

Genesis 45:1-28, No. 70
“...Where Partings are No More”
October 8, 2017
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Text Comment

Judah’s magnificent speech and his offer to take Benjamin’s place, to be enslaved so that his young half-brother might go free, had brought Joseph’s great project to the happiest conceivable end. He could no longer and need no longer maintain the pretense and disclosed himself to his brothers.

v.2 He had wanted to keep the family affair private, but he couldn’t control his weeping and soon everyone knew!

v.3 The tears and deep emotion of the Egyptian must have left the brothers shaken and confused. After all, they had been on a roller coaster of emotion the last twenty-four hours. But his sudden announcement, “I am Joseph,” left them dumbfounded. The term used – the ESV has “dismayed”, the NIV has “terrified” – is used of that paralyzing fear that sometimes overcomes men in battle.

The question, “Is my father still alive?” strikes us as odd after Judah’s long speech about Jacob, but it makes sense if we take it not as a request for information, but as an exclamation. Jacob was an old man when Joseph had last seen him twenty-two years before!

v.4 He had to identify himself a second time. The brothers clearly couldn’t believe what they had heard. And the addition of the words “whom you sold into Egypt” probably only increased their alarm. So, Joseph hurried on to reassure them.

v.7 This is one of those striking statements – there are many in the Bible – of the doctrine of “concurrence”, a part of the doctrine of the providence of God. Any event may be said to be caused by an individual, even a sinning individual, or by God. They each are actors, their purposes may differ greatly, but the same event may truly be said to be caused by God or man, or, in one striking case in Kings and Chronicles, by Satan or by God. “You meant it for evil; God meant it for good,” Joseph will say again in 50:20. The act was both the will of man and the will of God if for different reasons.

v.8 “Father to Pharaoh” may mean “adviser to the king.” [cf. Sarna, 309] Joseph was so determined to bring the family, and especially Jacob, to Egypt that he discussed this first, leaving the gestures of greeting and reconciliation until later.

v.10 “Goshen” is a Hebrew name, not Egyptian. It is an area of northeastern Egypt, a part of the country known to have been occupied by Semites and other Asians at this time. [Sarna, 310] Egyptians could be generous, but they still considered and cared about the distinction of races.

- v.12 “That it is my own mouth speaking to you” means that Joseph is no longer speaking to them through interpreters.
- v.13 Just as was true in Judah’s speech, Joseph’s dominating concern was his father Jacob. It had been a great surprise to him that his father was still alive. Jacob was an old man the last time Joseph had seen him twenty-two years before. This may very well explain why, once he had risen to power in Egypt, he made no effort to reunite himself with his family in Canaan. He assumed his father was dead, and all that was left of the family were his brothers who had sold him into slavery in Egypt, not likely to welcome him.
- v.19 A special status was being granted Jacob’s family. They were to be virtually wards of the king. [Sarna, 311]
- v.20 Pharaoh is revealed to have been a thoughtful, friendly man and the full measure of the blessing now being poured out on the family is underscored. They could leave all they own back in Canaan, for in Egypt they would be royally supplied with new things and better things.
- v.22 Interestingly, the preference for Benjamin survived the reconciliation; but it was no longer a source of discontent among the others. Don’t you suppose that the other nine disciples of the Lord had some work to do in their own hearts to rise above their natural jealousy of Peter, James, and John, whom the Lord had made his favorites among the Twelve? Like it or not, everyone isn’t treated the same in life, everyone isn’t loved to the same degree or favored to the same extent. The need for humility is built in to human life!
- v.24 Here was one final demonstration of Joseph’s wisdom. His parting shot was realistic. The old crime was now going to come to light, Jacob would learn of what his sons had done to Joseph, and mutual recriminations would naturally proliferate. We may hope it was an unnecessary warning.
- v.28 As so often before in the narrative of Genesis, the last verse of the section sums up what has gone before and anticipates the subject of the next section: in this case, Jacob’s journey to Egypt and settlement there. Scholars call such a statement “Janus material,” after the Roman god Janus who had two faces, each pointed in the opposite direction. V. 28 looks back and looks forward at the same time.

We have said, in our consideration of the Joseph/Judah material that this history is clearly typological. “Typology,” someone has said, “is God’s fingerprint on history.” We have found already interwoven through this history the foreshadowing of Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, and a human demonstration, in Joseph’s orchestration of events, of God’s providential ordering of the affairs of men and nations to bring about his holy purposes in the world.

I think we have another dimension of this typology here in chapter 45. There is much to discuss here, of course, not least the explicit statement of divine providence and concurrence in vv. 5-7.

But, we have considered that lesson already on several occasions and there is something else that I don't want us to miss in the grand conclusion of the story given us in this chapter.

For, in Joseph, the God-figure in this material, the one who acts God's part in the life of his brothers, the Deus *absconditus* becomes the Deus *revelatus*: the hidden God becomes the revealed God. Deus *absconditus*, you may remember, was Martin Luther's term for God insofar as God hides himself from man and does not explain himself to man. It is impossible to know what God is doing in our own lives or in the life of the world. He rules over all, but in a most mysterious and hidden way. Strikingly enough, it is even possible for men to deny that God exists, so carefully does God hide himself from men. And even for those who know God, while God sees the end from the beginning of all things, while God knows precisely what he is about and where he is going, believers do not. We cannot discern God's purpose or plan as events unfold.

That has certainly been true throughout this history. The last thing the brothers thought when they sold Joseph into slavery twenty-two years before was that they were arranging for the provision of the family in a famine that would come upon the world two decades later. Nor did they imagine that their terrible crime and the misery they visited upon their brother and their father would someday be the means of their spiritual renewal. But God had all of these outcomes in mind when he employed the sinful attitudes and intentions of the brothers to send Joseph ahead of them to Egypt. Potiphar and his wife certainly had no intention to provide for the welfare of Egypt when they sent Joseph to prison for a crime he had not committed, but that is exactly what purpose God had in all of that injustice they committed against their young Hebrew slave. And on and on throughout this entire history.

We pointed out that Joseph became himself a God-figure in this history, orchestrating the events in the lives of his brothers behind-the-scenes in order to bring about their spiritual renewal and eventual reconciliation with him. He masterminded a scheme of which the brothers were completely ignorant. The hiding of his identity from them; the peremptory way in which he dealt with them upon their first meeting; putting their money put back in their sacks; the demand to see Benjamin; holding Simeon hostage; the preferential treatment given to Benjamin when he arrived; the cup put in his sack; and all the rest. Not only did they not recognize the purpose that lay behind the various things that happened to them, not only did they fail completely *even to imagine* that the Egyptian was dealing with them in some purposeful way, they ascribed a completely different meaning to those events and, as it turned out, a completely false meaning. Their interpretation of the events as they unfolded was completely wrong, 100% of the time! They got it wrong because Joseph, all this while, hid himself and his intention from them. He did it on purpose. He was Joseph *absconditus*! It was necessary for the achievement of his purpose that his brothers neither recognized him nor knew the reason for what was happening to them. *But, now, Joseph's purpose had been achieved. The hidden Joseph became the revealed Joseph. And what became of that?*

Well, there were tears. Rivers of tears. And that is interesting. Why do people cry over good news? What produces tears when brothers, so long estranged, are reunited? Eleonore Stump, professor of philosophy at St. Louis University, in an essay published some years ago entitled

“The Mirror of Evil,” reflected on this question of why tears are shed over profoundly happy news.

“A woman imprisoned for life without parole for killing her husband had her sentence unexpectedly commuted by the governor, and she wept when she heard the news. Why did she cry? Because the news was good, and she had been so used to hearing only bad. But why cry at good news? Perhaps because if most of your news is bad, you need to harden your heart to it. So you become accustomed to bad news, and to one extent or another, you learn to protect yourself against it, maybe by not minding so much. And then good news cracks your heart. It makes it feel keenly all the evils to which it had become dull. It also opens it up to longing and hope, and hope is painful, because what is hoped for is not yet there.” So Prof. Stump continues, “A loathing focus on the evils of our world and ourselves prepares us to be the more startled by the taste of true goodness when we find it...” [Cited in Ravi Zacharias, *Just Thinking* (Fall 1999), 3]

Perhaps that is something of what happened here. These are men whose hearts had grown hard through the years of living either with their sins or with the consequences of the sins of others, as in Joseph’s case. We even heard Joseph say, in 41:51, that he had forgotten all the trouble he had experienced in his father’s house as a younger man; he had long remembered the wrongs that had been done him.

But, now his family was before him, all the old painful memories were there but so also brothers who were no longer cruel and heartless as they had once been. They were rather remarkably tender-hearted and full of sacrificial love, and the tears came unbidden, unstoppable. All the evil was felt again but in the presence of what was supremely good and wonderful. The tears were the evidence of the truest, most authentic, most perfectly human emotion called forth by the realization of the truth, both good and bad, but a realization only made possible finally by the breakthrough of the good. Whether for that reason or not, we all know that tears flow when powerful emotion is unleashed: sorrow, or love, or joy. I remember being embarrassed that shortly after my wedding service was over I had to keep brushing away the tears. Florence was crying too for a different reason; she suddenly realized what she had done!

And, then, there was the reconciliation, the reunion, the celebration of unity and family love. Joseph kissed all his brothers, embraced them one by one – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and on down the row -- and then they talked, *and what a conversation must that have been.* How abashed the brothers, how anxious to tell Joseph of their sorrow, their shame for what they did to him, how glad to be able to say that where their sin abounded, God’s grace had much more abounded. And with what intriguing detail and emotion Joseph must have told them his story, and with what suspense they must have listened to that drama unfold, red in the face, shame and utter relief vying for the control of their hearts.

And, then, at the end of the chapter, we see, in anticipation, Jacob’s reunion with his long-lost favorite son. What a scene *that* will be when we get to it at the end of chapter 46. When Jacob saw his brother, Esau, after years of bitter separation, and found Esau reconciled to him, he said that to see Esau’s face was to see the face of God. And Jacob and Joseph must have felt the same when they saw one another again after twenty-two years.

This was a kind of coming home for all of them, and what more powerful and sweet and emotional experience is there in life than coming home from far away after long and hard days separated from loved ones. We are treated to such scenes all the time on the news – powerful as they are, awakening in every one of us something deep inside – soldiers returning from battle fields being greeted by wives and children on the tarmac.

And, then, there was the marvelous provision, prosperity, and fullness of life. See how Joseph piled it on, simply because he was so happy to have his family whole once again and perhaps healthier than it had ever been. He wants them all to share in the wealth and glory the Lord had lavished on him. There was the promise of all that Egypt could provide; there was the money: three hundred shekels of silver. They had sold Joseph into slavery years before and made just twenty shekels of silver; the family had made a fifteen-fold return on their dirty money! There are all the new clothes and the donkeys loaded with the luxuries of Egypt, and all the bread and grain and other food – they could eat like kings while their neighbors around them in Canaan still had to hunt for anything with which to make their next meal. Don't you suppose, with their hearts as full as they were, that they were generous to their neighbors?

It was all so stunning! Such a complete reversal of what they had known in the world up to that point. The text makes a point of saying it! When the brothers got their first inkling of what had happened they were dumbfounded, even terrified. And, at the end of the chapter it is the same. Jacob was stunned. It was overwhelming but in a good way!

We began by saying that there is typology here, an enacted prophecy; that God had left his fingerprint on this history and had woven into it the pattern, the meaning, and the nature of salvation. This is the great subject of the Bible so it's not surprising that it is taught in many different ways. And what lesson is all of this but that however mysterious God's providence, however opaque the purposes of God made remain, for the people of God, their pilgrimage through this world, however tortuous the road, however difficult the climb, will bring them at last to a wonderful destination.

What else – with all of the Bible before us – what else are we to think when we, after all the detail of the winding road taken by Joseph and his brothers, read such a happy scene of family reunion and reconciliation, when we see the tears flowing from Joseph's eyes, and Benjamin's, and Jacob's, but of the entrance into heaven, where, as Henry Alford has it in his great hymn:

O then what raptured greetings on Canaan's happy shore;
 What knitting severed friendships up where partings are no more!
 Then eyes with joy shall sparkle, that brimmed with tears of late;
 Orphans no longer fatherless, nor widows desolate.

I suppose that only those who have loved and lost and have loved ones in heaven and sometimes find Joseph's and Jacob's own tears welling up in their eyes in the hope and the prospect of reunion – testimony both to the heartbreak of loss and the hope of such happiness to come – can fully know how heavenly this scene really is that is painted for us in Genesis 45. It is a text like this one that answers the question: “Are we going to know one another in heaven? Are we going

to greet our loved ones when we get there? Are they going to fall on our necks and kiss us as well?” teaches us that such a family reunion awaits us in heaven.

And what are we to think of all that wealth and luxury being lavished on those undeserving brothers, except the lavish bounty and glory and beauty of heaven, which is described in the Bible in very similar, though still more extravagant terms: the best of the land of Egypt and the enjoyment of the fat of the land become in heaven not shekels of silver but streets of gold! What does John say in his vision of the heavenly Jerusalem? “All the glory of the nations shall be brought into it.”

And what are we to think when we see, in the tears of those men, the force and energy of emotion when into their hearts and consciences roiled the suppressed and pent-up guilt and sadness and bitterness of all those years, let loose by the stunning appearance of their deliverance and the opening of a way forward to a completely new life that was finally truly good and worthy, *a life to which they knew full well they had no right whatsoever* – I say, what are we to think when we feel the force of their emotion but of that moment when we, after our sinful lives, with so much that we must regret as we look back upon them, when we open our own sinless eyes on heaven and a world washed completely clean and find, standing there before us, our elder brother himself?

Some of you will remember how *A Severe Mercy* begins, Sheldon Vanauken’s enchanting book about love, death, and salvation in Christ. Six months after the death of his wife, many years after the death of his parents, and long after the family home had been sold, he returned one night, silently and surreptitiously to the estate where he had grown up, where he had long ago brought Davy, then his girl-friend, later to be his wife, home to meet his parents. It was a property large enough to have a name: Glenmerle. He walked up the drive, through the dark woods, across the wooden bridge, seeing the sights of his by-gone youth. And then, from a distance, the sight of the great house.

“He pictured the interior of the house as he had known it: the drawing-room with his mother half-reclining on the graceful old Duncan Phyfe sofa, the carved Chippendale chair that a great-aunt had brought from England, the oriental rugs glowing on the floor, the white columns of the mantelpiece. Past the fireplace, at the other end of the long room where the door opened into the study, was the piano: he could see his mother seated there with her auburn hair piled high on her head and hear her clear soprano voice singing the light opera songs she loved. Or he might glance out the window and see her in the flower-garden cutting flowers or conferring with the ancient gardener.” [13-14]

I wonder how often Joseph, during the long years in Egypt, first in Potiphar’s house, then in prison, and finally in his great palace, lay in bed at night and revisited the scenes of his youth?

“Glenmerle, he thought, had been a place to come home to, home from Kentucky or Florida or England, home from schools and home from college. He pictured coming home from boarding school, perhaps for the Christmas holidays, perhaps with snow all about – the woods full of snow. It would be a winter dusk with the big blue spruce a-twinkle with tiny white lights like stars, the big car sweeping up the hill to the house. Then his mother’s cries

of welcome and her kiss, his father's handshake, and his brother grinning in the background. And of course, as always, the cheery fire in the drawing-room, and through the French doors the dining-room alight with preparations. Upstairs, waiting, would be his own room, just as he had left it. Heaven itself, he thought, would be – *must* be – a coming home." [19]

Surely you can see the typology here! Joseph the God figure has brought his brothers home in every conceivable way. The end of the journey that Joseph set out for his brothers to travel that they might finally come to be with him where he was; the end of the story that God wrote before it had begun. There is a sweet sadness, but, of course, the joy is not yet complete. It is only typology. What if, that night, Sheldon had found Davy there too and they had been reunited, never to be separated again!

That glorious world, golden streets, the wealth and honor of the nations wherever one looks. We will be there! I promise you who are Christians! And the tears. Yes, even the tears. As all that was bad and evil and hard and so profoundly regrettable through our lives is recalled only to be swept away in a flood of the purest, sweetest tears. "No!" you say, "for there are no tears in heaven." Oh, I think you are mistaken about that! There are no tears of a certain kind – tears of mourning, tears of hopelessness and tears of pain – we are told that. But, what of tears of joy that are fed and purified by the recollection of things past, even sorrowful things, such as our own sins. Surely, we will never forget what once we were! If we did we could not fully appreciate what Christ had done for us and what he had made of us.

No one can love Christ as he must be loved by his people through eternity without the recollection of his or her sins and guilt while in the world. And no one can rejoice to the fullest, *who does not weep with joy*. When the Lord Christ returned to heaven after the terrible agonies of his humiliation for us, do you not think there were tears in his eyes – tears of the purest joy and relief after all of that indescribable pain and sorrow. He was and is today a true man. The Scripture says that he feels the sorrows of his people. Are there no tears in his eyes, from time to time, there at the Right Hand? You know there are!

Well, then, when our stony hearts are melted into a contrite joy for ever and ever, when we finally love as much because we have been forgiven much, will there not be, must there not be some of what the old Highlander called "an eternity of sweet weeping"?

And then, "afterward his brothers talked with him." And when we meet our elder brother in his palace and look on him whom we pierced, and when we have wept, and then fall to talking – *what a conversation that will be!*

Brothers and sisters, it is the destination that determines the meaning of the journey. If there is no happy ending – supremely happy ending – then we Christians are of all men the most to be pitied. But since this wonderful day awaits us, because Jesus Christ himself has promised it to us, we have *everything* to live for and we can suffer *anything* along the way! You and I must think more often and more carefully than we do of what and who will meet us at the end of the road.