

Lesson 20
Joseph Forgives His Brothers
Text: Genesis 42-44

Introduction

"It serves him right!" "He hit me first!"

Have you ever heard anyone say anything like that? I don't suppose *you* would ever say it? I'm afraid it's a human failing to want to get even with people who have done wrong things to us. All of us have done it. Do you think it is right to try to "pay back" people who have hurt us? No, God says we should forgive, and leave the punishing to Him.

If anyone was ever tempted to get even, surely it must have been Joseph! Do you remember all the terrible things his brothers had done to him? They had sold him as a slave and caused him to have terrible years of misery and hard work as a slave and a prisoner. Let's find out in our story today what Joseph did to his brothers.

The Story

The seven years of famine God had foretold was upon the land. No rain fell, and the crops didn't grow. People began to be very hungry as food became more and more scarce. Jacob and his eleven sons in Canaan began to feel the effects of the famine, too.

"Don't just stand there looking at one another," Jacob told his sons. "I've heard there is corn in the land of Egypt. Go there and buy some for us so that we'll not have to starve to death."

So ten of Joseph's brothers set off for Egypt, but Benjamin, the youngest stayed at home with his father.

Joseph, now the second-in-command of the whole Egyptian nation, was at work overseeing the selling of the corn. Suddenly, he saw a sight that must have made his heart skip a

beat. There in the line to buy corn stood some familiar faces. He saw his brothers!

He knew them, but they didn't recognize him. After all, they would hardly expect the brother they had sold as a lowly slave to turn up as the governor of Egypt. They bowed down to the ground to him in respect.

Joseph remembered the dreams that had made his brothers so angry. All their sheaves of wheat had bowed down to his. "We'll never bow down to you!" they had exclaimed. But here they were bowing down to him.

"What do you want?" he asked roughly.

"We came to buy food," they replied.

"No, you didn't. You're spies, coming to see how weak we are with the famine."

"No, we're not," they protested. "We're brothers. There were twelve of us, but one is dead, and the youngest is at home with our father."

"All right," Joseph said. "If that's true, prove it by bringing your youngest brother here to see me. If you don't bring him, I'll know you're lying, and I'll have you killed as spies."

He had them all thrown in prison for three days, then let them out.

"I'll keep one of you here," he said. "I'll let him go when the rest of you bring back the youngest brother."

The brothers were dismayed by the turn of events.

"It's our fault this has happened to us," they said to one another. "God let this happen to us because of what we did to Joseph. Do you remember how he cried and begged us not to sell him as a slave? We did it anyway. Now God has sent this as a judgment on us."

"I was against it," Reuben told them. "I said not to sin against the child, but you wouldn't listen to me."

They didn't know that Joseph could understand what they were saying, because they had spoken to him in Egyptian through an interpreter before. He did hear and understand them, and he had to hurry out so that they couldn't see the tears in his eyes.

He took Simeon and tied him up while the brothers watched. He was seeing if they had really changed. Were they still selfish, or had they learned to care for one another?

Joseph commanded that a sack of corn was to be given to each brother. He told his servants to put the money they paid back in the sack.

What a surprise they had when they opened up the sacks when they arrived at home. There was their money.

"What is God doing to us?" they moaned. "The governor will think we cheated him. How will we get Simeon back now?"

"You'll not take Benjamin back there!" Jacob insisted when he had heard the story. "We've lost Joseph and Simeon. I'll not lose Benjamin, too."

But, the time came when the food was gone again.

"Go back to Egypt to buy some more corn," Jacob told his sons.

"We can't go unless we take Benjamin," they insisted.

At last he had to agree. They took twice as much money and came again to stand before Joseph. They were prepared for the worst, but they weren't prepared for what actually happened.

He invited them to his house for dinner! They couldn't figure it out, and they couldn't figure out how he knew their ages. They were seated at the table with the oldest at the head of the table and the others arranged by age. Benjamin had five times as much food served to him as the others did.

They started off again for Canaan, thankfully taking Simeon and Benjamin with them.

But, Joseph wasn't through with them yet! Joseph sent his soldiers out chasing after them.

"The governor was so kind to you and you repay him by stealing his special cup," the soldiers said, just as Joseph had instructed.

"We didn't take his cup!" they insisted when they heard the soldiers' message. "Go ahead and look. You can kill whoever has it because we know it was none of us."

"Okay with us," the soldiers said. So they searched the sacks of grain and found the silver cup Joseph had hidden in Benjamin's sack.

What would the brothers do now? Joseph had planned the whole thing to find out if his brothers had changed. Did they hate Benjamin as they had him? Would they see him carried off to be killed as they had Joseph?

I'm glad to say that the brothers had learned a few things in the years that had passed. They wouldn't leave Benjamin, but went back to the city.

"God has found out our sin," they told Joseph. "Put us to death with our brother."

"No, I won't kill all of you," Joseph replied. "I'll just keep your youngest brother who stole the cup here as my slave. The rest of you can go back to your father in peace."

Judah came up to Joseph and pleaded with him. "This boy is our father's favorite son," he told Joseph. "He is all our father has left of his favorite wife, as their other son is dead. His life is bound up in the life of the child. If we go back home without Benjamin, our father will never get over it. He will die of grief. Please don't keep him. Let me take his place. I'll be your slave, but just let Benjamin go."

What a change Joseph saw in his brothers! Now he trusted them enough to reveal himself to them--and were they ever surprised. They were also afraid. Would Joseph pay them back for the evil they had done him?

"Don't be afraid," he told them. "You meant the things you did to harm me, but God had it all planned out for good. If all these things hadn't happened, we might have all starved to death. Had I not been sold as a slave and imprisoned, I could never have interpreted the butler's dream, and Pharaoh would never have heard of me. His dream would not have been understood, and the famine would have found the land unprepared. It seemed terrible at the time, but God knew just what he was doing."

So Joseph forgave his brothers and prepared a place for them and for his father in Egypt. They remained there safe and secure during the terrible time of famine.

The Life Lesson

I hope you remember when *you* go through hard times, that God is in control of your life just as He was in control of Joseph's. People may do things that hurt us, but God uses even those painful things for our good. So let's not mope, or take things into our own hands. Let's trust God--and let him take care of the people who do wrong to us.

Review Questions

Why did Joseph's brothers come to Egypt?

To buy food.

Did the brothers recognize Joseph?

No

Why did Joseph trick his brothers?

To see if they had changed.

Which brother did Joseph keep so the brothers would be sure to come back?

Simeon

What did the brothers find in their sacks of corn when they had returned home?

Their money they had paid for the corn.

Why did Jacob finally decide to let Benjamin go back to Egypt with them?

Because they would all starve, otherwise.

What surprised the brothers at the dinner Joseph had for them?

They were arranged oldest to youngest, and Benjamin had five times as much food as the others.

What did Joseph do to test the brothers?

He put his special cup in Benjamin's sack to see if the brothers would desert Benjamin as they had deserted him.

Did the brothers leave Benjamin in Egypt?

No, they all went back and Judah offered to take Benjamin's place.

Had the brothers changed?

Yes. They were willing to sacrifice themselves for Benjamin.

Did Joseph forgive his brothers?

Yes.