

Genesis 45:3-8, 15 *Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. ⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ 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 you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. . . . ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.*

The Great Escape

1. The brothers' evil
2. God's plan
3. Joseph's forgiveness

Moses gave Joseph lots of ink in Genesis. When one reads Genesis in one sitting, it becomes obvious that the Holy Spirit has Moses slow the story down in order to tell it. It's an epic tale with many twists and turns. It's a riches to rags and back to riches story. The plot contains elements of a Hollywood blockbuster: jealousy, lying, cheating, murder, adultery, injustice and sibling rivalry. But the real story here is not about Joseph. Joseph, himself, admits that. The real story is about how God works for the good of his people. The real story is the Great Escape.

Joseph's brothers despised him. He was dad's favorite, the first son of his favorite wife. He was the eleventh of 12 boys in the family and his father gave him special privileges. Then, on top of all that, Joseph bragged about dreams he had that said his brothers and parents would one day bow down to him. Oh, how that galled them.

Teenagers like to fit in. Joseph was a teenager and he didn't fit in. His brothers couldn't stand him. He was an outcast in his own family. Have you ever felt like an outcast before? Imagine being Joseph. Nobody likes you. And then one day, your own brothers throw you into a hole in the ground and sell you to some strangers.

Joseph was tied up, put into a wagon and taken to a foreign land. He probably didn't speak the language. He was even more of an outcast than he was at home. After that his life went on a roller coaster of changes. He was a slave for Potiphar a government official, then falsely accused and thrown in jail. So there he is alone, an outcast, rotting in jail. That's what his brothers did to him.

Joseph's story brings to light the destructive power of sin. No one in this story is without guilt. Joseph was haughty and proud. His father played favorites. The brothers were jealous and hateful. Then they lied and cheated. And where did it end up? Joseph's father was heartbroken. His brothers carried the guilt of what they had done for decades. Joseph was in prison.

Where does sin get you? What has your pride, jealous and hatred done to your relationships? Has it harmed your marriage, estranged family members or broken friendships? Sin divides. Sin separates. Sin divides spouses. It divides entire families. It divides the church. Sin separates people from God. Even for believers, sin stifles the growth of faith and can separate us from our Savior.

By God's grace our story doesn't end there and Joseph's story didn't end in prison either. A seven-year famine came on that whole region. God's people, Israel, and God's promise to Abraham through them would come to an end if they were not preserved through the famine.

The story of Joseph is the story of the great escape from destruction and death. Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery. But Joseph became a favorite of his master. Then he resisted sexual advances and landed in an Egyptian jail. There he interpreted a dream to save a fellow prisoner, and the cell mate promptly forgot about him. Joseph's valiant stabs at goodness landed him in nothing but trouble. But in the darkest of times, the Lord led Joseph see his hand of blessing and it elevated Joseph to a new level of spiritual maturity.

Joseph was brought out of jail to interpret a dream for Pharaoh and he was made ruler of all Egypt. Through Joseph they understood there would be seven years of plenty and then seven years of famine. With Joseph's leadership they were prepared for the famine and Joseph understood God's plan. *⁵ 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 you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and*

reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

Joseph realized that all that happened to him was God's plan that was bigger than Joseph. It was God's plan to preserve the promise of the Savior. Later he would tell his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (Genesis 50:20) Paul applies that truth to all of us in his letter to the Romans. He said, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

God makes all things work for our good. That's his promise. That even includes choices in life that were influenced by sin or sinful motives. It was sin for Joseph's brothers to do what they did. It was sin for Potiphar to unjustly accuse Joseph without the facts. But God made those things, wrong as they were, work out for Joseph's ultimate good. Joseph may not have understood it at the time, but that didn't prevent him from later acknowledging God's plan.

You may not imagine that God could work any good out of your broken life. Maybe you've really messed up with drugs, sex, alcohol – whatever. If you think that there's no way this can work out, God's Word to you this morning is just wait. Jesus has already done the unthinkable. He already died for you and rose from the dead. God has forgiven you! Can he work out your problems into good? Joseph would tell you he can. The Apostle Paul promised you he will. Believe that. Live in his forgiveness and trust his plans. Then apply that forgiveness to others, too.

Joseph was now king of the nation. If you or I had spent some twenty years rotting in slavery and in prison, we would have been pretty tempted to get some vengeance on those scumbag brothers. His brothers had now made their second trip to Egypt for food. They had brought Benjamin along as Joseph instructed. However, he then proceeded to plant his silver cup in Benjamin's bag, framing him for a crime he didn't commit. He wanted to see how they would respond and what he heard tugged at his heart. Brother Judah admitted that God was exposing their sin against Joseph. And he added that he would suffer in place of his brothers.

Now Joseph had heard enough. The deep feelings of his brothers' hearts had been laid bare, revealing true repentance for sin. *Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.* Up to this point Joseph had been speaking Egyptian and did not let on that he understood them when they spoke in Hebrew. Now, he clears the room so that it's just his brothers with him. With tears he revealed himself as the brother they sold into slavery.

And they were terrified. Not only had they fallen into the hands of a harsh ruler, but now they know it's the brother they had so grievously wronged. They were speechless with fear. But Joseph assured them, ⁵ *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 you.* And then our text adds, ¹⁵ *And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.*

Isn't this a wonderful picture of what God does with us? Like Joseph's brothers, we live with guilt. Our consciences continue to bring up past sins, and we search for refuge but don't seem to find it. We are born with a deep fear of knowing that we deserve punishment from God. And what does God do? He does his best to reassure us that we are forgiven. He cries with the Holy Spirit, "When you were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6)

And just as Joseph reassured his brothers with hugs and kisses, God assures us of his love and forgiveness in a physical way. He could just say, "Your sins are forgiven," but with his body and blood, Jesus puts his arms around us and says, "I died for you, personally! It's like when your spouse or your mom gives you a hug. There's something to be said for physical contact. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus gives you that physical contact and reassurance of forgiveness.

The scene of Joseph and his brothers touches our hearts. It also urges us to ask whether love always has its pardoning ways in our daily dealings with our family, friends and fellow workers. Above all, it raises our eyes to a higher love and a greater pardon. Standing beneath the filled cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb of Easter, we are brought face to face with God's pardoning love. May we show that same love to others – even those who have wronged us.

Joseph understood that it wasn't about him, but about God working out his plan through him. He could forgive because he understood that forgiveness was part of God's plan and the way he worked out his great escape.