

Title: “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt”

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Genesis 45:4b

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Service Readings: Gen 45:3-15; 1 Cor. 15:21-26, 30-42; Luke 6:27-38

A description of God and His true nature can be found in the account of Joseph.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

“I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!”

Wait a moment! Full stop, or as the teens say these days: “Bet!” This is *impossible!* Before we go on, if you are not familiar with the backstory, you may not realize that this statement is like the climax of an account that has been building up for nine chapters. This would be the last sentence in a TV series as it ended for the season. It would be a cliffhanger of sorts. And so, if you are not familiar with the drama of the entire season, you may miss out on the crescendo reached at this point. So, let me try to catch you up.

Joseph was the son of Jacob and Rachel. He had one full brother and ten half-brothers. His father favored him among all of them, so much that he gave Joseph a coat of many colors. The brothers were, of course, extremely jealous and so they tossed him in a well while they decided what to do with him. Some wanted him dead but in the end they sold him into slavery to some merchants who were heading to Egypt. Joseph excelled in his service to his master but then found himself in prison because the master’s wife unsuccessfully tried to seduce him. In prison, Joseph excelled and eventually won the favor of Pharaoh who appointed him governor of Egypt. It had been revealed to him that there would be a seven-year famine, so he prepared the country for it. With me so far? Good. In the middle of this famine Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain and this is about where we pick up. Now, I left out quite a few details that make this account even more fascinating than I described, so I encourage you to binge-read it for yourself – Genesis 36 to 50.

Now that you are caught up, let’s get back to verse 4:

“I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!”

Standing before them was the brother that they plotted to kill. The brother that they threw down a well while they argued about what to do with him. The brother that they sold instead of murdered.

Here he was! Standing before them! And in a position of power and authority. In a position of judgement! And they knew very well how they deserved to be judged. And they knew that they didn’t have a legal leg to stand on. They knew what we know to be true: You simply *don’t* sell your brother for the things of this world. You don’t expel him from your life because he crimps your style and holds you back. And *if* you do all that, you *surely don’t* ever want to come face to face with him

in the future. Especially if that *place* is *his* courtroom. And crawling back to him when you need something that only he can provide? That is completely out of the question. And yet, this was exactly the situation that these men found themselves in. No leg to stand on is really an understatement. They were as good as dead, as good as banished. They probably felt they would have been better off continuing to struggle in their own lives, separate from him, even if that guaranteed their death. But they were desperate and starving and in need of something that only he could provide but they probably would have preferred to take their own chances than stand before him that day. But this is where they found themselves: facing a judge that they had wronged and a judgement that they knew they deserved.

But it doesn't turn out the way that they expect; they don't get what they deserve. Instead, they get the complete opposite. Joseph overwhelms them with mercy and grace. He gives them the best land, provides for them during the famine, treats them like the royalty that *he* now is. He calls them his family even though he has been exalted above them.

This account, quite simply, is how God deals with us. It is an illustration of his nature and it is recorded for us so that we can learn to acknowledge him, trust him, and return to him even when we stumble. Even when we stumble. That's really an understatement. One could liken it to stating that Joseph's brothers didn't sell him into slavery but merely sent him on an adventure without first acquiring his permission. We don't just stumble, we sin. We toss Jesus into the – push him out of the decisions of our lives – and then justify it to ourselves. We invent our own truths and seek communities that will share in these truths with us. A simple glance at Facebook posts will support my position. Our posts reflect our own truths; how many of them align to God's?

Now, I bring up truth because one day we will come face to face with the Truth. We will all stand before our judge and king and just like Joseph's brothers, it will be in that moment that our life will be judged according to that truth. No longer will we be able to hide behind the communities of this world; no longer will we be able to justify our thoughts and actions to ourselves; no longer will we be able to ignore the reality of how we have treated God. In that moment our sin will be measured by God's rule - and in that moment we will fully realize the judgement that is due us.

<pause>

But what we deserve is not what we will receive. God in his infinite mercy sent his only son, instead. Jesus was born into this world as a humble child. He was tried and tested by God, even unto death. And he was then raised up and exalted. And he will come again to judge the living and the dead. And for those who believe in him he will say "I am your brother."

Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

See the connection between Joseph and Jesus? And the connection between his brothers and us? But there is a difference that is worth exploring. Joseph's brothers first came face to face with him at the time of their judgement. But we have access to Jesus now – we don't have to wait. In fact, we *can't* wait until that day. But I don't believe that to be how this message is framed. It is not a

warning to us to repent and turn to Jesus out of fear. Instead, I read this as a gospel message. I read this as an invitation to reflect daily on our sins, our failures, our disobedience to God. When we do this, and when we are honest with ourselves, we become humbled to the point of despair. We have wronged God, our God, the God who moved heaven and earth to save us. Our God who gave his only son to be our sacrifice, take our punishment for our sins. How could we ever expect to enter into his courtroom and receive mercy and forgiveness? But in our despair, that is exactly where we find ourselves – in the throne room of God. And at the feet of Jesus our humility is not used to render satisfaction for our sins but to be cleansed of them. The punishment has already been suffered but not by us but by our judge, himself. Our sins have not been forgotten but forgiven.

Luther once wrote about this passage the following:

“Wrath and judgment are shown through the Law to keep us from sinning. But when we have fallen, we have the Word of promise by which we are taught not to despair but to bear in mind that the goodness and mercy of God are boundless. He gave His son for us that we should be our satisfaction and that by His blood our sin should be devoured and destroyed (p.40-41).”

In other words, Jesus calls us into his courtroom where we receive the boundless mercy and goodness of God. And where we hear from Jesus: “Come near to me, please. I am your brother.” This is the comfort that is available to us today. All we must do is present ourselves to Jesus and ask for forgiveness. Are you looking for this comfort? He is offering it to you.

Please pray with me.

The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

Amen.