

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS RETURN TO CANAAN

TEXT: GENESIS 42:24—43:34

INTRODUCTION:

1. We left off last week with Joseph weeping (42:24).
2. Then Joseph “took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes” (42:24b). The Bible does not say why Joseph chose Simeon.
3. We know from chapter 34 that Simeon and Levi led the massacre in Shechem, and Jacob refers to their cruelty in Genesis 49:5.
4. And it is quite possible that Simeon was the ringleader when the brothers cast Joseph into the pit, and then sold him into slavery. But we cannot know for sure why Simeon was chosen.
5. Reading Genesis 42, it is not always easy to discern Joseph’s true feelings towards his brothers. At first he “spoke roughly to them” (42:7) and he repeatedly accused them of being spies (42:9, 12, 14, etc.).
6. However, he also told them that he feared God (42:18).
7. And when his brothers admitted their sin and guilt, Joseph had to turn away from them and weep (42:24). So we can see that his heart was still tender toward them in spite of what they had done to him.
8. Then after he took Simeon and tied him up, Joseph commanded his men to fill his brothers’ sacks with corn, and to restore every man’s money into his sack, and to give them provision for their journey home (42:25).
9. Certainly, filling his brothers’ sacks with corn and money indicates Joseph’s kindness and compassion toward them.

10. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, “There is nothing more striking in the character of Joseph than the utter absence of revengeful feeling, whether it was against his brethren, or against Potiphar, or against the chief butler. At each step of his journey he shows the true forgiving spirit of the man to whom God is a supreme and blessed reality. There are some people who never seem to get over slight and injustice. They brood over them and take almost every opportunity of pouring out their wrongs and indulging a revengeful spirit. To such people ‘Revenge is sweet,’ and they take a pleasure in repaying people in their own coin. Not so with Joseph. To revenge may be human, but to forgive is Divine” (*Genesis*).

I. THE BROTHERS’ GUILTY CONSCIENCES

1. It has been said that the greatest punishment that a man can suffer is that which comes from a guilty conscience (42:21, 22).
2. We see in the story of Joseph’s brothers in Egypt, remorse and sorrow, but not true repentance. Not at first.
3. The brothers acknowledged their sin (42:21), but consciousness of sin and even confession of sin is often not enough. Joseph heard their conversation, and noticed their change of mind (42:23), but he knew they still lacked genuine repentance.
4. Right views of sin are one thing. To stop sinning is quite another. Joseph felt he needed to see what would happen when his brothers returned to Egypt.
5. Repentance has been defined as a change of mind that leads to a change of direction. Joseph saw their change of mind, and he was waiting for a change in their behavior.
6. Behind the scenes in Genesis chapters 42--44 are God’s purpose and plans for Jacob and his family, and a big part of this plan is the need for Joseph’s brothers to repent.
7. Behind all of these fascinating events (Joseph being sold into slavery, Joseph put into prison, the chief butler’s dream, the chief

- baker's dream, Pharaoh's dream, then Joseph exalted by Pharaoh, the severe famine etc.) there is this one goal: that there may be conviction of sin and genuine repentance.
8. Joseph's brothers had not gotten far away before they discovered the money in their sacks, and when they found it "their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?" (42:26-28).
 9. Notice they said, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" (42:28).
 10. Earlier, Joseph told his brothers, "I fear God" (42:18). Joseph often referred to God because Joseph had a heart for God.
 11. And because Joseph feared God, he said to Potiphar's lustful wife, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (39:9).
 12. Joseph said to the chief butler and the chief baker, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (40:8).
 13. Joseph said to Pharaoh, "God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace...The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do...What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh...it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (41:16, 25, 28, 32).
 14. When Joseph named his two sons, God was in Joseph's heart and on his mind (41:51, 52). He knew God gave him his two sons.
 15. But Joseph's brothers never talked about God. They lived their lives without any thought of God.
 16. Psalm 10:4 says, "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."
 17. God was not in their thoughts when Joseph's brothers massacred the entire village of Shechem.

18. God was not in their thoughts when Joseph's brothers conspired to kill him, and then decided to sell him into slavery.
19. God was not in their thoughts when Joseph's brothers traveled to Egypt looking to buy corn.
20. Even when they were in prison for three days, and they were under great conviction, they did not call on God, and they did not come to full repentance.
21. So Joseph kept working on them. Opening up their sacks, they knew that they had no right to the money, and so now for the first time God's hand in all of these circumstances was recognized (42:28).
22. Referring to Hamlet's famous words, W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Conscience was still making cowards of them, and they could not but associate the circumstance of the money in the sack with their past wrong-doing" (*Genesis*).
23. After a long trip, they arrived back home and told their father all that had happened to them (42:29-35).
24. They told Jacob everything, especially the condition laid down by the governor in Egypt about returning with Benjamin, their youngest brother (42:33, 34).

II. JACOB'S FAITHLESSNESS

1. Jacob was afraid when he saw the bundles of money in the sacks. He felt the same dread and fear that his sons did, and his words show how keenly he took all this to heart (42:36).
2. But Jacob was fearful and short-sighted. And this was because he was faithless. He said, "all these things are against me" (42:36b). In reality, all these things were for him, but he could not see it.

3. Through judging by circumstances, Jacob proved himself to be utterly wrong. The key is learning how to look up above circumstances. Then we see things as they really are.
4. You may remember the time that the king of Israel wanted to kill Elisha the prophet, and it was told him, "Behold, he is in Dothan."
5. So the king sent horses and chariots and a great army to Dothan, and they came by night and surrounded the city. Elisha's servant said to him, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?"
6. Certainly the circumstances didn't look very good for Elisha.
7. Elisha answered him, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."
8. And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (II Kings 6:17).
9. That's looking above and beyond circumstances!
10. But Jacob was not looking beyond the circumstances.
11. The poet said:

Rest in the Lord, my soul;

Commit to Him thy way.

What to thy sight seems dark as night,

To Him is bright as day.

Rest in the Lord, my soul;

He planned for thee thy life,

Brings fruit from rain, brings good from pain,

And peace and joy from strife.

Rest in the Lord, my soul;

This fretting weakens thee.

Why not be still? Accept His will;

Thou shalt His glory see. (Maltbie Babcock)

12. Jacob was back to being “the old Jacob” once more. The old Jacob who tricked his brother Esau, and deceived his father Isaac.
13. The old Jacob before Bethel. The old Jacob before Peniel.
14. Jacob’s words, “Me have ye bereaved of my children” (42:36), indicate that Jacob always suspected that his sons were responsible for Joseph’s death.
15. Perhaps Jacob even suspected that his sons had actually killed Joseph themselves.
16. In any event, Jacob was looking at everything from a worldly perspective, and not from God’s perspective. Soon he would see Joseph face to face, but all he could do was complain, “all these things are against me” (42:36b).
17. Joseph understood “that all things work together for good to them that love God,” but Jacob moaned “all these things are against me” (42:36b).
18. As was his habit, Jacob was looking entirely on the human side, and never thinking of the possibility of God having some wise purpose in all these events.
19. Jacob was not trusting in God’s providence. Jacob was all mixed-up. He said Joseph was dead, when he was alive and well.
20. He seems to have thought he’d never see Simeon again, when he was going to be reunited with him shortly.

21. Jacob thought it impossible to send Benjamin to Egypt, assuming he'd never see him again.
22. Jacob very was slow to see that God was working all things together for good out of these difficult circumstances.
23. When his sons returned from Egypt and told Jacob that Benjamin had to go with them to Egypt, he refused.
24. Reuben offered his two sons as hostages if Jacob would allow Benjamin to go. He even went so far as to say, "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee..." (42:37).
25. It was a courageous and generous offer, though it didn't seem to make much sense. What satisfaction would Jacob get out of killing his two grandsons?
26. And how could Reuben guarantee that Benjamin would return safely from Egypt? But his intentions were good. Someone had to persuade Jacob that his obstinacy was only making a bad situation worse.
27. But Jacob would not be persuaded. Certainly not by Reuben who had seduced Jacob's concubine, a sin Jacob could never forget.
28. Years later, Jacob said, "Reuben, thou art...Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch" (49:3, 4).
29. By refusing to allow Benjamin to go with his brothers, Jacob not only delayed the best interests of himself and his family, but he also hindered the development and progress of God's plan and purposes (cf. 43:10).
30. God had a wonderful plan for Jacob and his family, but God's plan was being stalled by Jacob's stubbornness.
31. Sadly, many people – even Christian people – are guilty of hindering the work of God.

32. Jacob didn't understand it at the time, but everything that was happening to Jacob was part of God's plan and purpose for his family.

33. Shakespeare said, "There is a Divinity that shapes our ends, Rough hew them how we will" (Hamlet)

III. THE TRIP BACK TO SEE JOSEPH

1. After wasting precious time, Jacob finally and reluctantly let his sons take Benjamin to Egypt, and he gave them instructions as to what they should take with them so they might be well received – they were to take double money, as well as their best fruits, and a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds (43:1-13).
2. Despite his worldly ways, Jacob did not forget that the success of the journey was in God's hands, and so he committed them all to the merciful care of God (43:14).
3. Jacob's sad words, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved" (43:14b) show his submission to God's will.
4. The sons did what Jacob told them to do. They "took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph" (43:15).
5. When Joseph saw his brothers, and Benjamin with them, he commanded the ruler of his house to bring them to his house for a meal (43:16, 17).
6. Then their guilty consciences started bothering them again (43:18). Their feelings of awe on entering Joseph's beautiful home, their anxiety at the reasons of their being taken there, their worries about the restored money, made them afraid (43:18).
7. The brothers had such guilt concerning their mistreatment of Joseph twenty years earlier that anything and everything caused them to fear.

8. Before they were afraid because Joseph spoke roughly to them and put them in prison for three days. But now even Joseph's hospitality brought fear upon them.
9. Proverbs 28:1 says, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."
10. Joseph still did not identify himself to his brothers. Joseph knew that God's program was not yet completed, and that it was important to wait for God's perfect time, regardless of how difficult it was because of his own emotions (cf. 43:30).
11. The guilty brothers told Joseph's steward that they had no idea how the money wound up in their sacks, and the steward assured them all was well (43:19-25).
12. The steward's encouraging words and kind hospitality should have been a sign to Joseph's brothers that God was at work, but their worldly and sinful minds were still confused.
13. It sounds like Joseph's steward had been taught about the true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (43:23), but yet he refers to God as "your God, and the God of your father."
14. He was probably taught by Joseph, but perhaps he still wasn't saved.
15. But like Pharaoh, the steward recognized Joseph's God (cf. 41:38).
16. In their confused state of mind, Joseph's brothers didn't realize that when they bowed down before Joseph, they were fulfilling his dream (43:26-28; cf. 37:7, 8; 42:6).
17. Joseph had them seated at the dinner table according to their ages. His brothers "marvelled one at another," astonished that this Egyptian ruler knew their ages and was able to seat them in the right order (43:33).
18. This made them even more fearful, and they were probably wondering what else he knew about them. It looked to them that nothing was hidden from him.

19. Joseph's brothers were convicted. They were remorseful, but they were still impenitent.
20. And the seating arrangement was part of Joseph's plan to get them to repent.
21. "Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of their's" (43:34). Giving Benjamin a double mess would have been a great honor, but for Benjamin to receive five times as much as his brethren was very unusual.
22. Joseph was testing his brothers regarding their attitude toward their younger brother Benjamin. They had been envious of Joseph because of their father's special love for him, and perhaps Joseph wanted to see if they felt the same way toward Benjamin (43:34).
23. In any event, they passed that test and "were merry," and not resentful (43:34b). The brothers quickly went from being convicted to being confused to being cheerful.

CONCLUSION:

1. The story of Joseph's brothers in Egypt illustrates the fact that one thing is truly necessary in the Christian life is genuine repentance and faith.
2. You cannot have one without the other.
3. The apostle Paul said, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).
4. Paul said in Acts 17:30 that God "commandeth all men every where to repent."
5. Consciousness of sin is not enough. It must go deeper than that.
6. Genuine repentance involves not only consciousness of sin, but works worthy of repentance.

7. John the Baptist said, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:8).
8. A.C. Dixon said, "In repentance you think of the sin you hate; in faith you think of the Christ you love."