

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 45

It is a pity that this chapter and the foregoing should be parted, and read asunder. There we had Judah's intercession for Benjamin, with which, we may suppose, the rest of his brethren signified their concurrence; Joseph let him go on without interruption, heard all he had to say, and then answered it all in one word,

"I am Joseph."

Now he found his brethren humbled for their sins, mindful of himself (for Judah had mentioned him twice in his speech), respectful to their father, and very tender of their brother Benjamin; now they were ripe for the comfort he designed them, by making himself known to them, the story of which we have in this chapter. It was to Joseph's brethren as clear shining after rain, nay, it was to them as life from the dead. Here is,

I. Joseph's discovery of himself to his brethren, and his discourse with them upon that occasion, [#Ge 45:1-15](#).

II. The orders Pharaoh, hereupon, gave to fetch Jacob and his family down to Egypt, and Joseph's despatch of his brethren, accordingly, back to his father with those orders, [#Ge 45:16-24](#).

III. The joyful tidings of this brought to Jacob, [#Ge 45:25-28](#).

[#Ge 45:1-15](#)

Judah and his brethren were waiting for an answer, and could not but be amazed to discover, instead of the gravity of a judge, the natural affection of a father or brother.

I. Joseph ordered all his attendants to withdraw, [#Ge 45:1](#). The private conversations of friends are the most free. When Joseph would put on love he puts off state, and it was not fit his servants should be witnesses of this. Thus Christ graciously manifests himself and his loving-kindness to his people, out of the sight and hearing of the world.

II. Tears were the preface or introduction to his discourse, [#Ge 45:2](#). He had dammed up this stream a great while, and with much ado: but now it swelled so high that he could no longer contain, but *he wept aloud*, so that those whom he had forbidden to see him could not but hear him. These were tears of tenderness and strong affection, and with these he threw off that austerity with which he had hitherto carried himself towards his brethren; for he could bear it no longer. This represents the divine compassion towards returning penitents, as much as that of the father of the prodigal, [#Lu 15:20](#); [Ho 14:8,9](#).

III. He very abruptly (as one uneasy till it was out) tells them who he was: *I am Joseph*. They knew him only by his Egyptian name, *Zaphnath-paaneah*, his

Hebrew name being lost and forgotten in Egypt; but now he teaches them to call him by that: *I am Joseph*; nay, that they might not suspect it was another of the same name, he explains himself (#Ge 45:4): *I am Joseph, your brother*. This would both humble them yet more for their sin in selling him, and would encourage them to hope for kind treatment. Thus when Christ would convince Paul he said, *I am Jesus*; and when he would comfort his disciples he said, *It is I, be not afraid*. This word, at first, startled Joseph's brethren; they started back through fear, or at least stood still astonished; but Joseph called kindly and familiarly to them: *Come near, I pray you*. Thus when Christ manifests himself to his people he encourages them to draw near to him with a true heart. Perhaps, being about to speak of their selling him, he would not speak aloud, lest the Egyptians should overhear, and it should make the Hebrews to be yet more an abomination to them; therefore he would have them come near, that he might whisper with them, which, now that the tide of his passion was a little over, he was able to do, whereas at first he could not but cry out.

IV. He endeavours to assuage their grief for the injuries they had done him, by showing them that whatever they designed God meant it for good, and had brought much good out of it (#Ge 45:5): *Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves*. Sinners must grieve, and be angry with themselves, for their sins; yea, though God by his power brings good out of them, for no thanks are due to the sinner for this: but true penitents should be greatly affected when they see God thus bringing good out of evil, *meat out of the eater*. Though we must not with this consideration extenuate our own sins and so take off the edge of our repentance, yet it may be well thus to extenuate the sins of others and so take off the edge of our angry resentments. Thus Joseph does here; his brethren needed not to fear that he would avenge upon them an injury which God's providence had made to turn so much to his advantage and that of his family. Now he tells them how long the famine was likely to last--*five years*; yet (#Ge 45:6) what a capacity he was in of being kind to his relations and friends, which is the greatest satisfaction that wealth and power can give to a good man, #Ge 45:8. See what a favourable colour he puts upon the injury they had done him: *God sent me before you*, #Ge 45:5,7. Note,

1. God's Israel is the particular care of God's providence. Joseph reckoned that his advancement was not so much designed to save a whole kingdom of Egyptians as to preserve a small family of Israelites: *for the Lord's portion is his people*; whatever becomes of theirs, they shall be secured.
2. Providence looks a great way forward, and has a long reach. Even long before the years of plenty, Providence was preparing for the supply of Jacob's house in the years of famine. The psalmist praises God for this (#Ps 105:17): *He sent a man before them, even Joseph*. God sees his work from the beginning to the end, but we do not, #Ec 3:11. How admirable are the projects of providence! How remote its tendencies! What wheels are there within wheels, and yet all directed by the eyes in the wheels, and the spirit of the living creature! Let us therefore judge nothing before the time.
3. God often works by contraries. The envy and contention of brethren threaten

the ruin of families, yet, in this instance, they prove the occasion of preserving Jacob's family. Joseph could never have been *the shepherd and stone of Israel* if his brethren had not shot at him, and hated him; even those that had wickedly sold Joseph into Egypt yet themselves reaped the benefit of the good God brought out of it; as those that put Christ to death were many of them saved by his death.

4. God must have all the glory of the seasonable preservations of his people, by what way soever they are effected. *It was not you that sent me hither, but God, #Ge 45:8.* As, on the one hand, they must not fret at it, because it ended so well, so on the other hand they must not be proud of it, because it was God's doing, and not theirs. They designed, by selling him into Egypt, to defeat his dreams, but God thereby designed to accomplish them. *#Isa 10:7, Howbeit he meaneth not so.*

V. He promises to take care of his father and all the family during the rest of the years of famine.

1. He desires that his father may speedily be made glad with the tidings of his life and dignity. His brethren must hasten to Canaan, and must inform Jacob that his son Joseph was *lord of all Egypt*; (*#Ge 45:9*): they must tell him of all his glory there, *#Ge 45:13*. He knew it would be a refreshing oil to his hoary head and a sovereign cordial to his spirits. If any thing would make him young again, this would. He desires them to give themselves, and take with them to their father, all possible satisfaction of the truth of these surprising tidings: *Your eyes see that it is my mouth, #Ge 45:12*. If they would recollect themselves, they might remember something of his features, speech, &c., and be satisfied.
2. He is very earnest that his father and all his family should come to him to Egypt: *Come down unto me, tarry not, #Ge 45:9*. He allots his dwelling in Goshen, that part of Egypt which lay towards Canaan, that they might be mindful of the country from which they were to come out, *#Ge 45:10*. He promises to provide for him: *I will nourish thee, #Ge 45:11*. Note, It is the duty of children, if the necessity of their parents do at any time require it, to support and supply them to the utmost of their ability; and Corban will never excuse them, *#Mr 7:11*. This is showing piety at home, *#1Ti 5:4*. Our Lord Jesus being, like Joseph, exalted to the highest honours and powers of the upper world, it is his will that all that are his should be with him where he is, *#Joh 17:24*. This is his commandment, that we be with him now in faith and hope, and a heavenly conversation; and this is his promise, that we shall be for ever with him.

VI. Endearments were interchanged between him and his brethren. He began with the youngest, his own brother Benjamin, who was but about a year old when Joseph was separated from his brethren; they wept on each other's neck (*#Ge 45:14*), perhaps to think of their mother Rachel, who died in travail of Benjamin. Rachel, in her husband, Jacob, had been lately weeping for her children, because, in his apprehension, they were not--Joseph gone, and Benjamin going; and now

they were weeping for her, because she was not. After he had embraced Benjamin, he, in like manner, caressed them all (#Ge 45:15); and then *his brethren talked with him* freely and familiarly of all the affairs of their father's house. After the tokens of true reconciliation follow the instances of a sweet communion.

Ver. 16.

Here is,

1. The kindness of Pharaoh to Joseph, and to his relations for his sake: he bade his brethren welcome (#Ge 45:16), though it was a time of scarcity, and they were likely to be a charge to him. Nay, because it pleased Pharaoh, it pleased his servants too, at least they pretended to be pleased because Pharaoh was. He engaged Joseph to send for his father down to Egypt, and promised to furnish them with all conveniences both for his removal thither and his settlement there. If the good of all the land of Egypt (as it was not better stocked than any other land, thanks to Joseph, under God) would suffice him, he was welcome to it all, it was all his own, even *the fat of the land* (#Ge 45:18), so that they need not *regard their stuff*, #Ge 45:20. What they had in Canaan he reckoned but stuff, in comparison with what he had for them in Egypt; and therefore if they should be constrained to leave some of that behind them, let them not be discontented; Egypt would afford them enough to make up the losses of their removal. Thus those for whom Christ intends shares in his heavenly glory ought not to regard the stuff of this world: The best of its enjoyments are but stuff, but lumber; we cannot make sure of it while we are here, much less can we carry it away with us; let us not therefore be solicitous about it, nor set our eyes or hearts upon it. There are better things reserved for us in that blessed land whither our Joseph has gone to prepare a place.

II. The kindness of Joseph to his father and brethren. Pharaoh was respectful to Joseph, in gratitude, because he had been an instrument of much good to him and his kingdom, not only preserving it from the common calamity, but helping to make it considerable among the nations; for all their neighbours would say,

"Surely the Egyptians are a wise and an understanding people, that are so well stocked in a time of scarcity."

For this reason Pharaoh never thought any thing too much that he could do for Joseph. Note, There is a gratitude owing even to inferiors; and when any have shown us kindness we should study to requite it, not only to them, but to their relations. And Joseph likewise was respectful to his father and brethren in duty, because they were his near relations, though his brethren had been his enemies, and his father long a stranger.

1. He furnished them for necessity, #Ge 45:21. He gave them wagons and provisions for the way, both going and coming; for we never find that Jacob was very rich, and, at this time, when the famine prevailed, we may suppose

he was rather poor.

2. He furnished them for ornament and delight. To his brethren he gave two suits a piece of good clothes, to Benjamin five suits, and money besides in his pocket, **#Ge 45:22**. To his father he sent a very handsome present of the varieties of Egypt, **#Ge 45:23**. Note: Those that are wealthy should be generous, and devise liberal things; what is an abundance good for, but to do good with it?
3. He dismissed them with a seasonable caution: *See that you fall not out by the way*, **#Ge 45:24**. He knew they were but too apt to be quarrelsome; and what had lately passed, which revived the remembrance of what they had done formerly against their brother, might give them occasion to quarrel. Joseph had observed them to contend about it, **#Ge 42:22**. To one they would say,

"It was you that first upbraided him with his dreams;" to another, "It was you that stripped him of his fine coat;" to another, "It was you that threw him into the pit," &c.

Now Joseph, having forgiven them all, lays this obligation upon them, not to upbraid one another. This charge our Lord Jesus has given to us, *that we love one another*, that we live in peace, that whatever occurs, or whatever former occurrences are remembered, we fall not out. For,

(1.) We are brethren, we have all one Father.

(2.) We are his brethren, and we shame our relation to him *who is our peace*, if we fall out.

(3.) We are guilty, *verily guilty*, and, instead of quarrelling with one another, have a great deal of reason to fall out with ourselves.

(4.) We are, or hope to be, forgiven of God whom we have all offended, and therefore should be ready to forgive one another.

(5.) We are *by the way*, a way that lies through the land of Egypt, where we have many eyes upon us, that seek occasion and advantage against us, a way that leads to Canaan, where we hope to be for ever in perfect peace.

Ver. 25.

We have here the good news brought to Jacob.

1. The relation of it, at first, sunk his spirits. When, without any preamble, his sons came in, crying, *Joseph is yet alive*, each striving which should first proclaim it, perhaps he thought they bantered him, and the affront grieved him; or the very mention of Joseph's name revived his sorrow, so that his

heart fainted, **#Ge 45:26**. It was a good while before he came to himself. He was in such care and fear about the rest of them that at this time it would have been joy enough to him to hear that Simeon was released, and that Benjamin had come safely home (for he had been ready to despair concerning both these); but to hear that *Joseph is alive* is too good news to be true; he faints, for he believes it not. Note, We faint, because we do not believe; David himself had fainted if he had not believed, **#Ps 27:13**.

2. The confirmation of it, by degrees, revived his spirit. Jacob had easily believed his sons formerly when they told him, *Joseph is dead*; but he can hardly believe them now that they tell him, *Joseph is alive*. Weak and tender spirits are influenced more by fear than hope, and are more apt to receive impressions that are discouraging than those that are encouraging. But at length Jacob is convinced of the truth of the story, especially when he sees the wagons which were sent to carry him (for seeing is believing), then his *spirit revived*. Death is as the wagons which are sent to fetch us to Christ: the very sight of it approaching should revive us. Now Jacob is called Israel (**#Ge 45:28**), for he begins to recover his wonted vigour.

(1.) It pleases him to think that Joseph is alive. He says nothing of Joseph's glory, of which they told him; it was enough to him that Joseph was alive. Note, Those that would be content with less degrees of comfort are best prepared for greater.

(2.) It pleases him to think of going to see him. Though he was old, and the journey long, yet he would go to see Joseph, because Joseph's business would not permit him to come to see him. Observe, He says,

"I will go and see him," not, "I will go and live with him;" Jacob was old, and did not expect to live long; "But I will go and see him *before I die*, and then let me depart in peace; let my eyes be refreshed with this sight before they are closed, and then it is *enough*, I need no more to make me happy in this world."

Note, It is good for us all to make death familiar to us, and to speak of it as near, that we may think how little we have to do before we die, that we may do it with all our might, and may enjoy our comforts as those that must quickly die, and leave them.