

WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US

September 24, 2023

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Psalm of the Day; Psalm 103

Epistle Lesson; Romans 14:5-9

Gospel Lesson; Matthew 18:21-35

Sermon Text; Genesis 50:15-21

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen

God's Word for our consideration is our Old Testament Lesson from Genesis chapter fifty, verses fifteen through twenty-one.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and will pay us back in full for all of the evil that we did to him." They sent the following message to Joseph: "Before he died your father commanded us, 'You are to tell Joseph, "Please forgive the offense of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" "Now, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down in front of him, and they said, "See now, we are your servants." Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring this to pass and to keep many people alive, as it is this day. Now therefore, do not be

afraid. I will nourish you and your little ones.” He comforted them and spoke to them in a kind way.

So far the Word of our God.

These are Your Words, Heavenly Father. Make us holy by Your truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed, forgiveness often astounds the forgiven. Abraham Lincoln's treasury secretary, Solomon Chase, was 'a thorn in Lincoln's side' from the very beginning of his administration. He threatened over, and over again to quit his job, and leave Lincoln high and dry.

And then, in 1864 in the middle of The Civil War, during the height of The Civil War, when it was time for elections again, and each party had their nominating convention, Chase actually tried to usurp the nomination for president from Lincoln at that convention.

So, how did Abraham Lincoln deal with Solomon Chase? Did he fire him? Did he say, “*Get out of Washington D.C. I don't' ever want to see you again*”? Did he publicly embarrass Chase, after defeating him at the convention? No. Lincoln actually nominated Chase to be the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. He forgave Chase.

And, Solomon Chase was astounded by it. He was astounded. He wrote to one of his friends about what happened. He wrote of Abraham Lincoln, “*I cannot understand the man.*”

He could not understand how, after everything he had done, Lincoln could now nominate him for this very prestigious position. He could not understand how, after everything he had done, Lincoln could forgive him, because frankly Solomon Chase was himself not a very forgiving person. He was somebody who you could say lived in 'the

prison' of the past, he lived in 'the prison' of the evils that were done to him in the past, and 'the prison' of feeling like he, himself, had to make up for the wrongs he had committed toward others.

To escape that 'prison' is easier said than done, isn't it? To get out of that 'prison' of the past is not so easy for us to do. We have all been 'inmates in that prison', at one time, or another. Either barred in the guilt and regrets over things we have said and done to other people, or 'imprisoned and shackled' by the way we hold on to the wrongs that others have done to us. We wonder, sometimes, *“How does a person get out of that 'prison'? How do you escape that 'prison' of the past?”*

In Genesis, chapter fifty, we see somebody who has escaped that 'prison', in Joseph. In his words he points us really to the key that sets us all free, the key that not only allows us to know peace for ourselves, but also to be able to forgive those, (*as The Lord's Prayer says*), **“Forgive those who trespass against us”**, to forgive them especially when they seek out our forgiveness. That is what Joseph's brothers were doing.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and will pay us back in full for all of the evil that we did to him.”

Genesis, chapter fifty is the last chapter in the book of Genesis. It really is the end, the very end of the story of Jacob and his sons, and Joseph in Egypt. If you go back to the beginning of ***The Joseph Story***, (*as we often call it*), it goes back a whole bunch of chapters earlier. Very early in Joseph's life, his brothers hated him. His brothers resented the fact that Joseph was Daddy's favorite. Jacob's son Joseph was the first son born to his favorite wife, Rachel. If you remember, Jacob had two wives, Rachel and Leah. Leah had given birth to many, many sons and daughters, but Rachel had not. Joseph was the first son born to Rachel, who was Jacob's favorite wife, the wife he had originally intended to marry. And so, Joseph was

avored by his father Jacob, greatly. As a result of that, his brothers resented him. They resented the fact that Joseph kind of knew he was favored by his father.

And so one day, when Joseph came out to the field, where his brothers were watching the flock, his brothers decided they were going to kill Joseph. They took Joseph, and threw him into the bottom of an empty well, while they figured out what they were going to do with him.

But, instead of killing Joseph, they decided it would be better instead to sell him into slavery. They sold Joseph to a bunch of traveling merchants that were going by, who brought Joseph down to Egypt. In the meantime, Joseph's brothers decided it also would be good to tell their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. So they faked Joseph's death, as well.

That is how Joseph wound up in Egypt. First, as a slave in the house of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Later, as a prisoner. But now, 'the tables were turned'. Things were a bit different in Egypt. Because of the Lord's blessings, Joseph was now the second in command of all of Egypt. He was second only to Pharaoh in terms of his authority,

Now, Joseph's brothers, who previously hated him, had come down to Egypt, during the famine, dependent upon Joseph.

Many decades passed, forty years later, their father Jacob died. And now, the brothers are afraid, because they are still walking around in that 'prison of guilt', over what they had done. They are afraid, and they are wondering to themselves, *“Now that Dad is dead, is Joseph going to finally get even with us, for all of the things we did to him? Was Joseph only being kind to us, and taking care of us, because Dad was still alive?”*

So, they wanted to be reconciled to Joseph. But, instead of actually just coming out, and saying they were sorry, they came at it from a kind of indirect route. They came at it from, *(maybe you could call*

it), a tricky, crafty way. They wrapped their requests, they wrapped their repentance in the request of saying, “This was Father's dying wish. It was Father's dying wish that you would forgive us for the wrongs we have committed against you.”

They sent the following message to Joseph:

“Before he died, your father commanded us, 'You are to tell Joseph, “Please forgive the offense of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.’”

You think about the way they expressed their repentance here. They were not perfect, were they? Their expression of their sorrow over their sin was not perfect. It never is, right? In life, when somebody comes to you, and apologizes, how often is that apology conditioned in some way? Or, how often is that apology maybe wrapped up in a certain way? Or, maybe it does not look as sincere as you think it should look?

And yet, when Joseph's brothers actually came to him, they expressed their repentance a little bit more fully. They fell down on their hands and knees in front of Joseph and said,

“See now, we are your servants.”

The reason people kneel before a king, or before those in authority is because when you kneel, you are offering your neck, for them either to step on, or to cut off. That is what Joseph's brothers were doing in that moment. They were truly sorry for what they had done, and they wanted Joseph to really understand that.

And yet, at the end of verse seventeen, it says,

“Joseph wept when they spoke to him.”

Joseph wept. We might think of all kinds of reasons why Joseph wept. Maybe he was thinking about the past. Maybe he was thinking about the terrible things they had done. But, that would not be it, right, because the first words out of Joseph's mouth, when his brothers fall down before him, those first words are,

“Do not be afraid...”

You see, Joseph had already forgiven his brothers a long time ago. He already had seen how they had changed, since the time when he was seventeen years old, and they had sold him off in slavery. He saw how they now cared for their other younger brother, Benjamin, and protected him. They even wanted to stand in his place, when Joseph, (*before he revealed himself to them*), had threatened to keep Benjamin as a prisoner. He had already forgiven them a long time ago, because he could see they were still living in that 'prison' of the past. Those first words out of his mouth were,

“Do not be afraid...”

When you think about what happens, when somebody seeks our forgiveness, yes, their expression of their repentance will probably be imperfect. They may not appear as sorry as we wish they were. But, at the same time, we know what it is like to live in that 'prison of guilt'. We know what it is like to walk around with that regret over the things we have done. And so, even if it has been days since that person has done what they have done, or weeks, or months, or years, or even decades, when somebody seeks our forgiveness, especially a brother, or sister in Christ, we forgive them. We forgive those who trespass against us.

And yet, forgiveness is hard, isn't it? Forgiveness does not come easy. There is the old adage, “*Forgive and forget.*” Right? The forgiveness part might come easy. It might come easy for us to say to somebody, “*I forgive you*”, but losing it in your memory is a lot more difficult. We are not like Charlie Brown, are we, when it comes to remembering what others have said and done to us over the years? We, ourselves, are still trapped in that 'prison of the past', sometimes. We hold on to the hurts that others have caused.

Really, the only way out of that 'prison' for us is through our Lord, and through the fact that He shows His grace to us.

You know, when Joseph's brothers came, and fell down before him, he said,

**“Do not be afraid,
for am I in the place of God?
You meant evil against me,
but God meant it for good,
to bring this thing to pass,
and to keep many people alive,
as it is this day.”**

When you think about the grace that God had shown to Joseph, during his time in Egypt, it is pretty amazing to think about.

-Even while he was a slave in Potiphar's house, the Lord blessed Joseph with some really good administrative talents, and blessed Joseph during his time there. Joseph worked his way up to becoming the manager of the house.

-And then, when Joseph was sent to prison, the Lord blessed Joseph, during his time in prison. He caused him to be basically the warden's secretary, and to manage all of the other prisoners.

-Then, it was the Lord who ultimately brought Joseph out of prison, when Pharaoh had his dream. You might remember the dream Pharaoh had. He dreamed about seven fat cows, and seven skinny cows. The seven skinny cows ate the seven fat cows. With God's help, Joseph interpreted the dream. Joseph told Pharaoh, *“Those seven fat cows are seven good years, seven years of plenty. Those seven skinny cows are seven years of famine that are coming, and they are going to eat up everything that came during those seven good years.”*

-Pharaoh gave Joseph his ring, made Joseph his second in command, and gave him authority over all the Kingdom of Egypt to prepare for the coming famine, during the seven good years, storing up enough grain.

-As a result of that, not only was there enough food to feed Egypt during the famine, but people from surrounding nations started coming to Egypt, including Joseph's brothers and father.

God used Joseph not only to save many lives in Egypt, but to save even his own family!

Think about how Joseph is able to see that reality, to see all of those things that happened were not just happenstance. Joseph was not just lucky.

It was God working all of these things out for Joseph
and for his family.

The only reason Joseph could do that is because, ultimately, God had shown Joseph His grace far earlier in his life. Joseph had grown up in the house of Jacob. Growing up in the house of Jacob meant you learned the promise that had been handed down from Jacob's ancestors, from Joseph's great grandfather Abraham, his grandfather Issac, and his father Jacob.

The promise of a Savior,
the promise of a Savior from sin and death,
the promise of One who would come,
as the LORD had promised to Abraham,

One who would come,

through whom all of the nations on earth would be blessed.

The Holy Spirit had worked faith in Joseph's heart, through this promise, so Joseph could see things from God's point of view.

Ultimately he, himself, was set free by that promise. He, himself, was forgiven for his sins, because of that promised Savior. Joseph was also free now to forgive the sins of his brothers.

Think about how God has shown us that same grace each, and every day.

We heard the parable of the unmerciful servant. You think about the servant who the king forgives. He owed ten thousand talents. (*It was the equivalent of, you could almost think of it, as the equivalent of ten thousand years worth of salary!*) It was a debt he could never pay back. Even though he wanted to pay it back, he could never pay it back.

Such is the debt of our sins. The debt of our sins is so great before God, we could work on paying Him off for all eternity, and we would never be able to pay Him off. We would never be able to satisfy God in His justice, for the evils we have thought, spoken, and done.

And yet, instead of condemning our sins in us, God instead chose to condemn our sins in His own Son. God the Son, Jesus Christ, was willing to take in Himself the guilt of all of our sins, and of all of the sins of the world. By doing so, by paying for those sins at the cross, you and I are set free. You and I have been set free from the debt of sin we owe God. We have been set free from the punishment we deserve. We have been set free, with God's free and full forgiveness. That forgiveness also sets us free from 'the prison' of the past. It sets us free from those 'chains' of guilt and regret. It sets us free from the wrongs others have committed against us, because we are reminded of God's grace toward us. That grace forgives the 'mountains' of sins we have committed in our lives. In that grace we find also the strength to forgive the 'molehills' of the sins of those who sin against us.

As we forgive those sins, as people come to us seeking our forgiveness, and we forgive them, we declare the forgiveness that is theirs, we declare to them our own forgiveness. We do so in a way that leaves absolutely no doubt.

That is really what Joseph was after, here. He had forgiven his brothers years before, but he could still see they were unsure of his forgiveness. And so, when his brothers came before him, it says,

“He comforted them and spoke to them in a kind way.”

He reassured them. He left nothing unsaid, when it came to their standing before him. He made sure they knew he had forgiven them. When a brother or sister in Christ comes to you, seeking your forgiveness, that is not the time for a halfhearted, *“I forgive you”*. That is not the time to for bringing up, dredging up what happened

before this. It is not the time for any of that stuff.

That is the time, as Paul says,

“...leave no record of wrong”.

Love leaves no record of wrong. So, neither do we. That is the time, when somebody comes to us, and they are unsure of how we think about them, or unsure of how God thinks about them, that is the time for us to say, “*You are forgiven*”, to comfort them, and assure them, sometimes again, and again, and **again**. Leave that person with absolutely no doubt that God has forgiven them, as well yourself.

That is what God does for us. That is what God does for us in Christ. You think of Jesus' cries from the cross. He said,

“It is finished!”

That cry rings out to all eternity for all of us, every time we hear it, and every time we read it. To think of what scripture tells us there is no sin that is not covered by the blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Think of how that message gets repeated to us, again, and again, and **again** through the pages of scripture.

-It gets repeated to us in our devotional lives.

-It gets repeated to us when we come to church.

and Pastor Bartels, (*like he did today*), stood there in front of you and said,

“I forgive you all of your sins.”

-What God does for us, when we are reminded of our baptism, reminded God has put His name on us, and washed all of our sins away in Jesus' blood.

-What God does for us, every time we come to this altar, and receive Jesus' body and blood under the bread and the wine. God is reminding us, assuring us, and letting us know and leaving us without any doubt of where we stand with Him. We are His children, and our sins are forgiven.

Forgiveness astounds the forgiven, though, doesn't it? Solomon

Chase never understood why Abraham Lincoln could forgive him, but I am sure he was thankful for it. I am sure he was thankful for Lincoln's forgiveness. And in the same way, in this life, while we are here on earth, you and I, we may never fully understand how a just and holy God can forgive our many daily sins, day in and day out. We may never fully understand the breadth, the depth, and the height of the love of God for us, in our Lord Jesus Christ. We may never fully understand how God the Son could become one of us and take the punishment that we deserve. Why He would do that? But, we are certainly thankful that He did.

In that spirit of thanksgiving and gratitude, and in that spirit of God's grace that has been placed in to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and the faith that clings to Christ, knowing we ourselves are cleansed by His blood, in that spirit of gratitude may we also always forgive those who trespass against us.

Amen

Now, the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your heart, and mind through Christ Jesus.

Amen