

“Am I in the Place of God?!”—Genesis 50:19-20

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Am I in the Place of God?!”, is Genesis 50:19-20 → *Joseph said to his brothers, “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.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

A number of years ago a woman by the name of Erma Bombeck wrote a book entitled, “If Life Is a Bowl of Cherries, Why Am I Always in the Pits?” While the book is filled with stories and quips about her life as a mother and the many joys and challenges with children and family, the title of the book is actually even more fitting for the life of Joseph, the favored son of Jacob in the Old Testament.

While many people in our culture may know of Joseph as the “Prince of Egypt” thanks to movie animation, his road to Egypt was “the pits” in many respects:

- Jealousy over his being their father’s favorite drove *all his brothers* to hate *him and . . . not speak peacefully to him* (cf. Genesis 37:1-11).
- While conspiring to kill Joseph, his brothers instead sold him as a slave to some Ishmaelite traders on their way to Egypt (cf. Genesis

37:18-11).

- While serving an officer of the king of Egypt's army named Potiphar, his wife falsely accused Joseph of rape and he was sent *into the pit*, that is, prison. (cf. Genesis 39:1-20)
- While in prison he interpreted the dreams of two men, one of whom was executed and the other who was reinstated to his position with Pharaoh. Joseph asked him to mention his unjust treatment to Pharaoh, saying, *I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit*. Once reinstated, the cupbearer forgot about Joseph. (cf. Genesis 40) It was truly "the pits" with two more years in *the pit*.

Throughout Joseph's "journey" we are told that Yahweh *was with Joseph* (cf. Genesis 39:2,21). However, it could have probably felt like the LORD was against him with all the injustices against himself which he constantly encountered. It may have even seemed like everyone else was in control rather than Yahweh—like they were "playing god" with his life. However, finally his day arrived. Raised to the position of administrator of all Egypt he was charged with the collection of food in preparation for a seven year famine in the country. He was second only to Pharaoh and possessed quite a power in the Egyptian empire at the age of thirty (cf. Genesis 41:38-45). Now who was in control?

Eventually Joseph's brothers had to appear before him to get food for

their families, a process by which the LORD reunited them with Joseph. However, unconfessed sin will eventually come back to haunt you in the form of regrets and a renewed guilty conscience. Even during this process of trying to obtain food, the brothers concluded in Genesis 42:21-22 → *“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.” And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. (i.e. “I told you so!”) So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.”* The guilt of sin still came to the forefront of their lives some 15+ years after the fact! This is what happens when people take the place of god and refuse to deal with their sin properly.

This is true of all unrepentant sin for all people. Even if a person has become so callous to his conscience’s conviction of sin with guilt and shame, there will be reminders throughout life which will bring unrepentant sin to the forefront. If not in this life there will be a day of reckoning from which no one will escape. This is why we are told in Hebrews 3:12-13 → *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Repent and trust in Christ’s forgiveness for you now!*

After being reunited with his family, forgiving his brothers and providing them a place to live in Egypt with food, you would think that the guilt of sin should be gone. However, about twenty-five years later, upon the death of their dad (i.e. Israel), our context records Joseph's brothers still worried that he will take revenge on them for their sin against him. Thus, Joseph found himself in a very unique situation in our text—a situation in which he appeared to his brothers to be in the place of God (i.e. in total control of their destiny).

What would be their fate if Joseph's sinful human nature would take advantage of his unique position? It is very easy for us sinners to hold grudges against those who have wronged us and just as easy to “get back” at them when the opportune time comes. In fact, it is the natural reaction of our sinful human natures. This is why forgiveness must be expressed based upon something outside of ourselves. It must flow from the heart to God through the heart of Christ into the lives of others.

After their feeble attempts at trying to control reconciliation, Joseph displayed a forgiveness flowing from his faith in Yahweh. According to verse 19 of our text Joseph did not respond as one in the place of God but as one who knew his place in relationship to the LORD! *Joseph said to his brothers, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? From the perspective of his brothers . . . absolutely! Second in power only to Pharaoh in a world empire with just cause to finally punish his brothers*

for sending him on a journey of life “in the pits,” he could now get revenge without disrespect and hurting his father. After all, they were taking the place of God by trying to control forgiveness. Why wouldn’t he take the place of God to bring about a delayed justice?

Because of his respect for his Dad—that is, his heavenly Father!

Throughout his life in the pits Joseph dealt with people and life **on the basis of God’s relationship with him!** Recognizing his dreams as God given and that interpretation belonged to Yahweh, not to him (cf. Genesis 40:6-8,23; Genesis 41:15-16); his refusal to *sin against God* and commit adultery with Potipher’s wife (cf. Genesis 39:8-9); recognizing **God’s** plan in the midst of all their intended evil in verse 20 of our text when he told his 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.*

Joseph’s rhetorical question revealed that he wasn’t in the place of God and because he was not God neither could he create the forgiveness which they so desired and needed. All he could do was announce forgiveness to them **on God’s terms—based upon grace.** This is the LORD’s promise in Isaiah 43:25 → *I, I am He Who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.* It is a forgiveness *for His own sake*, that is, so pure and perfect that we

cannot fathom it. Yet it has all we desire and look for in the forgiveness of others toward us: undeserved—we want them to forgive us even though we don't deserve to be forgiven; sin completely blotted out—we expect the sin and its consequences to be completely null and void so the relationship can go back to what it was before the sin occurred; forgiven and forgotten—we expect them to forget the sin to be truly forgiving. Interesting how we expect abilities which only God can do to be done by others, in effect putting them in the place of God.

God says He forgives *for My own sake*. This means He forgives on His own terms. These terms He carried out in the perfect life and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for you. Thus, as you experience this forgiveness by the power of the Holy Spirit Who gives you faith to trust in Jesus, you forgive others **on God's terms in Christ as well**. John 20:22-23 says that Jesus *breathed on His disciples and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."* With these words He has not put you in the place of God but rather given you the privilege to announce a person's place before God on His terms in Christ Jesus.

As you live in relationship to the LORD and His plan for your life in Jesus Christ it **will** affect how you view and deal with life, people, circumstances, situations, and so forth. Instead of looking at life as being

“fair” or “unfair” you will see every aspect of life as part of a larger plan in God’s working through you. His primary work through you is to bring people to the place of God in Christ Jesus so they repent of their sins and cease efforts to usurp the place of God as they bask in sins forgiven, burdens lifted and life empowered by God’s grace. Amen.

*We know that for those who love God
all things work together for good,
for those who are called according to His purpose.*

(Romans 8:28)

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