

Recognising the Work of Grace in Your Brother

Genesis 50:15-21

Halifax: 26 March 2017, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Last week in our Genesis sermon series, we saw how Jacob died in hope.

- Over the course of his 147 years, he had always had a great desire to obtain the blessing of God,
 - but he had not always trusted God for it as he ought.
- But on his death bed, we saw how he died full of hope, trusting fully in the promises of God.
 - He was sure that his family would be blessed even though they were now Egypt, and he was sure that he would be gathered to his people at his death, and that both he and his fathers would be raised up to inherit Canaan.
 - In testimony of his hope, he insisted that his sons would bury him in Canaan with his fathers.
 - We saw how his death and burial became a testimony of hope in God's faithfulness not only to his family Israel, but also to the Egyptians and even to the Canaanites.
 - And of course, it stands as a testimony to us even more because we have seen how the LORD fulfilled so many of the promises that Jacob trusted in.
 - How God had changed Jacob from deep despair to full hope.

But in our text today, we find Jacob's sons in the aftermath of Jacob's burial.

- Their father is now gone, and now they have to sort out how they are going to relate to each other without him.
 - Often such times are hard for a family.
 - Often it is a time when past tensions and greed and power struggles will arise.
- With Jacob's sons, there is a rather unique situation.
 - It is a situation in which one the sons in the family, Joseph, has virtually unlimited authority over his brothers.
 - As we shall see, they are suspicious of what he might do to them now that their father Jacob is gone because of the wrong that they had done to him!
 - But they happily are able to see that their brother has grace in his heart.
 - God has so transformed Joseph that there is no hostility or resentment in him, only a desire to be a blessing to his brothers.
- In looking at this, I want to show you this beautiful work of grace that God can do in the heart of others...so that you need not be suspicious of them...
 - and in particular I want to show you the grace that is in the heart of our elder brother in the kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus Christ!
 - We are completely under His power, but there is no reason to fear that He will use that power but for the good of all who come to Him for life.
 - I hope very much that you will see how grace overflows in Him so that you will trust Him without the least shade of suspicion or uneasiness!

Let's turn to our scripture reading—it begins in Genesis 50 verse 15...

- Give careful attention because this is the word of God: Gen 50:15.

Genesis 50:15-21: When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent *messengers* to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, ¹⁷ 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." ' Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept

when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we *are* your servants." ¹⁹ Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. ²¹ Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

May the Lord bless to us the hearing of His holy Word.

I. Suspicion often troubles God's people.

A. It certainly troubled Joseph's brothers!

- Their anxiety is described in verse 15: **When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him."**
- 1. They were afraid that Joseph might still be harbouring resentment because of the awful way they had treated him almost 40 years before.
 - a. Most of you know how they had seized him when he went to visit them while they were looking after the flocks of their father.
 - They were full of envy and hatred and they threw him into a pit despite his earnest pleading with them. They intended to leave him there to die.
 - But just after they had left him, they saw a caravan on its way to Egypt and they decided to sell him as a slave instead.
 - So Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold as a slave
 - b. When Joseph had pled with them for his life, they very much enjoyed the fact that they had absolute control to do whatever they wanted with him.
 - Now that God had made Joseph the vizier or Egypt, second only to Pharaoh in authority,
 - and had brought Jacob and his sons to Egypt to live under the protective arm of Joseph,
 - the tables had been turned and now Joseph was in the position to do whatever he wanted with his brothers.
 - What would he do to them after all that they had done to him?
 - It was the same position that those who crucified the LORD were in when they realised that God had raised Him to sit at His right hand as Lord and Christ.
 - When they had control of Him, they had crucified Him.
 - What would He do to them now that He was in control?
 - Would He be gracious to them?
- 2. They had good reason to be suspicious, did they not?

- a. Yes, for the past 17 years, Joseph had shown kindness to them—but perhaps that had only been for the sake of their father!
 - They knew that Joseph deeply loved their father and that their father would have been very grieved if Joseph had used his authority to pay them back for what they had done to him.
 - but what would Joseph do now that Jacob was gone?
 - That was the suspicion that began to haunt them day and night!
 - b. They knew that they truly were guilty and that they fully deserved to be severely punished.
 - They had a shadowy hope that there might truly be grace in Joseph’s heart toward them...
 - but their guilt prevented them from being able to clearly see the reality of that grace.
 - They had never really asked Joseph to forgive them...
 - So there was this very troubling suspicion in their hearts.
 - c. Guilt is often the cause of suspicion in us too.
 - If we have wronged someone, then, rather seeing God’s work in them, we start to think that they must be after us—even when it is not true at all.
- B. What harm suspicions can cause.
1. Early on in my ministry, I had a counseling experience that impressed me with how destructive suspicion can be.
 - Two young Christian women came to me.
 - They had been good friends, but for the past year, their relationship had been very cold and distrustful.
 - As they answered questions, it soon became evident that one of them had become suspicious of her Christian friend.
 - She thought her friend opposed something she was doing, even though that was not the case, and she began to hold her at a distance.
 - Then her friend assumed that the reason for this was because of jealousy, and they lived a whole year in suspicion of each other’s love.
 - And in fact there was little love between them, even though both of them wanted to love the other—unfounded suspicion kept them apart.

➤ Suspicion can ruin relationships.

 - 2. It can even ruin the relationship of a husband and wife.
 - a. If you think that your spouse is not out for your best interests—that they are against you—that they do not have Christian love in their heart...
 - and of course it is possible that you are right—
 - but if you have such a suspicion, it will keep you from being able to receive them even if you are wrong and they actually do love you!
 - b. And very often the reason that you are suspicious is because you know that you have not been the kind of husband or wife that you should have been.
 - And instead of asking them to forgive you, you have settled in to suppose that they do not love you...that God’s grace is not at work in their heart.

- c. And the more you are like that, the more you will rebuff their attempts to show love to you—because you won't see it as love.
 - And this will discourage them from showing love to you because when they do, it only seems to annoy you.
 - And then you will criticise them for their coldness toward you, and even worse than that, you will suppress your memory of your own sins and start to regard your spouse (who wants to love you) as cruel and unjust.
3. Such suspicion can also keep you from the shepherds that God has given you—that is, from your parents or your elders in the church.
- a. I sometimes challenge young people who are hostile toward their parents—and they often tell me how their parents do not trust them.
 - I ask them if they like the way their relationship is with their parents and of course they say “no.”
 - I ask them if they would like to have a good relationship with them and they almost always say “yes,” often with tears.
 - Their parents are amazed.
 - And then I ask the parents if they also would like to have a good relationship with their child—if they would like to be able to trust them and to walk together in love...and of course they always say yes.
 - And then I point out to them that they actually both want the same thing.
 - And I ask them if they think the Lord wants them to have a good relationship with each other—and they say yes.
 - And I ask them if He would be willing to help them and give them grace to have a good relationship—and again they say yes.
 - From there we begin to talk about how they have locked in to a relationship of distrust and suspicion...
 - And we begin to look at ways they can show love and commitment to each other—and build trust rather than tear it down.
 - b. The truth is that both the parent and the child love each other—both yearn to have a good relationship...
 - but both think the other is against them and hates them.
 - In a way, it is true—resentment and bitterness have built up because of years of suspicion that the other hates them.
 - But once they see the heart of the other—that there is yearning for a good relationship, sometimes there is beautiful reconciliation.
 - c. And this same kind of suspicion can exist between members of the congregation and their elders who yearn to shepherd them.
 - Look, there are bad elders in the church of Jesus Christ.
 - But most elders want to help you!
 - It doesn't matter what you may have done—what great sin you may have committed—even against the elders...
 - They only want to see you serving the Lord—they want to help you—and it hurts them deeply when you act as if they are out to get you.
 - Even when they discipline you, if they are the kind of elders they ought to be, they are doing it in love to restore you.

- But do you know what is even worse than this?
- 4. It is that as believers we can harbour suspicions about our Lord Jesus Christ!
 - We can be afraid to come to Him and to be open with Him because we are afraid that He may have run out of patience with us.
 - All the while He is yearning for us to come to Him, we are looking at Him as cold and austere toward us.
 - We do not see the grace that is in His heart!
 - We misread Him.
 - We do not see His gracious heart that is ready to welcome us with open arms—so we remain cold and aloof.
- So what ought you to do when suspicions arise in your heart toward your brother?

II. When suspicions arise, deal with them.

- A. Joseph's brothers go to plead with him for forgiveness...and that is good!
 - 1. They are compelled by circumstances.
 - a. They were terrified because Joseph had the power to harm them.
 - They had no ability to resist him if he had wanted to take revenge on them.
 - They were wholly at his mercy.
 - But this is just where they needed to be.
 - b. It was God who had brought about these circumstances, with them ending up in Egypt, with them being dependant on Joseph, with Joseph being in such a high position, and now with their father's death...
 - While they did not like to be in this position, God had brought it about for good—to force them to deal with matters that they should have dealt with long before.
 - 2. They should have gone to Joseph to plead for forgiveness long ago (17 years!)
 - a. Everything had happened so fast at the time—they had been shocked when they had found out that Joseph was the vizier in Egypt.
 - He had been kind to them at the time and had immediately begun to make plans for them and their father to come to Egypt.
 - b. But somewhere along the way, the brothers should have come to Joseph and confessed how they had sinned against them pled for his forgiveness.
 - At the time, it did not seem as if they needed to do this...because while their father was alive, it was clear from Joseph's actions that he was not going to harm them.
 - But they should have asked him to forgive them simply because of the wrong they had done—not just to get out trouble.
 - 3. You get the point—you should ask forgiveness simply because it is the right thing to do...
 - a. It should not be just for the purpose of avoiding punishment.
 - Yes, you should ask for forgiveness even if you are the one who is has the authority in the relationship to do any punishing that is done.
 - Forgiveness is not something you seek just to get out of punishment—it is something you are to seek to restore broken relationships.

- b. Jesus says that this ought to be a priority for us with our Christian brothers and sisters.
 - In Matthew 5:23-24, He said: **“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”**
 - Don’t just leave things to fester and hope they will blow over.
 - Your worship will be hindered if you do not right the wrongs that you have done.
 - Don’t wait until there are circumstances that force you to go.
 - c. Nevertheless, if there are circumstances that force you to deal with it, give thanks for that...
 - Your heavenly Father has brought it about so that you will do what you should have done because He loves you.
- B. There is something to learn from the content of the pleading of Joseph’s brothers here as well.
1. Learn from them to humbly and sincerely confess the wrong that you have done.
 - I realise that they were propelled by their fear, but their frank and earnest confession is all the more exemplary because of that.
 - a. See how they spare nothing in attesting to the sinfulness of what they have done.
 - They pretty much exhaust the vocabulary of their day to describe it.
 - They call it **the trespass of your brothers**, they use the word **trespass** twice;
 - and they refer to it as their **sin** and also as the **evil** that that they did.
 - b. Sometimes it is difficult for us to actually say that we have sinned against our brother...
 - We want to call it a mistake, or even worse we want to tell him that we are sorry he was hurt or sorry that we had offended him.
 - When you say that, it leaves it open as to whether you even think you did wrong to him.
 - He may have been hurt or offended by you even though you did no wrong.
 - There is a great difference in being sorry that someone was offended and in admitting that you sinned against them.
 - If you sinned, go on and admit it!
 2. It is important to actually ask for forgiveness because forgiveness clears the record.
 - When you confess that you have sinned, asking forgiveness means that you are asking your brother not to hold the wrong you did to him against you.
 - The goal of forgiveness is the restoration of your relationship.
 - You are actually asking for a commitment on his part that he will not hold your sin against you because you have repented of it.
 - The world gets forgiveness wrong.
 - They talk about forgiving people that have never asked for forgiveness.
 - That leaves out the most important part—reconciliation!

- Don't misunderstand what I am saying here.
 - You should never hate those who have sinned against you—you should not become bitter and resentful and hostile.
 - But your goal should be to restore the relationship that they have broken by their sin.
 - Like our Lord, you don't forgive them until they repent and want to be restored to you—but you are ready to forgive them—
 - and you are trying to win them and you are showing love to them in all the ways that you can and praying for them.
 - So we can learn from the way Joseph's brothers confess their sin and from the way that they actually ask for forgiveness.
3. Another way that Joseph's brothers leave us a good example is the way they use arguments.
- a. They are earnest about receiving forgiveness for good reason—and when you are earnest, you will plead with arguments...
 - And again, even if you aren't dealing with someone who has authority to crush you, it is always very important to reconcile with them.
 - b. Learn from how they use arguments—
 - 1) First, mention those related to you that would be hurt by your division.
 - You see how they bring their father Jacob into the picture...
 - It is hard to know if their father really had said this—it sounds a little phony—but they may have gone to him and he may have said something like this when he saw their unfounded fears (for he knew that Joseph was not out to get them).
 - Of course it is wrong to fabricate a story, and they should not have done so if they did, but at least what they said was consistent with what their father would have wanted.
 - In any case, the point is, if you think someone might not want to forgive you, you can bring in the desire of others as an argument.
 - 2) Secondly, mention your relationship with the one you are asking to forgive.
 - See how they refer to themselves as “your brothers,” reminding Joseph that they are his own flesh and blood.
 - This can be helpful when you are asking for forgiveness—
 - to your father you can say, “please forgive your son,”
 - to your spouse, you can say, “please forgive your loving husband,” and you might even add, “you are my wife and I do not want what I have done to come between us.”
 - Plead your relationship.
 - 3) Thirdly, learn from Joseph's brothers to refer to the fact that you are servants of the same God.
 - This, of course, is always a strong reason for forgiving one another, for if the Lord has accepted us and is not ashamed to call us His brothers, how can we be ashamed to call them our brothers?

- 4) And then finally learn to use a very earnest pleading tone.
 - They use the word “please” twice, and they also use the word “beg” in formulating this request.
 - And then, as is appropriate in this case (not that it would ordinarily be appropriate for you in relation to other people), they fall before his face and say, “We are your servants.”
 - While that would not usually be appropriate to do before other people, it certainly is appropriate to do before the Lord.

TRANS> And then if your brother is a believer, you will have an opportunity to do the next thing...

III. Behold the beautiful grace of God in a true child of God.

A. If your brother has grace in his heart, he will forgive you.

1. Any true Christian who walks with God will be delighted to forgive you!
 - a. One of the ways that God changes us when we truly are born of His Spirit—when we have truly been converted—
 - is in giving us a love for a brother.
 - b. So often we underestimate the power of God’s grace in each other.
 - We look at each other with suspicion.
 - As I was talking about with relationships before—instead of looking at our children and others as those in whom God is at work, we look at them as if they are enemies.
 - If your brother is believer, he will want to have a good relationship with you and he will be eager to forgive you.
 - c. If he is not, it is appropriate to have a talk with him.
 - to look for opportunities to win him—it may be that he does not know the Lord.
2. Any Christian will also be one who loves our Saviour—our Saviour who has forgiven him.
 - He realises how much God has forgiven him, and he is so very thankful and indebted to Him for this that whatever you have done seems very trivial.
 - Because God has accepted him, how could he refuse to forgive you?
 - Forgiveness is simply the way of Christ’s kingdom, and as Jesus says, if you don’t forgive your brother for his sins, He will not forgive you.
 - It is very contrary all that it means to be a disciple.
3. And, if your brother is a believer, he will yearn to see you walk with God—
 - That means that as soon as you repent, he will never be grieved about whatever you may have done for the joy that you have repented.

B. Look at how this grace is so evident in Joseph.

1. You can see it first of all in the way he weeps.
 - The very idea that his brothers should have thought for all these years that Joseph was the kind of person who was just waiting for their father to die so he could exact revenge...like their uncle Esau was toward their father.
 - This was so alien to Joseph—it was disturbing—it was painful.

- How little they knew their brother!
 - Now he might have gotten angry at them—“how dare you think that I would do such a thing!”
 - “What kind of person do you think I am?”
 - “Haven’t I proven to you by now that I am not like that? That I am not against you?”
 - “What more do I have to do to prove it to you?”
 - But not Joseph—he is too mature for such pettiness...
 - No, he weeps to think that his brothers whom he loved were afraid of him like that.
 - His concern was for them and not for himself.
- That he is concerned for them (instead of himself) is all the more shown by what he does next.
2. He declares to them that he is not in the place of God—he labours to point them to God.
- Look at verse 19 and 20: **Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”**
 - What is Joseph getting at here?
 - a. He is doing what he always does—pointing to the LORD.
 - He does not say a lot, but whenever he speaks, he seems to always point people to God and to what God is doing.
 - He is telling his brothers here that yes, they did something that was intended as evil against him...
 - But whatever they did becomes very trivial when it is put in the context of what God was doing!
 - That is the way we ought to look at everything...
 - No matter if the economy collapses or a tragic car accident takes the lives of your family—whatever happens,
 - do as Joseph and see that your times are in God’s hands.
 - God is working out His plan and we need to trust Him.
 - If Jesus is on the cross and you are there, God has a plan.
 - b. And Joseph reminds his brothers that God’s purpose in the whole affair was “to save many people alive.”
 - Joseph does not have some personal agenda that is separate from that.
 - It is the farthest thing from his mind to take personal vengeance against the very people that God had sent him to save.
 - Joseph was not even thinking about harming his brothers—such a thing had not even occurred to him!
 - How could he go through all that he went through as God’s servant, and then turn around and destroy the very people God sent him to save?
 - That would be absurd!

- Imagine going through all that he had gone through to bring salvation to himself, to his brothers, to Egypt and ultimately to the whole world,
 - and then destroy the very people God sent him to save?
- c. This is the way you think when you have grace in your heart like Joseph did.
 - It is not about your own petty quarrels with people, about what they did to you or about how they might hurt you—none of that...
 - You are there for God!
 - You are living for His kingdom and His purposes.
 - You are keeping in step with His will, not pursuing your own selfish agenda.
 - When you have grace in your heart, it is not all about you; it is all about God.
 - Like Paul, if you are cast in prison, you are glad for it because, as Paul said to the Philippians, **the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel (Phil 1:12).**
- 3. And see how Joseph assures them that he is committed to them—to do them good.
 - a. In verse 21, he repeats the words, “Do not be afraid.”
 - How he loves them.
 - He does not say, “How could you think that I would harm you”—it is not about him,
 - but “Do not be afraid.”
 - He is concerned about them.
 - And then he tells them something wonderful...
 - b. Not only will he forgive them, but he will also provide for them!
 - He says, still v. 21: **I will provide for you and your little ones.**
 - He is so far from wanting to punish them or pay them back for the evil that they had done that he wants to take care of them with the great resources he has at his disposal.
 - c. And he does not let up with that...
 - Verse 21 tells how he went on, **And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**
 - His heart filled with the transforming grace of God keeps on aiming to comfort his poor frightened brothers who thought he was out to get them.

TRANS> What a treat for them to see the grace that was in Joseph’s heart!

- What a treat it is for us to read about it here!
 - What a treat it is to see it in those who extend true Christian forgiveness to you!
 - Give them a chance by going to them and asking them to forgive you.
 - It is the right thing to do, and it may be that you will get to see this beautiful grace in their response of forgiving you.
 - And what a treat it is to have this grace in your own heart—
 - so that you are not concerned about the wrongs that others have done to you, but are concerned for Christ’s kingdom—for seeing His work in His people.
 - That you’d much rather see them repent than to pay them back for the wrongs they have done to you.

But above all...

- Let this wonderful passage that speaks about the grace that Jacob's sons found in their brother Joseph point you to the grace that is our elder brother Jesus Christ!

C. Behold the grace that is in the LORD Jesus Christ!

1. How we have abused Him—He has cause to be very angry with us!
 - It was for our sin that He had to go to the cross.
 - It was for us that He suffered and was cut off from the Father and became a curse for us.
 - His Father sent Him in order that He might save many people alive.
2. And so instead of anger toward us on account of our sin, there are tears for the way we stand aloof in fear.
 - He weeps when He sees that we are afraid of Him and think He is out to harm us if we get too close to Him.
 - When He came upon the city of Jerusalem, so hardened in their sin, so unwilling to come to Him because their deeds were evil, the scripture says:
 - **Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"**
 - Do not look at our Saviour as one who is out to get you.
 - He is not like that all.
3. Just as we saw with Joseph, He did not come to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him!
 - He tells us this in John 6:38-40:
 - **John 6:38-40: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."**
 - This is the reason He came.
 - Do not for a minute suppose that He went to the cross and went through all that He did to save sinners and that now when poor sinners come to Him for mercy that He will meet them with vengeance!
 - He came to do the Father's will—He came to save many people alive.
 - He does not care that your sins put Him on the cross.
 - He is not interested in vengeance, but in fulfilling the Father's purpose to save you.
 - Come to Him, and you will see His beautiful gracious heart.
 - Don't be afraid...
 - He will provide for you and your little ones out of His great resources...
 - He will give you eternal life.

- He will comfort you and speak kindly to you.
 - Do not be suspicious of Him.
 - He is not out to get you.
 - It is His desire to see you saved and blessed forever.