

**Genesis 45:4-8, 14-15**  
8<sup>th</sup> September 2019 am Hill and Arcadia  
**Avoiding bitterness**

Reflecting back on the history of Israel the Psalmist gives us a glimpse of the initial **circumstances** Joseph endured having been sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites...

*Psalms 105:17 ...Joseph, who was sold as a slave. 18 His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron;*

Many years later when Joseph (who is now the ruler of Egypt) insists that the brothers return home to fetch their younger brother, **their response** to this unwelcome demand gives us some further insight into what Joseph endured on that terrible day when '*brothers betray brother*'.

*Genesis 42:21 Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen."*

**What was it like for Joseph?** I can't find the words in my vocabulary to adequately and accurately describe how he must have felt... other than repeating what the brothers observed... *distress in his soul*.

With that '*distress in his soul*' description stirring in your mind... **imagine** another situation...

*A person being hunted like an animal, eventually caught in some kind of man made trap, put in a cage, transported over land and sea in despicable conditions, other captives dead from disease, taken to a foreign land amongst foreign people and then sold off as a piece of merchandise as a slave must have been indescribably and horrifically traumatic.*

Could **Joseph's ordeal** of being maliciously sold into slavery by his own brothers been anything like that?

These are surely amongst the worst kinds of **brutal, callous inhumane** actions any person or persons can intentionally inflict on any other human being.

## 1 Why do people hurt each other so badly?

Is there anyone among us who has **never been hurt**? I don't think so. All of us at some point in time and in some way and in some measure have felt the pain of brutal, insensitive callous inhumane treatment.

**Sometimes** it's deliberate or premeditated and **sometimes** it's not intended but it still hurts. We all have feelings and we know the ache of being on the receiving end of malicious attack.

Perhaps **some of you** find yourself in that place this morning. Inside you are reeling in unbearable emotional pain as a result of gross evil that has been thrown at you.

*Genesis 37 follows Genesis 3* helping us to see that Joseph's brother along with the rest of humanity suffer with a fallen sinful nature. Their problem and our problem is the curse of depravity.

**We are all fallible.** We are **all** selfishly defective. We are **all** imperfect. We are **all** sinners. We **all** fall short of the glory of God. (*Romans 3:23*).

Our fallibility makes us **all potential candidates** for dishing out hurt to others.

Logically the converse is also true. Not only are we all potential candidates for dishing out hurt to others but we are all potential candidates for **being recipients** or targets of that hurt.

**My point** is that sadly and tragically, we can and do deliberately or sometimes unintentionally hurt each other.

Since we have the potential and the even the tendency to act in sinful ways toward each other **the Bible** is filled with commands concerning 'each other' that are right and good.

**Here is a sample** list; love each other, do not deprive each other, have equal concern for each other, stop biting and devouring each other, let us not become conceited provoking and envying each other, forgive each other, agree with each other, do not lie to each other, bear with each other, encourage each other, build each other up, do not grumble against each other ...

This 'sad' fact of life can be seen in **the life of Joseph**. Look at his brothers' malicious and unkind action toward him.

*Genesis 37v4b ...they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.*

*Genesis 37v8 ...they hated all the more because of his dream and what he had said.*

*Genesis 37v18 ...they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.*

*Genesis 37:20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."*

*Genesis 37:23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.*

*Genesis 37v28 ...Come let us sell him to the Ishmaelites.*

Do you feel like sometimes **you are wearing** Joseph's shoes?

Are you this morning suffering with **lingering** pain and *distress in your soul* from racial abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse...? This is so much worse when the perpetrator is a family member or friend.

**Perhaps** *the distress in your soul* is something different like... you are disappointed with people or maybe even that you are disappointed and angry with God.

The very sad truth of it all is that most of us here today **know what it is to be hurt** in some way and to some degree. We can't avoid hurt as those who live in and are part of our broken and sinful world.

But as we move on the **important question** we need to consider is; what will you do with that lingering hurt? What will you do with *the distress in your soul*?

## 2 Will you leave it there to fester?

The **seven years of plenty** came and went just as Joseph predicted Then came the years of famine – a famine more severe and harsh than ever experienced before.

*Genesis 41v53 The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began*

The **famine extended** far beyond the borders of Egypt. And it was not long before Jacob and Joseph's brothers began to feel the pinch and sting of the famine. They had heard that there was food in Egypt.

*Genesis 42v1 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "why do you just keep looking at each other?" I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy grain in Egypt.*

And we all know the story so well. **The brothers** came to Egypt ...

*Genesis 42v6 Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them ...*

He realized at the moment when his brothers bowed to the ground that **he had them in his power** and he could do with them anything he wanted.

Now was **the ideal time** to give expression to festering bitterness. The time line is helpful here...

Joseph was 17 years old (37:2) at the beginning of this drama, Joseph was 30 years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh (41:46), there were 7 years of plenty, add a few months before the first visit of the brothers to Egypt and you can see that Joseph had **20 plus years to stew**.

The opportunity **for revenge** was at hand.

- He could have **sent them away** empty handed to face the death they deserved for doing what they did to him in the prime of his life.
- He could have **ordered them to be arrested** and thrown into prison to even to be made slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt.
- He could have **gloated**. Enjoying the pleasure of seeing them squirm with a gentle reminder of his dream and the words, *"I told you so"*.
- He could have **returned evil for evil** – and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
- He could have **taken revenge!**
- He could have followed the very **natural and fallible path** of short term satisfaction.

In our own seasons of soul distress we can long for this kind of **sweet revenge**.

There can be times when our distressed lives are **consumed** with plotting and rehearsing conversations and expending energy on ways and means to get back at those who have caused us so much pain.

The **madness of this approach** is that the harboring of bitterness; waiting for an opportunity to dole out the revenge actually does more damage to you than to the one you'd like to see getting some of their own medicine.

If you give in to the temptation to be bitter you **will be the long term loser**.

- You will hurt yourself by allowing this thing to consume **your precious time** and energy.
- You will hurt yourself by being **vulnerable to illness**. A Dr S I McMillen in his book, *'None of these diseases'*, lists over 50 diseases that may be caused by sinful emotions like bitterness and anger.
- You will hurt yourself by **not getting enough sleep**.
- You will hurt yourself, in your unresolved anger by **suffering with guilt**. You know deep down that this is not the way of Christ.
- You will hurt yourself by being **an unproductive Christian**.
- You will hurt yourself by **grieving the heart of God**.

The writer to the Hebrews **urges**... *Hebrews 12:14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;*

It is so important to learn the lesson that **Eliphaz** makes in *Job 5v2; Resentment kills a fool ...*

There is a **better response** that takes us to a third point.

### **3 You don't need to give into the temptation to be bitter**

Joseph does **not give into the temptation to be bitter**. He did not live for the day of revenge.

### 3.1 Why does Joseph not leave the bitterness to fester?

I would suggest that one of the common reasons **most of us resort to** growing and nurturing the root of bitterness is because of... inadequate and distorted and selective and domestic views about God.

We can unthinkingly treat the nature of God like a **Sunday lunch buffet**; selecting whatever attribute of God that is a personal preference.

We can so easily end up **not knowing** who God actually is.

It can be so easy for us **to respond** to suffering and abuse and disappointment (even when inflicted by other people) by saying things like...

How can a loving God allow this? Or, God is not present or God is not interested...

Joseph is unwavering in his convictions about **the loving purposes of a sovereign God**. He does not question God's ability or absence or nature. Instead he affirms invisible hand of God at work in and through the adversity (personally and nationally).

This is what he says to the now troubled and exposed **perpetrators of evil**...

*Genesis 45:5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.*

In prison Joseph **deferred to God** as the one to whom interpretations of dreams belong (40:8). The same credit is given to God with the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams (41:16 ...it is not in me, God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.)

There is a huge lesson for us here... we need to see and learn that wrong or distorted views of God lead to **an unwillingness to trust God** in the carrying out of his loving and good purposes through and even with difficult times.

Whereas when you and I have a more accurate understanding and conviction of who God is and what He is doing, we will be **more content** as we travel through the dark valleys and deep waters of affliction or hardship.

(I will return to this aspect of Joseph's life again in coming weeks **to reinforce** the blessing of the sovereign hand of God in the most difficult times of life.)

### 3.2 How is Joseph able to avoid bitterness?

We are given a clue to see the answer to this question after the brothers return to Egypt **a second time**. There is a precious moment of love expressed by Joseph...

*Genesis 45:14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.*

To be able to do this he must have **forgiven them**.

The only way you will be able to keep bitterness and revenge from dominating your life and eating you up like stage 5 cancer is to learn the simple but hard lesson – **FORGIVE!**

**Revenge** may bring a short lived satisfaction **but forgiveness** will bring long term peace. The better way / the right way is to forgive. This of course does not mean that sin should not be confronted. It must and we have guidelines given to us in *Matthew 18*.

**But forgive we must** – again and again,

*Matthew 18v21*      *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy seven times.*

Forgiveness is **at the heart of the gospel**.

**On the cross**, in a state of anguish and suffering at the hands of wicked men, in a state of God forsakenness he prays, *Father forgive them (Matthew 23v34)*

*Colossians 1v12*      *... joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

The heart of the gospel **is about forgiveness**. God providing, God opening the way, God securing, God purchasing our pardon on Calvary's tree...

If you are a believer **God has forgiven you**. This leaves you no other option but to forgive those who hurt and offend you. Forgive them and release yourself to a peaceful way of life.

## Conclusion

**This approach** may leave you feeling that the guilty walk away scot free. Justice will not be served and the innocent will never be vindicated.

If that is a troubling thought to you or an obstacle to you walking around with a forgiving heart then **be reminded** of what God has said...

*Romans 12:19* *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*

*Hebrews 10:30* *For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."*

Nothing escapes **the eye of God**. He will do what needs to be done. And as far as you and I are concerned...

*Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*