

Scripture Reading: 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, & 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.”

“The Conviction of Sin”

Just as we have seen with Joseph’s actions as a civil ruler, we now come to some interaction with his family that can give us much to ponder! But I trust we will see that just as he brings salvation to the land of Egypt as a wise civil ruler, here as well he is working toward real restoration in a very broken family.

The famine has come as we saw at the end of Chapter 41 and now we see the need in Jacob’s family for food... Right away we have a lesson in the text that can be very important to us today and can be quickly passed over. It comes with Jacob’s comment to his boys about not just looking at themselves but going to Egypt to buy grain...

““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.””

Now “Why do you look at one another?” has been translated in various ways, but I think what is clearly communicated is the fact that these sons of Jacob were paralyzed by the seriousness of the situation and frozen in a state of inaction. I can relate to this personally when it comes to the important task that I face each week: My sermon preparation! Many weeks the hardest part seems to be sitting down and putting those first few comments or thoughts on the paper... Once I do that the rest seems to flow pretty well because it was not a lack of study or preparation that was holding me up, but just taking that first step... In a sense, I was just sitting there looking at myself rather than acting.

This is an important lesson to learn because such inaction usually comes when we really do need action because the work to do is overwhelming us! It can be that pile of paperwork at the office that would go away IF we simply started to work our way through it. Everyone has no problem with a few dirty dishes or some light housework, but when a big mess appears we can find ourselves in a state of inaction because we don’t know where to start!

- So Jacob’s advice is wise and should ring in our ears the next time we feel overwhelmed or paralyzed: Don’t sit around stressing, go to Egypt and buy some food!**

Now we have no reason to believe that these sons thought that they might run into Joseph down in Egypt... But some have wondered why Joseph had not reached out to his father in the first seven years where he has been the ruler in Egypt. I think the reason for this relates to the care we will now see him provide for these estranged brothers, because how could he have reached out to his father without causing a world of trouble for his brothers with Dad?

- With that said, the fact is we are simply not told and thus we can only speculate.

What we are told is how Joseph relates to his sinful brothers when they do appear before him there in Egypt and it is here that I believe we have another important lesson to learn...

- A central lesson about the importance of true confession of our sins and how fellow brothers & sisters can help us to see our sin!

Our morning text makes it clear that Joseph both realized who these men were AND that he also chose to conceal his own identity. This would not have been difficult...

- But the tougher question will be why he did so?

First it has been around twenty years since they last saw Joseph and we all know how much a person can change from their teen years to their thirties. Add to this the fact that Joseph no longer looked like a Hebrew shepherd but would rather have been very Egyptian in his appearance...

- Especially with all the royal robes and trappings that Pharaoh had bestowed upon him.

And finally we learn a bit later that Joseph spoke to them through an interpreter as well.

And from the perspective of the brothers, EVEN if they might have thought that Joseph could have ended up in the land of Egypt they could not have conceived of him rising to the second most powerful position in that land...

- Something only God could have arranged!

Remember, they sold him into slavery and would likely have doubted that he could have even lived for twenty years in such a condition. So, the brothers who were ready to kill their own brother and then sold him into slavery now stand before him in need of food.

Obviously, Joseph chooses to not immediately reveal who he is...

- So what was his purpose or motivation in not doing so?

--Was he just having a bit of fun with them?

--Was he wanting to torture them by dragging things out a bit?

--Did he want to bide his time to find out what was really going on at home?

--Was Benjamin safe or had he also been cast out by these brothers as well?

--Was his father still even alive?

Now many of the commentators see these last few questions as Joseph's driving motivation.

- But those could have been ascertained with a direct confrontation.

If revenge or even justice was his motivation, again a direct confrontation would have worked the best...

So, we are left with the question of why the concealment and rough treatment.

I want to argue that Joseph is here showing true love for these brothers who had treated him so poorly by helping them to honestly confront the sins they had committed.

So Joseph speaks roughly to them asking where they are from, a question that he already knew the answer to! Think of it as the parent who asked the child that still has the chocolate chip mustache, what happened to the cookies that were on the counter?

Verse nine tells us that “Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them...”

- Clearly Joseph is remembering that all of this has been a part of God’s grand plan for his family.

Joseph then begins a quick exchange that brings the first glimmer of the true confessions that these brothers needed to make... Joseph said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!” Here the nakedness of the land means the weakness of the land, accusing them of looking for a way to conquer Egypt.

This puts the brothers on the defensive where they speak the truth, but not the whole truth in an effort to calm this man’s fears about them: 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.”

- We should notice that they position themselves first and last as Joseph’s servants which is just what God’s dreams had revealed.

They have come to buy food, not to conquer AND if they truly were spies why would any man send all of his sons to play such a dangerous role?

At this point, Joseph knows that they have not revealed all there is to know about their family and so he pushes them a bit further... 12 “But he said to them, “No, but you have come to see the nakedness [or weakness] of the land.””

At this point they reveal what Joseph needed to know about his younger brother and father... 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.”

If this information was all that Joseph was after he could have simply revealed who he was at this point & sent the brothers off to bring his father and brother Benjamin to Egypt.

Obviously, Joseph was after something more because these interactions are going to continue on for another three plus chapters! These brothers have now been honest about their family having twelve brothers AND we see the beginning of a confession regarding their wicked actions when they say, “and one is no more.” While Joseph is being rough on his brothers, this is not an easy exchange for him either, as we see in a moment.

So Joseph now wants his brothers to truly confront their sins and so he puts them to the test...

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.”

Now on the surface what Joseph is doing is giving them the opportunity to prove their story is true by producing the other brother. Of course, Joseph knows the family history and all the trouble that such an action would stir up with their father.

- We have already seen how Jacob withheld Benjamin because of what happened to Joseph!
- Seeing their father go through the pain of sending off yet another favored son would do much to remind them of their own sins.

Joseph gives them three days in jail to think things over and then begins to soften his stance and gives them something to ponder...

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.””

- **Joseph has given them a more reasonable option with only one of them needing to remain as his hostage.**

He also begins to reveal the truth that will come out in the near future:

- **He is one who fears the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!**
- **He is in fact their brother!**
- **I suspect at this point that his brothers heard this in a generic sense of one who believes in a god or gods, but he was telling the truth!**

The brothers agree to the new plan and then in verse 21 we see that Joseph’s goal is starting to be achieved:

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.”

At this point these brothers have reached the point of being sorry that their sins have caught up with them and thus the drama will continue in the coming weeks.

- **We also begin to see just how difficult it is for Joseph to draw out the truth from his brothers!**

So, let me end for today with a focus on the second of our important lessons:

- **The honest confession of our sins!**

We stress the importance of this here at Church of the King with our weekly time of confession in worship! As part of that weekly confession we quote various passages on the importance of confession and often turn to I John chapter one:

I John 1:1 “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. 5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light & in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 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. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.””

The Apostle John wants us to have the fullness of the joy God gives us!

We cannot have that joy when walking in darkness, just as these brothers of Joseph have never had any real peace for the past twenty years. However, the lesson here is not just about personal confession...

But how the role of others in our lives can lead us to such proper confession. Left to themselves these men would never have confessed to what they had done...

- **And even with this initial push from Joseph they have only reached the point of self-pity.**

While some of Joseph's actions may seem hard to understand, I think we see them in a better light when we realize he is being loving to his brothers. As we learn these important lessons from the life of Joseph we should remember that they are to be applied in so many ways in our lives as we show true love to those we love: Parents have the responsibility to help their own children see their sins. Sometimes that can come with some real pain as the rod of correction is used and sometimes it can come with some long exchanges to help them understand the seriousness of their actions as Joseph is doing here. As they grow older it will often come with serious consequences not unlike what these brothers are now experiencing.

Husbands and wives must hold each other accountable for their sins. Those of us who are married certainly know that this is very dangerous ground to tread upon...

- **But important ground to cover nonetheless.**
- **True love does not seek to hide or even ignore sins seen in others!**

Yes, the officers in Christ's Church have the responsibility to help the Saints to see their sins!

- **And again, those of us who serve in such roles know how dangerous this ground can be!**

We must avoid those ditches once again: We cannot simply sit back and let each man or women in the congregation do what they think is right in their own eyes...

- **AND we must not become legalistic in our discipleship of those entrusted to our care.**

And yes, each of us have this responsibility as well with our brothers and sisters, both at home or at Church. And of course, that responsibility comes, in all of these important areas, with a very powerful warning from Jesus that we should always have in mind when we seek to minister this type of love to others...

- **It is a lesson we must learn well and remember as we continue to study this important subject!**

It begins with perhaps the most misquoted passage in all of the Scriptures, which I trust we will learn can and must be seen in its proper context: Matthew 7:1 ““Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

Jesus wants neither specks nor planks in our eyes or the eyes of others... This is why we must learn to be faithful in removing the planks from our own eyes so we can assist others!

And remember those planks cannot somehow be removed in secret where no one needs to know what our sin was, but can only be removed by proper confession and the work of the Holy Spirit. If you child, your spouse, your congregant or your friend do not see such work in your own life, they will NOT hear anything you have to say about the speck that you see SO clearly in their eyes!

Communion Meditation: Proverbs 9

“Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; 2 She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. 3 She has sent out her maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city, 4 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!” As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, 5 “Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed.