

SAINT, YOUR WAGON

GENESIS 45:16-28 JANUARY 18, 2023

Scale models can be helpful in preparing people for the mission ahead. In *Apollo 13*, we watch the crew train on docking with the lunar module again and again. They needed to be ready for trouble.

In the 1970's, the Swiss army decided they wanted to build tank simulators in order to train new drivers. After all, *real* tanks are really expensive to build, fuel, and maintain. But, it was the 70's, so you couldn't just generate a virtual world in *Unreal Engine* and let people game their way through. Instead, they built an extensive, miniature landscape that would be connected via camera to real-world controls in a model that thousands of tankers trained on, without having to burn countless gallons of fuel or accidentally crunching over real buildings.¹

As the Joseph saga comes to a crescendo, we are able to look at, essentially, a scale model of our own spiritual lives. We have been called before a throne, offered forgiveness, commanded to do certain things and stay in close relationship with this all-powerful Sovereign, and to spread the word of His invitation to others. It's not always easy. God's providential work in our lives requires that we walk by faith, that we live in humility, and, sometimes, that we face the consequences of our mistakes. But, no matter the difficulties or our missteps, the destination is worth the pilgrimage.

Let's take a look at this scale model of God's generosity and guidance, beginning in verse 16.

Genesis 45:16 - ¹⁶When the news reached Pharaoh's palace, "Joseph's brothers have come," Pharaoh and his servants were pleased.

In Mark 7, Jesus is traveling through the Gentile towns of Tyre and Sidon. After healing a man who was deaf and mute the people declared, "He does everything well."² Joseph had *that* kind of effect on the Egyptians. Through Joseph, God saved their nation. People at every level had affectionate appreciation for him. Joseph wasn't only on the good side of the elites while ignoring the servant class. They *all* were pleased to hear that his brothers had come to town. He lived as a blessing.

Kenneth Mathews points out that the Egyptians used Joseph's *Hebrew* name, not the Egyptian name he had been given.³ In this regard, Joseph was like Daniel in that he remained set apart in his Godly culture, but that didn't mean he couldn't have successful relationships with unbelievers.

Christ does not conform to pagan culture - He always remains apart and calls us to be set-apart and Godly. But separation isn't the same as *segregation*. We can be both holy and winsome to a dying world. In fact, we *must* be both of those things. Daniel and Joseph are great examples of that tension. They offered help to the pagans around them, while remaining holy and unconformed.

¹ Tom Scott *This 1970s tank simulator drives through a tiny world* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcQifPHcMLE>

² Mark 7:37

³ Kenneth A. Mathews *Genesis 11:27-50:26 The New American Commentary Volume 1B*

Genesis 45:17-18 - ¹⁷Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and go on back to the land of Canaan. ¹⁸Get your father and your families, and come back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you can eat from the richness of the land.'

The king spoke through Joseph. Bruce Waltke notes the brothers needed someone to interpret the words of the king *and* act as an intermediary for them.⁴ This is what Christ does. He is the Word Who became flesh, dwelt among us, became our Substitute, and now makes intercession for us.

Joseph didn't have to *convince* Pharaoh to welcome his brothers. There's no scene where he and Pharaoh had a meeting to talk it over, yet Pharaoh gives the invitation to come and be blessed just as Joseph did in the last passage.⁵

God the Father is not a cosmic grump, ready to smash the petulant humans who annoy Him. He and the Son and the Spirit are One. *Together* they extend love, mercy, generosity, and welcome to anyone who is willing to receive them. There's a lovely phrase there that speaks to us of the Father's heart: Pharaoh said, "Return to *me*." That's the Lord's desire. Yes, He has plans for our lives but *more* importantly, He desires communion between us and Him.

Just as all of this rescue happened through Joseph, so too spiritual rescue happens *only* through Christ. There is no other "brother" that the 11 could turn to. There was no other deliverer who could've saved Egypt from the famine. There was only one, provided by God.

Pharaoh's offer continued:

Genesis 45:19-20 - ¹⁹You are also commanded to tell them, 'Do this: Take wagons from the land of Egypt for your dependents and your wives and bring your father here. ²⁰Do not be concerned about your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.' "

At the start of this story, the brothers simply hoped to get a few bags of grain so they wouldn't starve to death. Now what's the offer? *Way* more than a sack of oats. We're talking about *all kinds* of provision and protection and security and reconciliation and enjoyment and honor and freedom. The *best* Egypt had to offer, not just for these men but for *all* their families.

Pharaoh didn't bother taking a head count. He didn't say, "I've got tickets for 25 people." He said, "Bring them all. It doesn't matter how many. I'm writing you a blank check."

But, notice: behind this generous invitation there was *insistence*. Pharaoh *commanded* them to do this, just as the Lord commands us to be saved. "Turn and live."⁶ They would only get the blessing if they obeyed. This would be a very plain teaching that Moses would give the Israelites in

⁴ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Ezekiel 18:32

Deuteronomy: If you want the blessings God offers, you must follow His commands. Of course, there was *no* reason not to obey. But it was still a choice they would have to make.

Pharaoh made it possible for all of them to get to Egypt. The wagons meant the very young and the very old, the sick and the weak could make the trip.⁷ No one needed to miss out.

At the same time, Pharaoh encouraged them to travel light.⁸ He said, "Don't be concerned about your belongings." He didn't want them to get back home, look at all the stuff in their tents (much of it they had shamefully stolen from Shechem) and decide it was too much trouble to pack it all up.⁹ Another way of translating the phrase is, "Regret not your belongings."¹⁰ Don't regret what you're leaving behind. What the king was offering *far* outmatched whatever they had.¹¹

In our own lives, God has told us not to be wrapped up in our earthly belongings. We'll have to choose. We can't serve both God and material wealth. But the Lord reveals that He has much, much better planned for us. Don't trade the best of heaven for the odds and ends of Hanford.

Genesis 45:21 - ²¹The sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh had commanded, and he gave them provisions for the journey.

Pharaoh and Joseph are so detail oriented. They've thought about the trip there and back again. They considered the old and the weak and the little ones. They have everything picked out, set aside, made ready for this family to come and enjoy rest in the midst of the world's famine.

And while these men and their families would experience *individual* salvation, they were also living and moving as a unit. The United Sons Of Israel. They would take the walk together, with a common purpose, sharing the joys and the responsibilities of the journey. There would be a lot of unknowns on the road. Wheels might fall off, donkeys might go lame, storms might brew on the horizon, but they would work together to make progress toward their new home.

Genesis 45:22 - ²²He gave each of the brothers changes of clothes, but he gave Benjamin three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothes.

The brothers had stolen and ruined Joseph's beautiful coat. Then they beat him, threw him in a pit, and sold him into slavery. Now, Joseph gives them each new robes of their own. Remember: Joseph had been given a royal robe. Now he gives those sort of robes to his brothers.¹²

Not only is this a beautiful depiction of God's generous grace - how Jesus, Who was stripped naked, beaten, and crucified, now raised in glory offers us His robe of righteousness, we also can

⁷ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

⁸ Mathews

⁹ Gordon Wenham *Genesis 16-50 Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2*

¹⁰ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

¹¹ *Faithlife Study Bible Notes*

¹² John Goldingay *Genesis*

see the tender heart of God. You see, when the silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack, what did all the brothers do? They tore their clothes. There they are, guilty and broken and disheveled. Joseph says, "Let's take off these ruined robes and instead put on these royal robes." Scholars tell us that they were probably the kind of clothes used for festive occasions.¹³ Joseph is not only providing for their need, he's telling them, "The time for mourning is over.¹⁴ Your guilt is gone."

In Zechariah 3, the Angel of the Lord spoke and said, "Take off his filthy clothes! I have removed your iniquity from you and I will clothe you with *festive* robes."

What about the extras given to Benjamin? Some commentators say Joseph is showing the kind of favoritism that got Jacob into trouble. Maybe. On the other hand, Benjamin had the largest family of all the brothers. He had 10 sons. The closest behind him had 7. Most of the others had 4 or 5.

Benjamin's gift reveals something about the brothers and something about the Lord. The brothers, who had been so jealous before, aren't jealous anymore.¹⁵ It doesn't bother them at all. And jealousy shouldn't bother us, either. The truth is, God is *not* always equal in His distribution of grace when it comes to *physical* circumstances. That's just the truth. About 4% of children don't make it to their 5th birthday.¹⁶ 1 out of every 10 people on planet earth will go to bed hungry tonight.¹⁷

God's spiritual grace and eternal promises are equal. But the physical "gifts" are not. Is that fair? Well, what would be *fair*? What would've been fair for the 10 brothers of Joseph? *Fair* would've had them impaled on a pole for their evil deeds. So, they were all way over into the positive side of the equation. Five changes of clothes instead of two changes of clothes really wasn't something to get upset about, when what you *deserved* was execution.

God has given us access to heaven. He has given us spiritual gifts. He gives us joy and peace. He brings us into His family. He rewards us for the things He accomplishes in our lives. We have no reason to complain that someone else has it physically better than us, especially when we have it far physically better than almost all the people who have ever lived in any place or generation.

Does that mean we shouldn't worry about feeding the hungry? Of course not. That's not what I'm saying. But when we see what *looks* like lopsided grace in physical circumstances, we can continue to trust God, be thankful, and then use what we have to be generous like He is.

Genesis 45:23 - ²³ He sent his father the following: ten donkeys carrying the best products of Egypt and ten female donkeys carrying grain, food, and provisions for his father on the journey.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Mathews

¹⁵ Waltke

¹⁶ <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-survival/under-five-mortality/>

¹⁷ <https://www.worldvision.org/hunger-news-stories/world-hunger-facts>

They brought the best of their land only to have even more of the best given back to them. This speaks to us of God's generosity toward us. You cannot out-give God.

Luke 6:38 - ³⁸Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

God does not *need* you to give to Him or His work. *YOU* need you to give to Him and His work.

When the brothers came, they brought 10 donkeys. Now they're coming back with 20 more. Plus wagons. Plus supplies for a round trip. Plus a land grant. Plus silver. Plus, plus, plus!

Genesis 45:24 - ²⁴So Joseph sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving, he said to them, "Don't argue on the way."

Scholars debate about what Joseph meant, because the root word is only used this one time.¹⁸ It can have a variety of meanings, which aren't mutually exclusive. One is what we read: Don't argue or quarrel on the way.¹⁹ Don't get into a fight over who should've done what. All has been made new. Or, it can mean, "Don't be afraid or anxious as you go."²⁰ Yes, storms and robbers and potholes and complications still exist, but don't focus on those things and worry about them. It might mean, "Don't have second thoughts about following through on this plan."²¹ Stay the course and see it through to the end. It can mean, "Stay calm and peaceful, don't worry that Joseph might turn against you."²² We'll see they *did* worry about that after Jacob died. One linguist says that the word for 'argue' is the antonym for the word 'peace.'²³ Don't be *not* at peace.

All of these angles speak to us of commands and encouragements we're given as children of God living the Christian life. Don't be afraid. Don't be quarrelsome. Don't let the cares of the world shake you out of peace or out of pace. Follow through and receive what God wants to give.

Genesis 45:25 - ²⁵So they went up from Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan.

After more than 20 years, the brothers would finally have to admit what they did to Joseph. And, then they would have to bring Pharaoh's offer to Jacob. Why would he believe them when they had spent so many years lying?

Their stakes of their return make us wonder why Joseph didn't go with his brothers. When Jacob dies and it's time to bury him, Joseph goes to Canaan. Not only Joseph, but all the elders of Egypt

¹⁸ Mathews

¹⁹ Waltke

²⁰ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

²¹ Wenham

²² Derek Kidner *Genesis*, Andrew Steinmann *Genesis*

²³ Alter

go! But not here when it was way more important. Why? Well, the focus is on Jacob now. He, *too*, must make the choice to walk by faith.

Genesis 45:26 - ²⁶They said, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt!" Jacob was stunned, for he did not believe them.

You see, it's all about belief. Jacob hears the message and, at first, he *did not believe*. We're told he was "stunned." Your version may say, his "heart stood still." Linguists tell us that these modern versions blunt the force of the original.²⁴ Jacob nearly died of shock on the spot.²⁵

Genesis 45:27 - ²⁷But when they told Jacob all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

What brought revival? It was when these changed men humbly and honestly delivered the words of the rescuer and the invitation of king and showed a demonstration of the reality of His power and grace. "Here's what the man said. Here are the wagons. Yes, we were lying, thieving killers, but now we are set free by the truth, and we're here to say the king has invited us all to be with him."

The wagons were a big deal. You couldn't just get wagons. They were an innovative and rare vehicle in Egypt.²⁶ They would be pulled by a team of oxen. One ox cost as much as four month's salary. They were the luxury vehicles only the elite could afford.

When the brothers shared the message and pointed and said, "Look at what the king has provided to us," he saw that it was real and it brought revival to Jacob's heart.

Genesis 45:28 - ²⁸Then Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go to see him before I die."

Jacob didn't see Joseph yet, but he trusted in the news and in the testimony of his other sons and he said, "I'm convinced. Let's go." This is a *big* move. This isn't a small trip. He was going to spend the rest of his life going to Egypt and living there with the rescuer.

Did you notice the little change there? It says, "Then *Israel* said." Gordon Wenham points out that Jacob turns into Israel when his spiritual strength returns - when *Jacob* walks in faith, he is *Israel*.

What a beautiful model of the Christian life. The King and the Prince have invited us to come. They have provided all we need for the journey. They trust us to share the invitation with others. They have enriched our lives beyond what we could ask or imagine or deserve. Now we have the chance to take the trip, to walk by faith, trusting our Lord and being used by Him to demonstrate the

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Robert Davidson *Genesis 12-50*

²⁶ Heidi Köpp-Junk *Wagons And Carts And Their Significance In Ancient Egypt*

power and grace and provision that He makes available to *anyone* who will believe. And some will believe when they look at our changed lives, when they see in us a true demonstration of the reality of God's grace and generous mercy. When they see the wagons of heaven that we've brought with us to share with them, knowing there is a hope and a home and future waiting for us.