

022022 Genesis 45:3-11 "Joseph and God's Salvation"

Today, we read Genesis 45. It would be great if you can have a big picture about Genesis. It starts with creation and goes over stories of Noah, Tower of Babel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. It's about Joseph today. Not only was Jacob's eleventh son, Joseph, who was considered dead, to be alive, but he was also the prime minister of Egypt who ended up having a crucial role of saving Jacob's family from famine. Because Joseph had been favored by his father Jacob from childhood, his brothers envied him and hated him. When they continued their hate for Joseph, the brothers did something to Joseph that they should have never done. They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelite merchants for 20 silver coins as a slave. Having experienced this, how much did Joseph hate his brothers?

Since I was a little kid, I liked martial arts movies. The theme that appears frequently in those movies is revenge. For example, the father dies with a will and says to his son, "take revenge for me." Then his son goes into the mountains and trains martial arts for a long time. Eventually he pays back his father's enemies. But the problem is that the son of the person who was killed then goes into the mountains and learns martial arts, paying his enemies for murdering his father. Such a vicious cycle continues. It sounds like a joke, but this is what happens in real human history and in our reality.

Let's come back to the story of Joseph. How surprised must Joseph's brothers be when they hear that the man standing before them as Egypt's prime minister is the Joseph whom they sold into Egypt? Verse 3 says, "But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence." The hearts of these brothers later become anxious again when their father dies in Genesis 50.

While Jacob was alive, he became a shield for the brothers so Joseph wouldn't take revenge. Now that he passed away, the brothers were afraid and didn't know how Joseph would act. If you were Joseph, what would you do if your brothers/sisters gave you unforgivable hurt and damage that you could not wash away, especially if you had the power to take revenge? This usually leads to a story of bloodshed and revenge. But in the story of Joseph, we see God's story!

Joseph says something unbelievable. In verses 7 and 8, Joseph said to them, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 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."

Joseph is also human so he must have had hatred for his brothers. There must have been a moment in every corner of his life when he felt what God had done for him. Nevertheless, Joseph was clearly a man who experienced the special grace of God. As he looked through the pieces of his life, he discovered that God was leading him. And he solved life's difficult problems of hatred and revenge by laying down the root of bitterness before God!

Not only does Joseph not ask for the sins of his brothers, but he goes one step further and says that he will take care of them and their children. Look at verses 10 and 11. "You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there--since there are five more years of famine to come--so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty."

Until then, of course, their "father," Jacob, plays an important intermediary role. At this time, it can be interpreted that Joseph endured because of his "father" Jacob. However, later, in Genesis 50, did Joseph's revenge really come about after his father, Jacob, passed away? No! Joseph did not take revenge.

It never happens just because someone being a good person! If we take a close look at Joseph's words in the Bible today, Joseph confesses that God was working behind everything. In other words, you can see that Joseph was able to do this because he believed in God who works beyond the visible environment and reality! I read in the Bible that Joseph was still conscious of God when he was sold into slavery and even when he was accused by Potiphar's wife. "How can I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9)

Romans 8:28 says this. "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans."

An ordinary person might have resented the brothers and God. That resentment would only deepen as time passed. His brothers sold him into slavery, so they are enemies, and he must have blamed God for not doing anything for him.

When sin entered humanity and relationship with God was severed, people began to think that they had nothing to do with God. People often think, "What have I done wrong to God? What has God done for me?" Sin [harmatia] in a Greek word in the Bible means "missing the target." The nature of sin is that we continue to avoid, neglect and deny God who is the

Lord of life. "I have nothing to do with God!" Instead, people focus on material things, social achievement, success, and popularity. Of course, those things are necessary and can be beneficial to us, but the Bible says they cannot be the purpose of life.

In the eyes of a man, Joseph's brothers sold him to slavery, his master's wife accused him, and his interpretation of dreams were forgotten to the cupbearer for two years. Yet, he did not lose heart! In the eyes of God, Joseph was faithful and God watched him in each step for all his life, so that he could be acknowledged by Potiphar, by the captain of the guard, and by Pharaoh to save many lives. Dear beloved, I know that you put in a lot of effort in surviving each day in difficult times. By the way, are you relying on God's help each day and every day, hoping, and writing God's story into your life?

"God intended it for good... " That's what Joseph said later in Genesis 50. Brothers and sisters, God also intends to turn your lives to good, even though COVID-19 has changed our daily life.

Do you know the sculpture Pieta? Pieta is considered one of the best masterpieces of Michelangelo. It is stored in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican and is representative of Renaissance sculpture. It was sculpted for three years at the request of Jean De Bilheres, a French cardinal who was staying in Rome at the time. Pieta is the only work on which Michelangelo inscribed his own name.

Looking at this work, it's Mary who is in sorrow when holding the corpse of Jesus after he was taken down from the cross. It draws heart-wrenching pain and holiness from the viewers. There is a story about Pieta. Pope,

cardinals, and various nobilities came to the opening ceremony when Pieta was completed. Everyone was overwhelmed by this work of art. Pope said to Michelangelo, "You are a truly great artist!" In response, Michelangelo said, "Father, I did not sculpt Pieta. I simply got rid of fragments and scraps so that what God has made inside this lump of marble can be revealed."

Pieta means "reverent heart." In short, reverence is refining with God's grace and Jesus's blood ourselves that have been tainted by sin and greed in this world, so that God's image deep within us can be seen. Sitting in church doesn't make one reverent. Reverence is the journey of seeking God's image as we love God's grace today! Isn't it marvelous?

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, hopefully we too, even though today's reality is difficult in many ways, whether you are running a business, studying, doing research, or taking care of your family, do it all "by the grace of God and by the inspiration of God!" Just like Joseph, please come to have an intimate relationship with God. I pray that you can turn away your anguish, curses, and hatred into goodness through the help of God. Fairfield Grace, May God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.