

Doing the Unthinkable

Reading: Genesis 45:1-15

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- Next I want to address a question that keeps coming up whenever I think about Forgiveness...

"How do I really know when I have forgiven someone?"

- That's a reasonable question
- The mind is deceitful, and it is tricky to know when you are being honest with yourself
- I don't really have a good answer, because I continue to struggle with this myself
- Truly, honestly forgiving someone is one of the hardest things that we do
- I think we can get lots of guidance from the life of Joseph
- We're all familiar with the story of Joseph...
 - His brothers conspired to kill him because they were jealous of his Father's attention
 - Instead of killing him they decide to sell him as a slave into Egypt
 - God blesses Joseph and he gets a good job in the house of Potiphar
 - Joseph declines Potiphar's wife's inappropriate advances and she has him put in prison
- Everyone's life has ups and downs

- Everyone is familiar with the hilltops and valleys of a spiritual life...

- ***But, Joseph!***

- Can you even begin to imagine these kinds of highs and lows?
- Sure, my Brothers picked on me as a kid
- But, I never found myself in a pit overhearing them eating their Dinner and arguing about whether to kill me or sell me as a slave
- Sure, I've had times when things went really well at work
- But, I never was given unlimited power and control by one of the richest men in the civilized world
- The real question to me about Joseph is "What was God trying to teach him?"
- Why after rescuing Joseph from death and then delivering him into slavery...
- And then raising him up to such a wonderful position in Potiphar's house...
- Why would God allow him to be put in prison for a crime that he is innocent of?
- The only answer that I can come to was that God thought that Joseph had more growing to do
- God wanted Joseph to learn more and be better prepared for what was to come ahead
- God is ultimately concerned about saving His People, and He will do whatever needs to be done to ensure that this happens
- In this case, that meant putting Joseph through some uncomfortable times in the worst prison in Egypt, the one reserved for Pharaoh's enemies
- But, God doesn't just do things like that for no reason at all
- God might bring you through some pretty uncomfortable times in your life, but it is for a reason

- The odd thing is that it is because God loves you!

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- Hebrews 12:6

6) For the Lord **disciplines** the one he **loves**, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

- God sure must love Joseph!
- Look what he went through
- Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes right about the time that those bars clang shut:
 - 1) Your Brothers have treated you with cruelty
 - 2) Potiphar’s wife has falsely accused you
 - 3) And, most maddening of all... GOD had allowed all of this to happen!
- God had given you visions of glory in your childhood, and now you are sitting there in chains, all you can smell is human waste, and there are rats crawling all over your naked body...
- Clearly, God has something big in mind for Joseph
- We know what happens in prison with the Cupbearer’s and Baker’s dreams
- God gives Joseph the ability to interpret the dreams, but Joseph is tempted to put in a request for his own benefit as well...

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- Genesis 40:14-15

- 14) Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.
- 15) For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also **I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.”**

- What we have been talking about during these classes is bitterness and self-pity being hallmarks of a person who has NOT forgiven
- It looks like Joseph is still bitter about his position and life, and his Brothers who put him there
- Remember we talked about "*Love keeps no record of wrongs*"? Let's read that verse again:

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- 1 Corinthians 13:5
 - 5) ...(Love) is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, **it keeps no record of wrongs.**
- When you truly forgive you are not concerned with seeking your own advantage
- When Joseph says "*I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon*", you can hear in his voice that he hadn't really yet forgiven his brothers
- When we see Joseph at the end of this story, there is no bitterness, no self-seeking pity, no grudges
- What happened?
- I think that Joseph is really changed by those last two years in prison
- When his brothers come begging for food, we see a Joseph full of love, mercy, kindness and weeping...
- I'd like to spend some time reviewing that interaction between Joseph and his brethren
- There are **THREE** things we can take away how Joseph treated his brothers when they showed up in Egypt with "Hat in Hand"

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- 1) **Don't let anyone know what someone did to you or said about you**

- Did you ever notice what the first thing Joseph does before he reveals himself?

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- Genesis 45:1

1) Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, **"Make everyone go out from me."** So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

- Joseph wanted to ensure privacy before he revealed himself to his brothers because he didn't want a single person in Egypt to know what his brothers had done to him 22 years before
- He didn't want any of the Egyptians opinions of these strangers clouded by old news that he has now forgiven
- This is how God forgives us, and how we need to forgive others
- Keep it private
- Keep it just between the two of you
- Let's agree from the start - This is the hardest part
- Not only do I find it hard to forgive, but then I can't even get the satisfaction of letting others know about how big a person I am?
- I don't get the satisfaction of letting everyone know what they did to me...

"Well, I've forgiven them, of course, but I tell you... What they did to me was so bad..."

- When you find yourself not even wanting to share with others what happened to you...
- When you love the person so much that you don't want anyone to ever find out that they could say something that horrible to you...
- Then you know you have forgiven them

- Joseph takes specific actions to ensure that they were alone when this happens
- It would have been quite odd for a man of his position to send all of his servants and security away with a room full of unknown travelers
- But, Joseph didn't want people thinking badly of the Brothers that he forgave
- This really is one of the most important parts, and one of the hardest parts for us to do
- Now, let's remember, that clearly there are limits to this
- If someone is a danger to others, or if the law requires that you notify the authorities, then you really don't have another choice
- Matthew 18 agrees...

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Matthew 18:15-16

15) "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between **you and him alone**. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

- But, notice the next verse

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16) But if he does not listen, take **one or two others** along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

- Clearly, I'm focusing on the first verse here
- I'm focusing on the message that instructs us to keep things private
- Not to damage the reputation of the person
- Not to drag them through the mud because of their misstep
- But, clearly Matthew 18 tells us that this level of privacy has a limit

- If the person is not responding well to our contact, then we need to involve someone else in our disagreement our Brother
- But, not everything needs to jump to this level immediately
- Most things in life don't even need to be brought to the Sinner's attention
- I strongly believe in the 85% Solution
- I've learned that if a solution solves 85% of the problem then that is good enough
- You are hardly ever going to find perfect solutions in life
- Learn to work with the ones that cover the majority of the problem and move on
- I've found in my life that this 85% Solution applies to my interactions with others
- 85% of all the offenses in your life, are going to be ones that you can simply just ignore and get over it
- You don't have to call the person out every time
- You don't have to have a meeting and make it a "learning moment" for the person
- You can just be Christian about it!
- Let it go!
- 85% of the time, it's just about you suffering yourself to be defrauded, and not being so sensitive to the things that others say and do
- Of the remaining offenses, 85% are going to be solved by you simply going to the person alone and the two of you talking it out
- If it's something that really is hurtful
- Something that you can't lightly pass over
- Then by all means, have a meeting with the person, and point out the issue, and you'll find that 85% of the time, the person will say, ***"Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't even realize what I had done! I'm so sorry!"***

- Of the few issues that remain after that, then 85% will be solved by you taking along another trusted person to talk to the offender
- That is what Matthew 18 is talking about!
- Don't be quick to escalate things
- Try to resolve them quietly
- Only bring someone else into the situation if you really feel that it's important, and you aren't having any success in resolving it yourself
- And, we all know what the next step is...

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Matthew 18:17

17) If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

- We are talking about the worst case scenario here...
- 15% of 15% of 15%...
- Not really very often in your life!
- The percent that actually ends up being brought to the Arranging Board should be an incredibly tiny amount if we have all faithfully followed the above guideline
- If we have all kept things private, kept them quiet, kept them to ourselves
- The goal, like Joseph, is to not let anyone else know what that person did to you

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2) Do not allow anyone to be afraid of you or intimidated by you

- Look how Joseph did it!

- Joseph revealed himself to them with tears and compassion

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- Genesis 45:1-2

- 1) Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. **He cried**, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.
- 2) And **he wept aloud**, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

- The last thing he wanted was for them to be afraid of him or fear him
- For well they should! He now held their very lives in his hand!
- If someone who has hurt us freezes in anxiety when they see us approach, we might enjoy that a little bit in our hearts...

"Good! They should feel awkward after what they've done!"

- That means we are still are carrying a little bit of bitterness in our hearts
- Joseph sat in the highest position of power and prestige a man could get
- As he sat there on his throne and recognized these 10 men bowing before him
- He could have uttered the four most favorite words that human beings like to say:
I TOLD YOU SO!
- But, instead he said four different words... ***COME CLOSE TO ME***
- He didn't want them to feel any fear in his presence
- He wanted to be loved rather than feared
- We stand in that same position before God
- Remember what Paul said to the Romans?

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- Romans 8:14-15

14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

15) For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into **fear**, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

- God forgave us, and He doesn't want us to be afraid of Him
- Joseph didn't want his brothers to be afraid, and we should feel the same way about those who we have forgiven
- When we get pleasure knowing that the person we've forgiven is not afraid or intimidated by us, then we know that we have truly forgiven them

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3) Your goal is for them to **forgive themselves and not feel guilty**

- To me the most amazing part about the story of Joseph is not just that he forgives them, but that he **TOTALLY LET'S THEM OFF THE HOOK!**
- He offers to them an excuse for them to hold on to, instead of having to live with the enormity of their own sin

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- Genesis 45:5

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.**

- *I paid you \$1,000,000 for four crates of gold bars, and you cheated me out of my money and threw a bunch of worthless lemons in the crates...*
- *But, look at all the wonderful Lemonade that I made!*
- Sometimes you want to make the person **PAY** for their forgiveness

- Joseph didn't heap a bunch of guilt on their shoulders, he knew that they felt bad enough already
- Saying, "*I forgive you for what you did, but I hope you feel really bad about what you did*", is not our goal...
- Guilt is one of the worse pains that we can feel
- To be reminded of your own failures and shortcomings is hard
- If you want to really hurt someone, all you really have to do is send them on a guilt trip
- Joseph wanted to set his brothers free
- He didn't want them to blame themselves, he wanted them to forgive themselves
- To ease their minds, Joseph gave them an explanation for his suffering
- We've all had this happen to us... Someone graciously offered to help us, and when we protested and said that we didn't need help, they offered some trumped up excuse for their actions...

"It's no trouble making the hour long drive to take you to the Airport, I was looking for an opportunity to try out a new restaurant I've heard of down that way anyway..."

- Turning a bad experience to a good experience is a gift and a blessing
- When we find ways to let a person off the hook and not feel guilty for what they have done to us, then we have truly forgiven them
- There's **FOUR** further things that we would like to bring out about helping others feel forgiven

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1) We need to let them save face

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- Genesis 45:7-8

- 7) And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.
- 8) **So it was not you who sent me here, but God.** He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

- This is as good an example as I can think of
- When you can forgive like that, then you're there
- "Saving Face" means preserving one's dignity and self-esteem
- It provides a rationale that enables what they did to look good instead of bad
- This does not mean that you are excusing what they did
- What they did is still a sin, and they still have to address that with God
- But, as far as you are concerned, you are not going to make them feel bad about it
- Not only is this a loving gift to give to the person that offended you, but it is also the right thing to do
- We are not just being magnanimous and gracious, but we are doing what is right and just
- Take a different look at your circumstances
- Don't be consumed with self-pity and bitterness
- Look at what happened through God's perspective
- God was trying to teach you something by having that person say that to you
- God was trying to get you to grow by having that person do that to you

- Part of your process of healing is not to hold God in contempt for the evil that He allowed to happen to you, but to embrace the fact that it was EVIL, but God allowed it to happen so that GOOD can come from it
- When you are able to look at your life in those terms, then you can be more gracious and forgiving when you deal with the offender
- THIS WILL NOT BE IMMEDIATE
- This won't happen in a few days if the offense is severe
- It may take you a while to learn what God wants you to learn
- The goal is to be able to honestly say to the person, *"I know that you cheated me out of what I was due, but in actuality it all worked out for good. I have learned so much about who I am and what God wants me to be"*

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2) We need to protect them from their greatest fear

- So Joseph allowed his brothers to save face
- He explained to them the reality of the situation as he saw it with the maturity of his faith
- They would not have felt more guilty, but would have started to feel relieved
- They would have started to feel forgiven
- But, almost instantly their thoughts would then turn to their greatest fear
- Facing their Father
- They would have been anxious about returning to Canaan and having it come out to their Father that Joseph wasn't really killed by a wild animal, but they themselves had sold him like an animal into slavery
- Joseph was already a step ahead of them
- He had thought it through enough to give them a way to save face

- Now he was going to find a way to protect them from their greatest fear
- He knew that his forgiveness of them was utterly worthless if they had to tell the whole truth to their father
- What good is it to go to all the trouble to protect the person's privacy, and to make sure that no one hears about the evil they have done to you, if you know that they have to tell someone?
- So Joseph told them exactly what to tell Jacob and what not to tell him
- He worded his instructions carefully and they told their father everything he needed to know

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- Genesis 45:9-13
 - 9) Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, **God has made me lord of all Egypt**. Come down to me; do not tarry.
 - 10) You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have.

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- 11) There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.'
 - 12) And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you.
 - 13) **You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt**, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here."
- No mention about **HOW HE GOT TO EGYPT**
 - No mention about all he went through and all he had to endure on the way to becoming lord of all Egypt
 - Just the facts as they stand **TODAY**

- That is a great lesson for us to learn
- There often is no need to dredge up stuff from 20 years ago!
- People often don't have to know the deep, dark, **back story**
- There is no need to involve other people in your situation by unloading information on them that they can easily live without
- Keep it between you and God
- Keep your finger in Genesis, but take a minute to look at what David says in Psalm 51

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- Psalm 51:4
 - 4) **Against you, you only, have I sinned** and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.
- What do you think Bathsheba felt about what David did?
- Don't you think that Uriah had parents that loved him?
- How about brothers and sisters?
- But, David keeps it between himself and God
- Too often we involve people that don't need to be involved
- Too often we tell the people who are involved more than they need to know
- At first I thought that the brothers should have confessed their sin to Jacob
- But, why? Wouldn't that have simply given Jacob an even greater problem?
- Wouldn't he then have to struggle with the regret of lost years with Joseph and bitterness against his other sons?

- Instead, look how nicely it all works out...

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- Genesis 45:14-15

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.**

- His Brothers weren't stupid...
- There whole life growing up his words echoed in their minds... *"One day you'll bow down to me"*
- Here they are bowing down to him
- But, he says enough to put them at ease and allow them to feel free to talk to him, and start rebuilding a relationship
- We would never hold a person in continual fear by saying, *"I'll tell on you"*
- So, we shouldn't tell on them!

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3) We need to realize that it is a lifelong commitment

- Forgiveness isn't something that you do one day and it's done
- Forgiveness is a lifelong commitment that you keep on doing year after year
- You are going to remember what they did to you time after time as things come up that bring it to the forefront
- You are going to have opportunities over and over again to talk about what they did as people bring up other stories about them
- Forgiving means you keep on doing it as long as you live

- **17 Years** after reuniting with his son, Jacob died
- Joseph's brothers were terrified because they figured that Joseph was only being nice because his father was alive
- So, they make up a story...

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- Genesis 50:16-17
 - 16) So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "**Your father gave this command before he died:**
 - 17) 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him.
- Look at Joseph's reaction - He wept
- He couldn't believe that after all he had done, his brothers still doubted him
- Look at what he says

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- Genesis 50:19-21
 - 19) But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"
 - 20) As for you, you meant evil against me, but **God meant it for good**, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.
 - 21) So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.
- 17 years later and he's sticking with the same story
- He forgave them for **LIFE**
- If you are prepared to forgive someone, you have to keep forgiving them for that very same thing for the rest of your life

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4) We need to pray for them to be blessed

- If we really want to help others feel blessed, we should ask God to get involved
- Forgiveness involves praying for God's blessing to rain down on the lives of your offenders
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said,

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- Matthew 5:44

44) But I say to you, **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**

- You can't just say, "*Father, I commend them to you*" either!
- That's a cop out!
- You know them
- You know what they need
- You should pray that they will feel totally forgiven
- You should pray that God will bless them with specific things that you know they need
- This is probably the hardest part, but one of the most important...
- We can do all we can do to help a person feel forgiven, but we have to get God involved for the process to really work
- Look at the Lord's prayer...

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- Matthew 6:9-13

- 9) Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
- 10) Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
- 11) Give us this day our daily bread,
- 12) and forgive us our debts, **as we also have forgiven our debtors.**
- 13) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

- The Lord's prayer makes liars out of more people than almost anything else
- Forgive us our debts **as we also have forgiven our debtors**
- We're all pretty comfortable with the first half of the sentence, but it's the second half that really condemns us
- In Luke's version, it says, *"Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us"*
- It's pretty clear... But, do we do it?
- The Lord's prayer shows us that we need daily forgiveness just as much as we need daily bread
- AND if we want to walk with God, we also have to forgive every day
- Jesus seems to take two things for granted in the Lord's prayer:
 - That people will hurt us
 - That we ourselves will need to be forgiven
- We all come short of God's glory, and every day people come up short in how they treat us
- It's our responsibility to connect those two things together in our heads, and realize that if we want forgiveness from God, we have to give it to our Brother
- We have all been hurt by someone
- You may have been lied to, or taken advantage of

- They might have been ungrateful or disloyal
- Our bitterness that we feel because of the hurt robs us of the pleasure of walking with God
- If we claim to have fellowship with him, and yet hold bitterness in our hearts, we lie...
- There is more than one kind of hurt
- Sometimes people are just being mean and trying to hurt us
- But, often it is simply that they have done something unintentional and caused us pain
- Often what they have done is NOT A SIN, but it caused us pain nonetheless
- Sometimes we are all so full of ourselves - Due to Anger or Pride - That we simply aren't sensitive to the feelings of others
- But, what about those times when someone is just trying to hurt us?
- There are sins that are willfully committed
- Do we have to even forgive them?
- **Duh!** That is the whole point!
- It is hard to do, but we learn most by these kinds of experiences
- Consider what Solomon said,

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- Proverbs 19:11
 - 11) Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his **glory to overlook an offense.**
- Overlooking an offense is hard

- But, like I said, I firmly believe in the 85% Principle
- See if it's true in your life as well
- Learn to simply overlook those terrible and thoughtless things that people say and do to you
- And give Glory to God