

## Introduction

That video is really something. I really don't know how to follow that. Although I think that Guardian T shirt was mine that he was wearing, and I think I might want that back, Jeremy... wherever you are. It's great to be with you this morning. I want to thank you for having me here. Most of you probably have no idea who I am, but I love being here. This is, in some sense, a fulfillment for me or a coming home. It was 25 years ago... I met my wife here and married my wife here. It was my very first ministry position. I graduated from Cy-Creek High School in 1994 and married my wife a couple of years after that. My very first ministry position was the summer I graduated high school. It was with Zion Chinese Baptist Church which met right over here. Some of you may remember Zion Chinese Baptist Church that met over in the other building. There I was the youth director. I then served on youth ministry staff here at Houston Northwest before my brother began his illustrious career, which I think culminates with that video... (Laughter) ...I think it's all downhill from here. It's sweet to be with you. Just a few months ago, I was back in Houston and I was preaching at the church where 20 years ago I was licensed for Gospel ministry, so this is really kind of a full circle for me, in a way that words can't even really express.

If you have a Bible with you, I'd ask you to turn to Genesis chapter 50. We are wrapping up your series "It's Always Something" ...looking at the life of Joseph... snapshots from Joseph's life... some low-lights and some highlights. We have sort of a collision of those two things here in what really serves as kind of the coda or the conclusion of Joseph's life and ministry. Probably, like you, I have been somewhat troubled by the events over the last couple of weeks... really the events over the last year or two years. Like you, if you are someone who hopes and trusts in Jesus Christ, there's a lot about looking forward that I engage in. I want to look forward to what the Lord is doing... Jesus Christ is making all things new. We have to believe that, even though everything looks so broken and is so broken, we live in a fallen, sinful world. One of the things I also do, not just to look forward to heaven and the restoration that God is bringing through Jesus Christ, but also to look back and to learn from history.

One thing that I did this week was to look back at another time in our nation's history. Some of you probably remember well the events or at least the social climate of the year 1963 in the United States; 1963 was a very tense year for our country. The nation was still very anxious from the Cuban Missile Crisis which was in 1962, just a few months before the start of 1963. We had, at the end of 1963, of course, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The Vietnam War was in the height of that conflict there. There was a lot of tension at home about all of these things, including the civil rights movement. There was sort of a boiling point... a boiling over of racial tension in our nation during this year. Some of you probably remember the news coverage on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1963, and the days following. On that day, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1963, one of the most heinous acts of racial terrorism in our nation's history was carried out as a few men... white Supremacists connected to the KKK... planted a bomb underneath the steps of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The ensuing explosion killed four and wounded 22 others. The four who were killed... their names were Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carol Denise McNair... were girls between the ages of 11 and 14 years old. At the time, they were underneath the church, underneath exactly where the bomb was placed on the steps. They were down in the church basement putting on their choir robes, getting ready for the worship service. Now the FBI knew, by 1965, just two years after the bombing... they knew, by 1965, who the killers were. But it took until 1977... 14 years after the crime... for any prosecutions to take place. At that point, it was just one of the perpetrators who was prosecuted and convicted. It took until... this blew my mind... it took until 2002, nearly 40 years after the murders, for the remaining killers to be sentenced. That's a long time to wait for justice... 40 years.

I remember several years ago watching a documentary... It came out in 1997 by the filmmaker Spike Lee; it was called "Four Little Girls," and it's about the Birmingham church bombing. I don't recommend a whole lot of Spike Lee's movies to you, but I would recommend "Four Little Girls." For the most part, Lee sort of stays out of the narrative; he doesn't really insert himself too much. He is letting the voices of the witnesses and the victims and the people who were there at that time do most of the speaking. He uses a lot of archival news footage. He is sort of capturing the old broadcasts, setting the scene... the cultural climate of that day. He is interviewing a lot of witnesses, and he is interviewing the families of victims. There is one point in the documentary "Four Little Girls," where it's as if a lightning bolt from outer space... from heaven, really... sort of crashes into the narrative that's being constructed there... or being revealed there... and changes the conversation, in a way. It happens when, as Lee is interviewing some of the families of the victims, and they say that they have forgiven the murderers. Mind you, this was in 1997 or a few years before that as the movie is being made... this is before justice has been complete. This is before the rest of the perpetrators have been convicted... these families saying that they forgive those who have murdered their sisters and nieces... and Lee, who again, for the most part, isn't really intruding personally into the film... You can see that he is struggling with this very idea. "How could you possibly do such a thing? How could you possibly pronounce forgiveness for such a heinous act?" You can, in a sense, feel him wrestling with this idea. He is so bewildered by this concept of forgiveness. And maybe you have wrestled with it yourself before. Maybe this morning you are wrestling with this.

In 2013, President Obama issued to the four girls who were killed that day, Congressional Medals of Honor. But there was a fifth girl who was in that basement putting on her choir robe, getting ready for church, along with these others, who survived the blast. Her name is Sarah Rudolph. She reiterated in 2013 that although she survived the blast, having caused her some catastrophic injuries... she lost one of her eyes in the blast, and she still to this day suffers from PTSD... Rudolph said this: "When I would go to bed at night, I would just cry all night long. Just, 'Why did they kill those girls?' But being bitter won't bring the girls back... won't bring my sight back. So I had to forgive because it was what God wanted me to do." Now I don't know how that lands on you... especially at this point in time, on this given morning... if that lands on you in a somewhat uneasy way. I had actually already planned to use this illustration and one that I'll share later this morning. It was before the events of this week. It was not in response to the things that were happening this week. I almost wrestled... I was struggling with "Do I still use it? Should I take them out? Will it seem insensitive if I use these things?" But the text was given to me several months ago. The topic of forgiveness was given to me several months ago. As I sorted through these things, I decided to busy myself with fact-checking. "Do I even have the facts right? Is my story right?" So I began to look up to check, "Is the date right? Do I have the names of the girls right?" and all this sort of thing. And I learned something that I didn't know previously about this event... September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1963. Maybe you knew this. I didn't know this. I learned this this week. I learned that the sermon that was scheduled to be preached that morning, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1963, at 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama... before a terrorist bombing took the lives of four little girls... the sermon that was scheduled was titled, "A Love That Forgives." Maybe that has hung over... cast a shadow... over those events. Maybe it ought to cast a shadow over the events of this week. The truth is, God knew what was going to happen. God knew what was going to happen this week, and that's what I want to talk with you about this morning, from the life of Joseph.

Let's begin reading in verse 15, Genesis chapter 50: We are just going to go to verse 21: The Bewildering Bigness of Forgiveness: *"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.'* So they sent a message to Joseph,

*saying, 'Your father gave this command before he died, "Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?' 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 do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."* This is the Word of the Lord.

Let's pray. I want to ask our heavenly Father to bless our time together and that the preaching of His Word would not return void. "Heavenly Father, we thank You, first of all, that You are not silent with us... that You don't leave us to our own devices, but that You have spoken. You have sent Your Son, the Living Word. You sent Your Spirit to inspire these Words. And we know that we can trust these Words... every word breathed out by Your Holy Spirit. We ask that our hearts would be open to them... that we would be submissive to Your will, willing to do whatever it takes to make the Gospel of Your Son Jesus Christ look big and be manifest in our lives and the lives of those around us. It's in Your Son's great Name that we pray. Amen."

### **1. Forgiveness Proves God's Grace.**

We should probably recap the story of Joseph. I know most of you are probably familiar with the Joseph story, but I don't want to assume that everyone is totally familiar. I know that you've seen some snapshots from the life of Joseph. You probably remember that in the early days Joseph's brothers were very jealous of him. We don't know if he was as cocky as the text implies or infers. He tells these dreams, "I'm lording over you in my dreams" and that sort of thing. They start to stew with bitterness about that. Jacob gave him that really nice coat; and who knows, maybe Joseph was walking around like, "Look at my coat; where's your coat? Your coat is not as good as mine." In any event, his brothers hate him, and they hate him so much they want to kill him. So you probably know that the rotten fruit of this jealousy and this bitter relationship results in his brothers selling him into slavery. Even that is sort of a consolation... selling him into slavery is sort of like, "Well, we want to kill him, but, you know, I guess we can be prevailed upon to show a little mercy, and we'll just sell him into slavery." So Joseph goes into slavery. But then you also know, probably, that what happens after that is this sort of great comeback. Some of the prosperity gospel-ists say, "Every setback is a setup for a comeback." Correct? Well, if you know anything about the life of Joseph, you also know the inverse is true and is often very true for those who are in the biblical narrative and true for us as well: "Every comeback is usually a setup for a setback." So, as Joseph rises to prominence, of course, then he is accused of sexual impropriety with an official's wife, and he is thrown into prison. He is languishing and living out his days there. Then he rises to prominence once again. You probably know that Joseph has been through this scene before. Genesis 50 is, in some ways, an echo of what happens in Genesis chapter 45 where Joseph puts his brothers through the wringer a little bit... he kind of tests them out a little bit to see if they have a spirit of repentance in their hearts. There's this great, beautiful emotional moment where they are finally reconciled. There's weeping... there's blubbering on his brother's shoulders and they are crying and they are hugging and they are kissing... Joseph brings the whole family to be close to him... including dear, old dad... dad, who is kind of on his last legs. He brings him in so they can all live out their days together in close proximity. But now something has happened. Now dad has passed... Jacob has died. The brothers are wondering if now all bets are off. "You know... he was only being nice to us for dad's sake... as long as dad was around. You noticed the way he looked at us when dad left the room. Now that dad's gone, he's really going to let us have it." That's what you and I would be thinking, I think. Is this forgiveness stuff for real? We're going to see the real Joseph now.

And they did see the real Joseph. They did see the real Joseph. They even try to butter him up a little bit. They played the "dear old dad" card. Beginning in verse 16... *"So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this command before he died, 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin...'"* Now we don't know for sure, from the text, that they're making this up, but it's probably pretty likely that they were making this up. It's probably pretty likely that Jacob had more respect for Joseph and his integrity than the brothers did. But, in any event, they are thinking, "Let's tell him that dad wanted him to forgive us, and that way, we'll make sure that he forgives because he'll feel guilty if he goes against dad." The reality is that they don't need to do this because Joseph can be trusted. They are so distrustful... they are so fearful.

I don't know about you but I see myself here in the place of these brothers. It's only self-righteousness that would have us read this story and immediately put ourselves in the shoes of Joseph. Joseph, who rises above it all... Joseph, the man of integrity... Joseph, who immediately forgives... Yeah, that's me: never tested, never tempted. Really? I think if we're honest, we are more like the brothers. I tend to think in these sort of last-straw kinds of ways.

I've had trouble, since as far back as I can remember, trusting that God would forgive me. For some strange reason, I grew up in the Church, believe in God, believe in the Gospel... I never doubted that God **could** forgive me, but I've certainly doubted that God **would** forgive me. Maybe that resonates with you. I sometimes see myself in the place of the woman... do you remember, as Jesus is passing through the crowd, and she reaches out to grab ahold of His garment... to be healed. She has desperation there. It's showing that she believes that Jesus **can** heal her, but she's not so sure that if she were to ask Him face-to-face that He **will** heal her. Now I think that's what is happening here. Joseph, who probably even knows that they're lying to him, still full of mercy, full of grace... responds. How does he respond? Look at the end of verse 17: *"Joseph wept..."* Why is he crying? I think Joseph is seeing beneath, even if he suspects that they're trying to play on his sympathies... that they're making up this thing about a message from dad... He's seeing that there's a desperation there. There is no malicious intent in that deception. What they're really trying to do is be right with their brother: "We want you to forgive us. We want to be right with you." There's a desperation there, and he sees that and it breaks his heart. He's broken open for his brothers. "Of course, you are my brothers... Of course, I love you... Of course, I forgive you." And he does. Again... It tells us the very first important thing that we need to know about forgiveness, which is this: "Forgiveness proves God's grace." Forgiveness proves God's grace.

Let's take a step back and define forgiveness. What is forgiveness? First of all, forgiveness is **not**... for instance, hear what I'm saying "it's not" as well as what I'm saying that "it is"... Forgiveness is **not** when we say that what somebody did was alright. Parents of small children... you're trying to work out... teach them... reconciliation and how to have restoration in their conflicts and in their tensions. You rightly teach, on one hand, when one child had hurt the other child, to come and apologize... to say, "I'm sorry for what I did." Don't let the hurt child... the offended child... say, "It's okay." ...or "It's alright." Have them say... if it's true, "I forgive you." I know what we mean when we say to someone, "It's okay" or "It's alright." But that's not what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is not excusing sin; it's pardoning sin.

What is grace? Let's define "grace." I like the churchy, Christianese definition of grace: "Grace is unearned or unmerited pardon... unmerited favor... unmerited blessing." In fact, if you put an ounce of works into the equation for the response of love, it ceases to be grace because grace presupposes a lack of earning. Paul, in the New Testament, in fact, says, "If you put any works into that equation, grace is no longer grace... it's not grace anymore. It's merit." This is why, I think, the Bible teaches that forgiveness is

unilateral. It is one-way. Forgiveness that proves God's grace... unmerited pardon... is forgiveness that is given... even... even when people don't deserve it. This is what makes the Gospel so bewildering... and makes forgiveness so confounding to the mind and heart that hasn't been open to the things of God... because anyone in the world can understand that you would forgive somebody who deserves it. That makes sense to the world. People cannot understand that you would forgive someone who doesn't deserve it. "You forgave them?" "Well, yeah." "Why did you do that? They're not even sorry; they're probably going to do it again." "Well, probably so; but God forgave me, and He knows that I'm probably going to do it again. So what kind of self-righteous person would I be if I didn't share that grace with somebody else?" You know, if we don't share that grace that God has given us... unmerited, one-way, unilateral forgiveness... if we don't share that with others, it's like saying we are holier than God. "Sure... God would forgive me, but I'm not going to forgive them."

You know, the Bible warns us about attitudes like that. There are a lot of arguments that can be made about forgiveness... who you can give forgiveness to... when you can give forgiveness... but I don't think that forgiveness is meant to be contingent on repentance. I don't think the Bible teaches that, actually. Jesus says, "Love your enemies." He doesn't say, "Love your enemies when they start acting right." He says, "Bless those who persecute you." He doesn't say, "Bless those who persecute you when they stop persecuting you." And even Jesus Himself, on the cross, looking down... as he is being murdered... to His murderers, says "what" to the Father? "Forgive them; they do not know what they're doing." Now, again, this is not saying that what somebody did was okay.

This is the difference between forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation. I can forgive an unrepentant person, but we can't be reconciled. We can't have a restored relationship because they're unrepentant. I can repent of something that I've done against someone. I can genuinely repent of it... even if they don't forgive me. But we can't be reconciled because they don't forgive me. But if you have one party who has repented and the other party that forgives, now you can be restored. So please hear again what I'm saying. This can be taken so many dangerous ways. This is not saying that forgiveness means you go right back into an abusive relationship because if they're not repentant, you can't restore that relationship. This doesn't mean that forgiveness means you can go right back into a circumstance where someone is unrepentantly hurting you. It just means that you are forgoing vengeance.

This is not the first time that Joseph has relied on this sort of dynamic relationship with God. Notice in verse 20 what he says. He is not whitewashing their sin. He names it; just like God names our sin... *"...you meant this for evil..."* He doesn't say, "Oh, it's okay; it's alright. It's no big deal. No worries." He is not excusing it. He is not glossing over it. He is not acting like it's no big deal, but he's forgiving it and that's a difference.

I love these words from the prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon: He says, "If a man has injured me, I must forgive him, and if I find him to be faulty, I must love him until he gets better. And if I cannot make him get better by ordinary love, I must love him more... even as Christ loved His Church and gave Himself for it, that He might present it to Himself, a glorious Church... not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. He did not love Her because She was without spot or wrinkle but to get the spots and wrinkles out of Her."

In the end, we forgive as an extension of the gracious forgiveness that God has given us. And we forgive because we know that God's grace is doing things in the world that are bigger and better and more eternal than our need for personal satisfaction. Forgiveness proves God's grace. As provocative as that is, it gets even stranger. Joseph says in verse 20, *"You meant this for evil..."* Again, he's not saying that what

they did was okay, but he follows that up to say this: "...God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they were today." Are you kidding me? What can this possibly mean?

## 2. Forgiveness Trusts God's Sovereignty.

I think it means this: Secondly, forgiveness trusts God's sovereignty. Forgiveness trusts God's sovereignty. Back in Genesis 45, the first time there is this sort of reunion and the possibility of forgiveness and restoration... when Joseph forgives his brothers, he says to them, "God sent me through this to save lives." He knows that God has a purpose for all his troubles, including the betrayal and hurt from his brothers. He says, "God sent me through this." Notice he doesn't say, "God allowed this to happen." Joseph has a right to be angry. He has a right to justice. He has another opportunity to give way to bitterness here, and he could be thinking, "You know, I didn't get much time with my dad because of you guys. ...And you know I love my dad, and my dad loved me, and you stole that from me... all these years I couldn't be in a relationship with my dad because of you! Then finally you bring him and he's old... and he's gone. I'll never have that time that you had. I never got to grow up enjoying my dad's company, being mentored by my dad... hanging out with my dad. You stole that from me. You knew how precious that was to me." Joseph has every right to do that, but instead, what does he say? Verse 19: "...am I in the place of God?" And he doesn't just mean, in the place of judgement. He does mean that... he does mean, "I cannot judge like God judges." But in this context, to say "God meant this for good," and going back again to Genesis 45 where he says to them, "God sent me here..." Joseph is saying this, essentially... "I am not in the place of control of my own life."

It's not like when you guys started doing this, God was like, "Ohhh... what do I do now? These guys are really acting up; I thought they were really good guys. I thought I could trust them with all this stuff." You know, God is not doing that. There are no emergency sessions in the trinitarian board room. "I thought they were going to do this; we need to get all hands on deck and figure out how we solve this guy's situation." You could dissect the text here and pull out the intricacies of divine sovereignty and human responsibility and predestination and free will. I don't think that's really the whole point of the text. But there is this sense here that Joseph is saying, "Through everything that I have been through, my ups and downs, being near death, being falsely accused... you guys trying to kill me. I'm seeing that God has a plan, and I am trusting He means something good by this."

You know, you and I think, very often, that we are gods... that we are in the place of God. I'll prove it to you.... I'll prove it to you, if you'll let me. Just give me a few minutes to prove it to you. If you have a morning commute, right... you're going to work and you have a commute of any distance... driving to work in the morning, everyone is driving too fast and too slow... correct? You're behind somebody and you say, "Pick up the pace... this is the Interstate... Why are you even on the road? They should take your license..." ...all that sort of thing. Or somebody zooms past... "That guy is going way too fast; he's going to kill somebody. I can't believe they'd let people drive that fast. Where are the police when you need them?" (Laughter) ...that sort of thing. Why is everyone driving too fast or too slow? ...Because you are the standard by which everyone should drive. (Laughter) Right? You say that to yourself, "If everyone just drove like me, everything would go so much more smoothly." (Laughter) Do you know what these people are saying ...the slow and fast people? They're saying the exact same thing. The guy who blows by you is going, "Agh... if that guy would just pick up the pace." (Laughter) Right? And when you blow by somebody else who's driving too slow because you're frustrated. That person is going, "Oh... I wish they would just slow down." How about this one: This, for me, is the primary arena of my sanctification... It's called the grocery store checkout line. Can I get an "Amen" on the grocery store checkout line? There's a sign...

there's a sign. It says, "Express Lane." (Laughter) I'm not sure there's any lie from the pit of hell bigger than "Express Lane." I smell sulphur as soon as I'm walking up to it. (Laughter) It clearly says, "Twelve items or less." It's right there. It's a big sign; you can't miss it: "Twelve items or less." I usually have three things... because I am a fulfiller of the Law... (Laughter) And the lady in front of me has approximately twenty thousand items in her basket... and I'm behind her going... "Grrr... (clearing my throat)" like that's going to make her look up... "Oh... I'm in the wrong lane; I want to get out." ...But it never happens. Ring up all of these items. Sometimes there are price checks... anything that can go wrong will go wrong. It gets to the end. They're all rung up and suddenly she is surprised she has to pay for these items. "Oh... I have to pay for these... I've never been in the grocery store before. I didn't know this was how this worked." (Laughter) And then what does she pull out of her purse? ...A checkbook! It's the 21<sup>st</sup> century! (Laughter) We don't trade pelts for jewelry anymore. (Laughter) We shouldn't write checks in the grocery store. Do it on your own time. Pay your bills with them... whatever... She doesn't know the name of the store... "What's the date?" Look... if you're going to write it... God bless you if you're going to write a check in the grocery store. Have it ready! Just leave the amount blank... It's smooth. You get out real quick. The whole time this is going on, I'm just back there fuming. "Ooohhh... what's she doing? She's ruining my life!" (Laughter) Why am I like that? Why am I doing that? I'm in a hurry... to nowhere. It's not like I have an ice chest with a kidney in it, and there's someone waiting on a transplant..." (Laughter) I'm just anxious because she's frustrating my plan for my day. I want to get somewhere, and I'm the center of the universe. We all do this: self-sovereign. Then trouble comes along... something happens to frustrate our own sense of self-sovereignty... the agenda... what we mean for our lives... whether it's suffering or persecution or conflict... Something happens that reminds us, "You are not God. You are not in the place of God."

Joseph, I think, has learned this hard lesson. It would not behoove us to think of Joseph as some sort of superman... some sort of super-saint. Yes, he is a man of integrity; he is a godly man. But I think he has become this way through the refinery of suffering. I think that he has learned this hard lesson. He has wrestled with his feeling of helplessness and hopelessness in the depths of that dark pit and in the dungeons of the prison. He has considered the evil against him from his brothers. He has had the hate boil up in his heart. And the evil that was against him and the false accusation from Potiphar's wife, and somehow through this struggle he has come out on the other side saying, "God is faithful. God is loving. God has a plan that I can't see. And I can trust Him because God is sovereign... because God is God."

Maybe you and I in the morning we need to get up, look in the mirror very first thing and say, "Am I in the place of God?" Forgiveness trusts God's sovereignty. But it's only a cold comfort to know that God is sovereign: He is in control of everything... if you don't also know that God is love. This is what Joseph is trusting: Not simply that God is some great puppet master doing whatever He wants with human lives out of some strange desire or His own amusement. He is not treating us like robots left to our own devices, callously and coolly from distance of heaven. No... Joseph forgives because he knows that God's sovereign plan is verse 20: "To bring it about that many people should be kept alive." God's plan is not to harm His children but, in the end, to give them the hope of eternity.

### **3. Forgiveness Magnifies God's Gospel.**

So we see from Joseph here, thirdly and finally, this: Forgiveness magnifies God's Gospel. The whole passage... like the whole Old Testament... is just a foreshadow of the cross of Jesus Christ. What Joseph is doing, by God's design not his, is laying one more historical cobblestone on the path that runs from the old covenant Scriptures... right to the cross.

I will give you a more modern example of our opening historical anecdote. Just one year ago last month, June 2015, a young man named Dylann Roof entered a Bible study in a predominantly black church in Charleston, South Carolina. And although they weren't accustomed to having visits from young white men, the church folks welcomed Dylann to the study and treated him warmly. And when the Bible study was over, he took out a gun and murdered nine of those in attendance. He later said that he wanted his act of terrorism to instigate a race war. In less than a week, just a few days later... not at his trial... not at his sentencing... not years after the fact but less than a week later, at his bond hearing... several family members of the victims expressed something the unbelieving world cannot seem to wrap their mind around. It makes no sense in the economy of the flesh. Nadine Collier, the daughter of 70-year-old Ethel Lance who was murdered that night, said at the hearing this, her voice breaking with emotion: "I forgive you. You took something very precious from me..." Notice she didn't say, "It's okay." She is naming the sin. "You took something precious from me. I will never talk to her again; I will never ever hold her again, but I forgive you and have mercy on your soul." Myra Thompson, sister of another of the victims also said, "I acknowledge that I am very angry, but one thing that Depayne always enjoyed in our family was that she taught me that we are the family that love built. We have no room for hating, so we have to forgive. I pray God on your soul." What is happening here? They have a right to be angry. They have a right to demand justice, but they also mention mercy. They mention a family that love built. They mention God's acting on his soul. Like Joseph, they have the opportunity to wish retribution and to give reign to bitterness, but instead they cling to the hope of the Gospel.

This entire passage is one big shadow cast by the cross. The cross is the place where God's wrath and mercy meet. The cross is the intersection of grace and justice because it is the cross where God punishes sin and pours out His wrath on the transgressions against Him, and in doing so, pours out mercy on sinners by the blood of Jesus Christ. And like Joseph's brothers, you and I, we come to this intersection of wrath and mercy; we see Jesus Christ nailed to the cross, bleeding and dying. We look up to it and we know that we deserve to be there, we deserve to be judged, we deserve to be condemned. We know that we are not worthy of this cross, and we are convicted of our sin and we know that we deserve wrath. And we say, like Joseph's brothers, "Please forgive us... Please forgive us." And the cross of Jesus Christ says to the repentant sinner, as Joseph says to his brothers... "Don't fear... don't fear." Joseph says, "Am I in the place of God?" Well, Jesus Christ was God. He was in the place of God, but He left the place of God willingly, and He took on human flesh.

John chapter 3 says, "*God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world*" ...the world was already condemned... "*...but in order that the world might be saved through Him.*" So the God-Man Jesus Christ puts Himself in the place of sinful man... in the place of the condemned man... nailed to the cross. The cross is the event that the Romans, the Jews, and the entire world meant for evil. The cross is the outcome that Satan and his hellish schemes meant for evil, and yet despite all of that, it was not some Plan B in God's sovereign design. God was not surprised by the cross. The cross was the plan of salvation all along. "*The Lamb was slain,*" the Bible says, "*...from the foundation of the world.*" So what Christ's killers meant for evil, God meant for good. As Joseph says, "That many people should be kept alive, as they are today." The cross of Jesus Christ is the great interrupter of human agendas. The sinful world says, "We mean this for evil," but the God of all comfort says, "Well, I mean it for good." So Jesus dies on the cross that we might be made alive and just as Joseph's forgiveness was just the beginning of his provision and comfort for his brothers... verse 21. "The cross of Christ makes provision of blood of Christ, for us, for all time." We are never lacking in coverage by the blood of Christ. Its provision is eternal, and we are never lacking in comfort from the cross of Christ. Its peace is everlasting. Christians should never worry

about their standing with God, because the cross is His final word that His intentions for us are characterized by kindness. (Clapping)

If you have ever been anxious, ever doubtful, ever struggling, ever hurting, ever wounded, ever wrestling with forgiveness and repentance and reconciliation, maybe you are there this morning. Look to the cross. The cross is proof that God loves sinners. In fact, like Joseph's brothers, we come hemming and hawing to the cross. We sit down to our prayers and we poke around the issues that God most wants to deal with in us. We always shift the blame. It's always somebody else's fault. We wonder if it could be even true that God's love would be so presumed upon. But Christ is an unending fountain of grace, and it's at His cross that He declares to every weary sinner, forevermore, *"It is finished."* The cross has proved that God is more eager, in fact, more eager to forgive than we are to sin... and that's really eager. But Joseph, after all he has been through and seen the work of the Lord in, is resting all his hope in the promise of the grace of God. It is a picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ... the Good News that God loves sinners and saves them if they repent and believe in His Son.

You know, if you have your Bible open, you see, the Book ends. And next scene is Joseph dying. This is the end of his life. This is how he goes out. This is the legacy that he lives. What kind of perspective did Joseph have, looking back on his life, after all he has been through? He could have looked at these guys... these losers in front of him... miserable... pitiful... tried to game the system one more time, and he could have shook his head and said, "It's always something with these guys." But does God look at us that way? Joseph's life, with all its ups and downs, had taught him something: God is faithful; God is sovereign; God can be trusted. When the crucial moment came, he decided, like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, pondering the cross, "Not My will but the Father's." And he asked himself this question: "What would glorify God? What would glorify God's grace?" That's the key question for you and I. When you leave this place this morning, that is the question that needs to be hovering over your heart. "What is it in my life... what decision do I need to make... what relationship do I need to address... what sin do I need to repent of... what is it that would make Jesus look big?" Forgiveness magnifies the Gospel. Let's pray.

"Heavenly Father, You know what we need. In fact, You know it better than we do. We come with our requests... things that we want, things that we think we need... and yet in this moment, in this divine appointment we have this morning, we were just coming to church. We were just coming, minding our own religious business. I pray that You would show up. Knowing that You have been here waiting for us... You were here before the doors opened. We ask, Father, that You would put in our hearts the truth, the reality... the bewildering reality... that you have supplied all of our needs according to Your riches in Christ Jesus... not some of our needs, not a few of our needs, not almost all of our needs, but all of our needs. Father, help us to look to Your Son for all things, knowing that He is reconciling all things to Himself. And we pray all of these things in the Name of Your Son, that He would be glorified... Jesus Christ, Amen."

"Amen." Thank you, Jared. What an incredible truth... that God sees us and is more eager to forgive than we are to sin. How glorious the forgiveness of our God in Jesus Christ.