

**Genesis 50: 15-21; “To Save Many People Alive”, Sermon # 120 in the series –  
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008,  
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The story of Joseph ends for us this morning in this touching interchange between he and his brothers. The main lesson that we should learn from the life of Joseph is that God has a great and loving purposes in permitting His dear children to go through various trials and testings of their faith. Even though He has sometimes ordained great trials for us, it is always His intention to bring about great good in the lives of His people. His loving purpose is to save many people alive. He did this for Jacob, Joseph, and his whole family.

So the question that I would like to bring before you at this time, is this: What was the purpose of God in permitting these trials and testings, not only to Joseph but to all of his brothers? And how does God’s purpose for Joseph set forth for us a type of Christ in relation to all those who are being saved by Him? As we think carefully together about this passage, I will make three observations which I think will help you to understand more of the love of God and Christ.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The Purpose of God was to bring about a sincere and humble heart in his brothers who had so grievously sinned against him.** (verses 15-17)

When Jacob died, a great fear came upon all his brothers who had mistreated him. This fear was that perhaps Joseph would hate them, and actually repay them for all the evil that they had done unto him. Now this is an astounding thing for them to think, since Joseph, when he first revealed himself to them, gave them very real assurance by his own words that he was not going to repay them for their sins against him. That was 17 years before the events of the verses that we are studying. And yet now his brothers become afraid. They had lived this long in Goshen, being shown the goodness of Joseph to them in providing for all of their needs.

Never once did Joseph act in a manner which would lead them to believe that he held anything against them. Turn over to Genesis 45, we will remind ourselves of what Joseph actually said to them. Joseph is now revealing himself to his brothers as being their brother and not the Egyptian Vizier that they think they have been dealing with all this time before. Verse 3 says – “Then 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.’” “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.”

In these words, “do not grieve or be angry with yourself” is the implied forgiveness of their sinful acts, even though he never expressly declared it to them at that time. A person who has sinned in the way that these brothers sinned against Joseph has every reason to be grieved and angry with themselves when they realize their guilt in the sight of the holy God. These brothers had sinned against him in a very great way when they mistreated him and sold him into Egypt. But following their sinful acts, and for many years afterward, they had suppressed the voice of their conscience.

Their conscience was only truly awakened when they were brought down to Egypt in the time of the famine. Their conscience was awakened when they came into the trouble of not being able to buy grain unless they brought Benjamin to Joseph. Chapter 42, verse 18 shows this. Joseph said to them – “Do this and live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses.” “And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” “And they did so.”

“Then they said to one another, we are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has

come upon us.” “And Reuben answered them saying, ‘Did I not speak to you saying, “Do not sin against the boy”; and you would not listen?” “Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.” So, as you can see here, that this was when their consciences were awakened. And it was all of them together, for the first time. But that was 17 years before this. So you see how wonderful God is in His working. It is now that their consciences began collectively raking them over the coals for what they did to Joseph so many years before.

This leads me to make some observations on our conscience, with relation to sin. Conscience is that faculty of our soul that God has placed in our mind and heart as a witness within us. It enables us to know and experience whether what we are doing and saying is wrong or right, at least to some degree. It is either awake or asleep to sin and righteousness depending upon whether grace is at work in our soul or not. The preaching of the law may awaken conscience to a sense of sin, but only grace from God can give it peace.

Our thoughts alternately either accuse or defend us in relation to the instruction of the Word of God which we have received. The light which we have received by knowing something of God’s will, is meant to guide and direct us in our performing righteous thoughts and actions. If we sin, our conscience, if it is doing its duty, will accuse us and let us know that we are guilty. We are breaking God’s law in some way. A guilty conscience, once it is awakened, has a voice to be able to speak unrest to your soul.

It has the power to agitate your heart and mind, and to bring blame to the soul, which is very great. And the issues that your conscience will bring to the floor, in the judgment hall of your own mind, in regard to your past sins, it will not let your soul rest satisfied and content until you have thoughts of guilt, remorse, and repentance come to your mind to think about doing something about them. I don’t know how many of you have read that great book by John Bunyan, *The Holy War*. It is an allegory like *Pilgrim’s Progress*. It is the story of the struggles of a man’s soul; the soul of man is being pictured for the reader as a town called Mansoul.

Satan with all of his forces besieges Mansoul and takes it over, and in order to do so, he has to deal with Conscience, which in the allegory is called Mr. Recorder. This is what Bunyan says about Mr. Recorder, or the conscience in man. “As for Mr. Recorder, before the town was taken, he was a man well read in the law of his king, and also a man of courage and faithfulness to speak the truth on every occasion; and he had a tongue as bravely hung, as he had an head filled with judgment. Now Diabolus (Satan in the story), could by no means abide this Mr. Recorder, because though he gave his consent to his coming into the town, yet he could not, by all his wiles, trials, stratagems, and devises that he could use, make him his own.”

“True he was much degenerated from his former king, and also much pleased with the giant’s service, (that is Satan’s service) and many of his laws. But all this would not do, forasmuch as he was not wholly his; he (that is Conscience) would now and then think upon Shaddai, (that is God) and have a dread of his law upon him, and then he would speak against Diabolus with a voice as great as when a lion roars: yea and would also at certain times, when his fits were upon him (for you must know, that sometimes he had terrible fits,) make the whole town of Mansoul shake with his voice; and therefore the new king of Mansoul (that is the Devil) could not abide him.”

So Conscience, I say, has a loud voice once it is awakened. Listen to what Matthew Henry says. “A guilty conscience exposes men to continual frights, even where no fear is, and makes them suspicious of everybody, as Cain.” “Those who would be fearless must keep themselves guiltless.” I would say to you that these brothers were afraid. And they were suspicious of Joseph, the one who had only shown them kindness. They were this way because they were still experiencing the fits of a guilty conscience, and a conscience awakened to sense of what their sins deserved.

And I want you to see that a conscience once awakened must be cleared. And it can only be cleared by the blood of Jesus Christ. A declaration of sins forgiven must be made if ever peace and joy shall rule in the heart once again. Or even perhaps for the first time. Who can forgive sins but God alone? But often our sins are against those who are closest to us; those whom we should most dearly love. This is what aggravated the sense of sin to these brothers so many years later. It was that Joseph had been so loving to them, so forgiving of them, that they simply could not believe it that it could continue forever.

Surely, at some point, he would bring up their sins and avenge himself upon them. That's the way they thought. But they were totally mistaken. And they were mistaken because of the loudness of the voice of conscience crying against them in their souls. How could they find peace, and how could they really know if Joseph would forgive their sins? Truly Joseph was a man of grace; the perfect picture to us of what we should do when those who are closest to us, have instead hated us and mistreated us.

This is how a Christian should act, when later on, the ones who have offended us or harmed us, come to their senses by God's grace. When they come to us looking for us to forgive them, we are not to bring up all their faults. We should not plague their consciences with guilt. Since we ourselves have been forgiven by God, we should freely forgive those who have offended us. Joseph had done this even before they ever asked for forgiveness from him. He did it when he first revealed himself to his brothers.

But the brother's consciences and their fears bothered them so much that they did not believe that they could go to Joseph in person, first off, and ask his forgiveness. Verse 16 says, "So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, 'Before your father died he commanded, saying, thus you shall 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." Now, I am quite convinced that this is the work of God, to thoroughly convince men of their sin where they need it.

These men were convinced and convicted of their sins. They needed peace to be spoken to their consciences. Especially in light of all the goodness and mercy which Joseph had shown to them in the past 17 years. Since they call themselves the "servants of the God of your father", they are saying that they had, at some point in those 17 years, humbled themselves in the sight of Almighty God and had asked Him for forgiveness of their sins. But now because of the death of their father, they wondered if Joseph would continue to show them kindness. They wondered if they would continue to treat them well.

There were so many sins that were coming to their minds at this time. The way that they had treated him in light of his dreams, which had all come true, the lie that they told their father when they came home and showed him the coat of many colors all stained with the blood of an animal. This cover-up of their sinful actions for many years afterward. But all of this was forgiven by God. I think that they knew this; but would Joseph really forgive them? What was God's purpose in letting them wait so long to find peace of conscience in relation to their brother Joseph?

His purpose, I believe, was to bring about a sincere and humble heart in the life of each one of them. O, this is what I want you to see, that our hearts can be so very tricky. They can be so very treacherous, even after we become a true Christian! Yes, it is true that God has forgiven us through Christ. He is our Joseph, who has suffered for us on the cross and died. And yet it is possible to think that our sins have been so great in the past, the things which we have done to grieve and wound the heart of our Lord are so great, that surely we cannot be forgiven. Your past sins may continue to plague you for many years, even though God has forgiven them.

It is good to come directly to God Himself, confessing your sins, and then you can be assured that He will cleanse you of all iniquity. But let us understand also, that the guilt of

your past sins may not necessarily be something which you can simply confess, once, and then forever be convinced that your conscience will not bring it up again. It is true that God chooses not to remember our sins, but He may indeed let us remember them at times, in order that we might sincerely regret ever having committed them. His purpose in this is that He would have us to be humbled so that we will walk in His fear all of our days. That is the first purpose of God in permitting these kind of trials to Joseph and his brothers.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – These trials were permitted in order to show the brothers that God really meant it all for good.** (verse 17b and verses 18-20)

“And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.” “Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants.’” “Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?’” So, this weeping of Joseph took place after he had heard the message of the messengers which were sent to him by his brothers. The brothers had not yet seen him personally themselves, as of yet. While the brothers were yet fearful of having their sins against Joseph, of many years past, forgiven them, Joseph is weeping when he hears what they are saying, and understands the way that they think.

I believe that God ordered these things for the good of both Joseph and his brothers. The brothers had already been forgiven by God, but they were really doubting Joseph’s love and good-will toward them. Joseph is a good picture to us of what our Lord Jesus Christ is like. He weeps for us in the secret place where He is, because in His life, and in His death on the cross, He has demonstrated His love to us in many ways, and yet we continue to think that God cannot forgive our grievous sins of the past. And we question how it is that Jesus can really love us and continue to provide for all of our spiritual needs.

The fact that Jesus died for our sins, the fact that He bore our sins in His body on the tree, this was in order to bring us to God. We have no reason to doubt His love. But a troubled conscience sometimes will. The brothers then did the right thing. They came to Joseph and fell down before his face, and they said – Behold, we are your servants. They all felt so badly about what they had done to Joseph that they all offered to become his slaves. They threw themselves upon his mercy so that he would not take revenge upon them for the evil deeds that they had done to him.

But he said to them – Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? Truly this is a wonderful statement to consider. Let us always remember that no matter what sins we may have committed against other people, and no matter what we think we might owe to them because we have done harm to them in the past, that no man is ever in the place of God. The Lord Jesus Christ alone has that place in our lives. These brothers of Joseph’s knew that they owed everything to him, that he had preserved their lives from dying in the famine, and that he had in the past never taken revenge upon them for their sins against him.

But Joseph meant to keep them from them from serving him as a man, because he knew that they should serve God alone. God alone can forgive sins and make things right in our relationships with those whom we have sinned against. Joseph was right to do this, to tell them that he was not in the place of God. Their coming to know God, and their being forgiven of their sins by God, their being forgiven by Joseph personally for all of the offenses that they had committed against him, and their being reconciled to Joseph, all this was all of grace. He was not in the place of God, either to judge them or to save them.

In the end, as great a type as Joseph is, of our Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot stand in God’s or Christ’s place. There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Even though the words and actions of Joseph’s brothers were not right to put Joseph in the place of God, they are a good example of what you should do, when you have come to understand that your sins are forgiven. You become the servant of Christ. You present yourself to God as His servant forever. Listen to Romans 6: 16 – “Do you not know that to whom you

present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered." "And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." And verse 22 – "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life."

The thing that Joseph wanted to persuade his brothers of, more than anything else, was that God had meant what they did to him, to be something that He would work for their good. The purpose of God in His decrees of what should happen to every Christian in their suffering at the hands of men, is the great and overruling purpose which no man can thwart. But, no matter what men purpose to do or actually do succeed in doing in evil, God certainly can overrule it for good.

This was exactly what the brothers needed to know, and to hear from Joseph, so that their guilty consciences could be freed. God was so much greater than they were in His purposes that He was able to take all the evil that they did to Joseph and to work it for good in his life and theirs. How about you, my friend? Can you apply this to yourself and the worst situations that you have had to endure at the hands of men? Have you come to understand this mighty truth? Have you come to think about Your mighty, wise, and holy God in this way?

This is the way that He is. And this is the thing that He does for all of His dear children. The messengers that you send to your heavenly Joseph, the Lord Jesus Christ, are your prayers. He hears the message from your lips, that you are looking for forgiveness from a guilty conscience, even though he has forgiven you of all your sins years ago. He weeps for you in secret to think that you do not think that He loves you, in spite of His wounds and His death for you. He would have you read once again the words of God's love letter to you, so that you might once again freely offer yourself to His service.

Romans 8: 28 – "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." And verse 35 – "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And verse 37 – "Yet in all these things we more than conquerors through Him who loved us." This is what Joseph wanted his brothers to see. And this is what I would have you to see as we think of the greatest of the lessons of the book of Genesis.

**For 3<sup>rd</sup> – It was the purpose of God to save many people alive.** (verse 21)

"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." "Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." "And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them." Do you believe it now, my beloved brethren? The purposes of God are very great, much greater than our conception of them. His purpose is to save many people alive through Jesus Christ our Lord. He will not fail in His purpose. So do not be afraid as you live your Christian life.

If Joseph comforted his brethren and spoke kindly to them, after all the sins that they committed and all the trials which he disciplined them for, for the purpose of godliness, even so, Christ will comfort you who will trust in Him. You may fail in your purposes to accomplish and do many things to His glory, but His purpose for you will never fail. Please remember this. Remember that His grace is greater than all of your sin, and present your body to Him a living sacrifice. This is holy and acceptable to God and pleasing to Him. Then go on to prove His good and acceptable and perfect will for your life.

