

Coloring – Coat of many colors: **EPIC: Joseph** - “Forgiveness”

Our current series entitled EPIC continues with another story found in the book of Genesis – the story of Joseph.

Last week I encouraged you to read chapters 37 – 50 knowing that there is just too much to Joseph’s story to cover on one Sunday morning.

So, before I get to the part I would like to focus on today, let me give you a very brief summary of Joseph’s life leading up to that point.

Joseph grew up in a very dysfunctional family, 11 brothers, several sisters, several stepmothers all wanting the love and acceptance from Jacob.

Jacob’s bad habit of showing favoritism to his wives and children. Made a **coat of many colors for Joseph**. All it did was foster jealousy and division.

Joseph’s 10 older brothers, for instance, became so jealous and irritated by this favoritism and Joseph’s lofty dreams that they sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt. They tell their father that he was killed and by a wild animal.

Once in Egypt, at the age of 17, he became the slave of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s prison. Over time, Joseph does such a great job that Potiphar promotes him to higher positions within his home with greater responsibility.

God was blessing him despite his horrible predicament. After 10 years of faithful service in Potiphar’s home, when he was 27, Potiphar’s wife becomes inappropriately affectionate of Joseph and attempts to seduce him, but Joseph flees as she grabs at his shirt and tears it off his back. To mask her attempted unfaithfulness to her husband she blames Joseph of sexual assault.

Potiphar throws him into prison. All of which would never had happened if his brothers had not betrayed him and sold him into slavery. ***It would have been easy for Joseph to give into bitterness, hate and despair.***

Yet even in the worst of circumstances, God blesses him in the prison:

Genesis 39:21-23, *“But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.”*

Yet, despite the God's blessing on him there, it seems as though Joseph was forgotten there. Some 3 years pass in prison. **Now he is 30.**

That is when Pharaoh had a dream that no one could interpret. A former prisoner, the cupbearer to the Pharaoh suddenly remembered a young man who could interpret dreams.

Joseph was summoned and God gave Joseph the answer. Because of Joseph's ability, he was elevated to the position of Prime Minister.

7 years of plenty and 2 years into the 7-year famine, Joseph is 39 now, his backstabbing older brothers (in 40s) show up in Egypt and find themselves kneeling before Joseph to buy grain. *Funny how we picture people as they were more than as they are. Now they're adults still harboring childhood hurts.*

Genesis 42:1-9, *"When Jacob heard that grain was available in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why are you standing around looking at one another? I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy enough grain to keep us alive. Otherwise we'll die." So Joseph's ten older brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain. But Jacob wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, go with them, for fear some harm might come to him. So Jacob's sons arrived in Egypt along with others to buy food, for the famine was in Canaan as well. Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of selling grain to all the people, it was to him that his brothers came. When they arrived, they bowed before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph recognized his brothers instantly, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where are you from?" he demanded. "From the land of Canaan," they replied. "We have come to buy food." Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him. And he remembered the dreams he'd had about them many years before. He said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see how vulnerable our land has become."*

What would you do if you were Joseph? Are you the kind of person who holds on to a grudge? Do you look for an opportunity for "pay back"? Or celebrate when someone gets what was coming to them?

It's never easy to forget hurts that scar our souls and change our lives. Some have said, the best cure for healing unjust hurts is a strong dose of memory loss. But there's another option according to the Bible.

It is a simple idea but ever so powerful: It's called Forgiveness!

Jesus taught His disciples this principle when it comes to forgiveness:

Luke 17:3-4, *“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you **seven times** in a day and **seven times** come back to you saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”*

Robert Hoyer in his book (**Seventy Times Seven**), reflects upon this command of Jesus when he writes: *“The primary act of faith is forgiving. It is the characteristic act of God, the Father of Jesus Christ. If we follow him in faith it is the first thing we do in our following. It is the one thing different we do in faith which we would not do if we had no faith. It is what we start with if we want to put meaning and purpose back into our lives.”*

*Simon Wiesenthal lost 89 relatives in Hitler’s death camps. He devoted his life to fining Nazi criminals and bringing them to justice. He was often asked **when he would give up?** After all, he was hunting down men in their 70’s and 80’s for crimes committed half a century ago.*

Wiesenthal answered by writing a book. The book begins with a true experience he had while he was a prisoner in a concentration camp.

One day he was yanked out of a work detail and taken to a dark hospital room. A nurse led him into the room, and then left him alone with a man wrapped in white, lying on a bed. He was a badly wounded German soldier, whose entire face was covered with bandages. His name was Karl.

With a trembling voice, Karl made a kind of confession to Wiesenthal. He told how he had been brought up in a Nazi family - the fighting he had experienced on the Russian front - and the brutal measures his S.S. unit had taken against Jews. And then he told of a terrible atrocity where all the Jews in a town were brutally exterminated.

Karl said he had taken an active part in the crime. Several times Wiesenthal tried to leave, but each time the man would reach out and beg him to stay. Finally, after 2 hours, he told Wiesenthal why he summoned him.

I asked a nurse if any Jews still existed. I wanted one brought to my room so I could clear my conscience. He said... “I am left here with my guilt. I do not know who you are, I know only that you are a Jew and this is enough. I know that what I am asking is almost too much for you. But without your answer I cannot die in peace.”

Karl asked for forgiveness for all the Jews he had killed. He asked for forgiveness from a man who might also die very soon at the hands of the Germans.

Wiesenthal sat in silence staring at the man's bandaged face. Without a word, he stood up, left the room leaving the soldier in torment, unforgiven.

Had Simon Wiesenthal done the best he could? He seemed dissatisfied with his own response. He went over it with his companions. He visited the dead soldier's mother. In his book, he asks 32 rabbis, Christian theologians and secular philosophers to comment on it. "What would YOU have done?"

Out of the **32 people** he asked the **majority said** he had done the right thing in leaving the soldier unforgiven. **Only 6** said he had done wrong.

What do you think? I mean, Karl did go as far as to show a repentant heart and ask for forgiveness.

The Apostle Peter was perplexed with forgiving someone whose offenses went beyond the norm. *"Aren't there any exceptions or limitations, Jesus?"*

Matthew 18:21-22, *"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

How do you forgive someone when they keep wronging you over and over again? Aren't there limitations to forgiveness? That was Peter's question? And how in the world do you forgive someone when the magnitude of what they have done is off the charts?

When I look at Joseph, you can't help but think that all the horrible junk Joseph went through was a result of what his brothers did to him years earlier. *How could he ever forgive them? They wanted him dead but sold him into slavery – imprisonment? Was forgiveness even possible? And if he decided to do so, how could he ever trust them again?*

Joseph gives us a model of how forgiveness is possible and what it looks like.

So, let me build upon the part of Joseph's story we read in Genesis 42.

Jacob's family is desperate for food, He sends his sons to buy grain in Egypt who end up facing, unbeknownst to them, their long-lost brother, Joseph.

Even though Joseph recognizes his brothers he speaks in Egyptian, using an interpreter and is dressed like an Egyptian. So they don't recognize him

30 years have passed, and in that moment, Joseph remembers his dreams from 30 years ago as his brothers are bowing before him. He wonders, *Are they still the same jerks they were before, or have they changed?*

Joseph needed to find out, so he tested them.

Who are you guys? Where do you come from? Are you spies?

No, sir, we are here just to buy food.

No, you're spies come to see how protected we are so you can rob us!

No, we're not spies, we're 10 brothers, a younger is at home and 1 is no more.

To build his story he builds upon their fears. *I'm throwing you all in prison and I will let one of you go and bring this so called brother back here to me - I want to see how honest you guys are.*

So, he throws them into prison for three days and then releases them and says, okay, you can all go back but **one of you** stays here with me.

They started to panic! Speaking in Hebrew to one another they blame each other for their situation believing that fate for what they had done years ago has caught up with them! They didn't realize Joseph understood every word.

Joseph began to weep and had to remove himself. *Now he could see the guilt and anguish that haunted them for the last 30 years! Maybe they've changed.*

He composes himself and returns and has Simeon bound and taken!

Along the way home, they stop for a rest and find that the silver they used to buy the grain has somehow made its way back into their grain sacks. **FEAR!**

As they tell the story to their father, he's mortified. He's lost two children now and the idea of sending Benjamin, the youngest back is unthinkable. *But what about Simeon?* Judah promises on his life to keep Benjamin safe. So, Jacob agrees to let them go but says to them in **Genesis 43**...

"Put some of the best products of the land in your bags as a gift—a little balm, honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put in your sacks and then buy more grain. May God Almighty have mercy on you."

As they neared the city, Joseph could see them returning with their brother. He told his steward to take them to his home and prepare a great meal.

When they heard they were going to his home, they were frightened that it was a trap in retaliation for the missing silver. They wasted no time in explaining to the steward that they found the silver and wanted to return it.

The steward said, *It's all right,* "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, gave you this treasure." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

Joseph returned home, but they, still fearful and still not recognizing him, bowed down and presented him all the gifts they had brought.

He asked, *how their father was? And is this the youngest brother?* When he saw him, he couldn't contain himself again and hurried away to cry in private.

When he gained his composure again, he said serve the food.

The food was served but Benjamin received **5 times** as much food!

After the meal, they started their journey home, but this time the steward hid Joseph's special silver cup in Benjamin's bag, making it look like he stole it.

Long story short, the missing cup is found, and Joseph threatens to enslave Benjamin, but Judah steps in offers his own life instead. **Why did Judah feel so responsible?** Reuben's the oldest. Judah accepts his guilt for times past,

Remember, it was Judah's idea to sell Joseph to the slave caravan.

So, when Judah offered himself, it says Joseph "**could no longer control himself**". His questions were answered. His Father was alive. His brothers had told the truth. Their hearts had changed.

Genesis 45:1-3, *"Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have 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."*

Their response was silence. They had already experienced Egyptian prison. They had nothing more to say. They were unsure if Joseph still held a grudge.

Genesis 45:4-8, *“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! 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. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. **But God sent me** ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.”*

Now let me sum up by giving you some of the keys to Joseph’s ability to forgive some pretty big stuff and what it looks like when done right.

First, I want you to see that Joseph Size...

1. Forgiveness is an Act of Faith!

Notice the two words. **“But God.” “God sent me.”** It wasn’t you but God.

Forgiveness for both the little and really big stuff that people do to us is only possible when we release our lives to God and trust Him believing that He is able to accomplish great stuff regardless of and even using all the awful things that happen to us.

Joseph didn’t focus on the horror and say all this happened because of you guys! Nor did he blame God for it! He had faith in God and knew that God was good and that He would everything in his life to accomplish great things.

GRAVES TO GARDENS FOLKS – We sang about it today!

When we walk with God, we come to understand His greatness and goodness, and His ability to turn the injustice that beats us up in the world, into opportunities to grow us and bless us, we learn to trust Him with all the gory details; no matter how bad things get!

We can say to God, “I don’t know what you’re going to do with all this junk, but I know you have something good in store for me. Give me strength.

All that said, let me also say this, Don’t be fooled.

2. Forgiveness is never easy.

It wasn’t easy for Joseph – it was a process.

That is why we see so many chapters devoted to Joseph's process of forgiveness and the several scenes where we see him having to excuse himself because he became an emotional wreck!

Forgiveness never meant that Joseph had to minimize the pain of what had happened to him.

It wasn't easy for Peter either. That is why he was so troubled with forgiving repeat offenders. Jesus, there must be limitations on forgiveness, right?

3. Forgiveness doesn't overlook or excuse the wrong done!

Joseph clearly said in **Genesis 50:20**, *"You meant it for evil but God meant it for good."*

Forgiveness doesn't call evil good or find excuses for the wrong that was done. What happened wasn't the result of a bad home environment, poverty or any other thing that society uses to excuse sin!

They did evil! It isn't about minimizing the wrong. Joseph doesn't say, *"Boys, don't worry about it, it was not that big of a deal!"*

No matter who hurt us, or how wrong the offense, or how hard it is to forgive, – **We must forgive! Why?**

4. Those Forgiven MUST Forgive.

We've all desired forgiveness and received it at one time or another. You know and love forgiveness – so do what's right and dish it out.

For those of us who have humbled ourselves before God and acknowledged our sins and embraced Jesus's death to pay for those sins – we have been forgiven by God. And because we're forgiven, we **MUST** forgive.

It is the first thing we must do if we trust God and follow Jesus. It isn't negotiable Peter! That is what Jesus teaches Peter in next 13 verses with the story of the unmerciful servant!

Matthew 18:32-35, *"The master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he*

should pay back all he owed. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

We must forgive others because we have been forgiven.

The apostle Paul writes in **Colossians 2:14**, "When you were dead in your sins,...God made you alive in Jesus. He forgave us all our sins having canceled the written code with its regulations... that stood opposed to us; he nailed our sins to the cross of Jesus."

Think of that gift of grace.... All your sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, the punishment for broken commandments canceled and nailed to the cross of Jesus.

Being forgive has the power to change us! Doesn't it?

But here is a second truth that God wants us to realize.

When we forgive, **our forgiveness** may not change the one who harmed our emotions... **but it will change us.**

1. Do you need to forgive someone today? Don't wait, start right now – it begins in your heart. That is what God said to the unmerciful servant.

2. Do you want to receive God's forgiveness through what Jesus did for you today? It will change you and give you a brand new start in life. And you know what? It begins in the heart too. You can receive it today if you sincerely desire it. I can lead you there in prayer this morning.

Would you pray in your hearts with me this morning?

PRAYER