

Back to Egypt: Caring for Others More than Myself

Genesis 43

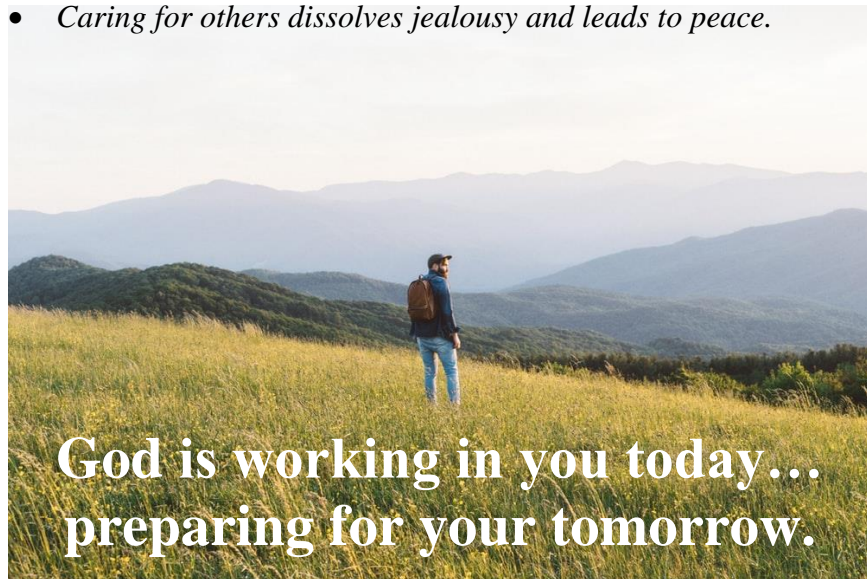
The famine forces Joseph's brothers back to Egypt for a second time. God awakened their guilt the first trip; now, spiritual transformation is exhibited in selfless behavior. The wintry chill of guilt melts into the spring of concern for others, confession, and peace.

The return to Egypt: God's transformation of Jacob's sons

- *Reluctant Jacob lets Benjamin go; Judah is surety (1-15)*
- *The brothers confess finding money in their bags (16-25)*
- *Joseph eats with his brothers; Benjamin gets most (26-34)*

Evidences of growth of spiritual transformation

- *Taking responsibility for the welfare of others.*
- *Confession leads to forgiveness, forgiveness to thanksgiving.*
- *Caring for others dissolves jealousy and leads to peace.*



**God is working in you today...
preparing for your tomorrow.**

- Announce Gary and Chela sabbatical
- Give thanks for all who gave for the AED equipment
- Next Week: Thanksgiving Praise Service and Feast!

We're in Genesis this morning, for the last time this year, so turn to Gen. 43. We're in the middle of the narrative about the life of Joseph. After slavery and imprisonment in Egypt, and a terrible famine covering the earth, God's purpose will finally begin to come into focus today.

But before we get to the text, let's step back and look at the big picture for a moment. We began our journey through the book of Genesis in February, 2017. We'll finish it in February, 2020. If there is one thing the story of creation through the flood and Babel, to God's choice of a people to bless the whole earth, it is *grace*. Where you or I would have thrown in the towel a hundred times, God is holy, just, patient, gentle, compassionate, faithful, forgiving, kind, always aware of how feeble and prone to failure we are. If God were a capricious, angry, grudge-holding, bean-counting deity, the earth would not be here today. *God is love*, the Apostle John writes, and it is evident on every page in Genesis.

But listen: This gracious, patient, loving God can get lost in religion, and we need to beware of it: People caught in Satan's trap of sin and hopelessness need to know the loving God who *wants* to save them, not some god who angrily threatens them with hell. I want to show you two videos this morning. The first is so bad, it feels like a Hollywood parody. It's not... [Video: Punching preacher]

Just so you know, that's *not* the way we teach evangelism in the GiD course here at NBBC! Eternal life is the gift of God; we don't cram it down anyone's throat, or beat them over the head with it. We offer hope to hurting people, eternal life to those who want it.

The second video is more serious. The good news of a home in heaven, of eternal life received by believing in Jesus Christ who died for our sin on the cross, is being undermined today by theologians and preachers who make themselves judges of who goes to heaven, and who does not. They come right out and declare that if you don't live a holy enough life, even if you believe in Jesus, you'll still go to hell. (Video: Piper's gospel)

I may disagree with theologians, authors, or pastors, but few things make me as angry as this. I take my cue from the Apostle Paul. In Gal. 1, he confronted teachers in the first century who twisted the gospel and added works to it, and in vv8-9 called down God's judgment on them.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim a gospel to you contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let him be accursed! As we said before, and now I say again, if anyone is proclaiming a gospel to you contrary to what you have received, let him be accursed!

As we live our lives before the world, let's reflect the character of our God, who reveals Himself as patient and loving, who invites all to come and receive the 'water of life' free of charge, paid for in full by His Son in His death on the cross. Live it. Tell it.

Why have I taken the time to tell you this today? Because in Gen. 43, God's patient, loving, long-suffering plan to transform the sons of Jacob into a unit that will become the nation of Israel finally begins to come into focus.

Last week, in Gen. 42, Joseph's brothers come to Egypt for grain, and without knowing it, stand before their little brother Joseph. He accuses them of being spies, and they express their guilt for selling him into slavery (21-22) and declare that God is judging them (28). After twenty years, God awakens their conscience – *twenty years!* You or I might not have waited that long. We'd have made them pay for their sin a lot sooner! But God is gracious and patient.

That brings us to Gen 43. This chapter has three scenes: We begin in Canaan, where the famine is hitting Jacob and his ten sons, and they are running out of grain.

Return to Egypt: God's transformation of Jacob's sons

- *Jacob lets Benjamin go, with Judah as surety (1-15)*

Now the famine in the land was severe. And it happened that as they finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt their father said to them, "Return and buy a little food for us." Then Judah said to him, "The man solemnly admonished us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy food for you, but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' "

This is a crisis for Jacob: More than 20 years earlier, his son Joseph was taken from him – he thinks he was killed by wild animals. Joseph was one of two sons birthed by his beloved wife Rachel. Now he has one, Benjamin, and he is afraid something will happen to him.

But when the other brothers were in Egypt on their first trip, ‘the man’ – remember, that was Joseph – took Simeon as prisoner, and said he would not meet with them unless they returned with their youngest brother. Jacob doesn’t want to let him go.

Finally, the situation is desperate; if they don’t get some grain, they will die. In vv. 8-9, Judah steps forward and becomes a leader of the family:

Judah said to his father Israel, “Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. “I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever.

In the end, there was no choice. They had to get some food. The decision is made: Benjamin will go. Imagine the scene. Jacob has lost his son Joseph, his son Simeon is already in prison in Egypt, and now his ten other sons are all leaving. He must have wondered if he would ever see any of them again.

- *The brothers confess finding money in their bags (16-25)*

The next scene is in Egypt. Joseph sees his brothers, with Benjamin, arrive, and tells his house steward to bring them to his home, and set the table for lunch. Knowing how powerful the Egyptian leader was, the brothers are terrified. They think he is going to make them slaves, because of the money found in their bags of grain when they came down the first time (42.27, 35).

So they go to this house steward, and confess the whole story, and tell him that they have brought all the money back with them (19-22). Joseph’s house servant responds amazingly in v23:

He said, “Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money.”

Joseph’s house servant has come to believe in the God of Israel. Joseph’s life and words have led this Egyptian to faith in Elohim. He tells them they don’t have to return the money – that God gave it back to them!

With their fear relieved, and Simeon released from prison and back with them, they all sit down to eat with Joseph.

- *Joseph eats with his brothers; Benjamin gets most (26-34)*

This is the third scene. Joseph is overwhelmed to be with all his brothers, especially Benjamin! At one point (v30),

he leaves so that he can weep. Underneath the cloak of his Egyptian appearance, a heart of love for his family throbs (cf. Waltke, 556).

But when he returns, Joseph has another test to see if his brothers are still motivated by greed and jealousy. After all, they had sold him into slavery because of it! So he has them seated by age – which astonishes the brothers, since they wonder how he would know this. Then when the food is brought out, Benjamin receives five times as much as any of the others (34a). The brothers evidently had no problem with this, because the chapter ends with the words, *So they feasted and drank freely with him.*

Evidences of growth of spiritual transformation

I love this chapter because I love good news. After all the hate and suffering the brothers have caused, God finally is getting through to them. I love seeing God change a person's heart. Three things stand out:

- *Taking responsibility for the welfare of others.*

I highlighted it earlier, but remember how Judah offered himself as surety for Benjamin? He declared he would bear the blame if Benjamin did not return (8-9). Taking responsibility for the welfare of others is the opposite of what Judah and his brothers had done before. But God is changing Judah's heart. Where he once proposed selling Joseph instead of killing him, so they could make a profit off the deal (37.26-27), now he lays down his own life as security for his brother.

Centuries later, the Apostle Paul wrote a lovely letter to the Christians in Philippi, with this advice (2.3-4):

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

That's a sign of spiritual transformation.

- *Confession leads to forgiveness, forgiveness to thanksgiving.*

The second sign of spiritual transformation is confession. The brothers confess finding money in their sacks after their first trip to buy grain, they take it back with them, are forgiven, and give a gift of thanks in return.

I'm sorry. I was wrong. Will you forgive me? How long has it been since you've heard those words? How long has it been since you've said them? Why is it so hard for us to admit our wrong and ask for forgiveness? Pride.

Scripture is clear. Jesus said, *Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted* (Matt. 23.12). James wrote, *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (James 4.6b).

Do you have something to confess? A sign of spiritual transformation is confessing our wrongs.

- *Caring for others dissolves jealousy and leads to peace.*

Finally, I love the scene right at the end of the chapter. Joseph gives Benjamin five times as much food as his brothers, and waits to see their response; will they be jealous that he received more than they did? There is no jealousy, they eat in peace. Spiritual transformation is taking place!

Let me ask you a question this morning: Is there someone in your life who you think is just too far gone – that God Himself could not bring this person back to Himself, to a place where they confess their sin and submit themselves to God’s plan for their lives? There is reason to rejoice in Genesis 43. If ever there was a pack of losers, entrenched in their deception and violence and evil, it was the ten brothers of Joseph. For twenty years they perpetrated a lie on their father, telling them he had been killed when they all knew they had sold him into slavery. But God used a famine and an obedient brother to begin a process of spiritual transformation in their hearts.

It would be simplistic to say that *they all lived happily ever after* – because they didn’t. But the cold, heartless sons of Jacob are coming back to God.

Maybe that person who is rebelling against God is you. Maybe you’ve heard all about a God who wants to rap you over the knuckles, and who angrily threatens you with hell. If so...let me introduce you this morning to the *true God*, who is patient, waiting for you to come to Him.

Return to Egypt: Caring for Others Over Ourselves (43)

Having come to grips with their sin in selling Joseph into slavery, the brothers now need to deal with their inherent self-serving attitude, always 'looking out for #1' – a tendency they may have inherited from Jacob, who demonstrated this throughout his life! But if they are to form the basis for a united people, they must get over their intrinsic jealousy. Judah comes to the fore in this chapter – taking his place as a leader among the brothers (tribes) of Israel.

Judah first shines in his speech to his father, offering himself as surety that Benjamin will return (1-15). The meeting with Joseph presents a number of features showing the spiritual changes taking place in the brothers' lives (16—34): First, they confess that their money was in their sacks when they returned home the first time, demonstrating honesty over potential personal gain (Joseph's dismissal of their guilt, expressing his own complicity, even as they do not know who he is, demonstrates grace; 16-25). Second, the 'family scene' in Joseph's house, where Joseph gives Benjamin five times as much as the older brothers, tests their jealousy (26-34). They begrudged Joseph being favored over them and sold him into slavery! Recognizing their guilt for that sin has matured them; they do not begrudge Benjamin being shown favor, and eat and fellowship together.

Would that God's people of every generation would learn this lesson! The modern religious 'entitlement' culture creates Christians who pursue personal preferences instead of worship of God and meeting the needs of

others. New Testament passages like Rom. 12.3, Phil. 2.1-4, and James 4.1-10 echo the lesson which Joseph's brothers are learning in this chapter.

Three Signs of Spiritual Renewal in God's People

- 1) Judah offers himself as surety for Benjamin; he will bear the blame if Benjamin does not return. *Taking responsibility for the welfare of others.* (1-15; esp. vv8-9)
- 2) The brothers confess finding money in their sacks after their first trip to buy grain, return it, are forgiven, and prepare a gift of thanks in return. *Confession leads to forgiveness, and being forgiven elicits thanksgiving.* (16-25)
- 3) Joseph gives Benjamin five times the food of his brothers, and waits to see their response; there is no jealousy, and they eat in peace. *Caring for others instead of ourselves dissolves jealousy and leads to peace.* (26-34)

Digging Deeper

1. In Gen. 42, God used famine to begin transforming the sons of Joseph from a selfish, dysfunctional clan into men from whom a mighty nation would grow. Their guilt over the treatment of their brother rose to the surface, and they recognized that God was doing something to them. This spark of conscience grew, and in Gen. 43 it is beginning to ‘bud’ in their lives. Judah rises to the top of the ten brothers in this chapter (hence, it is through him that the Messiah will come): What does he say to his father Jacob to get him to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt? What trait of character does he exhibit in verses 8-9?
2. Vv. 16-25 record the ‘build-up’ to the eleven brothers meeting Joseph for lunch. They are about to have a private lunch with a man of immense power. Hebrew scholar Bruce Waltke writes, *To be invited to a meal with a high official...is fraught with the potential for promotion or rejection.* What is their fear? What do they do? How might this event have affected their hearts?
3. Joseph’s steward’s words in v23 are fascinating. He recognizes God (*Elohim*) as providentially guiding events! Where might a pagan Egyptian servant have come to know the God of Israel? His opening words, *Be at ease [shalom lachem; lit. “Peace to you”], do not be afraid,* are like Jesus’ words to His disciples (Jn. 14.27). He confirms he received their money on their first trip), then says, *the God of your father has given your treasure in your sacks.* In other words, *You don’t owe us anything; your God gave you your money back!* What are they thinking now?
4. Joseph’s passion is seen again in the closing paragraph of Gen. 43 (verses 26-34), when he leaves his brothers and weeps. Why do you think he is weeping? His love for his brothers, however, doesn’t keep him from testing them again. What does he seek to learn about the ten older brothers by giving Benjamin more food than them? What is the result of his test? What phrase in v34 implies this?