

Forgiveness

MEMORY VERSE:

"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

Matthew 6:12

Twenty years had passed since Joseph was taken to Egypt as a slave. He had grown up quite a bit and probably looked quite different. He now wore fine Egyptian style clothes. His head was probably shaved and instead of his own hair he wore a wig like all the other Egyptians. He was an important man in Egypt now and was honoured and respected.

Now that the crops wouldn't grow in the fields, the people came to Joseph to buy the grain that had been stored up during the years of plenty. The Egyptians weren't the only ones affected by the famine. Back in Canaan, there was famine too. Joseph's brothers and their families were running out of food.

They heard that there was food in Egypt and so one day ten of the brothers set out on the journey to Egypt to buy grain so their families wouldn't starve.

Perhaps Joseph was looking for his brothers to come. He would have known how widespread the famine was. One day he saw them coming. Although he had changed so much, his brothers looked pretty much the same. He recognized them right away. What do you think he did?

When Joseph saw his brothers, he didn't reveal himself right away and they didn't recognize him at all. He wanted to find out if they had changed and regretted their actions to him. Since Joseph was in charge of selling the grain, it was to him that his brothers came and bowed low before him with their faces to the ground. Perhaps Joseph was reminded of his dreams from long ago.

"You are spies!" Joseph accused them. The brothers were shocked. "No, No!" they protested. "We are all brothers and honest men and have come to buy food!" But Joseph had them all thrown into prison for three days. On the third day, he came to them and told them that one of them would remain behind in prison while the others went to get their youngest brother and bring him to Egypt. If they could prove they had a younger brother, he would believe that they were not spies.

As Joseph stood there, the brothers spoke to each other of how this was happening to them as judgement for what they had done to Joseph long ago. The brothers didn't know that Joseph could understand their language.

On their way home, they were astonished to find that each man's money which they had used to pay for their grain, was in their sacks of grain! They were filled with terror, wondering what God was doing to them.

It wasn't long before the grain they had brought from Egypt was gone and it was necessary to go back to get some more. But this time they had to bring their youngest brother Benjamin back with them, and Jacob did not want to let him go.

Finally the brothers were able to convince Jacob that they would protect Benjamin with their lives and once again they made the journey to Egypt.

When the brothers arrived and Joseph saw them, he sent the manager of his house to get them and bring them to his house. He wanted them to dine with him that day. The brothers were a little afraid when they were singled out and marched to Joseph's house. Simeon was brought out to them, safe and well. Then they were seated around the table in order of their ages much to their astonishment and given a wonderful meal.

When they were ready to leave, Joseph ordered his household manager to once again replace the money they had brought and to put his own silver cup in Benjamin's sack.

When the brothers were barely out of the city, Joseph sent his men to chase after them and ask them why they had repaid evil for good and stolen his silver cup. The brothers were indignant, loudly protesting that they would never do such a thing. If the cup were found on one of them, that person would die and the others would be slaves of their master!

So the brothers each took down their sacks of grain and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. The brothers looked at each other with dread. They ripped their clothes, loaded up their donkeys and returned to the city and fell at the feet of Joseph.

Joseph sternly rebuked them and the brothers meekly told Joseph they had returned to become his slaves as there was no way they could prove their innocence. They felt that God was punishing them for their sins. But Joseph refused to take them all as slaves. "I will only take the one in whose sack the cup was found," he told them.

Judah came forward to plead with Joseph. "Take me," he said. "If we do not bring Benjamin back to his father, his father will die. I promised to look after him and I cannot bear to go back to my father without him!"

Joseph could see that his brothers had changed. The years they had spent with their guilty secret had prompted a change of heart. Although Benjamin was obviously a favourite of their fathers, they were ready to give their lives for him. He cried out for all his attendants to leave, and then when he was alone with his brothers, he turned to them. "I am your brother Joseph! I am the one who you sold into Egypt! But don't be angry with yourselves, for God did this. He sent me here to preserve your lives. Now, hurry, return to your father and families and bring them all here to Egypt and I will look after you."

Then weeping with joy, he hugged all his brothers who looked at each other first in alarm but then in increasing joy. He gave them wagons and sent them on their way.

And so, when the brothers arrived home told their father that Joseph was alive and ruler of all Egypt. Jacob couldn't at first believe it, but when he saw all the wagons sent to bring them down into Egypt, and heard the story the brothers had to tell of their part in the story, he rejoiced that he would see Joseph once more before he died.

Things to Remember

- The brothers learned that jealousy and revenge don't make things better.
- Joseph freely forgave his brothers for what they had done to him.
- Jacob and all his family moved down into Egypt where Joseph looked after them during the famine.

Discussion

In this story it is wonderful to see the changed hearts of the brothers as they pledge to keep their younger brother safe on the trip to Egypt and then are so distressed when it looks like he may be in trouble. Joseph tests his brothers first to see what is in their hearts, but then readily forgives them and uses his position in Egypt to provide for them.

What did the brothers find in their sacks of grain when they took them home?

Why did Joseph have the silver cup put in Benjamin's sack?

Who did Joseph say had brought him to Egypt?

Activity Suggestions

Draw a picture of Joseph's silver cup and decorate it with foil and glitter.

The grain that had been saved during the years of plenty would have been used to make such things as bread. Try making some wholewheat bread. Here is a recipe:

WHOLEWHEAT BREAD

1 tsp honey

1 tbsp yeast

1-1/2 cup warm water

1 tbsp olive oil

4-1/4 cups stoneground wholewheat flour

1 tsp salt

Dissolve honey in 1/2 cup of the water and sprinkle with the yeast. Let sit for 10-15 minutes. Stir in the oil. Sift together the flour and salt. Pour in yeast mixture and then add enough of the warm water to make a soft dough. Knead for 10 minutes. Let rise 1 hour. Oil two 2-lb loaf tins. Divide into two equal portions and shape to fit the pans. Let rise for 30 minutes. Heat oven to 400 F. Bake for 10 minutes, then turn down heat to 350 F. Bake for 30-40 minutes.

For rolls: After first rising, shape, rise for 20 minutes and bake at 400 F for 20-25 minutes.