

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

..... *GENESIS*

Kingdom Forgiveness: Genesis 50

Pastor Anthony Ferguson

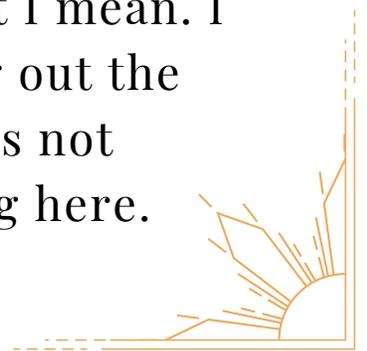
The title of today's sermon is kingdom forgiveness. Joseph forgives his brothers. The main idea of today's sermon is that kingdom citizenship demands kingdom forgiveness.

Now, before we get started, let's define and describe forgiveness. Unfortunately, many believers misunderstand this topic, so I hope today that we leave with a biblical understanding of forgiveness while being encouraged to ask for forgiveness and give it.

For example, Christians often equate forgiveness of sin with forgetting sin or with the concept of letting go. Forgiveness resembles these concepts in part, but not entirely. The verb for forget is used only once in the Old Testament to communicate the idea of forgiveness. When contemplating forgiveness, we could describe it better than this.

In Genesis 50, the word used for forgiveness communicates the idea of “lifting up.” Words often have a concrete and an abstract (or theological) meaning. Typically understanding the concrete meaning helps us understand the abstract meaning. For example, the word for repentance in Hebrew is the word “to turn.” When we “turn” from sin and to God, we repent. The concrete idea is “to turn,” but when authors use this verb in a theological context, we get the idea of “repentance.” This detail is why some pastors call repentance a 180. The concrete idea of “turning” provides us insight into the concept of repentance.

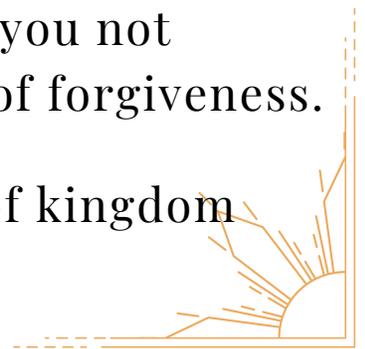
Now the concrete meaning of a word does not always help us understand the abstract sense. Think of the word glove box, for example. At one time, the glove box is where you put your driving gloves, but not anymore. Instead, the glove box is a place for your junk and trash, yet we do not call it the trash box. We still call it the glovebox. In this situation, a glovebox's concrete idea provides us with no help concerning the item's function. Another example of this would be the verb “tape” of “film.” I might say to my wife, “Let's tape Asher blowing out the candles.” Kristen's iPhone has no tape in it; yet, she knows what I mean. I mean to say let's take a video of him blowing out the candles. Again, the concrete idea of tape does not correspond to the abstract notion of videoing here.



Now, back to Genesis 50. The concept of forgiveness here concerns “lifting up.” To forgive someone means to lift up their sin so that the sin is now gone in terms of your relationship. What this idea suggests is that you no longer punish them for sinning against you. Therefore, the concept of forgiveness is closely connected to restoration, as we see here in Genesis 50. Joseph forgives his brothers, and their relationship as brothers is restored and healed. Forgiveness, then, is not a mere mental activity of forgetfulness, nor is it best described as “letting go.” Forgiveness is not just ignoring the sin. Forgiveness is a commitment not to punish someone for their sin: you have lifted their sin up. Restoration characterizes the relationship.

Forgiveness brings restoration, but restoration does not always look the same. For example, forgiveness does not demand that you have a friendship with someone who abused you. Forgiveness does not demand that you trust a person who hurt you. There are consequences to sin, and forgiveness does not always erase these consequences. Forgiveness, however, does mean that you commit not to punish that person any longer for that offense; your new relationship with that person – although that relationship may look different – is not characterized by you not punishing them any longer. This is the idea of forgiveness.

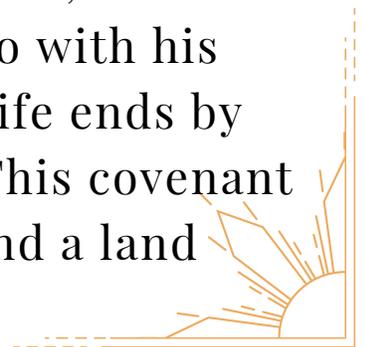
With that in mind, let’s look at the concept of kingdom forgiveness in Genesis 50.



THE DEATH OF JACOB: GENESIS 50:1-14

Last week we investigated Jacob's last words and acts. As we did this, we learned how to die well. Now, we transition to the actual death of Jacob. Overall, Jacob receives great honor at his death. Several details make this point clear. First, Joseph weeps over his father and kisses him. This reaction certainly communicates to us the depth of love Joseph had for his father. Second, the Egyptians, including the very house of Pharaoh, lament Jacob's death greatly. They weep for him for seventy days (3) and then cross into Canaan with a great camp of people (7-10). The mourning did not end on day seventy. Moses tells us that the camp made a great, very heavy mourning for Jacob (10). Those who lived in the land recognized this unusual activity and even named the place that they mourned the Egyptians' mourning (11). Third, Joseph and his brothers honored him by burying him where he requested to be buried (see Genesis 47:29-31): in the cave where Abraham and Isaac were buried (13). Truly, Jacob is honored at his death.

We also see that Jacob's life ends with a focus on his descendants and the Promised Land. Some of his final words concern him adopting Joseph's children, while the last narrative in Genesis about him has to do with his burial in the Promised Land. Thus, Jacob's life ends by whispering to us the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant is the promise of a kingdom: descendants and a land for God's people (Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22).

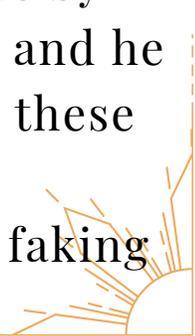


FINAL RECONCILIATION: GENESIS 50:15-21

The main idea of Genesis 50, however, is not Jacob's death. The details of Jacob's death instead are the context for the main point. In Genesis 50:15-21, we see a powerful picture of the gospel: kingdom life is a forgiving life. We learned about this truth already in Genesis 45 when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. Although they were terrified (Genesis 45:3, 5), Joseph forgave them.

We learn that the brothers harbored, at least some fear, for the last seventeen years since now in Genesis 50, they are terrified again. They believe that Joseph will repay evil to them because of their past evil. This fear leads them to tell Joseph about their father's instructions. We are not sure if Jacob said these words; Moses does not record them for us elsewhere in Scripture. Regardless, the brothers assume that Joseph's kindness was unauthentic and that there is no way that he could have forgiven them. They believe that now that Jacob has died, Joseph will get revenge. The brothers, however, are wrong.

Upon hearing of the brothers' fear, Joseph responds by forgiving them. He weeps when they speak to him, and he says, "Do not fear" (17, 19). This act of weeping and these words of grace proves the genuineness of Joseph's compassion and forgiveness again. Joseph was not faking forgiveness before, and he is not faking it now.



Church family, we need to pay close attention here to what motivates Joseph's forgiving response because forgiveness is an essential characteristic for kingdom citizens. Let me highlight the importance of this concept by reminding us of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:14-15:

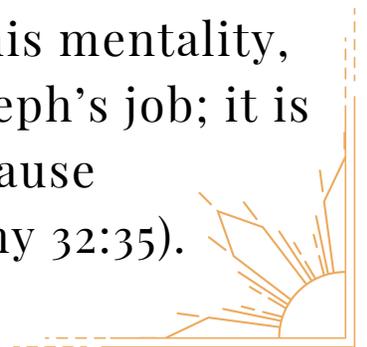
14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,

15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This verse highlights the importance of forgiving those who hurt us, so let's highlight together what motivates forgiveness in Genesis 50.

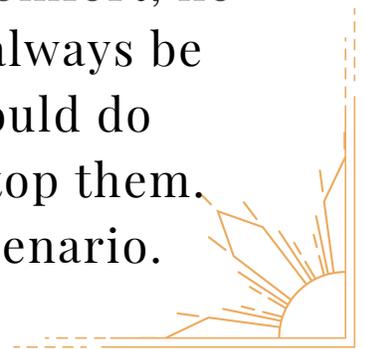
First, Joseph forgives his brothers because vengeance belongs to God. After commanding them not to fear, he tells them, "Am I in the place of God" (19). The brothers are afraid that Joseph will execute vengeance on them for their sin. This detail is evident since they say to one another that Joseph will hate them and now return evil to them for their sin (15). Our world often responds this way. Fighting is an act where two people try to hurt one another: the one who hurts the other the most wins.

The brothers think that Joseph will adopt this mentality, but they are wrong. Repaying evil is not Joseph's job; it is the Lord's. Joseph forgives his brothers because vengeance belongs to the Lord (Deuteronomy 32:35). It does not belong to Joseph.



When those who hurt us ask for our forgiveness, let's not seek to repay them evil; rather, let's be quick to forgive. Listen, when someone does evil against you, they deserve for evil to be repaid to them. The issue here is not if they deserve to be punished; they do. The issue here is that a Christian response embraces the truth that vengeance belongs to the Lord. The Lord will deal with this person's sin either at the cross or for eternity in hell. Vengeance belongs to the Lord.

Second, Joseph forgave his brothers because God is sovereign: he controls all things. Joseph says in verse 20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." We have been highlighting this truth for several weeks now, and we will highlight this truth again this week. God controls all things, even the evil things that people do against us. Church family, God not only controls events when things go well for us; he also controls events when they go poorly. This truth is important to grasp. Imagine how scary it would be if every time pain and trouble happened to you, the reason was none other than God's limited power. He simply could not prevent the evil from happening. That reality would be a nightmare. There would be no comfort, no relief, no hope if this were true. We would always be afraid that perhaps some force or person could do something to harm us, and God could not stop them. Terrifying is how we would describe that scenario.



Church family, that view of God's control, is not only frightening, but it is also unbiblical. Let's look again at verse 20: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Joseph's brothers intended grave evil against him, but God planned to work through this pain to accomplish his purposes. Joseph forgave his brothers because God controls all things.

Church family, God controls all events, even the hurtful things. Yes, the person who harmed you is responsible for this evil, but God is at work through it.

Third, Joseph forgives his brothers because God's sovereignty is aimed at a glorious, good end. This point is made again in verse 20: "as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." God not only has the power to control all things, but he also has the character to control all things out for good, and the chief good God had in mind was his mission. Notice the end of verse 20: "to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." God intended good through all of the evil intended against Joseph, including...

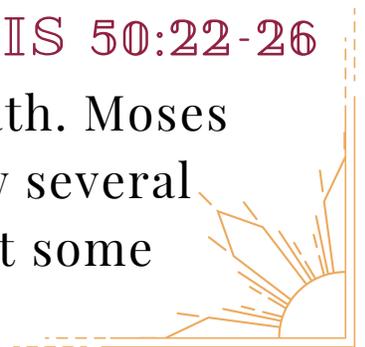


1. When the brothers sold Joseph as a slave
2. When the brother ignored Joseph as he begged for his life
3. When the Ishmaelites and Midianites ignored Joseph's cries for help
4. When Potiphar and his wife both used Joseph for their own good
5. When the cupbearer decided not to repay steadfast love to Joseph

Man intended all of this evil against Joseph, yet God intended good. God worked through all of this evil to save *many people* from famine. Imagine if Joseph was not in prison to interpret the cupbearer's dream, then what would have happened to the nations? Many would have died a horrible death by famine. God did not intend this reality; rather, he intended to save the nations through Joseph: a faithful covenant partner. God intends this good, and it points us forward to Christ, who saves people from all nations by his faithfulness. Joseph was motivated to show grace to his brothers because he knew that God worked this out for his mission.

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH: GENESIS 50:22-26

The book of Genesis ends with Joseph's death. Moses records for us that Joseph was able to know several generations of his descendants (23) and that some

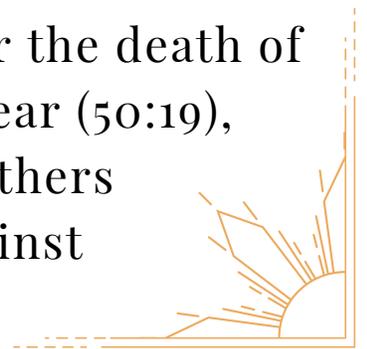


were even counted as his own children (23). Finally, Joseph asks that when God saves his people from Egypt, that they will take his bones out of Egypt and bury him in the Promised Land (25). Thus, the death of Jacob and Joseph both end with a focus on children and a relocation to the Promised Land: these are the two pillars of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The book of Genesis ends then by whispering to us that God will establish his covenant with Abraham soon.

APPLICATION

Church family, when others hurt us, we must keep our eyes on God's mission. If we think only about our hurt and how another person hurt us, we will likely not forgive them. We will repay evil to them. However, if we keep our eyes on the mission of God, then we will be ready to forgive because we will know that God accomplishes his mission of saving the nations through man's evil intentions. Children can get saved as they see their parents endure pain as Christ did. Our lost neighbors can get saved as we walk through trials well. Church family, let's keep our eyes on the mission amid our pain and see God extend his glory to all corners of this planet.

Joseph's conversation with his brothers after the death of his dad began with him telling them not to fear (50:19), and it ends that way too (50:21). Joseph's brothers come to him in fear because they sinned against



Joseph, but Joseph comforts them and speaks kindly to them. What motivated this reply? Joseph had a high view of God: God judges sinners, not Joseph; God controls all things, not Joseph; God works all things out for a glorious good end, not Joseph.

Church family, adopting this view of God will motivate us to forgive those who do not deserve it. If that is not enough motivation, here the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:15 again: but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Perhaps that will be strong enough motivation. Let's be a people who ask for forgiveness and who extend forgiveness to those who hurt us. Kingdom citizenship demands it.

Non-Christian friend, will you come today to the one who can forgive you of your sins. Jesus died so that if you would turn from your sins and trust in Jesus, his righteousness would be given to you as a gift. Would you come to him today?

PRAYER

God, help us, for we need your help, to forgive those who have sinned against us, and to ask for forgiveness when needed. Help us be a kingdom people; help us be a forgiving people. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.