

Lesson 7 – 13 June 2010

Joseph Tests His Brothers.

Lesson Scope: [Genesis 42-44](#)

Lesson Focus

More than twenty years had passed since Joseph last saw his brothers. They had lived with the dark secret of Joseph's disappearance and not one had confessed their sin to their father. They had not forgotten his pitiful entreaties when he was carried away, and they knew that somewhere, sometime his blood would be required (42:21-22). Judah, in particular led an immoral life, and God slew two of his sons because of their wickedness. Jacob's comment that "-all these things are against me" testified to the sorrow of his bereavement and his distress over the ungodly choices of his older sons.

God was still working with Joseph's brothers. Their protective attitude toward Jacob and Benjamin indicates that their outlook had changed from when they had heartlessly sold Joseph and brazenly lied to Jacob. Joseph's testing of their character typifies God's moving in the heart of the sinner.

Joseph could have revealed himself to his brothers immediately. Because of his position and their need, they would have had no choice but to plead for mercy. He could get a far clearer picture of their attitude by seeing how they responded to Benjamin. His struggles to keep his composure tell us that testing his brothers was almost as hard for him as for them.

Joseph was completely without malice toward his brothers. He could have enslaved them or denied them food, but he recognized that he was not, in the place of God to bring justice (Gen.50:19). Even later, after Jacob had died, Joseph showed no trace of revenge.

We see here that in spite of all Joseph's trials in Egypt, he had a happier existence than his brothers. They lived with a guilty conscience and saw their father visibly age from sorrow over Joseph's disappearance.

God lights the candle of each man's conscience. Through the sovereign arrangement of circumstances He disturbs the guilty conscience and leads the responsive to repentance.

Lesson Aim: To illustrate how God deals with people to bring them to repentance.

Theme Verse: [Proverbs 28:13](#).

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: hut whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Lesson Text

Interrogated

[Genesis 42:6-7](#)

And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth. ⁷And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

[Genesis 42:12-17](#)

And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. ¹³And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not. ¹⁴And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies: ¹⁵Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. ¹⁶Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies. ¹⁷And he put them all together into ward three days.

Convicted

[Genesis 42:21-22](#)

And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. ²²And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.

Humbled

[Genesis 42:14-23](#)

And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies: ¹⁵Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. ¹⁶Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that

your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies. ¹⁷And he put them all together into ward three days. ¹⁸And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God: ¹⁹If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses: ²⁰But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so.

²¹And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. ²²And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required. ²³And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.

[Genesis 42:33-34](#)

And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone: ³⁴And bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land.

Questions for Study

Interrogated

1. Why did Joseph make himself strange to his brothers?
2. Were Joseph's brothers "true men" as they claimed? Explain.
3. Is it ever right for us to test our brother's sincerity? Explain.

Convicted

4. How is Reuben's reply in Gen.42:22 typical of a guilty conscience?
5. How does God awaken man's conscience?

Humbled

6. Compare the brothers' actions in this account with their actions in Genesis 37.
7. What did Judah's impassioned plea to Joseph reveal about him? (Gen.44:18-34).
8. How can we clear ourselves of past sins?

Analyzing the Passage

As governor, Joseph controlled the distribution of food to the needy. This was a powerful position because the famine made this an issue of life or death. He was in a unique position to test his brothers. He could barely control his emotions as he did so (Gen.42:24, 43:30), indicating his complete lack of malice. Joseph had authority to imprison or enslave them, but he refrained from doing so.

The accusation of spying that Joseph brought against his brothers reflected the danger of a foreign invasion. Egypt had abundance, and the nations around were hungry. Hence, Joseph wisely sold food to other nations to reduce the likelihood of adding war to the current distress of famine.

"One is not" (Gen.42:13) and "his blood is required" (Gen.42:22) indicate that they, essentially were guilty of murder. They were aware that God would require a just penalty for shedding of their brother's innocent blood.

Benjamin's absence in the first journey to Egypt no doubt signaled to Joseph that Benjamin had replaced him as the object of his father's special favor. Demanding that Benjamin come the next time allowed him to test whether his brothers' animosity was transferred to Benjamin.

Judah's plea to be a slave in Egypt in Benjamin's stead (Gen.44:33) proved he truly meant the promise he had given to his father. It convinced his father that he had "cleared" himself (Gen.44:16) and was a changed person.

Principles and Applications

Interrogated

1. God arranges the circumstances of life to bring man to the realization of his need (Gen.42:6-7, 12). Who could have imagined on that fateful day many years ago when Joseph was sold into Egypt what a dramatic role reversal Joseph and his brothers would experience? Now they were utterly at his mercy.

We like to think of ourselves as being the master of events, but God can very easily reduce us to supplicants. God wants to remove self-sufficiency from our lives so that we may understand our need of Him.

2. God at times stops people in the pursuits of life to give time for the conscience to work (Gen.42:15-17). Joseph's brothers did not expect to waste three days confined in Egypt; neither did they have any inkling that this ruler would ask them to bring Benjamin the next time. These unexpected events reminded them of a subject that was very likely taboo, Joseph's fate. God uses sickness, death, and other misfortunes to help us

think soberly about the realities of life and death. God will speak to us in such times if we will listen.

Convicted

3. God works through the conscience to bring to remembrance sinful deeds committed (Gen.42:21-22). Time does not erase unconfessed sin. God uses the conscience to condemn man and to mercifully give opportunity to repent. If we ignore the promptings of our conscience, we eventually develop a hardened heart. It is wholly unnecessary to carry the burden of a guilty conscience, because God will freely forgive when we confess.

Humbled

4. God places into man's path people of authority, who must be reckoned with, in order to bring them to repentance (Gen.44:14-15). This ruler was an authority Joseph's brothers could not ignore or control. God has set rulers in place to enforce the laws of the land. Being arrested or imprisoned helps people to understand that their conduct is unacceptable.

5. God brings man to the realization of his accountability before Him (Gen.44:16). Our Creator has placed a conscience in every man. As Christians we have the responsibility to remind people of their accountability before God. Unbelievers who react to us with a snarl are indicating that their conscience is working.

6. God allows circumstances that test a person's level of commitment (Gen.44:17). Judah proved his full commitment by offering himself in Benjamin's place. Sometimes God must reprove us for our shallow half-hearted-ness. If our commitment to someone or something else is greater than our commitment to God, we must repent.

7. God brings man to see his helplessness and hopelessness outside of divine compassion (Gen.44:18-23). Judah was reduced to the undignified position of begging Joseph for mercy. Likewise, God wants us to understand that our only hope for deliverance is to trust the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Christ will always fully pardon a broken and contrite heart and restore our relationship with Him, just as Joseph did to his brothers.

8. Complete surrender and genuine openness mark true repentance (44:33-34). Judah poured out his story with pathos. His heartfelt eloquence moved Joseph to tears because of his sincerity. Anything less than complete surrender is insufficient. God wants our whole heart.

Important Teachings

1. God arranges the circumstances of life to bring man to the realization of his need (Gen.42:6-7, 12).

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2. God at times stops people in the pursuits of life to give time for the conscience to work (Gen.42:15-17).

3. God works through the conscience to bring to remembrance sinful deeds committed (Gen.Gen.42:21-22).

4. God places into man's path people of authority, who must be reckoned with, in order to bring them to repentance (Gen.44:14-15).

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6. God allows circumstances that test a person's level of commitment (Gen.44:17).

7. God brings man to realize his helplessness and hopelessness outside of divine compassion (Gen.44:18-23).

8. Complete surrender and genuine openness mark true repentance (44:33-34).

Answers to Questions

I. Why did Joseph make himself strange to his brothers?

Joseph could better observe their actions and reactions by remaining a stranger. He wanted to test specifically their relationship to Jacob and Benjamin. Joseph's ultimate goal was to be reconciled to his brothers.

2. Were Joseph's brothers "true men" as they claimed? Explain.

They were true in the sense of not being spies. They were not true in that they were living with a covered sin and the fear of retribution for that sin.

3. Is it ever right for us to test our brother's sincerity?

We are responsible to forgive personal offenses regardless of the other person's sincerity. Jesus taught us to forgive an unlimited amount of times for the same offense. On the church level, however, the group is responsible to evaluate the fruit of a person's life before granting membership or taking disciplinary action.

4. How is Reuben's reply in Gen.42:22 typical of a guilty conscience?

Reuben tried to justify himself by giving reasons why he was not at fault. Remember, he was as guilty as the rest in covering up the crime. We may try to salve our conscience with some technical reason why we are not guilty.

5. How does God awaken man's conscience?

God's Holy Spirit uses the Word to speak to the conscience of those who are coming to the age of accountability. He will order events to remind people of their sin. He may send sickness or death to remind them of their frailty. He may allow them to be mistreated in the same manner they mistreated others. In a broader sense, He may send a disease such as AIDS on sinful lifestyles, or He might allow a catastrophe to strike a particularly wicked area such as New Orleans.

6. Compare the brothers' actions in this account with their actions in Genesis 37.

Jacob's special affection for Joseph (Gen.37:4) aroused their hatred. They protected Benjamin although he was loved in the same manner Joseph had been. Joseph's brothers had wanted him dead (Gen.37:18), but they were willing to offer their own lives so that Benjamin could return to Jacob (Gen.44:16, 33). They were calloused to Joseph's cries for pity (Gen.42:21), but they were very concerned about the effect of Benjamin's fate upon their father (Gen.44:34). They deceived Jacob (Gen.37:32, 33), but were honest in business in Egypt (Gen.43:19-23).

7. What did Judah's impassioned plea to Joseph reveal about him (Gen.44:18-34)?

Judah's character had changed. He realized his total helplessness before the Egyptian governor. He was determined to bring no more sorrow to his father. He proved that he genuinely meant his pledge to his father.

8. How can we clear ourselves of past sins?

God always forgives when we repent. Repentance involves confessing sin to God and to those we have wronged. Restitution must be made when possible. True repentance means that our hearts are changed, and we resolve to never repeat the same offense.

Summarizing the Lesson

God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore He arranges circumstances to help people see their need. In mercy He exposes their sin that they might have opportunity to repent. It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Research Guide: Read Genesis Chapters 42 through 50 to fully understand the entire context of this lesson.