

# The Saga of Joseph: The Brothers are Reconciled!

Genesis 44:1-45:15

Change...

True and lasting change...

... of your heart and of the hearts of all who bear the name of Jesus Christ.

**Psalms 51:10** <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Fundamental to the Christian faith is the belief that when we look to Jesus Christ, God will begin changing us more and more into His image.

To deny the hope of change is to deny the power of the Gospel.

That being said, we have all experienced the frustration of our own hearts being slow to change. And, we have been disappointed by the lack of change in others. Our experiences make us reticent to believe that true change has occurred.

The story of Joseph proclaims that true change is possible!

At the same time, Joseph's caution to believe that his brothers have changed helps us to see that true change is not common, or natural.

The Saga of Joseph is history. The conversations happened. And the recorded actions occurred in time and space. The characters are real people with thoughts and feelings much like yours.

But while this story is history, it is more than an historical account. As it is given to us on the pages of God's Word, it is "theological history." In God's absolute sovereignty over all things, He is using this family to teach the rest of us theological lessons.

God teaches us in the saga of Joseph is that He is able to transform His people out of hatred and into love for one another.

Ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin, jealousy and hatred have ruled among brothers. Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and now Joseph with his older brothers.

If the blessing bestowed upon Abraham is ever to be fulfilled, true love must reign among the people of God.

The jealousy and hatred of the brothers toward Joseph is so strong that they sell him into lifelong slavery.

What are we to think when we see such selfish hatred?

Is it even possible for people like that to change?

This is fundamental question about God's grace.

Is God able to change the hearts of men?

If your answer to that question is "no", then every hope that we have as Christians is compromised? Any salvation that leaves us full of evil is no salvation at all.

But not only must God change the hearts of the brothers, He must also change the heart of Joseph.

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God has raised Joseph to a position of power. Rather than being a helpless victim, he now has the power to exact revenge.

How is it possible for the pains that Joseph has endured at their hands not to drive him to seek their destruction?

How can God transform Joseph from a man seeking revenge into a man seeking reconciliation?

As you can see, for reconciliation to occur, much must happen.

And the same work that God had to do in the hearts of Joseph and his brothers, he also must do in our hearts.

What about your life?

In what ways can you relate to Joseph?

How have you been hurt by the sins of others who bear the name of Christ?

You may be asking if it is possible for the feelings of bitterness and hatred towards other brothers and sisters in Christ to ever be replaced by love and affection.

In what ways can you relate to the brothers?

You may not have thrown someone into slavery. But you are often jealous of your brothers and sisters when things go well for them. And you lack true empathy and love when they face trials. Truth be told, we are all a long way from loving our brothers and sisters as we love ourselves.

Is it even possible to consistently look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others in the body of Christ?

When you imagine eternal life, how often do you dream of perfect fellowship with brothers and sisters with whom you currently have little affection?

I know that my dreams far more often relate to my personal wants and wishes. Or I imagine being reunited with my wife, or my children or my best friends.

But dreaming of perfect fellowship with those for whom I presently do not much care.

It is hard to imagine an existence where the entire body of Christ lives in true harmony and love.

But in the Saga of Joseph, God declares that this is where His covenant love is driving us.

This covenant love has been accomplished in Jesus Christ, and through His prayers is being fulfilled in us even as I preach this sermon.

**John 17:10-11** <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Jesus is working to make all his people one. He is bringing us to love one another in the way that the Father and the Son and Spirit love one another and are one.

At the end of chapter 43, Joseph had provided a rich meal for his brothers. This act of hospitality would have deeply obligated the brothers to Joseph. To receive such kindness from his hand and then to do anything against Joseph would have been a terrible evil.

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In addition, at this meal Joseph seats the brothers according to their birth order. Since the brothers had not given Joseph this information, it appears that Joseph has divine knowledge. In other words, to try to deceive such a powerful ruler who possesses such supernatural knowledge would be incredibly foolish.

And finally, at this meal Benjamin is given far more favor than the other brothers. He is given 5 times as much as the other brothers!

It is this sort of favoritism from the hand of Jacob their father, that had previously driven the brothers to hate Joseph.

Would those same attitudes of jealousy rule their hearts now?

We pick up the story after the meal is over. The brothers return to their quarters to prepare for their long journey home.

Read Genesis 44:1-2.

Then  
he (Joseph) commanded the steward of his house,  
"Fill the men's sacks with food,  
as much as they can carry,  
and  
put each man's money in the mouth of his sack,  
2 and  
put my cup,  
the silver cup,  
in the mouth of the sack of the youngest,  
with his money for the grain."  
And  
he did as Joseph told him.

Joseph sets up his brothers to give them one final test. Are they still men full of jealousy and hatred? He fills their sacks with as much food as they can carry as a demonstration of his tremendous generosity. He returns their money to make it plain that what they now possess has been given to them as a gift. The abundance and the money would not have been interpreted as theft. They simply add to the fact that stealing Joseph's personal "cup" was done in the face of true kindness.

Joseph wants to see if the brothers will abandon Benjamin in the same way that they abandoned Joseph into slavery long ago.

Read Genesis 44:3-6.

3 As soon as the morning was light,  
the men were sent away with their donkeys.  
4 They had gone only a short distance from the city.  
Now  
Joseph said to his steward,  
"Up,  
follow after the men,  
and when you overtake them,  
say to them,  
5 'Why have you repaid evil for good?'  
Is it not from this that my lord drinks,

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and  
by this that he practices divination?  
You have done evil in doing this."  
6 When he overtook them,  
he spoke to them these words.

The stealing of the cup is the only act of evil of which the brothers are being accused.  
The irony is that they are innocent of stealing this cup.  
But they are not innocent of the previous crime of jealousy and hatred towards Joseph.  
The brothers defend themselves of their current innocence.

Read Genesis 44:7-9.

7 They said to him,  
"Why does my lord speak such words as these?  
Far be it from your servants to do such a thing!  
8 Behold,  
the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks  
we brought back to you from the land of Canaan.  
How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house?  
9 Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die,  
and  
we also will be my lord's servants."

It is easy to miss that the brothers here express trust in one another and defend themselves as a unit.  
They don't say, "I don't know about these other guys, but I am innocent." They are also willing to bear  
the guilt of any other brother who may have committed such a terrible crime.

"If one of us has stolen the cup, then that one shall die. But all of us will then become your slaves."  
The brothers are functioning as one.

How often do you identify with the sins of other Christians in this way?  
It is far more common to separate ourselves from the sins of our brothers and sisters in the Church. We  
criticize one another when we see faults, as if we do not belong to one another.

The solidarity of these brothers is a good thing.  
**But** it works against the test that Joseph desires.  
And Joseph has made clear to his steward that he wants Benjamin to be singled out.

Read Genesis 44:10.

10 He said,  
"Let it be as you say:  
he who is found with it shall be my servant,  
and  
the rest of you shall be innocent."

The steward replies, "Only the person who has stolen the cup will be made Joseph's slave."  
The rest will be free to return home.  
The point is to give the brothers every opportunity to abandon Benjamin.

Read Genesis 44:11-13.

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11           Then  
          each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground,  
          and  
          each man opened his sack.  
12           And  
          he searched,  
                  beginning with the eldest  
                  and  
                  ending with the youngest.  
          And  
          the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.  
13           Then  
          they tore their clothes,  
          and  
          every man loaded his donkey.  
          and  
          they returned to the city.

The story is full of tension and drama. From oldest to youngest the sacks are opened. Of course, it is Benjamin's sack that contains the silver cup.

It is rather amazing that the brothers do not make accusations against Benjamin. Instead, they tear their clothes as a sign of great grief.

To the brothers, Benjamin's guilt or innocence is not the point. They simply grieve that it is now a certainty that Joseph has a claim on Benjamin's life.

But they do not abandon Benjamin.  
Each of them – to a man – returns to the city.

How do you think Benjamin would have felt to see his brothers choose to return with him?  
When you are down, whether by your own sin or simply by life, knowing that someone continues to be in your camp means the world.

We are not told of Benjamin's feelings at this point, but it is not difficult to imagine the strength he receives from the love of his brothers.

Read Genesis 44:14-15.

14           When  
          Judah  
          and  
          his brothers  
                  came to Joseph's house,  
          he was still there.  
          They fell before him to the ground.  
15           Joseph said to them,  
          "What deed is this that you have done?  
          Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?"

When the brothers come before Joseph, they all fall to the ground humbly seeking his mercy.

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Joseph accuses them of their evil act and reminds them of his ability to see what normal men cannot see. It is doubtful that Joseph practices divination. But the brothers do not know that.

Judah rises to speak for all the brothers.

Read Genesis 44:16.

16           And  
          Judah said,  
              "What shall we say to my lord?  
              What shall we speak?  
              Or  
              how can we clear ourselves?  
              **God has found out the guilt of your servants;**  
              behold,  
              we are my lord's servants,  
              both we  
              and  
              he also in whose hand the cup has been found."

In this verse Judah admits the guilt, not just of Benjamin, but of all the brothers. This is a case of wondering if Joseph and Judah are speaking about the same thing. Joseph is accusing the brothers of stealing his cup. But Judah is admitting a guilt that belongs to all the brothers. On the one hand, Judah is speaking out of his solidarity with Benjamin. But on the other hand, he continues to remember the guilt of all the brothers as they sent Joseph into slavery long ago.

It is not Joseph's ability to use divination that has found this out. It has been God Almighty that has found out the guilt of the brothers. They may not be guilty of the crime of the silver cup, but they are guilty of far worse.

Judah does not try to proclaim innocence in this one instance. He knows that if they receive injustice now, it is only just because of their previous sins.

Remember the far worse sins that you have committed when someone accuses you of something that you did not commit.

This sense of guilt must have taken Joseph by surprise, in a good way.

**But** it still works against the one test that truly matters to him: will the brothers abandon Benjamin?

Read Genesis 44:17-19.

17           But  
          he said,  
              "Far be it from me  
              that I should do so!  
              Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant.  
              But  
              as for you, go up in peace to your father."  
18           Then  
          Judah went up to him and said,

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19 "O my lord,  
please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears,  
and  
let not your anger burn against your servant,  
for you are like Pharaoh himself.  
My lord asked his servants, saying,  
'Have you a father, or a brother?'

Judah pleads with Joseph to think of the situation, not as a Governor of Egypt, but as a fellow man, the son of a father, or as one having brothers.

Of course, Joseph has been thinking this way all along, but Judah does not know that. Now that Judah has appealed to Joseph's sense of family bonds, he launches into his appeal for mercy. In order to get to his request, he must remind Joseph of the history of events leading up to this moment.

Read Genesis 44:20-31.

20 And  
we said to my lord,  
'We have a father,  
an old man,  
and  
a young brother,  
the child of his old age.  
His brother is dead,  
and  
he alone is left of his mother's children,  
and  
his father loves him.'

21 Then  
you said to your servants,  
'Bring him down to me,  
that I may set my eyes on him.'

22 We said to my lord,  
'The boy cannot leave his father,  
for if he should leave his father,  
his father would die.'

23 Then  
you said to your servants,  
'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you,  
you shall not see my face again.'

24 "When we went back to your servant my father,  
we told him the words of my lord.

25 And  
when our father said,  
'Go again,  
buy us a little food,'

26 we said,  
'We cannot go down.  
If our youngest brother goes with us,  
then we will go down.  
For we cannot see the man's face  
unless our youngest brother is with us.'

27 Then  
your servant my father said to us,

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28 'You know that my wife bore me two sons.  
One left me,  
and  
I said,  
Surely he has been torn to pieces,  
and  
I have never seen him since.  
29 If you take this one also from me,  
and  
harm happens to him,  
you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.'  
30 **"Now therefore,**  
as soon as I come to your servant my father,  
and  
the boy is not with us,  
31 then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life,  
as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us,  
he will die,  
and  
your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant  
our father with sorrow to Sheol.

Judah makes it clear to Joseph that to return home without Benjamin would kill Jacob. Even if it did not physically kill him, it would bring upon him unbearable sorrow.

Judah is trying to bring Joseph to feel compassion for Jacob. He hasn't a clue that the man with whom he is speaking is Jacob's favored son. But in the midst of explaining his case, he is actually making another case – one that matters even more to Joseph.

Judah is demonstrating that he now has compassion for the feelings of his father. Before, Judah was willing to lie to his dad. He was willing to take from his dad his most favored son. Now, he is full of compassion for his dad. What a change has occurred!

Judah is almost ready to make his appeal for mercy from Joseph.

Read Genesis 44:32.

32 **For your servant became  
a pledge of safety  
for the boy to my father,**  
saying,  
'If I do not bring him back to you,  
then I shall bear the blame  
before my father  
all my life.'

Judah hopes that he has been able to bring Joseph to see the gravity of the situation. Being "a pledge of safety" establishes the groundwork for Judah's appeal.

Read Genesis 44:33-34.

33 Now therefore,

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**please let your servant remain  
instead of the boy  
as a servant to my lord,  
and  
let the boy go back with his brothers.**

34

For how can I go back to my father  
if the boy is not with me?  
I fear to see the evil that would find my father."

Judah does not ask Joseph to let Benjamin go without any payment.

He might have simply begged for mercy.

Instead, Judah offers himself as a substitutionary payment. Judah will spend the rest of his life in Egypt as a slave to Joseph, so that Benjamin might be released to return to his father.

Judah demonstrates a tremendous love for his father.

No longer is Judah driven by jealousy and hatred.

Judah is willing for Benjamin to have greater honor and privilege.

Judah is willing to give up his place in the family for the sake of Benjamin.

Therefore, Judah is also driven by love for his brother.

Judah's attitude and words foreshadow those of Jesus Christ.

Jesus offers himself in the place of his brothers out of deep love for His Father.

And Jesus, himself deserving the place of honor, is willing to leave His privilege and honor to stand as a substitute for us.

This is the first instance in Scripture where we see a free offer of human substitution. We have seen animal substitution, but this is the first instance of one man offering himself in the place of another.

Is it any wonder that it is from the line of Judah that our Messiah will come?

Judah is not himself the Messiah. But God has used him to help us understand the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

How incredible that God is so amazingly sovereign that he can use historical people and events to teach theological lessons to His people!

As preachers, we often come to understand a theological point, and then we look for something in life to illustrate the point. Only God can make His theological point using the life situations of His people. He is the Master Teacher!

Judah has finally rung the bell!

He has passed the test. It is not a test of perfection. It is a test of transformation.

Joseph has finally seen what he has been hoping for all along.

Genuine change has occurred in the brothers.

Joseph desires the reconciliation of his family.

But he knows that unless there has been a true heart change in his brothers, that reconciliation could never occur.

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The change in Judah's heart does not earn him a place in the family.  
The change in Judah's heart (and really all the brothers) fixes that which created the rift in the first place.

When God sets out to save a people for himself, He has two challenges.  
The first challenge is to deal with the guilt of people who have fallen into sin.  
God overcomes this challenge by sending His own Son to stand in the place of sinful men.  
Jesus alone bears the full weight of our sin.  
Jesus alone fully atones for the guilt that belongs to us.

But overcoming your guilt is only the first challenge.  
The second challenge is to change your heart so that which originally caused your separation from God and from one another is repaired.  
This fixing of the heart is only accomplished by sovereign hand of Almighty God.  
Judah did not come to the place of caring for his father and loving his brother on his own.  
Nor is he even now entirely perfect.  
But Judah is not the same man he once was. And this change is the result of God's powerful grace working in Judah's heart.

This is the same grace that is working in you today if you belong to Jesus Christ.  
I am sure that Judah is consciously striving to be a different person. But Judah's change of character cannot be explained by human choice alone. God has ignited in Judah a love that did not previously exist.

This is the new birth!  
When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you are relying upon Him to work in you the way that He worked in Judah.  
You want God to take the punishment for every evil you have ever done or thought.  
And you want God to fix what is broken in you. You are trusting him to replace the old heart of stone and give you a new heart of love.

Taking your punishment upon Himself is a finished act. There is no improvement on what He has done.  
Transforming your heart and life is an unfinished and ongoing work. We have not yet attained the perfection for which Jesus' death was intended.  
But both have been secured in Jesus' death on the cross on your behalf.

If you have never truly trusted in Jesus Christ, then do not wait any longer. There is no better time than the present! Even before you leave this service, cry out to Jesus, "Save me!" Acknowledge the evil of your heart and plead with God to make you into a different person.

Then trust Jesus' promise that whoever comes to Him, He will never drive away, but will raise up on the last day.

Only as God rips out our heart of stone and gives to us a new heart that beats in unison with that of Jesus, will we be able to know the joys of God's promised blessing.

I know that you still struggle with believing that full and complete change is possible.

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While every person who trusts in Jesus Christ has been given a new heart, that new heart is still growing and is not yet fully formed. And this new heart grows up in the midst of the old heart of sin. It is often terribly difficult to separate one from the other.

Think of a tree that has been cut off at the stump. And from that stump grow up new shoots.

The point being, your old heart still remains. And it loves sin just as much today as it did before your conversion. We all experience a life-long, irreconcilable war with our old nature.

Because of this, we often struggle to believe that we are truly being changed. Paul identifies with your struggle.

**Philippians 3:12-14** <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

When we are seeing progress in one area of our character or another it is very encouraging. It gives us hope.

But when we struggle to experience full victory over a particular sin, it can be very discouraging. It may even bring us to question whether we are being changed.

Or even worse, it can cause us to doubt whether God is in the business of changing people at all.

The struggle with ongoing sin presents the potential of leading us to a crisis of faith.

There are many places to go in Scripture to strengthen our confidence that God is working to change us. But the example of Joseph's brothers is a good one.

The change took years.

It was a palpable change.

It was a change that was driven by God's sovereign hand.

You may be frustrated with your current level of change.

Your frustration is a good sign. It is a sign that the Spirit is working.

Only those without the Spirit are comfortable remaining in their sin.

But, I want to encourage you, in your frustration, do not leave the source of transforming power in your heart. Every Christian must strive to make daily choices to overcome sin and walk with God. But in those choices beware of the danger of relying upon your own strength to transform your heart.

If you could change your heart by making a decision, Jesus would not have had to die. Nor would He have had to give you His Holy Spirit.

**Galatians 3:1-3** O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Throughout your life, you must continually be brought back to Jesus Christ, and faith in Him.

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If the original giving of the Holy Spirit occurred through faith alone, does it not follow that the continuing of the Spirit's working will also be by faith.

Sometimes, I like to ask people when they confess to me some sin, "What is the first thing that God wants you to do now?"

They usually tell me to the effect, "I need to try harder to do better."

I have no problem with trying harder. If you know me at all you know that I highly value the importance of having a strong work ethic.

But this is a terrible answer. And it is contrary to the Gospel.

The first and most important thing that you will ever do when you commit a sin, or even feel the strength of the evil within you, is to flee to Jesus Christ.

You are to confess to Him what He already knows to be true.

And you are to cling to Jesus, believing that He is working to transform you into His glorious image.

From this position of faith, make whatever choices you feel necessary to defeat sin.

But do not leave out fleeing to Jesus Christ.

God does not increase the power of the Spirit in your life because you try harder.

God increases the power of the Spirit in your life because you are trusting in Jesus Christ.

Faith alone is the source of our strength.

Jesus Christ is the guarantee of the full and complete transformation of our lives.

We see a foreshadow of this in the lives of Joseph and his brothers.

If we saw everything, we would know that they were not yet perfect either.

But do not let anyone tell you that change is not possible.

It is not possible for us to accomplish.

But what is impossible with men, is possible with God!

Pause...

When I was preparing this sermon, I wanted to head into the next chapter and end this sermon with the joyful reconciliation that we have been waiting for over several chapters.

But as I got into the details of these verses, I began to realize that there was too much there. In the movies reconciliation seems easy. But in reality, it is more complex than we would like to think.

So, next week we will explore the first 15 verses of chapter 45.

But I am going to read vv. 14-15 in closing to give you a taste of their reconciliation.

14                   Then  
                      he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck  
                      and  
                      wept,  
                      and  
15                   Benjamin wept upon his neck.  
                      And

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he kissed all his brothers  
and  
wept upon them.  
After that  
his brothers talked with him.

This is the Christian hope! All God's people living in sweet fellowship with one another, having been reconciled to God.

Amen!