Joseph And Forgiveness Essay, Research Paper

Joseph and Forgiveness

The story of Joseph has several important themes, but the one I thought was the most significant was the unbelievable forgiveness of Joseph toward his brothers.

Joseph was the son of Jacob, raised with 11 brothers and several sisters. His early life was troubled. His brothers despised him because their father made no secret of his special love for Joseph. When he was 17 they conspired to kill him. Instead, they threw him into an empty cistern and ignored his desperate pleas for help. Later they sold him to a group of traders who were on their way to Egypt and then reported to their father that he had been killed by a wild beast. Joseph was taken involuntarily across international borders and resold as a slave to Potiphar. Then his life took a turn for the worst. He was falsely accused of having sexual relations with his employer’s wife, subjected to wrongful imprisonment and forgotten in jail by someone who could have interceded with government officials on his behalf. If anyone ever had reason to be bitter, angry, and vengeful, it was Joseph.

What’s amazing about Joseph’s story is that in spite of all the tragedies that befell him he was appointed ruler over all Egypt. What’s even more amazing is that he eventually forgives his brothers for their wrong doings.

The issue of forgiveness is alive and well within all of our lives. Perhaps it was a parent who didn’t protect us or a friend who betrayed us. When we are hurt, we want to strike back. When someone wrongs us, we want him or her to pay. When someone makes us suffer, we want him or her to know the same kind of suffering. It is silly to pretend otherwise. Forgiveness is something we all struggle with. We know Joseph had lots of reasons to be bitter and to hold a grudge. But when Joseph meets up with his brothers, he gives them a few tests, but when the tests are over he embraces them, weeps over them, and offers them the best of what he has to offer.

We are always told to forgive and forget. But some scars are so deep that we feel we could never forget what happened. And we are not sure we should forget. If we forgive and forget aren’t we setting up ourselves to be burned again? I think it’s a matter of choice. God allows us to make a choice of not allowing what has happened with us in the past to affect our relationship with God in the present. God knows our weaknesses and gives us a choice to improve, but his fellowship with us remains solid. That’s the kind of forgetting that should come with forgiving. We may not be able to literally forget what another has done, but we can refuse to let the past influence our relationship in the present.

Second, forgiveness does not mean subjecting ourselves to the some hurt over and over. I think we see this in Joseph. Joseph has no animosity for his brothers but he was not going to make himself vulnerable again until he knew that they had changed. Joseph had no bitterness but he also had no desire to be victimized again. In other words, forgiveness precedes a restored relationship but for a relationship to be restored, one must acknowledge the wrong they have committed.

Forgetting and with that trusting comes as we see genuine change and repentance. Forgetting becomes possible when both parties seek to establish a new relationship that will keep this kind of thing from happening again in the future.

When the process of forgiveness was finally complete, restoration of Joseph’s relationship with his brothers was extremely pleasurable. Joseph could forgive completely a wrong that was fully acknowledged. He could forgive because he had come to understand that his well being and provisions were not in the hands of his brothers. He was in the hands of his provider God.