

Genesis 45:1-15 I am Joseph

Introduction

We all have our special moments when we experience great joy or happiness because something we could only dream of –not reasonably expect – has taken place. For some people it relates to our work. A footballer, Jay Rodriguez, never expected a call up by England football manager Roy Hodgson in November 2013. A player who has graced the colours of Stirling Albion, Barnsley and Burnley would not normally expect to receive such welcome news. However last year this young Lancastrian lad from Burnley hit the big time with a move to Southampton and the rest has been history! What might your special moment be? For some of us it will immediately come to mind, but for others there may be a few things that we will never forget because they have made us so grateful to God for these blessings. I remember the day when a fellow student at College came in so happy because he had finally found out who his birth mother was. For some older people one of their special moments in the family circle may have been confirmation that someone precious to them who has been missing in action in World War Two had been located safe and sound months after that dreaded notice had been given. For old Jacob and his sons the revelatory moment that is recorded in Genesis 45:1-15 would almost certainly have topped their list. No words are adequate to describe such a moment or the emotions that overwhelmed them as a family that day.

1. The Revelation (Genesis 45:1-8)

(a) The Declaration (Genesis 45:1-3) *Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Make everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. ³ 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.* Joseph as I mentioned in an earlier sermon has been seen as a type or representation in the Old Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here it is good to highlight one or two features of that: (i) The brother's attitude to Joseph (v4) *But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.* When the risen Lord Jesus appeared to the apostle John, Revelation 1:17-18 states: ¹⁷ *When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.* Joseph had been in effect dead to his brothers and although they had a suspicion that he might still be alive it shock them to the core of their being that the living Joseph was there in front of them. He neither said nor did anything to terrify them. It was his presence alone that brought that response. John's encounter with the glorified Lord Jesus was equally terrifying not because of anything the Lord had said to induce such a response. It was the majesty of His glory that brought about this reaction. Both Joseph with his brothers and the Lord Jesus with John sought to provide assurance of their good intentions, but it took some time to come to terms with the sense of reverent fear in the presence of one so awesome and majestic. (ii) His knowledge of them long before they knew Him David, the great King of Israel, wrote these amazing words concerning God in Psalm 139:1-4: *You have searched me, Lord, and You know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue You, Lord know it completely.* These words spoken in the context concerning God the Father, yet within the Trinity they are equally true of the Son and the

Spirit with reference to God's people. God loved us before we were created and planned our salvation, our journey of faith in this life, together with His purpose of calling us to Himself beyond the grave. The sovereignty of God in salvation ought to be a wonderful source of joy to us. He knows the bigger picture because it is in His hands! Paul grasped that in Romans 8:28-30: *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.* ²⁹ *For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.* ³⁰ *And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.* Each of the tenses in the glorious chain of redemption imply something that happened at a specific moment in the past and that events yet future are as certain as past completed events in the purposes of God! Joseph knew these men –his brothers- long before this episode of their visits to Egypt. They had no idea that this mysterious Egyptian official who had taken such an interest in their family knew exactly who they were (Genesis 42:8 *Although Joseph recognised his brothers, they did not recognise him.*). The strange goings on, for example of money returned in sacks or place settings at a dinner table in birth order for the brothers as well as special treatment of Benjamin all appeared random and strange occurrences. They had no idea of the bigger picture that it was part of a carefully thought out plan by Joseph. A plan conceived not for their harm but their good was being executed. They were put under pressure, endured deprivations in prison and other painful experiences which they must have feared, possibly even resented at the time. Have you not struggled at times with making sense of things that happened in your life or that of other people close to you? If the answer is 'no' then you will be the exception not the rule. God is God and as fallible finite human beings we will only ever see a small part of the bigger picture of His plans for us. (iii) The centrality of love behind his actions Every action of Joseph was motivated by love for them when they had no right to expect it. In a limited way this is a picture of God's dealings with us. Only He sees the bigger picture –yet because of His great love for us, supremely in sending Jesus to die in our place as our substitute, sin-bearer and Saviour (Romans 5:8 *God demonstrates His own love for us...*) we can trust Him to work in and through us for our good and for His glory. At first his brothers hated him so much that they couldn't bear to be near him and then as it escalated sold him into slavery. Yet through this time of trials they first came to regret their actions (Genesis 42:21-22), then as conviction of sin became a reality they asked: *What is this that God has done to us?* (Genesis 42:28b). Until their hearts were softened and consciences seriously convicted repentance was out of the question and Joseph had to withhold his identity from them. When Judah, the hard man of the family, was clearly transformed in Joseph's presence following the arrest of Benjamin and the plea he made for the younger brother, the opportunity had arisen to open his heart of love to them. However, let us reflect that sometimes God allows difficult or painful things to happen in our lives for a purpose. There are times when we might not learn a lesson we need to grasp through any other means. Often it is through challenging times that we come to see our need to trust the Lord in the first place; likewise, in the same way it can often be when we grow most as a Christian because we have to depend more on God to get us through some particular trial. Our human nature urges us to focus on the symptoms of a problem which we rightly seek to resolve, but it is wise to ask what might my loving heavenly father want me to learn through this situation? In the 'stiff upper lip' public culture of Egypt what was about to happen was extraordinary. Joseph had to ask the Egyptian officials to leave while he revealed himself to his brothers. Genesis 45:1-2 *Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Make everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers.* ² *And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.* You cannot love people and want the best for them without being

vulnerable to the deepest of hurts. Jesus wept over people's sinful choices (Luke 19:42) and was overwhelmed in His spirit by the pain of human suffering in the face of sickness and death (for example, John 11:33-35). You and I will weep when people we love and pray for, week by week, speak or act in ways that cause us deep pain and anguish. It cannot be any other way and wasn't for Joseph either. These situations inevitably are deeply emotional as here *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 (Genesis 45:3). Yet it was love not any other motivation that brought about these circumstances on that day.

(iv) Our accountability for our actions When the brothers realised it was Joseph standing in front of them they were rightly terrified. Even seventeen years later (see Genesis 47:28) it hadn't left them and came out after Jacob's death. Genesis 50: 15-18 will reveal the extent of their fears. They were anxious now to do the right thing to please Joseph. However, he wanted them to do so out of love in response to his prior love not out of fear of punishment. This is exactly our situation today with respect to the Lord Jesus. He wants us to put Him first in our lives not out of fear that otherwise He will send us to hell, but rather because he loves us so much that He wants the very best for us as His children. We are accountable to Him and will one day stand before Him (II Corinthians 5:9-10), but on that day He desires to honour and bless us for faithful service not the opposite! *I am Joseph* was a revelation intended to produce a response of love and appreciation but in a context of the highest respect and a determination to live a God-honouring life.

(b) The Assurance (Genesis 45:4-8)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 ploughing 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.* Joseph begins by stating what no-one else would have dared to raise: *I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!* (Genesis 45:4b) Our theology to be relevant has to be contextual. Our faith to be practical has to address the pressing issue in hand. Without this fact no member of that family would have been in that building for that purpose on that day in Egypt. Our faithfulness to God requires us to face up the real issues of life and not evade them. Living in parallel worlds of the 'church' and the 'work-place' or wherever will not do. God is deeply concerned with the whole of our lives. There is no sacred /secular divide. All belongs to God. His values and principles are equally applicable in every location. This was one of the great truths recovered at the Protestant Reformation, but needing to be rediscovered and applied in each subsequent generation.

(i) Who is in control here? *God sent me ahead of you* (v5) *God sent me ahead of you* (v7) *it was not you who sent me here, but God* (v8) *He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt* (v8); The God-centred practical theology of Joseph is consistent throughout his adult life and provided the foundation for the extraordinary success God could entrust to him. It is sobering how few people can become more holy and God-centred in their apparent successes than via their trials. His words to Potiphar's wife in rejecting her sexual advances: *How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?* (Genesis 39:9); His words to the baker and butler concerning the source behind the interpretation of their dreams, Genesis 40:8: *Do not interpretations belong to God?* Likewise to Pharaoh in Genesis 41:16: *'I cannot do it,' Joseph replied to Pharaoh, 'but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.'* And Genesis 41:25: *God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. Why did Joseph call his firstborn son Manasseh and his second son Ephraim? Genesis 41:51-52 tells us: It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household.'* ⁵² *The second son he named*

Ephraim and said, 'It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.' Right to his death bed the same God-centredness was in evidence. Genesis 50:24-25 records: Then Joseph said to his brothers, *'I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land He promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'*²³ And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, *'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.'* This was the ground of Joseph's confidence and ours for ministry.

(ii) The extraordinary invitation Then Joseph said to his brothers, *'Come close to me.'* (Genesis 45:4); then with respect to Jacob his Father he told the brothers to say to him: *Come down to me...* (Genesis 45:9)... The problems of the past were not swept under the carpet. They were acknowledged, but their past would not define their future. Does yours? Does ours? Does it concerning 'the other' to whom we currently or should relate? Unfortunately this issue is evaded by too many Christians who carry baggage from their own past or someone else's and relationships in the present are either less than they might be or well-nigh impossible to sustain unless past baggage is left with the Lord Jesus at the cross and in the present when we come to His Table in communion (see I Corinthians 11:28-31 and Matthew 5:23-24:²³ *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,*²⁴ *leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*) The offended party or the offending party can take the initiative. God did it in Christ with the Gospel for sinners. Here Joseph does it with respect to his brothers. It speaks very seriously to Christians who have issues as to whom can be welcomed into fellowship in their local Church. I have been shocked over the years by reports of or personal experience of professing Evangelical Christians who objected to people on racial grounds; social class grounds in both directions! or because in some other way the fellow believers who wished to join them were 'different' in some way. If Jesus welcomes someone into His family by grace –how dare His followers take such sinful judgemental attitudes to those for whom Jesus died! No wonder the witness of the Christian Church in Scotland is so compromised when Evangelical Christians (not even thinking about liberal denials of the Gospel or false versions of Christian Churches presented on people's doorsteps!) fail to grasp the depth of what it means to live out the grace of God which we have been freely given. Do I, do you need to repent of sinful attitudes towards a brother(s) or sister(s) in Christ? Joseph models for us the Christ-like attitude to historic misconduct.

2. The Message (Genesis 45:9-13)

(a) The urgency of the mission (Genesis 45:9-10)⁹ *Now hurry back to my father and say to him, "This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay.*¹⁰ *You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me – you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have.* When God reveals a mission to His people there is an expectancy of obedience and action. Our Bible verse for the year as a church Revelation 3:8 stated: *See, I have set before you an open door that no-one can shut.* The blessings of life in Goshen could have been enjoyed by this family more than a year previously but they had not been open to see where God had been directing them to go. Their agenda had excluded the door God had opened for them until famine had forced them to go to Egypt. Now when they had met Joseph and realised what God had been doing there was probably no need to persuade them to act, except for Joseph to remind them that every delay meant they were missing out on some of God's blessings that He had planned to give them. Later in Goshen they would rue their reluctance to move forward much quicker. How many times have God's people in the post-Pentecost era missed out on blessings God has for us because of an unwillingness to step out in faith and trust God to provide for our needs and take care of our necessary arrangements? The blessings of obedience here were greater than

they could ever have dreamed of! All they could think of were obstacles of why going to Egypt was a bad idea. In your life and mine we have on average seventy or eighty years of opportunities to serve the Lord and model lives of faith to younger Christians coming on behind. Do we have a sense of urgency? Do we grasp the plight of countless people in our community of Broughty Ferry facing a Christ-less eternity –when we can do something about it and enable more of them to hear the good news of Jesus? Are we willing to step out of our comfort zone and recognise that our primary calling is to reach the lost for Jesus? We have been greatly blessed as a church over recent years in our work but we cannot rest on our laurels when so much yet remains to be done. Do those of us who are older have the Caleb spirit of that eighty-five year old man who volunteered for the hardest task of taking on the Anakites near Hebron. Joshua 14:10-12 states: ¹⁰ *‘Now then, just as the Lord promised, He has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time He said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! ¹¹ I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. ¹² Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as He said.’* What an inspiration that was when the oldest renowned leader in their ranks gave his full support to Joshua and the other Israelites in taking advantage of the opportunities presented to them. So many Israelites sadly forty-five years earlier had seen only obstacles, but the man of God recognised the difficulties but volunteered to be a leader this time in going forward by faith. Caleb would not live long to enjoy all the blessings of obedience of going forward in the Promised Land but he was an outstanding example to the people of God in being willing to grasp the opportunity God had given them –will you here who are older be a Caleb like example to the younger members in being will to be bold and courageous in grasping opportunities that our children and possibly grandchildren may enjoy and be blessed. May we never forget in McCheyne’s words ‘the shortness of time and the nearness of eternity’.

(b) **The provision for the mission** (Genesis 45:11-13) ¹¹ *I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.* ¹² *‘You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honour accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.’* All manner of excuses could arise: it’s too far for an old man like me (Jacob) to move approximately 250 miles and to another country; its inconvenient possibly having to mix with Egyptians –who knows how we would get on? The food might be different! What happens if the cost of living is higher there and we run out of money? Ought we not to play safe and just settle down and put up with our existing problems in Canaan? Joseph quietly would say to such questions: ¹¹ *I will provide for you **there*** (Genesis 45:11a). There was a warning here to note, though in verse 11: ***Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.*** Stepping outside God’s will means risking forfeiting the blessings He has in store for us. We don’t lose our salvation, that is impossible, but we can miss out on the blessings of obedience. As Abraham learned on Mount Moriah when he needed a ram for a sacrifice, that God meets all the needs of His obedient people: *So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.’* (Genesis 22:14). The following verses make it plain that it required this step of obedience before the greater blessings would follow. Paul assured the Christians in Philippi: *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19). God wants to assure us that He has not changed and our faith steps with Him will not fail but instead be fruitful for the extension of His kingdom. Yet even with the door of opportunity being opened; even here with the guarantee of provisions for their stay from the Vizier of Egypt Joseph still felt a need to make this plea: *And bring my father down here quickly* (Genesis 45:13b). Did he think they would come up with more

excuses to delay going forward to Goshen? When God opens doors, remember He is Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides for the needs of His obedient children. Will we be in that category?

3. **The Reconciliation** (Genesis 45:14-15)

The Egyptians in public were Stoics with inscrutable expressions, hiding their emotions. For more than two decades Joseph had to learn to act like an Egyptian and cover up any hint of his personal feelings. Therefore when this Hebrew family opened up to one another and especially Joseph's true feelings surfaced no wonder the Egyptians were surprised. Genesis 45: 1-2 had stated: *Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Make everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.* The agonies he had endured burst to the surface like a volcano and erupted. His passion could not be hidden any longer. Joseph was not thinking just of himself –though it included that- instead it was of his whole family because it really mattered. Genesis 45:14-15 shows this to be true: ¹⁴*Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterwards his brothers talked with him.* Here again a type of Jesus Joseph showed humility in spending time to reacquaint himself with these brothers who had hurt him so dearly. Here he showed love to them by treating them far better than they deserved. Here he showed vulnerability with his tears and implicit admission of loneliness that he needed them as much as they needed him. Here he modelled forgiveness and grace to the undeserving –can we do less than Joseph to other people other Christians? Here he demonstrated wisdom in taking the first steps to reconcile with them, not leaving them to take the initiative. The challenge to us is this: how do others in this community view us individually and collectively? Do they see us as a welcoming and inclusive congregation open to all who wish to come in? Are we a place of healing to the broken hearted; a place of encouragement to the discouraged and a place of strength to the spiritually weak? May God help us to model the Joseph-like spirit in our work and witness for the Lord, Amen.