

Redeeming Evil
Genesis 50:15-21
Everton Hills
17 September 2017

Evil. It's defined as that which is profoundly immoral or wicked, which causes harm to another, which takes away life and sucks out its joy.

Have you ever noticed that evil is the very opposite of what it means to live?

Which ponders the question. **Can evil ever be redeemed?** Can it be turned around and produce life?

Think about it. Think about the evil that may have been inflicted on you...
...some past pain that continues to haunt. Is it still debilitating and life sapping?

Or what about the evil that you may have inadvertently inflicted on another – a careless comment, a thoughtless word, that that other person has mulled over, and over and over, to the extent that they can't get past it, and their life seems destroyed?

What would it be like for you if that even evil could be redeemed, transformed? If it could return their souls to life?

To redeem evil. That's what I am talking about today.

Yet it is not something that is easy to contemplate.

How do you redeem the evil of a rogue state threatening to rain down nuclear war on its neighbours?

How do you redeem a situation where you feel so powerless and trapped because of the decisions made by others?

How do you redeem a situation where some disgusting evil has been perpetrated on an innocent child?

Can evil ever be redeemed?

Well, today we are going to explore just what that means through a guy named Joseph.

He was a nice guy. Mostly. It was in the days where polygamy seemed normal. In the light of the current Same Sex Marriage debate, sometimes we forget that the history of our religion has its own dodgy characters.

You see, Joseph's dad had really wanted to marry a girl called Rachel. And the agreement was that if he worked for Rachel's dad for seven years, they could get married. But when the marriage occurred, and Jacob lifted his bride's veil, it wasn't Rachel that he had made the marriage covenant with, but Rachel's older sister Leah.

And to cut a long story short, Jacob had to work another seven years in order to marry his beloved – Rachel.

To top it though, it seemed at first as though Rachel couldn't have kids. Leah, the less favoured wife, gave birth to seven children. Rachel had none. So Rachel gave her servant to Jacob 'as a wife', as a concubine, so that he might have a child sort of by her. And in response Leah gave Jacob her servant, for the same reason.

So Jacob ended up with ten sons (and a daughter) before Rachel finally gave birth. And she gave birth to Joseph, and Benjamin... but our focus is on Joseph.

The fact is, to Jacob, Joseph was the favoured child...

“Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe.” (Genesis 37:3, NLT)

Are you getting the picture?

On top of that, Joseph had a habit of bragging his being the favourite, of letting everybody know that he was special. And he had dreams. And told everyone who would listen of the dreams... that one day his brothers and his parents would bow down to him.

That'd certainly make for calming family relations, wouldn't it? We all respond so well to that 'look at me, look at me, look at me' dab!

Well one day Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers who were tending the family flock...

“When they had been gone for some time, Jacob said to Joseph, “Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Get ready, and I will send you to them.” “I’m ready to go,” Joseph replied. “Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are getting along,” Jacob said. “Then come back and bring me a report.” So Jacob sent him on his way, and Joseph traveled to Shechem from their home in the valley of Hebron.” (Genesis 37:13–14, NLT)

Note that. Joseph, the chosen child, is chilling out in the family home. And while he is doing that, his brothers are 80km away in the dust and the dirt, without creature comforts.

Do you think there would any resentment?

Well, when Joseph's brothers spotted him coming their way wearing that 'fancy coat', in their anger

“...they made plans to kill him. “Here comes the dreamer!” they said. “Come on, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, ‘A wild animal has eaten him.’ Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams!”” (Genesis 37:18–20, NLT)

Now thankfully two brothers, Reuben and Judah, intervened. And instead of being killed, he was sold off to some passing Mideanite traders as a slave. And he ended up in Egypt, while his brothers kept to their story and told Jacob that his favourite son was dead.

Now I am not going to retell the entire story – however if you want to have a good read, you can read the whole thing in the book of Genesis from about chapter 29.

But essentially, things didn't get any easier for Joseph.

First, he was made a slave in Potipher's house, then falsely accused of sexual harassment and ended up in prison. That all happened over about 13 years. It's a long time to wait.

But throughout all that time he was faithful to his God. And eventually God transitioned him from being a prisoner and accused sexual deviant, to second in charge over all of Egypt – a position he used to oversee Egypt’s food distribution during a massive drought.

And this is the point where we start to see how evil can be redeemed!

It was under these circumstances of famine, that Joseph came face to face with his brothers. They had come for help. Joseph recognised them. They did not recognise Joseph. And when he revealed his true identity, his brothers were petrified. As you would. This brother, who they had done all sorts of awful things to, now had the resources of the Egyptian army at his hand.

What would you do?

Well Joseph became the bigger person, and forgave. Not just by telling them... but by caring for them and their families. By giving them food and places to live.

Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” (Genesis 50:19–21, NLT)

And that gives us a clue as to how evil get redeemed. Through hope. And through the power of forgiveness. Through faith and believing that even out of evil situations, God can and does do good!

That was Joseph’s story. For thirteen years he was a slave and prisoner... but during that time never forgot the promise. He never forgot the dream that God had a bigger plan for him. And he let that dream, that promise, shape all of the decisions that he made, to the point where it redeemed the evil that had been done to him.

Hope and Forgiveness is the only thing that can redeem evil. The only thing that evil cannot stand against is forgiveness and hope, forgiveness and faith.

Note this too. Forgiveness is total. It is unconditional. Forgiveness doesn’t say, “I will only forgive you if you never do that again.” Because forgiveness knows that you probably will.

But that is the kind of forgiveness that God shows us. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, in that vile act of evil, what God saw was our evil actions and evil selves being nailed to the cross with him. What God saw was our desire for revenge, and refusal to let go of grudges... and in Jesus God said, **“It is finished”**.

The time for punishment is finished.

The debt has be paid.

Or more to the point, the debt itself, has been cancelled, so that we are free to live free.

Evil. Pain. Suffering. They are part of this world because this world is broken.

But evil, pain and suffering, need not control who we are and what we become. It is because of what God has done on the cross, or perhaps put a little differently, it is because God redeemed the evil of the cross by declaring it is finished, that we are forgiven. And if we are

forgiven, then we too can hold onto the hope and the promise and the dream that God has something good in store for us; despite our painful experiences.

God does redeem evil. That is his promise.