

Session 5

February 20, 2022

THE PITFALL OF BITTERNESS

Genesis 45:1-5, 9-11

Revenge.

That word is both sinister and sweet. We know we shouldn't seek it, but we can't help feeling some secret satisfaction when someone who deserves it "gets what's coming to them."

If anyone had justification for revenge, it would be Joseph. And by this point in our story, he has both the opportunity and the ability to extract it on his hateful brothers. But the Bible warns against allowing the root of bitterness to fester and grow (Heb. 12:15), suggesting the solution to festering anger for the believer is not vengeance, but grace. And that is exactly what Joseph demonstrates in this chapter. The demonstration of Joseph's grace unfolds in four key words.

Emotion (vv. 1-2). As if the continued drama with his brothers wasn't enough, the pitiable speech of Judah (see Gen 44:18ff) describing his father's anguish and referring to Joseph twice was the breaking point. Until now, Joseph had maintained a stoic façade (at least publicly). But now the building torrent of emotion was too much. With what little noble demeanor remained, he quickly dismissed his subordinates and allowed his feelings to finally pour out. Verse 2 makes it clear: Joseph couldn't hide his true feelings if he wanted to, for his wailing was heard by both his attending staff and pharaoh's household. For reflection: *Why do you think Joseph broke down with weeping? Were they tears of joy? Frustration? Mourning? Do you think crying is important and helpful? When?*

Reaction (vv. 3-4). Far from finding comfort in Joseph's reaction, his outburst terrified his brothers (v. 3). The details of this encounter indicate that his brothers cowered away from him in the large room in which they met. Calling them close he again told them who he was. One can only imagine the brothers' reaction to all this! This powerful ruler in Egypt was now in tears, asking about his father, and referring to himself as "the one you sold into Egypt" (v. 4).

Explanation (vv. 5-8). Two important principles emerge from these verses. The first is *forgiveness*. Joseph was well aware of the fear his brothers felt standing before the one whom they would have killed; the same one who now had the authority to kill them! But his assurances demonstrated his forgiveness: "Don't worry...and don't be angry with yourselves" (v. 5). The second principle is *faithfulness*. Three times, Joseph declared, "God sent me." Through it all, Joseph realized that God had a plan and that He was faithful to carry it out. For reflection: *Be honest and put yourself in Joseph's place. Why was he able to forgive after all those years of abuse? Do you think we can do the same? How?*

Restoration (vv. 9-11). The one who once looked up from the bottom of a pit, was now looking down from the top of the throne. But rather than seek revenge, Joseph offered restoration. Notice that Joseph didn't dwell on the misfortune he had faced. Rather, it was time to act. The first order of business was to fetch his father and get them all back together. The first set of verbs (v. 9) are imperatives (commands). These express not only Joseph's control over the situation, but the

urgency of the requests he was making. The second set of verbs (“you can settle and be near me” v. 10) are not commands but express the result of those commands as though they are already accomplished. Joseph’s confidence in this part of God’s plan is clear: “I will sustain (or *provide for*) you” (v. 11). **For reflection:** *Notice the grace of God and of Joseph. The hatred that once separated the family has been replaced with the love that was able to restore the family. How does our salvation reflect this principle?*