

Genesis 45:1-46:30 & Lord's Day 17 >> Joseph 6: My Son Was Dead and Is Alive Again!¹

Stanley J. Groothof

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Today is Easter Sunday. We are at the climax of the story of Joseph;² we are also at the climax of the story of salvation in Jesus Christ. At the darkest, most uncertain moment of the story of Joseph, Joseph exclaims,

“I am Joseph!” (45:3)

Just when everyone believes that Satan and death have won, Jesus says,

“Mary” (Jn 20:16),

and appears to His disciples with these words on His lips:

“Peace be with you!” (Jn 20:19)

and

“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” (Jn 20:27)

In Genesis, it turns out that Joseph is alive. In the Gospels, it turns out that the resurrection is true.

This morning I'd like to unpack four connections, four parallels between the Genesis story we just read and the Gospel reading we heard a few minutes before that. In these connections between Genesis and the Gospels, we'll find further connections to our own lives today.

Resurrections

The first thing we see in both Genesis 45-46 and the Gospels is a *resurrection*.

Joseph's family indeed experiences a resurrection of sorts.³ In Genesis 37, Jacob holds the bloodied robe of his favourite son and is convinced that Joseph is dead. But in Genesis 46, Jacob and Joseph are in each others' arms, Joseph being very much alive. Not only is Joseph alive, he's actually the ruler of the superpower of the day. Tears flow as father and son “embrace at length, joyfully reunited after so many years apart...”⁴

I am reminded of the father of the prodigal sons in Jesus' parable, inviting the older son to come into the house to feast and celebrate when the younger son returns from the far country, saying, “We [have] to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead

¹ I am grateful to Monica for initially drawing numerous connections between Joseph and Jesus that I hadn't and probably wouldn't have thought about. Thank you!

² As per Terence E. Fretheim in “The Book of Genesis” in *New Interpreter's Bible* (vol. 1; L.E. Keck, ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 643.

³ Bruce Waltke in *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 578, refers to it as such.

⁴ Fretheim, 653.

and is alive again” (Lk 15:32; *cf.* Lk 15:24). I can hear Jacob saying, *This son of mine was dead as far as I knew, but now he’s alive again!*

Radio preacher Chuck Swindoll recalls a news story years ago about “the meeting of twins who had been separated at birth. They knew they were adopted, but they had no idea who their biological parents were. Through the help of a third party, they were brought together. But when their pictures appeared in the paper, telling about their adult reunion, a third identical person appeared. They were triplets!

“As excited and dumbfounded as those three men must have been, I suggest that this ... family reunion [is] even greater...”⁵ After years of wheeling and dealing, always living up to the meaning of his name and looking over his shoulder, we read that Jacob the deceiver is finally at peace. He pronounces a *nunc dimittis* (like the old prophet Simeon in the temple 2000 years later when he sees the baby Jesus): “Now I am ready to die,” says Jacob, “since I have seen for myself that you are still alive” (46:30).⁶ Joseph is alive, so Jacob is at peace.

Today, of course, we celebrate that Jesus is alive. Unlike Joseph, who was only presumed dead, Jesus truly was dead. He died on the cross and was buried in a tomb. But, “death cannot keep its prey,” and “up from the grave He arose!”⁷

And unlike Joseph, who was ruler only in one particular country, Jesus rules over the entire world. Jesus is alive and He reigns, so we can be at peace.

He lives, and so can we – today and for eternity. Upon seeing Joseph again, Jacob says he can die in peace. How much more can followers of Jesus say that, confident knowing that the grave is not the end. The joy experienced by Jesus’ first followers – not unlike the joy Jacob has when he’s reunited with Joseph – can be ours for now and eternity.

Doubts

Of course, it takes Jesus’ first followers a bit of time to grasp all this. The initial responses to the news of Jesus’ resurrection are fear (*cf.* Mk 16:8), despair (*cf.* Lk 24:20-24), and doubt (*cf.* Jn 20:24-25). Here is the second parallel: Jacob, too, initially responds to the good news of Joseph’s “resurrection” with *doubt*. His sons eagerly tell him, “Joseph is alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.” Having passed the elaborate series of tests set up by Joseph, “the brothers are free of their guilt and can speak the truth.”⁸

Jacob hears this and is “stunned; he [does] not believe them” (45:26). You have to appreciate the irony here: “In chapter 37, Jacob [does] believe his sons when they are lying to him. In chapter 45, Jacob disbelieve[s] his sons when they are being truthful with him. Bad news he accepts; good news he rejects.”⁹

⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, *Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 163.

⁶ Waltke, 585, refers to Jacob’s comment as his *nunc dimittis*. Waltke adds: “The man who feared his sons would bring him to Sheol in mourning now can die in peace.” Incidentally, Jacob actually lives another 17 peaceful years.

⁷ From the hymn “Low in the Grave Christ Lay,” written by Robert Lowry (*Psalter Hymnal* 396).

⁸ Waltke, 572.

⁹ Swindoll, 157. Swindoll is quoting Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 587.

It takes some convincing for Jacob to finally believe, and he is finally convinced when, in addition to his sons' story and the goods they brought back from Egypt, when he sees "the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back" (45:27). They don't sound like much to us, but those carts represent some pretty impressive transportation back in that day. "Perhaps the grain, animals, and gifts could have been bought with the silver they had in hand or had stolen, but not the wagons."¹⁰ It's all pretty much too outrageous to be a lie; Jacob's sons couldn't have dreamed up something this ridiculous, so it must be true!

The most famous doubter in history, though, isn't Jacob; the disciple Thomas has that dubious honour (*cf.* Jn 20:24-29). Summarizing and reflecting on the story of Thomas, preacher Fleming Rutledge writes:

"When the disciples [are] gathered together in that room where the risen Lord first appear[s] to them all, Thomas [is] not with them; he [is] so angry and bitter and broken up that he could not, or would not, seek fellowship – very much like many of us, don't you say, when we are mad at God or mad at the world, and we stay away from [church]. Thomas stayed away, and he missed it! – he missed the visit of the Lord who had risen from the dead."¹¹

And when he does hear about it, it's going to take more than words to prove to him that the others really saw Jesus. Thomas, as well as the other disciples, simply have no mental categories for perceiving a resurrection following such a humiliating death.

But Jesus, in his grace, meets them (and us) where they (and we) are.¹² The disciples respond appropriately – with joy and, finally, in Thomas' case, with belief and then worship. They remain good role models for us to this day.

You have to admit that the truth sounds so outrageous that it cannot be a lie – no one could ever have thought up a story where a man crucified as a criminal destroys death itself. As Thomas and the others discover, even in the injustice and tragedy of Jesus' death, God works His salvation purposes out, inviting us, too, to confess to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

Purposes

That's the third parallel: Despite evidence to the contrary, God is working His *purposes* out in both Genesis and the Gospels.

Joseph is quick to point out to his brothers that God had a grand purpose in mind even when they wickedly sold him into slavery. Repeatedly he credits God with orchestrating the events leading up to his family being fed and ultimately their happy reunion:

¹⁰ Waltke, 573.

¹¹ Fleming Rutledge, *The Bible and the New York Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 140-141. I wrote in the margin here: "When you miss a church service (*i.e.*, a gathering of disciples), you can miss a lot!"

¹² On this point, see Rutledge, 142. This reminds me of Joseph coming down from his chariot to greet his father – Joseph greets him not as a ruler but as a son. On this point, see Fretheim, 653.

“...Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that *God sent me ahead of you...*” (45:5)

“*God sent me ahead of you ... to save your lives by a great deliverance.*” (45:7)

“So then, it was not you who sent me here, *but God.*” (45:8).

Joseph declares that the real mover-and-shaker is God, not Joseph: “Though the brothers were responsible for Joseph’s being sold into Egypt, and though they intended ‘harm,’ God was ultimately behind it all and had worked it out for the ‘good’ (cf. 50:20).”¹³ In short, “*God has acted so that life, rather than death, now abounds.*”¹⁴ God has put Joseph in the right place at the right time so that many people can be saved; Joseph even uses the language of “great deliverance” (45:7) in referring to what God is accomplishing through him.

Jesus, of course, is the great Deliverer with a capital *D*. Not unlike in the story of Joseph, “God overruled the intentions of wicked people in order to bring about deliverance. Jesus, after all, was crucified by people who only sought to destroy Him. God, however, ‘intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives’ (Gen 50:20)... God overrules evil for good.”¹⁵

I wonder if the apostle Peter has the story of Joseph in mind when he preaches these words on Pentecost Sunday:

“Jesus of Nazareth ... was handed over to you *by God’s deliberate plan and fore-knowledge*; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing Him to the cross. *But God raised Him from the dead...* Let all Israel be assured of this: *God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.*” (Ac 2:22-24, 36)

Throughout history, God has a knack for transforming something bad into something good.

That can give us a measure of hope, particularly when we feel as though Murphy’s Law is applying to us more than anyone else in the whole world. Now, can I tell you what the purpose of your pain and suffering is? Maybe I can take a guess sometimes, but certainly not always. But God indeed has a purpose. He is not stumped by the bad and broken things happening in your life right now or by pain and trauma you’ve endured in the past. The story of Joseph and the fact of Jesus’ resurrection both invite us to put our trust in the One who brings purpose and something good out of even the most painful and hopeless situations.

Reconciliations

The final result of God’s purposes in both Genesis and the Gospels is *reconciliation*. That’s the fourth and final parallel I’m drawing between Joseph and Jesus this morning. In both

¹³ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (vol. 2; F.E. Gæbelein, ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 257.

¹⁴ Fretheim, 646. Waltke, 563, puts it this way: “God directs the maze of human guilt to achieve his good and set purposes.”

¹⁵ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 56.

Genesis and the Gospels there is a resurrection, there is doubt to overcome, there is evidence of God's purpose being worked out. Now we see in both Genesis and the Gospels reconciliation.

In Genesis 45, Joseph and his brothers finally have a tear-filled reunion. All the sons of Jacob are alive. It takes a bit to convince Joseph's brothers: "...His brothers [are] not able to answer him, because they [are] terrified at his presence" (45:3).

Joseph invites them to come close to him (*cf.* 45:4), to look him in the eyes and listen with their ears to him speaking their own language. "...Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here," Joseph says to them (45:5). "Joseph ... asks for no confession of sin and issues no absolution. Rather, he wants to allay their fears."¹⁶ Reconciliation cannot truly happen until the brothers' fear is gone. To relieve their fear, "Joseph directs their gaze away from their sins to God's grace" and God's purpose in sending Joseph to Egypt.¹⁷

Slowly the brothers begin to realize the truth of what Joseph is saying and fears that he's about to squash them like bugs for what they did to him years ago are relieved. They all embrace, and Benjamin in particular joins in Joseph's tears of joy (*cf.* 45:14-15).

Eventually they all calm down enough to talk with each other (*cf.* 45:15). That might not sound too profound, the fact that Joseph and his brothers are talking, but remember way back at the beginning of the story over 20 years earlier how the brothers "hated [Joseph] and could not speak a kind word to him" (37:4). Now, after all these years and all these ordeals, Joseph and his brothers can have not only a civil, but even loving conversation.¹⁸

Then Joseph invites the entire family to come down from the land of famine so they can be provided for in Egypt, where there is an abundance of food. For their journey back to Canaan to bring their father the good news of Joseph's wellbeing and to gather their things for the return trip, Joseph generously gives them everything they need and then some! We already noted the carts, but notice also how Joseph provides Benjamin with silver (*cf.* 45:22). Unlike with the foreigners heading to Egypt over 20 years ago, "here ... silver is given to bless a brother, not to sell him (*cf.* 37:28)."¹⁹

What's more, Joseph gives each of his brothers "new clothing" (45:22). Recall how it was a piece of clothing – Joseph's fancy robe – that, in part, provoked the brothers' hatred toward Joseph, pushing them to sell him to foreigners on their way to Egypt. "Clothing now becomes a sign of reconciliation."²⁰ As one commentary writer puts it: "Since an article of [clothing] had featured prominently in the tale of hostility between Joseph and his brothers, it is only fitting [no pun intended?] that their reconciliation should be marked by a gift of [clothing]."²¹

By the end of our Scripture reading today, Joseph is reunited with Jacob, and, like with his brothers, their reunion is emotional, too. Finally the entire family experiences reconciliation. Chuck Swindoll helps us connect Joseph with Jesus at this point:

Joseph's life offers us a magnificent portrayal of the grace of God as He [comes to reconcile us through] the Person of His Son, Jesus. So many come to Him, like

¹⁶ Fretheim, 644.

¹⁷ Waltke, 563.

¹⁸ Fretheim, 644, connects Gen 45:15 with Gen 37:4. See also Waltke, 564.

¹⁹ Waltke, 572.

²⁰ Fretheim, 645.

²¹ Waltke, 572. Waltke is quoting N. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 311.

Joseph's guilty brothers, feeling the distance and fearing the worst from God, only to have Him demonstrate incredible generosity and mercy. Instead of being blamed, we are forgiven. Instead of feeling guilty, we are freed. And instead of experiencing punishment, which we certainly deserve, we are seated at His table and served more than we can ever take in.²²

Our resurrected Lord invites to a life of reconciliation with God our loving Creator and Father.

"Do not be afraid," Jesus says to the women at the tomb (Mt 28:9) and to us today, similar to how Joseph calms his brothers' fears. These are also the words that God speaks to Jacob as he begins travelling to Egypt: "Do not be afraid... I will go down to Egypt with you..." (46:3, 4). God's covenant with Jacob is still in effect.

Do not be afraid. Just as Joseph does not wish ill upon his brothers and just as God promises to be with Jacob, so our God promises to continue providing for us and to be with us for all time. His covenant with us is still in effect. Friends, do not be afraid.

Joseph gives his brothers gifts of silver. Our risen Lord provides us the gifts of His Holy Spirit – gifts of different abilities as well as the time and desire to use them (*cf.* Rom 12:6-8 ; 1Cor 12:1-11).

Joseph gives his brothers gifts of clothes. The apostle Paul writes to the Galatians: "You [are] baptized into union with Christ, and now you are *clothed*, so to speak, with the life of Christ Himself" (Gal 3:26-27, GNB). In Colossians, Paul also uses the metaphor of clothing, speaking of how we are called to let Jesus *clothe* us "with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (Col 3:12). In short, just as Joseph provides his family with what they need, God provides for us in the risen Jesus and His Holy Spirit all we need. We are reconciled to God and equipped to live grateful lives for Him.

We truly do not need to be afraid.

This is the Good News of Easter.

Like Joseph and his brothers and father experiencing a new beginning, we can have a new beginning, too. Like Jacob and his sons moving away from a land of famine, dryness, and death, Jesus invites us to move to a place of abundance, fruitfulness, and life in Him. The catechism refers to it as being "resurrected to a new life" (Lord's Day 17, Q&A 45). Jesus is the greatest Deliverer of all, overcoming death, giving us the gift of life, and guaranteeing our glorious resurrection.

Like Joseph in the arms of his brothers and then his father, come into the loving embrace of our heavenly Father. In His risen Son, we'll truly live.

This is the Good News, the true gift of Easter for you and for me.

²² Swindoll, 131-132.