

TWO ROADS
Genesis 45

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First Baptist Church
Amarillo, Texas
November 19, 2023

Every person will travel life upon one of two roads. Each of us – rich or poor, young or old – will choose to walk life’s journey plodding upon one of these two paths.

In today’s story, we come to the character Joseph later in his life, as he himself faces the same choice that you face and that I face. Which of the two roads will he choose? The road to revenge or the road to reconciliation?

Joseph’s story, his family’s story, could have made a reality television show. All of the brothers gather around the talk show host, cameras rolling. The crowd urging on the confessions.

- “I hated him,” says the first brother.
- “Dad loved him the most.”
- “He had the fancy robe and wouldn’t get his hands dirty.”
- “That kid drove me crazy with his dreams,” one of the other brothers shouts.
- “He thought he was our king.”

And then they explain just how they pulled it off. •“We thought about killing him.”

- “We wanted to throw dream-boy into a pit.”
- “Yea, kill him and throw him into a pit,” another one chimes in.
- “Say the wild animals ate him.”
- “But Reuben said no, we shouldn’t kill him.”
- “So we stripped him and sold him.”
- “Yea, sold him to the Ishmaelites,” Judah chimes in.
- “Got 20 pieces of silver for him.”
- “Pretty good money for a braggadocios little boy.”

Joseph had a dream – a braggadocios boy with big ideas. In his dreams there were sheaves or the sun and the moon and eleven stars – everybody was always bowing down to him. Yes, his father, his mother, and his brothers were bowing before the young boy. This really, really angered his brothers.

So, his brothers plotted his demise, jealous because daddy loved him the most. They sell him into slavery to a caravan of Ishmaelites headed to Egypt. Then, they cover his multicolored tunic –

another hot spot for their jealousy – with the red blood of a goat, and tell Jacob that his beloved boy has been butchered by a beast.

But in Egypt, all went well for Joseph.

Look at Genesis 39:2.

And the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man.

While doing time in prison because he was falsely accused of misconduct by Potiphar's wife, God gives him the gift of reading dreams. He reads Pharaoh's dreams. And Joseph, in his wisdom – no longer a boy, but now a man – becomes the equivalent of the vice-president of Egypt, in charge of all of Pharaoh's kingdom.

He was the only one able to tell Pharaoh that the fat cows meant a fantastic crop, and the gaunt cows meant seven years of famine to follow. Joseph had the plan to set aside grain in the seven years of plenty to take care of the seven years of famine. Joseph is made second in command in the land of Egypt.

Indeed, famine strikes the land as Pharaoh had dreamed and Joseph had interpreted. And all the grain is stored in Egypt, for Joseph has prepared the Egyptians for such a day.

Meanwhile, his whole family back home – daddy thinking he is dead and his brothers having long forgotten about their braggadocious brother and his colorful coat – is starving. Jacob, now an old man, sends his boys to Egypt to get some grain.

Look at Genesis 42:6

Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

Just like his dream. Remember, their bundle(s) of wheat would bow down to his. His brothers bowed like the bundle of wheat in the dream, although they did not know it was he.

Genesis 42:8

But Joseph recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him.

The joy of being reunited was just too much for Joseph. He sends all the Egyptians out of the room "Have everyone go out from me" (Genesis 45:1). He wept so loudly at the reconciliation that it was heard throughout the land of Egypt. He declares in verse 3, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" Another way of asking in antiquity, "How's my daddy doing?"

Silence. Stunned silence. Dismayed. Afraid. His brothers, the ones who had sold him into slavery, were now facing the one who held their future in his hands.

But then words of reconciliation. "Don't be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life." In other words, "God is using me here to help our family through the famine. What you meant to be evil, God has turned to good."

In verse 14, his favorite brother, Benjamin – the brother with whom he shares the same mother – falls upon his neck and weeps, a cry that only being reunited can produce.

Then Israel (Jacob's new name) says in the last verse of the chapter, "It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

Reunion is a powerful force. There is a driving desire within each of us to be together again with those whom we love, with those whom we are supposed to love. But before reunion can happen, there is a barrier that must be brought down. There is forgiving and forgetting that must take place.

Like Joseph, each of us lives his life on the road to revenge or on the road to reconciliation. Joseph – willing to forget and forgive the wrong that his brothers had done to him. Separating him from his father. Selling him into slavery. Joseph was willing to let it all go – all of it.

I want you to notice what he says to his brothers in verse 4. "Please come closer to me." Come closer – the call of the road to reunion. The call of reconciliation. "Come closer, let's break down the barrier that separates us from one another."

Maybe it's not a family member. Maybe it's a friend.

I want you to know this morning that God does not call us to forgive without giving us the power to do so. We cannot forgive out of our own strength, for it is humanly impossible to let things go. There is a great power in forgiveness. **Forgiveness liberates us from the painful past and places us into a new future. Forgiveness sets us free from those dark, evil forces that can storm our minds and seize our souls and hold us hostage until the ransom of revenge is paid – and then paid again and again until, at last, we are morally and spiritually bankrupt. To refuse to forgive is to choose to hate, and hatred becomes a cancer to your soul, a carcinoma of the human spirit. (Randall O'Brien, *Set Free by Forgiveness*, p. 78)**

Joseph could have chosen the other road. He could have chosen the road to revenge. You and I can choose that road, too. But to choose not to forgive is to choose to live backward rather than live forward. It is to prefer to be imprisoned in the past rather than be released to the freedom of the future.

"But I've been wronged." So had Joseph. And so have you. But we must be willing to forgive.

Someone has defined forgiveness as the removal of personal barriers within a relationship caused by wrongdoing, real or imagined. (Randall O'Brien, p. 50)

The words of the Bible for forgiveness are interpreted "to lift up," "to bear," "to dismiss," "to send away." With forgiveness, sins are sent away and individuals are called, like Joseph calls, to come closer. Forgiveness rids relationships of revenge and breaks down bitter barriers.

Joseph stood at the crossroads that day. He could have chosen to have revenge on his brothers. To force them to suffer from the famine. To imprison them. He had all the power at his disposal

to do anything that he wanted to do. What's at stake? His faith. He'd been living obedient to God. Did he have faith that God could take the mess that his brothers had made and turn it into something powerful and transforming?

In Genesis 50:19-21, his brothers fell down before him and said, "'Behold, we are your servants.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.' So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

Not only was his faith at stake, but his family was at stake. With the famine, his family would die. But God had placed him in Egypt, allowed him to interpret the dreams, to gather the grain in order to feed God's people. He said, "I'll take care of you and your little ones." And he had the power to do so.

And his future was at stake – his faith, his family, and his future. The future of a nation. Oh, God could have worked it out, as God can always work things out. But Joseph was a pivotal character because he chose the road to reconciliation rather than the road to revenge.

I want to tell you a few things about the road to revenge.

I. Revenge will rot your soul.

When we find ourselves in the crisis of forgiveness, we can very easily become a slave to our own rage of revenge. We can hurt and hate until hell freezes over. But in doing so, our desire for revenge, our bearing the burden of rage, destroys us in the process.

You see, living on the road of revenge is really living a lifetime with a burden. Living on the road to reconciliation is to choose to live in freedom.

Germany's first chancellor, Bismark, boasted, "I am accustomed to paying men back in their own coin." Or maybe you've seen the bumper sticker, "I don't get mad. I get even." The problem with getting even is that it never happens. Revenge simply chains us to a whole series of events that poison our soul. Revenge is not sweet – that's a lie. It's a bitter poison that stuns us, drugs us, and soon sours our souls. Of course, I've tasted it before. And so have you.

Revenge will rot you to the core. Revenge demands a ransom, and we can live our life wanting the privilege of "pay back" only to find that we have imprisoned ourselves.

II. You can let revenge go, even when the culprit of your pain doesn't repent.

That's a complex thought. But it's true. If you can't get rid of revenge unless he repents, then you have given him power over the rest of your life. In fact, what we learn is that it is our forgiving that allows repentance.

Some of you are asking the question in your own mind, “Do I have to forgive him if he doesn’t repent?”

Randall O’Brien has formulated the best response to that question that I have ever heard. He said that’s not even the right question. The question isn’t, “Do I have to forgive him if he doesn’t repent.” The question is, “Can he repent if I don’t forgive?”

That’s what the cross is, isn’t it? The cross was Christ’s forgiveness of our sins, even before we repented. For example, Christ said, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” He forgave, but who had repented? Had Pilate repented of what he had done? He washed his hands, but he didn’t repent. Did the high priest repent? Never. The Romans? Didn’t even understand until it was too late. The silent masses? No – they shouted out, “Crucify him,” before. They might have grown silent, but they didn’t grow sorrowful. The cowardly disciples? Not even them.

Who, who then repented of what happened to Christ when he said, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do?” Not one. No one did. And yet Jesus cried out. Yet Jesus forgave. And somehow our cold, hard hearts are melted in the warmth of the Son of God.

We’re here today in this church because He wanted to forgive us before we repented. Unconditional love and forgiveness.

When you forgive your enemy, when your spirit changes, he may yet repent and become all that God intends him to be. If you’re waiting for him to say “I’m sorry” before you release your revenge, you’re making yourself his prisoner and you’re not following the model of the Christ.

God does not love us and want to forgive us because we repent. Rather, we repent because God loves us and wants to forgive us. Paul wrote it this way, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Or John puts it this way, “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

It’s a hard lesson at Calvary, but the lesson is this: Reconciliation is the task of the victim.

Your love, despite their lack of repentance, can change them – as much as it changes you.

Johnny Lee Clary, Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, sat impatiently in a local radio studio awaiting the arrival of his debate opponent, the Reverend Wade Watts of McAlester, Oklahoma. Rev. Watts, head of the Oklahoma NAACP, served as pastor of a McAlester church which Clary unsuccessfully had tried to burn to the ground. When Rev. Watts arrived, he walked over to the hate-filled Klansman, who defiantly sat in his white sheet. Extending his hand, the Black minister smiled and said, “I love you.” Caught completely off guard, the KKK’s grand dragon reached out his own hand, before he even thought, and embraced the minister’s hand of forgiveness.

It was 1979. Within ten years, Clary, still hate-filled, had risen to the rank of Imperial Wizard in the Klan. However, he had never been able to shake the warm welcome, smile, and loving words of his supposed archenemy. One fine day ten years later, in 1989, Clary convened the Grand

Council of the Klan and dropped a bombshell. “I quit,” he announced. Two years later, Johnny Lee surrendered his life to Christian ministry, testifying that he could no longer run from the haunting witness of Rev. Watts, the man who had loved him when he was unlovable, the man who had not sought revenge but who had forgiven him despite the fact he hadn’t repented.

Clary called the Rev. Watts to share the good news. Watts invited Clary – get this, Clary, the KKK Imperial Wizard, preached in the Black church. Soon the two men were traveling throughout the south, preaching a gospel of racial reconciliation, even protesting together at KKK rallies. Clary founded a ministry called Operation Colorblind to combat racism.

Following the death of Rev. Watts, Mrs. Watts shared, “Johnny Clary became like family to us. He always told us how much he loved us.”

You forgive before they repent, for it is your grace of the gospel that will impact their soul.

You probably say, “Jesus can say, ‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,’ but that’s impossible for me.” Is it? What happened to Stephen in the book of Acts, a servant leader in the first century. Saul is standing there, a young man, holding the coats of those who are stoning him. There the bloody martyr, Stephen, was dying. And Stephen breathed this prayer, much like the Lord’s, in Acts 7:60. “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” In due time, as Clary was changed by Watts’ forgiving love, Paul was changed by the same Christ who had called Stephen to be a forgiver. St. Augustine later observed, “Had Stephen not prayed, the church would not have had a Paul” – the one who wrote much of our New Testament.

Listen to me carefully. If God were not willing to forgive sin, heaven would be empty. You wouldn’t be there.

So, what about you? I know how Joseph’s story ends. Joseph walks the way of reconciliation. But you stand this morning at the point of choice. Do you pick the road of reconciliation or the road of revenge? Are you willing to risk your faith, your family, and your future in order to hold a grudge? Are you waiting for someone to say they’re sorry when, in fact, you need to forgive whether or not they say they are sorry – if not for their good, then for your own.

Two roads. One that leads to reunion and reconciliation. And the other that leads to revenge or resentment. Unless you make the conscience choice, you’ll find yourself plodding the path on the road of revenge.

What about you? What about me? Which way will we walk?