

Today, the majority of us will be familiar with the story concerning Joseph – someone that we have been looking at over these past few weeks. We know how this is going to end up. We know it all works out for good don't we? We know that Joseph's family life has been so full of dysfunction, and yet now we know it's going to end well. Many of you will know those verses in the final chapter of Genesis where Joseph says "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives". And so in chapter 45 today we see the beginnings of the culmination of what God has essentially been doing over the last 20 of Joseph's life. It's all being brought to a head in this chapter. And it's in this chapter that we see one of the most amazing pictures of forgiveness and restoration in the entire bible.

So the word for today to think about is Restoration. And in every one of our lives, we have relationships; some of which are great, but then there's ones that are somewhat challenging. Maybe those have been there all your life, or maybe right now they feel very current. And we naturally find it difficult to know what really we can do to resolve or restore those broken relationships. And it's no surprise that you will hear me say we need to look at what scripture says today. What is the pathway that the word of God gives us to navigate through those life situations? And so at the outset, let's be completely honest with ourselves. There's not one of us that isn't dysfunctional – don't think that everything is fine right throughout life, of course it's not. We all have challenges and baggage that we bring into life – so how do we navigate the issue of forgiveness and restoration – we are going to see how that's dealt with in our reading today.

So, let's start with the position of confession.

Joseph in our opening verse cannot control himself any longer as he stands in front of his brothers. His brothers don't recognise him. His brothers don't even know what's going on as they stand before this prime minister of the land who wants to know who has stolen his silver. Joseph has been watching them very carefully. He tests them to see whether there has been a work of God in them in the 20 years since he last saw them. Remember the last time that he had seen them, they had sold him off to slave traders. He tests their sincerity. They have arrived back home having asked him for grain but also they find the silver is there also. It's going to look as if they have ripped Pharaoh off. And remember the story in previous chapters that they remained at home until the famine was so severe. But now they had to return – things were so tough. Jacob told them that they needed to return to buy some more food, but now his son Judah has to be honest with their dad because he knows he has to bring Benjamin with them this time. You see, God was bringing the brothers to a place of surrender. They had to go back and confront the issues and they knew the huge pressure this was placing on their elderly father, so they went back this time with gifts and a double portion of money and gifts to hopefully receive favour and forgiveness from the prime-minister.

You know that God loves each of us so much, that if we are living in sin, and not dealing with those issues, he will bring us to a place where we have to confront the sin in our lives. He doesn't want anything to have priority in your heart other than him. But he doesn't do it to bring pain, it is instead to restore you to him.

And so the brothers bring their brother and also give their gifts to the prime-minister, and they return back to their father with more food, but again stashed in Benjamin's sack was Joseph's silver cup. So they've been tested twice. Joseph has been watching them. They've

been honest so far, and although he knows the brothers are sick with worry for their own lives, Joseph is seeing that things have changed in them.

Folks, forgiveness and restoration begins from that place of confession. These brothers were brought to a place of realising all the damage and heartache that they had brought on their family, and so a change had to take place in them. Their past sins were catching up on them, but they hadn't confessed to their father what they had done – they had moved on with life, forgetting about it. In some sick way they probably were able to justify that it had been the right thing to do for their family. You know, sometimes we can be so determined in our lives that we are the ones who are in right, when in fact we are the ones in the wrong. We can be so convinced that we are completely justified in our actions. And as a result, you haven't taken the time for proper reflection for the Holy Spirit to search out your heart in a situation to consider whether you are actually in the wrong. Maybe we believe that we are the victim – it's other people's faults. And when you are looking at everyone else's problems, you don't have time to consider the question – Lord is it me? Folks, it's so important to take the time to say, as the Psalmist says "Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me". When was the last time that you actually did that in a situation that has damaged a relationship with someone else? Or are you just stuck believing in your own self-righteousness? This is what God was doing with these brothers. Judah realises this, and it opens the door to confession. This is what Joseph has been waiting for. And that folks is where things truly begin. The beginning of restoring a relationship is always the confession of our own sin. If the other person has wronged you, well that's up to them to sort out, but stop worrying about the other person's wrongs and think about your own. Proverbs 28:13 says that 'People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy'. Let's be honest with the Lord in confession.

So now the brothers return, and Joseph reveals himself to them. Can you imagine how the brothers are feeling. They now realise that the guy who they tried to kill is now the prime-minister of Egypt – in effect they are as good as dead. And yet Joseph is weeping so much that Pharaoh's household can hear him. Personally I think the reason for Joseph's grief is two-fold. Yes, it's obvious that Joseph was overwhelmed at how the restoration of a broken relationship was unfolding in front of him, and he was relieved to know that his father was still alive. But the other reason I think he was crying so deeply, was that he was recognising what God was doing in the bigger picture. He knows that it wasn't just about his brothers selling him that had landed him in Egypt, but in fact it was God who had brought Joseph there. Verse 7&8 Joseph tells his brothers, "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God".

If we truly want to receive restoration in relationships, we've got to start with our own confessions, but then we have got to be aware of the sovereignty of God in our lives. Joseph recognised that God was at work in all of this. He probably didn't know this in the first years when he was in Potiphar's house, or when he was in the prison, but as time progressed he began to realise that God was doing a bigger thing. I wonder are you confident that God is sovereign today in situations you have been through or are going through? Do you believe that he is working in your life, even when you think other people are scheming bad things against you, or causing you great trial? If we're honest right now, you will probably admit that it is very difficult to accept that God could work in those situations for his good. When you are going through difficult times, maybe when a boss in

work is giving you grief, you are more than likely to lose sight of the sovereignty of God. If we really believe that God is in control, then we can accept that even in the tough times of life, we still need to trust in him – really believing that ‘all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28). Joseph was able to say to the brothers that had wanted to kill him, “look guys, it wasn’t you that brought me here, it was God”. I wonder could any of us say that - God allowed this.

Now just so that we don’t misunderstand this, it doesn’t mean that God was ok with what the brothers had done. It isn’t that God ignores sin. Joseph is not saying that the brothers were not responsible for their sin, because miraculously God has been able to turn it around. Remember God’s will isn’t that we sin. But God is able to work all things together for his good, in spite of the mess that sometimes we make in relationships. It’s in his mercy and grace that he still can bring something good out of it. But remember there is still a responsibility for those that sin, to confess and turn away from that. Remember it’s not God’s will for sin to occur, so if you’ve sinned against someone, don’t ever state that now people are through the other side that in some way God was in it – no – it’s the beauty that God is still merciful even in the mess of sin. It doesn’t detract from the need to confess, but God in his mercy is able to do incredible things – far more than we could ever do. In fact we see it throughout scripture at how God remains merciful even in times of people’s disobedience. Joseph was realising and recognising that God was sovereign. There was a divine plan, that God was fulfilling, back to the dreams that Joseph had. For us we need to recognize that God is sovereign and has a plan – therefore if I know God has a plan, then when people come against me, I don’t have to respond in anger in those circumstances. The sovereignty of God should lift us up above those things and keep our hearts in a place where we can experience restoration and relationships, instead of spite or revenge. Because if we engage in the flesh and fight back, and get gnarled with those who annoy you, then the pathway to restoration is broken.

So now as we conclude this reading, let’s look at these final verses. Verse 11. Joseph tells the brothers that he will provide for the family because of the five years of famine that the people still have to go through. You see what is happening to Joseph here. He could have quite easily sent the brothers on their way with some food and got on with his life, but instead he submits to the plans that God has had all along through this story. He could have just forgotten about the family, now that he had made a new life for himself in Egypt. But he doesn’t. And the reading goes on to say that he embraces each of his brothers and cries over them – he’s so overwhelmed at the true restoration that has taken place through God.

You know, it’s not always easy to hear a person’s confession before you and respond positively. What if you are on the end where you have been so hurt. How easy is it to not only hear the confession before you, but then actively pursue after peace and reconciliation? It can be so natural to pull back, or walk away. Joseph could have thanked the brothers for coming, but then send them on their way. He could have used his position to ensure he got payback for all of those years lost without his father Jacob, and let them be slaves for the rest of their lives. But the problem with that approach would have been that there would be no new beginning. Instead he sees that he needs to provide for his family, submitting to the Lord, and what the Lord wants.

And so we see this beautiful picture of full reconciliation. Joseph releases this incredible love over his siblings. There’s no sense of revenge. It’s true restoration. Often times we fall short of this, don’t we. We don’t allow God to fulfil what he wants in our relationships with

others. We become guarded. We put up walls to ensure we are not hurt again by that person. And our forgiveness is not truly God's forgiveness being poured through our lives, instead it's conditional.

You know, in marriage ceremonies that I lead, I often talk about the different types of love that there are, but the one I focus on is called Agapé love which is the unconditional love. It's the love that says, even though today I feel hurt by you, I still love you, I still forgive you. Now that for humans is not a natural love. Instead our love is conditional, which says, when you recognise how bad you have been to me, then I'll tell you what you need to do to earn my love again. But you see the Agapé love can only come from God. That's how God is with us, in our sin, and that's how God wants us to be with others. That's what Joseph here was demonstrating. Yes the brothers had been incredibly cruel to him, but now in true love and true forgiveness, a deep Godly restoration takes place which could only come from God.

Can you imagine as the brothers leave that situation, how they must be feeling. They more than likely are thinking to themselves, we don't in any way deserve this. Our hatred for our brother turned us to carry out actions which have broken our family, we discounted all those dreams he had, we've ignored our God who has been at work even when we have been sinful, and now as we have stood before our brother he has not only demonstrated total forgiveness, he now wants to lavish us and protect us in the midst of this famine. What has just happened? Well the answer is, it's the grace, that undeserved love of God. God turns everything around to preserve the life of the family. And therefore if we consider our lives, we are just like these brothers. We have sinned, we deserve judgment, we have been guilty of self-righteousness. And thank the Lord that He has brought many of us to that place, where we recognise the sin we have caused on him and we need his salvation. And when we came to him, we realised that when we deserved the full wrath of God, God instead blessed us through Jesus Christ. God gave you what you don't deserve. And he continues to pour his love.

This story of Joseph that we all know from our Sunday School days is a picture of the goodness of God that pours out on us, even though we don't deserve it. The brothers didn't deserve the restoration, and yet God's provision and sovereignty was teaching them that even in a dysfunctional family such as theirs, he desired restoration and reconciliation and healing.

Folks, I want to encourage you today, that if there are relationships that are broken or fractured in your life that need healing, know that God desires there to be restoration. So where do you start? Well, pray through it, ask the Lord humbly, "Is it me, Lord that needs to repent?". And if it is, allow the Lord to speak into your heart concerning your own confession. And if it's not, then pray that the other person would know your true forgiveness, in the way that God has forgiven you. And I pray that as God journeys with you through the restoration, that you would see his hand at work, as you submit to his desire for healing.