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Psalm 67; Genesis 45: 1-15

Desolation and Consolation Part II

Last week, we considered the plight of Joseph, the young man whose own brothers had plotted his death, tossed him into a pit, and eventually settled for selling him into slavery, to be trafficked to a foreign land. We left our reading in that moment of his desolation—when he had been stripped of everything and everyone he knew—and leaving it there was an uncomfortable thing to do. But the reality is that there are times in life when we are left in those desolate places, and sometimes there isn't much to do but to persevere through them. And yet today's passage reminds us that those times do not last forever. On the other side of desolation, we so often find its opposite: consolation.

In my previous congregation, there were a significant number of veterans, many of whom had served in or during the Korean War. There was one older gentleman in particular who had served as a "flight engineer," which he informed me meant his job was to fix the plane in the air while it was being shot, so it would stay in the air as long as possible. He didn't talk extensively about his time in Korea, but he did speak about how terrible it was—not just the fighting and the usual challenges of being deployed, but also about the human toll he saw in the Korean people he encountered.

While dwelling on today's text and the reunification of Joseph with his brothers, it brought to mind a piece of history that I don't recall seeing with my own eyes, but that did, just barely, happen in my lifetime, long after that man's service in Korea had come to an end. Back in the summer of 1983, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the ceasefire agreement that ended the Korean War, a South Korean TV special was televised. Its title, translated to English, was "Finding Dispersed Families."¹ It was originally planned to be a 45-minute special focused on helping to bring people who had been separated during the war back together with long-lost family members—but the TV studio soon realized that they had important work to do that would take a lot longer than that.

The Korean Broadcasting System (KSB) was so overwhelmed with people writing in and asking to be featured on the show that they very quickly started it back up again. What was supposed to be a 95-minute TV special turned into a 453 hour, 45 minute run over 138 days, featuring 53,000 people and reuniting around 10,000 families. Watching video from that series is a

¹ Wikipedia contributors. "Finding Dispersed Families." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 12 Aug. 2026. Web. 13 Aug. 2026.

complex experience. On the one hand, it's heartwarming to see people reunited after decades apart, not even knowing if one another are alive.

On the other hand, seeing and hearing the pain in people's faces and voices as they relive the horrors of war in search of their loved ones is gut-wrenching. And you can often see these conflicting emotions embodied in the people on the show. When they realize that they have, in fact, made a connection with a long-lost loved one, there is often a flood of mixed emotions expressed. Tears and laughter; smiles and grimaces; true joy and, yet, grief for those who didn't survive, or for the years that were lost apart from one another.

What is particularly striking, however, is that moment where recognition happens: when the two people speaking know beyond any shadow of doubt that the loved one they thought had been long dead is not only alive, but *right there*. No one was thankful for the horrors they had suffered because of the war, but precisely because of how hard those years and the three decades that followed had been, the reunions were all the more meaningful. About **10,000** families reunited, not unlike the one we've just read about today.

Our Desolation, God's Consolation

The human experience, though it varies from one era to another, has some common themes. Just like the folks who were on that Korean TV program searching for their lost loved ones, the moments of desolation and consolation in *our* lives can be fundamentally life-changing, and the ways we encounter those times can bring forth deeply conflicting emotions and experiences—and the reunion of Joseph and his estranged brothers is no exception.

And yet, what could have been an opportunity for vengeance and comeuppance is instead a moment of bittersweet joy and celebration, because of how Joseph has been transformed in the long years between last week's reading and where we find ourselves today.

The Word

Now, we've jumped from Chapter 37 of Genesis all the way to Chapter 45 this week, and a lot has happened in those intervening pages. Joseph had arrived in Egypt, where he was sold as a slave to Potiphar, the captain of the royal guard. He had proven himself trustworthy and risen in authority within Potiphar's household, right up until he was falsely accused of assaulting Potiphar's wife.

He was subsequently imprisoned. Two years into his imprisonment, he helped interpret the dreams of two fellow prisoners, Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer, and asked the cupbearer to remember him and appeal to the Pharaoh when he was restored to his position. The

cupbearer did not do this, and Joseph continued his time in prison until he had spent 13 years under lock and key.

Joseph was finally released when Pharaoh was in need of an interpreter for a dream of his own, and the cupbearer finally remembered that—oh yeah!—he knew a guy.

Joseph proved himself to be able to interpret the prophetic dream of the Pharaoh, which revealed that Egypt would soon experience seven years of plenty, but those would be followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh, impressed by Joseph's wisdom, appointed him as a sort of prime minister over all of Egypt, to ensure that his nation would not only survive the famine, but would thrive through it.

The famine did indeed arrive, and back home, Jacob and all of Joseph's brothers and their families were struggling to survive, but word had come to them that Egypt had prepared well for this famine, and they had grain to spare—and so Joseph's brothers had been sent to buy grain from Egypt (and, incredibly, from Joseph, the brother they had sold into slavery.) Joseph, remembering his dreams about his brothers' sheaves and stars bowing before him, did not immediately inform them of his identity, but through some subterfuge and trickery, managed to get his brother, Benjamin, the only other son of his mother, Rachel, to be brought down to Egypt as well. Through more chicanery, he planned to use Benjamin as bait to get his father to come to Egypt, but as he is attempting to manipulate his brothers, his brother Judah shares that if Jacob, their father, were to hear that Benjamin were lost as well as Joseph—whom they had not recognized, and still presumed to be lost to them—he would surely die of grief.

On hearing this, we reach today's passage, where Joseph is so overwhelmed with love for his long-lost brothers and father that he can no longer hide his identity or pretend to be a distant, imposing lord of the land. Instead, he tells his brothers his true name and gathers them close, telling them not to be worried or fearful. And what's more, Joseph identifies that even though they acted against him out of anger, jealousy, and rage, it was God who used their sinful acts to do a great thing through them all and create a place of safety and provision in the face of the greater harm of the famine that had come upon the land.

The Grace

This reunion of the sons of Jacob would be moving in and of itself, but it is all the more meaningful because of what had led up to it. Joseph's brothers had lived for decades seeing their father grieve the loss of the son he had presumed was dead, knowing all the while that they were responsible for his loss. They had lived with the guilt of what they had done for most of their lives, hiding it away from their father and likely never talking about it with one another.

Joseph, himself, had suffered cruelly for years on end in ways that were truly unfair and, frankly, deeply troubling! And yet, he continually rose above it, proving himself to be diligent, wise, and trustworthy. He made the best of what was truly a terrible situation, time and again.

And now, as Joseph finally openly acknowledges his identity and welcomes his brothers not with hate or vengeance, but with love and grace, all of those wounds and all of that grief is still there, but it is redeemed into something good. They receive *consolation* following the desolation.

That doesn't make the hurts of the desolation they had experienced *good*. It doesn't mean that what Joseph suffered should be celebrated, or that the acts of his brothers were any less sinful... but it does open the door for this family to find a path toward healing and wholeness by seeing how God's hand brought blessings to them *despite* all they had gone through.

When we finally find relief and restoration after those desolate times, it can be overwhelming—just like those moments of reunion I mentioned earlier.

Joy has a way of breaking through the clouds of our suffering and uncertainty in ways that are hard to describe, but unforgettable when it happens. It's like having all of the weight of that time lost to hurt, doubt, and uncertainty suddenly washes away, and it is one of those moments in life that can lead even the most stalwart person to be overwhelmed by a flood of emotions.

But it is a sweet, unforgettable experience.

Closing Thoughts

You know, nobody who walked through the studio door and onto that stage in Korea back in 1983 was *grateful* for the war. They didn't stand there thinking the years of separation had been some kind of gift. What they were grateful for — and overwhelmed by — was a reunion they could never have engineered nor earned, arriving on the far side of a loss they would have given *anything* to undo.

That's the distinction Joseph draws, too, and it's worth noting precisely. He doesn't tell his brothers that getting thrown into the pit was *good*. He doesn't *thank* them for the caravan, the auction block, the thirteen years he spent enslaved and imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit.

Look at what he actually says in verse 5: "*do not be distressed or angry with yourselves.*" He's not excusing what they did. He's not calling evil good. What he's saying is: ***God was working, even there, in our messiness — and look what's happening on the other side of it. Because of***

God's grace, I forgive you and am able to save you and the rest of our family from destruction.

That's the whole shape of the gospel, really. God doesn't need our suffering to accomplish His purposes, and He's never the author of the pit we get thrown into. But He is the kind of God who meets us at the bottom of it, works even through what should *never* have happened, and — in His timing — opens a **door of deliverance** that in our distress, maybe we'd stopped believing would ever open.

So, if *you're* carrying something today; if *you're* feeling stuck in a pit of your own — a loss, a betrayal, years that feel wasted or stolen — if you find yourself experiencing a time of desolation, hear this: **God is not asking you to call it good. But he is asking you to trust that He is not finished.** Somewhere on the other side of what you're walking through, there is a door to a reunion waiting. A voice that says *I am here. Come near. It's really me.* And when you finally hear it, you still may never wish to have gone *through* the desolation — but you *won't* be sorry you kept walking toward the door that opened the path to God's **consolation**.

So, in our times of trouble, we should seek to be like Joseph; persevering and carrying on, bearing up under the hardship as best we can, trusting that God is with us, all in the knowledge that his consolation—his loving care for us—will always come through in the end, one way or another.