

SERIES: Joseph: From Pit to Prominence  
SERMON: **The Ultimate Family Reunion**  
SCRIPTURE: Genesis 45:16-47:12  
SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus  
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I want to talk to you today about *The Ultimate Family Reunion*. When I think of family reunions I can't help but think of Alma Wing, one of our wonderful senior citizens here at First Free. Alma belongs to a family that has world-class reunions. I first learned this because there was a family in our church in St. Louis who belonged to the Wing family, and when they got together with their extended family it was nothing short of amazing! I later asked Alma if she knew about the Wing family reunions and discovered she was very active and had attended many of them.

The Wings trace their lineage back to Rev. John Wing, whose family came to America in 1631. They actually incorporated in 1801 as *The Wing Family of America, Inc.* and now have chapters all across the country. They have their own publication, the OWL, their own website, and even a headquarters at the Fort House in Sandwich, Mass., which I understand is the oldest house in the U.S. occupied continuously by one family. These people take reunions seriously!

Now your family may be a lot smaller than the Wings, and you may not be able to trace your heritage back to England before the colonies. But for most people family reunions are wonderful occasions to catch up on the in-laws and the outlaws, and to brag about your kids and grandkids. For some, of course, reunions are mixed blessings because of irregular people in the family tree.

I like the title Charles Swindoll gave to chapters 45 and 46 of Genesis: *The Ultimate Family Reunion*. I liked it so much I decided to borrow it this morning—not the sermon, just the title. I would like to use the typical family reunion as a framework to look at our Scripture text. I suspect there are usually four aspects to any family reunion—preparation for it, anticipation of it, the journey to it, and finally the reunion itself.

For those who may be visiting today, we have been studying the amazing life of Joseph the patriarch from the book of Genesis. Nearly 4000 years ago this 17-year-old boy was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery in a foreign land, and eventually thrown into prison. But God was there (as He always is), and through His providence Joseph was not only released from prison but was actually made the ruler or Prime Minister of Egypt at the age of 30. When a long famine (which he had personally prophesied based on Pharaoh's dream) actually occurred, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt seeking food. There they came into contact with Joseph, who recognized them, but they did not recognize him.

Joseph tested his brothers in a number of ways, and eventually he was satisfied that they were not the same evil-hearted men who had betrayed him. So he revealed himself to them and forgave them—more than 22 years after they had robbed him of his boyhood, his family, his country, and for all they knew, his very life. Last Lord's Day the sermon was on *How to Forgive the Hard to Forgive*.

By the way, if you were unable to be here last Sunday, I want to encourage you to get a copy of that sermon and listen especially to the powerful testimony shared by one of our members about how God enabled him to forgive someone at least as hard to forgive as Joseph's brothers.

Now today we come to the amazing story of the reunion of the entire family of Jacob.

### **Preparation for the reunion (45:16-28)**

No family reunion happens without someone doing a lot of work in preparation. In our family it's my niece, Kristin Stebhen, who normally organizes our gatherings. Kristin is just amazing in her ability and willingness to find a place for us to meet, schedule activities, plan the meals, etc. Well, in Genesis 45 we read about some of the preparation that is done for the reunion of Jacob's family. 45:16-24:

*When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.'*

*"You are also directed to tell them, 'Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.' "*

*So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey. To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey. Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Don't quarrel on the way!"*

### **Pharaoh invites the family to have their reunion in Egypt, all expenses paid. (16-20)**

In fact, he invites them to actually move to Egypt. Back in verse 10 we read of Pharaoh's intention of allowing them to live in the land of Goshen. Its exact location is not known, but most scholars are convinced that Goshen was the eastern part of the Nile Delta, a perfect location for herds of cattle and sheep. Furthermore, Pharaoh insists that they leave all their "stuff" back in Canaan, because he would give them the best of everything.

The difference between Canaan and Egypt then would be like the difference between a third-world country and the United States today. If you were emigrating to the US from North Korea or Rwanda it would be quite understandable if your sponsor said to you, "Bring only the clothes on your back," because virtually nothing in those countries would be worth the cost of transporting it. That's essentially what Pharaoh says to Jacob's family.

**Joseph executes Pharaoh's instructions, and then some. (21-24)** He sends ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt to his father, along with ten more donkeys loaded with food

provisions. But Joseph also gives 300 shekels of silver and five sets of clothes to Benjamin, who is his only full brother (the other ten are his half-brothers).

He also gives his brothers some advice, “Don’t quarrel on the way!” I have puzzled over this sort of down-home, almost humorous observation by the narrator. Why does Joseph say this? I suspect he anticipates that the brothers might have a major falling out over how they are going to tell their father the news that Joseph is alive. After all, they had lied to their father that Joseph was killed by a wild animal, and they had watched their father grieve uncontrollably. How can they now admit it was all a hoax? Accusations and recriminations could have easily led to blows between the brothers. So Joseph urges them to make this is a time for joyful reunion, not quarreling.

While preparation is going on for any reunion, the anticipation builds.

### **Anticipation of the reunion (45:25-28)**

The anticipation for this particular reunion must have been electric, for this family has been separated for almost 23 years. There has been an empty chair at Jacob’s table every day, plus a huge void in his heart! Turn to the last paragraph in Genesis 45 where we read about how Jacob receives the news that his son Joseph, long-presumed dead, is alive and well, and about the reunion he anticipates. Gen. 45:25-28:

*So they (i.e. Joseph’s brothers) went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. They told him, “Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.” Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, “I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”*

I want you to try to translate this scene into today. Imagine parents whose child was kidnapped and presumed killed 25 years ago. They have been grieving their loss the entire time. Every birthday has been painful, every Christmas, every holiday. They grieved when his graduation date from high school passed, when his marriage would likely have occurred, when grandchildren should have been born. Then they get a call one day saying their child is not only alive but is the President and CEO of CitiCorp, with a wife and family of his own! Growing up in a foster home, he had finally tracked down his birth parents and is sending his personal jet to fly them to New York for a reunion! They wouldn’t be able to eat, or sleep, and they would undoubtedly be saying over and over, “It’s too good to be true!”

I think that must have been something like the anticipation that Jacob and the rest of his extended family experience. Stunned by the news, Jacob joyfully accepts the invitation.

### **Journey to the reunion (46:1-28)**

**Distance is irrelevant.** When a loving family decides to have a reunion, they will travel

almost any distance to participate. Traveling from Canaan to Egypt in that day was no simple matter, especially for a man who is well over 100 years old. But Joseph is in Egypt and Jacob will go meet him, no matter his age or his health.

**God is not left out.** (1-4) A wise person always prays for traveling mercies. Especially when setting out on a long, dangerous journey, it is wise to consult with the Lord and seek his face. Look at the opening verses of chapter 46:

*So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.*

*And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am," he replied.*

*"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."*

As he starts out on this long journey, Jacob stops and worships at the place where both Abraham and Isaac had built altars. Not surprisingly God takes the opportunity to speak to Jacob and give him His confirmation and affirmation of the trip. Not only does God tell him not to be afraid; He also reaffirms a promise—that He will make of Jacob a great nation. Furthermore, God will go with him, and eventually bring him back. And finally God promises him that his long-lost son Joseph will be with him when he died.

The point the story makes here seems to be that believers need occasional reassurances of God's promises that He will bring them to their ultimate destination as they make their decisions in life, and God provides exactly the reassurance they need.

**No one is left out.** (46:5-27) We've had family reunions when all but a few of the 60+ members of my parents' family failed to show. But with this reunion *everyone* in the family of Jacob prepares to attend—*no one* will allow *anything* to keep them away. Look at verses 5-7 of chapter 46:

*Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel's sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. They also took with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan, and Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt. He took with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters*

In verses 8-25 the actual names of all these family members are listed. We're not going to take the time to read these verses this morning, although there are some interesting gems hidden here. But I would like to ask the question, "Why does God take up precious space in the Scriptures to give us a list of names, most of which are hard to pronounce and never mentioned again apart from this list?" Well, I think these names are included in order to communicate that God is a God who keeps track of people, even insignificant people as we view them.

Instead of reading the names I direct your attention to the summary in verses 26 and 27:

*All those who went to Egypt with Jacob those who were his direct descendants,*

*not counting his sons' wives numbered sixty-six persons.*

*With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all.*

These 70 individuals formed the original nation of Israel. Four hundred years later, when Moses led them across the Sea of Reeds to Mt. Sinai on their 38-year-long journey back to the Palestine, they were hundreds of thousands strong, perhaps as numerous as 2 million!

**Directions are critical.** It's tell-tale proof that Jacob was not an American male, because he asks for directions on how to get to Goshen. Look at verse 28: "Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen." I put this in more for its humor than anything, but there is something to it. If you have spent time preparing to go somewhere and if your heart is anticipating it with great passion, the last thing you want to do is to get lost on the way.

**Finally, arrival!** (46:29-47:12)

**Incredible emotion.** Verse 29: "Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time." I don't know anything a person can say that would add anything to the pathos of this scene.

**Peace and resignation.** Verse 30: "Israel said to Joseph, 'Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive.'" (He doesn't actually die for 17 more years, but he's ready. I think I have shared with you how three years ago on Easter Sunday my sister and her husband came to faith in Christ. My little sister walked away from the Lord and from the church at age 15 and showed no interest in spiritual things, didn't attend church, didn't raise her children in the things of the Lord, and generally lived a very secular and selfish life. My parents prayed for Mary and Rob every single day for those 40 years, and as my dad approached 90 years of age the miracle happened.

Dad's response was to quote the prophet Simeon in Luke 2:29-30: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation." The original prophecy was about the baby Jesus, of course, but the spirit of it is the same as what Jacob says to his son here: "Now I am ready to die." In other words, he has seen the hand of the Lord in such a way that he needs nothing more in order to consider his sojourn complete. It reveals a sense of peace and godly resignation on Jacob's part.

Third, family reunions should be a time of mutual blessing, and this one certainly is no exception.

**Mutual blessing.** (46:31-47:12) In the final section of our story we have several long-term blessings offered and received. The first is a blessing from Pharaoh on the family. Joseph arranges for five of his brothers to represent the family in Pharaoh's presence (verse 47:2). This is apparently the first time they meet Pharaoh in person, and the ruler of Egypt takes the opportunity to confirm what he has already promised. Look at verse 5: "Pharaoh said to Joseph,

‘Your father and your brothers have come to you, and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock.’

This latter comment is interesting to me because at the end of the previous chapter Joseph warned his brothers that shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians. The Egyptians tended to be farmers, not herdsman. Once again God is working behind the scenes in small but important ways to accomplish His purposes. Since Egyptians hated shepherds, the family of Jacob would largely be left alone in Goshen, a fertile but little used part of Egypt. Thus they would not be in danger of assimilating Egyptian culture and religion. They would be allowed to thrive away from the centers of power and influence. But at the same time they would earn needed revenue by taking care of Pharaoh’s livestock!

But there is another blessing offered, and this is from Jacob to Pharaoh. It says in verse 7:

*“Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked him, ‘How old are you?’ And Jacob said to Pharaoh, ‘The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers.’ (Jacob’s father, Isaac, lived to be 180, and his grandfather Abraham lived to be 175.) Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence.”*

The book of Hebrews tells us that it is always the greater person who blesses the lesser. Because he knew God, Jacob is well aware that Pharaoh is a mere man, not the god the Egyptians treated him as. I suspect his blessing on Pharaoh, both when he comes into his presence in verse 7 and when he leaves in verse 10, is Jacob’s way of communicating to Pharaoh that God is the source of all that he, Jacob, or even Pharaoh enjoys. And I suppose Jacob’s response to Pharaoh’s inquiry about his age is a way of telling Pharaoh that age is not what matters, rather one’s relationship with God.

I see one other blessing in this story that isn’t verbalized, but I’m certain it is observable. And that is the unity that must have been experienced by this family. During the decades that my sister Mary was away from the Lord, there was always a bit of awkwardness in our family reunions. Since the other four children in the family were all in the ministry, we loved to talk shop, talk theology and share what the Lord was doing in our lives. But that made Mary very uncomfortable, so when she was around we would talk about the weather and the stock market and trips we had taken, so as not to offend her. Over the past three years our reunions have been so much better. No one has to hold back. In fact, Mary and Rob often initiate a discussion of what God is doing in their lives and in their church.

I strongly suspect that for the first time in decades Joseph’s brothers are able to really relax around their father, and that for the first time ever this family really enjoys unity.

I want to mention just one more development in the story:

**Request and promise (47:27-31)**

Look at chapter 47:27-31:

*Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.*

*Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried."*

*"I will do as you say," he said.*

*"Swear to me," he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.*

Jacob asks Joseph to promise that he will not be buried in Egypt but rather that his bones will be returned to Canaan. He believes God that a great nation would spring from his family and that one day they would return to the promised land. So that's where he wants to be buried. This is Jacob's way of expressing his belief in what God has promised.

Now I want to take just a moment to talk about the theological importance of this family reunion in the story of salvation. The Joseph story explains the origin and preservation of the people who later came to be known as Israelites or Jews. God had promised the patriarch Abraham that he would have a progeny as numerous as the sands on the seashore. Yet several hundred years after that promise the family numbers only 70 people. Has God forgotten His promise? No. But they are living in a land known as Canaan, where life is rough and hard. How is God's promise going to be fulfilled?

Through a famine God takes the family to the land of Goshen, where the circumstances are ideal for them to grow into the mighty nation that God promised. They will multiply incredibly over the next 300 years. Yet God doesn't want them to become too comfortable or to assimilate the culture of Egypt. So he allows pressure to be applied by a new Pharaoh, one who knew not Joseph. Life eventually becomes so unbearable that the Lord raises up a deliverer, Moses, to lead them out of Egypt. Do you remember the divine soliloquy offered in Hosea 11:1: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." God did indeed call Israel out of Egypt some 400 years after Joseph, but of course there was an even greater fulfillment of that prophecy according to Matthew 2:15, when Mary and Joseph were forced to flee from Herod to Egypt with the baby Jesus, but God called Him out of Egypt back to Israel to live and work and preach the Gospel and then die for the sins of the world.

Now I would be remiss if I didn't mention that there is an incredible family reunion coming one of these days that will cause Jacob's and Joseph's reunion to pale in comparison.

### **Looking forward to an even greater family reunion (1 Thes. 4:13-18)**

Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to*

*grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

Every one of you has lost loved ones, some recently and you may be going through significant grief. If your family member knew Jesus as his or her Savior, there will be a reunion, and you can prepare for it, not only by making sure of our own eternal destiny but also by investing in eternal things. You can anticipate it with great delight. The remainder of your journey could have some detours to places like Egypt, but stop and worship along the way. God will bring you back. Follow His directions. When you finally arrive at that reunion, I can assure you there will be incredible emotion, not only in meeting your loved ones but even more in meeting Jesus Christ face to face.

Have you RSVP'd to the invitation to the Ultimate Family Reunion? You can do so by placing your faith and trust in Jesus, who died for you and made it possible for you to attend.