

Someone Always Pays a Price
By Mark Archibald
1 John 1:5-2:2. Genesis 37-39, 41-50
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We're often very critical of Hollywood for its portrayal of sin and evil. We say that sex and violence and greed are glamorized. And this is true. But the very best movies, shows and stories deal with sin and evil well. This is not as rare as you would think.

We think of Hollywood as an "anything goes" environment. But occasionally it takes the sins people do very seriously. Many of us enjoy a good revenge movie. "Ha Ha! The villain got his just desserts! With no collateral damage and no further consequences to anyone else in the movie!" But we know that's not real life. We know that one violent act doesn't end evil. We know that the evil and sin and violence of the world are never wrapped up easily, if wrapped up at all. The best storytellers know this, and know that justice is a messy, if not impossible process. The best storytellers know that the evil and selfish actions of one character either come back to haunt them, or the evil and selfish actions of one character ruin those around them. When it comes to evil, someone always pays a price. Good writers communicate well the high cost of bad decisions.

Long before Hollywood the writers and readers of Scripture knew this. Justice is messy. Evil is not easily contained or ended. Things that seem like easy solutions to the evil of the world are often lies. Sin has consequences that affect those who commit the sin, sin has consequences for the family of the person who sinned, sin has consequences that last for generations.

Let's turn to Scripture and find a story that displays continual consequences of sin that affect those committing the sin, or those who face consequences from someone else's sin. When it comes to sin, someone always pays a price, which is a theme we'll see in the story of Joseph.

As I read this overview, make note of who sinned, and who faced the consequences for that sin.

Let's settle in as we read this overview of the life of Joseph together. This is written by the makers of a Bible study series called *Echo the Story* (www.echothestory.com)

Jacob and his 12 sons now lived in the Promised Land. Out of all of his sons, Israel loved Joseph the most and made him a beautiful coat with long sleeves. When Joseph was 17, he helped his brothers tend the cattle – and reported to his father anything they did wrong.

Joseph's brothers grew to hate him because he was their father's favorite. They hated him even more when he told them that he had dreams about the future where he saw all of them bowing down to him!

One day Joseph went to check on his brothers and they grabbed him, ripped off his beautiful coat, and threw him into a deep hole. Then the brothers decided to sell Joseph to slave traders who were passing by on their way to Egypt.

They tore up their brother's coat, soaked it in goat's blood, and brought it to their father saying, "We found this in the field – it's Joseph's isn't it?"

Jacob examined it and said, "Yes, this is my son's coat. A wild animal must have attacked and eaten him." He began to weep, saying, "I will mourn my son's death until the day I die!"

Meanwhile, the slave traders sold Joseph to a man named Potiphar, the head guard for Pharaoh, the King of Egypt. Potiphar noticed that God was with Joseph and blessed everything that he did. So he promoted him, putting him in charge of his entire household and business.

Now Joseph was a young, handsome man, and Potiphar's wife began to desire him. She constantly pressured him to sleep with her. But Joseph refused, saying, "That would be a terrible thing and a great sin against God!"

One night after Potiphar got home, his wife told him, "the Hebrew slave you brought here tried to rape me."

Potiphar became furious and threw Joseph into the King's Prison. But God gave him favour with the head of the jail. God was with Joseph, continuing to give him success in everything he did. Before long, Joseph was put in charge of the other prisoners and everything that happened there! God also gave Joseph the ability to interpret the other prisoner's dreams.

A few years later Pharaoh had some dreams that troubled him. In one of them he saw 7 fat cows being eaten by 7 thin cows! None of Pharaoh's wisest men could interpret what this meant.

One of the servants who had been in prison with Joseph told Pharaoh about his ability to interpret dreams. So Pharaoh had Joseph brought to him and asked, "Can you really interpret dreams?"

Joseph replied, "That is beyond me, but God will tell you what your dreams mean and ease your worry."

Pharaoh shared his dreams and Joseph interpreted them saying, "For the next seven years Egypt will have an abundance of food. This will be followed by seven years of a terrible famine that will spread over the land."

The king was so impressed with Joseph that he put him in charge of everything in Egypt- second in power only to Pharaoh himself!

During the next seven years Joseph travelled throughout Egypt making sure plenty of food was being stored up in each city. Joseph was only 30 years old at the time.

Seven years passed and the famine came, spreading throughout the world. People from all over the land came to Egypt to buy food from Joseph.

When Jacob realized his family was running out of food, he sent his sons to Egypt. When the brothers arrived to buy food, they didn't recognize Joseph and bowed down before him. Joseph did not tell them who he was until later.

At first, Joseph was harsh with his brothers, even accusing them of being spies and putting them in prison. But later, after many meetings and two journeys by his brothers, Joseph finally revealed who he was saying, "I am Joseph, your brother whom you sold as a slave!"

The brothers stood there speechless – shocked and afraid! They would never have thought that Joseph could still be alive.

But Joseph spoke kindly to them and said, "Don't be afraid, God turned your evil into something good, He put me in this high position so I could save the lives of many people. Now I will take care of you and your families."

When Pharaoh heard that Joseph's brothers had come, he invited Israel and his entire family to live in Egypt. He gave them a plot of his best land, plenty of food, and all new clothing!

So the family of Israel came to live in Egypt, escaping the drought and enjoying the blessings that God had given to Joseph. (Genesis 37-39, 41-50. Echo the Story)

A lot happened to Joseph in this story. The sins of others do great damage to his life. Joseph maybe doesn't help things on occasions either. We see the effects of sin not just in the immediate moment, but generationally.

What were some of the things that people did that we would categorize as sinful?

Who paid the consequences for that person's sin?

Someone always pays for the sin of someone else. Often the people who pay are not just the "sinner", but those around them. When Joseph's brothers throw him into the well, they intend to harm only one person: Joseph.

When Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, they intend to harm only one person: Joseph. They intend to benefit themselves by having this pain out of their lives.

They end up more profoundly destroying their father, Jacob. He becomes a shell of a man. They lose their brother, but they lose their father, too. They lose him for decades.

The simplest acts of greed personally, corporately and nationally always come at a cost to someone else. Often the people most affected are the poorest and most vulnerable among us. The things we think we are doing to only one person affect far more than that one person. The things that we do to advance ourselves often come at a significant cost to someone else.

Forgiveness is always costly. We always bear the consequences of the sins of others. And others bear the consequences of our own sin. Imagine someone who has grown up in a home with an alcoholic parent. This child endures years of abuse, shame and fear. Then one day the person who did all of this damage in this home hits rock bottom and actually makes a change. They find freedom. They overcome their addiction. And then come back to the son or daughter whose childhood they ruined, whose life they've made more complicated than they could possibly imagine, and they ask for forgiveness.

We know what this person is supposed to do. But will they do it? When that person forgives their parent, or child, or friend, or spouse, they are taking on a terrible burden. “Forgive you? No way! Do you know how much fear I have suffered through? Do you know the habits that I now have and the sinful behavior that I have passed on because of what you did to me?” Forgiveness is not easy. There is an incredible burden to forgive – to release the things that others have done to us. There is a high cost in humbling ourselves, releasing what has been done to us, and forgiving another person.

Our sin is a heavy burden. The things that we do that are wrong have consequences for ourselves. The evil that we do gives us a heavy burden of guilt that we carry, just like the burden of guilt that Joseph’s brother’s carried.

Forgiveness is a heavy burden. It is a difficult thing to forgive. Joseph found this so difficult he was very harsh with his brothers, to the point of imprisoning them. It is a difficult task to forgive. It actually costs us something.

Neither our sin nor the forgiveness we offer others is a weight we can bear on our own.

Here is where we encounter Jesus, at our point of greatest need. We have sin we do that has harmed ourselves and others. We have sin that we continue to do that continues to harm ourselves and others. We need someone greater than ourselves to deal with us in our sin. We need someone who can take the sin that we have done and fully and completely forgive us for this.

Jesus does this. Jesus, as he is killed on the cross, takes the sin of the world on himself. The sin itself. The cost of that sin. Jesus stands as a sacrifice that pays for the sin of the whole world. In the passage we read earlier, we hear, ***If we confess our sins, [Jesus] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)***

We come to Jesus with the burden of our sin and he forgives us. Someone always pays the price for our sin. Jesus volunteers to pay that price on our behalf.

Jesus takes the burden of our sin and the burden of forgiveness on himself at the crucifixion. Wicked people lie about Jesus, try him unfairly, torture him, nail him to the cross, taunt him while on the cross. And Jesus forgives them: “Father forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”

Jesus gives this example of forgiveness. Jesus also empowers us to forgive. He has left us that Holy Spirit that indwells us and equips us to do those things that we cannot do on our own. Jesus bears the incredible burden of forgiving others on the cross and calls us daily to do the same with him.

[Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

Bishop Desmond Tutu was a priest and leader during Apartheid in South Africa, and also got to see his country transition out of Apartheid into reconciliation. There were many grave sins to confess. There was much to forgive. The cross of Jesus speaks directly into the darkest realities of our world and the

Bishop knew this. ***“Forgiveness is not cheap. It is costly. Reconciliation is not an easy option. It cost God the death of his son.” (Bishop Desmond Tutu)***

We have all done things that have brought ourselves shame and that have hurt those around us. Jesus pays the price for these things we have done, offering forgiveness and freedom instead.

We have all had things done to us. Jesus calls us to forgive. Jesus calls us to forgive knowing the incredible burden that it is to forgive another person. Jesus has walked that path, and Jesus wants to walk that path with us as he calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

The weight of sin and the burden of forgiveness are impossible things to bear. And yet Jesus makes this possible through the cross.

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)

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