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# Out of Evil, Good

## Genesis 50:15-21

**Introduction** There is no better place to start on this subject than by thinking over the life of Joseph. Here is a shocking history of incredible being sinned against. Yet the man moves with stunning grace and poise.

### **Trials Exposing a Faithful Heart**

Listen to the story of Joseph that brings us to this text.

#### **Conflict - Joseph's Pride**

Joseph has the joy of his father and the jealousy of his brothers. He stirs their passions by telling of them of a dream that seems to predict their subservience to him.

#### **Cost – Brother's Betrayal**

He is sent on an errand by his father to check on his brothers who are out tending flock. They plot to kill him, placing him in a pit. They decide to sell him into slavery. Then they splash his coat with blood and tell his father he is dead.

#### **Correction – Joseph's Travail**

He is bought by an Egyptian military officer who places him in household service as a slave. By God's blessing he becomes a valued and responsible member of the household as a slave. Then, the wife has designs on him and attempts to seduce him. He rejects her and flees from her. She in turn falsely accuses him of inappropriate sexual advances and attempted rape. He is imprisoned as a sexual predator.

#### **Coronation – Joseph's Elevation**

In prison, he rises to a place of trust and responsibility. He is forgotten by someone he has helped and languishes for years. Then, his ability to interpret dreams is remembered, called upon and rewarded. He is made the vice-regent over Egypt with primary responsibility to buy, store and distribute the harvests in anticipation of the famine that came. His family seeks help and he eventually identifies himself to them, brings to live in Egypt and is seemingly reconciled to his brothers.

It is an amazing story – Joseph should be a psychological and emotional wreck by modern standards. He is hated by his brothers, eleven of them. He is sold into slavery. He is falsely accused of rape. He is apparently abandoned in prison. He would have every right to see himself as having been victimized by everyone in his life. We would expect him to be depressed, bitter and an angry man.

But that is not the man we encounter. How can that be?

## Fear Exposing Guilty Hearts

(v.15-17)

Watch the reaction of Joseph's brothers to Israel's death.

### The Father's Death

Genesis 49 closes with the death of Jacob (Israel). Chapter 50 relates his embalming, funeral and eventual burial. In the midst of this time, the brothers observe the respect of the Egyptians for Joseph and the power he wields as a result.

### The Brother's Fear

And they are afraid. They speculate about Joseph's attitudes and intentions. They impute to Joseph their own sinful heart issues. They fear that Joseph has just waited until his father was dead to exact his vengeance. They acknowledge that what they did to him was evil. Their sin against him started the dominoes of hardship, slander and suffering. Their evil grew through the hands of others. And now, it is pay back time.

### The Brother's Response

So, in their usual way, they connive to manipulate Joseph through his love for his father. They try to protect themselves with what appears to be a lie. One more time they sin against him by tainting the memory of his father's love and death. They ask for his forgiveness, but it is leveraged with emotional pressure.

So, how do you respond?

## Tears Exposing a Forgiving Heart

(v.17b-18)

Listen to the responses of both Joseph and his brothers. Think about this for a moment – here is the acid test where many go wrong.

- We rehearse the wrongs against us. We play the video of being wronged over and over again in our hearts until we know the script well.
- We become bitter. Hateful words in the heart become bitter emotions in the soul.
- We excuse our sinful reactions, even when they are primarily aimed at others. There is an overflow from our hearts that poisons relationships but it feels so justified to us.
- We plan vengeance. We may never be able to execute our revenge; but the planning of it is no less the sweeter.
- We withhold forgiveness when there is a genuine confession. We are confronted with humble acknowledgement and we withhold forgiveness. The pain we have experienced demands punishment and they are not getting off this easily.
- We are cut off from being able to either execute our vengeance or experience reconciliation. This may come through losing touch or through death.

## The Holiness of Joseph

But Joseph weeps. His tears show his love and attitude toward his brothers. There is no bitterness, no rehearsal of wrongs suffered, no plotting from a throne of power, no withholding forgiveness.

There are tears. Why tears? Here is the heartbreak that his brothers are so spiritually and personally inept that they would expect this from him. He has already tested the genuineness of their regret and forgiven – how could they think that he would do this? It breaks his heart.

This is a long way from being a victim. Here emerges a man of God who is a victor.

## The Humbleness of the Brothers

And suddenly, they get it. Joseph's brothers show their contrition and humbleness. They fulfill the long ago dream by bowing before their brother. And even in this there is no sense of satisfaction or justice. They are humbled by the grace of God through the tears of the brother they wronged. They want to be his servants.

How can he respond like this?

## Truth Exposing a Trusting Heart

(v.19-21)

Tears and gentleness arise what Joseph believes and desires.

## The Truths He Believes

*VENGEANCE PUTS US IN GOD'S PLACE.* There is an idolatry that rejects the mercy of God and enacts the wrath of God. But he is not God. He will not try to take God's place by punishing them. Here is a fundamental confession for your soul as someone who has been sinned against: I am not in control of when and how God will balance the scale.

*THE SOVEREIGN GOD IS IN CONTROL.* Men mean evil, God intends and works good. Notice that this not God extracting good out of man's evil as a fallback. He is saying something about the very *intention* of God. While man intends evil, God is at work in the very attitudes and actions to intending good. This is huge. I will respond to being sinned against with grace because behind the sin of people is the sweet and sovereign hand of God.

*MY IMMEDIATE TRIAL MAY BE PRIMARILY ABOUT OTHERS.* In effect, Joseph says, "I went through all this suffering and pain and trouble at the hands of others for the sake of these saved alive through famine." You do not own your suffering. Your suffering is a stewardship for the good of others. What you have experienced and what you may be experiencing now may be all about God's good for someone else.

## The Comfort He Shares

This kind of belief and want can not only produce tears, but also initiate acts of good for those who have sinned. Here is overcoming evil with good. Here is doing good to your enemies.

So, he commits to meet personal needs, even those of their children. He is not going to withhold the food nor will he dispense the justice in his power to give. He will overflow with bounty to his brothers and their families.

And, he comforts and speaks kindly. His words are the overflow of a heart that is full of grace, full of faith, full of trust in God. He is not forcing kindness – gentleness and kindness are the hard won effects of the very trials he has experienced.

As we will see later in the last of this series, this points us to Christ who left a pattern for us to follow in His steps.

- He accepts suffering for the good of others, and so must you.
- With the power to punish, He loves to pardon, and so must you.
- He forgives sinners and receives as brothers, and so must you.
- He commits through love to promises of provision, and so must you.

I don't doubt that many of you have experiences like Joseph.

## Conclusion

Maybe you have been betrayed by a family member.

Maybe you have been falsely accused, possibly even as a result of doing right.

Maybe you have been abandoned by someone you helped.

Maybe you have been misinterpreted and mistrusted in the midst of genuine love and forgiveness.

May you be like Joseph.

Be faithful to the tasks you are given.

Be forgiving when there is a genuine repentance.

Be gracious and kind even when misunderstood.

Be vigilant over words that run over and over again, rehearsing pain and producing bitterness.

Do good when you can and speak kindly as you ought.

Think like Joseph does.

I am not God and will wait for Him.

God intends good even when others intend evil.

All this may be for someone else's good.