

JOSEPH - FROM PIT TO PRIME MINISTER (VOLUME 2)

Chapter 1 Genesis 42 – Joseph’s brothers go to Egypt

Introduction

The previous chapter in Genesis (see also *Sound Words’* Study Booklet ‘From Pit To Prime Minister – Vol 1’) left us with the report that the famine - which had come to Egypt and for which Joseph had been raised up by God so that there would be sufficient food – was severe in the whole world. It had spread to all the known countries of that time, and that included the land of Canaan (v5), where Joseph’s father Jacob and his remaining eleven brothers were living. (Stephen refers to this in Acts 7:11-12). Clearly it was a serious and life-endangering situation that threatened to wipe out the entire population of these lands. Yet the enormity of this need only serves to magnify the grace and mercy of God, because he had raised up Joseph to meet the deprivation of this time, and to save many lives. Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity! He knew this need would arise long before it happened, and he had already planned how to meet the needs of these seven years of famine.

There are very clear parallels with the experience of Joseph and his family, and the work and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Christ was raised up to bring a greater salvation to many more lives than Joseph could have saved. His is a salvation from sin and judgement and hell, and a

salvation of forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and heaven to come.

- Just as with the need of Joseph’s time, God also knew long before sin entered the world that mankind would rebel against him, and through Adam’s disobedience the whole human race would become sinful and under his wrath. (See Genesis 3; Romans 5:12ff; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22; Psalm 51:5.) Yet wonderfully, even before any of that took place, God had provided a way of deliverance from it. Christ was appointed to save millions of people through his sinless life, atoning death on the cross and his glorious resurrection, and this was settled even before sin entered the world! Peter described this as he lifted the veil of eternity past to give us a glimpse of the amazing grace and mercy of God towards sinners. Writing to Christian believers he declared in 1 Peter 1:18-20, “*For you know it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.*” Before the beginning of time God had his marvellous plan of salvation in place, and Jesus was appointed to be the Saviour, and to come and meet the need of sinners by dying in their place. What an amazing and merciful God the Lord is!

Returning to Joseph, it was at least twenty years since his brothers had sold him as a slave. We are told he was aged

17 in Genesis 37:2, and thirty when he began to serve Pharaoh (Genesis 41:46), and there had already been the seven years of plentiful harvests. It was probably a little more than twenty years, allowing time for the famine to have bitten hard and the remaining food in Canaan to have been used up. So Joseph, who was just a teenager when his brothers sold him, was now nearing the age of 40, and he would have changed in his features and appearance quite considerably during that time.

1) The wisdom of Jacob (v1-2).

As the famine began to bite hard in Canaan we can imagine the effect this must have had on old Jacob and his sons. Those who have experienced famine know how devastating it is. There is the suffering that is felt as hunger pains remain unrequited. Then the anguish experienced as children become thin and their little tummies swell. Added to that is the sight of those who were formerly well built rapidly turning to just skin and bones. And hanging over all in these conditions is the fear of approaching death. Even if you have never experienced famine at first hand you will probably have seen photographs of famine victims, and the sight is heart-rending to observe. Well, the famine began to bring such suffering to Canaan, but Jacob had acquired a most valuable piece of information (Genesis 42:1): “...*Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt...*” And on hearing this, Jacob did not need to be told twice what to do with it. He had to act upon it with considerable haste if his family were to be saved from certain death. The danger was too great to play around with, and undue delay could

well prove fatal. So he sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain for their survival. His words to his sons indicate they were at a loss as to what to do, for he challenges them (v1), “*Why do you just keep looking at each other?*” It appears they were hesitant even though they had learned of the food available in Egypt. So Jacob directed them with great clarity and urgency to go and purchase grain, adding (v2), “*so that we may live and not die.*” Jacob was fully aware of the seriousness of the situation, and he acted wisely to prevent the disaster coming on them.

The way Jacob responded to this urgent need is exactly the way God wants us to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of our sinfulness there is the great danger we will die, for (Romans 6:23) “*the wages of sin is death...*” And the death referred to in those words is eternal death - separation from God forever, under the full weight of his holy anger in hell. It is a danger that far exceeds any other we may have to face. But God has provided the world with a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He came and shed his precious blood on the cross to deal with sin for all who will turn to him for forgiveness (1 Timothy 1:15). Indeed, salvation is found in no one else except the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:12). And all who go to him in humble repentance and faith will be saved. (See Acts 16:30-31; Romans 10:13.) Indeed, God commands that all men everywhere repent (Acts 17:30). God wants sinners in danger of hell to flee to Christ with great urgency so that, to use Jacob’s words from Genesis 42:2, “*...we might live and not die.*” And God will give to all who turn to the Lord Jesus Christ the gift of eternal life (see John 3:16; John 10:10; Romans

6:23). But there are millions, who hesitate about this, and delay, and who refuse to recognise the urgency of their need of God's mercy, and they do not go to Christ for pardon. All who live like this are foolish in the extreme. But Joseph's father Jacob was wise in his day, and God would want us to be wise in ours, and to flee to Christ before it is too late. If Jacob did what was necessary for the saving of his family, how much more is it important for us to trust in Christ for the saving of our lives?

So Jacob sent his ten oldest sons to Egypt, but kept Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother, at home with him, refusing to let him go lest he lose the last of Rachel's children. Jacob was fearful that harm might come to him, and so the other brothers went to purchase corn, as did many more at that time (v5).

2) Joseph meets his brothers (v6-13).

a. The initial meeting (v6-8).

As Joseph was now the governor of Egypt and responsible for the selling of the grain, his brothers had to come to him, although they did not know it was Joseph. As already mentioned, Joseph would have changed considerably from the young teenager they last saw, to this handsome man who was dressed in Egyptian attire. And they would not have expected to see him in such a high position because they had sold him into slavery. As they approached him (v6), they all bowed to the ground before him. (NB. The words 'bowed down' in Genesis 41:6 are exactly the same as used in Gen 37:7 in Joseph's dream about the sheaves of corn!) In an instant Joseph recognised them. They had been men when he last saw them and would not have

changed as radically as he had done. And from what followed, Joseph had decided to test his brothers to see if they had changed in any way from their previously jealous and hateful attitudes twenty years or more earlier. We say this because he did not let them know who he was, and pretended to be a stranger. He had spoken in Egyptian and through an interpreter as verse 23 states, but he understood their every word. He began to question them harshly (v7), "*Where do you come from?*" And they answered honestly, stating they had come to him to buy food. Although he was in full view before them, they did not recognise him at all.

b. The fulfilled dream (v9).

And it was at that precise moment that Joseph remembered his dreams of twenty years previously (v9). What God had revealed to him then, and what his brothers despised and rejected, had now been fulfilled as they did in fact bow down to him!

Lesson 1.

We have a very important lesson to learn here and it is that, whenever God says something will take place, he always keeps his word. We might even try to engineer circumstances to prevent what God has said would happen, just as Joseph's brothers thought that by selling him into slavery they would never have to bow down to him. But all of that will be of no avail because God is the all-powerful God. His purposes cannot be frustrated in any way whatsoever. And in fact, the wicked actions of Joseph's brothers in selling him as they did were actually overruled and used by God to fulfil the very things he had

revealed would happen! God's ways are higher than ours, and so are his thoughts!

This principle is something we see supremely in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. God used the very wicked actions of those who hated the Lord Jesus in putting him to death, to achieve the salvation of all his people as Peter declared on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22-24), "*Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*" In a similar way we read in Hebrews 2:14-15, "*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too (i.e. Jesus) shared their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*" The very thing that was intended by men and Satan to destroy Christ and destroy his kingdom, was used by God to establish him and to spread his kingdom! God's ways are marvellous, and we can just stand back in astonishment and wonder at his works.

Lesson 2.

The next lesson we learn from the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams is that the passing of time does not frustrate God's purposes. Therefore we must be very careful not to fall

into the danger of thinking what God has said will never happen. We might become impatient if he does not do it immediately, but we would be wrong to conclude God had forgotten his word or is unable to keep it. There is an excellent example of this in the New Testament with regard to the promise of God that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth and judge the wicked. There were some who were saying that the delay in God fulfilling this promise meant it would never happen. But they were wrong, as are those today who ignore the fact that Christ will come again and judge the world. Peter put it like this in 2 Peter 3:3-7, "*First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.' But they deliberately forgot that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world at that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men.*" Many were claiming God would never judge the world, but Peter reminded them and us that God has already done so through the flood in the days of Noah, so is well able to do so again. (See Genesis 6-9.) Peter then added this warning to those who fail to realise that time does not have the same restraint on God, as it does on us (2 Peter 3:8-9), "*But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a*

day. The Lord is NOT slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Returning to Joseph, it is interesting that through all the long years of suffering and injustice he had endured there is no reference to him remembering his dreams or of complaining to God that he was slow in bringing them to fruition. This indicates that Joseph had learned true humility, and had committed his life into God’s care and was content to leave it with the Lord.

c. An unusual action (v9-13).

What followed was in some ways a little unorthodox, because Joseph accused his brothers of being spies (v9). And this raises the question, ‘Why?’ On the one hand we could say that Joseph was not being entirely honourable because he knew the truth about his brothers, and by this are reminded that even godly men are not perfect. We could also say that he seemed to be teasing them without them realising it, which lays him open to the charge of being unkind. But it is significant to note that the Lord did not rebuke him for his behaviour, and therefore that leads us to think that Joseph had a perfectly good and honourable reason for doing what he did. And we must ask, ‘What was that reason?’

The answer lies in the fact that he was testing his brothers to see if they had really repented of their cruel, wicked and sinful actions of twenty years previously. He wanted to see if they were genuinely sorry for their harsh cruelty because then there could be a genuine reconciliation between them

and him, and so he put into action an intriguing plan to ascertain the truth. He did this by accusing them of being spies that had come to see where the Egyptian defences were weak (v9 & 12). The brothers protested their innocence, and revealed to Joseph the details about the family, telling him about his father, and also about his own brother Benjamin back home. They even spoke of Joseph, describing him as ‘*one who is no more.*’ They had not forgotten their brother and even after all these years, the memory of him lingered in their consciences.

3) The test Joseph sets (v14-24).

a. A short spell in prison (v14-17).

Joseph persisted in his accusation that they were spies, and said the only way they could prove they were not was to bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, to Egypt. Joseph was careful not actually to use Benjamin’s name, because that would have revealed his own identity. He suggested they send one of their number to fetch their youngest brother while the rest stayed in prison, and this would prove if their words were true (v16). And then he gave them time to think it over by putting them in custody for three days. We can see here something of the wise way Joseph was behaving because, although he was probably unaware that his brothers had lied to their father about what they had done to him, he was looking for indications that they had genuinely and truthfully learned from their past sin. What went on as they were held in custody for those days is not recorded, but it surely is not wrong to suggest that his brothers must have been in turmoil.

b. Joseph’s plan (v18-20).

On the third day they were called before Joseph again (v18). This time Joseph laid before them another plan, and he introduced it in a remarkable way (Genesis 42:18): *“Do this and you will live, for I fear God.”* And that, *‘I fear God’* must have penetrated their hearts and minds. Who would have expected that in the offices of state of idolatrous Egypt there would be one man who feared the God these same brothers had been taught to fear! Then again he challenged them with the words, *“If you are honest men...”* Their truthfulness and faithfulness were under scrutiny. Joseph unfolded his new scheme which was that one of their number had to remain behind while the rest returned to Canaan to fetch their younger brother, and only then would their words be verified and their lives spared (Genesis 42:19-20).

c. The brothers’ confession (v21-24).

Whether it was because Joseph mentioned that he feared God, or whether it was just the memory of the past coming up before them again, the brothers began to speak to one another and without a doubt they knew why they were now in trouble (Genesis 42:21-22): *“Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come upon us. Reuben replied, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.’* It is quite remarkable to see that although over twenty years had passed since their dreadful treatment of Joseph, they had not been able to blot out their sin from their minds. And now at long last, they

were admitting unreservedly that they were the guilty ones for what they had done. It has been pointed out that this is the only acknowledgement of sin in the book of Genesis by those who are guilty! There was no blaming of their father, there was no blaming Joseph, but they blamed themselves. There is an emphatic placing of each ‘we’ in their confession – *“...we are being punished... We saw how distressed...we would not listen...we must give an accounting for his blood.”* At long last they were taking the responsibility for all the evil they had done.

This was the first step to reconciliation with God and their brother, and this is an important lesson for us to remember. Many people try to forget their sin and think it will go away, but it will raise its ugly head in their memories again and again. Sin will only be dealt with thoroughly if it is brought to the Lord in repentance for forgiveness, otherwise God will judge the guilty ones! We cannot manufacture lasting peace in our hearts. God alone is able to grant us this.

As Joseph’s brothers talked they described their ill treatment of Joseph as if it had happened only yesterday, it was so vividly etched in their hearts and minds. But what is so encouraging is that they openly acknowledged how wrong they were. They confessed their hardness of heart and complete indifference to Joseph’s pleas for mercy at that time. Indeed, it was as if they could hear the cries of his lips as if he had just shouted them out! And now they declared the distress they had caused was coming back on them and they were the distressed ones!

The great lesson here is that time does not remove guilt, and the consequences of our sin catches up with us in the end. Many have become physically ill as a result of their guilt. An example is David who tried to keep his sin quiet in Psalm 32:3-4, *“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”* And David goes on in that Psalm to tell us he found no relief until he acknowledged his sin to the Lord and brought it out into the open. We need to remember the wise and searching instruction of Paul (Galatians 6:7-8): *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”* We learn that we cannot hide our sins from God, and in the end the truth will come out (see Numbers 32:23). These men knew they were being called to account for their wickedness over twenty years previously, and there was no escaping it. As such, they are like millions in our world today whose consciences trouble them because of their past wickedness. The only way to deal with such troubled consciences is to bring them to God for mercy. The Lord Jesus Christ alone is able to bring us God’s forgiveness. Paul described those who have turned to the Lord Jesus in humble faith for mercy like this, in Romans 5:1, *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”* And we find these precious words in Romans 8:1, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for*

those who are in Christ Jesus...” So it is to Christ we must turn if we are to know the forgiveness of our sins and enjoy peace with God.

These brothers did not realise it, but Joseph understood every word they spoke, and as he listened he was moved to tears and had to turn away from them because he began to weep (v24). This was a further indication Joseph was not acting out of vengeance but out of love. And so Simeon was chosen as the one to remain behind, and he was bound before their eyes. Again this was something that must have driven home the painful lessons they were learning.

4) The kindness Joseph showed (v25-28).

a. Joseph’s generosity.

Although Joseph had spoken to them sharply, his apparent wrath was mingled with mercy. He not only gave them what they came to buy, but also provisions for their journey, and he ordered that their money was to be placed in each man’s sack. Joseph’s heart was still tender and gracious, even though his outward appearance seemed otherwise. He could not let his brothers suffer unduly, and by his generosity they were able to return home with more than they came for. This certainly was not something they deserved, and it also indicates that Joseph had not harboured a grudge against his brothers nor did he seek to retaliate with malice and revenge. His actions were from a heart that loved and was concerned for his brothers. These were the deeds of a man who walked closely with God, and had committed his way to the Lord to work things out. What a gracious man Joseph had become during those past twenty years! He did not keep a list of all the wrongs done

to him and then wreak revenge at the earliest opportunity. We have no record of him taking revenge on the cupbearer who forgot him for two years. We have no record of him taking revenge on Potiphar for wrongly imprisoning him. We have no record of him taking revenge on Potiphar's wife for her lying accusation. And now we have no record of him taking revenge on his brothers, even though they deserved judgement. Twenty years previously they had planned to leave Joseph in a pit to die by starvation, which they eventually changed to selling him, but Joseph did the opposite. He fed his brothers and gave them their money back!

How illustrative this is of the greater kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ to those who are unworthy and guilty sinners. Although we do not deserve it, he forgives the guilt of our sin and showers us with grace upon grace. It was this which constrained the Christian hymn writer, Katie Barclay Wilkinson, to write:

*“May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
All I do and say.”*

How easy it is for us to do the opposite to Joseph. May the Lord help us not to harbour grudges and animosity in our hearts against those who have failed or hurt or damaged us. The only way we will be able to do this is to constantly look to our Saviour and remember just how guilty we have been ourselves and how gracious he has been to us. We need to come to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ every day of our lives and remind ourselves of what

he has done for us and how he has treated us. We need to seek his grace to be like him as Peter reminds us (1 Pet 2:23): *“When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”* And Paul helpfully instructs us similarly in his letter to the believers at Rome. In Romans 12:17 he wrote, *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.”* And in Romans 12:21 he added, *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* (See also Proverbs 20:22 & 24:29.) Joseph had done this, and the Lord would want us to do the same.

b. The effect it produced.

There is another interesting and significant turn of events as the story unfolds. As the brothers rested at nightfall, one of them opened his sack to feed his donkey when he discovered his silver had been returned (v27-28). Such was the conviction of sin they were under, not a single one of them rejoiced at their findings, instead they trembled with fear. The word means to shake violently and is used in 1 Samuel 14:15 to describe an earthquake! Indeed, they went further and said in verse 28, *“What is this that God has done to us?”* The Lord was dealing with them very deeply, and they still feared him. As E. M. Blaiklock has written, *“...while that abides there is still hope.”* Joseph is an example of what we read about in Romans 12:20, *“...If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”* The kindness Joseph had shown them was bringing them to repentance.

5) The brothers' report to Jacob (v29-38).

a. Their tale of woe (v29-35).

As soon as they arrived home they told their father everything that had happened, and how the ruler of the land (i.e. Joseph) had treated them. Their unfolding of the details is moving to read as here were men in deep distress (v29-32). They told Jacob how Simeon had been kept in Egypt until they returned with Benjamin, and only then would they receive their brother back and be free to trade in the land (v33-34). Then each man began to undo his sack (v35), and in each one was his pouch of silver! This only served to deepen their fear and fill them with terror.

b. Jacob's response (v36-38).

At this point Jacob spoke up and directly challenged his sons, laying the blame firmly on them for the earlier loss of Joseph and now the further loss of Simeon. And the old man feared lest his beloved Benjamin should also be lost (Gen 42:36): *"Their father Jacob said to them, 'You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin.'*" He blamed his sons for the loss of both Joseph and Simeon. Did he suspect they had lied about Joseph all along? Those words from their father must have made them feel even more guilty for their past sins. However, Jacob refused to let Benjamin go to Egypt. His assessment was that everything was against him!

How sad it was that Jacob seemed to find it impossible to rest in the overruling providence and sovereignty of God and commit his way to the Lord with peace and assurance.

But before we are too quick to accuse him of lack of faith, we need to ask how we would have reacted if we had been in the same situation. I guess most of us would have felt exactly the same, and even been filled with despair. We know that when Job lost his children he was able to say in Job 1:21, *"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."* But it takes much grace and faith to make such a statement, and therefore we need to be earnest in prayer to God that should we ever be called to go through similar circumstances he would strengthen us for that day, because none of us has that kind of strength in ourselves. Only the Lord can help us at such times. As Jacob heard the news of the situation he was overwhelmed by it all, and exclaimed (v36), *"Everything is against me!"* There was no seeking the Lord's help, there was no resting in the Lord's sovereignty. Instead of fervent prayer to God, there was despair in the old man's heart and mind. And how easy it is for us to fall into the same trap, and perhaps as we look back over our lives we can recall times when we did exactly the same as Jacob when difficulty confronted us. If we are Christian believers, we must remind ourselves that although we may feel like that at times, the truth is in fact very different because God is *'for us'*. We need to remember this is true however and whatever we may feel (Romans 8:28-39), and God has complete control of our lives and all that happens to us, and he will bring great good out of what we may feel is great harm. How we need to pray for the Lord's help at such times to enable us to walk by faith when we cannot see anything good around us! And if we meet believers

who are so hard pressed that they respond like Jacob, we need to treat them with much compassion and loving kindness, and offer them support, not harsh criticism. Very often God's depressed servants do not see things clearly, and Elijah comes to mind (1 Kings 19). The Lord's dealing with Elijah was not to crush his distressed servant, but in tenderness he gave him sleep and food to refresh his weary spirits. God did eventually challenge Elijah, but only when he was strong enough to take it. We must seek to be like our loving heavenly Father and our gracious Saviour.

At this point Reuben stepped in and pledged himself to take care of Benjamin, and to show his earnestness he was prepared to lose his own two sons (v37)! What a different attitude to that which characterised those self-centred and jealous brothers all those years ago! A great transformation was beginning to take place in their hearts, and Reuben's willingness to lose his own children is an indication of this. He then pleaded with his father to let him take Benjamin to Egypt. Jacob's reaction to all of this was to refuse to let Benjamin go (v38). And his reason was that he could not bear to lose him, having already lost Joseph. If anything happened to Benjamin, Jacob declared, it would bring his now '*...grey head down to the grave in sorrow.*' For the old man this really was too much to bear. What Jacob needed was a fresh awareness of the presence of God, but for the time being this seems to have been beyond his grasp.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the Lord's plan to bring Benjamin and eventually Jacob and their whole family to

Egypt was in no way frustrated by Jacob's initial refusal, so we must turn to that next.

Chapter 2 Genesis 43 – The brothers' second journey to Egypt

Introduction

There is a lovely expression which God used concerning himself in Isaiah 46:10, "*My purpose will stand, and I will do what I please.*" This is a very wonderful thing that God is telling us, because it means that all his plans and purposes can never be overcome, or hindered, or fail. What God says he will do, he will do. And we can easily see from this how different God is from us. So often we have plans or ambitions or hopes that eventually come to nothing. And so many things can happen to bring us such disappointments. We may become unexpectedly ill, or lose our job, or find someone opposes us, and our well thought out and cherished plans come to nothing. But that never happens with the Lord. His purposes always stand, even when he is opposed by men or the devil, and even when to human sight and reasoning it appears as if his plans are going to come to nothing, God is still working his purposes out. We have already seen this with Joseph, as the Lord fulfilled those dreams he had as a young man that his brothers would come and bow down to him. Throughout Joseph's many years of difficulties, when all seemed to militate against him ever coming to a position where his brothers would bow to him, the Lord was still at work and brought his purpose to completion. I mention this because the previous chapter, Genesis 42, ends with Jacob refusing to allow his sons to take Benjamin, Joseph's younger

brother and Jacob's youngest son, back to Egypt as had been demanded by the ruler of Egypt, Joseph himself. Remember, neither his brothers nor his father knew that this ruler was Joseph, as this had been kept from them. Jacob's life in recent years had been very dark and difficult, and poor Jacob was obviously crushed in spirit, and all did indeed seem against him. And this reminds us that often God's servants have to go through dark and painful experiences so that the purposes of God may be fulfilled. But if Jacob did not relent it could well have meant the starvation of the whole family, and the cessation of the Lord's plans to bless both Jacob's descendants and also eventually the whole world through the Lord Jesus. It was through the family line of Jacob's son Judah that the Lord Jesus Christ was eventually born (see Matthew 1:2-3). In addition to this, God had promised Abraham many years earlier that his descendants would be enslaved in a country not their own for over 400 years (Genesis 15:13). That country was Egypt, and so Jacob and his family and descendants had to be brought there, even though Jacob at first resisted. But as we have already seen, nothing prevents the Lord's plans being fulfilled, not even the stubborn refusal of the aged Jacob. As we shall see, the Lord overruled in order that his will would be fulfilled. This is something he always does, and will continue to do. Before coming to the details of how God did this we need to pause and consider an important lesson from what we have already said.

Lesson.

The fact that God always carries out his plans and purposes is both an encouragement and an incentive for Christian believers in our work on earth now. God has told us his people will eventually be a multitude that no man can number, and they will come from every nation and language on the earth (Revelation 7:9). Therefore, although this world is getting increasingly wicked, and at times it might seem to human eyes that Satan has the upper hand, this will not stop God fulfilling his plans. God will make his kingdom spread and increase and will bring millions to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and no one will be able to prevent him. Therefore this is a great encouragement for us in evangelism, for we know that God will rescue men and women from their sin as they are brought to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sure and certain work because it does not rest on our abilities but on God's purposes, and this in turn stirs us up actively to tell others about Christ, the only Saviour of the lost. And we can add that all of that great multitude will be brought safely to heaven. God has said so, and his purposes will stand and not fail, and if you are a Christian believer today you already belong to that great multitude of God's people. With this in mind we now return to the narrative of Genesis 43.

1) The problem Jacob faced (43:1-7).

It is quite evident that Jacob did not discern the hand of God in his circumstances as much as he should have done. Everything seemed against him, and all was dark and despairing for him. However, the Lord was not going to let this prevent his plans from being fulfilled, and so he

compelled Jacob to submit by ordering a deterioration in his circumstances. The famine remained severe in Canaan (v1), and Jacob's land at Hebron would have become like a dust bowl. There was no relief, no rain, no crops growing. And before long, all the grain that had been brought from Egypt was used up, which meant they were then in a very dangerous situation. And so Jacob ordered his sons to return to Egypt to buy more grain (v2).

It is at this point that Judah spoke up (v3). Reuben had already failed to persuade Jacob to let Benjamin return with them (42:37-38), Simeon was in Egypt, and Levi, the next in line, had forfeited his father's confidence over his treachery with the Shechemites in Genesis 34. So Judah took the lead. Remember it was Judah who suggested to his brothers that they sell Joseph instead of killing him. He reminded his father of the man's (i.e. Joseph's) solemn warning that they would not see his face again, and therefore not be able to purchase any more grain, unless Benjamin went with them. Therefore he pleaded with his father to let Benjamin go to Egypt (v4). But Jacob, called Israel in verse 6, began to scold his sons for having told the ruler in Egypt about Benjamin. (Jacob's name 'Israel' means 'one who struggles with God' and was given to Jacob after he wrestled all night with the Lord in Genesis 35:10. Its use here could well be because he is again struggling with the Lord, because this time he was unwilling to let his sons go to Egypt.) All Jacob could do was unjustly to blame his sons by asking why they told the man about Benjamin. And note how self-centred Jacob had become in this because he said in verse 6, "*Why did*

you bring this trouble on me..." He was absorbed with himself, but God did not allow him to stay like that for long. All of the brothers protested that they had no idea questions would be presented to them, or why, and they had to answer them. They did not know what was going to be demanded regarding Benjamin. They really had no idea that it was their own brother Joseph who had spoken to them. It had not once entered their minds that such close questioning was because of the personal knowledge of the questioner.

2) The promise Judah made (43:8-10).

Judah, who has been seen to be a man of milder temperament than his brothers, and one who did not always want to go as far as them in their wicked schemes – although he was still very wrong to want to sell his brother as a slave – spoke up (v8f). There was both an urgency and a maturity in his words. He urged his father to let him take Benjamin with him because if they did nothing they would die. Judah mentioned in particular their children (v8), or 'little ones' as the original means. So the need was felt very keenly. Could Jacob really let his grandchildren die of starvation? Their need was critical as is also seen by Judah's words (v8), "*...we will go at once...*" He also took full responsibility for his younger brother, assuring his father he would guarantee his safety, and he would be held personally responsible if any harm came to the boy. Here was a generosity of spirit that was very admirable. Joseph's wise dealings with his brothers was producing qualities in them that had not been there before. Even when Judah suggested selling Joseph, although it did mean

sparing his life, the reason he gave was that they would not gain by killing him, but selling him would bring them some profit (Genesis 37:26-28). So it was really from selfish motives that he had acted in this more lenient way. But now it was quite different. He took full responsibility for his younger brother and promised to do all he could to protect him. He even went further, because if he failed he said he would bear the blame entirely himself (v9). Then he impressed on his father the great urgency there was for speedy action (v10), *“As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice.”* The whole family was in great peril, their lives were at stake, and they needed to go to Joseph with great haste.

There is an interesting parallel here between the way Judah sought salvation from starvation for himself and his family and the way sinners need to seek salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. All sinners ought to see their need to flee to Christ urgently, without delay, for he alone is able to bring us God’s forgiveness for our sins. (See Acts 4:12; John 14:6; 1 Timothy 1:15.) But sadly for many today, even though their lives are in danger of the judgement of God, they do not show any concern nor turn from their sinful behaviour to the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue them from hell. The urgency we see in Judah over his physical survival should be much greater in sinners whose very spiritual and eternal wellbeing is at risk, but tragically millions have no concern at all. We should beware that we do not fall into that trap and perish.

3) The submission Jacob yielded (43:11-14).

a. Jacob submits.

At long last their father Jacob relented. He was brought to realise there was no other way out, he had to let his beloved Benjamin go to Egypt (v11). Therefore he instructed his sons (v11) to *‘take some of the best products’* still available in Canaan as a gift to Egypt for *‘the man’*. His use of the word *‘some’* is indicative that there was only a very small amount of these things left. He lists *‘...a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds.’* His use of *‘...a little...’* again stresses there was not much left at all.

b. Jacob’s honesty.

At this point, Jacob’s honesty shone forth (v12), because he told his sons to take double the amount of silver to Egypt, thus returning the silver each of his sons had found in their sacks after their first visit. When he could so easily have kept the money for himself, he knew the Lord would be displeased if had done so, and without question ordered his sons to act with integrity. He stated that this may well have been a mistake by someone in Egypt (v12), and he was not going to take advantage of someone else’s unfortunate error. How easy it would have been for him to remain silent about this. How easy it would have been for him to let someone in Egypt suffer for not taking the money, as they should have done. But Jacob refused to give in to any such temptations, and the fact he did not know Joseph had ordered the money to be returned to them only heightens Jacob’s honesty. This is a very important quality that the Lord God expects from us today. You will recall later in Exodus 20 we are commanded not to steal (Exodus 20:15). And this same principle is applied to

honest weights in the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 11:1; 16:11). Paul instructed those who used to steal before they became Christian believers to steal no more, but to work honestly so they would have resources to share with those in need (Ephesians 4:28). It is important to stress this need for honesty in today's world where corruption of all sorts, including bribery, has become acceptable to many. All dishonesty will be called to account on the day of judgement. Therefore it should not be seen amongst the people of God.

c. Jacob's hope (v13-14).

He commanded his sons to take Benjamin and to return to Egypt quickly. Then for the first time in all of these events surrounding Joseph, Jacob referred to the Lord (v14), "*And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your brother and Benjamin come back with you.*" (See similar expressions of trust in God in 2 Samuel 22:4; Psalms 27:1, 28:2; 116:1-2.) It is lovely to see that underneath all his fears and doubts and human frailty, the aged Jacob put his hope in the Lord. And it is the Lord as '*God Almighty*', El-Shaddai, the God with whom all things are possible and for whom nothing is too hard. Jacob knew that the hearts of kings and rulers are in the hand of the Lord! (See Proverbs 8:15-16; Romans 13:1-7). He committed the way of his family to the Lord for him to direct their paths (cf. Proverbs 3:5-6). And there was no one better that he could have entrusted them to, because none can hurt us unless the Lord permits, and none can harm us when God is for us, not even our enemies. Remember the words of Jesus to Pilate the Roman

governor (John 19:11), "*You would have no power over me if it were not given you from above.*" Jacob challenges us to commit our own families to the Lord each day. And notice that as Jacob's faith was strengthened, he did not lose his humility because he did not demand that God Almighty be gracious to them, but humbly begs '*may*' he be gracious to them. He placed his hope in the Lord, and that was the wisest thing he could do. And more than that, he even submitted to the possibility that if he lost his son, then he would accept it. (v14) "*As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.*" (Cf. Similar words to those of Esther in Esther 4:16.) Clearly this was something of which Jacob was very fearful because he did not want to lose any of his sons, but he realised that the providence of God might lead that way and he accepted it. How hard this must have been for him, and that made his submission all the more genuine. His way was committed to the Lord, whatever the outcome.

There are so many today who want to trust God only while things are going well and life is easy, but true trust in God perseveres even when there is great personal loss and even tragedy. Many of God's dear children have had to go through great traumas and have trusted the Lord through them all! They stand as a challenge and an encouragement to us to persevere in our own trust and dependence on the Lord at all times.

4) The brothers meet Joseph again (43:15-34)

a. Their unexpected invitation (v15-16).

The brothers delayed no longer (v15). They hurried down to Egypt. Not only was there the need to purchase the

food, but also to see their brother Simeon who had been kept in Egypt. They presented themselves to Joseph, and when he saw his younger brother Benjamin he ordered that the men should be taken to his own house and an animal slaughtered so that they could eat with him at midday.

b. Their fears (v17-18).

This unexpected kindness was certainly not something they had anticipated at all. Indeed, it had a very frightening effect on them. They reasoned that they had been brought to Joseph's house because of the silver that was in their sacks after their previous visit. They probably were afraid that Joseph thought they were spies, as he had said at their last visit. And they began to fear they would be attacked and enslaved and their animals taken from them. Their whole outlook was bleak.

c. Their honesty (v19-23).

They acted swiftly and informed Joseph's steward about the silver and how they had returned with it. But he reassured them that they had paid the money in full, they had not stolen it, and they were not under any suspicion, "*It's all right, he said, 'Don't be afraid.'*" Indeed, he went so far as to tell them that their God, the God of their father Jacob, had given them this treasure in their sacks. And his words should have put them immediately at ease. It was then that Simeon was restored to them. (By comparing Genesis 45:6 the famine had lasted for two years, and therefore we can safely say that Simeon had been detained for several months because of the delayed return of his brothers.) We are not told what happened, but

they must have been deeply relieved to see him again, and he must have been very pleased to see his brothers.

d. Their preparation to meet Joseph (v24-25).

Instead of being treated as slaves or thieves, the steward treated them as honoured guests. He gave them water to refresh themselves after travelling in the heat and dust of the land, and also provided food for their animals. (As an aside, note the sharp contrast between the treatment these brothers received with that Jesus received when he had been invited into the home of Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7:36-50, and especially v44. Although he was the Son of God, the Lord of glory, he was despised and not honoured. How gracious the Lord Jesus was to suffer such treatment from sinful men when he came to earth to save his people.) Joseph's brothers prepared the few gifts they had brought from home, as they had heard they would be eating with Joseph at noon.

e. Their conversation with Joseph (v26-30).

When Joseph eventually arrived, they gave him their gifts and bowed to the ground before him. A second time the Lord had fulfilled the dreams Joseph had received in his teens, but the brothers were completely unaware to whom they were bowing. (See Genesis 37:7 & 9.) Joseph immediately inquired about them (v27), "*He asked how they were...*" – a further unexpected kindness, and one which Joseph could well have deliberately not shown considering the way they had treated him. We see something of the love he had in his heart for them, and also his quiet confidence that the Lord had been in all that had happened to him. Only God can create such kind attitudes

in men so that they are willing to forgive those who despicably treat them. Jesus said this is one of the marks of those who belong to God (Matthew 5:10-12), and will bring blessing to them when they do respond in this way. For Joseph there was no malice or spite towards his brothers. Then quite naturally he asked them about their father, wanting to know if he was still alive. They responded by saying he was alive and well, and again they bow to Joseph, and we are specifically told they did this to honour him. How wrong they were all those years ago when they said to Joseph (Genesis 33:8), *“Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?”* The purposes of God were wonderfully being worked out. Then as Joseph viewed them all his eyes fell on his own brother Benjamin, his own mother’s son. He asked if this really was their younger brother whom they had spoken about on their first visit. Then he said to Benjamin, *“God be gracious to you, my son.”* He longed for the Lord to bless his brother abundantly. At this point it all became too much for Joseph; deeply moved and overcome by emotion he had to leave them and go to his own private room to weep. The occasion had a profound effect on Joseph, for here was the brother he had probably thought in the earlier years of his captivity he would never see again, and here they were reunited.

f. Their meal and astonishment (v31-34).

After washing his face and controlling himself, Joseph returned and they sat for the meal. There were strict rules of etiquette that were observed at meals in the ancient Middle East. The brothers were by themselves in a group,

the Egyptians in another group, and Joseph ate by himself. And remarkably the seating arrangements for the brothers were in strict order of their age! Henry Morris has written, *“...there are no less than 39,917,000 different orders in which eleven individuals could have been seated!”* Joseph got it right first time. The brothers were beginning to realise this man knew a lot more about them than they ever thought, because his Egyptian stewards would have had no idea of their ages. The response to this by the brothers was complete astonishment. And still they did not consider that this was their brother Joseph!

When the food was served, all were given the same portions except Benjamin who received five times as much as everyone else! This marked him out as one with a special relationship with Joseph as the son of his own mother Rachel. Yet even with this the brothers did not recognise or think the ruler in Egypt was their own brother. By treating Benjamin so generously Joseph was also testing his other brothers to see if they still had the jealousy and envy which they displayed when he had been favoured by his father. Would they be resentful of young Benjamin? The chapter ends with them feasting and drinking freely with him, and their earlier fears were at least for a time relieved. And the reason for this was the kindness and grace shown to them by Joseph. He did not treat them out of resentment or bearing a grudge for their past, neither did he remind them of their crimes. Instead, he treated them with kindness and grace, with the result that their fears were dissipated.

g. A portrayal of Christ.

Joseph's kindness is a small picture of that greater grace and forgiveness God shows through the Lord Jesus Christ to all who put their trust in him. We have ill-treated him, abused him, broken his laws, ignored his commands, yet he treats us, not as we deserve, but with great grace and mercy, giving his own dear Son to be our Saviour. And how many have come near to him with great fears as the burden of their guilt weighed heavily on their hearts. Millions have feared he would reject them and cast them off or treat them harshly, and have discovered the opposite, that he has treated them with kindness. Jesus said in John 6:37, *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."* His grace and generosity are immense, and instead of shouting to all the universe about our guilt and unworthiness and pouring out his just punishment on us, he forgives us everything! Isaiah the prophet has described God's grace so marvellously (Isaiah 30:18): *"Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who long for him!"* It is no wonder that when the Christian hymn writer John Newton wrote about this he declared:

*"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm found;
Was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!"*

Although Joseph's brothers were enjoying his kindness, they had not yet come to realise who it was that did this for them. Joseph kept his identity to himself for the time being. And so the full enjoyment of being reconciled to him lay a little while off. No doubt throughout all this Joseph was looking for those signs that indicated these harsh brutal men had indeed learned from their past and were truly repentant. So he had to test them one more time as we shall see in our next chapter. True reconciliation cannot be accomplished without true repentance, but when repentance is evident the path to enjoying full forgiveness is opened.

Chapter 3 Genesis 44 – The cup in Benjamin's sack

Introduction

At the end of Genesis 43 we left Joseph and his brothers, including Benjamin, feasting together in Joseph's house. Benjamin had been shown special favour by receiving five times more food than any of the others, even though he was the youngest. And as yet the brothers still did not know it was Joseph.

There was still one further test Joseph wanted and needed to put them through to demonstrate they had indeed become changed men who were filled with that godly sorrow which leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). Up to now we have seen how different were Joseph's dealings with his brothers compared with the harsh and brutal treatment they had handed out to him more than twenty years earlier. It is worth recapping a little and reminding ourselves that when Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave

to those Midianite merchants, they displayed two great evils in their hearts.

- i. Their hatred of Joseph, their own brother, and this we have stressed throughout these booklets.
- ii. Their total disrespect of their father Jacob.

They knew how deeply Jacob would feel the loss of Joseph, yet they still went ahead with their wicked plan because they despised him for showing favouritism to Joseph. So they deliberately deceived Jacob, concealing what they had done to Joseph by tearing the special coat Jacob had given him and covering it with blood so he thought some wild animal had killed him. They showed complete disregard and lack of respect and love for their father. (See and contrast Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-3.) But by now they had seen their father suffer grief from their behaviour for over twenty years, and it had all been their fault. There was no-one else they could blame for the distress and sorrow they had inflicted on their father. Twenty years previously they had not cared at all about their evil actions. Their wickedness had hardened their hearts and their evil intentions were carried out without a moment's hesitation to the consequences. They had dug a deep, dark, pit for themselves and were glad in those far off days to be in it, such was their animosity towards Joseph and their father Jacob. Therefore it was clear that if these men were to enjoy full forgiveness from the Lord and from Joseph, then they had to show that their former sinful and selfish attitudes had radically changed. We have already seen indications or markers that this had happened to these men, but Joseph wanted to be absolutely sure. Joseph had

heard them say (Genesis 42:21), *“Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us.”* It is also fair to say that their respect and concern for their father had begun to improve, but there was the need to ensure this was genuine. It is all too easy to say the right things with your lips but still be unchanged in your heart. Jesus himself mentioned this when he spoke against the Pharisees (Mark 7:6): *“He replied, ‘Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”’”* (See also Psalm 78:34-37.)

So we come to Genesis 44 and the action Joseph took to prove without any doubt that his brothers were changed men.

1) Joseph's test (44:1-6).

Preparations were made for the brothers' return to Canaan and their father Jacob. As before (see 42:25), Joseph instructed that the brothers' money be placed in each man's sack. They were also given as much grain as they could carry, such was Joseph's generosity. However, there was one exception. Joseph ordered that his own silver cup be secretly hidden in Benjamin's sack, he being the youngest of the brothers. This was all because Joseph wanted to see if there was in his brothers a powerful faith in God and a positive response towards others. And his master plan would indicate one way or the other if they would abandon Benjamin, the one he had favoured the day previously, just

as they had abandoned him, the favoured son, those twenty or more years earlier. Their response would indicate if they were repentant or not, and if they had learned from the past.

Before we proceed with the rest of the narrative we need to remind ourselves at this point just how reluctant old Jacob had been to let Benjamin go to Egypt at all. Remember Joseph and Benjamin were the only sons his beloved wife Rachel had given him, and with Joseph presumed dead, Benjamin was very precious to his aged father. Initially he had refused to let Benjamin go, but when he saw there was no alternative he at last agreed, but even then he feared that Benjamin might die. He had said (Genesis 43:14), *“As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”*

Returning to the narrative of Genesis 44, as soon as it was light the brothers left for home, totally ignorant of Joseph’s plan. The day before they had feasted with the second ruler of Egypt. He had also ensured they were given copious amounts of grain, and it may well have seemed to them as if at last things were going well. However, they had not gone far outside the city when Joseph sent his steward after them (Genesis 44:4-5): *“...Joseph said to his steward, ‘Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, “Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.”’”* The fact that the steward was sent after them so soon served the double purpose of bringing Joseph’s test to a speedy conclusion, and also preventing his brothers

finding the silver cup and returning with it themselves, thus thwarting his plan.

There is a problem with the detail telling us Joseph used his cup *‘for divination’*, as divination was forbidden amongst the people of God later in the Mosaic law. A number of solutions have been suggested.

- Joseph, although a child of God, was not a perfect child of God, and suffered from weaknesses just as we do today, and therefore he may have succumbed to this Egyptian custom.
- Another suggestion is that Joseph did not actually use his cup for divination, only that he said he did to make his brothers think he was indeed a genuine Egyptian, but this would make Joseph guilty of deceit, one of the things his brothers had been guilty of previously.
- A third possibility is that perhaps God had indeed revealed things to Joseph through this means, but only as a temporary measure, as Joseph would have had only a very small portion of the Bible in his day as Moses, who compiled the first five books of the Bible, had not yet been born. Also this would mean Joseph did not have the law of God which only in a later period banned divination as an abomination unto the Lord.
- Another suggestion is that the original Hebrew words can be translated differently implying that Joseph was simply one who was able to discern future events, as the Lord had enabled him to do with the dreams of the baker and cupbearer and those of Pharaoh.

We have to say that the Bible itself does not supply us with a solution to this problem, and therefore we must not speculate.

Returning to the Biblical narrative it is interesting to note that the steward did not specifically state they had stolen the cup, but that was obviously implied and that was certainly how the brothers understood what he said to them.

2) The brothers' initial response (44:7-13).

(a) Their initial declaration of innocence (v7-9).

The very thought of stealing Joseph's cup was unthinkable for them, and they said so (Genesis 44:7): "*Far be it from your servants to do anything like that!*" Stealing and deceiving was not something they ever once considered and all the brothers protested their innocence of the accusation. How different this response was to when they did steal Joseph, sold him for profit, and lied to their father Jacob about it. The years since then had a profound effect on these men as they realised their sin of over twenty years earlier. They would never think of being dishonest now, and that was really their claim. Not only that, but they produced evidence that demonstrated their honesty. They had brought back the money they had found in their bags after their first trip to buy corn in Egypt (v8). This, they declared, meant they had no reason whatsoever for stealing the cup, whether it was gold or silver. So honest had they become that in verse 9 they said if one of them did have the cup he deserved to die and the rest of them would become slaves in Egypt! Hardly the suggestion of men who were hiding something! They were simply saying this was now

something they would not have done, which was so different from when they had schemed together to get rid of Joseph.

(b) The steward's acceptance (v10).

The steward agreed to their proposal but modified it by reducing the penalty saying it applied only to the guilty man. He also said the guilty one would not die but become a slave and the rest would be set free to return home as free from blame.

(c) The careful search (v11-13).

All that remained was for each man's sack to be opened and searched, which they readily and quickly did (v11). And we can imagine the tension as each man's sack was searched, and the great relief when the cup wasn't found! The tension was heightened by the steward starting with the oldest and working through them one by one until he came to the youngest. We can only imagine what might have gone through their minds as the search proceeded. While there would have been increased relief as each man was cleared in turn, there also must have been increased tension and anxiety as it got to the last one, Benjamin's. Then, to their absolute shock and horror, the cup was discovered in Benjamin's sack! This must have been an absolutely devastating blow for them to receive. Indeed, it was so great, and they were filled with such anguish and terror that they tore their clothes, which indicated the intensity of their grief at this finding. Benjamin, their younger brother, the one so dear to their father Jacob – who would have thought he had been the one to steal this cup, and what would this do to their aged father! The thought

was almost too terrifying to contemplate and they were stricken with grief and alarm. Although the Bible gives us no details, their minds must have been in turmoil. We are simply told (v13), “*They all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city!*” Moments earlier they had left the city having been treated most generously by Joseph, and now they returned in such a short time utterly devastated, and with Benjamin in serious trouble.

3) The brothers before Joseph (44:14-34).

Joseph was still in the house awaiting their return. The brothers were so distraught that they all fell on the floor before him – “*they threw themselves*” (v14). They were utterly devastated by what seems to have happened. They had no excuse – the cup was in Benjamin’s sack – it appeared he was the guilty one. We also see a further fulfilment of Joseph’s own dreams for his brothers did bow down to him yet again, and much lower than was ever anticipated. Joseph then spoke to them in solemn words (v15), asking them what they had done and declaring he was well able to find out the truth about such things. Judah answered him, and the pathos in his words was intense, as was his respect for Joseph calling him ‘*my lord*’ (Genesis 44:16): “*What can we say to my lord?*” Judah replied, “*What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves – we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.*” The deep sorrow that he felt at what had happened was immense. And further, the brothers acknowledged the hand of God was in all this! Undoubtedly Judah was referring not just to the supposedly

stolen cup, but also their guilt against Joseph himself, as was mentioned in Genesis 42:21. They were showing themselves at last to be men for whom God was not only important, but central and sovereign over their lives. They did indeed have real faith in him, and bowed to his providence. Note Judah did not isolate Benjamin, nor directly blame him, but spoke of them all being guilty. Again another amazing change from their earlier selfish and self-centred attitude to Joseph. Judah acknowledged that all of them, including Benjamin, would be his slaves. Note also that he did not say ‘*Benjamin*’, but ‘*the one who was found to have the cup*’. It still seemed unthinkable to him that Benjamin should have done such a thing. The whole scene was dramatic. There was deep sorrow among them that such a thing had taken place. Their consciences had become sensitive to sin and recoiled from it.

Joseph spoke again (v17), stressing he would not be unjust and would keep only Benjamin as his slave and would release the others so they could go back to their father in peace. And those words must have been like a knife in their hearts. They could never return to their father in peace in such circumstances.

- a. Such news about Benjamin would have devastated their father. His grief would have been intolerable, and would probably have driven him to an early grave. And that was something they could not do.
- b. Neither could they desert their younger brother and leave him to suffer alone.

This all becomes evident as Judah pleads with Joseph in what must be one of the most moving passages we find in

the Bible. It is full of sincerity and depth of feeling and is the mark of a changed man (v18-34). The great reformer Martin Luther once said, *“I would give very much to be able to pray to our Lord God as well as Judah prays to Joseph here: for it is a perfect specimen of prayer, the true feeling that there ought to be in prayer.”* Judah, you will remember, was the one who had suggested they gain financially by selling Joseph as a slave instead of killing him (Genesis 37:26f). He was once a hardened schemer, a man who could not care less about his younger brother or what his father thought. What a different Judah now! Not one who wanted to spare his own life from difficulty, nor one who wanted to profit from the misfortune of his younger brother, nor one who was uncaring about his father. He was indeed a changed man, and this came out as he spoke to this great ruler in Egypt.

He addressed Joseph with earnestness and begs for him to listen (Genesis 44:18): *“Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself.”* He came to plead for his brother’s release as he outlines the history of the days since they first travelled to Egypt. The best way for us to see this is by simply reading what Judah said as it is recorded in the Bible:

(Genesis 44:19-20) *“My lord asked his servants, ‘Do you have a father or a brother?’ And we answered, ‘We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother’s sons left and his father loves him.”*

With the exception that Joseph was not dead as they supposed but standing in front of them, all that Judah said was true. And it is so touching to see how Judah stressed Benjamin’s preciousness to their father Jacob, and he did so without a scrap of resentment or jealousy as they had once felt about Joseph. Judah continued:

(Genesis 44:21-29) *“Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.’ And we said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.’ But you told your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.’ When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.*

Then our father said, ‘Go back and buy a little more food.’ But we said, ‘We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’

Your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, “He has surely been torn to pieces.” And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my grey head down to the grave in misery.’”

Judah spoke with great tenderness about his father Jacob and how he would respond if Benjamin did not return to him (v22), *“If he leaves him, his father will die.”* He knew that Jacob feared the worst if Benjamin left him, that harm may befall him, and if so that eventuality would drive Jacob to the grave in great distress. There was now a deep

love and concern and respect for their aged father. They had seen how their earlier wicked treatment of Joseph had brought much grief to Jacob, and as the years passed they had clearly grown to regret what they had done. Judah continued:

(Genesis 44:30-33) “So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy’s life, sees that the boy isn’t there, he will die. Your servants will bring the grey head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!’

Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in the place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers.”

Judah poured out his heart on behalf of Benjamin and of Jacob. He did not want to cause any further distress to either of them, and certainly did not want to cause his father’s death. Indeed, he was prepared to give his own life and be a slave in exchange for Benjamin’s freedom and his father’s consolation. This sacrificial attitude displayed by Judah portrays that even greater sacrifice of his descendant the Lord Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 7:14, John 10:11), and his intercession mirrors that greater intercession of Christ (see Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25). The scene is indeed one of the most moving in the life of Joseph as Judah pleads with him for Benjamin’s release. These are no longer the words of a hard, callous, uncaring

brother or son, but those of one who learned deeply and painfully from the cost of his earlier sin. Though sin can at times be quite pleasurable (Hebrews 11:25), and though these brothers were glad when they had got rid of Joseph, that was no longer so. Like the lemon tree whose blossom is so sweet but whose fruit is so sour and bitter, so sin eventually reaps its reward of misery and pain, leading ultimately to the condemnation and wrath of God, unless repented of. Here was a man who had indeed repented and been changed by the grace of God. His final statement puts the seal on it all:

(Genesis 44:34) “How can I go back to my father, if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father.”

How thoroughly chastening had produced its desired result (Hebrews 12:10): “...God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.” The years of seeing their father’s sorrow over the loss of Joseph, and the years of feeling the guilt of their past sin as their consciences gave them no rest, had brought these men to see the wrong they had done and now they were different. For these brothers crisis point had been reached, but the crisis indicated they were indeed transformed men with new hearts. They were not envious towards the favour shown to Benjamin the day before, and Judah possessed that self-sacrificing love that made him willing to suffer in Benjamin’s place. They had passed the test Joseph set for them, they were truly repentant men, God had indeed done his work in their hearts, and now the stage was set for their forgiveness and reconciliation with Joseph.

Chapter 4 Genesis 45 – Joseph makes himself known

Introduction

It was now twenty-two years since Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers, which made him aged 39. Although they did not realise it, his brothers had already seen him, but with wisdom and due caution Joseph had not made himself known. Instead, he had tested them to see if they had learned from their past sins of jealousy and deceit and cruelty, and also ceased in their disregard for their father Jacob, all of which lay behind their treatment of Joseph as a young 17 year old. He wanted to see if they had truly repented of their past sinfulness and were now seeking to live in a God honouring way. With great wisdom he had drawn out from these men the truth that they had indeed changed.

- He had tested their truthfulness by making them bring his younger brother Benjamin to Egypt.
- He had tested their generosity and unselfishness by giving Benjamin five times more food than the rest of them, marking him out as a favoured man. And they were not resentful or jealous of Benjamin at all.
- He had tested their kindness, tenderness and compassion for their younger brother, and also their loving concern for their father Jacob by accusing Benjamin of stealing his cup. And they responded to this in a most remarkably tender way. In the previous chapter we saw how Judah had pleaded for his younger brother Benjamin, and asked that he be taken instead of his younger brother. Judah begged Joseph to allow

this to save their father any further distress and pain, which would have brought him down to the grave in sorrow. In one of the most moving chapters in the whole Bible Judah and his brothers had indicated they were thoroughly changed men, men who not only regretted their sins of twenty two years previously, but who had regretted them deeply, with that godly sorrow which leads to repentance. We read in 2 Corinthians 7:10, *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”*

- And their respect and love and heartfelt concern for their father, the aged Jacob, was so different from their resentment of his treatment of Joseph in those earlier years. They had been guilty of causing him enough pain and anguish already, and this they regretted and did not want to add to in any way whatsoever.

This was what Joseph longed to see in his brothers more than anything, and now he had evidence enough to convince him his brothers were different men. In other words, these men were ready to receive Joseph’s full forgiveness and to enjoy reconciliation with him. And so we turn from the moving details of Genesis 44 to another moving scene in Genesis 45.

1) Joseph is re-united with his brothers (45:1-15)

a. Joseph wept (v1-2)

As Joseph witnessed the chain of events we have just described, as he had seen the godly longings of his heart for his brothers fulfilled, he was totally overcome with

emotion and could restrain himself no longer. With a heart filled with joy and gladness and relief and thankfulness, he could no longer control himself and cried out in verse 1, *“Make everyone leave my presence!”* He was so overwhelmed with gratitude to God that he wept so loudly the Egyptians heard him, as did Pharaoh’s household. It is a most touching scene that is painted for us in Genesis 45, and it is not difficult to understand why this great man of God behaved as he did. For twenty-two years he had waited for this moment, and since first seeing his brothers those months earlier when they made their first visit to Egypt, his longing was not for revenge but for reconciliation. And it is as if the pent up emotion of all those years could be held back no longer, and this grown man and statesman in Egypt wept aloud with tears of joy and thankfulness.

One cannot but remember another who wept many years later than Joseph, but wept for completely the opposite reasons. The Lord Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem, but not with tears of joy and gratitude, but with sorrow and grief because its people had refused to repent (Matthew 23:37): *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”* (See also Luke 13:34f.) (Luke 19:41) *“As he (i.e. Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from*

your eyes...” But in sharp contrast to the Saviour’s weeping in sorrow stands Joseph’s weeping in gladness.

b. Joseph spoke (v2-3).

Without any further delay Joseph tells his brothers who he is (v3): *“I am Joseph! Is my father still living?”* Joseph saw no further reason whatsoever to delay revealing himself to his brothers because the evidence of their repentance had been clearly displayed before him. He had longed to be able to forgive them, and now the necessary basis for forgiveness, their repentance, had been demonstrated and so he acted swiftly. It is also moving to read of his longing to know if his father was still alive. All those years away from home had not diminished his concern for Jacob at all. He still loved his father dearly. There is a saying which declares, *‘Out of sight, out of mind.’* In other words, when you do not see someone it is easy to forget them. But this was not so with Joseph and his father whom he had not seen for twenty-two years; he had not forgotten him.

Joseph’s brothers just stood there in stunned silence and were unable to utter a word! In fact they were filled with fear – *“terrified at his presence.”* And it is not too difficult to understand this. The shock must have been tremendous, and perhaps in a way almost unbelievable to them. This mighty leader in Egypt was actually their brother whom they had so ill-treated all those years ago. Who would have ever thought that this was what had become of him! And no doubt coupled with this was the fear that he might get his revenge on them for their

previously despicable behaviour. This was now something easily within his power.

c. Joseph reassured (v4-8).

The silence of those moments was broken by Joseph as he graciously and tenderly urged his brothers to come close to him. And we can almost picture the scene as the brothers, still in shock, nervously approach this ruler in Egypt, perhaps still finding what they had just heard as unbelievable. And then when they were close to him and they could see him better, he graciously repeated what he had just said, *“I am your brother Joseph”*, and to make it absolutely clear that this was not some mistake he added (v4), *“the one you sold into Egypt!”* And he did not give them any time to be even more alarmed, but said immediately (v5), *“And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.”* What remarkable words these were, and how they not only indicate the gracious and forgiving spirit of Joseph, but also his deep grasp and understanding of the sovereign providence and overruling and control of all the events in our lives by Almighty God. He reassured his brothers completely he was not out for revenge at all. He urged them not to incriminate themselves and inflict their own consciences any more over the evil they had committed against him. Instead, Joseph had discerned a higher hand than theirs had been at work throughout all the difficulties he had faced. Joseph knew that God had been in it all. Indeed, he went further and actually declared, *“...God sent me ahead of you...”* What an understanding of God Joseph

had attained, and how the deep truths of God’s sovereignty, which are beyond our full understanding, none-the-less had been written deeply on his heart. As he looked back over all the events of his troublesome past and the more recent nine years of privileged position in Egypt, he discerned that God had been in it all – both the bad and the good years. And this had sustained him through the difficult years as well as the more recent prosperous years, and now it enabled him to forgive his brothers completely, and he urged them to recognise God’s hand was in all that happened to him. He added that God had done this for the saving of many lives. And how true that was! The famine was so devastating that if Joseph had not appeared on the scene in Egypt as he had done so, millions would have died of starvation, including his own family. Joseph spoke of the severity of the famine already two years old, and that it would continue for five more years, just as God had said it would – another reminder that God’s word and purposes do not fail. Indeed he said that there would not even be any ploughing or reaping throughout this period. And then Joseph concentrated on his brothers and declared in verse 7, *“But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”* We have to conclude that the ways of God are past finding out. His thoughts are infinitely higher than ours, and so are his ways higher than ours. His overruling is a wonder to behold, a marvel, and yet a gloriously reassuring fact for all of God’s people right down to today. And how the grace of God is seen in all of this as well. These brothers deserved the Lord’s wrath and

condemnation, but God used their hatred of Joseph to achieve their salvation and preserve their lives! It is really quite astonishing to behold and wonderful and beyond measure. And compare how all of this is paralleled in a much greater degree in the Lord Jesus Christ. What happened to Joseph points us to what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ, how he was hated far more than Joseph was, how he was ill-treated to a much greater extent than Joseph. Throughout his life he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. How despicably and unjustly he was crucified by evil and wicked men! And yet it was through that very suffering and injustice that God achieved the eternal salvation of all his people. Consider how Peter put it in his sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:22-24: *“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”* (See also Acts 4:28.) God sent Jesus into the world in order that the world might be saved through him. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to die for sinners, so that all who believe on him will not perish and languish in hell forever, but have everlasting life. Christ came for the saving of many lives – a number that will be a great multitude from all over the world (see Revelation 7:9-10).

Joseph then repeated that it was God and not his brothers who had sent him to Egypt (v8). Joseph said he had become *“a father to Pharaoh”*, and this was a title of honour given to high officials, as well as indicating how much he was respected and valued by Pharaoh. The Lord had done it and had made him like a father to Pharaoh, placing him over both his household and all the land of Egypt.

d. Joseph’s instructions (v9-13).

Joseph then urged his brothers to go back to his father Jacob, and to explain all that God had done, and then persuade Jacob to come to him in Egypt. Joseph told them to *‘hurry’*. He wanted to see his father as soon as possible. Also the famine was so great he did not want to endanger their lives or prolong their distress by undue delay. He told them to bring their entire families and animals, and that they could live in Goshen, a very fertile area in the eastern Nile delta and an ideal place for them to live. Added to all this, Joseph assured them he would provide for all their needs, for the famine would last five more years. And he added that if this did not happen (ie. their move to Egypt) then they would be destitute.

What amazing compassion Joseph displayed, and there was the complete absence of any spirit of revenge against them. And again how this foreshadows the infinitely greater compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ! He provides all that we need for life and salvation so that we do not perish, and his mercy and grace last not for five years but forever. We have so many lovely statements to reassure Christian

believers of this and here are a few examples from the Bible:

(John 10:27-30) *Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”*

(Colossians 2:9-10) *“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the Head over every power and authority.”*

(Philippians 4:19) *“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

(2 Corinthians 9:8) *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”*

(2 Peter 1:3) *“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”*

How secure we are if we truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and what a glorious future awaits us as Peter declared (1 Peter 1:3-5): *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that*

can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” Reading the narrative in Genesis 45 one wonders if his brothers were still finding it hard to believe that it really was Joseph because he went on to say (v12-13), *“You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all the honour accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”*

e. Joseph embraced them (v14-15).

Joseph then flung his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept yet again, and Benjamin did the same, and then Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept over them. What a precious scene this was! Here was genuine reconciliation. If Joseph’s words had left them in any doubts as to his intentions towards them, these actions dispelled any fears or dreads they may still have had in their hearts and minds. What a welcome he gave them! It was similar to that welcome the prodigal son received in Luke 15:20 when he returned home after rejecting his father and wasting his money in wild living, and which Jesus said was how God in heaven responds when a sinner repents. How gracious the Lord our God is, and how wonderful that Jesus should welcome us back to himself with such willingness and fervour. Returning to Joseph, we are then told these lovely words in Genesis 45:15, *“Afterwards his brothers talked with him.”* How different to moments earlier in verse 3 where they were unable to speak because of being terrified of Joseph. Their past had been forgiven, and now they were

able to enjoy conversation with their brother. What they said we are not told, but their fellowship and friendship had now been restored after twenty-two years! No doubt there was much catching up with each other's news and the details of the family back in Canaan.

This is one of the happiest reunions that are recorded in the Bible, and again so suggestive of that communion sinners enjoy with God through Christ when we bring our sins to him for forgiveness. Christ is the only way to the Father (John 14:6), and through him we have access to the very throne of heaven (Romans 5:1-2): *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”* The Lord Jesus Christ ushers the repentant believer into the very presence of God. In Christ prayer and communion with God become a precious reality. This is so helpfully described in Hebrews 4:14-16: *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* That word ‘confidence’ means we can pray to God with boldness and complete openness, and the Lord will receive us with sympathy and understanding and help us when we are

being tempted and tried. The Lord Jesus Christ is indeed the Friend of sinners.

2) Pharaoh also rejoiced (v16-23).

We see here something of the very real affection that existed between Joseph, Pharaoh and the royal household in Egypt, because when the news reached Pharaoh about Joseph's brothers' arrival, *“he and all his officials were pleased.”* Remember that Pharaoh and his officials were not believers in the Lord. They remained idolatrous throughout this period, and yet they were still glad that Joseph was united to his brothers. Later on in the Bible we are told in Proverbs 16:7, *“When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.”* And Joseph's whole behaviour had pleased the Lord for many, many years, and now the Lord was blessing him even in the idolatrous and ungodly royal household of Egypt.

Pharaoh then gave careful instructions to Joseph that the brothers were to return home and bring their father and families back to Egypt and he would give them the very best of the land in which to live. In addition, they were given carts for their families, and urged not even to bother about bringing their belongings back to Egypt with them because Pharaoh would provide all they needed (v17-20). So Joseph did as Pharaoh commanded giving them provisions for the journey and new clothes for everyone. Benjamin was singled out and was given 300 shekels of silver and five sets of new clothes (v22). To his father Joseph sent (v23), *“...ten donkeys loaded with the best*

things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for the journey.”

The kind way that Joseph’s brothers were treated is a reminder of the generosity of God’s grace to the believer. We are told in John’s Gospel that the believer receives grace upon grace from God (John 1:16): *“From the fullness of his grace we all have received one blessing after another.”* God’s grace which first forgives our sins when we come to him in repentance and faith, does not end there, but continues throughout the believer’s life adding blessing after blessing. Having believed, sinners are first forgiven, then justified by God, given the righteousness of Christ and treated as if we had never sinned! Following this we are then adopted into God’s family with all the lifelong privileges of God’s care as our loving heavenly Father. In addition the Holy Spirit takes his abode in our hearts and begins that lifelong work of making us more and more holy and like the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. Alongside this believers are given God’s grace to persevere in being faithful believers to the end, and then we will be glorified in heaven itself. And God’s grace is given every day for every eventuality and is never withdrawn from the Christian believer, ensuring we safely reach heaven itself. How generous God is in the blessings he bestows on those who follow his dear Son.

3) The brothers return for their father (v24-28).

With great wisdom Joseph sent his brothers away with these words ringing in their ears (v24), *“Don’t quarrel on the way!”* How easy it would have been for the brothers to recriminate each other and argue who was to blame for the

past, particularly as they were going to have to tell their father the truth about Joseph. But Joseph did not want them to do that at all, for the Lord had been in all that had happened and had wonderfully overruled, so this was not an occasion for arguments but thankfulness. Arguments would also have wasted time and the need was for them to go and return as quickly as possible because the famine was so severe. So the brothers returned to Canaan to what is another moving scene.

On arrival at home they told their father (v26), *“Joseph is still alive! In fact he is ruler of all Egypt.”* It is not at all difficult to picture the scene in our minds as their aged father received the news. We are told in Genesis 45:26 that, *“Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them.”* Having lived with Joseph’s supposed death for so long, and now in the frailty of old age, it was all too much for Jacob. As far as he was concerned it was too good to be true. But the brothers lovingly told their father all that Joseph had told them, and then showed him the evidence of Joseph’s high position and kindness illustrated in the carts and produce they had brought from Egypt. Then we read in verse 27 that, *“when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father revived.”* As we read those words we can almost see Jacob’s face brighten and the years of grief and sorrow just melt away. Then Jacob declared, *“I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”* What a delightful scene this is, and what joy there must have been in that family when all this was shared with them. And for Jacob it was a special token of the Lord’s kindness to him

in his old age; it was nothing less than a mercy from the Lord.

Jacob's initial reaction is very reminiscent of the response of the disciple Thomas when he was told in John 20 that Jesus had risen from the dead. Having been told by the other disciples that they had seen the Lord, it was all too much for Thomas, and he refused to believe (John 20:25): *"So the other disciples told him (ie. Thomas), 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.'"* But the Lord dealt so tenderly with his frail disciple and only a week later when Thomas was with the other disciples Jesus appeared to them again. He told Thomas to put his finger in the nail holes and his hand in his side (John 20:26-27). Thomas did not need to do any of those things as the evidence was plain before him that Jesus was alive; he had risen from the dead. Thomas simply bowed in worship and adoration before the Lord and said (John 20:28), *"My Lord and my God!"* Just as Joseph sent the evidence that he was alive to his father Jacob, so the Lord Jesus sent the evidence to Thomas that he was alive, and both men believed. Then Jesus said something very significant and important to Thomas (John 20:29): *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Even though we do not see the physical presence of Jesus with us as Thomas was favoured to witness, none-the-less if we believe that Jesus is indeed alive, then we will not miss out in any way but instead be blessed greatly by God. Paul put it like this in

Romans 10:9, *"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Returning to Genesis 45, old Jacob was now ready to travel to Egypt, and we must turn to that in our next chapter.

Chapter 5 Genesis 46-47:12 – Jacob goes to Egypt

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw one of the most moving scenes in the Bible as Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, forgave them and was fully reconciled to them. His willingness to forgive them for the way they had so despicably treated him is in itself a mark of one who was full of the grace of God. Having been forgiven by God he became a forgiving man himself. Indeed, this is exactly what Jesus taught us to expect in those who truly know him as their Saviour. In his sermon on the mount in Matthew chapters 5 - 7, having instructed his disciples to pray to God to forgive them for their own sins, he added in Matthew 6:14-15, *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."* Paul also urged the believers in Ephesus to do the same (Ephesians 4:32): *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* (See also Colossians 3:12-13.) We must add that to forgive someone who has hurt us can be one of the hardest things for us to do, and so Joseph's willingness to forgive his brothers tells us just how spiritual a man he was. We have seen that he had come to recognise that even though his brothers had been

evil in the way they had treated him, God was in it all and used even their hostility to bring Joseph to Egypt, which in turn led to his amazing promotion resulting in the saving of many lives.

Well, Joseph sent his brothers home to collect their families and especially their father Jacob, and to bring them all down to Egypt where he could provide for and look after them.

1) Jacob Goes To Beersheba (v1-4).

a. Jacob sacrifices to the Lord (v1).

The opening verses of the chapter reveal to us some very significant details. Jacob moved from where he lived in Hebron (see Genesis 35:27) to Beersheba which was on the southern border of Canaan on the route to Egypt. But Jacob stopped at that point to do something special (v1): “...he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.” Actually both Abraham and Isaac had called on the Lord in Beersheba (see Genesis 21:33; 26:23-25). Even though he wanted to see Joseph before he died (Genesis 45:28), and was fully aware that he was now very old and could die at any moment, he took time to worship God. Jacob, now a very mature saint of God, knew that in all things God must be first. And so he paused to commit his way into the Lord’s hands. This, of course, was so right because it was not just Jacob who was travelling to Egypt but actually the nation of Israel, because his family were the nation at that time! And to emphasise this, Jacob is actually called Israel in verse 1. We need to remember that Canaan had been promised to them by God as far back as the days of Abraham, so to move to another country was a major step.

The destiny of the people of God was at stake here, and therefore the need to know the Lord’s blessing was essential.

The question arises as to why Jacob did not make these sacrifices before he left his home area of Hebron. It is probably not possible to answer this in depth as the Bible is silent over this question. However, a number of reasons have been suggested which are quite helpful.

- First, he left Hebron at once because in the providence of God Joseph had sent for him and it seemed this was what God wanted.
- Second, as Jacob came to the borders of Canaan at Beersheba the enormity of the step he was taking in leaving the promised land to go to Egypt came home to him with much force and he wanted to be certain this was indeed the Lord’s will.
- Third, he would have remembered that when Abraham went into Egypt he fell into sin and lied (Genesis 12:10ff) and Jacob did not want to fall into temptation.
- Fourth, Jacob’s own father Isaac had been forbidden to enter Egypt in Genesis 26:2. Therefore Jacob wanted to be certain that this was God’s will for him and his family, and that God would go with them and protect them. He wanted to do only the will of God and therefore took time to offer sacrifices to the Lord and to seek his mind and will.

Lesson

How easily we can rush into things without first seeking the Lord’s guidance, only to discover we have made a

terrible mistake. We must put the Lord first in all things and commit our way to him in all things, great and small (see Proverbs 3:5-6).

b. The Lord reassures Jacob (v2-4).

The Lord graciously spoke to Jacob in a vision at night calling his name, and he responded immediately (v2): “*Here I am, he replied.*” He did not delay in his response to the Lord, nor ignore the Lord’s voice. So many people fail to respond to the Lord as readily as Jacob did on this occasion. Indeed many do not want to hear the word of God, and when they do, so often they reject it. This is very sad and tragic, and they will be called by God to give account of themselves one day! When Jacob responded positively, the Lord then reassured him that this was his will for him and he would care for his family in all that lay ahead.

- First, the Lord told Jacob (v3), “*I am God, the God of your father...*” so Jacob knew this was indeed the Lord. Also the name which God used described him as ‘the Strong One’ – the one with the ability to help and protect Jacob and his family.
- Second, God told him (v3) not to be afraid to travel to Egypt and that there God would make him into a great nation – which we know the Lord did because by the time of Moses over 400 years later they numbered between 1 and 3 million people.
- Third, then the Lord assured Jacob (v4) that he would bring the people of Israel back to the land of Canaan, the land he had promised them. And again this was

something the Lord did over 400 years later. Jacob’s own body was returned to Canaan much earlier (Genesis 50:1-14).

- Fourth, Jacob was assured that when he died (v4) Joseph would be with him and would close his eyes. Again something that happened (Genesis 49:33-50:1).

So again we are being reminded, as we have been so often in our studies in the life of Joseph, that the Lord never ever breaks his word or goes back on his promises. Jesus declared in his prayer to his Father in John 17:17, “*...your word is truth.*” Therefore how precious it is that we now have the completed word of God, the Bible, to teach us and direct us in the ways of God. Time studying the Bible and obeying its instructions is time well spent because it is the word of the Lord and there is no one better or wiser to direct us in our lives. Professing Christian believers who never or rarely read the Bible because they do not want to, are depriving themselves of great benefit and need to question if they really are true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2) Jacob’s entire family moved to Egypt (v5-27).

Having heard the word of God, Jacob obeyed it immediately and went down to Egypt being assured in his heart that the Lord was directing him and watching over him. The carts that Pharaoh had directed Joseph to send to Canaan were put to good use as Jacob took his children and his grandchildren with him and their wives, along with all their livestock and possessions. Even with all his sons and grandsons whose names are all listed in Genesis 46, we are told that along with Joseph and his two sons there were

seventy in all (v27). Not a very large number at all by human standards, and indeed compared with the vast multitudes in Egypt they must have looked very insignificant. BUT they were the people of God and were precious to him.

A little later in the Bible during the days of a different Pharaoh from the one of Joseph's time, and after the people of Israel had come out of Egypt and were about to return to the promised land, Moses taught a lovely and important lesson from this fact of the smallness of the number of Jacob's family. He tells us that God's choice of whom he sets his special love and care upon is not dependent on the strength or size or abilities or worthiness of the recipients, but is solely down to the grace of God alone (Deuteronomy 7:7&8): *"The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept his oath he swore to our forefathers that he has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt."* Who would have considered seventy people as a nation? How unimportant they were in worldly terms. There was nothing about them that made them stand out as worthy of special attention by God. Every one of them was sinful, just as we are, and therefore unworthy of any of the Lord's mercy. BUT still God loved them, and he did so because he wanted to, out of his pure grace – not because he was forced to love them, not because he was coaxed to love them, not because he thought they were worthy to be loved, but simply because

he wanted to love them. How amazing this is, yet also how encouraging, because we too are sinners and are unworthy of the Lord's mercy. Indeed, if he treated us as we deserved there would be no hope for any one of us. But praise God he is a gracious God, who out of the sheer pleasure of his will sets his affection on sinners. If you are a Christian believer today and are enjoying the forgiveness of your sins through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, and know the presence of God in your life each day, it is all by God's grace. You have not deserved or earned or merited any one of his favours. God has done it simply because he chose to love you. How this magnifies the mercy and love of God that is found in Christ Jesus, and therefore how we should be a people who praise him daily and live obediently to him constantly! Further, this wonderful lesson about God's mercy and grace shows believers how secure we are because we are loved by God because he delighted to love us. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that nothing can ever separate the Christian believer from this amazing love of God that we have received through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 8:38-39).

3) Jacob at last meets Joseph (v28-30)

It is not at all difficult to imagine the sense of excitement and anticipation that must have been in old Jacob's heart as they got nearer and nearer to Egypt. He had not seen Joseph for almost a quarter of a century, and had thought he was dead all that time. Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to get directions from Joseph as to exactly where in Goshen they were to go. When they arrived Joseph wasted no time in ordering that his chariot, his royal chariot in all its

splendour, be made ready and he went out to meet his father.

Picture the scene as they met: Joseph dressed in all the finery of Egypt and Jacob dressed in the clothes of a farmer, but none of that mattered at all because they were a father and his son. And so we read in Genesis 46:29, *“As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.”* The emotion of that moment must have been tremendous. For all those years in Egypt Joseph probably thought he would never see his dad again, and we know that for Jacob it never entered his mind because he thought Joseph was dead. But now they were reunited and they just hugged and hugged each other and wept with joy and love and deep affection. For quite a while there was not a word spoken. The Bible scholar H. C. Leupold writes: *“There is no need of words. Words cannot utter the deep feelings of this hour.”* This is another one of the most moving scenes in all the Bible. Indeed, Jacob was so grateful to the Lord for this precious blessing of seeing his dear son Joseph again, that when eventually he did speak he said, *“Now I am ready to die, since I have seen you for myself.”* In other words, whenever his time to die would come, now he could do so with ease, such was the love that existed between him and Joseph.

The joy of this scene so helpfully directs our attention to the even greater joy that will occur when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again and when all Christian believers will be reunited first with him, and then with all our believing loved ones who have already died and gone to be with the

Lord. This is such a comforting fact as Paul so graciously and wisely shows us in his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians. Some of Paul’s dear brethren and sisters in Christ at Thessalonica were heartbroken because some of their number had already died, and they mistakenly thought they would miss out on the blessing that will occur when Jesus returns. Paul wrote these lovely, comforting, and instructive words, telling them and us that we will be reunited with them one day, just as Joseph was reunited with Jacob (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18): *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”* What a joyful occasion that will be! The only way to be sure that you will share in that joy is to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Saviour. To do that you must turn from your own sin and guilt in repentance and to put your faith in the Lord Jesus and all he accomplished to bring sinners forgiveness through his death on the cross. All who do so

will share in that glorious day at the end of time. The hymn writers John Cennick and Charles Wesley have written about that final reunion at Christ's return like this:

*“Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand, thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Hallelujah!
God appears on earth to reign.
Now redemption, long expected,
See in solemn pomp appear!
All his saints, by man rejected,
Now shall meet him in the air:
Hallelujah!
See the day of God appear!”*

4) The family settle in Goshen (46:31-47:12).

There was a problem which needed careful handling by Joseph and which he described in Genesis 46:34, “...for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.” His father and brothers had been shepherds for many years and had brought their livestock with them, so the issue could not be avoided. This meant the situation needed to be dealt with wisely, something Joseph had already anticipated.

Joseph had singled out Goshen as the best place for them to settle in (Genesis 45:10). Goshen was in a very fertile area of the Nile delta and ideal for the raising of animals. Even in drought years the Nile still had water in it. It was also isolated from the main population and so his family would

not be a cause of offence and embarrassment to Pharaoh and his people who despised shepherds. Further, it would be a safe and secure place in which Joseph's family could settle and continue to live as the people of God without the pressures to compromise with Egyptian idolatry and customs. Now, for this to happen Joseph needed to gain Pharaoh's approval, therefore he instructed his brothers to be honest with Pharaoh when he questioned them about their occupation. He also instructed them to respect Pharaoh and to refer to themselves as his servants (Genesis 46:34).

Joseph then presented himself to Pharaoh and informed him his family had arrived in Egypt and were in fact already in Goshen. He chose five of his brothers to represent the rest, and when Pharaoh questioned them about their occupation they told him they were shepherds, that due to the famine their grazing in Canaan had failed, and they asked if they could settle in Goshen. Pharaoh then instructed Joseph to let them do as they wished, and in fact to live in the best part of the land (Genesis 47:6). It is quite clear that Pharaoh's regard and affection for Joseph were considerable, and is another indication of how faithfully Joseph had served the king and gone about his daily work with thoroughness and integrity. Pharaoh added that if some of his brothers had special ability in rearing animals they were to be put in charge of Pharaoh's own livestock! Finally, Joseph presented his father to Pharaoh (Genesis 47:7), and the godly patriarch blessed Pharaoh, and according to Hebrews 7:7 the lesser person is blessed by the greater!

It was obvious to Pharaoh that Jacob was an old man and so he inquired exactly how old he was. Jacob's answer is well known and full of spiritual instruction (Genesis 47:9): *"The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."*

Jacob viewed himself, as have all the true people of God on earth, as a pilgrim. He was conscious that this world was not the end of the journey for him, he was just travelling through it to a better place. We are told that Jacob's grandfather Abraham considered his life in a similar way in Hebrews 11:9-10: *"By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder was God."* They knew they were going to a better place, the heavenly Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem as the New Testament calls it. Jacob had a loose grip on this world, because he knew before long he would leave it all behind for a better place. And it is the same today for the people of God, the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:11): *"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers (or pilgrims) in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."* As believers we are on the road to heaven, we are already its citizens, and therefore we should live our lives now as those destined for that holy and glorious place. That was how Jacob described and viewed his own life.

We must also note Jacob had a correct view of time. He considered his 130 years as brief: brief in relation to his forefathers who lived on earth for longer, but also brief in relation to eternity. He challenges us to gain this same perspective, and to realise we will not be here for ever, and even if we live to over 100 years such a time is minuscule in comparison with the ages of eternity. Therefore we need to pray as Moses did in Psalm 90:12, *"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."* And how do we know if we have such wisdom? If we love, honour and revere the Lord God (Proverbs 1:7): *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."* Jacob feared the Lord and so he graciously bears testimony to his faith even before Pharaoh, the most powerful king on earth at that time! What a challenge to us to bear our own witness for the Lord to others we meet today!

And so it was that Joseph's family settled in Goshen, also known as Roan, and called the district of Rameses in Genesis 47:11. Joseph then lovingly, faithfully and generously provided for his relatives as he had promised, according to the number of their children.

In closing, as we survey all that has happened to Joseph and his family thus far, we see so clearly the sovereign hand of Almighty God controlling and guiding all these events, caring for his people, so that his purposes would be fulfilled. How great God is, and how great to be in his sovereign care! The question is, are you?

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