

## **Joseph and His Brothers, Part 2 – Genesis 45:1-15 – August 20, 2017**

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So last week we talked about the story about how Joseph, the second youngest of 12 brothers, was a dreamer and the most beloved by his father. His dreams showed him in a position of power over his parents and brothers, and in a society where the oldest is set to inherit a majority of the estate, his dreams seemed ludicrous. His brothers were jealous of his position with his father and with his delusions of grandeur. Once, when they were away from home, the brothers plotted to kill Joseph, but after their oldest brother stepped in to protect him, they decided instead to sell him into slavery. Putting blood on his cloak, they returned home, telling their father that Joseph must have been mauled to death by a wild animal.

Today's story from Genesis shows a beautiful and emotional scene of reconciliation between the brothers.

Now, without knowing what happened in the intervening time, this coming together between these brothers seems next to impossible. A lot has happened in the years between young Joseph being sold into slavery. Eventually he became a trusted advisor and friend to the Egyptian Pharaoh, but that didn't happen quickly, and he had some additional harrowing situations before attaining his high status.

So too his brother had to deal with the years of facing their father's anguish over the death of his beloved son Joseph, while harboring their secret guilt at having been the instigators of that horrific deed. The brazen act of their youthful jealousy of their brother could never be forgotten and surely tainted the years following.

Now, again, just like last week I had a plan in mind of what I wanted to say to you. In the story leading up to the reconciliation of the brothers, Joseph had his own bit of revenge. When his older brothers came to Egypt in search of food, due to a famine in their homeland, he treated them harshly and tricked them into turning over their youngest brother Benjamin to him. This caused a great deal of anguish on all the brothers and they knew this would destroy their father to lose another son, so they pleaded for his life. Finally, Joseph relented and revealed himself to his brothers in the passage from today.

So originally, I was going to talk about how wrong Joseph was to heighten the anxiety of the situation with his brothers by his act of deception toward them. He knew he was going to help them, so why cause any extra drama to an already tense situation. Why take the youngest brother Benjamin and threaten harm to him? Was that simply to get back at his brothers for what they had done to him?

I wanted to say today that both sides were wrong. Joseph's brothers committed a heinous crime by first threatening to kill Joseph but then only throwing him into a pit and then selling

him into a life a slavery. They literally ruined his life. They had no idea what would happen to him, and they didn't care how harsh his future would be.

And then years later, when the brothers came to Egypt seeking food, they had no idea they were talking to Joseph their brother. They only knew that their youngest brother Benjamin was at risk. Wasn't that wrong of Joseph to retaliate like that?

I have a friend from college that I interact with regularly on Facebook. Allison (not her real name) experienced a couple of sexual assaults while she served in the Air Force after college. Because of those assaults, she struggles with PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder. Even though those assaults happened to her many years ago, she still struggles daily with its repercussions. And she posts about her struggle on Facebook in great detail. Sometimes I would read her posts, and be surprised about how easily she could be triggered. What seemed like the smallest incident to me, could cause her to experience a panic attack that lasted for days or to lash out in anger or fear. Allison posts her struggles on Facebook for a couple of reasons. One, it helps her to deal with the issue and get support from her friends. And two, by posting about PTSD, it helps others to understand how much an act of violence or assault can affect one's life even years later. You can't just erase trauma from one's psyche.

So that got me to thinking about again, the current issues that we're hearing about lately. The white supremacist and neo-nazi rally that took place in Charlottesville, VA last weekend to protest the removal of a monument to Robert E. Lee. Violence erupted between the hate groups and the protestors that showed up in opposition to hate. And then a woman was killed when a man, consumed by his hate, drove a car into a crowd of protestors.

Monuments to the Confederacy are being discussed in many cities around the country. Should they be removed? People claim that to remove them would be a move toward forgetting our history. That removing them would become a slippery slope. Others claim that the monuments were specifically put up during the Jim Crow era, a time in our history of deep racial tension. Some people say that by removing the monuments they are losing part of their heritage. Others say, is that a heritage they want to be celebrating. And still others say, if you want to preserve history, then put them in a museum. There are many discussions going on, and I think it is good that people are putting energy into these discussions. I wonder, do these monuments, that depict so-called confederate heroes of the civil war act as a trigger to the people who are the recipients of racist actions and violence? Is it a reminder to them of the hatred people have for them simply due to the color of their skin? And I think of my friend Allison, how she responds to the triggers of her PTSD and how hard that is for her.

And I think about the actions of some of those who protest racism and oppose the neo-nazis and the white supremacists? And I wonder, for people who have experienced hate for so long, or have witnessed others who have been harmed by hate – are their reactions somewhat understandable? Maybe they aren't totally "right" or the actions aren't constructive – but maybe it's something to think about.

In a perfect world, Joseph probably should not have taunted and toyed with his brothers. He knew it was wrong. He knew he was going to help them anyway, so why stir up trouble? Maybe seeing them in the flesh after all those years – maybe that hit him a little hard and sparked a reaction in him that he couldn't quite control rationally. Sometimes our emotions take over.

In the end, reconciliation did occur. But that reconciliation between the brothers was accomplished because they all loved and worshipped God. In the end, reconciliation happened because of love. Love trumps hate.