

Text: Genesis 45

Title: "God's work of providence calls us to faithful family love"

Time: 8/30/09 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: As Americans we can hear the echo of the Biblical heritage of our country in the name of some of its cities and streets. Two major cities here in the east quickly come to mind in this regard.

We have been studying the doctrine of God's work of providence from the life of Joseph, and we have mentioned that the capital of Rhode Island is Providence. The one city to rival the Baptist city of Providence in the cause of religious freedom and liberty of conscience was the Quaker city, Philadelphia, the birthplace of our nation. It too has a Bible name. *Phil* comes from one of the four Greek terms for *love* (*philos*), and *adelphias* comes from the Greek word for *brother*.

William Penn's father was an admiral in the British navy, who had been a personal friend of King Charles II. When his father died, King Charles agreed to pay a £16,000 debt he owed to Penn's father by giving him charter to the territory that came to be Pennsylvania.

Penn was a Quaker convert of George Fox (back in the day when the Quakers were more Biblical than they are today), and he believed from his Bible and his own experience with religious persecution in England that all men were created equal and should be tolerated in a civil society equally. For these reasons, he named the city he founded to govern Pennsylvania *Philadelphia*, "the city of brotherly love."

The passage we have before us this morning emphasizes the theme “brotherly love.” It is the literary climax of the Joseph story we have been studying for a number of weeks since chapter 37. Here in chapter 45, Joseph identifies himself to his brothers, and years of sibling rivalry and hatred come to an end with a flood of brotherly love in this chapter. The word *brother* is used 11 times in its 28 verses. I want us to see this morning that the work of God’s providence in our lives calls us to faithful brotherly love.

I. Brotherly love services an unchangeable and exclusive relationship (vv. 1-3).

Illustration: This past week I postponed a deacon/trustee meeting on Thursday evening because I thought that I had previously committed to a town rec dept meeting for basketball coaches on that night. It turns out that I had previously committed to the rec dept meeting on Wednesday night, and only thought it was on Thursday. I missed the Wednesday meeting.

On Thursday I emailed the guy who heads things up for us, John Willard, to apologize and get caught up, and John mentioned in his email back to me that he and Mike in the rec department had discussed that morning whether they thought I was going to be coaching this year. It was nice to be missed.

But if the answer were “no, I do not want to coach,” then I would no longer be a coach. When it comes to coaching basketball for the town, I am merely a volunteer. My relationship to this church is far different from that as a brother in Christ. When I say, “no, I do not want to worship,” nothing really changes about the fact that I am a part of this family with the responsibility of brotherly love.

Application: The relationship we have with our family in Christ is closer than the relationship we have with other people, because it is a relationship based on Christ's work in our lives, not on volunteerism.

Did you notice that as much as Joseph appreciated the relationships that he had with his Egyptian friends, they had to leave before he could truly reveal what was most important to his heart. If we are not closer to our family in Christ than we are to others, something could be terribly wrong. Have you ever thought of a local church as a family in Christ?

We like to call ourselves a family in Christ here at New Boston Baptist Church. We like that terminology enough to put it on the sign in front of our building. It appears on all the church-generated literature that we produce.

Why do we do this? Over and over the New Testament calls believers to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, as a family:

Rom. 12:10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love";

Rom. 14:15, "For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love";

Philem. 7, "For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother";

1 Pet. 2:17, "love the brotherhood";

2 Pet. 1:7, "[Add] to your godliness, brotherly kindness, and to your brotherly kindness, love";

1 John 2:10, "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him";

1 John 3:10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice right-

eousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother”;

1 John 4:20-21, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”

As much as we advertise that our church is a family in Christ, what we truly are depends not on our advertising, but of the way we live. Have you lived with the family love these passages call us to?

Like all family love, this closeness can be a source of great pain, as much as a source of great reward. We see Joseph’s and his brothers’ pain and reward in this passage. Yet neither great pain nor great reward changes the reality of the closeness of a family’s relationship.

The reality of our relationship as a family is based on the reality of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Philippians is a letter about Christian brotherly love, and it begins by describing brothers in terms of their common relationship to Christ (Phil. 1:1-3, “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you”).

We like to turn that around. We think our relationship will survive only as long as we are likeminded. Paul says, “Be likeminded, because you are and always will be part of the brotherhood because of the work of Christ in your life.”

II. Brotherly love covers a multitude of sins (vv. 4-8).

Illustration: I purchased the nicest bicycle any Hobi has ever owned for my son's birthday last February from Dick's Sporting Goods store. Brandon has gotten good use of it with many a journey around town, but since February the bike has needed two major repairs.

This last time a rope somehow managed to get all snagged up in places that prevent a bike from continuing on. Evidently, this mishap broke the front brake among other things. Last time it was the chain that broke, I believe. Now because it was the most expensive bike I ever purchased, I also paid the extra thirty dollars or so to get a warranty that covers these periodic needs for major repairs. Brandon does not have to pay for the damage he caused his bike on these two occasions, because there is an insurance policy in place to cover this cost. That was part of the birthday gift.

Application: The Bible tells us that family love is supposed to work like that insurance policy. It is supposed to allow us to remedy the sins we commit against the Lord and one another. We see family covering the sins of Joseph's brothers in this passage.

1 Peter 4:8 emphasizes our need for the insurance policy of brotherly love: "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." Our love for one another ought to provide a context in which our sins and failures can find a solution. As in Joseph's case, this can take time, but family love endures until it happens. Joseph gives us two insights that helped him practice family love.

1. Joseph could love those who sinned against him because he was dedicated to a cause greater than himself (vv. 5-7, "to preserve life and a remnant" for the Abrahamic

covenant promise of the seed). The reason underlying our connection to a family in Christ has to be bigger than ourselves, or it is not sustainable. If you are here week after week only to see what is in it for you, the week will come when you will no longer be here. I need to be here for the well-being of the cause of Christ, and the well-being of the family in Christ, or I will eventually stop being here.

2. Joseph could love those who sinned against him because he could see a plan that was greater than theirs (v. 8, “it was not you who sent me here, but God”). The plan of the brothers was to rid themselves of Joseph for good; Joseph could see that the God of providence had a different plan, one that could even use the plan of those who meant him harm, such that the harm worked out for his and their good.

If we are having trouble being fervent enough in our love for others so that it covers a multitude of their sins against us, we need to cast our gaze a much higher and see God working His plan, even through what seems so awful and unjust to us.

III. Brotherly love is the love of God shed abroad by our hearts (vv. 9-15, 21-23).

Application: These verses describe for us one of the most moving scenes in the Bible. Joseph weeps in blessed reunion with his brothers. We need that kind of weeping in the family of Christ.

We see the outpouring of Joseph’s love for his family in the multitude of gifts and assurances he gives them here, but how does he account for these things? Joseph makes clear that God did it (v. 9). And how did God do it? We would have to go all the way back to chapter 37 to answer that question.

God not only readied the circumstances for this reunion, but also He readied the heart of Joseph, and He did so through tribulation. We have seen in Joseph's life the process Paul describes for us in Rom. 5:3-5 ("And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us").

Brotherly love is a fruit of the Spirit; it is not our love but the love of God shed abroad by our hearts. God puts that love there through tribulation, which leads to perseverance, which leads to proven character, which leads to hope. It does this because part of the proven character is Spirit-filled love. Where there is God's love in the heart, there is hope for the family in Christ. Where that love is missing, God often brings tribulation to develop it. God is at work to make us love one another. We need to yield to that work.

IV. Brotherly love is critical to our testimony to a lost world (vv. 16-20).

Application: Jesus told us, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (John 13:35). He called this the new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you." People see Christ's love for us when they see our love for one another. You cannot be an effective witness to your lost neighbors without a demonstration of your Christ-like brotherly love.

V. Brotherly love needs constant maintenance (vv. 24-28).

Application: In spite of the huge blessings of that day, the brothers had to be reminded not to quarrel on the journey.

We never quite shake that reminder, do we? I trust this message has been a reminder not to quarrel on the journey.

Conclusion: Did you notice that the thought of seeing Joseph again was the kind of thing that made Jacob's mind go numb? He could not envision it or imagine that such a thing could ever happen. We need to envision, imagine, and believe that brotherly love can happen in the family of Christ, that the rewards of this love will follow the pain our closeness brings us at times.

Is there a brother in the Lord who needs your brotherly love this morning? Perhaps you have come to the point at which it is hard to even imagine such a reunion. The God of providence can make it happen. Let's respond to His plan for us with faithful brotherly love.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*