

Scripture Reading: Genesis 43:1-23

“Now the famine was severe in the land. 2 And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, “Go back, buy us a little food.” 3 But Judah spoke to him, saying, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ 4 If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. 5 But if you will not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’” 6 And Israel said, “Why did you deal so wrongfully with me as to tell the man whether you had still another brother?” 7 But they said, “The man asked us pointedly about ourselves and our family, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?’ And we told him according to these words. Could we possibly have known that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’” 8 Then Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. 9 I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. 10 For if we had not lingered, surely by now we would have returned this second time.” 11 And their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: Take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a present for the man—a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. 12 Take double money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. 13 Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man. 14 And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!” 15 So the men took that present and Benjamin, and they took double money in their hand, and arose and went down to Egypt; and they stood before Joseph.

'Benjamin Travels to Egypt'

We are back in the Book of beginnings and our attention now turns to the youngest brother Benjamin!

Let me take a moment for a quick reminder about the importance of our family history here... And I say OUR family history because we are told by the Apostle Paul that we are the true children of Abraham, Abraham is our father!

- **So who can name the three patriarchs of our family... Those as Jamie Soles rightly points out are the fathers of nations?**

We have studied Abraham and Issac at length and now we are in the midst of the story of Jacob which takes us to the end of Genesis...

- **How many sons did Jacob have?**

That is right, twelve and they become the twelve tribes of Israel!

And of course that leads to the next question:

- **How many disciples did Jesus have?**

Those disciples, with the exception of Judas the betrayer, become the Apostles of the Book of Acts!

And my last question might be a little tougher...

- **Who was the last Apostle born out of time?**
- **And what tribe did the Apostle Paul come from?**

That is right the tribe of Benjamin, named after the son of Jacob who will now journey to Egypt, in many ways testing his brothers as the new Joseph!

So, as you can imagine, there have been many comments about what all of this means for us today!

As we have already seen, there are important lessons about Grace and contentment [that is the lack of anxiety!] and we have seen the consequences of former sins tormenting this family. All of these themes will continue as the writer of Genesis goes on to give our family history and the telling of these events can also be helpful with how we approach our Bibles.

- **This is God’s revelation to us: God telling his story!**

That grand story of salvation that we often refer too, but here we are reminded about how God reveals or relates His story:

- **It is not given to us as mere propositions or a systematic theology book.**
- **It is not given as a simple pamphlet that gives us the simple Gospel in a few sentences.**
- **It is not like a legal brief that provides all the evidences to make a case in very formal language.**

Now of course to properly understand and share the truths of the Bible, all of those aspects can be important:

- **Systematic theology books and Creeds keep us away from error.**
- **The simple Gospel is what gives us hope and should be shared.**
- **And the evidences for our faith steel us against the assaults by those who deny God’s story.**

However, with all of that we must never forget that God communicates all of this to us by telling His story! And what we will be considering over the next few weeks is a great example of what I mean by all this: I could communicate what “needs” to be known from these chapters with a simple statement:

‘Finally Jacob sends his sons back to Egypt for more food, where Joseph reveals himself to them and brings all of Jacob’s family down to Egypt so they can live there as God had said would for hundreds of years.’

- **That certainly gives us the facts but misses the richness of the story!**

So as we unpack all that God reveals in these three chapters about those simple facts, I trust we will remember how this is truly the way we each live our ‘story’ here in God’s creation!

- **This is why we stand in awe when we see a stunning sunset, rather than just think about the physics of what is happening at that moment.**
- **This is why the young child wants to do a simple task over and over and over again, just as God does each day with the sun!**
- **This is why our marriages are much more than a certificate of marriage or even a ring on our finger, they should be alive & filled with stories all the days of our lives.**
- **This is why our vocations or home-making should be much more than a paycheck or clean kitchen.**

Creation is God’s story and we are to live out our story in the same way we see all of history played out.

So with all of that in mind, let us see how the story of Jacob continues! As we do this, we should remember some of the roles that each are playing: Joseph has been made ruler of Egypt and is now striving to bring restoration to his family, which includes comfort for his father and repentance for his brothers: He is the one we are to see as Jesus in this account.

- **Sadly, we often have to see ourselves in the lives of Jacob and his other sons!**

Sin has taken its toll, so that we see a great deal of fear & confusion.

During the first visit, we saw the beginnings of repentance on the part of Joseph's brothers, but upon their return the utter despair of them & their father.

- **As I pointed out they were being anxious for everything!**

But God does not leave His people to their own devices or wisdom, thankfully!

In this case, He uses the famine to get their attention and they are forced to deal with Joseph once again.

Verse one tells us that the famine was severe in the land and there is an important lesson for us here: What may seem like very bad circumstances to us can well be just what God has decided to use as the means to get us where He wants us to be, and where we need to be!

- **God told Abraham there would be 400 years in Egypt & that is just what will happen because of Joseph's enslavement & a famine!**
- **I think if we are honest, neither of those events would be things we would write into our own story!**
- **So, when we face unpleasant events or circumstances we should remember Who is in control and that He is much wiser than we are!**

With the famine continuing, Jacob now tells the brothers to return to Egypt for more food: Then we see Judah step forward as the new advocate, foretelling of course the role that his family would play in bringing forth the Messiah, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

Judah reminds his father about the difficulty they have in returning without Benjamin and while Jacob at first is still bitter and tries to blame the actions of the other brothers, Judah insists they had no choice and I think Jacob begins to see God's hand in all this.

- **When he sees that action must be taken, he does what he did when facing the terror of returning to his brother Esau: He sends gifts!**

Even in the midst of a great famine, the land flowing with milk and honey was still producing fruit and honey and so he saw this as a chance to present a great gift to the leader of Egypt in an attempt to win his favor. He then instructs them to take back the money they had found in their bags along with new money for food.

- **The last instruction, which I am sure was both last and the hardest, was for them to take their brother Benjamin.**

But then we see two more things in the text that we have not seen for some time in the life of Jacob:

He turns to God in prayer and we see his anxiety turn to contentment:

14 "And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"

- **He asks God, the Almighty God of his Fathers, to go before them to deliver both Simeon and Benjamin!**

But then he also acknowledges that God is the one who truly determines what is best, just as Daniel's friends did before the King who threatened them with death: Telling that King that God could deliver them from his hand, but if He did not they would still not bow down to his idol!

We see this later with King David who pleads for the life of Bathsheba's first son, but then surprises his servants with an attitude of worship when the Lord said no and the child dies.

We see this also with Job, when he responds to his foolish help-meet who suggested that he just curse God & die by saying, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?"

And of course, Ester knew that her fate lie squarely in the hands of God and not the King who could have her executed, when she also prayed and accepted God's will as supreme:

Ester 4:15: "15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

- So in the end Jacob trusts the Almighty God of his fathers and sends his sons back to Egypt.

Ester said if I perish I perish, trusting God, and Jacob now says "if I am bereaved I am bereaved" also trusting that God's will be done!

And I as I pointed out, we now have almost three chapters worth of story telling to see how all of these characters interact and we should remember to see them as our family! Just as we know much of the recent history of our families, we must take care to know our distant history as well. *[mention impact of genealogies]*

So the brothers pack up the gifts and money and make the journey back to Egypt and our story continues at verse 16 "When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for these men will dine with me at noon." 17 Then the man did as Joseph ordered, and the man brought the men into Joseph's house."

Joseph knew how difficult the task he had given his brothers would be and it had been some time since he had sent them off...

- But now they return with Benjamin!

Thus he is ready to continue his ministry to his errant brothers and sends them off to his own home for a meal. [yes, eating again!] We will see his steward faithfully carry out his instructions and you can imagine how confusing all of this was now for these brothers... He is the man who roughly accused them of being spies on the first visit and arresting them and kept Simeon as a hostage...

- And yet, now he is sending them off to his home for a meal!

Of course, all of their anxious habits have not left them as we then read...

18 "Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, "It is because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and seize us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys."

These brothers have come under the conviction of sin and as we often do, now think that everything revolves around the consequences they must face: They have been found out and Joseph is surely setting them up!

- Thus they try to quickly win the favor of the steward and rightly think that honesty is the best policy!

19 "When they drew near to the steward of Joseph's house, they talked with him at the door of the house, 20 and said, "O sir, we indeed came down the first time to buy food; 21 but it happened, when we came to the encampment, that we opened our sacks, and there, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it back in our hand. 22 And we have brought down other money in our hands to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks."

- The brothers are sure they are going to be confronted about the mysterious return of their money in the sacks, but the steward gives them a surprising response:

23 "But he said, "Peace be with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them."

It is interesting to note that this Egyptian steward did not say that the gods had cared for them, but rather their God, the God of Jacob...

In my mind this is another bit of evidence that Joseph is bringing salvation to Egypt, which we will consider again in a few weeks. But for now, the writer of Genesis wants us to take in many of the details of this gracious event... Yes, we should think of sinners invited to the wedding feast with new wedding garments.

24 “So the man brought the men into Joseph’s house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys feed. 25 Then they made the present ready for Joseph’s coming at noon, for they heard that they would eat bread there.”

- **While the brothers are still a little anxious about what all this means and thus want to win Joseph’s favor, we now see them beginning to take in all that is happening!**

26 “And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed down before him to the earth. 27 Then he asked them about their well-being, and said, “Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?” 28 And they answered, “Your servant our father is in good health; he is still alive.” And they bowed their heads down and prostrated themselves.”

Notice that we are told not once but twice that the brothers bowed down just as Joseph had seen long ago in his dreams and now with his father’s gifts also arrayed before him, we have the sun, moon and eleven stars that Joseph saw in the second dream.

29 Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother’s son, and said, “Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?” And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.”

As Joseph sees his dreams fulfilled he knows that God is being gracious to his entire family... However, his ministry to his brothers is not yet complete, but at this point his own emotions get the better of him:

30 “Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep. And he went into his chamber and wept there. 31 Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, “Serve the bread.”

Theses brothers had journeyed to Egypt with gifts and money to secure bread for their families and now they are served before the Egyptian ruler!

Now I am going to leave us hanging just a bit here in our story... This event should obviously remind us of the Table the Lord sets before us each week here in the worship service and I will reflect on that a bit more when we partake.

But remember that I mentioned how Benjamin now had a role to play in God’s story and this is what we will see at length next week and I would encourage you to read on a bit and pay special attention to the details we are given with regard to this feast!

Joseph is laying the ground work for the final test of his brothers:

- **He will give Benjamin special treatment and then put him in peril to see how those brothers now react to a new favored son!**

But for this morning I want to conclude with another reminder that we are studying our family history!

- **A history that is critical to the story of redemption as the heirs of the promised Seed are guided and protected.**

But also a history that can help us in our families and our relationships: We are all sinners and Saints! We are subject to temptations and anxieties just like Jacob and his sons.

We are also children of Abraham and know that God not only came to save His people from their sins, but has given us His Spirit so we can have the wisdom of Joseph, or the courage we saw here with Judah.

When the Apostle Paul stresses these important truths in his Epistles, he always makes the practical applications that impact not just individuals, but our marriages, our families, our Church life and even our homes and vocations.

➤ **May we be those who hear & obey!**

Communion Meditation: Matthew 22

“8 Then he said to his servants,

‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’

10 So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”