

DATE: February 15, 2009

TEXT: Genesis 41: 46-54, 42:14-24

TITLE: "Genesis XXVI: Moving Forward in Faith"



We are now moving forward in our story of Joseph. Last week we left Joseph, being led out of the prison cell he had occupied for maybe 4,5,6 years, interpreting the dream of Pharaoh and being made the # 2 man in all of Egypt. A very quick turn around. For the rest of his story we see Joseph as a man of power. But we also continue to see him as a man of God. I will share 2 lessons from chapters 41 and 42 of Genesis.

Lesson # 1 Joseph continues as a man of faith in the position of power. We see this lesson in the naming of his sons. *Genesis 41:50-52 states...*

Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On. 51 Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." 52 The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."

There are a number of important facts to be pointed out in this verse. First, notice that Joseph had a wife. That may not be extremely interesting... but the fact that he only had one wife is. Finally, someone realizes that multiple wives is not the will of God. Finally, someone who

understands that multiple wives leads to strife and discord in the family. In some ways it is amazing..... here is a man living in Egyptian society.... here is a man who is wealthy and powerful... choosing a path of obedience.

But there is a second and even greater indication of his faithfulness to God in the midst of this society..... he gave his sons Hebrew names. Manasseh and Ephraim. I imagine this was hard. He was married to a woman of influence in Egypt who had to be concerned about the Hebrew names. We will see later that Manasseh and Ephraim become very important in the tribal structure of Israel.

The names of the boys is also very telling. Manasseh means “to forget” and Ephraim means “twice fruitful” The names instantly brought a text to my mind. It is *Phil. 3: 12-14*

12Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

This is what Joseph was doing. He was leaving the pain and hurt in the past and moving forward. Truthfully, we will see in future lessons, that he doesn't achieve this goal, but it was his

desire. This text in Philippians gives us to necessary steps in moving forward in faith.

Step # 1 we must forget what lies behind. Let me say, very often this is not an easy step.

In one of my previous churches there was a woman in the church who had been abused as a child

by her uncle. We talked many times. She told me the hardest thing she had ever done in her life

was to forgive this man and move forward in life. She, of course, never befriended him. Never

trusted him. Never wanted to see him. But she told me the anger and the bitterness she felt

toward the man was eating her up in the inside. The anger was preventing her from experiencing

the full love Jesus was giving to her. Through counseling and through prayer she was able to

forgive and move forward in her life and in her faith. I am going to share with you a long quote.

I don't like doing this... but it is a rich, rich quote. Last week I read the book The Shack written

by William Young. This is not a easy book to read.... but I found it a very, very rich book to

read. It begins with a tragedy. A six year old girl is kidnapped and murdered. The entire book is

the encounter of the girls father and the Triune God. I am skipping to the second from last

chapter in the book. This is almost unfair... you will not experience the slow building of

relationship between this man, his name is Mack, and God, who is called Papa in this book, that is the theme of the entire book. Here is the quote....

Papa spoke “Today we are on a healing trail to bring closure to this part of your journey—not just fo you but for other as well. Today we are throwing a big rock into the lake and those ripples will reach places you would not expect. You already know what I want, don’t you?”

“I’m afraid I do,” Mack mumbled, feeling emotions rising as they seeped out of a locked room in his heart.

“Son, you need to speak it, to name it.”

Now there was no holding back as hot tears poured down his face and between sobs Mack began to confess. “Papa,” he cried, “How can I forgive that son of a (gun) who killed my Missy. If he were here today, I don’t know what I would do. I know it is not right, but I want to hurt him like he hurt me..... if I can’t get justice, I still want revenge.”

Papa simply let the torrent rush out of Mack, waiting for the wave to pass.

“Mack, for you to forgive this man is for you to release him to me and allow me to redeem him.”

“Redeem him?” Again Mack felt the fire of anger and hurt, ‘ I don’t want you to redeem him! I want you to hurt him, to punish him, to put him in hell...” his voice trailed off. Papa waited patiently for his emotions to ease.

“I’m stuck, Papa. I just can’t forget what he did can I?” Mack implored.

“Forgiveness is not about forgiving Mack. It’s about letting go of another person’s throat.”

“But I thought you forget our sins?”

Mack, I am God. I forget nothing. I know everything. So forgetting for me is a choice to limit myself. Son,” Papa’s voice got quiet and Mack looked up at him, directly into his deep brown eyes, “because of Jesus, there is now no law demanding that I bring your sins back to mind. They are gone when to come to you and me, and they run no interference in our relationship.”

“But this man....”

“But he too is my son. I want to redeem him.”

“So what then? I just forgive him and everything is okay, and we become buddies?” Mack stated softly but sarcastically.

“You don’t have a relationship with this man, at least not yet. Forgiveness does not establish relationship. In Jesus, I have forgiven all humans for their sins against me, but only some choose relationship. Mackenzie, don’t you see that forgiveness is an incredible power—a power you share with us, a power Jesus gives to all whom he indwells so that reconciliation can grow? When Jesus forgave those who nailed him to the cross they were

no longer in his debt, nor mine. In my relationship with those men, I will never bring up what they did, or shame them or embarrass them.”

“I don’t think I can do this.” Mack answered softly.

“I want you to. Forgiveness is first for you, the forgiver,” answered Papa, “to release you from something that will eat you alive; that will destroy your joy and your ability to love fully and openly. Do you think this man cares about the pain and torment you have gone through? If anything, he feeds on that knowledge. Don’t you want to cut that off? And in doing so, you’ll release him from a burden he carries whether he knows it or not—acknowledge it or not. When you choose to forgive another, you love him well.”

“I do not live him.”

“Not today, you don’t. But I do, Mack, not for what he’s become, but for the broken child that has been twisted by his pain. I want to help you take on that nature that finds more power in love and forgiveness than hate.”

“So does that mean,” Mack was again a little angry at the direction of the conversation, “that if I forgive this man, then I let him play with (my other daughter), or my first granddaughter?”

“Mackenzie,” Papa was strong and firm, “I already told you that forgiveness does not create relationship. Unless people speak the truth about what they have done and change their mind and behavior, a relationship of trust is not possible. When you forgive someone you certainly release them from judgment, but without true change, no real relationship can be established.”

“So forgiveness does not require me to pretend what he did never happened?”

“How can you, but now you can love him in the face of it.”.....

Mack slid to the ground and leaned back against the rock he had been sitting on. He studied the dirt between his feet, “Papa, I think I understand what you are saying. But it feels like if I forgive this guy he goes free. How do I excuse what he did? Is it fair to Missy, if I don’t stay angry with him?”

“Mackenzie, forgiveness does not excuse anything. Believe me the last thing this man is, is free.”

Mack felt Papa sit down next to him on the ground but he still didn’t look up. As papa’s arms enfolded Mack he began to cry. Missy and her memories again flooded his mind; visions of coloring books and crayons and torn and bloody dresses. He wept until he had cried out all the darkness, all the longing and all the loss, until nothing was left.

With his eyes now closed, rocking back and forth, he pleaded, “Help me, Papa. Help me! What do I do? How do I forgive him?”

“Tell him.”

“How Papa?”

Just say it out loud. There is power in what my children declare.”

Mack began to whisper in tones first halfhearted and stumbling, but then with increasing conviction. “I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you.”

Papa held him close, “Mackenzie you are such a joy.”

“Wow!” Mack said hoarsely. He felt alive and asked, “so is it all right if I’m still angry?”

Papa was quick to respond. “Absolutely! What he did was terrible. He caused incredible pain to many. It was wrong and anger is the right response to something that wrong. But don’t let anger and pain and loss you feel prevent you from forgiving him and removing your hands from around his neck. “Son you may have to declare your forgiveness a hundred times the first day and the second day, but the third day will be less and each day after, until one day you will realize that you have forgiven him completely. And then one day you will pray for his wholeness.

I believe every one of us has hurt and pain in our pasts. It could be from a parent, It could be from a child. It could be from a boss. It could be from a brother or sister. It could be from a stranger. But as Paul commanded us... we must forget what was behind. That is what Joseph was doing when he named his firstborn son.... Manasseh

Brothers and sisters in Christ.... I implore you to go through the process of forgiveness. As Mack learned in this story, all the arms of the heavenly Father to envelope you and lead you into love and forgiveness. Then and only then can we grow in our emotions of joy and peace.

But the text in Phillipians has a second clause.... we must **“strain toward what is ahead,”**

We must **“press on toward the goal”** We must move forward in our faith. God never desires stagnancy in His children. Our relationship of intimacy must ever grow. That can be seen in the

life of Joseph as he named his second son. His name was Ephraim. It means “twice fruitful.”

Joseph is saying now his life will be fruitful for the Lord. We will see the fulfillment of this truth.

Joseph, by the power of God saved millions from starvation. Joseph, by the power of God, saved his entire family. He was greatly used by God as he moved forward in faith. I will close with one final lesson

Lesson # 2 See the continued mistakes of disobedience committed by his family.

Genesis 42:3-4 states....

Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.

We are going to see again and again and again in this story that Jacob was once again favoring his son... this time Benjamin. His one son from Rachel was dead... so now he favored his other son. He was willing for his one son to remain in prison forever rather than risk Benjamin. Benjamin was a full adult now. He wasn't a kid. These events took place 22 years after Joseph was first sold as a slave. In 22 years the father had not learned. The brothers, by the way had learned.... that is the lesson for next week.

The lesson is this. God desires a mature intimate relationship with his children. In order to experience that relationship we must let go of the pain in our past. We must give forgiveness to those who have hurt us. We must allow the power of the Holy Spirit to indwell us.

We must, unlike Jacob, learn from our past mistakes and move forward in faith. Next week we see the brothers approach Joseph.

AMEN