

Title: Forgive us our sins

Key theme: Joseph forgives his brothers.

Background: The story of Joseph and his family comprises 8 chapters in the book of Genesis, so today's text is just a tiny snippet of these scriptures. I would like to therefore give you some background about this text. Joseph is the son of Jacob (who wrested with God until God blessed him). Jacob was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham and together, they comprise the three patriarchs of the Israelites. Joseph had 10 brothers; 9 from Jacob's first wife, Leah, and Joseph and Benjamin are full brothers from Jacob's wife, Rachel. If you will recall from the stories of Jacob, Jacob left home and went to work for Laban and Jacob fell in love with Laban's daughter, Rachel. Jacob went to Laban and asked for Rachel's hand in marriage and Laban said that Jacob would have to work 7 years for Laban and then he could marry Rachel. So after 7 years, Jacob went to Laban and again asked for Rachel's hand in marriage but instead, Laban gave him her older sister Leah and said that Jacob would have to work an additional 7 years to earn Rachel's hand. So Jacob complied and was also given Rachel's hand in marriage. Now Rachel was his favorite and first love, so when Rachel bore him a son, Joseph, Joseph became Jacob's favorite. When Joseph was 17 years old, Jacob made him a beautiful robe of great ornamentation and Joseph's older brothers were very jealous and hated him. Then Joseph had a dream and told his brothers about it; it was about binding sheaves and Joseph's sheave rose and stood upright, while his brother's sheaves gathered around his and bowed down to it. And his brothers hated him even more. So his brothers began to plot to kill Joseph. When his brothers were grazing their flocks in Shechem, Jacob sent Joseph to check on them. Before Joseph got there his brothers had planned to murder him, and throw him into one of the cisterns but his brother Reuben said, no, just put him into the cistern unharmed. And so when Joseph arrived, his brothers tore off his robe and dumped him in the cistern. Then, along came some Medianite merchants, and his brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to the Medianites who took him to Egypt as a slave. While in Egypt, Joseph was bought by Potiphar (Poti-far), an Egyptian official and God was with Joseph and Potiphar looked fondly upon him and promoted him to be his attendant and put him in charge of his household.

But Potiphar's wife took notice of Joseph because he was well built and handsome and tried to lure him into her bed and Joseph refused. But one time, she was alone in the house and grabbed Joseph and told him to come with her to her bed and Joseph ran away but left his cloak there. Potiphar's wife then told Potiphar that Joseph tried to have his way with her and Potiphar sent Joseph to prison. While in prison, God was with Joseph and Joseph was put in charge of the prisoners. Then Pharaoh sent his chief cup bearer and baker to prison and they both had dreams. Joseph asked them what their dreams were and they told him. The chief cup bearer said, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand." Joseph then interpreted the dream and said that in three days the chief cup bearer would be restored to his position under Pharaoh. The baker then told Joseph his dream, saying: "On my head were three baskets of bread. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." Joseph interpreted that dream that Pharaoh would hang the baker in three days. Joseph's interpretations came true and the chief cup bearer was restored to his position in three days and the baker was hanged by Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh had a dream and he called all of his magicians and wise men together to interpret the dream and they could not. Then the cup bearer told Pharaoh about Joseph so Pharaoh sent for Joseph. Pharaoh told Joseph his dream: Pharaoh was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and the interpretation was that there would be 7 years of abundant harvests, followed by 7 years of famine. Joseph said that Pharaoh should save up a fifth of the good harvests so that when the famine came, Egypt would have storehouses full of the grain. Pharaoh then put Joseph in charge of all of his affairs, except for the throne and gave Joseph his signet key to rule all of Egypt. Joseph was 30 years old (the same age as Jesus' public ministry). So Joseph stored up the grain for seven years, and two years into the famine, his brothers showed up in Egypt to buy grain. And this brings us to today's text.

Problem in the text: When Joseph was 17, his brothers plotted to kill him and after Reuben interceded; they decided to just dump him into a cistern. Then when a Medianite caravan was riding by, they sold Joseph to become a slave in Egypt.

Grace in the text: But in today's text, we see that Joseph has forgiven his brothers. In fact, Joseph believes that God planned it this way in order that Joseph may go to Egypt and save many lives during the 7 years of draught. Joseph believed in a providential God; but if God is providential, and wills all of our actions, then did God will Joseph's brothers to sin by selling him into slavery in Egypt? We know from the Joseph scriptures that God was with Joseph and Joseph found favor in Potiphar's household and was appointed head of the household. And we know God was with Joseph when he was in prison and he was recognized and put in charge of the prisoners. And we know God was definitely with Joseph when Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream. But God was also with Joseph when he brought his brothers back to him, allowing him to forgive his brothers.

Problem in the world: On April 16, 2007, a lone gunman named Cho Seung Hui, who was a 23 year old student at Virginia Tech shot and killed 32 students on the Virginia Tech campus before killing himself. This was the worst shooting rampage of a single gunman to occur in U.S. history. The whole world grieved for the innocent victims of this tragedy. President and Laura Bush attended a memorial service on the campus of Virginia Tech the next day. A week later on April 25th, memorial shrines appeared spontaneously on the drill field honoring the dead, and there was even a shrine for Cho Seung Hui. The shrines consisted of flowers, letters, and candles that were placed there by students. One of the letters said: "Dear Cho, you are not excluded from our sorrow in death although you thought you were excluded from our love in life. I wish you had given us all a chance. Your choice was so final." Another just said, "I forgive you."

Grace in the World: I would like to tell you a story about personal forgiveness. When I was 19, I went off to college to the University of Colorado, in Boulder. My mother came with me to help settle me in as she had done with two of my older siblings in prior years. We were staying at a hotel right next to the campus. My dorm rooms was very typical and small: there were 2 beds, 2 desks, and 2 closets; the bathrooms were down the hall. I liked one side of the room better than the other and my mom suggested that I hang up my sweater in that side of the room's closet. So I did that to reserve my side of the bedroom. So my mother and I toured the campus together and I saw many new students who were walking around with their roommates and I felt jealous of them. My roommate would not come to school until the first day of classes as he lived in a suburb of Denver and was not anxious to come to school. So I just had my mom. My mother was suffering from an inner ear infection and she had forgotten her medicine in Hawaii and while we were walking by the infirmary, my mom smiled slyly and she asked me if she could go in there and get treated and I replied: "No! It is just for students, Mom!" I felt embarrassed that my 51 year old mother should go to the school infirmary.

Then we went shopping at a local department store and all of the clothes were plaid shirts and jeans (and coming from Hawaii, I didn't own any of those) so my mom bought me a whole new wardrobe. While we were shopping, my mother picked up some leather jackets (and being in Colorado, there was a large selection of leather jackets) and she held one up to me and said, "Wouldn't this be great for your brother John?" And I retorted, "Mom, we're shopping for me; concentrate!" And her smile faded.

So I moved my stuff into the dorm but stayed over one more night with my mom in the hotel because she was leaving the next day. I kept thinking, I wanted her to leave so I could get into the swing of things and start meeting people in my dorm. When the van came to pick my mother up, we hugged and she said good bye, and she got into the van. And as the van was taking off, she smiled broadly and waved from the rear window at me, and I just burst into tears. I finally got it! I felt so guilty about how I had treated my mom, and I also felt completely alone. The next morning I called my mom and confessed everything to her and repented of my sins. She just laughed. A couple of years before my mom's stroke I brought up the

subject again and I said how very sorry I was and she just smiled and said not to worry about it. I think she was surprised that I still carried that burden around with me.

So we all need forgiveness some time in our lives. We probably all had many mentors who have forgiven us our trespasses. But just as we have asked for forgiveness, we need to forgive others.

Mission: Forgiveness: We may be feeling guilty about pain we may have caused someone, and I urge you to reach out to that person and apologize and ask for forgiveness. In Ephesians 4:26 it says, "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." In a similar way, I would add, do not let the sun go down if you have sinned against another; make amends; apologize, and then go to sleep knowing that you have worked to repair your relationship with that person, and to repair your relationship with God. Give that person the gift of forgiveness.

In addition, if there is someone who *you* have been holding a grudge against; someone who you might have had a parting of ways with over some incident, I urge you to forgive him/her, like Joseph forgave his brothers and my mom forgave me. When Peter asked Jesus in Matthew 18:21-22 if he should forgive a brother who sinned against him 7 times, Jesus replied, "I tell you not 7 times, but 77 times." Even on the cross, Jesus said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." In all Jesus' suffering and humiliation, he still pleaded with God to forgive those who sinned against him.