

Intro: Not one person here today is exempt from it. In one shape or another, every one of us must deal with it. If you are not a Christian, you face it. If you are a Christian, you likewise are not shielded from it. What is it? Pain.

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Key: All of us either are having, or will have, painful situations in life. ALL of us. For one it will be the loss of a parent to a terminal illness. For another it may be the tragic and unexpected shock of having a child die. The sorts of pain are varied: Job terminations, broken marriages, memories of childhood abuse, regrets over foolish decisions and wasted opportunities.

None of us are exempt from pain.

Q: What difference does the Presence of God make in dealing with Pain?

That's the question before us this morning. There are few individuals more qualified to answer that question than Joseph. For 2 reasons. One, he faced plenty of painful situations in his life. And two, God made a difference in his life in the way he handled each painful experience. Such was the case in Gen 50.

Proposition: In Genesis 50, Joseph's example gives us insight into dealing with pain. This morning, we want to watch the difference God's presence made in 2 very painful (and contemporary) situations in Joseph's life.

- I. The Pain of Release (1-14)
 - A. The Burial (1-13)
 - 1. Grief (1)
 - 2. Embalming (2-3)
 - 3. Funeral Procession (4-11)
 - 4. Interment (12-13)
 - B. The Bereavement (14)
- II. The Pain of Regret (15-26)
 - A. The Brothers' Fear (15-18)
 - B. Joseph's Forgiveness (19-21)
 - C. God's Favor (22-26)

Joseph faced 2 types of pain in Gen 50. The first type of pain Joseph faced in ch 50 is described in vv 1-14.

I. The Pain of Release (1-14)

Remember what happened last week, in 49:33?

V 33 "Jacob...died..."

After 147 years of life, the patriarch passed from this world. With his 12 sons around his bed, he lay down and breathed his last breath.

Q: How did Jacob's death impact his son Joseph?

V 1 "And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him."

Joseph felt the chillful pain of release. His dad was gone. There would be no more father and son chats. He would never see his beloved father again in this life.

Illust: Phone call from Bryce. "We need to get together." Dead 2 weeks

Q: How did Joseph deal with the Pain of Release, the Pain of Parting, of death?

A: Watch the sequence of events that surrounded his father's burial.

A. The Burial (1-13)

Observation: As I've helped grieving families work through the loss of loved ones, I've noticed something that's not surprising...

Key: There's a world of difference between people who know Christ and people who don't know Him, when it comes to the way they handle death. Knowing God makes a difference in the way we handle the Pain of Release.

Watch the steps Joseph took...

1. Grief (1)

V 1 "Joseph...fell...wept...kissed him."

I marvel at how expressive Bible characters were in grieving. David fasted and lay all night on the ground when he learned that his illegitimate child would die (II Sam 12). Here Joseph broke down, and lay across his father's lifeless body, and shed many affectionate tears. He vented his emotions in an unrestrained expression of love.

Listen. Even Christians grieve. It's OK to grieve. It's even healthy physically to express grief, to show emotion, when confronted with pain.

We'll say more about this later, but let me point out now that there is a difference in the grieving process for Christians. Paul put it this way in I Th 4:13, we "do not sorrow as those who have no hope." We have hope in Christ, hope that is victorious over death.

Soon Joseph collected himself. There were a host of arrangements.

Q: What do you think of first when you think of ancient Egypt?

A: Pyramids and mummies!

2. Embalming (2-3)

V 2 "And Joseph commanded his servants...to embalm..."

V 3 "And 40 days were fulfilled..."

The ancient Egyptians developed an elaborate and extensive embalming process. Did you catch how long it took? 40 days. Other Egyptian sources mention that sometimes it took as long as 70 days to prepare a body for burial.

Q: What else happened in conjunction with the embalming process?

A: V 3 "the Egyptians mourned 70 days..."

Wow! 70 days of mourning. According to Egyptian custom, the length of mourning time indicated how how respected the deceased was. Remember, Jacob was the father of the highest official in Egypt. Records show that the mourning period for a

Pharaoh lasted 72 days. Our text tells us that even the Egyptians participated in the mourning. What respect for Joseph!

3. Funeral Procession (4-11)

Joseph asked Pharaoh for permission to leave Egypt, and honor his father's request to bury him in Canaan (vv 4-6). Pharaoh granted his request.

So Joseph prepared to leave. He didn't go alone.

Vv 7-9 "And Joseph went up to bury...and with him...the elders..."

That was quite a funeral procession! V 9 is no exaggeration, "a very great company"! Egyptian dignitaries went along. So did the officials of Pharaoh's court. There were even chariots and horsemen (for defense purposes while traveling through hostile territory). And of course, did Jacob's 12 sons and their wives joined the funeral procession. The grandchildren and livestock did not make the trip. Why not?

Q: How long do you think the trip was? 300 miles!

A: How many days would it take? 10 miles a day, 30 days just to get there!

Observation: You can tell a lot about a culture by the way it treats its dead.

Illust: Indian burial site at Traucht's

In the case of the death of Jacob, they took 40 days for the embalming process, 70 days for mourning, who knows how many weeks (or months) to travel to the proper burial site.

Note: The procession did not take a direct route to the burial site...

V 10 "And they came to the threshing floor of Atad"

Joseph and company took a circular route, and entered Canaan through the "back door" ("beyond the Jordan"--just like the Israelites would do 400 years later when entering the Promised Land). They traveled around the Dead Sea, and up the east side of the Jordan river, until they came to Atad. What happened in Atad?

Vv 10b-11 "there they mourned with a great and very strong mourning..."

Can you picture the scene? The funeral procession stopped at Atad (in the Transjordan region). They've finally arrived in the land of Canaan. So they stop. The entire company mourns for the next 7 days.

The emotion was so great that the local inhabitants gave the location a new name: "Abel-mizraim" which means, "the mourning of the Egyptians."

After the 7 days, the procession moved to the place of interment.

4. Interment (12-13)

Notice carefully who actually buried Jacob...

V 12 "And his sons did unto him as he commanded them."

V 13 "For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan and buried him..."

If I understand the text, the large company did not go to the burial site. The Egyptians stayed at Atad. Only Jacob's sons carried his body across the Jordan river, and to cave at Machpelah. It was fitting that family privacy be maintained. It was at

Machpelah that Abraham and Sarah were buried. So were Isaac and Rebekah. So was Leah. That cave was the only piece of property Jacob owned when he died. But he died in faith, believing that one day, God would give the entire Promised Land to his descendants.

So concluded the burial. But the pain of release was not over for Joseph...

B. The Bereavement (14)

V 14 "And Joseph returned into Egypt..."

I like to try to put myself into the dramatic accounts of Scripture. The text says that "Joseph returned to Egypt." I wonder what went through his mind on the way home. Remember it took weeks to get back home. Weeks of walking. Weeks of reflecting. Weeks of reminiscing. Weeks of talking with family members. Weeks of mourning.

Q: How should we respond when we lose a loved one?

Observation: I know we need to be careful when handling narrative literature in the Bible. God is not necessarily endorsing Joseph's behavior. He's not saying, "Everyone should grieve 70 days when they lose a loved one." But when I look at Joseph's example, it seems that we have before us a helpful model for dealing with the pain of release. I observe 2 principles of bereavement...

1. Be careful not to bury the pain of release too soon.

Listen. It's OK to mourn. Death is painful. Why do we have death in the world? Never forget that death is the result of sin's curse. Death is the consequence of mankind's rebellion against the Creator.

Did you notice how Joseph dealt with the pain of release in this episode? Did you see how he grieved? He wept, unashamedly. His weeping was not a sign of weakness.

V 1 "And Joseph...wept..."

Vv 3-4 "...the Egyptians mourned 70 days. And when ...mourning..."

V 10 "they mourned with a great and strong mourning..."

By the way, when you have a friend who loses a loved one, allow them to grieve. Don't be a stoic who says, "Be strong! Don't cry!" We have a tendency in our society to be too "surfacey." We try to "get on with life" too quickly. We don't deal with the pain of death. We try to hide it and bury it and isolate ourselves from it.

Here's the first principle. Be careful not to bury the pain of release too soon.

2. After sufficient time for grieving, don't live in the past.

Joseph mourned, no doubt, for many weeks, if not months. That was OK, even appropriate. But then he got on with life.

I realize this is a delicate subject. We've already said that grieving is normal, even essential. For a time. But there are people who a year or two later are still paralyzed by the loss of their loved one. They've stopped living. They've forgotten that God has a plan for their lives. What do they need to do?

--Fix their eyes on the Lord, and His purpose for them.

--Get involved in serving the Lord. Ask the Lord to bring someone into their life to whom they can minister.

Jesus' promises:

Jn 10:10 "I am come that you might have life..."

Jn 11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Illust:

Tran: We've seen the difference God's presence made in one very painful experience in Joseph's life. God made all the difference in dealing with the Pain of Release.

II. The Pain of Regret (15-26)

Q: Do you have any regrets in life?

Illust: Willie Mays as a rookie hit Warren Spahn for a HR. "It looked"

Do you have any regrets? Any blots in your life you wish you could erase?

Joseph's brothers did. In fact, their father's death was not only a time for reminiscing, but also a time for doubts, and second thoughts, and even fear.

A. The Brothers' Fear (15-18)

Vv 15-17a "And when Joseph's brethren saw..."

I realize we studied this episode a couple of years ago in a series "How to Experience God's Forgiveness." But today I want us to take a close look at the pain of regret. Joseph's brothers are still paralyzed by their past. They're quaking in their boots. And remember, it's been over 35 years since the crime! And don't forget that Joseph already told his siblings he forgave them, 17 years earlier!

Illust: Press Headline, "Convict Tells of a Torture Time can't Change"

Time didn't erase the pain of regret from Joseph's brothers.

Q: Will Joseph turn on us?! They conjured up a plan:

--Sent messenger to Joe (16)

--Fabricated a story (17) "Dad told us to tell you..."

--Tried to earn Joseph's forgiveness (18)

V 18 "And his brethren went and fell down...we are thy servants."

Problem: Some people feel they have to punish themselves for past blunders. It makes them feel better, for awhile. They think that if they chastise themselves, they'll pacify God.

Illust: I used to view prayer that way. I hit my knees. No pain no gain.

I'm so glad God's forgiveness is not that way!

Ps 130:3-4 "If you Lord kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness. Therefore you are feared."

We've seen the Brother's Fear...

B. Joseph's Forgiveness (19-21)

V 17 "And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him."

Why did he weep? Because his brothers crushed his heart. He'd already dealt with the past. But they hadn't. He'd already forgiven them (ch 45). But they were still full of regrets.

Watch what Joseph did. Watch how he responded.

1. He calmed their fears (19). "Fear not."
2. He turned their thoughts to God (19). "Am I in the place of God?"

Joseph was constantly doing that with people. He prompted people to get their eyes off of themselves, and on God. What a great trait!

3. He reminded them that God can use the pains from the past to accomplish His purposes in the present (20). "You meant evil...but God meant good."

4. He extinguished their regrets with deeds of kindness (21).

Joseph forgave his brothers.

Quote: George Herbert "He who cannot forgive others..."

Q: Are you living with the pain of regret today?

--Is there someone you need to forgive and release from past hurts?

--Are you refusing to seek and accept forgiveness for your past?

The story ends on a great note: the Brothers' Fear, Joseph's Forgiveness, and...

C. God's Favor (22-26)

Vv 22-26 "And Joseph dwelt..."

Joseph too was embalmed (I wonder if his body is still in tact?!).

Joseph lived in light of God's promises. He died in light of God's promises.

He went to his grave with his focus on what God would do for His people in the future.

v 24 "God will surely visit you."

Do you know what impresses me about Joseph? He grew old free of bitterness. I think it was Hendricks who said, "When people grow old they either grow bitter or better." When Joseph died, he was ready. He was right with God. And he was right with his fellow man. What memory will your children have of you?

Conclusion:

Illust: Epitaph: "Forgiven."

Q: How did the brothers respond to Joseph's offer of forgiveness?

A: We're not told. Did they continue to flog themselves? Did they continue to drown in the sea of regrets? Or did they accept his offer of forgiveness?

This is a picture of the way some people respond to God's offer of forgiveness.

Illust: Your neighbor wresting with his car. You offer to help. His response? "No thanks, I think I can get it myself." Makes your actions seem like a waste, doesn't it.

That's exactly what people do who refuse God's offer of forgiveness. God offers forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. But the world is full of people who are trying to save themselves. In essence they're saying, "Thanks God, but no thanks. I can take care of the problem myself..."