

## JOSEPH FORGIVES HIS BROTHERS

Rev. Harold C. Cranch

*This is the story of how Joseph met with his brothers again and forgave them for the terrible wrong they had done in selling him into Egypt.*

*Now there was a great famine in many places for seven years, as Joseph had foretold from Pharaoh's dream. The famine was in Canaan, where Joseph's family was, as well as in Egypt, and Joseph's brothers were not prepared. They hadn't saved up food. But they heard that there was food in Egypt, so they went down there to buy some. They left the youngest son Benjamin behind with his father, Jacob or Israel. When they came to Egypt, Joseph recognized them, but they did not recognize him. Joseph accused his brothers of being spies and kept one of them, Simeon, imprisoned in Egypt. He told them that they should not return without their youngest brother, Benjamin, and that he would not release Simeon until they did this. Then the rest of the brothers returned to Canaan with the food they had bought.*

Now after the brothers of Joseph had been at home in Canaan for some time, they again used up all their food. Israel or Jacob said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food" (Genesis 43:2). But the brothers said, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you'" (Genesis 43:3). Israel did not want to send Benjamin. But finally Judah, one of the brothers, said, "I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever" (Genesis 43:9). So finally, Israel permitted them to go and take Benjamin with them.

When they came into the land of Egypt, Joseph saw them and recognized them, and he said to his servants, "Take these men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for these men will dine with me at noon" (Genesis 43:16). And they came to Joseph's home and sat down at the table, and Joseph sat at a separate table by himself as a great ruler, separate from his people. Joseph was glad to see his brothers, and he gave food to them—food from his own table—but for Benjamin he gave five times as much as to the others. This was partially to test his brothers to see if they were still selfish, greedy, and evil. But instead of feeling sorry that Benjamin was shown this honor, they rejoiced that he had found favor in the eyes of the ruler of Egypt. And Joseph was happy that they were unselfish and good.

After they had eaten, Joseph commanded his servants to fill their bags with grain. Then, unknown to all his brothers, Joseph took a great silver cup and placed it in Benjamin's bag. Then he sent them on their way. They had gone only a little distance when Joseph sent his soldiers after them with this

message, “Why have you repaid evil for good?”(Genesis 44:4-5). The brothers protested that they were innocent; they had not taken the cup. They said, “Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing.... With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves” (Genesis 44:7,9). So they searched, and in Benjamin’s bag of grain they found the cup. Now the brothers had not stolen it, and Joseph knew that they had not. He was doing this to test them, to see if they would be unselfish and help Benjamin. And, indeed, the brothers would not leave Benjamin, and they all went back.

Then Judah came to Joseph and pleaded with him. He said, “[P]lease let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers” (Genesis 44:33). Joseph was touched. He was filled with happiness because his brothers had so completely changed. They were now willing to give themselves up in the place of Benjamin, their youngest brother.

Joseph sent away all those that were with him in the great hall. When they were all gone, he wept and said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” (Genesis 45:3). Now when the brothers heard this, they were filled with fear. They remembered all the things that they had done to Joseph. Perhaps they thought that he would punish them now that he had great power. They trembled with fear. But Joseph was a kind man, and he was filled with happiness to see that his brothers had turned away from their evil ways. He told them, “Hasten 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. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you...”’” (Genesis 45:9-11). Then they all rejoiced and talked together and planned for the future.

There are many wonderful lessons in this part of the story of Joseph. One of the most important is to see that the Lord is always with us to help us if we will only allow Him to, just as he was with Joseph all through his life, even through times of trouble and despair. For Joseph loved the Lord and tried to serve Him, no matter what happened, no matter in what circumstances he found himself. He tried to serve the Lord even in prison, and therefore, the Lord turned all of his experiences into good, and prepared him to become a ruler in Egypt. This is important to know, and it was taught by the apostles—the leaders of the early Christian church—who wrote, “[A]ll things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:38). So let it be in our own lives. No matter what happens to us, if we will love the Lord and try to obey His commandments in everything that we do, the Lord will be with us to turn even our bad experiences into things that are good for us, that will prepare us for heaven.

Amen.