

The Story of Joseph

The Death of Grace

Part 59 – September 8, 2013



We ended on the funeral procession for Joseph's dad, Jacob. Joseph is returning home, after 40 years, in a caravan, accompanied by the two reasons for *all* his troubles: his brothers and the Egyptians.

At the threshing floor of Atad, they set up camp and "lamented loudly *and* bitterly."

... and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. – Genesis 50:10b NIV



Seems odd the brothers aren't mentioned.

When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning." [The brothers kind of take a backseat, what with all the Egyptian elite, and Egyptian attendants, and the impressive Egyptian military guard] That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim. ['Meadow of Egypt'. Some Bibles say 'Mourning of Egypt' because it's a play on the words *Abel* (meadow) and *Ebel* (mourning)] – Genesis 50:11 NIV



There's something very strange going on. Joseph took a *big detour* to get here. They haven't even entered the Promised Land. That's in the next verse. When Joseph was *kidnapped*, the route from home was like Burlington (WA) to Eugene (OR). But, the route he returns on is like Eugene to Portland, to Yakima, to Wenatchee, to Abbotsford, to Vancouver, and then down to Bellingham, to Burlington.

Moses' audience would've went, "Whaaat? Why?" Ah, *that's* the *password* for entering into a conversation with God's Word! "Why?"

Why the detour, Joseph? My guess is that facing the sickening memories on the road that had ripped him from his dad, would've distracted all involved, and diminished his father's funeral.

Moses takes Joseph's detour when he leads Israel out of bondage.

So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them: They carried him **after the seven days** to **as in 'into'** the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. – Genesis 50:12-13 NIV

And, so ends the life of the last of the big-three patriarchs, who had *personally encountered* God: Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.



Cave of the Patriarchs, Hebron

But, of the three, **Jacob was by far the best and brightest example of God's grace ... not giving, the receiving!** Always striving, contending, conniving; however, he *never let go* of God's grace! He's the only man to *physically wrestle* with the Lord; and *all night!* Till dawn. Till he got his blessing ... *and bum hip.* (32:24-30)

It was a huge honor to be buried in the cave of the Patriarchs with Abraham & Sarah, and Isaac & Rebekah, and where Jacob had carved out two spots (50:5) and buried ... *not Joseph's mother!* (49:31) Remember, last week? Jacob said: "Bury me with my fathers in the cave ... there I buried Leah." (49:29-31) Why, Jacob? Why not Rachel, your special favorite?



Rachel stole, concealed, and lied about her father's household gods. (31:35) Maybe they were found when she died and she forfeited not only God's grace but her place in Abraham's tomb. Jacob had said that the one who had 'em shall not live. (31:32) And Rachel died less than a day's ride to Abraham's tomb. But, for some reason Jacob stayed put and built a tomb and put her in it. Whatever the reason, the fact that the brothers' mother was in the tomb of the patriarchs had to make things a bit awkward.

I'm starting to see why the brothers were keeping such a low profile.

After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father. – Genesis 50:14 NIV

It doesn't say they crossed the Jordan again; so, they probably took the shortest route, and they're probably on ... the road. What do you think the brothers think Joseph is thinking about? **Their imaginations are selling them into slavery on the road!**

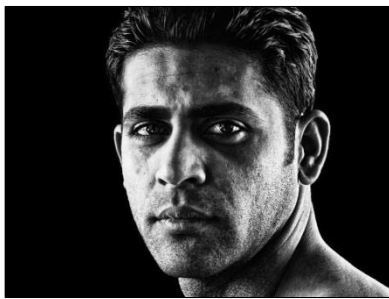
When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" – Genesis 50:15 NIV



They feared that the death of Jacob signaled the death of Joseph's grace! When young Joseph was out of dad's protective reach, they threw him down and sold him out. Now *they're* out of dad's reach! **Fear. Guilt. Shame. Self-loathing. In the end it's self worship, because it's self-focused and rejects the truth of God's love, and suffocates the grace we've been given.** For seven days, Joseph wailed, "Dad's dead!" And for seven days, the brothers whispered, "*We're* dead!"

So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: **["This was your father's dying wish"]** 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." **[This is a lack of faith disguised as an apology]** When their message came to him, Joseph wept. – Genesis 50:16-17 NIV

Why? *Why* are you weeping, Joseph? He's not offended; that doesn't fit. His love and grace have been *absolutely, shockingly* sincere.



His eyes well up because, this rehash of the trash of their past reveals a pit *they've* never escaped. 17 years in Goshen, and **they've never fully received what he's so freely, joyfully given.** And, it kind'a breaks his heart.

All that hurt they're harboring, by refusing to forgive what God has forgiven. Why can't we see the sin of the unforgiveness we hold against ourselves?

God went to great lengths to offer you the grace you're *unworthy* to receive. But, He doesn't even have to *try* to love you! You've been created in *His* image; so, you're *worthy* of *His* great love!

The enemy doesn't have to convince you that you don't deserve God's grace, because ... you *don't*. And, you know it. We all do. **He's got to convince you you're *unworthy* of God's love, because confidence in God's love keeps you firmly gripped in His grace.**

His response was tears. That's the message he sends back! **Same response Jesus sends when you won't receive the forgiveness you've humbly requested and he's freely, joyfully, provided.** They got the message. His tears emboldened them to come before him.



His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. – Genesis 50:18 NIV

Remember when he revealed his dream, 40 years earlier, and they mocked the thought of bowing to him, and rose up against him, and threw him down a cistern, and then down to Egypt? Now they're *glad* to bow. No more begging for forgiveness. His tears have convinced 'em.

They throw down their pride and receive his love and grace with humble, grateful, devotion.

When he'd revealed himself, he'd said, "don't be distressed or angry with yourselves for selling me, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. I'll provide for you. Otherwise you and your household will become destitute." (45:5, 11 condensed)

Not a lot left to say; so, what can he add to what he's already said? *Nothing!* **All he can do is repeat it, emphasize it, and hope they hear it, receive it, and hold onto it ... *this time*.**

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, ["it hurt and I hated you"] but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ["I was young. Naïve. I grew up. I can see His hand. I *trust* Him. We're in our 60s! You boys need to grow up. Trust His love so you can embrace His grace"] So then, don't be afraid. ["Wait. We're in our 60s. Death isn't the "payback" you fear, is it? You fear that I'll forsake you, and stop caring for you, and watching over your kids. Oh, my brothers ..."] I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. – Genesis 50:19-21 NIV

How could Joseph face the pain, rise above, and respond with such consistent love? He wasn't God. No, but he learned a most valuable lesson from his dad: **God wrestles with His children!**

If you think God's grace only comes to make you feel warm and fuzzy, you don't know God's grace very well. His grace comes to bless *and* train *and* challenge *and* strengthen His children.

And, those who experience God's grace, and recognize God's grace, are better trained to extend God's grace. Like Joseph did. Abuse, betrayal, bondage; loneliness, hopelessness; longings, temptations, accusations; the dungeon, deprivation, desperation; promotion, power, prestige; and the perfect opportunity for payback. It's all a wrestling match with grace.

It's a fight to the death 'cause it's a fight for true life, and it's fought with *yourself* until you surrender all your trust to God's great love, and embrace His grace with a grateful heart.

And this is where we have to close God's story for today.