**Too Good To Be True**

*Preached Thursday, February 27, 2020 at Centred Young Adults*

When I was in younger, basketball was a big part of my life (I think I’ve brought this up for illustrations in the past – I do apologize to my non-sports fans). Anyway, I played a couple years of rep towards the end of elementary school and so by the time I got to grade nine, I was ready for our high school team. And, I remember this like it was yesterday, there we were it was during the warm-up before our first game of the season; the coach came to me and said, “David, I want you to start at point guard.”

And if you know anything about basketball – point guard is like the quarterback of the sport, you set up plays, bring the ball up the court, in a lot of ways your team runs through you. So, for me this was like a dream scenario, it was the position I always wanted to play, like that part in the musical, that solo in band, that program you got into, that company you always wanted to work for, that person you dreamed of marrying. Here I was getting that kind of opportunity.

But do you know what my response was? It didn’t take me long, I said, “Coach, I’m flattered, but I really think Derek should play point guard, I could play with him at another position, but he should be the guy.”

You see as much I wanted to be the starting point guard (as a grade 9) I couldn’t accept it because I didn’t think I deserved it. I had grown up playing basketball with my friend Derek and he was always the best player, just the way it was. He would have been the best basketball player in Peterborough for our age, and maybe even the year older. So why not put your best player where it mattered most.

It’s amazing the excuses you’ll make up to get out of something you feel unworthy of, isn’t it?

Gifts, cool trips, work promotions, the list goes on. Intrinsically we are wired to receive only what we’ve worked for.

This evening we’re going to consider why that is.

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT SOMETHING YOU DON’T DESERVE?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis 50- the very end of the first book of the Bible. We’re going to read from verse 15 down to 21 (Read and pray).

So, we’re picking up on the end of the end of Jacob’s life. He’s the guy that has the twelve sons – who the tribes get named off of. And this text focusses in on all of his sons but particularly the relationship that the brothers have with Joseph. You see, its after they’ve had this funeral for their dad Jacob, that Joseph’s brothers start to get worried.

You see, for the past several years – the brothers and their families had been living in Egypt. There had been a famine in the land at one point, and so they left Canaan and went to Egypt looking for food. Egypt had planned ahead and stored all sorts of food for the seven dreadful years.

Little did they know that once they got to Egypt it was their brother Joseph who was in charge of the land – he was 2nd in command to Pharaoh for all of the country.

So Joseph says, “hey don’t bother buying this food – come on, bring dad and you guys can live here too, we’ll set you up with the most fertile land we’ve got.”

Sounds like a pretty sweet deal doesn’t it? At a time of crisis when there’s no food to go around, these guys have been rescued. So then why are the brothers worrying about Joseph having a grudge against them?

Keep reading. It says “because of all the wrongs that they did to him” (Gen 50:15).

Maybe you know the story.

Jacob had 12 sons, but Joseph was his favourite, he was one of two who was actually born to Jacob’s wife Rachel in old age (and not a slave), so there’s that. And also, Joseph was a little impulsive, he got his foot in his mouth, and would make comments about his dreams and how he would one day rule over his brothers. These are things that I think any older brother would be infuriated with. It even says, “They hated him and couldn’t speak a kind word to him” (Gen 37:4). Jacob loved him more than all of the rest. It drove them mad.

Well, one day, the brothers, they’re out grazing the flocks one day, making sure that their sheep/cattle are finding enough grass to eat, and this is far away from home, so Jacob tells Joseph. He says, “Go check up on your brothers, make sure they’re okay and, oh, here you can bring them lunch.” (This is all in Genesis 37, but I’ll summarize).

And so, Joseph goes, and he tracks them down, but rather than give him a big hug, “oh bro, thanks for bringing the food.” They take him and sell him to these Midianite merchants who are passing through the area. The brothers then slaughtered a goat and dipped Joseph’s coat in the blood, they bring this back to their dad and make up an excuse that a wild animal devoured him (Gen 37:31-33).

Then it’s another roughly 25 years after that they reconnect with Joseph in Egypt. Probably never thought they’d see him again, but the Midianites went on to then sell Joseph to Egypt where he eventually comes to rule.

This is the backstory.

So now when Jacob dies, the brothers start to worry, like what if the only reason he’s been nice to us this whole time is because of dad. Now what? He could turn on us and give us what we really deserve. This dream that we’re living in in Egypt, it could be over.

I think this can be our natural default in these kinds of situations to become a pessimist, and you think of the worst-case scenario. So how do you shake that off?

You can begin to cut corners…You think, what if I fail that test, mark goes out the window, that’s not worth it so I’m going to cheat, just a little peak, the teacher won’t even notice. Or maybe you bluff a little…What I lack in experience let me tell you sir, I make up in heart. I’ve been doing freelance work for big companies in New York and San Fran for years – my resume ought to be on the top of your stack.

These kinds of things never work out though, do they?

Here, the brothers are scrambling, they’ve got this hunch that the hammer is about to come down on them soon, they could be back to no food, in the famine before they know it.

So, they make up a little note - you can read it in verses 16 and 17.

“Your father left these instructions before he died. ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.”

Just in case you’re wondering this is completely made up, there’s no indication anywhere that Jacob left a note like that. They would have had to forge their deceased father’s signature.

Then, what happens?

The message came to him, and it says that Joseph wept (Gen 50:17).

I’ve got to think that this is a lot for him to handle emotionally.

Joseph’s father just died, the dad he never thought he would see again, and now his brothers are questioning his kindness to them. Joseph already forgave them.

When the brothers arrived in Egypt during the famine, Joseph forgave them then.

He told them in Genesis 45, “Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you” Gen 45:5).

God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance (Gen 45:7).

Joseph came to a place where he could see that despite the horrid ways his brothers had abused him; it was actually God’s intention to get him where he is now to help them, and to help so many others.

And even before he says this to the brothers, he had some kids. Jacob was getting grandkids he knew nothing about, Joseph had done alright for himself. Genesis 41:51 says Joseph named his first son Manasseh. And you know what he says, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” That’s what Manasseh means. Every time Joseph would looked at his son, he would have had this reminder that God had allowed him to move on.

He didn’t make up what he said to his brothers, that was genuine. So then why did they need forgiveness a second time?

**Rather than believing Joseph, the brothers believe the lie of the enemy.**

The brothers heard a voice that wasn’t Joseph’s. They heard a voice that said what they have here in Egypt they don’t deserve, and it would only be a matter of time before they got the boot.

You and I can do that to, can’t we?

You hear that voice saying like, “Do you really think God will just forgive what you did the other day? I mean that was pretty bad. Now do you really think He’ll just look past everything else you’ve done? Are you kidding?”

It’s one thing to read a verse like 1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all righteousness. It’s one thing to read that, it’s another to actually believe it and live it out.

It was in university that I grew in my faith and Jesus truly became my first love. A big reason for that was getting plugged into the campus ministry Power to Change. And there was one guy in particular who went out of his way to make sure that I was looked after. Ernie was his name, he was a couple years ahead of me, and I looked up to him. He would say things like, ‘David, come on out to wings with us, or I’m so excited that you’re leading a Bible study, make sure you come to retreats’ – he really gave me a push and showed me that it didn’t matter we were at the biggest party school at Western in the country – I could still thrive in my faith. We became great friends.

By my final year of school I was doing an internship in Toronto and Ernie was working there, so we got together for supper one night. It was here that I knew something had changed for Ernie. He just didn’t seem to be talking about God like he used to. He was really fixated on his career and told me he wasn’t able to get to church much anymore. About a year later, I found out that Ernie had come out of the closet. He was gay – had a boyfriend and was living a different lifestyle now. I was surprised, but eventually it started making sense to me.

Here’s why I bring this up, somewhere along the way with Ernie, this same-sex temptation he had, he would have had to believe that he couldn’t share that with Jesus, that he couldn’t take that to the cross. He would have started giving up on the church, and his Christian friends. He would have had to believe that ‘this God of redemption is just too good to be true, so I’m just going to do my own thing.’ Do you see what happens when you start to believe the lie of the enemy?

The brothers in this story came to believe a lie of the enemy too. They thought Joseph had had a mask on. The forgiveness that he had offered was all contingent on their father.

Maybe you’re here tonight, and in the past you’ve been back-stabbed by someone who said they were a Christian so because of that you’re having a tough time trusting the people at your church, even those in this room. I want to remind you that none of us are perfect, Jesus came for the sick. To assume that you’re being judged for what you’ve done or that gossip will spread about you is to believe the lie of the enemy; believe the word of the Lord. God is as good as it says He is in here (hold up Bible). He loves you.

Let’s get back to the story. Joseph weeps after he reads their message; then his brothers bow down before him and declare that they’re his slaves. They’re really reaching at this point.

And then Joseph says this: “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children” (Gen 50:19-21).

‘You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.’ What a statement! Do you think the brothers were starting to get the whole forgiveness thing at this point? When you can see God’s role in your life, you can forgive. Joseph could do that.

Notice too, how Joseph is quick to comfort his brothers. “Don’t be afraid,” he says that twice.

I think this is significant because even though the brothers have made up this message, like totally fabricated that their father Jacob left this for them - **this is the first time that the brothers ask for forgiveness.**

Before when Joseph made himself known to them when they first came to Egypt, he told them how he had forgiven them, but they never actually confessed their sins. So while it would have appeared as like this great exchange between Joseph and his brothers, from what we’re told that wasn’t the case. It was actually as if Joseph was heading down a one-way street, and his brothers were just watching him. Joseph’s conscience is clean, but the brothers are still filled with guilt.

Bible scholar Theodore Robinson puts it like this, **“Even the years they [the brothers] have spent in Egypt and the kindness they have received have not wholly obliterated from the minds of the Joseph’s brothers the wrongs that they did to him in boyhood.” (247)**

They couldn’t erase it from their memory. Finally here, the brothers are actually confessing their guilt – admitting they’re in the wrong. Twice they ask for forgiveness. And there is something so sweet about confessing your sins out loud to someone. Hard as ever to do, but once you get that off your chest, you know a weight has just been lifted, you’re now in good standing with that person.

It’s the same thing with God, until you actually acknowledge how you’ve messed up and until you ask for forgiveness; then you receive mercy. God doesn’t just hand it over to you on a silver platter, you have to respond.

This evening God wants you to respond. He wants you to experience that same transformation to know Jesus as your Saviour.

You see just like the brothers felt indebted to Joseph, you and I are indebted to God. We’ll never be able to pay him back for what we’ve done by ourselves.

Every time you sin, every time you disobey God, it hurts him.

Joseph told his brothers: “You intended to harm me.” You intended to destroy my life. I mean you can go back in your Bible in Genesis 37 and you can read how the brothers actually contemplated killing Joseph first. He heard that conversation. He heard that conversation – it should have scarred him. And then, to top it off he’s sold into slavery. There are few things worse than being sold. We’re at the end of Black History month – praise God for racial equality, praise God that slavery by in large no longer exists in North America.

“You intended to harm me,” That’s the first part of the verse, but what’s the second part? “But God intended it for good.” “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.”

You see, rather than God taking out his anger on us and actually giving us the punishment we deserve, he sent his only Son to die for you on the cross. This way, Jesus took your penalty, he took what you and I deserve, and he paid for it, he bore it himself. And then he rose again, defeating sin once and for all.

\***If there’s anything I want you to remember today, it’s this, God’s love for you is too good to be true.\***

God’s love is too good to be true because Jesus is too powerful to be defeated.

God’s love is too good to be true because we don’t deserve to be in His presence, but through Jesus, you can be.

Now in closing I just want to touch on two components of this love. 1) how you can be a recipient and 2) how you can be a distributor.

So how can you be a recipient of this love that is too good to be true? In Romans 10:9 it says this.

“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

“If you believe in your heart that God raised him –raised Jesus – from the dead, you will saved.”

This isn’t believing in the lies of the enemy, like the brothers did, but it’s believing in your heavenly Father, believing what He did for you is true.

Now the next verse in Romans 10 builds on what we’ve been saying this evening further. Romans 10:10 says:

“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified,” Okay, that’s part 1, the Apostle Paul goes on. “and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

You have to confess your sins; you have to admit that you are guilty for harming God. Then, you can receive, and then you are able to fully accept what God has done for you. Before, it’s just like an offer on the table, but now it’s something you’ve taken hold of. No more guilt, no more shame- a new life has been made possible at the cross.

God wants you to stop believing the lie of the enemy; he wants you to confess your guilt at last. You don’t need to carry that.

I don’t know where you’re at this evening, maybe you’ve been coming here for a really long time, and everything I’m telling you is a reminder. But maybe like the brothers, you’ve never actually confronted your sin before. You’ve just been going through the motions. You appreciate the people here, but maybe you’ve never given your life to Jesus.

If you’ve never made this decision before, I want to invite you to do that right now.

(Hold up basketball) It’s time for you to get in the game. The coach wants to put you in.

I want everyone to close their eyes and if this is the desire of your heart to pray along with me:

Father, I realize that your love for me is too good to be true, I don’t deserve this, but you love me anyways. I admit that I have believed the lie of the enemy, and I lay that at your feet now and instead I choose to believe in Jesus. I give my sins and my guilt over to you now, and thank you that through the cross you tossed them away as far as the east is from the west, you sunk them in the bottom of the ocean -you have forgiven me. I accept that now. Thank you for this new life. Thank you for what is to come. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

Keep your eyes closed; and if you prayed and accepted Jesus into your life for the first time, I want you to raise your hand. Please don’t leave here today without telling me or someone you came with.

God’s love for you it too good to be true.

*Now with a story like that I didn’t want to pass up an opportunity to welcome someone to the family of God, so for those of you who rose your hands buckle up.*

Secondly though, how can you be a distributor of this love that is too good to be true?

How can you be like Joseph and forgive those in your life that have harmed you?

For one, you have to get to a heavenly vantage point. Joseph breaks that down in the well-known verse: the brothers’ intention was for harm, but God’s intention was actually for good. In order to forgive someone who has unfairly treated you, the only way is draw from the forgiveness that God has given you. The **good** perspective is the **God** perspective.

How did Joseph do that? As you scan through this incredible story, you’ll see time and time again the repeated statement “The Lord was with Joseph,” the writer of Genesis even makes mention of how other people noticed this. Joseph was in the presence of the Lord. The more time you spend with someone the better you’ll understand them. Joseph knew that God was in control, and because of that He could come to understand that as terribly as his brothers had treated him, God was actually going to restore that and use Joseph mightily in Egypt. He gained that perspective.

Karl - story.