

## **Problems Christians Face Dealing with forgiveness, Genesis 50:15-21**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### **Introduction.**

Welcome to a new series on 'Problems Christians Face', all based on the life of Joseph as found in the book of Genesis. The first talk is on the topic of forgiveness. This is followed by sexual attraction and finally unfair dismissal from employment over the next two weeks, God willing. The issue of forgiveness that Joseph faced had its roots many years earlier and started when his father Jacob wanted to marry Rachel. On the wedding day, Jacob was deceived by Rachel's father Laban, who put his eldest daughter, Leah, into the wedding garments instead of Rachel. We are not told how the swap was not noticed but there it was, and the trickery was not discovered until the next morning. To gain a detailed understanding you need to start reading from Genesis chapter 29 to find the full story and how we come to the matter of forgiveness in chapter 50, our text for this talk.

Before proceeding much further I would just say that all Scripture quotations will be taken from the 'English Standard Version' unless otherwise stated.

### **1. Dealing with forgiveness, background.**

Before starting on the text in chapter 50 we need a little bit of background. Most people will be familiar with some of the life of Joseph even if it is only through Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical 'Joseph and his technicolour dream coat' but hopefully more accurately by reading about the life of Joseph in the book of Genesis. Jacob in his long life ended up with four wives, but he had a favourite, Rachel. Rachel's first born was Joseph and her second child was Benjamin. Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. Naturally, Jacob loved these two, and Joseph in particular, above his other ten sons. This and other things caused the ten sons to resent Joseph and there came a day when circumstances gave them opportunity to rid themselves of this favourite son. Having done so, the other ten sons thought that they had solved all their problems, this troublesome brother was gone forever. God, however, had other plans. Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt, first to a wealthy householder and later imprisoned but was eventually released to become Pharaoh's right hand-man.

This all came about because God used Joseph to warn Pharaoh about a severe famine that would come upon the land of Egypt and the surrounding nations. Joseph gives instruction to Pharaoh what he should do prior to the famine coming and as a result, he is raised to the exalted position of being second in the kingdom. Joseph organises the storage of vast quantities of food and when the famine arrives, he sells the food, both to the Egyptian people and to the people of the surrounding nations. This made Pharaoh extremely wealthy.

One of the surrounding nations was the land of Canaan where Jacob, his family and a large number of servants lived. Jacob sends his ten sons to purchase food to help them through the famine. Unknown to the brothers, Joseph is the person they must transact their business with. They do not recognise Joseph who looks like an Egyptian, but he recognises them. The full details of how Joseph deals with his brothers is found in chapters 42 to 45. It might seem that Joseph is being very harsh with his brothers, but it is only to make them realise their need of forgiveness.

The hymn by S Davies (1723-61) is a reminder of a great God who in His ways has worked wonderfully to bring sinners to Himself both for forgiveness and eventually to sing heavenly praises. Such a God is infinitely greater than Joseph who was showing mercy to his brothers.

Great God of wonders, all Thy ways  
Are righteous, matchless, and divine;  
But the blest triumphs of Thy grace  
Most marvellous, unrivalled, shine;  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

Crimes of such horror to forgive,  
Such guilty, daring worms to spare;  
This is Thy grand prerogative,  
And none can in that honour share:  
Pardon, O God, is only Thine;  
Mercy and grace are all divine.

In wonder lost, with trembling joy,  
We hail the pardon of our God,  
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,  
A pardon traced in Jesus' blood.  
To pardon thus is Thine alone;  
Mercy and grace are both Thine own.

Soon shall this strange, this wondrous grace,  
This perfect miracle of love,  
Fill the wide earth, while sweeter praise  
Sounds its own note in heaven above:  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich, so free?

## **2. Dealing with forgiveness.**

Once Joseph has made his brothers realise who he was, Joseph brings his father and his large family with all their servants down to Egypt to live there at his expense until the famine is past and life starts to return to normal. Now his father was extremely old, and it came to the point where Jacob was going to die. Jacob wanted to be buried back in the land of Canaan, and it was Joseph who organised the funeral. Afterwards, when everyone had arrived back in Egypt, Joseph's brothers were still concerned about their relationship with him. We will now read the text from Genesis 50:15-21,

“When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” So, they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died, ‘Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.’ And now, please

forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus, he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (Genesis 50:15-21).

The problem with wrongs committed against another and where there is no seeking of forgiveness, is that the issue will fester on until the matter is put right. It is always there in the back of a person’s mind and the relationship between both parties is no longer as free and comfortable as before the disagreement occurred. We see this in Genesis 42:21-23 regarding the ten brothers of Joseph,

“Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us, and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them” (Genesis 42:21-23).

Now we should say that Joseph was not seeking revenge but that they might be in the right frame of mind to repent about what they had done many year previous. But we now see that the brothers were still not convinced that Joseph had forgiven them. They were in such a poor state of mind that they were willing to be Joseph’s servants. However, Joseph looked at the bigger picture from God’s point of view and could say,

“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20).

The amazing way in which God works, Joseph’s faith kept him secure as he waited God’s time to bring him out of his trials and then to be able to support his father and brothers throughout the famine, and now extends unreserved forgiveness to his brethren. He knew they were repentant but needed reassurance. This resulted in a stronger bond as Joseph promised to feed both them and their little ones, bringing comfort into their lives with words of kindness. The events in Joseph’s life are a feeble picture of how our Saviour God works. We will now look at this in our next section.

However, Joseph’s brothers may well have spent years since arriving in Egypt worrying how Joseph would react once their father was dead. But this is not so with Christians. We have no need to worry. J Allen (1734-1804) and W. W. Shirley (1725-86) in their hymn touches upon the confidence we have in the completed work of Jesus.

Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,  
Musing o’er the cross we spend;  
Life, and health, and peace possessing  
From the dying sinners’ Friend.

Here we rest-in wonder viewing  
All our guilt on Jesus laid,  
And a full redemption flowing  
From the sacrifice He made.

Here we find the dawn of heaven,  
While upon the Lamb we gaze,  
See our trespasses forgiven,  
And our songs of triumph raise.

O that strong in faith abiding,  
We may to the Saviour cleave,  
Nought with Him our hearts dividing,  
All for Him content to leave!

May we still, God's mind discerning,  
To the Lamb for wisdom go;  
There new wonders daily learning,  
All the depths of mercy know.

### **3. God our Saviour.**

We will now consider the substance of forgiveness as found with our Saviour God. Illustrations and pictures as found in Scripture are all well and good, but we need to think about how God has worked in this matter of forgiveness. From the beginning, after Adam and Eve had sinned by disobeying the simple command of God to not eat “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17), God has worked tirelessly to bring about forgiveness. We must realise that it is on God's terms and not ours. Adam and Eve's attempts with a covering of leaves were not suitable. What it did show was they realised something must be done and that they were seeking forgiveness. So, God showed them, with the skins of animals, the seriousness of the situation that it required the death of a sin offering.

It is important to notice that God does not seek revenge, but He seeks recovery to a restored relationship. The first sin impacted the whole of mankind, therefore the grand solution had always the whole of mankind in view. Anything less would not be compatible with a God of love who is also holy, righteous, and just. At the same time, the solution seen for Adam and Eve must be the same for others. Therefore, Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's children, must follow the same path for recovery if they are to have a meaningful relationship with God. Sadly, Cain thought he knew better, unlike his brother who did understand. This resulted in Cain murdering his brother Abel.

Returning to the situation of the first sin and the sad blame game that came about when God confronted Adam and Eve about what they had done. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent (Satan) which resulted in God judging the serpent but at the same time He pronounced the solution that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. In other words, there would be a descendent of the woman who would defeat all of Satan's plans. This person was none other than Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Animal sacrifices were for a time, a temporary solution seen specifically in the worship system established by God for the delivered nation of Israel from the land of Egypt. The national sacrificial system like those of individuals, such as Abel were only temporary. What was needed was a perfect solution and only Jesus Christ could provide such a sacrifice.

Thus, in the matter of an eternally lasting forgiveness God acted first by sending His Son into this world. This is captured in the beautiful verse found in John's Gospel,

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

There are points worth highlighting in this verse,

1. the extent of God's love is not limited, it embraces the whole world.
2. there is an intensity in God's love.
3. there is a very personal involvement.
4. that involvement was God's only Son.
5. the only restriction is on mankind's side.
6. the choice is between perishing through not believing or eternal life for those who do believe.
7. the action is individual and must be true and real.

Joseph in his situation could only reach the sphere of his influence Egypt and the surrounding nations, but with God there is no limitation in terms of geography, the whole world was in view. The depth of God's love far exceeded that of Joseph's. God was considering the untold damage that sin had caused and is still doing so today not just the relative damage of a famine possibly confined to middle eastern countries.

Eventually, Joseph had a personal involvement when his brothers came to purchase food. However, God was very much more involved as it meant the giving of His own dear Son to die on the cross at the hands of abusive people. There could not be a greater involvement as the seriousness of sin required a sacrifice that eclipsed every other sacrifice and met the depth of God's righteous judgement against sin that would enable sinners to be forgiven. God moved dramatically to bring about salvation that included forgiveness. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and His resurrection laid the foundation. The next move is on the part of individuals to accept what God through Christ had accomplished. Each person needs to repent to receive the forgiveness that God offers. It seems so simple, yet people find it incredibly difficult to acknowledge that they are sinners and need a Saviour.

Once that step of faith and trust is taken a person moves from being separated from God to a place of nearness. Being sinners puts us in a position of an enemy, alienated, at a distance and with no possible chance of any nearness at all. Whereas, once we trust Christ and confess Him as our Saviour we are brought into incredible nearness. The Lord Jesus in John 15:15 said to his disciples,

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).

That is the same for every believer today. Additionally, as being brought into the family of God we become both children and sons, an even closer and deeper relationship to our wonderful Saviour God.

Joseph could say to his brothers,

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20).

Joseph would have in mind the people of Egypt and the surrounding nations. But God in His work of salvation had the whole world in view. As mentioned earlier, 'For God so loved the world.' It matters not what nation we belong to or what we might believe, the salvation that God offers through Christ is freely available to whosoever. God does not delight in sinners dying alienated from Himself and lost for all eternity. He would much rather see sinners converted and enjoy the delights of the Father's house for eternity.

J. G. Deck's (1802-84) hymn captures something of the vastness of the love of God.

O Lord, Thy love's unbounded,  
So full, so vast, so free!  
Our thoughts are all confounded  
Whene'er we think of Thee:  
For us Thou cam'st from heaven,  
For us to bleed and die,  
That, purchased and forgiven,  
We might ascend on high.

But oh! The hope of being  
For ever with the Lord,  
The joyful hope of seeing  
That face for us so marred!  
It fills our hearts with comfort,  
It fills our lips with praise,  
So that amidst our sorrow  
A joyful song we raise.

O Lamb of God we thank Thee,  
We bless Thy holy name;  
Thy love once made Thee willing  
To bear our sin and shame.  
And now Thy love is waiting  
Thy saints like Thee to raise;  
Firstborn of many brethren,  
To Thee be all the praise.

#### **4. How should forgiveness affect me?**

As a Christian if there is a disagreement which is causing a problem and I am one of the persons involved, then it is best to seek to resolve the situation as soon as possible. I remember as a young Christian being told that I had upset an older brother in our fellowship. The person who made me aware of this was himself an older brother in the assembly. But the interesting thing was neither he nor I were aware of what I had done. So, I decided that I would go and see the person concerned that same evening. I was welcomed into the house and we both sat down together in the front room to talk things over. I remember that my opening words were something like 'I have been told that I have upset you in some way and that I was sorry about that.' We then talked for what was probably about half an hour but all during that time I never discovered what it was that I had said or done. However, at the next meeting of the assembly this elderly brother was back in his usual place and nothing more was said. Possibly all he needed to hear was me saying that I was sorry and whatever the issue it did not need mentioning.

That was an occasion in my local fellowship. I believe if there is a similar problem with a non-Christian, a neighbour or work colleague for example, then it is just as important to seek to resolve the difficulty as quickly as possible, as not to do so would be damaging to the Christian testimony. But what should not happen, if I am hurt in some way is to seek to 'get my own back' or in other words revenge. The Lord Jesus teaches His own to turn the other cheek.

Where there is disagreement in the church the goal must always be to restore peace and harmony in the fellowship and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the local company of believers. Over the years, upsets in the church of the Lord's people have often been about minor things and sometimes not even about biblical issues. When the issue is non-biblical, it is often easier to let

the problem be handled by those who have strong feelings about it than to let it blow up into something that causes disagreement and bad feelings which might fester on for a long time. If there are issues which are kept under the surface and not dealt with then although everything appears well on the surface nevertheless the well-being of the church will be affected.

Paul when writing to the church at Philippi touched on one such disagreement between two sisters in the fellowship. It was having a disruptive impact and so in his letter he touches upon the matter in just one verse.

“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord” (Philippians 4:2).

Paul brings the Lord into the difficulty so that it becomes not just a matter between two sisters but the honour of the Lord. Again, it implies the harmony of the fellowship and possibly testimony in general is being damaged in that company of saints.

As always whoever becomes aware of the problem should be seen to act first and not to leave it to the other party. Difficulties need resolving as quickly as possible. We all need to have a forgiving spirit as we fellowship with one another or mix with our neighbours. In terms of fellow believers, a forgiving spirit helps us. This is the Lord’s teaching in Matthew’s Gospel which is very challenging.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:15-22).

There is no limit in seeking forgiveness.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on ‘Dealing with forgiveness’ in our series ‘Problems Christians face’, talk number T1210.

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