

“REPENTANCE TESTED AND VERIFIED”

I. Introduction

- A. People respond in varying ways when something they have done wrong is found out.
 - 1. Some take offense that their wrongdoing has been noticed.
 - 2. Some shift the blame onto someone else.
 - 3. Some downplay or excuse their offense.
 - 4. And some express remorse over what they have done.
 - 5. Even if a person does express remorse, it can be difficult to know whether he is being sincere, or is merely upset because he is experiencing the negative consequences of his actions.
 - 6. This was the dilemma that Joseph was facing with regard to his brothers.

- B. As we have followed the things that transpired with Joseph’s brothers over the past few chapters, we have seen them admit their guilt concerning their past mistreatment of Joseph.
 - 1. And unbeknownst to them, Joseph overheard their admission of guilt.
 - 2. While he wants to see his family reconciled, first he has to determine whether his brothers are truly repentant for how they treated both him and their father.
 - 3. As we consider this chapter this morning, we will see how Joseph’s testing of his brothers teaches us that genuine repentance is marked

by two things.

4. First, those who are truly repentant acknowledge and turn away from their sin.
5. And second, those who are truly repentant put on the virtues that are antithetical to their sin.

II. Acknowledging and Turning Away from Sin

- A. In the previous chapter, Joseph set a feast before his brothers and tested them by giving five times more food to Benjamin than the other brothers.
 1. The brothers passed that test.
 2. Instead of being jealous of Benjamin, they made merry with him.
 3. But now, as Joseph sends them on their way back home, he puts them to an even more severe test.
- B. Joseph's brothers must have been feeling a great deal of relief as they packed up and began to head home.
 1. Things had gone far better than they could have hoped.
 2. They had been treated like honored guests by Joseph.
 3. They got their grain.
 4. They didn't have to pay for the grain that they purchased on their previous visit.
 5. And they were bringing Simeon and Benjamin back home with them.
 6. Everything worked out, or so it seemed at the time.

7. Little did they know what was about to transpire.
- C. Before his brothers leave, Joseph directs his steward to place the money back in their sacks again and to place his own silver cup in the sack of Benjamin.
1. As we have already noted, the reason why Joseph puts on this ruse is to test his brothers.
 2. He has to see if they have truly changed.
 3. In order to find out, he creates a scenario that provides them with an opportunity to commit the same sin all over again.
 4. Two decades earlier, they had sold their father's favorite son into slavery, having no qualms about the suffering it would bring upon both Joseph and their father.
 5. Joseph wants to see how his brothers will respond when they are given the opportunity to give Benjamin up in order to save their own necks.
 6. Will they throw Benjamin under the bus, or will the situation heighten their sense of guilt over what they had done to Joseph?
 7. As commentator Meredith Kline explains, Joseph's reason for placing the money back in his brothers' sacks was "to enflame the brothers' smouldering sense that God was mysteriously dealing with them for their great sin, summoning them to repentance."
[*Eerdmans Bible Commentary*, 110]
 8. Ever since their first visit to Egypt, the brothers have had a sense that God's hand is behind the things that are happening to them.
 9. Joseph wants to make sure that that sense remains hot within them.

- D. When the steward catches up with the brothers and makes the accusation about the cup, they are utterly surprised, as we would expect.
1. They do not hesitate to put down their sacks so that the steward can search through them for Joseph's silver cup.
 2. We should note, by the way, that the steward's mention of Joseph using this cup to practice divination does not necessarily mean that Joseph actually engaged in such a superstitious practice.
 3. In fact, this would be in conflict with Joseph's statement to Pharaoh back in chapter 40, where he said that only God can reveal the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams.
 4. It seems best to see the mention of divination as part of the ruse.
 5. It makes the cup seem that much more precious, and the crime of stealing it that much more serious.
- E. When the cup is discovered in the sack of Benjamin, the brothers tear their clothes and return to the city.
1. Now, both of these actions are significant.
 2. Twenty years before this, when the brothers told their father about what happened to Joseph, it was only Jacob who tore his clothes to give expression to his despair.
 3. The brothers did not tear their clothes on that occasion.
 4. They were not disturbed over Joseph's disappearance.
 5. After all, they had orchestrated it.
 6. But in this passage they do tear their clothes.

7. Previously, they did not care at all about their father's favorite son.
 8. Now they do.
- F. That this is indeed the case is further demonstrated by the fact that the all of the brothers go back to the city.
1. They would not have had to do this.
 2. The steward told them, "he who is found with [the cup] shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent."
 3. The brothers could have handed Benjamin over and then gone on their way.
 4. They were being given the chance to get rid of their father's favorite, and to do so to their own advantage.
 5. But they did not take the opportunity to do this.
 6. They all went back to the city.
 7. This shows that the brothers have in fact changed.
 8. True repentance has taken place.
 9. They have turned from their sin, and they are not going to commit it again.
- G. When the brothers arrive back in the city and are confronted by Joseph, Judah serves as their spokesman.
1. Recall the things that we have been told about Judah in the preceding chapters of Genesis.

2. It was Judah who had come up with the idea of selling Joseph in order to turn a profit.
 3. After that, Judah left the covenant circle to live among the Canaanites, intermarrying with them.
 4. He raised boys who were so wicked that two of them were put to death directly by the Lord.
 5. He failed to fulfill his obligations to his widowed daughter-in-law Tamar.
 6. Then he had sexual intercourse with Tamar when she disguised herself as a prostitute.
 7. Judah was not an upright man.
 8. Yet in spite of all of his sin, the Lord was gracious to Judah and brought him to the point of repentance.
 9. We were given a glimpse of Judah's new character in chapter 43, where he took it upon himself to be the pledge of Benjamin's safety to his father.
 10. Here in this chapter, we see Judah making good on his promise.
- H. Put yourself in Judah's shoes when Joseph confronts the brothers for stealing his silver cup.
1. What is your first impulse when you are accused of doing something that you have not done?
 2. Wouldn't you deny the accusation and plead your innocence?
 3. That is not what Judah does here.

4. Instead, he says, "God has found out the guilt of your servants."
 5. Why would Judah say that?
 6. He says it to acknowledge their past sin.
 7. Though the brothers are innocent of this particular crime, they realize that there is a higher justice behind what is transpiring here.
 8. Judah is talking about the guilt they bore for what they had done to Joseph those many years before.
 9. As we said earlier, during both of their trips to Egypt, the brothers interpreted every setback as divine punishment for what they had done to Joseph.
 10. They realized that there was nothing they could do to escape God's justice.
 11. He found them out.
 12. That is why they admit their guilt.
 13. And by doing so, they further demonstrate the genuineness of their repentance.
- I. The brothers did not know it at the time, but their admission of guilt paved the way for a beautiful reconciliation.
1. Before that could happen, they had to be brought to a low point.
 2. They had to see the evil of their sin and God's wrath against it before they could receive the grace that the Lord was about to pour out upon them.

3. This points to a principle that is at the heart of the Christian message.
4. We need to experience the bitterness of our sin and guilt before we can appreciate the greatness of God's grace in Jesus Christ.
5. As the Puritan Thomas Watson put it, "Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet."
6. If you don't taste the bitterness of your sin, you won't be able to taste the sweetness of the gospel.

III. Putting on Virtues Antithetical to Sin

- A. In verses 18 through 34, we see Judah putting on virtues that are the direct opposite of the sin that he had committed when he and his brothers sold Joseph as a slave.
 1. In committing that sin, they were putting themselves before their brother and their father.
 2. To gratify their hatred and jealousy, they subjected Joseph to the misery of being a slave, bringing Jacob the misery of being bereaved of his beloved son.
 3. But here, we see Judah doing the opposite, putting others before himself.
 4. We first see this in how he speaks about his father.
 5. He mentions Jacob fourteen times in this speech.
 6. Instead of expressing resentment over Jacob's favoritism, he accepts it as a fact and even uses it as the basis for his plea.
 7. He quotes his father as saying that his wife had only bore him two sons, as if his other sons did not count because they were not

Rachel's children.

8. Judah admits that Jacob's life is bound up with the life of Benjamin.
9. He tells Joseph that if Benjamin does not return, then Jacob will go down to the grave in sorrow.

B. The reason why this stands out so much is because it is Judah who is saying it.

1. Neither he, nor the brothers for whom he is speaking, cared one bit about their father when they conspired to make him think that Joseph had been eaten by a wild animal.
2. Nor did Judah care about his daughter-in-law's situation when his two wicked sons died and left her childless.
3. But now Judah does care about others.
4. What accounts for this change?
5. The Lord has humbled him by opening his eyes to see the sinfulness of his selfishness.
6. Judah has repented of that sin.
7. And his repentance is evidenced by the fact that he is no longer living only for himself.

C. The second thing to note in Judah's speech is what he says at the very end of it.

1. After making his case for why it is so important that Benjamin be allowed to return home, Judah pleads with Joseph to take him as a servant in Benjamin's place.

2. Judah's concern for his father causes him to sacrifice himself for Benjamin's sake.
 3. He cannot bear to think of the evil that will befall his father if Benjamin does not return.
 4. As one commentator puts it, Judah "learned first the evil that results from hating a brother and then, to prevent such evil again, he would sacrifice himself for his brother." [Ross, 668]
- D. Judah's self-sacrifice foreshadows what would be done by his greatest descendent many years later.
1. This is a picture of what Jesus did when he offered himself up on the cross to secure our redemption.
 2. Judah is functioning as a type of Christ here.
 3. He is a changed man, and his life has taken on a Christlike form.
 4. That is what happens when the Lord works repentance in a person's heart.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The whole Christian life is to be marked by repentance, as we daily turn from sin to God, endeavoring after new obedience.
- B. This passage shows us that repentant people see everything that happens to them through the lens of their own sin and God's great mercy in Christ.
- C. And as they reflect upon the fact that God does not treat them as their sins deserve, they stop thinking only about themselves and begin caring about other people.
- D. Judah demonstrated his repentance with self-sacrificing love.

- E. He serves an example for each of us to follow.
- F. The way to express repentance for your own selfishness is to look for ways you can lay your life down for the benefit of those around you.
- G. As the apostle John reminds us in his first epistle, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” (1 Jn. 3:16)