

Scripture Reading: Genesis 44:32 -- 45:20

*[Judah continues as Benjamin's advocate]* “32 For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.’ 33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. 34 For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?” 45:1 “Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept aloud, & the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. 4 And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.”

## "Joseph is Overwhelmed!"

For the sake of time, I have left us hanging for the past few weeks, but now we come to the climax of our account and I want to just quickly “set the table” so we remember where we are in the story that these important chapters tell us: Chapters 43-45 are in some ways a parenthetical story in the midst of the account of Joseph saving Jacob and all of Egypt in this time of feast & famine.

It began with Jacob knowing they would need some of the food which he had heard about in Egypt & sending his ten older sons down to purchase some.

- They come before Joseph who keeps his identity a secret and begins his ministry to those same brothers who considered killing him and then sold him into slavery over twenty years before.

He treats them harshly and keeps Simeon as a hostage demanding that they return only with Benjamin! Next, we saw a pretty sad family that was being anxious for everything, but in the end the famine drives Jacob to send Benjamin off with his brothers. With their return, Joseph prepares the great test for them by setting up Benjamin as the new Joseph which these brothers can choose to again abandon to slavery or stand with him.

- They have passed this test with flying colors and now we have Judah making his final appeal as the advocate for Benjamin.

Judah is asking for mercy in a situation that is totally hopeless for Benjamin. Benjamin stands guilty before this minister of Egypt, just as each of us stands guilty before God almighty!

Judah offers to take the punishment that is due his brother, just as Jesus does for each of us!

- What a glorious picture of the Gospel and now the brothers will receive Good News that they could never have imagined!

And right here in the middle of the account comes what many consider the worse chapter division that is found in the Bible... Now don't panic about that criticism because as we should know those chapters and verses that we find in the Bible were not part of the inspired text delivered faithfully by the Holy Spirit.

- So why are they there?

A good question for us to occasionally ponder so let me make sure our children understand and the adults can listen in. Basically, they are tools that help us to understand and share the truths that God has given us in the Bible... Just like the pages and page numbers! Our Scriptures as originally given in 66 books over about 1500 years, were written on scrolls or parchment which of course were difficult to duplicate. It was not until 1439, about 1400 years after the last of the inspired text was first written, that the Bible could be read and shared as a book with pages, and of course page numbers! Next in the 1500's came the use of the accepted chapters and verses that we have with us today. Again, so it would be easier to find the place someone was referring to and to study it yourself. The first English Bible to have the chapters and verses was the Geneva Bible that many of us are familiar with.

- So while it is easy for us to second guess the chapter divisions or even verses that we find, we should remember that it does not impact the authority of the Bible!

And they will not be changing any time soon because we now have millions of references from the Bible using them that would become very confusing if they were changed.

So just as a great novel might leave us hanging at the end of a chapter, or even as I have in these sermons, we now move from one chapter to the next in the middle of a great drama.

Thus at the end of chapter 44 we have Judah making his final appeal that I read as part of our text this morning... Then we have the reaction of Joseph as chapter 45 begins

45:1 "Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it."

- As we saw in the earlier visit, we are seeing the power of emotions here in the life of Joseph.

He is again overwhelmed by this appeal and the nearness of his brothers: Last time he left the room, wept in private and then composed himself because it was important that his ministry to his brothers continue with a cloak of secrecy.

- Now the brothers have proven themselves faithful and Joseph is ready for the great family reunion and the thought of it causes him to weep again, but this time for joy, in front of his brothers!

AND this is just a close family affair and so Joseph has the others excused. Not so they will not know what is going on, they can hear the weeping, but so his brothers need not be embarrassed by the revelation of what they had done to Joseph so many years before.

3 "Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence."

Since the brothers had already informed Joseph that his father was alive and doing well, he is asking a rhetorical question in the midst of his excitement!

As for his brothers, this is a pretty shocking turn of events...

- The text says "they were dismayed in his presence."

I suspect that is putting it mildly and I am sure part of their thinking on the spot was, 'boy, we only thought we were in trouble before! In their minds IF the young lad they sold into slavery year ago was in fact this man whose power was like unto Pharaoh now standing before them, they were in BIG trouble!

I am sure they suddenly saw all of the harshness and tricks which Joseph had played on them during these visits as the beginning of his revenge upon them.

- Now suddenly only Benjamin would be the innocent party in this group and perhaps that is why Joseph demanded that he be brought down.
- But Joseph has mercy on his brothers and does not let them dwell long on such troubling thoughts!

4 “And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.”

- Joseph assures them that it really is him and that they have nothing to fear.

Joseph is not excusing their sin, but firmly pointing out that God sees the bigger picture and has used their sin to prepare for the great trials that lie ahead.

6 “For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.”

The famine has already been severe enough to force these brothers to make two trips down to Egypt for food, so you can imagine their shock in hearing there would be five more years of famine! And so, Joseph repeats the major point that he wants them to understand: 7 “And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.”

- AND the writer of Genesis will also repeat this important lesson for us in the final chapter of Genesis!

So yes, it is an important lesson and here I will again turn to the thoughts of others who have said things better than I might have done: It is Professor Gordon Wenham who puts it well in his commentary on Genesis: “The statements about God’s overruling of human affairs are undoubtedly the key to understanding the whole Joseph story... All the episodes in the Joseph story contribute to demonstrating how God’s purposes are ultimately fulfilled through and in spite of human deeds, whether or not those deeds are morally right. The apparent secularity of much of the story [witnesses] to the invisibility of God’s actions in human affairs: Only in retrospect can man see what God has been doing.”

- We should take a moment to ponder that last statement from Professor Wenham:
- Often we like to think that we know what God is doing, but alas only in retrospect can we truly see what He has done and how He has done it, though often not why!

Over the past two weeks I have pointed out how this lesson is demonstrated in the account before us:

- The brothers left the city in great joy, not knowing the challenge that lie just ahead!
- Then the brothers returned with great fear not knowing the Joy that lay just ahead.

Professor Wenham goes on to give an excellent summary of the theology involved here and while we might be tempted to think it is just heady stuff that we do not need to bother with: I hope we can learn from these stories that it does in fact determine how we should face & understand the joys and trials that do in fact come into our lives!

Thus the Professor continues, “The relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is a theological mystery that is something ultimately beyond human comprehension. Mysteries make us uncomfortable, and thus there is always a temptation to rationalize them that is, to modify one belief to make it more compatible with the other, in this case to play down divine sovereignty by saying that certainly actions fall outside the realm of God’s control or, alternatively, to claim that, since all is predestined, man is not really answerable for his acts. But the Joseph story and the rest of Scripture insist that both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are true.”

Certainly, the actions by Joseph's brothers, and later Potiphar and the King's cup bearer, do in fact show us the truth of this matter, but they are not the only examples... The clearest New Testament example would be Judas and the religious leaders who betrayed and crucified the Lord of Glory:

- Those events are the very basis of our salvation but Judas and those leaders were clearly held accountable for their wicked actions.

In the Old Testament we can study the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Isaiah to see how God used the wicked actions of the King of Assyria to punish the Northern Kingdom of Israel and then judged him for his wickedness.

And the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty is certainly found in the Book of Job, but alas there we also see that the why is sometimes kept hidden from the human characters.

- This of course points us back to the importance of confession!

All of Adam's children are born in trespasses and sins and if God were not truly in control we would make an even bigger mess of the Creation! Not only does God not panic when we do wicked things, but He can and will use them to carry out His purposes and more importantly offers His own Son Jesus as the advocate for us and the proper propitiation for those sins so He can be as the Apostle Paul declares, both just and one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus!

This is why the ministry to Joseph's brothers was so important and why our honest confession of sin is so vital. Joseph's brothers can now move past the weight of their past sins and enjoy the blessings of a restored family. We who confess their sins can know that God forgives their sin and cleanses them from all unrighteousness so that they can cry Aba Father in a sweet restored relationship with God.

- And it is such joy that we now see in our story!

After putting their minds at ease, Joseph then tells his brothers:

9 "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. 10 You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. 11 There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine."' 12 "And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth that speaks to you. 13 So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here."

Joseph had been very patient in working with his brothers until they had truly repented of their sin...

- But is now telling them to hurry, not once not twice but three times!
- He cannot wait to see his father!

And then we see him enjoy the reunion with all of his brothers...

14 "Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. 15 Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him."

What a sweet time of fellowship and reunion for this troubled family and yes, I think it should bring to mind another reunion we see much later in God's grand story...

When Jesus did the work that He was ordained to do from the foundation of the world on that cross outside of Jerusalem, the Disciples scattered, Peter betrayed him three times and later they all cowered in fear.

On Easter morning, they even doubted the early reports of the resurrection!

The Gospel writers show us that Jesus revealed Himself to them in much the same way Joseph did, saying, ‘it is I myself’ when He first appeared to them! He then gave instruction to gather in Galilee just as Joseph told his father to journey to Egypt. And we know from the prayer of Simeon, which we know well here at Church of the King, that the Risen Jesus was now to be a light unto the Gentiles: So it should not surprise us to see the joy of Jacob’s family spilling over into the Egyptian community, which of course is where our text goes next:

16 “Now the report of it was heard in Pharaoh’s house, saying, “Joseph’s brothers have come.” So it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well. 17 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: Load your animals and depart; go to the land of Canaan. 18 Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. 19 Now you are commanded—do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and your wives; bring your father and come. 20 Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’””

- Not only has God brought these brothers and this family back together, but He has prepared a place of blessing for them.

Next week we will see Jacob journey to this new land of blessing and be reconciled with his long-lost son, so let us reflect on what it means for us: Surely this time in Egypt is a small picture of the Land flowing with milk and honey that God will give to them a few centuries later... And most certainly a foretaste of the New Jerusalem and the New Heavens and New earth that Jesus has won for his Bride the Church!

And of course a grand picture of how we are reconciled to our Father in Christ... A theme that the Apostle Paul lays out beautifully to the Saints at Colossi. I would commend it to you further study as we finish up this account next week, but allow me to close with just a few of the highlights from chapter 1:

Colossians 1: “9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

- A truth that is surely pictured here as God delivers this broken family from darkness to the glories that await them in Egypt!

The Apostle speaks of the glory of Jesus and continues in verse 19:

“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”... 27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Communion Meditation: Psalm 103

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;  
12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.  
13 As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him.  
14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.