE SECOND IN AUTHORITY ONLY TO PHAROAH.

A FAMINE STRUCK THE LAND AND ALL THE SURROUNDING AREA, AND BECAUSE GOD WARNED JOSEPH THIS WOULD HAPPEN, HE WAS ABLE TO STORE UP FOOD.

IN FACT, EGYPT HAD ENOUGH FOOD TO SELL TO OTHER PEOPLE, WHICH BROUGHT JOSEPH'S BROTHERS TO HIM.

BUT WHEN HIS FORMERLY ABUSIVE BROTHERS MET HIM AGAIN, THEY ONLY SAW AN EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL, THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE HIM.

HE DID KNOW WHO THEY WERE AND SO JOSEPH TESTED THEM AND FOUND THEY TOO HAD CHANGED FOR THE BETTER.

JOSEPH, WHO HAD THE POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH OVER THEM, COULD HAVE ABUSED OR ENSLAVED THEM.

HE HAD A CHOICE TO MAKE: WOULD HE ENACT JUSTIFIABLE VENGEANCE AGAINST THEM, OR WOULD HE HONOR GOD FOR PRESERVING HIM AND OTHERS THROUGH HIM?

HE CHOOSE FORGIVENESS. BUT THINK ABOUT THIS, JOSEPH'S FORGIVENESS IS ILLOGICAL ACCORDING TO THE WAYS OF THE WORLD.

SOCIETY TELLS US TO GIVE AS GOOD AS YOU GET, AND IT TEACHES REPARATIONS FOR CRIMES AND OTHER THINGS ARE JUSTIFIED, AND EVEN NECESSARY FOR PEACE AND HEALING.

JOSEPH COULD HAVE CHOSEN TO DO WHAT MADE SENSE ACCORDING TO THE WORLD.

HE COULD HAVE PUNISHED HIS OLDER BROTHERS, IN A WAY THAT PRESERVED THEIR LIVES, FOR HIS FATHER'S SAKE, BUT ALSO GAVE HIM SOME JUSTICE.

BUT JOSEPH DID NOT RESPOND TO HIS POWER OVER THEM ACCORDING TO THE LOGIC OF THE WORLD.

HE RELEASED THE HURT AND ANGER OVER WHAT HAD BEEN DONE TO HIM INTO GOD'S HANDS, AND IN THIS WAY, HE FULFILLED GOD'S PLAN.

IT COULD BE SAID THAT JOSEPH ACTED THEOLOGICALLY TOWARDS HIS BROTHERS, BY FORGIVING THEM. THIS IS WHAT WE MIGHT EXPECT FROM ONE WHO HONORS GOD.

BUT THEN JOSEPH WENT THE EXTRA MILE, HE TOLD HIS OLDER BROTHERS TO FORGIVE THEMSELVES.

GENESIS 45:5 SAYS: "AND NOW DO NOT BE DISTRESSED OR ANGRY WITH YOURSELVES BECAUSE YOU SOLD ME HERE; FOR GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE LIFE."

THINK ABOUT THIS FOR A MOMENT, SO OFTEN WE REMEMBER THE TEACHING, FOUND IN TODAY'S GOSPEL PASSAGE TO FORGIVE OTHERS.

AND IT IS A GOOD THING TO DO-FOR OUR OWN SAKE, AS WELL AS FOR THE SAKE OF OTHER PEOPLE.

BUT ALSO PRAYING THEY FORGIVE THEMSELVES FOR THE WRONG THEY HAVE DONE SHOWS REAL LOVE FOR THEM.

SUCH A PRAYER SHOWS A DESIRE THAT GOD NOT ONLY HEALS US FROM THE HURT THEY CAUSED, BUT ALSO HEALS THEM.

THIS IS A POWERFUL WAY TO LEAVE HEART-PRINTS ON OTHERS THAT POINT TOWARDS THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

THUS, JOSEPH, THROUGH HIS FORGIVENESS AND IN HIS CALL FOR HIS BROTHERS TO FORGIVE THEMSELVES, SERVES AS A PROPHECY THAT POINTS US TO JESUS.

THROUGH JOSEPH, GOD SHOWS GRACIOUS LOVE AND FORGIVENESS TOWARDS THOSE WHO SINNED AGAINST GOD, AND THEIR OWN BROTHER.

IN A MORE POWERFUL AND EXTENSIVE WAY GOD SHOWS THE SAME GRACIOUS LOVE TO US, THROUGH HIS SON.

INDEED, JESUS SUFFERED GREATER ABUSE, UNFAIRNESS, AND EVIL THAN JOSEPH HAD, AND JESUS COUNTERED IT WITH A MORE PROFOUND AND EXTRAVAGANT LOVE.

HE DID SO BY ASKING HIS FATHER TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO CRUCIFIED HIM, MEANING TO FORGIVE US ALL.

JESUS ALSO FORGAVE HIS CLOSEST DISCIPLES, WHO WERE LIKE HIS BROTHERS, YET BETRAYED, DENIED, AND ABANDONED HIM.

HE MADE SURE THE SURVIVING ELEVEN DISCIPLES KNEW HE FORGAVE THEM, AND THAT HE STILL WANTED THEM TO BE HIS DISCIPLES.

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, JESUS INTENTIONALLY ACTED TO HELP PETER NOT JUST HEAR, BUT FEEL THE FORGIVENESS HE HAD RECEIVED, AND HE CALLED PETER TO RESPOND.

LIKE WITH PETER, PART OF OUR RESPONSE TO BEING FORGIVEN IS TO FORGIVE OURSELVES, FOR ONLY THEN CAN WE REALLY BE HEALED, AND SERVE CHRIST BETTER.

HEALING FROM THE HURT OTHERS HAVE CAUSED US, AND HEALING FROM THE HURT WE HAVE CAUSED OTHERS ARE BOTH NECESSARY TO EXPERIENCE THE ABUNDANT LIFE GOD DESIRES FOR US.

JESUS' DEATH IN ITSELF WAS THE MEANS GOD USED TO ENABLE FORGIVENESS, AND TO PRESERVE LIFE IN A FAR GREATER WAY THAN WHAT HE HAD DONE THROUGH JOSEPH.

THE APOSTLE PAUL DESCRIBES THE POWER OF GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE, HE HIMSELF EXPERIENCED, WRITING:

“GOD PROVES HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE WE STILL WERE SINNERS CHRIST DIED FOR US.”

IN OTHER WORDS, JESUS DIED FOR HIS ENEMIES, AND THROUGH HIS DEATH OPENED THE WAY TO MAKE THEM HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AS WELL AS HIS FRIENDS.

JESUS CALLS US TO LOVE HIM BY LOVING OTHERS, NOT SO MUCH IN AN EMOTIONAL SENSE, BUT THROUGH ACTION.

SPECIFICALLY, BY- DOING GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE US, BLESSING THOSE WHO CURSE US, AND PRAYING FOR OUR ENEMIES.

HE ASKS WE GO THE EXTRA MILE BY LIVING AS THOSE WHO ARE FORGIVEN AND TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE.

JESUS SAYS, THAT INSTEAD OF TREATING OTHERS IN THE SAME WAY THEY TREAT US, WE SHOULD SPEAK AND ACT TOWARDS EVERYONE IN THE WAY WE WISH TO BE TREATED.

SOMETIMES THIS IS EASY, BUT OTHER TIMES BEING AGENTS OF GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE CAN BE THE MOST DIFFICULT THING GOD ASKS US TO DO.

ONE PROBLEM IS THAT OUR MOOD OR EMOTIONS CAN CAUSE US TO SPEAK OR ACT RASHLY, OR EVEN DELIBERATELY ACT IN WAYS DO NOT LEAVE POSITIVE HEART-PRINTS.

INDEED, THERE ARE HURTS AND DAMAGE WE MAY DO TO OTHERS, AND THEY MAY CAUSE TO US- THAT CANNOT BE REVERSED.

AND WHILE BIBLE STORIES CAN BE NICE TO HEAR, AS WELL AS ENCOURAGING, THEY CAN ALSO BE CHALLENGING.

MANY, IF NOT MOST, CHRISTIANS EXPERIENCE TIMES WHEN IT CAN BE HARD TO FIND GOOD IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS.

GOD'S GRACE AND REDEMPTIVE ACTIONS ON OUR BEHALF ARE NOT ALWAYS IMMEDIATELY EVIDENT, AND SOMETIMES WE NEVER SEE THEM, EVEN IF WE BELIEVE THEY ARE THERE.

HOWEVER, HEALING MAY STILL COME, SOMETIMES IN UNEXPECTED WAYS.

FOR EXAMPLE: A BOOK ON GRIEF AND GRIEVING BY ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS AND DAVID KESSLER INCLUDES A STORY THAT RELATES TO THIS.

IT IS ABOUT A COUPLE WHOSE SON WAS SHOT AND KILLED BY A GANG MEMBER.

HIS MURDERER WAS ARRESTED AND CONVICTED AND SENTENCE TO LIFE IN PRISON.

SEVERAL YEARS LATER HE CAME UP FOR PAROLE AND THE FATHER OF THE VICTIM WENT TO THE HEARING, FILLED WITH ANGER OVER HIS SON'S DEATH ONCE MORE.

HE WAS GLAD WHEN PAROLE WAS QUICKLY DENIED, BUT THEN HE NOTICED THE FATHER OF THE SHOOTER WAS ALSO AT THE HEARING.

HE SAW HE MAN BEGAN TO QUIETLY WEEP AFTER HEARING THAT HIS SON WOULD NOT BE RELEASED.

THIS BROUGHT TO MIND SOMETHING THE VICTIM'S FATHER HAD NOT THOUGHT ABOUT-THE SHOOTER HAD A FAMILY, AND WAS LOVED BY THEM, LIKE HE LOVED HIS OWN SON.

HE FOUND HIMSELF WALKING TOWARDS THE OTHER FATHER TO TALK TO HIM. THEY SHOOK HANDS AND A CONNECTION WAS MADE.

THE TWO GRIEVING FATHER'S MET SEVERAL TIMES AND OUT OF THEIR MEETINGS AN IDEA WAS FORMED.

THEY BEGAN TO WORK TOGETHER TO HELP OTHERS ESCAPE GANGS. THEY VISITED SCHOOLS AND SHARED THEIR COMMON STORY.

THEIR STORY SHOWED THE HURT THAT EXISTED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE TRAGEDY.

BUT IT ALSO SHOWED HOW LOVE CAN BE MORE POWERFUL THAN ANGER, OR HATE, OR REVENGE.

THE ACT OF WORKING TOGETHER BROUGHT HEALING TO THE TWO FATHERS.

THEIR WORK DID NOT CHANGE THE TRAGEDY OF WHAT HAPPENED, BUT IT DID HELP TO PREVENT SOME FUTURE TRAGEDIES.

PERHAPS THE FATHER OF THE VICTIM STILL STRUGGLED TO FORGIVE HIS SON'S KILLER, BUT HE SHOWED LOVE TO HIM IN A WAY, BY FINDING RECONCILIATION WITH HIS FATHER.

I DO NOT KNOW IF THEY WERE CHRISTIANS, BUT WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN AND THROUGH THEM DEMONSTRATES JESUS' TEACHING TO LOVE AND TO TREAT OTHERS IN THE WAY YOU WANT TO BE TREATED.

THIS STORY ALSO SHOWS THAT REAL FORGIVENESS, ESPECIALLY FOR DEEPLY FELT HURTS, IS OFTEN A PROCESS.

THE GOOD NEWS IN THIS IS THAT JESUS UNDERSTANDS THIS PROBLEM, AND HE LOVES AND FORGIVES US ANYWAY.

HE KNOWS WE WILL NEVER REACH PERFECTION; HE ONLY ASKS US THAT WHEN WE FAIL, WE REPENT AND TRY AGAIN.

LET US PRAY: GRACIOUS GOD, WE THANK YOU THAT YOU ARE ABLE TO BRING GOOD OUT OF ANY SITUATION. GIVE US FAITH TO TRUST THIS, EVEN IF WE DO NOT SEE IT HAPPEN. HELP US TO FORGIVE OTHERS AND TO FORGIVE OURSELVES.

TEACH US YOUR WAY OF GRACE-TO MEET HATRED WITH KINDNESS, TO ANSWER CURSES WITH BLESSINGS, TO LOVE WITHOUT HOLDING BACK; TO GIVE WITHOUT THOUGHT FOR RETURN. IN JESUS' NAME WE PRAY. AMEN.

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