

If anybody had reason to seek revenge, it was Joseph. Left for dead by his brothers just because Joseph was the favorite of his father Jacob. Joseph was sold into slavery, he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of inappropriate conduct and taken to prison for years. If anyone had a reason to seek revenge on his brothers, it was Joseph.

In the suffering that Joseph endured, it would have been easy to give up hope. How often do we give up hope even when just one thing doesn't go our way? The Lord had promised to Joseph in a vision that his brothers and parents would bow down to him. How could a promise like that be fulfilled when he was sold into slavery or rotting in a jail cell?

Nonetheless, Joseph had the faith to trust the promises of God even despite all outward appearances. When he was sold into slavery to Potiphar, **"The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master."** Joseph quickly became in charge of all that Potiphar had.

After Joseph was thrown into prison, we read, **"But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison."** Before long, Joseph is out of prison, and elevated even higher, assisting as the right-hand man of Pharaoh, helping mitigate against a famine that the Lord told Pharaoh about in a dream.

It had been twenty-two years since Joseph's brothers had betrayed him. Imagine their guilt that simmered within them those twenty-two years. When the famine came upon the land, Joseph's brothers travel down to Egypt. Joseph recognizes them, but they don't recognize him. When Joseph imprisons them, **"Then they said to one another, 'In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.'"** Their guilty conscience still bothers them after all these years.

In our Old Testament text when Joseph reveals himself they are dismayed at his presence. Yet Joseph comforts them saying, **"And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."** Joseph knows that their consciences are laden with guilt, and he is at pains to comfort them and offer them forgiveness. It is only through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of Joseph that he was able to muster this forgiveness. It was not anything that Joseph could have manufactured himself.

The sufferings of this life hide away God's face from us, but the forgiveness we experience shows us the face of God and proclaim the Lord's love for me and for you. It is in forgiveness that we see how our God is able to work good out of evil. Joseph would later say to the brothers, **"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be**

kept alive, as they are today.” So we learn: FAITH SEES THROUGH GOD’S FROWNING COUNTENANCE TO SEE THE SMILE OF FORGIVENESS.

If anybody had reason to seek revenge, it was Jesus. Betrayed by one of his disciples, abandoned by all but one of them, most of us wouldn’t have gotten mad, but would have gotten even.

The sufferings Jesus endured in the last day of his life was more than any of us could bear. Sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane praying that the cup would pass from Him, being whipped, wearing a crown of thorns, carrying a cross up the hill, and having nails driven into his hands and feet. This suffering would be enough to make Him think the Father had abandoned Him. In fact, some of his last words were: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

It was promised that He would be the messiah. How could He be the promised savior hanging and dying on a tree? Had the Father lied? Was He mistaken?

Even in this darkest hour, Jesus had faith in God’s promises even despite all outward appearances. From the cross He pleaded to God saying, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** He arranged for the care of his mother Mary at the hands of John the disciple. Even the cry of abandonment was likely a call back to Psalm 22 which culminates in saying, **“I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:”** He knew he would live to tell the tale after suffering and dying on the cross.

“On the evening of [the day of Jesus’ resurrection], the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them...” The disciples are hiding and afraid after their leader dies. How would you react if you saw the leader you abandoned before your very eyes? I’m sure the disciples were much like Joseph’s brothers: **“But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.”**

Of course, Jesus doesn’t leave the disciples in suspense. Jesus came and stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you.”** Throughout the forty days of Jesus’ presence among the disciples, He comforted them and taught them as He prepared to ascend to heaven. He was working to cleanse the guilty consciences of the disciples and apply the forgiveness He won at Calvary to them.

Jesus forgave the disciples, and in receiving forgiveness, they saw the face of God which suffering and hardship had previously hid. In Jesus’ actions and ministry, He lived out the lifestyle He preached in Luke 6. He loved His enemies and did good to those who hated Him. He was merciful, even as His Heavenly Father was merciful. He could have smote His enemies, but He forgave them, even showing mercy on His disciples.

And He breathed on His disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit alone that we can muster up the strength to forgive others.

He makes the Church into a place where battered sinners like us can be restored and strengthened.

Luther compares the Church to the Inn to which the Good Samaritan takes the injured Jew. He writes, “For the churches are nothing else than lodging places of this kind in which the people who feel sin, death, and the terrors and vexations of an afflicted and wounded conscience are healed” (AE 8:54). The Church is a place where we can receive that forgiveness of sins and share it with others. It is a place where we have a community to face the trials and sufferings of this life and see God working out good even from evil. FAITH SEES THROUGH GOD’S FROWNING COUNTENANCE TO SEE THE SMILE OF FORGIVENESS.

I want to close our sermon with a quote from *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. She was a Dutch Christian who was sent to Ravensbruck, a concentration camp for women, along with her sister Betsy who died in the camp. Her suffering serves as a modern-day example of forgiveness like we see in the Joseph the patriarch.

“It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie’s pain-blانched face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. “How grateful I am for your message, *Fraulein*.” He said. “To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!”

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached to so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our own forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

FAITH SEES THROUGH GOD’S FROWNING COUNTENANCE TO SEE THE SMILE OF FORGIVENESS. No matter your trial or suffering, the Lord has given you abundant forgiveness that you can shower upon those around you.