

A STORY THAT IS JUST LIKE MY OWN
Epiphany 7 – February 20 & 24, 2019 (s757.doc)
238 – 492 – 504 – 490
Pastor Thomas Fricke

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

Over the years, I’ve heard people say a lot of things about the Bible, **[Bible image]** but one of the comments that has puzzled me the most is this: “I don’t know, the Bible just doesn’t make any sense to me. I don’t get it. It just doesn’t seem to relate to my life.”

I’ve given that some thought, and I believe that when we approach the Bible—when we sit down to read it, or listen to a sermon, or think about the stories we learned when we were in school—we can make one of **two mistakes [mistaken assumptions]** ...mistakes that immediately make the Bible more confounding and less relevant to our lives.

- ***The first mistake is to assume that all the people in the Bible are happier and holier than I am...*** as if they all walked around with harps and halos. It is to think, “Peter and Moses and Mary...they weren’t like me at all. I have nothing in common with them...and so the parts of the Bible that talk about them don’t teach me a thing.” That’s one mistake we can make when reading our Bibles...
- ***The other mistake is to assume that their sins were far worse, their motives more self-serving, and their families more dysfunctional than my own.*** It is to think, “I’d never do what they did...” and as a result, the parts of the Bible that talk about **them** don’t help **me** in **my** life. They can’t, because I think that spiritually, I’m in a whole different league. That’s the second mistake that can make the Bible seem less relevant to our lives...

If I do that either way, I’m wrong. It’s not that **the Bible is irrelevant to my life**; it’s that **I’m blind to the truth**. I can’t see how relevant it is. The Bible records for us the **real lives** of **real sinners**—Peter, Moses, and Mary included. In fact, the Bible could easily include the story of me...and how I’ve made such a mess of my life. **[blank screen]**

Today, we look at the story of Joseph and his brothers. On the surface we see a seriously dysfunctional family from days gone by. The characters are different, the culture is different, and the story is different....

And yet, as we look closely at the story of Joseph and his brothers, we may be surprised to discover...

A STORY THAT IS JUST LIKE MY OWN

And we may be interested to learn that, in every age it’s the **same** story:

- 1. Sin always makes a mess of things.**
- 2. But Jesus Christ makes a difference!**

The family Joseph grew up in...it had its problems. Two sins in particular caused pain...from one generation to the next. The first was **disregard for what God says about marriage**, and the second was **favoritism within the family**.

When he instituted marriage, **[marriage image]** God intended it to be the lifelong union of **one man** and **one woman** in an unconditional commitment of love. But we find that Jacob, Joseph’s father, had **four women**—two were his married wives and two were his wives’ servants. He had six sons (and one daughter) from one wife, two from another, and two children from each of his mistresses. This caused all kinds of heartaches and problems within the family. That’s what happens when you live as if God’s law didn’t apply to you.

We can see a second sin in Jacob’s family, a sin that grew out of the first, the sin of **favoritism**. **[I’m Dad’s Favorite]** Jacob had **his favorite wife: Rachel**. And Jacob had **his favorite son: Rachel’s firstborn, Joseph**.

When he showered Joseph with gifts he didn't give his other sons, that didn't sit well with his brothers. And when the Lord granted Joseph dreams that indicated that his brothers would one day bow down to him, and when **the favorite son** revealed those dreams to his brothers, that didn't sit too well with them, either. They hated him.

One day, Jacob sent Joseph to find his brothers in the fields. *"Here comes that dreamer!" they said... "Let's kill him"* (Genesis 37:19,20). Reuben convinced them to throw him into an empty pit instead. In the meantime, some Midianite merchants came by on their way to Egypt. The brothers saw a chance to make money and sold their brother. He was taken to Egypt and became a slave. The brothers cruelly concocted a story to convince their father that his favorite son was dead. They were happy to be rid of their conceited little brother...but this was a family that was more messed up now than ever. **[blank]** We see it today, don't we? It may not end up in murder and deceit, but sin causes generations to suffer. Family members carry a grudge and refuse talk to each other for years. Some won't get together in the same house with their own relatives. Children despise their parents—maybe because of some hurt from long ago that has never been forgotten or forgiven. And old sins are covered up with lies...or smoothed over with a show of repentance that is nothing more than a sham.

Unresolved, unrepented sin has a way of fracturing families and inflicting pain on everyone involved. **Sin always makes a mess of things.** But it doesn't have to.

God wasn't through with this broken family....

In Egypt, Joseph wound up in prison **[Joseph in prison]**—sent off to jail on trumped-up charges of attempted rape in the house of his master. It was all unfair—**everything!** But in prison, Joseph had time—time to think...to pray...to learn some humility and repent of his own sins—time and grow closer to God.

Eventually, God brought Joseph out of prison to become the head of the food administration in the land of Egypt. He gave him the power to interpret the king's dreams **[king's dream]**, and Joseph advised him to build grain elevators to save food during seven years of plenty, so that the people of Egypt could survive during the bad years to come. When Jacob's family ran out of food, Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy some. That's when they came face-to-face with Joseph. **[blank]**

Can you imagine what Joseph felt when he saw his brothers? He knew who they were. But they didn't recognize him...so he questioned them. He discovered that his youngest brother, Benjamin, was back home with his father because Jacob didn't want to lose **yet another** son. To test his brothers' sincerity, he accused them of being spies. He kept Simeon in Egypt and ordered them to bring Benjamin back the next time. So when the family needed food once more, Jacob sent his sons back to Egypt—this time, reluctantly, with Benjamin along.

Once more, the brothers bought food from Joseph and started home. But as they were on their way, Joseph sent his servant to accuse them of stealing his silver cup...and there it was, in Benjamin's sack! Joseph demanded that Benjamin stay in Egypt as his personal slave.

But Judah intervened and pleaded for Benjamin. If this young man did not return home, he said, his father would die of a broken heart...

Joseph now new knew that his brothers had **changed**. They **realized** the awful effect their past sins had on everyone involved. They **regretted** their past. They **loved** their father. They **felt concern** for their brother.

A wave of emotion swept over Joseph. He sent his attendants out of the room...and wept. He said, *"I am Joseph! Is my father still living?"* (Genesis 45:3). The brothers were speechless—terrified of Joseph and the awful memory of what they had done. But Joseph set their hearts at ease. *"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...."* (Genesis 45:7,8).

And so the healing began.

Do you see what Joseph did? He **forgave** his brothers. He didn't say, "After what you did to me? Are you kidding me?" He didn't say, "Get on your knees and beg for your lives..." He didn't make his brothers pay for all the trouble and heartaches they had brought into his life...though he knew it was wrong... No. He looked at everything that happened and realized that **God had a purpose in it all: 1) to save his family from starvation, and 2) to preserve the family from which the Savior of the world would be born.**

It's a beautiful story—a story about people no holier than you or I. But understand...their lives are no worse, either. It's a story that is much like our own. And the point is this: ***The forgiving love of God in Christ has the power to change our lives!***

The Scriptures urge us: "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you*" (Ephesians 4:32). That's the key to undoing the wrongs of the years. Yes, there are hurts in our families—**all** our families. But the key to resolving these problems is not **anger** and **bitterness**...it is not **revenge** and **retribution**...it is not **clinging** to those hurts and **nursing** them so that we feel justified in our self-pity. The key is **to forgive**...because **that is how God deals with us!**

Sin always makes a mess of things, but Jesus Christ makes a difference! He did, through his forgiving love, in story after story in biblical times. Let him do so in your life today. AMEN.