

We Are Truly Guilty
Genesis 42:1-24
Halifax: 11 December 2016, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Today as we move along in the account of Jacob's family as God's Spirit has given it to us in Genesis,

- We are taken back to Jacob and his eleven sons in Canaan.

If you have been with us, you know that for the last few weeks, we have been seeing what happened to Jacob's son Joseph in Egypt.

- He had been dragged off to Egypt as a slave in his seventeenth year.
 - He had been brought into the house of an Egyptian named Potiphar who was the captain of the guard in Egypt.
 - And Joseph had served him so faithfully that over the course of the years, Potiphar had put Joseph in charge of all that was in his house.
 - But Potiphar's wife had been attracted to Joseph and had tried to force him to lie with her,
 - Joseph had refused her, and she had turned on him and accused him of trying to rape her.
- Joseph was then cast into prison—probably he was spared from execution because Potiphar did not believe his wife...
 - But still Joseph was in the dungeon.
 - Yet even there he had served faithfully for more years and had been again put in charge of all that went on in the prison.
 - And in the discharge of his duties, he had met two high ranking officials in Pharaoh's court and had interpreted their dreams for them,
 - asking that the butler of Pharaoh who (according to the dreams was the one to be restored to his position) would remember him and get him out of the prison as he had done nothing wrong.
 - But the butler forgot Joseph for two more years until Pharaoh had a dream that no one in Egypt among all the wise men could interpret.
 - Then the butler told Pharaoh about Joseph and Pharaoh sent for him to see if he could interpret the dream.
 - Joseph insisted that it was not he who could interpret the dream, but that interpretations must come from God—and then he told him by prophecy what God was showing Pharaoh that He was going to do.
 - And not only that, but Joseph also gave advice to Pharaoh by prophecy about what he must do in light of what the dream had revealed.
 - Pharaoh was so impressed with what Joseph said that he immediately appointed him to be the vizier of Egypt—something like the prime minister—who was over all the affairs of Egypt.
 - Joseph was now in his thirtieth year.

- In the dream, God showed Pharaoh that there would be seven years of plenty in the land of Egypt followed by a severe worldwide famine for another seven years.
 - The plan that Joseph laid out for Pharaoh was that grain must be stored during the seven years of plenty so that there would be bread in Egypt for the seven years of famine.
 - When we pick up the story today in chapter 42, the famine has been going on for a couple of years, and Joseph's family back in Canaan are feeling the effects of it!

Now it needs to be understood that Joseph's half-brothers (there were ten of them) were the ones who had sold Joseph into slavery.

- Twenty-two years before, Joseph had been sent by his father to see how they were doing, and when they saw him coming, they plotted against him, purposing to kill him.
 - They threw him into a pit with the intention of leaving him there to die a slow and agonising death.
 - They did this because of envy...Joseph and his brother Benjamin were the sons of their father's favoured wife, and they deeply resented the favouritism that Joseph was shown by their father...
 - And their resentment was aggravated even more because they were unfaithful men and Joseph had sometimes reported them to their father...
 - And on top of that, Joseph had dreamed that the day would come when they would bow to him—a prophetic dream that had caused them to mock him.
 - On the day they decided to do away with him, they had mocked and said, “now we will see what will become of his dreams!”
 - And had it not been that a band of merchants happened to be travelling by after they had thrown Joseph into the pit on that day,
 - all of them but Reuben, who planned to rescue him, would have left him to die...
 - but seeing that they could make a profit by selling him to these merchants, they availed themselves of the opportunity,
 - and now it had been something like 22 years that Joseph had been in Egypt and they had no idea what had become of him—
 - likely, with the harsh treatment that slaves received, he was dead as far as they were concerned.
 - Of course they had concealed all of this from their father Jacob and from his youngest son Benjamin,
 - Jacob had taken Joseph's disappearance very hard—not having really believed the dreams that Joseph had had about the family bowing to him either.
 - He also knew the character of his sons, and no doubt he was suspicious when they brought Joseph's coat,
 - stained with blood, and asked him if it was the coat of his son, leaving him to conclude that he had been torn to pieces by a wild beast.
 - We will see evidence of Jacob's suspicion and his bitterness as we proceed in the account today.

But even more importantly, we will see today how Joseph's brothers are brought to conviction over their sin!

- After 22 years, the Lord graciously awakens their consciences so that they face the wickedness of what they had done to Joseph.
 - Today, I want to speak to you about the way that God works in His people to enable them to see their sin and guilt.
 - It is one of the most difficult things, for we are all masters of evasion, of self-justification, of excuse making, of blame shifting, and of just plain old avoidance.
 - Only through the working of God and of His Spirit do we ever come to the place where we even begin to face our true condition as sinners before God.
 - And even after we have come to true repentance and become the disciples of Jesus Christ,
 - our discipleship is very much hindered by our reluctance to face the sins that we need to repent of...
 - We live in our greed and our indifference to God and His commands, and we do not come to Jesus for help that we might grow, because we refuse to admit the sin that is there!
 - But our gracious Lord works in us and again and again brings us to face our sin so that we can repent and move forward.
 - May it be that today He will powerfully visit each one of us, and awaken our consciences in whatever ways they have been sleeping...
 - Perhaps there will even be someone who hears this sermon and faces your sins for the first time so that you can come to Jesus Christ and be forgiven and start living the new life that He gives to His people.

Give attention now as I read to you from Genesis 42.

- I will begin in 42:1 and read through to verse 24. Here is the Word of God.

Genesis 42:1-24: When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"² And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die."³ So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.⁴ But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "Lest some calamity befall him."⁵ And the sons of Israel went to buy *grain* among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.⁶ Now Joseph *was* governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with *their* faces to

the earth.⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."⁸ So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.⁹ Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You *are* spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!"¹⁰ And they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food.¹¹ We *are* all one man's sons; we *are* honest *men*; your servants are not spies."¹² But he said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land."¹³

And they said, “Your servants *are* twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest *is* with our father today, and one *is* no more.”¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, “It *is* as I spoke to you, saying, ‘You *are* spies!’¹⁵ In this *manner* you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here.¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether *there is* any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you *are* spies!”¹⁷ So he put them all together in prison three days.¹⁸ Then Joseph said to them the third day, “Do this and live, *for* I fear God:¹⁹ If you *are* honest *men*, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the

famine of your houses.²⁰ And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so.²¹ Then they said to one another, “We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.”²² And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”²³ But they did not know that Joseph understood *them*, for he spoke to them through an interpreter.²⁴ And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

See in this passage how the Lord awakens the consciences of His people!

I. First, He shows us that we will perish without the bread that He has provided for us.

A. Last week we saw how Joseph was a picture of Jesus Christ.

1. He was the only one who had the bread of life.
 - Perhaps you will remember that when people came to Pharaoh, Pharaoh’s instruction was simple, “Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you.”
2. That, of course, is exactly the way it is with Jesus Christ.
 - Of course there is a great deal of difference because with Joseph, it was bread for physical sustenance, but with Christ, it is spiritual bread.
 - He is revealed to us as the bread of life, unless we eat Him, we will all perish because there is no other source of bread anywhere in the world.
3. We also saw an additional picture of Christ with Joseph—
 - That as his brothers, his fellow Israelites, had rejected him, he first provided for the Egyptians—and then for his brothers...
 - With Jesus, we are told that He came to bring light to the Gentiles who had been in the darkness—and so when Israel rejected Him, His bread was distributed (and still is being distributed) to the nations of the earth.
 - But we are told that Jesus also came to bring repentance to Israel.
 - Acts 5:31 says: “**Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.**”

- And that means that God also works in the people of Israel to show them their great sin of rejecting their own Messiah that they might repent.
 - And I might add that He does (and will do) the same work in the nations that once embraced Christ, but then forsook Him.
 - Many of us are among Gentile peoples who once knew the Lord and then apostatised—having a form of religion without Christ but in name—
 - And God has granted to some us repentance.
- This is a huge point, because it means that there are people who are baptised and who were brought up in the church who have not truly come to Jesus.
 - And it means that God is working in them to grant them repentance.
 - Maybe there are those among us today who in fact are spiritually dead—you are not feeding on Jesus Christ.
 - Perhaps you will finally see your sin today when you see how Joseph’s brothers finally came to see their sin after 22 years of denial.

TRANS> But the first thing they saw was that they needed the bread that God had provided for them in Egypt.

B. The sons of Jacob saw that they would perish unless they went to Joseph for bread.

1. They did not know that it was Joseph yet when we are told of them at the beginning of chapter 42...but you can see what they know...
 - a. They know that the famine in Egypt is very severe and that they are running out of food.
 - They and their families are going to starve if they do not have bread.
 - This famine was not just an inconvenient thing—there were children with distended bellies and men and women who were skin and bones...
 - People were dying.
 - When you realise that you are perishing, you are desperate to find out where you can get bread.
 - b. And we see that Jacob had learned that there was bread in Egypt.
 - It is a very excellent thing to find out where bread can be obtained when you don’t have it.
 - And you see that with a rather impatient tone, Jacob prods his sons:
 - He says, **“Why do you look at one another?”**
 - That is what people do when they are all waiting for someone else to do something—like at a committee meeting when you are waiting for someone to volunteer and everyone is looking at everyone else.
 - And you see that Jacob does indeed present this as a matter of life and death in verse 2...
 - **And he said, “Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.”**

- c. His sons agree to go, but it is obvious that there was some reluctance.
 - They did not want to have to humble themselves before the Egyptians, for they were a wealthy and self-sufficient family.
 - Besides, they were God's people to whom promises had been made—God had spoken to them—why should they have to go to Egypt?
 - Of course, if they had been truly listening to God, they would have known that He had indeed told Abraham already that they would be going to Egypt and even that they would be in bondage there...
 - and then brought back to the land of Canaan—
 - but that was not a part of the promises that they liked to think about.
2. It is a hard thing for many who are in the covenant people—who are in the church today—to admit that they need bread from Jesus.
- Jews consider Him as the God of the Gentiles...
 - And nominal Christians have the name, but they do not acknowledge that they must receive Him as the one who was crucified to atone for their sin and to appease God's wrath.
 - They speak of His death only as an inspiration for dedication to a cause, but not as a sacrifice of atonement.
 - In their minds, they do not need to feed upon Him as the One who was crucified for the remission of sins.
 - They have never been broken before God to see that they need to feed upon Him as the bread of life or they will perish.
3. And so it is a very wonderful thing when God brings proud covenant people to see that they are just as destitute as the Egyptians without Joseph.
- a. God is the only one who can bring us to that point—to the end of ourselves—
 - And that is just what He does with the house of Jacob.
 - They realise that they must go to Egypt or they will perish.
 - They must have the bread that God has provided for the world, and that bread is in Egypt—it is with Joseph who is in Egypt—just as the spiritual bread of life is with Christ who is served in the world.
 - b. You can see in verse 6 how the sons of Jacob do go and how they bow down to the lord of Egypt, the saviour of the world, who has bread.
 - They come humbly, looking for mercy, and bow before Joseph with their faces to the earth.
 - Joseph knows them, but they do not yet recognise him.
 - c. This is what God does when He brings us to the end of ourselves...
 - We see that must go to Jesus Christ or we will perish—and so like the sons of Jacob, we go—
 - They went to get bread for their bodies and we go to get the bread of heaven from Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

II. But we must also be brought to repentance.

A. Sometimes, people come to Jesus so they can go to heaven—but they come without repentance.

1. If you read the New Testament, you will see that repentance is necessary.
 - You will see that conversion is often referred to as repentance.
 - Even as we saw in Acts 5:31 where it says that Christ came to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins.
 - You, see, repentance is necessary because Jesus Christ is not in the business of delivering people from death so they can go on living in rebellion against God.
 - His reason for delivering us from death and hell is so that we can be reconciled to God.
2. Even after we have come to Jesus, as I mentioned in the introduction today, we still have to continue to repent because we still sin.
 - In order to repent, we must see our sin—we must face it for what it is so that we can turn away from it...
 - Only then is the way opened for us to be filled with the new and better life that Jesus gives us.
 - We put off our foul words and start speaking helpful words...
 - We put off our laziness and we start serving others.
 - It begins with facing our sin and its wretchedness.
3. But often both believers and unbelievers who are being drawn to Christ do not want to face or acknowledge their sin and guilt...
 - And so our Lord has to break them—
 - He has to work in them by His Spirit and by providence to show them how ugly the sins are that they are not facing.
 - You know what I am talking about—we fall into sinful patterns and we just stay there—
 - It can be subtle things—or not so subtle...
 - Maybe we are living for entertainment instead of being fruitful and serving others, laying down our lives for God and for others.
 - Maybe we are not even thinking about the will of God but just frittering our time away with worthless activities.
 - Maybe we are drinking, or fretting, or gaming all day...or dabbling in porn—or just wasting our time...
 - Maybe we are breaking the Sabbath or giving less than ten per cent of our increase—seriously, if all of our members were doing that, we would have a lot more to give to missions...

TRANS> But we are not facing these things—we think that it is not a big deal.

- But it is a big deal and God has ways to break us.
- What does the Lord do to break us and bring us to repentance?
 - We can see what He does with Joseph's brothers...

- B. First of all He deals harshly with us so that we see the terror of the Lord.
1. We come and we bow down to our Saviour, but He speaks harshly to us.
 - He shows us that He is not happy with us.
 - You see how it says of Joseph that he acted as a stranger to his brothers and spoke roughly (or harshly) to them.
 - a. He accuses them—interestingly, of things that were in a certain way true.
 - He accuses them of being devious men who were not honest.
 - He says that they have come to spy out Egypt, perhaps as those who had been hired by Egypt’s enemies—the Egyptians were always on the lookout for invasions from some of their powerful enemies to the east of them.
 - Now of course, these men were not there to spy out Egypt,
 - But they were in fact devious men who had done great wickedness against Joseph and then had covered it up before their father.
 - They were not really honest men at all, and they needed to see that.
 - It had been twenty-two years and they had still not repented of what they did to Joseph.
 - b. And you see that Joseph practically gives them a replay of what they had done to him—only now they are the victims.
 - 1) He accuses of them of being spies—as they had falsely accused him of being a spy—
 - when in fact his father had sent him to check on them, partly to see if they needed anything—
 - though they knew that Joseph would report them if they were doing something wicked—so they looked at him as being a spy.
 - 2) He also detains them and confines them to prison, despite their pleas of innocence,
 - just as they had captured detained Joseph and put him in a pit and would not listen to his pleas.
 - 3) And he threatens them with death—just as they had threatened to kill him...
 - but he ends up keeping one of them in bonds, just as they had sold him into bondage.
2. Why does our Lord do this sort of thing?
 - a. Why is it that so often when we come to Christ, looking for life, we end up being afflicted with many trials and temptations?
 - Sometimes in this, we even look in vain for His smile and we cannot find it.
 - b. Sometimes—not always—but sometimes—it is because we have not really repented...
 - And by dealing with us this way, He searches us out so that we are forced to face our sins.
 - We realise that there is something between us and our Saviour that we have to deal with.
 - He is awakening our sleeping consciences.

- c. Does He seem far away from you today—or even harsh toward you?
 - It is not always so, but it may be that He is exposing you.
 - To Israel, Isaiah once remonstrated with them about how they kept being chastised because they kept refusing to repent...
 - In Isaiah 1:5-6, he said: **Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.**
 - They were like children that just kept on doing things for which they had to be chastened.
- But there is something else our LORD does at the same time that He afflicts us and speaks roughly to us that also helps to lead us to face our sin.
- It is something you can see in the passage I just quoted from Isaiah where he speaks of how their wounds from chastening have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment...
- C. He tempers His harshness with tokens of mercy and hope.
- Even as He afflicts us, He holds out hope the way Joseph does here!
 - After three days of confinement and uncertainty in prison, Joseph comes to speak to them as you can see in verse 18-20.
1. The first thing he does is promise life to them!
 - a. He says—**“Do this and live.”**
 - And then he tells them that he will let them all go—all but one of them whom he will keep as a hostage...
 - They will be able to carry grain to their families to supply their need...
 - but if they wish to return and if they wish to rescue the one he takes as a hostage, they must return with their youngest brother to verify their story.
 - In verse 20, he says, **“And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die.”**
 - b. This language is very familiar to them—**do this and live** (v. 18) **do this and you shall not die** (v. 20).
 - This is the language of Canaan that God spoke to His people—**do this and you shall live and not die...**
 - It is just what their father Jacob had said to them when he had sent them to Egypt—go and buy grain **“that we may live and not die.”**
 - c. Even when God is breaking us, He still brings us His promise of hope.
 - All along the promise is there, being refreshed to us, that if we repent and believe, if we leave all and follow Jesus, we shall live and not die.
 - The promise sustains us in the midst of our affliction and under His frowning countenance...
 - There is yet hope!

2. The second thing Joseph does in mercy is tell them that he fears God.
 - a. By this he assures them that he will not deal unjustly with them.
 - You can see in verse 18 how after saying “**do this and live,**” he adds the words ‘for I fear God’: “**Do this and live, for I fear God.**”
 - As one who fears God, he lets them know that he recognises that despite his high position, he must answer to God for everything that he does.
 - He will be faithful to his word and he will not deal unjustly with them.
 - b. Are we not told this of Jesus?
 - that He who has turned to us an angry countenance to humble us is not unjust—that He is faithful and righteous...
 - He will never deal unfairly with us because He does only the will of God as the mediator between God and man.
 - c. Not only does this comfort us, but it also convicts us because we know that we do not fear God as we should.
 - We see the justice and the righteousness of Christ and we know that we have not always dealt fairly with others.
 - What a rebuke this was to Joseph’s brothers when this Egyptian is telling them that he fears God when they,
 - in dealing with their own brother, were completely devoid of the fear of God.
 - How glad they are to hear this of this Egyptian, but how convicted they are to remember their own deeds.
- And then Joseph does a third thing to comfort them and give them hope...even while he is still afflicting them...
3. He gives them bread!
 - Even though they have not yet repented, already he is giving them the bread that they need for them and their families.
 - Does the LORD not do that for us too?
 - Even though we are being chastened, He is still providing life for us—He is even nourishing us that we may be brought to repentance.
 - His Spirit and His Word are working in us to draw us, else we would never be able to repent.
 - That is the way of our gracious LORD.

III. And now see what the wonderful result of His wise dealing with us is!

A. Like Joseph’s brothers, we come to acknowledge our guilt!

1. The combination of harsh treatment together with mercy and hope breaks us down...
 - We are not able to keep up our resistance.
 - We are both terrified and drawn in at the same time.
 - That is the way holiness is—it frightens us, it unnerves us, it makes us tremble, it dismays us; but it is inviting, and makes us want to draw near—it shows us that this is all our hope is found!

2. You see the beautiful awakening of Joseph's brothers that results—
 - They are brought to a true conviction of their sin.
 - In verse 21 & 22, it says: **Then they said to one another, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.”** ²² **And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”**
 - After 22 years, they finally face what they have done...
 - The terror of the Lord and the goodness of the Lord has brought them to this confession.
 - They have been put in their brother's place, and they realise that they fully deserve it,
 - Yet, the one who is dealing with them fears God and promises life to them while they had no fear of God in dealing with Joseph.
 - They see clearly how wretched they had been—
 - ignoring the cries of their brother as they violently handled him and threatened him with death and then sold him into slavery...
 - They remember his cries and tears, and guilt comes flooding into their souls—guilt before the face of God.
 - They know that their brother's blood is upon them—that they deserve to die because of what they have done.
 - There are no excuses.
 3. It is a beautiful thing when the LORD finally brings us to this place.
 - We are brought from the darkness in which we have been hiding into the light—we see the truth about ourselves that we have been avoiding.
 - Now the way is opened for us to repent.
 - 1 John 1:7-9 says: **But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**
 - We have faced what are and we cannot go on like that anymore.
- B. And look—our Lord weeps with joy when He sees this, as we see Joseph weeping with joy...
1. He is listening to us when we own our sin—He sees it even though we do not always know that He sees it...
 - They did not know that Joseph could understand them, but he could.
 - And you see that this dear loving, forgiving, brother of theirs who was so wronged by them is unable to contain his tears...
 - Verse 24 says: **And he turned himself away from them and wept.**

2. Our Lord Jesus takes great delight when we are finally brought to the conviction of our sin.
 - He sees us in our sorrow and He weeps with us, but He also rejoices that we are finally facing the truth so that we can repent.
 - How He who died for us loves us—He wants the best for us—
 - How He delights in our progress!

C. But there is still more to be done before He comforts us.

1. The trial must continue a little longer—
 - Conviction of sin is not yet repentance—for when we repent we not only loathe what we are before God and what we have done...
 - but we also begin to follow Jesus by His grace into new ways of living.
2. And so, as we see with Joseph,
 - He does not yet reveal himself to his brothers—it is still not time.
 - Instead, we are told that he binds Simeon before them and sends them away with grain for their families just as he said that he would.
 - They must come back with Benjamin, and then there will be more tests for them to see if they are really changed men.
 - It is one thing to see our sin, it is another to come and follow the Lord.

TRANS> Next week, if the Lord is willing, we will look at the testing of Jacob; and then the week after that, we will look at the testing of Joseph's brothers.

- They are on the road to repentance.
- Their repentance has begun with the conviction of their sin.

Conclusion:

And now I would ask each one of you—

- What, dear friend, do you need to face up to you that you have not really been willing to face?
 - Do you see the terror of the Lord?
 - Do you see the promises of God?
 - Do you sense that He is working in you even now to convict you?
- Then face whatever it is that is keeping you from Him!
 - I am serious—think about it—what specifically do you need to face in your life that you have been avoiding?
 - Face it in all of its wretchedness that you have been trying to deny.
 - Your Saviour will weep with you if you will just own up to it all.
 - And you can come to Him that you may live and not die.