

BROOKLAND BAPTIST CHURCH
Bible Study
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Lecture V

November 8, 2023

Forgiveness: A Key to Unlocking Your Divine Destiny
Case Study: The Account of Joseph
Ref: Genesis 37 – 50
(Part 2)

SIGNS OF AN UNFORGIVING HEART

Noteworthy Observations:

As we journey on in this case study of Joseph, there are some noteworthy observations that capture our attention as it relates to the unchecked effects of the hurt, pain, and even anger an offense can cause. As noted earlier in the study, if these feelings are not addressed in the proper time, they give way to malice, vengeance, evil desires, and other manifestations of the flesh in which we covered earlier. Make no mistake, when we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts, these works of the flesh are ever present and tend to fester and grow until they develop into other ungodly acts and/or feelings.

This is precisely what the bible warns us about in James 1:14-15 (and again what we learned from Dr. Jamison last spring when he taught on the Book of James). James 1:14-15 reads, "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and when sin is finished, it brings forth death." The Message Bible says it like this, "The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and us only. We have no one to blame for the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer".

This is an exact scenario that plays out in the lives of Joseph's brothers. Notice the systematic progression of their disdain for their younger brother.

- Even though they were all Joseph's half-brothers (with the exception of Benjamin who shared the same parents as Joseph), I strongly believe they truly loved Joseph in his early years. It is reasonable to conclude that they viewed Joseph no differently than any of the other brothers when he was younger.
- However, as Genesis 37 points out, by the time Joseph turned 17 years old, things had drastically changed.
- It is during this time that the brothers painfully discover that Joseph:
 - Had been spying on them
 - Is loved more than them
 - Is treated better than them

- Is told that he will be superior to them

In his brothers eyes, these were offenses that affected their relationship and caused their feelings to change toward Joseph. Their thoughts toward Joseph turned evil and then their actions soon followed suit. The late Chinese sage Lao Tzu is reported to have said, “Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions; watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character; watch your character, it becomes your destiny”.

The essence of Tzu’s wise council is that we must govern how we think about something or someone because again, as James 1:14-15 suggests, a person is tempted when they are drawn away by their own lust (thoughts) and enticed.

Please note that the term “lust” used here is taken from the Greek term “epithymia” which means, a desire, craving, longing, for that which is forbidden. When analyzing this definition, we can conclude that the word “lust” has several connotations beyond the sexual context the word is most associated with. In other words, you can not only lust after sex, but you can lust for power, lust for money, lust for attention, and according to the case study, lust for revenge, vengeance, and/or retaliation. And this is precisely where Joseph’s brothers find themselves, lusting for revenge, due to the unforgiveness in their hearts.

So, picking up in Genesis 37:12, imagine Joseph on his way to see his brothers in Dothan, and they know it is him they see coming because he is wearing the coat their father Jacob made for him. A coat that served as a stark reminder that their father loved Joseph more than them. So as Joseph is walking towards them, the brothers are plotting among themselves about how to get rid of Joseph, how could they get some “payback”, how could they execute some vigilante justice, because they felt wronged.

Now the inherent danger here regarding possessing an unforgiving spirit is that left unchecked, it has the propensity to spiral out-of-control and cause you to do some ungodly things, both intentional and non-intentional. Notice what the text says happens to Joseph at the hands of his brothers:

- *They* plotted and planned against him...all his brothers, except Rueben, were in agreement to do something evil to Joseph
- Decided to murder him...their own brother
- Fabricated a lie to cover up their evil intentions
- Mocked and ridiculed him
- Disrespected him
- Threw him in a pit
- Sold him into slavery

Let us consider these actions individually and see how they speak to us in this present age in the context of signs of an unforgiving heart.

THEY plotted and planned against Joseph:

- When unforgiveness resides in our hearts because of an offense, we tend to look for those who are sympathetic to our cause, who feel our pain, and connect with them, not for healing and wholeness, but for them to co-sign on our desire to get back at the people who have hurt us. There is a saying that goes, “hurt people, hurt people”. This suggest that when we get hurt it is almost a natural tendency to hurt others in return...whether they had anything to do with the offense or not.

Decided to murder Joseph:

- As the text reveals, unforgiveness can lead to thoughts that may compel us to do mortal harm to someone. As in the case of Joseph, unforgiveness can make one become so selfish that they do not consider the ripple effect their action(s) could have on others.

Fabricated a lie to cover up their evil intention(s):

- You know that what you are about to do is wrong when you must lie to yourself/others to either justify your actions or cover up your actions. Not dealing with the sin of unforgiveness will cause you to act in this manner.

Mocked and ridiculed Joseph:

- Joseph's brothers referring to him as "this dreamer" was not a term of endearment or a statement of reverence. On the contrary, it was a term that articulated their hatred, hostility, and disdain for Joseph. Even though the offender may be extremely close to you, these were Joseph's brothers, the effect of unforgiveness in your heart will make you totally dismissive of any relational bond that existed at the time of the offense. Before the offense you treated them like family, after the offense you treat them like an enemy.

Disrespected Joseph:

- Joseph's brothers forcibly disrobed him of the coat their father Jacob made especially for him. A symbol of his father's favor. This was akin to them saying, "We do not care about you, this robe, or what our father thinks of you!" The spiritual connotation here is that the effects of an unforgiving heart can lead you to, in your fit of rage, disrespecting someone who has been, unbeknownst to you, anointed and appointed by God to do a work that may ultimately benefit you.

Threw Joseph in a pit:

- Casting Joseph in a pit was part of his brother's plan to put him in a place where they could control him. Joseph was stripped, disrespected, and thrown in a pit. This signifies the misguided control of an unforgiving heart that can lead you to make someone feel hopeless and helpless. And just as Joseph's brothers wanted Joseph to know that they were in control...so does an unforgiving heart when it is offended. It seeks control.

Sold him into slavery:

- Judah persuaded his brothers not to kill Joseph but to instead sell him off as a slave. At first this seems to be something to commend Judah about until the text reveals a hidden motive. Judah is in it to make a profit. This is to suggest that an unforgiving heart seeks to benefit in some way, may not always be about money, at the expense of the offender.

Now as you have probably reasoned, Joseph went through a lot at the hands of his brothers. And for those wrestling with unforgiveness, you can probably identify with one, if not more, of the signs of an unforgiving heart because of some things you have gone through, or maybe going through. Without a doubt, one could argue that Joseph and Jacob's offense was no big deal, and from their perspective this could be their truth. However, we must always consider the feelings of the offended. We must remind ourselves that just because we think light of an offense does not mean that the person offended views it the same way. The things we can endure could truly be unbearable for others.

The last two observations I want to bring to your attention regarding the tell-tale signs of an unforgiving heart as depicted in this case study is this:

To try to pridefully, take the moral high ground for not doing something worst:

- Again, Judah's appeal to his brothers is indicative of what we do when our mind is made up to do wrong. We tend to justify our wrongdoing in some manner, saying things like, "he/she deserved it and they better be glad this is all I did...I could have done worst!" Or perhaps, "I am not going to do you like you did me", but what you did do afterwards was just as bad.

Joseph's brothers carried on as if nothing happened:

- The text says in Genesis 37:25a, "and they sat down to eat bread". This should serve as a stark reminder to us that some people possess such an unforgiving heart, they are so sent on vengeance, that they can do evil to you and not miss a step in their normal routine. The brothers did all that we had covered this evening to Joseph and sat down to eat dinner.

So, in conclusion, let us make sure that when an offense does occur in our lives, since it is not about "if" but "when", we are quick to take inventory of the signs we demonstrate to make sure they are not signs of an unforgiving heart.