

# Genesis 45:1-15

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 12 March 2023

Preacher: Hunter Nicholson

[0:00] Okay, Genesis 45. So a couple years ago, we had a missions conference at our church back in the States.

And we had a missionary from France who came and spoke to us. And he told us this story about a young woman in his congregation. And her name was Fatima. And Fatima was not raised a Christian.

I think she was raised in the Muslim community. But she became a Christian. And when she began to believe, her life was radically transformed by that, as you might expect.

By all accounts, she was a transformed person. And she was active in everything that the church did. And then one day, Fatima just disappears without an explanation. And no one knew what happened to her.

And the minister could not get in touch with her. And then one day, he sees her on the street. And he says, Fatima, where have you been? And she says, she tells him what had happened, which is that her family had found out that she had converted to Christianity.

[1:09] And they were furious. And her brothers came to her one day and assaulted her and even began to beat her with the Bible that she had been carrying around with her.

And they said, you have to deny this religion. Deny this Christ. And Fatima was a, you know, probably 19-year-old young woman and was terrified. And she did just that.

She said, fine, I deny this Christ. And Fatima told the minister that, all that had happened. And she ended her that story by saying, you see, I am not worthy to be called a Christian.

And Fatima's story is very unusual. Most of us have never had, ever even heard of something like that happening in our communities.

But I think what she experienced, the heart of it, speaks to something that a lot of us as Christians can go through, which is this feeling that we carry around with us sometimes, that I am not worthy to be called a Christian.

[2:10] And I think the story that we're going to look at this morning speaks to that fear. We're looking at the story of Joseph. And Joseph is a story that we all know because Joseph is the guy who did everything right.

He was faithful at hard times. His brothers sold him into slavery. He was faithful through that. A woman tried to seduce him. He turned her away and went to prison because of it.

And then, of course, you could say that the story is because he was faithful, God raised him up and made him one of the most powerful people in the country of Egypt. So it's a beautiful story about how great things can go for you if you're faithful to God.

But I think that that's actually not the heart of the story of Joseph, even though all those things are true. The book of Genesis gives us signs and indications to show us that when we read the story of Joseph, Joseph isn't the most important character.

And one way we know that is this really subtle clue. When you read the book of Genesis, there's ten different times that a story starts in the book of Genesis by saying, these are the generations of, and it will say someone's name.

[ 3 : 25 ] And every time it does that in the book of Genesis, the writer of Genesis is telling us, this is who the story I'm about to tell you is about. And what's interesting is when you read the story of Joseph, it begins in chapter 37 by saying, these are the generations of, and it's not Joseph.

It says these are the generations of Jacob. And what the writer of Genesis is doing in that moment is he's saying, when you read the story of Joseph, don't miss the forest through the trees. Because we're going to have a lot to say about Joseph, but this isn't a story about Joseph.

It's a story about all of Jacob's sons and what happens to them. And so what I want to do this morning is to consider this story not from the perspective of Joseph, but from the perspective of Joseph's brothers, who are essentially the bad guys in the story.

But this is who God wants us to focus on in this moment. And what is leading up to Genesis 45 is Joseph has met with his brothers in Egypt.

They've come to him because they're starving. They don't recognize him, which is the beautiful intensity of it all. He knows them, but they can't see who he is because he's a changed man over 20 years.

[ 4 : 39 ] And Joseph tests his brothers. And the way that he does it is he sends his brothers home. But on the way, he plants gold and silver in the youngest brother's suitcase, essentially.

And he tries to frame the younger brother. So they catch all the brothers. The younger brother here has gold and silver in his suitcase. So Joseph commands this young man to be brought back to Egypt and made his slave.

And just before the scene that we're reading today, the brothers have come before Joseph, still not knowing who he is. There's even a translator between them.

And there's this beautiful scene where Reuben, Reuben who was the very brother who suggested that they sell Joseph into slavery. Reuben comes before Joseph and he says, you cannot allow our youngest brother Benjamin to stay here in slavery.

Because if I go home and I tell my father Jacob that we left our youngest brother in Egypt as a slave, it will kill him. And I can't go home and tell my father that.

[ 5 : 51 ] And so Reuben says, rather than allow Benjamin to stay here as a slave, let me stay here. Let me take my brother's place. And it's when Joseph hears those words that he breaks down and he can't contain it anymore and he begins to weep.

Because here is this brother who has finally changed. He's a different man. And even so, the brothers are terrified. And what I want to talk about this morning is, what this passage shows us is that nothing that a believer has done in his or her past can ruin God's plan for their future.

Because here are ten brothers who come into this scene who have every right to believe that they've been caught. They've been exposed for the awful men that they are and now they're going to die.

And yet God shows them mercy through Joseph. And so what we're going to look at is three aspects of this truth that nothing that a believer has done in his past can ruin God's plan for their future.

And the first way we see this truth is we see that God rescues our present. And so in verses 1 and 2, you see this in verses 1 and 2 where it says, Joseph could no longer control himself before his attendance.

[ 7 : 13 ] And he cries out, make everyone leave from my presence. So that there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him.

Now there's so much more going on here in this scene than is obvious in the front. He says, when he sends the Egyptians out, there's a real symbolism to this. Because in the story up until this point, Joseph has only talked to his brothers through an interpreter.

His brothers didn't even know that he spoke Hebrew. So that adds to the intensity of the emotion that he just addresses them in Hebrew. And so he sends the interpreters out. And then he says in verse 3, is my father still alive?

And there's all these subtle ways that in these just two verses, God is bringing back together a family that had been torn apart for 20 years. They're speaking in their own language together.

They're talking about their father. Where for the past few chapters, Joseph had been asking about your father as if he didn't know who it was. And the brothers' response, it says that the brothers were, well, when I was preparing this in the ESV, it says that they were dismayed at Joseph's presence.

[ 8 : 28 ] Here in the TNIV, it says they were terrified of his presence. Which is really probably a more accurate translation because the word here is the same word that you would use when you're facing an army.

And you know that you're about to be defeated. And the brothers are terrified when they see Joseph. And for good reason. Because in verse 4, Joseph says, Come close to me.

And when they had done so, he said, I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into slavery. So, Joseph has not forgotten what has happened.

And he doesn't say it doesn't matter anymore. He says, no, I'm the one that you did sell into slavery. So, even if he's forgiving them, he hasn't forgotten what's happened.

And the beauty of this scene is, no sooner do the brothers understand how hopeless their situation is, that they are also called to accept the grace that Joseph shows them in this moment.

[ 9 : 30 ] So, Joseph says in verse 5, Don't be distressed or angry. Do not be distressed. Do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here. Because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

And what I just want to notice here at the beginning is, these brothers must have had so many questions. Like, how did you become the most powerful man in Egypt? Well, we sold you into slavery.

And how could you forgive us? But those aren't the questions that they're being asked to wrestle with right now. In the moment, Joseph is merely saying, Accept my grace.

Don't be afraid. And you can tell that they never actually got over. They never truly learned to trust Joseph. Because later on, after their father Jacob dies, it says that the brothers were afraid about what Joseph would do now that their father was dead.

But there's a truth here. Joseph is showing us a truth of the gospel, which is that the gospel, God rescues our present.

[ 10 : 35 ] The gospel always comes to us in the present moment, saying, Receive this grace now. As opposed to saying, You can come take this grace once you've proven yourself.

The Bible is filled with moments over and over again, especially in the New Testament, where Jesus, He merely calls people to Himself and tells them to follow.

He doesn't give them all the answers to the questions they're looking for. He merely says, Turn to me now, and you can be saved. So when Jesus calls Levi the tax collector, someone who would have had so much sinful baggage in his past, Jesus merely walks by him and says, Follow me.

And that's the choice that's put before Levi. It's not, Can you prove to me that your past could be redeemed? He merely just says, Follow me and accept my grace.

And so Joseph has this beautiful illustration of God's own mercy that always and only ever offers grace in the present moment.

[ 11 : 44 ] It never, you know, there's a famous hymn that says, Come ye sinners. And there's that line that says, If you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all.

And over and over again, the Bible confronts us with this choice to follow Christ in the present moment, ignoring the past and ignoring all the questions that still remain to be answered.

It says, Just follow Jesus Christ. So the point is, in Genesis 45, God is working behind the scenes to restore Joseph's brothers to himself.

And all he calls his brothers to do in this moment is to accept that grace and hug their brother and be reunited to them. So God redeems their present.

But then you see he redeems their past. You see this in verses 4 to 8. In a sense, this explains how he could redeem their present. So in verse 5, Joseph explains why he won't take vengeance.

[ 12 : 44 ] He says, And now do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of me.

So Joseph is, in a sense you could say, he's pulling back the curtains of history and he's showing his brother that there has always been more to this world than they could see.

Because the narrative that they had known about their lives was one of jealousy, one of sin, one where their own free actions had ruined their lives.

And you see over and over again, leading up to this moment, the brothers know that they've done wrong, that they have wronged Joseph. And they're convinced that having wronged Joseph, their life is over effectively.

And that God has a right to punish them. And then here comes Joseph who looks at the same events and tells a completely opposite story.

[ 13 : 42 ] Which is that in the midst of all these tragic events, God has been working behind the scenes. Not only not allowing the brothers' sinful actions to destroy everything, but actually using their actions and transforming them for a good that they could have never understood.

So there's two things that God was doing here. On the one hand, which may seem like the bigger thing, is he saves an entire nation. He saves all of Egypt. Because here, Joseph has been sent to Egypt.

He's the only one with the wisdom to know how to take care of the country for seven years of famine. And he saves the country. But even more than that, in verse seven, Joseph says, God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So Joseph is saying, all of these past 20 years, all of these awful things that you've done, like putting me in a well and selling me as a slave, they were awful.

And nothing can make them not awful. And yet at the same time, God for 20 years has been orchestrating all of these events to save you. So your worst, your most sinful acts are the very means that God has used to bring about your salvation.

[ 15 : 07 ] And it's not absolution. It's not saying, you see your sins weren't that bad. But it is saying, God is so miraculous that he can even work in these things and transform the world.

He's telling, the brothers are having to learn a lesson here, which is that nothing that they can do can thwart God's plan for Jacob, for the house of Jacob, for all the brothers. And his ultimate plan for salvation is being revealed here.

So, the verse that points this out is Romans 8, 28, right? Where Paul says, we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Now, that's a promise that's only for believers, but it's not a promise for perfect believers. It's a promise for all people who call on the name of Christ, which is that nothing you can do in your past, he redeems our past, nothing you can do in your past can tear you away from God.

You can't look at anything in your past and say, here is a monument to the fact that God could never love me and could never redeem what I've done. And you consider Judah.

[ 16 : 24 ] Judah here is this brother who sold his own brother into slavery. And if you read Judah's life, the sad thing is that's not the worst thing Judah ever did. But God looks at Judah and says, even this man, I can take his actions and I can work it for good.

And maybe the application for us is like this. To worry that our past will ruin God's plan for our future is to mistake God for something less than the sovereign ruler that he is.

And I don't know about you, but I often look, not just at my sins, but just at choices that I've made and I think, did I make a poor choice here? Maybe a poor decision about whether I moved to this city or moved to this city.

And those things can begin to haunt you at night. And you wonder, have I ruined my future? And God says, you can't, he disallows that thought because he says, you cannot get away from my plan for your life and my ability to restore however far you go astray.

And if you think about that woman, Fatima, Fatima, the narrative of her life had become, I am not worthy to be called a Christian because of what I had done in my past, because I had denied Christ.

[ 17 : 47 ] And the pastor who was telling us that story, he looked at Fatima and he said, Fatima, let me tell you about a man named Peter. And she talked, he told her about Peter and how Peter denied Christ not because he was confronted by men wielding clubs, but because he was confronted by a little girl who just said, aren't you one of those people who followed Jesus?

And that was enough to make Peter deny everything that he had ever known for the past three years. And consider Paul. Paul who had been a murderer of Christians.

And because of that, even so, God comes down to him and calls Paul to himself so that Paul can be the very one who says, no, literally, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

So the point is, that's being made to these brothers is that God can take our past and use it to do extraordinary things.

Nothing we can do in our past can ruin God's plan for our future. And that brings me to my last point. So God rescues our present. He redeems our past.

[ 19 : 02 ] Finally, he has the ability to restore our future. This is what God does. He has the power to set us on a sure footing and restore our hope in the future. And you see this in verses 9 to 11.

So, Joseph, in the short term, the way that God restores the future of Jacob is he brings them all to Egypt so that they won't die.

He gives them food so that they can survive. And so in the short term, you can see God's plan working itself out because they have enough food to survive for themselves. But there's much more that's going on in the story so that the story becomes this linchpin to explain so much more of the Bible.

Because in the long term, God uses all of them. God uses the brothers selling Joseph into slavery not just so that they can have food for a few years in Egypt, but he's preserving the brothers so that he can make good on a promise that he made to Abraham hundreds of years before.

which is, he looks at Abraham and he says, I will make you into a great nation as many as the stars. This is God making good on that promise when he redeems the brothers and he restores their future.

[ 20 : 17 ] And even more importantly, because God keeps Judah alive, when you read the New Testament, you find out that Judah becomes the one from whom Christ ultimately comes.

Judah is the great, great, however many, grandfathers of Jesus Christ. So by keeping Judah alive, God keeps alive the promise that the Redeemer will come one day.

And there's this poetic beauty to the fact that Judah is the first, Judah is the first person in the Bible who ever offers his life for someone else.

He offers his life to take vengeance in his place. This guy who was so selfish, who was so evil, becomes the Christ figure.

God saves this Christ figure in the midst of this pain and preserves life so that one day Jesus Christ can come and redeem all the brothers in a way that they could have never imagined.

[ 21 : 17 ] So through this story, God is saying, through these disasters, I can still save your future. And I think we need to hear that because so often we can say the past was great and things are going okay right now, but what gives me true anxiety is my future because I don't see what it holds and I don't see how it can look right.

And I talk, this may not be as on your radar as it is in college setting, but when I speak to college students, simple things like climate change give them anxiety about the future that they don't know how to handle.

And we can say, well, at the very least, we can say God controls our future and that can give us hope.

And what Genesis 45 and what stories like it do for us is it gives us these snapshots of ways in which the future looks dark for a people and the way in which God redeemed them so that we can look at our own lives and say, if God did this over and over again, can't He do it for me?

Won't He do it for me? When I was, when we were living in Mississippi and our daughter who is seven was in daycare, I began to bring her to daycare when she was like six months old and it was my job to drop her off because Carly had to go to work early and I'll never forget the first day I dropped her off just how she screamed so loud.

[ 23 : 00 ] And if you're a parent, you know that feeling. And it was terrible to watch her scream and then just to walk out the door. And she's six months old so she doesn't speak English and you can't tell her, don't worry, I'll be back in just a few hours.

But how do you teach her that? Well, you pick her up at the end of the day and then the next day you drop her off and she still cries. But you pick her up at the end of the day. And as you do that over and over again, she begins to learn, my Father will come back for me even when I can't see Him.

And that's what stories like Genesis 45 show us is. Even when we can't see what God is doing, our Father will come back for us. And that's, even that is wrong.

Even that's theologically incorrect because what we learn in these stories is that our Father has never left us. And that when it appears that He has come back for us, He was working behind the scenes the whole time.

And this is a story not about Joseph and about being truly great.

[ 24 : 10 ] It's about ten brothers who find themselves in needing grace. And God comes to them and says, I can offer you grace in the present and I can show you that I can redeem your past and I can restore your future.

And this is the God we serve. So Genesis 45 is this extraordinary passage about God's providence. The one thing I'll say in conclusion, we don't have what Joseph had.

Joseph had some kind of, I don't know what you call it, supernatural vision from God that would allow, I mean, Joseph had the ability to interpret the past 20 years in a way that we often can't.

And we often look at our situation and we want to say what God is doing, but we can't see what He's doing in the midst of our pain. And that's okay.

And what this story does is it allows us to see one example of how terrible things can happen and yet God can use it for good.

[ 25 : 12 ] And God just shows us this one time, He interprets for us this one story so that we can say, even in the midst of our suffering and even in the midst of our sin, we can't say what God is doing sometimes, but we can trust and we can know that He's working and that can give us hope.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your gospel. We thank You that You're the God who has never left us and we pray for forgiveness for the ways that we're so often blind to what You are doing, even in this community in which, for our Lord, when there can be so much anxiety, so much sorrow, it can appear that You're not working and yet You show us over and over again through Your Word and in the testimony of our own lives that You never stop working and You're never failing.

So be with us this morning. Help us to trust in Your goodness and help us to receive the grace that You offer to us. In Your son's name we pray. Amen. Thank you.