

Joseph and His Brothers

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Psalter 351

Scripture: Gen. 44:14 - Gen. 45:5

Text: Gen. 45:3-4

Psalter 297

Psalter 143:1, 3

Psalter 32

Our text words you can find in Genesis 45:3-4: “And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.”

With God’s help, we wish to consider with you:

Joseph and His Brothers

1. Betraying Joseph as an Enemy
2. Meeting Joseph as a Judge
3. Knowing Joseph as a Deliverer

Dear congregation, recently I received a letter from a child who wrote, “Would you please preach a sermon about Joseph and his brothers?” Today we are going to try to do that with God’s help. But I want to do that in a way, boys and girls, that you may be able to understand it. I know sometimes sermons are hard for children, but today we will try to make it very simple. I hope when you go home after this service that you will tell your mom and your dad what the sermon was about, but above all, boys and girls, that the Lord may bless this sermon to your heart, because the same thing that Joseph’s brothers needed, you and I also need. You cannot be too young, dear children, to seek the Lord, even if you are only three

or four years old. You may still ask the Lord, “Give me a new heart.” The Lord is almighty. And I hope, boys and girls, that you are often asking Him, “Lord, teach me how to pray.”

I think many of you know the story of Joseph and his brothers quite well already, and yet, boys and girls, there is something wonderful about the stories of the Bible. No matter how well we know those stories, there is always something new to learn, not only in our mind but also in our heart. You will remember, I think, that when Joseph and his brothers were very young, they didn’t get along so well. Not one of Joseph’s brothers liked him. That would be something, wouldn’t it? Many of you have many brothers and sisters. How would you feel if you didn’t have one brother or sister that liked you—if they all hated you? That would be very sad. I hope, boys and girls, that all of you love your brothers and sisters, and that you don’t do bad things or say naughty words to your brothers and sisters. You must treat each other with love.

There was a problem in Joseph’s family. Joseph’s father, whose name as you know was Jacob, kept giving more things to Joseph than he did to the other brothers. That was not very wise of Jacob. That was a mistake. The result was that Joseph’s brothers became very envious of Joseph. How would you feel if one of your brothers or sisters received most of the toys and gifts from your mom and dad and you received very little? Jacob, of course, gave something to all of his sons, but he gave special things to Joseph. Thus they hated Joseph. They were angry with Joseph. They didn’t want to have anything to do with Joseph. If Joseph would come along and try to play with them or do something with them, they would send him away. Later when they became teenagers and young men, they would go out to the fields to work. One day Jacob called Joseph and said, “Joseph, go out to the fields and find out where your brothers are.” And what did Joseph say? Did he say, “No, father, I won’t do that because my brothers don’t like me”? No; he was willing. He went out to look for brothers who hated him.

And so Joseph went to the fields. He arrived at one field and his brothers weren't there. He was told, "No, they're not in Shechem anymore; they're in another place called Dothan." Thus Joseph went to Dothan to look for his brothers. Do you remember, boys and girls, what happened when he got to Dothan? His brothers threw him into a pit. They weren't so easy on Joseph. They sat down to eat, and you can be sure that Joseph was crying in that pit. It hurt to be cast away. It was a very hard time for Joseph, but his brothers all sat down content.

What happened next? Since Joseph's brothers were tired of Joseph's dreams too because he told them that they would bow before him one day, they said to one another, "Let's get rid of this dreamer and his dreams." And so they sold him. They sold him for the cheapest price possible for a slave. In those days the lowest price for the most worthless slave was twenty shekels of silver, and that's what they sold Joseph for. They sold him as if he were the most worthless person on earth.

And now, boys and girls, you have to listen carefully. In all these things I have been telling you so far, Joseph was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ who comes from all eternity. He was born in Bethlehem's manger to make a long journey, to seek and to save sinners like you and I are. He goes into the field of the church; He comes especially on Sunday to seek sinners in His house. Jesus Christ is the Greater Joseph who goes from field to field and city to city to seek His brethren whom God has given to Him from all eternity. Before there was anything on this world, Jesus said to His Father in eternity, "Lo, I come...to do Thy will, O God." He was more willing than Joseph was. There was never anyone so willing as Jesus Christ to do the will of His Father. His whole life was to be about His Father's work.

When Jesus comes to seek sinners, just like Joseph, He is hated. Joseph was hated for his person and his words—for his person because he was the favorite son of his father; for his words because of his dreams. Jesus is hated because He is the God-man, but He is also hated be-

cause He says, "I tell you the truth. 'The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil'" When Jesus comes in the life of a sinner, boys and girls, He tells that sinner that he is a sinner, and we don't want to hear that we are sinners. By nature we are at enmity with Jesus, with God, and with our neighbor. We are no better than Joseph's brothers. Do you remember in the New Testament how many shekels Jesus was sold for by Judas? Thirty shekels of silver. That was the lowest price for a slave in New Testament times, just as twenty was in Old Testament times. Thus Jesus was that greater Joseph who, like Joseph, was hated by His brothers, sold for the lowest price, and still went out to seek His brothers. He is the Greater Joseph.

But now, boys and girls, the very worst thing of all is that you and I with our lives and sins also sell and crucify the Lord Jesus. No, that doesn't mean that we were standing there physically by the cross, but I mean in our hearts. You know, boys and girls, we can be guilty of something even if we don't do it. If we just think about it, if we think bad thoughts, that's sinful too. You see, we grow up not loving God as we should unless the Lord gives us a new heart, but by nature we grow up not desiring God. We are enemies of God. We don't want to admit that we are sinners. We want to sit down like Joseph's brothers, saying, "Away with Him." We want to sit down content, just like Joseph's brothers. How sad it is that Joseph's brothers had so much enmity against him that they could be content to leave Joseph alone while he was in the pit. Similarly, boys and girls, our great problem is that we are content to leave Jesus alone when He is on the cross. Though He still says to us today that He is willing to be the Savior also of sinful boys and girls, we will have nothing to do with Him. We sit down content without a new heart, without Christ. We are content to go straight to hell. We are content to be without God. We are content to be without a Savior for our soul. What a sad thing! These brothers wanted to sell Joseph. They wanted never to see Joseph again. Never! And what do we want, boys and

girls? By nature, if God just keeps giving us food and clothing and all that we need, for the rest we say (and it's terrible to have to say it), "Lord, leave us alone." We want to live our own lives. We don't want to be bothered by the Lord, just like Joseph's brothers didn't want to be bothered with Joseph.

But now, what God does is wonderful. Joseph was sold, and his brothers were glad. They thought, "Now we will never see Joseph again." But man proposes, and God disposes. That means, man can do something, but the Lord rules in the heavens. And twenty years later—that's older than all of you, boys and girls, Joseph and his brothers would meet again, but in a very surprising way. In the meantime Jacob was very sad because he thought he had lost his son Joseph. He said, "All these things are against me." What Jacob didn't realize is that all these things were for him.

Dear children of God in our midst, what an encouragement it is that God reigns! Once Jacob said, "All these things are against me," but later he said, "It is enough." In the original language it reads, "It is all"; in other words, "I have everything."

The Lord's ways are so far above our ways. That Ishmaelitish caravan was God's divine chariot to convey Joseph to the throne of Egypt. But what a hard way it was for Joseph! It was bad enough being in the pit, but now he came to Potiphar's house, and you know, boys and girls, what happened there. He was accused of something he did not do, and that man, Potiphar, believed his ungodly, sinful wife more than he believed godly Joseph. What happened to Joseph then? They cast him into prison. That was his second pit. And then what happened? You will remember that when he was in prison he told the butler and the baker the meaning of their dreams. The butler was restored to his position and the baker died. But the butler was supposed to remember Joseph, wasn't he? He returned to Pharaoh's courts and forgot all about Joseph for two more years. That was another trial for Joseph.

Then Pharaoh had a dream, didn't he? He told that

dream but no one could understand it. Finally the butler said to Pharaoh, "Oh, now I remember, there is a man named Joseph in prison who can interpret dreams." Then Pharaoh called for Joseph and Joseph came in front of Pharaoh. Pharaoh said, "I have heard, Joseph, that you can interpret dreams." And what did Joseph say? Did he say, "Yes I can"? No. Did he say, "Well, king, with the help of the Lord I may be able to"? No. What did he say? He said, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

And now, boys and girls, I want you to think about those words; "It is not in me" Do you realize how much Joseph learned in the pit, in prison, and through being forgotten? He learned a lot. When he was younger he never said, "It is not in me." He said to his brothers, "I have a dream. You shall all bow before me. I will be something, and you will be under me." But when he came into a pit, into prison, and then was forgotten, what was the Lord doing? He was doing just what Joseph needed. He was stripping Joseph down, bit by bit, so that there was nothing of Joseph left. Now even when Joseph had an opportunity to say something good about himself, he said, "It is not in me." That took grace, boys and girls. That took great grace.

And then Pharaoh told him his dream and Joseph explained it. There would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. Pharaoh then set Joseph up as a sort of vice-president, we would say today, over the whole country. Thus people brought corn for seven years and they built up a big supply of corn for people all over the world for the seven years of famine that were to come. In those seven years people came from all over the world to Joseph to buy corn.

Now Joseph's brothers also had to come, didn't they? Yes, indeed. They ran out of corn too. They came and Joseph said to them, "You are spies." Joseph was known to them by a very long name. Try to remember it. It was Zaphnath-paaneah. They didn't realize he was Joseph. Joseph knew them, but they didn't know Joseph. When

Joseph came to his brothers and said, “You are spies,” they said, “No, we are true men,” or in the original language of the Bible, “We are pious men.” In other words, “We are religious, God-fearing men.” And did Joseph say, “Oh, that’s wonderful that you are so pious, religious, and true”? No; Joseph put them into prison for three days—not out of anger, but out of love. “Love?” you say. “Is it loving to put someone in prison?” Boys and girls, Joseph had to teach his brothers that they could not have his heart until they had repented of their sin. We cannot find the Lord and be at peace with God until we know what it means to be lost and to repent of our sins. The world today is filled with people who have Jesus on their lips but they have never made confession with their hearts.

If you have a strong disagreement with someone, say your brother or sister, you cannot become one again until you confess. You cannot have reconciliation—that means, you cannot be one again—until you first have confession, until you first say, “I’m sorry.” So it is between God and us in spiritual life. We must truly be sorry for our sin shall we be reconciled to the Lord.

Joseph’s brothers were finally freed from prison and they went back home, but soon they ran out of corn again. And what did they do the second time? The second time they put all kinds of things together. They had saved their best food for last to bring to Joseph—fruits, balm, honey, spices, myrrh, nuts, and almonds. They also brought double money and, as Joseph had commanded, Benjamin. They came to him with the very best that they had, thinking, “If we give everything to him, Zaphnath-Paaneah won’t be so angry and stern with us and be so much like a judge.”

Boys and girls, that is just what happens when God works in the heart of a sinner. He makes that person feel he is a sinner and makes him hungry for the Lord. He runs out of corn, so to speak. He has nothing spiritually to eat. He cannot make ends meet with all his works, his prayers, and his tears. He becomes very hungry. He must have the Lord. And thus he comes to the Lord. But when he comes

to the Lord, the Lord doesn't begin right away with Jesus Christ. Rather, the Lord begins as Joseph began, with rough questions. "Whence come ye? Where are you from?" And when the Lord first begins, we say, "Lord, we are true men. We are concerned about our sins and we really want to be saved." But the Lord has to teach us, boys and girls, that there is so much wrong inside of our hearts. We first need to feel that we are unsaved before we can feel saved. We first need to feel that we are lost before we can feel that we are found. Sometimes the Lord will give a little encouragement to seeking souls, and that may be a little food to eat for a while, but the time comes again when they cannot live without the Lord. They have to go back a second time. And the further the Lord leads His child, even if it is a boy or girl of seven years old, then that child will experience that he or she will bring his or her very best to God. In other words, we will try to impress the Lord. That's what happens.

Well, what did Joseph do? He sent his brothers to his house and there the servant met them. They were very worried and afraid. They thought, "I don't know why we have to go to his house. This is very scary." But the servant smiled at them and spoke kind words to them. He said, "Peace be to you." But that didn't solve their problem; they had to hear that from Joseph's mouth. It is the same thing, boys and girls, with a lost sinner. It is one thing to have someone else say, "The Lord is working in your heart. Peace be to you." But that's not enough. We must hear it from the Lord through His Word that there is salvation also for us.

The Bible says something very interesting. They were waiting for Joseph to come home, and it says that they made ready the present for Joseph who came at noon. They were working until the very last moment when Joseph came. How surprised they were when Joseph came, because he set them down in the order of their age. He knew all about them, it seemed. He gave them food and was kind to them; he sent them away with money, with food, and with Benjamin, whom they were so worried

about. And while they were eating, the Bible says, "They drank, and were merry with him." They thought that everything was well. And in the morning they went home. They had their corn; they paid double for it; nobody was left behind; the ruler had been kind to them. They could hardly wait to tell Jacob. Everything was fine after all.

And yet, boys and girls, everything was not fine. They had still not confessed to Joseph. There are so many people today who are traveling to eternity with a religion that gives them, so to speak, full sacks and double money. They seem to have everything, but if you ask them how they received it and how they were emptied and how they became a lost sinner before God as a holy Judge, their mouth is closed. Oh, boys and girls, we need to know how God saves a sinner! Many times these people who always have their sacks full and can always speak about wonderful things in religion can even make a child of God jealous, but it is nothing to be jealous about. You could better be jealous of those whose sacks are empty and who are poor beggars waiting for a crumb from the Master's table. Joseph's brothers had yet to learn that.

But it was soon to happen. For while they were traveling back to Jacob, they heard a voice behind them. It was Joseph's steward and he was calling them to stop! They stopped and he said, "You have a cup, the silver cup of my lord. Wherefore have ye rewarded my master evil for all his good?" But the brothers were sure the cup was not in their sacks, so they took down all their sacks and opened them—and the cup was found! In whose sack? In Benjamin's sack.

Benjamin here, boys and girls, is also a type of Christ. The cup of sin was placed upon Christ and He had to bear the price of sin for His people. But there is another meaning here also. We have to learn in our lives that we have rewarded evil to the Lord for all His good. Now the Lord is finally beginning to teach these brothers important lessons. Had that happened twenty years ago, that that cup was found in Benjamin's sack, they would have sent Benjamin back alone—just as they left Joseph alone. But

this time they all went back with him, everyone in whose sacks no cup was found. They all went back to Joseph.

Boys and girls, we all have to learn that we all have to go back to Adam. It was not just Adam who ate of that fruit in Paradise. You and I have hearts just like him, and we have to be brought back to Paradise. That means we have to learn how sinful we are, that our whole hearts are filled with sin.

They returned to Joseph, and Joseph, the Bible says, “was yet there.” What a mercy! When sinners come back to God after years of sin, God is yet there. On the day of judgment it will be too late to repent. But Joseph was yet there. When a poor, lost sinner comes back to the Lord, dear children, he can hardly believe that the Lord would still be there to hear his cries and receive his tears after so many years of sin. That’s true if you are seventy years old, but it is also true if you are seven years old. If you are seven years old and the Lord begins with you tonight, you would say, “Lord, how could I have sinned so many years against Thee? Wilt Thou still be there? Wilt Thou still hear the cry of a sinner like I am?” If you are fifty years old and you look at that seven-year-old boy or girl, you say, “He or she is so young to be converted, so young in sin,” but, boys and girls, if the Lord works savingly in our life we will feel like we have sinned far too long, that we are old in sin, no matter how young we are.

Joseph was still there. This time everything was different. This time Judah stepped forward—we read it to you—and he said, “God has found out our iniquity.” This time all their excuses were lost. This time Judah offered to be a surety for his brother Benjamin. He said, “Spare Benjamin, and condemn me,” and that was like sweet music in the ears of Joseph because that was what Joseph had been waiting for all this time, namely, that his brothers would become guilty before him. He was waiting to hear that they were willing to be a surety for Benjamin. Joseph read between the lines of Judah’s confession and realized that Judah was the guilty one for the sin com-

mitted many years ago. Moreover, he saw that all the brothers agreed with Judah.

Then Joseph could hold himself back no longer. He was longing to make himself known to his brothers. He said, "Send all the Egyptians out of the room," and they all left. Joseph was crying. But that doesn't mean that they were forgiven yet. They didn't know what was happening. Tears do not mean forgiveness. Joseph was crying. They wondered what was happening. They didn't know. They had come back before Joseph as Zaphnath-paaneah, and he was a judge who had every right to condemn them. He was vice-president under Pharaoh. He could kill them. Then finally Joseph opened his mouth and said, "I am Joseph." Joseph? They looked at each other; they were troubled. Do you know why they were troubled? Because in Israel if you sold another Israelite into slavery you should receive a death sentence. That means, if you sold a brother Hebrew into slavery you had to be killed. They had sold Joseph as a slave to the Ishmaelites, so immediately when they heard the words, "I am Joseph," they thought, "That means we have to die, for we have sold our brother into slavery." They were troubled at his presence. They came before him as a judge, and they had to perish.

And now, boys and girls, it is the same way with a poor sinner. When he is brought back before the Lord as a Judge, then the Lord is just like a greater Joseph. It seems that the Lord has to condemn them. He is too holy to let them go. It seems they have to die. They have sinned too much and they have no excuses. They have to die.

But then Joseph said something else. He said, "Come near to me, I pray you...I am Joseph, your brother." Then he poured out his love, and they who betrayed him as an enemy and who came before him as a judge now would come to know him as a great deliverer. We will see that after we sing first from Psalter 143, stanzas 1 and 3.

APPLICATION

"I am Joseph." Oh, what an amazing thing, boys and

girls! "Joseph. We thought he was Zaphnath-paaneah, and here he is Joseph." Those brothers could hardly believe their ears. But then he said, "Come near to me, I pray you," and they saw his tears and felt his love. Their hearts were won over. They could not run away; they first dared not go to him. But when he said, "Come near to me, I pray you," and when he repeated it, "I am Joseph your brother," there was too much love in his words, too many tears on his face, for them to believe that he would exercise the death penalty. No, it was just the opposite. They suddenly saw love in Joseph instead of judgment. They saw inexpressible love. "I am Joseph your brother." Boys and girls, there was so much love there. Here was a man who was the second most important man, so to speak, in the whole world, and he said, "I am not ashamed to be called the brother of brothers who have betrayed me and sold me as the lowest person on earth. I will not sell you, my brothers. I will give you love for your hatred, and I will give you food for your selling me into slavery. I will render you good for evil." This is amazing love! "I am Joseph your brother."

Dear boys and girls, this love of Joseph, though it was so great, was not as great as the love of Jesus, the Greater Joseph, to His people, for we have all become sinners and we all deserve to be cast away as slaves, but instead we have cast Christ away. But Christ comes back to His people and He draws poor sinners to Himself saying as it were, "I am the Greater Joseph, your Elder Brother. I am not ashamed to be called your Brother, even though I am King of kings and Lord of lords and the whole universe belongs to Me. I am not ashamed to be called an Elder Brother of brothers who have sold Me and crucified Me and would have nothing to do with Me."

In these words, "I am Joseph," the gospel is freely preached. The Greater Joseph arose from the dead that He may be the firstborn among many brethren. And when He arose after all His sufferings, He said, "Go tell my brethren and Peter that I will meet them in Galilee." Oh, congregation, is there any love like that love? We

have said, "Away with Him, crucify Him!" When Peter said, "I know not the man," Jesus arose from the dead and said, "Go tell my brethren and Peter"—Peter is still a brother—"that I will meet them in Galilee." "I am Joseph your brother, your deliverer, your redeemer. Fear ye not: I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." Joseph did not overlook their sin—he reminded them of it—but he reminded them of their sin to magnify his grace. And still today, when God comes to remind His people of their sins, He does not do that to punish them, for their punishment is paid by Jesus Christ, but He reminds them of their sins to magnify His grace.

Here was Joseph giving his love to brothers who sold him into Egypt as a type of Jesus Christ who keeps loving those who have betrayed Him and are unworthy of Him. "I am Joseph." That word "am" never changes. That is the present tense. It is an eternal present tense. "I shall always be the Greater Joseph," Jesus would say. "I shall never be changeable. I shall always take care of My people, no matter how they treat Me, no matter how My Peters deny Me, no matter how My children betray Me and sell Me short."

"I am Joseph." It was as if Joseph said to his brothers, "Brothers, no matter how much you did to me, no matter how much you would still do to me, I am still Joseph, your brother. That blood tie cannot be broken. I am your brother." And until this very day Jesus Christ remains faithful unto His people, no matter how they treat Him. That's the gospel. You remember from Lord's Day 19 that wonderful phrase our instructor uses when he says, "What comfort is it to thee that 'Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead'? That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same Person, who before offered Himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as Judge from heaven: who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory." That "very same Person." "I am

what I am. I am the Greater Joseph and I cannot change. I am tied with everlasting blood ties of heavenly adoption, from the stillness of the eternal council of peace, unto My people, and no matter what they have done, I cannot break those blood ties.”

“I am Joseph your brother.” That’s the hope and the future for God’s people. Dear congregation, do you know a brother like the Lord Jesus Christ who is faithful in everything? “I am Joseph.”

Now his brothers could truly go home happy. They fell on his neck, they wept, they kissed him. Now they had reconciliation, following confession. And now they realized that before they had never confessed and they never were reconciled. Now they had everything. Now they had a real story to tell Jacob.

Boys and girls, dear congregation, have we ever met the Greater Joseph as Judge, but also, have we ever met Him as Savior? Do we know what it means to expect to perish on account of sin, but also, do we know what it means to hear from His mouth, through His Word, by His Spirit, “I am Joseph your Brother”? Then a child of God sees that everything is to be found in Christ. He has done everything. Joseph had everything ready for his brothers—the sacks, the corn, the money—he had everything they needed. Jesus Christ is the Greater Joseph who has the greater storehouse. Of that storehouse we read in Luke 15, that in Him there is bread enough and to spare. There is no emptying of the fullness of Christ. He is the perfect and the Greater Joseph.

Either we know this Greater Joseph or we know Him not. And if we do not know Him, dear congregation, oh, I appeal to your consciences and I beg you for your own soul’s sake, allow yourself no rest until you find Him. Can you bring yourself there? No, but you do have knees that bend, you do have hands that fold, and you do have lips that speak. Ask the Lord to teach you who this Greater Joseph is, and to teach you your sin, that you may need Him, that you cannot live without Him, and that you can-

not rest until He is revealed to your heart by the power of the Holy Ghost.

“I am Joseph your brother.” Does that mean that Joseph’s brothers had no more troubles in their life? No, it doesn’t mean that. They were truly happy now. But the doubts would come again. “The doubts?” you say. Yes, the doubts. How do we know that? We know that from Genesis 50. Jacob died, and suddenly Joseph’s brothers were worried. They thought to themselves, “Now Joseph will still take revenge.” And thus they sent a messenger; they were afraid to come before him. They sent a messenger with this message, “Behold, we be thy servants.” And what did Joseph do? He wept again and he called his brothers and they bowed down before him. His dream was fulfilled in the process again. But they bowed down before him and then he said some wonderful words. When they bowed before him and said, “Behold, we be thy servants,” he answered, “Fear ye not: I will nourish you.”

Dear child of God, when you have tasted of the riches of Christ and the doubts come in again like a flood, oh, do like Joseph’s brothers: Bow before Him and say, “Behold, we be Thy servants.” That means slaves, willing servitude—and wait at the gates of His house. He will say—and how sweet it is when you hear Him say it by renewal—“Fear ye not: I will nourish you.” He is a rich God to a poor and a dependent people.

Thus, boys and girls, I want to commend to you that God who is like the Greater Joseph. In Jesus Christ there is room also for boys and girls to be saved. Seek Him, children, while you are young. Call upon Him while He is near. AMEN.