



The Sermon

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Genesis 42:1-28

October 16, 2022

"Walking the Strange Road of Providence"

TRANSCRIPT

And, so with that in mind, let us humbly open to Genesis 42, and I will read a portion of this chapter, and we'll pray for the Lord's help as we understand it and seek to apply what is here for us today.

Genesis 42 beginning in verse 1: "When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, 'Why do you look at one another?' And he said, 'Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.' So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

"Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. 'Where do you come from?' he said. They said, 'From the land of Canaan, to buy food.' And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, 'You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.' They said to him, 'No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.'

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"He said to them, 'No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.' And they said, 'We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.' But Joseph said to them, 'It is as I said to you. You are spies. By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.' And he put them all together in custody for three days." Would you pray with me?

[Prayer] Lord, we come to You this morning asking for the help of Your Holy Spirit. I pray that You would help me to say things only that are true, helpful, things that would encourage these precious saints, and things that would honor Your Son. We pray for the Spirit's help for the hearers today, that they would listen, and more than just take it in, that they would consider it deeply, that together we would be impacted by Your Word and compelled by Your Spirit to believe it, to honor it, and to live according to it. We ask in the name of Jesus and for the sake of His glory and His name. Amen. [End]

Well, one of the things that is a challenge to come and to preach in a narrative, particularly like we are in here in Genesis, is everything within you wants to kind of jump ahead and tell some of the great things that are to come. I want to try hard not to do that and just limit my thoughts today on the very specific text in front of us, and those that come in the next few weeks will be able to complete the story. And so I want to try hard to not look ahead. It may be helpful for just a brief minute to look back and remind ourselves of the context and all that is going on that we've been studying here in Genesis up to this point.

Remember, Joseph has been left at the age of 17; he's now close to 40 years old. Much has changed in his life since his brothers threw him in the pit and then sold him off to the band of travelers that were coming by. He is now in Egypt, and things are very different at this point. Joseph looks like an Egyptian, he talks like an Egyptian, and for some who are about my age, you could say he walks like an Egyptian. If you don't know why that's funny see me after the service, I'll catch you up.

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Everything about him is very different. His brothers have no idea what has happened to him. They have to wonder, "Is he a servant in somebody's house? Is he dead? Is he is he living a life that's hard and impoverished?" They have no idea what's going on with him.

Of course, we remember all that has happened. The brothers had turned on him and they had given him away to others. They had gone back and been deceptive to their own father about what had happened. And Joseph, for his part, was then sold into captivity, ended up interpreting a dream for Pharaoh and his life turned around, and he now occupies a role similar to that of a prime minister there in Egypt.

He's gone through what happened to him at 17, enters Pharaoh's court at 30. We've been through seven years of plenty; we are now in Year One, maybe Year Two of the time of famine; and so a little more than twenty years have passed here. And Joseph is going to be reintroduced to his brothers after all of this time; and as we read these chapters, we have to do so through the lens of what will be said in chapter 50, verse 20, where we are reminded that what man has meant for evil, God has meant for good, that there is the divine hand of providence over our lives leading and orchestrating all that we do. We could call this today "walking the strange road of providence." So much about what happens in Genesis 42 feels strange, it feels awkward, it feels maybe coincidental; but the reality of it is this is the strange road of providence that is unveiled for us. As we walk through these chapters, these verses here at the first part of chapter 42, I'll give you a few headings as we walk through it just to help you to catch the flow of all that's going on in the story. The first thing we see is "there's a summons to action" in verses 1 and 2.

Again, back to verse 1, "Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, and said to his sons, 'Why do you look at one another?'" In other words, "Why are we just standing around? You guys are talking about how hungry you are, how there's no food, how things are really bad, and we know that there's a place where there's food available. Why are you just standing around looking at each other and staring at each other?" There's a call to action to get up and to go get food.

It's a severe famine, Genesis 41 told us, widespread, affecting a very large area. It's not the first time in Genesis you've come across the famine: we saw it in Genesis 12, we saw it in Genesis 26. And while the sons are here being indecisive, their father says, "It's time to get up and go to Egypt and get food."

But, just the mere mention of that word "Egypt" makes them begin to twitch just a little bit. It's a word they don't like to hear. It's a place they don't like to think about. It brings back to their minds the memory of one of their worst, most vicious days. It's what Sinclair Ferguson calls "a guilt word."

Maybe you have a guilt word in your life. Maybe there's a time in your history where you lived in a way that did not honor the Lord. Maybe there's a job you had that reminds you of some terrible things that you did, or a city you lived in where you were rebellious against the Lord, and just the mention of that location or that city or that job or that high school or that season your life just brings back memories of guilt and shame, so much that, if possible, you really don't even like to mention the word or think of it. That's what happens for the brothers here.

Verse 2 says that he tells them, "Behold, I've heard there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." They're needy and they're hungry, and because they are, it's going to compel them to do something about it; which reminds us that sometimes God has to bring us to a place of great need to get us to move and to go. That's important for us today, because what we often think are hardships or inconveniences are many times God's ways of accomplishing something good in our lives. And we need to be aware of that, because if we're not careful, what we will tend to do is take every inconvenience and every frustration and every obstacle and every disappointment, and we'll be so quick to say, "God, why have You let me down?" Or maybe even in a more severe moment, "God, why have You abandoned me?"

But what we know from our life is that this strange road of providence that God sets us on, often along the way it takes these hard seasons of need and of want to get us to go. That's what happens for the brothers here. They, of course, have no idea of Joseph's situation. They have no idea what's happened, his life; he has no idea what's happened to them. And it can't be

easy for these brothers to journey back to Egypt; just the sound of the name alone brings back their hidden shame and their secret sin.

And then we come to verse 3, and what we see in verses 3-6 is this shocking reunion that takes place: "Ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. And Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him." Jacob has already lost Joseph. As far as he knows, Joseph is gone for good. And Jacob does not want to risk losing now Benjamin, the other son that was born to him by Rachel, and so he holds him back.

And it tells us in verses 5 and 6 that "the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan." And Joseph, who is governor over the land, was the one who sold to all the people of the land. "And Joseph's brothers came and they bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground." And what strange moment that must have been as Joseph thinks back to the memory of the dreams that he had, these dreams that were part of what created so much jealousy among his brothers. And now Joseph, all these years later, sees that God is working, that his life has not just been a string of bad luck or good fortune, it's actually been the hand of providence all along the way.

"And the brothers bow down before him," and Joseph was seeing in real time in a living color that God's hand of providence is all over him. And as he begins to discern all that's taken place in verses 7-20, we get this prolonged section where he's going to give his brothers a strategic test. Look at it with me in verse 7: "Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. 'Where do you come from?' he said. They said, 'From the land of Canaan, to buy food.'"

Now at this point, Joseph's got so many questions swirling in his mind: "Is my father still alive? Is Benjamin OK?" But another question he would have to have in his mind is, "What has become of these brothers? Are these the same guys? Have they changed? Do they feel remorseful for what they did to me when I was a teenager? Do they ever think of me? Do they go around bragging to their friends about how they mistreated me and abandoned me and neglected me? Do they hear my name and weep? Do they think of me at

all?" Right in front of him are his own brothers, and his question has to be, I wonder who these men are now."

He has reason to be suspicious, of course, not only because the last time he saw them, they were abandoning him, and selling him off to a band of travelers coming through. But even in Genesis 34, 37, 38, as you've just recently studied, these guys were capable of some pretty wicked things. And it says back in verse 7 that "he spoke roughly to them." It's an interesting way to phrase it: "He spoke roughly." He spoke roughly because they needed their conscience awakened. It's a mercy to them to have someone to speak roughly to them, because they need to understand what they've done, and reckon with that.

Maybe you know what it's like to read your Bible or attend a bible study or to hear a sermon, and you think, "Man, I feel like the Lord's kind of dealing roughly with me." Well, that can be a really good thing, because one of the kindest things the Lord can do is deal with us roughly when we have abandoned Him. And all of this to me is so interesting, because while this is happening, remember, the brothers, they just went to get grain. They didn't go to be a part of some dramatic event. They didn't make that journey thinking, "Something's about to happen that's going to turn our life upside-down. They didn't go planning to have their consciences awakened by the Lord. They certainly didn't go expecting to have this confrontation with Joseph. For all they knew, he is gone. To them it was just a day. They were hungry, they needed food; Egypt has food. It was just a journey. But in God's providence, He had much more for them.

The last time they saw Joseph he was 17. Much has changed by this point. Verse 8 tells us, "Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him," because of the age that Joseph was when they last saw him. He's changed a lot. And a lot happens in that twenty-year span of life. Maybe not that much between 30 and 50, or 40 and 60. But from 17 to late 30s, much has changed.

Not only that, but he's an Egyptian now, as far as the brothers can tell and see. He is dressed like an Egyptian. The men in Palestine would wear very long beards, the men in Egypt were clean-shaven. He's in his upper 30s. He's dressed in this fine linen that would be flowing down with the gold

insignia to designate he was a part of the Egyptian aristocracy. And besides that, he's literally the last person in the world the brothers would have ever expected to see on that day.

So he recognizes them, they do not recognize him, and you've got this conversation, I've already read, in verses 9-13 where he says to them, "You're spies." And they say, "No, no, we're not spies; we are of one father." In other words, they're saying, "We represent a family, not a government. We're here to provide food for our family. We're not here to be spies, we're no threat."

They mention that there were twelve brothers, in their defense. They say, "One of them stayed back," - that's Benjamin - "and one of them is no more," and that is Joseph. You've got to wonder what expression came over the face of Joseph in that moment: "They're talking about me. Now they don't know it, but they're talking about me to me."

The brothers don't go into detail about what happened; you wouldn't expect them to. They're not going to say, "Hey, it's nice to meet you. We need some food." "Are you spies?" "No, we're brothers. We have twelve brothers: one is at home, and there's another brother, of course. We threw him in a pit left him for dead. But just back to the food." No, of course they're not going to say anything. But when they say, "He is no more," Joseph begins to get an insight into what's going on in their mind, and the harsh reality of the pain and suffering from twenty years ago now brought right to the forefront.

So, in verse 14, "Joseph said to them, 'It is as I said to you. You are spies; and by this you shall be tested.'" It's an interesting word, "you'll be tested." It's a word that we find elsewhere in the Old Testament give. I'll give you a couple examples of it.

Jeremiah 6:27, "I have made you a tester of metals among My people, that you may know and test their ways." Psalm 66:10, "For You, O God, have tested us; You have tried us as silver is tried." In other words, Joseph is going to test his brothers to see, "Who are you now? I know who you were when I was 17. Back then I had the physical scars to prove it, and today I've

got the emotional scars I live with from it. But I'm going to test you like you would test precious metal. Have you changed? Are you still the same guys who were fine to leave me for dead, or has something transpired that's transformed you?"

And Joseph was doing all of this to awaken their conscience to confront them in their sin, verse 15, "By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother," - Joseph desperately wants to see Benjamin, verse 16 - "while you remain confined, that your words may be tested whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." And so he's going to have them put in prison for three days. He's going to remove the distractions from them. He's going to take away their freedom, and they're going to be left with their conscience.

As they're walking this strange road of providence, this is not merely punishment in a prison, this is a chance for their conscience to convict them. Do you know what that's like? Hebrews 10:22 says it this way: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." It's a good thing to have the forgiveness of God cleanse an evil conscience; it's a dangerous thing to live a contented life when your conscience is no longer awakened. Paul calls it in the book of Ephesians "being past feeling."

And so, "He put them all together in custody for three days. On the third day Joseph said to them, 'Do this and he will live, for I fear God.'" It's an interesting thing; this has to take them back a bit. The men from where Joseph's brothers are, they do not expect to hear the Egyptian governor say, "I fear God." This would perk them up a bit.

Verse 19, "If you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so.

So the brother goes into custody, and as they're put in custody they're going to experience at least a glimpse of what they did to him all those years

earlier. They oppressed Joseph, now they are oppressed. They accused him of spying, now he accuses them of the same. They throw him into a pit, he puts them into prison. And yet Joseph shows them mercy as he changes what he's going to do. He goes from, "You're all going to stay and one can go," to, "One will stay, the rest will go." And there is a physical mercy here. If all but one are allowed to go, they're going to be able to carry much more grain back with them to feed their family. But ultimately, this is all done to be a test: "Who are these men now?"

That leads in verses 21-23; we get a little bit of an insight here to this soul-searching reality that takes place. Verse 21, "Then they said to one another, 'In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.' And Reuben answered them, 'Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.'" And they begin to feel guilty for their sin two decades earlier. They've never really dealt with this; but while they sit there confined, their conscience begins to convict them. Their memory is now alive with the details of their past sin, and their reason of their circumstance condemns them. It's as one author said that "our conscience, our memory, and our reason," he called, "the three great hounds to bark and bay at the door of our soul."

I want to say to you, friends, when the Lord through the Spirit brings conviction to your heart, don't be quick to push that away. When your conscience feels guilt and shame over how you're living, don't be quick to try to reason that away. This is one of God's great mercies to us, that through His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, through our conscience, our reason and our memory, He brings conviction to our soul. Everything about their circumstances feels like it's negative, but God was working.

Verse 23 adds, "They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them." He knows his language, he knows their language; there's an interpreter there, so they don't know that he knows their language. He's getting to hear their side of the story without them filtering it worried about who hears it.

That leads us to verse 24, a surprising discovery. It says, "Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes." Joseph hearing all that is said, and as he hears the brothers talk about his worst moments of life, it's too much. He removes himself and he weeps. I mean, think about all that he's carried the last two decades with him. Think about it's one thing to be hurt or betrayed by a friend. These are his brothers, and the brothers are talking about themselves when Joseph can hear it. They don't know he can understand, but he does, and they're saying, "Don't you remember the distress of his cries?" And Joseph, no doubt, still hears ringing in his ears all these years later the sound he made as he begged his brothers not to harm him.

Now I'm very well aware that there's probably some in this sanctuary, and you've cried those same cries. You've had people in your life who hurt you; people in your life who have not only betrayed you, but for some who have perpetrated not only an emotional kind of violence, but for others, possibly even physical violence or abuse; and in the wrong moment today you still hear the sound of that ringing in your mind. Or maybe for some of you, you were on the other side of that. Maybe in your worst moments you were the one who hurt or harmed someone, and you still hear in your mind the echoes of their cries for you to stop. Well, that's where Joseph is, and that's where these brothers are, and that's why Joseph steps out and weeps, because in one sense, he has moved on in life; in another sense, how do you ever forget that event.

"He took Simeon," it says, "and he had him bound." Reuben's the oldest; we'd be tempted to assume it would be Reuben who would be left behind. But what we've just found out is twenty years ago Reuben's the one who warned his brothers to do something different; and maybe that part of the conversation may be the first time Joseph's ever heard that detail. In any event, he takes Simeon and has him to stay behind.

Verse 25, "Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey; and this was done for them. And then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack, and he said to his brothers, 'My money has been put in put back; here it is in the

mouth of my sack!" In other words, they've gone, they paid money, they got their grain; they were accused of being spies, accused of being thieves. They said, "No, no, no; we're honest men." And now they get their grain, they go on their way, they open up their stuff and there's their money; and they're wondering now, "Are we going to be accused? Are they going to think that we were thieves?"

The closest that I can get in my own life to try to kind of in any way understand what was going through their mind, years ago my wife and I moved to where we live now - this was about 20 years ago or so, maybe 21 years ago - and I had gone to the bank. It's a new bank in our new city, and I had a check to deposit: \$1,100. Wrote the check, gave it to them, they gave me the receipt, got back in my car and was driving back home; and somewhere along my 10-12-mile journey back home, I picked up that receipt and looked at it and noticed the deposit was not credited for \$1,100, it was \$11,100. God wanted to bless me. And I thought to myself, "What do you do?" And as I kept driving home, I thought, "If this really goes this way, I've got \$10,000 unexpected dollars. I wonder how I could spend that." And before I got to two stop lights later, I had spent that \$10,000 about four different times. I was going to go broke spending this \$10,000 extra dollars I was given.

Of course, my conscience wouldn't allow me to keep it. So I turned around, went back to the bank, and I told the teller. She got very nervous, and she immediately got the branch manager. He came out, and all he knew was here as this customer who was saying that his deposit was incorrect. He thought, without me explaining, I was saying they didn't give me enough money. And he said to me, "Sir, we don't make these kinds of mistakes. What's on your deposit slip is the exact right amount."

I tried to explain to him again, he cut me off, and he said, "Sir, this is not the way our bank operates, these kind of mistakes cannot be made. The money you have on your slip is the money you have in your account." And I said, "I'm going to try one last time; and if it doesn't work. I'm going across the street and I'm going to buy a new vehicle." And I said, "You gave me too much money." And he said, "We gave you too much." He goes, "Well, we ought to talk about that." And in in that moment I'm thinking to myself, "I've got all this money I wasn't expecting to get, I don't want the bank to think I'm stealing, I don't want to use something that's not mine."

And in some way, that has to be part of what's going through their mind as they stop to feed their animals; and that's where they discover, "All the money that we spent has been returned to us." And verse 28 says, "At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, 'What is this that God has done to us?'" And their first thought is, "God is punishing us." This is part of what happens when we live with a guilty conscience and we don't deal with it; we just constantly live in fear of getting found out, live in fear of everything happening to us must be some kind of divine punishment for something that we've done. They're going to look like thieves.

When you have a pure conscience with the Lord, one of the great blessings of life as you walk this strange road of providence is you can take all that happens to you, and your question is changed from, "God, what have You done to me?" to, "God, what have You done for me?" Big difference. When you know the Lord and you're walking with Him, you can receive blessing or struggle, not through the lens of God is doing something to you, but with the awareness God is always working for you.

Now I want to be true to my assignment which ends in verse 28, which means we'll have to leave it for another day and another man to walk you through the good news and the good story. For now, we'll just try our best to leave it teed up to that. But I do want to take a few minutes, having walked through this text. Whenever you study the Bible, you always want to go back to the text, go back to the context, go back to what was going on then to rightly interpret it; then when you've done that, then we take the Bible and we bring it forward to our life today to say, "What are the applications or the implications for us that we can walk out of this place and live a changed life?" Let me walk you through a few of these.

Number one, I want you to realize that, "What makes you weep reveals your character. What makes you weep reveals your character." I think of this, because I think of what it is that finally moved Joseph to tears. And I think in our life as individuals, that while it's no weakness to cry, those tears do give an insight into our soul into, "What do we really love?" and, "What do we care most about?" and, "What makes us cry with joy?" and, "What makes us cry with frustration?"

I mean, when you have a brand new baby born, that mother and father and grandparents, the second they see that baby the first time, they hold their precious baby or their grandchild; you can't help but cry, because you love that child so much. And at the end of a baby's life, if that baby's allowed to be 70 or 80 or 90, their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren will gather around at a funeral and they will once again cry, tears of sadness, tears of grief, tears of loss. That's kind of how we're made. You make a human being happy enough, they cry; startled enough, they cry; mad enough, they cry; sad enough, they cry. What you cry over gives an insight into your character and into your soul.

Now I don't want to pretend to be somebody I'm not. I'm a die-hard Oklahoma Sooner College football fan; and if you know what that means, you know last Saturday was a very hard day for us. I've been trying to console my wife the last week; she takes the loss harder than I did. But I know what it is to be frustrated with a football team. I don't want to pretend that I'm above that, all right. I don't think I cry - not outside; on the inside, I was a mess.

But there are some grown men, and they'll come to worship service, and they'll just be completely unmoved. Sing songs about the cross, sing songs about heaven, hear God's words taught as they sit through the teaching of God's Word and Sunday School classes, great truths, life-changing truths, and some men can just sit there completely unmoved, no emotion, no feeling, no joy. And yet, when 19-year-olds they've never met and will never know don't score enough points, they will scream and throw the remote, and if they lose bad enough, maybe even cry.

And there's nothing wrong with hobbies and things that we enjoy, of course. But, it is worth asking, "What brings the most joy in your life, and what consumes your thoughts when you have nothing else to think about?" Or, to say it another way, "What moves you to tears? What do you really love? What do you really grieve over when you don't get it?" What makes you cry reveals your character.

Second, a question for you: "Do the sins of your past characterize your life still today? Do the sins of your past characterize your life still today?" This
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was the test from Joseph to his brothers: "Are you the same men that you were, or have you changed? Are you still liars? Are you still deceptive? Do you still act out on shameful impulses? Do you still do things that should bring shame and regret, or have you changed? Do the sins of your past characterize your life still today?"

Brothers and sisters, if we are walking with Christ, there ought to be change in our life. There may be things in your past that you would give anything to take back. We can't. Praise God by His grace He cleanses us from all unrighteousness, He forgives us. Praise God by His grace He makes us a new creation. Are you glad about that this morning? Praise God for that. But the sins of your past should not be the practice of your presence. We should be different.

Third, "Do those around you recognize a change in your life? Do those around you recognize a change in your life?" If the brothers have changed, it's going to be evident to Joseph. If they're really different people, it's going to be obvious. They're going to be true to their word, they're going to return to pick up Simeon, they're going to bring back Benjamin; their repentance is going to bear an obvious fruit. The same should be true of us. When we have repented, when we have trusted in Christ, when we know Christ is our Savior, it should be true of us not only that we've changed, but that change should be evident to those around us.

Now let's be very clear. The people around you may not like the change they see, but they should see it. It may be that the buddies you used to run with, that you use to do all kinds of things you're not proud of and don't wish to speak of today, that when you gave your life to Christ, they may have not liked at all that you no longer go the places you went and you no longer do the things you used to do. They may be very upset with you that you've changed your life, but they should sure know something has happened. The people in your office, when you refuse to do things the wrong way, when you refuse to tear down co-workers, when you refuse to do things that are dishonest, they may not like it; but they should sure notice there's something different about you. The changes in our life by God's grace should be evident to those around us.

Fourth, "Feeling conviction of sin is a great mercy of God in your life. Feeling conviction of sin is a great mercy of God in your life." There's a hymn, most of us in here have sung this hymn hundreds, maybe literally thousands of times, and there may be a line in there that while you could recite it, it may be a while since you really thought through its meaning. These are the words of John Newton: "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved." "Amazing Grace" says that in God's grace, the first thing grace did is it taught your heart to tremble: "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear." It was grace that showed me how wretched I am, how sinful I am, how holy God is. It was grace that broke me. "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear." And then when I saw who God was and I saw who I was and I learned that Christ has made a way for me, "it was grace my fears relieved." The convicting work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His people is a great mercy of God.

So many times we walk through a bible study, we hear a sermon, and if it tends to break us or convict us, sometimes we get upset with the author, we may get upset with the preacher, we may get frustrated with what we're hearing and think, "I don't like this. I came to church to feel good. I did my quiet time to feel better." And sometimes it's God's grace to teach your heart to fear, because it's a dangerous thing to walk in unrepentant sin, and it is a sweet mercy of God to bring conviction to your soul.

One last one: "Hard circumstances are used by God to help us. Hard circumstances are used by God to help us." That's what we've seen in Genesis 42. Without a drought, they're not going to Egypt. Without going to Egypt, they're not going to be confronted by their brother. Without being confronted by their brother, they're not going to be put in prison for three days. Without staying in prison for three days, their consciences are not going to be awakened. These hard circumstances, this strange road of God's providence is for their good. It's because they were hungry, it's because they were desperate that these things took place.

It's the same for you. All those things in your life that you just wish would instantly go away, could it be these are things God has brought into your life to help remove the distractions of the world so that you would cling not to worldly comforts, but run to Christ? Could it be that that physical limitation that you have today that you so much wish would go away is providing you extra time to be in the Word and in prayer? Could it be that

that person in your life who just continues to frustrate you is there to remind you every day that no person can ever provide for you what only God can provide for you? Could it be that the imperfections of the world you live in are there to remind you that this is not your home, and that here we have no lasting city, but we seek a city which is to come? Hard circumstances are used by God to help us.

Reminds me of a story you may have heard before of an old farmer who didn't have much. Had a single horse, and one day that horse ran away. His neighbors heard about it and knew that that was a great loss for their friend. And so they went over to his house, and his friend said the old farmer, "We heard that your horse ran away. We're so sorry for this horrible thing that's happened to you." And the farmer of faith just said, "Who can know about these things?"

The next day the horse returned, and it didn't return alone, it came back with an entire herd of horses that had joined with it and came back; and the neighbors heard that not only did the horse come back, but now the old farmer has a whole herd of horses. And they went over to celebrate and said, "We heard this wonderful, great news, that now you've got a whole herd of horses. What a great blessing!" And the old farmer just said, "Who can know about these things?"

The next day the farmer's teenage son wanted to ride one of the new horses, and he jumped on one of the new horses that had been brought back, and that horse threw him off, and when it threw him off, it broke the leg of the farmer's son. The neighbors heard about it and came over and said, "We're so sorry about this terrible misfortune that's happened to you." And the farmer once again said, "Who can know about these things?"

Wasn't but a couple of weeks later when fighting broke out, and the Army came through each town in each village, and they were requiring every healthy teenage boy to leave home and go serve in the Army and put their life on the line. But because the farmer's son had broken his leg, they said, "We're not going to take you, you can stay where it's safe because of your injury." And the neighbors heard that and they came back to the farmer and said, "What good luck has come to you." And again the farmer said, "Who can know about these things?"

And the lesson I want you to take away from this is if you think everything that goes your way is because God is good and everything is hard is because God has abandoned you, you're going to miss the divine hand of providence all over your life. It was famine that got them on the road. It was hunger that compelled them to go. But, brothers and sisters, God is still using all things and working them together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

It is still true that what man may mean for evil, God has meant for good. So whether plenty or want, full or hungry, whether days of great victory or sorrow, and whether the Lord gives or takes away, all of it is our invitation to trust in the name of God and to run to Christ. Would you pray with me?

[Prayer] Lord, we thank You today for Your Word. And I pray that Your Holy Spirit would help us to remember that which is helpful. If anything I've said is unclear or confusing, I pray it would be quickly forgotten. If what I have said is true and from Your Word helpful for these dear people and bring glory to Your name, I pray that it would be remembered. I pray, though, that You would give us the courage to not only understand these truths, but to live according to them; and that as You put us on this road of Your providence, that we would walk with trust, with faith, with obedience, with passion, knowing that behind the scenes what we cannot see but we can trust is the character of our God, who is good, and does good, and is working all things together for our good and for Your glory.

Make us more trusting. Make us more hopeful. Make us more quick to feel conviction. Make us more holy. Make us more forgiving. Break our hearts where it's needed and restore us when we're broken. And while some will trust in chariots and some trust in horses, as the psalmist declared, "We will trust in the name of the Lord our God." It's in the name of Christ we pray. Amen.