

Genesis 43-44

"A Heart Check"

What *is* true repentance if not a change of heart & life? It's a total turn around from whom I used to be. (I used to be hard, now I'm humbled. I used to live in sin, now I'm sanctified I used to deal deceitfully, now I'm a person of honesty & integrity). Whatever it is you *used* to be, it's not who you are currently; you've changed. You've turned from your sin & trusted in J.C. & that's evident by the way you lead your life.

Yet sometimes it's difficult to discern. People can seem to be one way, but given enough time you discover they're really another way. People can play a certain part for a stretch of time. But generally when difficult days befall them, that's when you see what's *really* in them.

Paul, when he wrote a disciplinary letter to the Corinthians, he really put them to the test. He wanted to see how they would react, how would they respond? Would they get all bent out of shape, come back at him like, "Who do you think you are, telling us what to do!?" Or would they follow through on his difficult instructions? & Based on their response he was able to discern that their repentance was real. He was able to see genuine change in their lives. & He said, *"Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."*¹

You see, even though he'd put them through the wringer, it was in how they responded (through their actions) that he detected their true repentance. They'd truly turned from their sin.

Jesus spoke of discerning someone's genuine nature by the fruit that's produced in their lives. It's not rocket science. What's the general pattern of a person's life? Hard, or humble? Tough guy, or tender? Conceited or compassionate? Are they a person of integrity or is it common for them to speak deceitfully, always engaging in unhealthy activity? ... It is what it is.

The question that confronts us concerning our current text...

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). [2 Co 7:9-11]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What's happening in the hearts of Joseph's brothers? Are they the same self-centered guys who sold him into slavery over 20 yrs earlier? Or have they had a change of heart as the years have passed by? Joseph issues a heart check.

Vs 1-2

We can envision Jacob just *praying* that the grain that they'd obtained in Egypt would be sufficient to sustain them through the famine. Yes, it would leave Simeon in prison for life, but at least he would lose Benjamin. If he was anything like you are or I am (& I suspect he was) he probably even got angry w/God, was wondering how God could let something like this happen to him & his family...

Yet God was preparing to for Jacob exceedingly/abundantly above all he could ask or even think. But God had to get them to Egypt & nothing short of the threat of starvation was going to do it. So in reality what he may've seen as something horrible happening was in reality a gift of God's grace in preparing to bless him beyond imagination.

You guys, it's not altogether uncommon for God to use needs in our lives physically to lead us to where we need to be spiritually. Now that doesn't mean that every lack in our lives is God pressing in on us; but He can certainly use it. He can control the circumstances that surround us so that as sinners we're brought to Himself & to the end of our self. It's reminiscent of the prodigal son (Luke 15). As long as things were good, he was gone. He sought to get as far away from his father as possible, but when he ran out of resources & had nowhere else to turn... His physical need brought him to his spiritual senses, he repented.

I'm not saying that people won't come to Jesus when things are good in their lives. I'm saying it's not common, most of us come to Jesus as the result of some kind of immense physical or emotional duress or suffering. & Once we come to Christ (like we spoke last week), it's many times the way God has to work change in our lives. We don't always respond to the gentle nudging of the Holy Spirit. So God has to get out the bit & bridle of circumstance & will use suffering, or physical need to bring about spiritual growth (to get us moving in the direction we need to be going).

Vs 3-10

You know that they'd had this conversation a hundred times. Jacob asking them, "Why did you even *tell him* that you had another brother?" Judah says, "Listen, he was asking us straight up about our family, if there were any more of us. How could we have possibly known that he would say, 'go get your younger brother & bring him here'?" But he basically says, "Dad, we've could've been there & back by now, but you won't let Ben go & we won't go w/out him."

So he says, "Listen, I'll personally be responsible for Benjamin. If I don't bring him back to you, I'll bear the blame forever." I find it interesting that it was Judah's idea to sell Joseph & now he offering to save Benjamin. He's in essence saying, "Dad, I'll die before he's not brought back safely to you."

What we're seeing here is a couple of things. #1 Judah's heart is different now toward his dad & the son of his father's love than it was before. #2 Judah's role of leadership w/in his family is beginning to emerge. Don't forget it's Judah's tribe that would be the royal tribe of Israel & ultimately Messiah Himself would come from his lineage.

Now Reuben had made a similar offer a yr earlier, even letting Jacob kill his two sons if he didn't bring Ben back safely. But we suspect that Reuben wasn't the brightest boy of the bunch (w/a statement like that it's not too hard to deduce) & so Jacob tells him not to be ridiculous, it wasn't going to happen (not to mention he'd slept w/one of Jacob's concubine so evidently Jacob just didn't trust him). **But you recall that Judah has had 2 of his own sons die. So perhaps Jacob thinks that Judah can empathize a little more w/where he's at, & since they're in a desperate way, he really sees no other choice.**

Also let's not forget that God had made known His plan for Jacob & his sons so Satan was seeking to work ruin/destruction into this family. He hated them for who they were & for what God had purposed to make of them. They would literally change the course of human history. Through their descendants would come the oracles of God, the Savior of the world. Satan hated this family.

& Listen, he hates you & your family as well. Because God uses you to change lives, to share His word, to be a light in a dark place, to point people to Jesus. God has purposed to conformed into the image of His Son. He has plans for you, a future & a hope. Satan hates that & so he makes it his aim to destroy your life. The bible says that the Satan came to steal, to kill & to destroy (Jn 10:10). That's his agenda, not to annoy you, but to destroy you. Jesus came to give you life, & that more abundantly...

Vs 11-14

When he felt as though he was in trouble w/Esau he sent gifts before him to ease the situation. Here he plans a similar approach. He puts together a gift, takes double money just incase there was an oversight last time... (PS, this makes 20 units of money. Remember how many pieces of silver they sold Joseph for? 20)

But ultimately Jacob comes to the resolve we all need to rest in. He commends himself into the grace & mercy of Almighty God & says, “Whatever will be, will be.” You guys, we like to think we’re in control; we’re not in control. We do well to trust in the love/grace & mercy of God & resolve that whatever will be; will be. Not in a fatalistic kind of way (which may be where Jacob is at). But in a, “God I’m casting my cares upon you, because I know that You care for me & so I trust in you, have *Your way*” kind of way.

Vs 15-18

They have this notion that they’ve blown it so bad that he’s just going to he’s going to deal w/them personally. Like this was the calm before the storm.

People still have this same view of the Greater than Joseph don’t they (J.C.). They say, “I’ve blown it so badly, I’ve erred in such a tremendous capacity that the Lord will surely condemn me.” But that’s not true. Yes, these guys had sinned. Yet they’re going to discover the same truth that each one of us have discovered who’ve come to Christ. That where sin abounds, His grace abounds much more (Rom 5:20)... The reason we often times think that the Lord will treat us a certain way is because that’s how *we’d* treat someone if we were the Lord!

But the bible says that we’re to seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, & the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return the Lord & He will have mercy on him; & to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. Then we read, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’*² God doesn’t think like we think. We’d grind them, God shows grace to them; we’d want them to suffer, God wants them to be saved. Even though his brothers had failed. Joseph says, “Today, we feast!” (Kinda takes us back to the prodigal, doesn’t it?)

Vs 19-23

It’s bothering them so bad they try to make an advocate out of this official before Joseph shows up. He’s all, “Chill-ax” guys, I had your money. Either he had it & gave it back (which we know happened) but it could also be that Joseph personally paid for their supplies.

Vs 24-30

² The New King James Version. (1982). [Is 55:8-9] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

They expected rebuke, they found refreshment. Rom 2:4, right? *"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"*³ We expect to be smashed, but when we're smothered w/love, knowing where we've been, what we've done, our heart crumbles in repentance toward God.

Now they still don't know this is Joseph. There's still more work to be done. He's prepared a place for them, but they're still being prepared for that place. Even so Jesus has prepared a place for us (Jn 14:2) but He's also preparing us for that place. & When we're ready He'll call us home (be it by rapture or death). But if you're still here, it means there's still work to do. Not just through us, but *in* us as well.

Vs 31-32

Egypt was one of the most racially separated/segregated societies on earth at this time. They believed that Egyptians came from the gods & everyone else was of a lesser origin. So Joseph (being a dignitary) had his own place, the Egyptians had their own table & the brothers all sat at their own table.

But again this is the wisdom of God. Before the book of Genesis comes to a close the entire family of Jacob will be in Egypt. Therefore by default they'd be isolated from surrounding people for 400 yrs. In that time they'd multiply into a nation, millions of people. Had they remained in Canaan (as we've noted) they'd have simply assimilated into the corrupt culture that was there. But God sent Joseph ahead of them to prepare a place for them so that they could grow into a nation unencumbered by the pagan cultures around them.

Vs 33-34

Why did it blow them away that they were seated in order of their birth? Because it's a practical impossibility for anyone to do this. The odds (statistically) of randomly seating them in the proper order according to their birth would be basically 40 million to 1. So they're freaking out (they're sensing something supernatural here).

But then Joseph lavishes upon Benjamin 5x's more than he gives them. Why? I believe it was simply because he wanted to see how they'd react. Because they had such resentment in their heart against Joseph for being favored. Were they the same guys? It's a heart check. Would they be discouraged, or could they simply rejoice that one was being blessed.

³ The New King James Version. (1982). [Ro 2:4]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Let me tell you, it's a heart check for us as well when one of our brothers or sisters is blessed. Will we envy them, or rejoice w/them?

They'd envied Joseph, now they have a chance to exhibit change. Let me tell you that when we fail a test, God has this way of arranging for us to take it again at another time. Here they don't envy him, they're stoked for him.

Ch 44

Vs 1-5

It all seemed to good to be true for them. They left in high spirits; treated well, sacks full of grain, Simeon out of prison, headed home w/Ben...

But there was one more test they needed to pass. Joseph has his silver cup put in Benjamin's sack & gives his steward the plan. He's to accuse them of repaying evil for good. Stealing Joseph's cup from which he divines...

What does that mean? Divination was the practice of looking at natural things for discovering supernatural signs. It could be reading tea leaves, looking at a liver of a sacrificial animal. 2 Things w/this. #1 It's plausible (though not probable) that Joseph engaged in the practice of divining. When the law was given God strictly forbade it (today it would be things like tarot cards, Ouija boards, astrology etc), but up to this point God hasn't given any word w/regard to such things.

More likely is that Joseph didn't divine at all. We've noted that his ability to see what's coming down the prophetic pike has come from the Lord. Not only that he's been careful to give God glory all throughout his life so it wouldn't add up for him to look to another means. So to w/you & me, we're not to look to other means for direction in life (horoscopes), we're to look to the Living God.

The point here is that this cup was an article that denoted his position & to steal it was to invoke harsh penalty. More than the cup we should note his conversation. He had shared w/those around him (including Pharaoh & his personal servant) the truth of God & the work of God in his life. Joseph was being a light in a very dark, pagan culture. So Joseph's gift wasn't in the cup, it was from God.

Vs 6-10

Again we're seeing more change in these guys. They trusted one another, they didn't say, "It's probably Levi!" Or anything like that, they knew none of them had taken it. As a matter of fact they're like, "Why would we bring back twice the money & then steal a cup? That doesn't even make sense. If you find it w/one of us, kill that guy & we'll all be your slaves."

He says, “No, that’s not necessary, if you don’t have it you can go free. If I find it w/one of you, *that* person will be my slave.”

Vs 11-13

Joseph’s servant adds to the drama ☺. He knows it’s in Ben’s sack, but he starts w/the oldest & works his way down. When he opens Benjamin’s bag, there it is... Nothing could’ve been worse, they all tear their clothes; he’s sentenced to a life of slavery if not death.

But notice they all packed their stuff & headed back to Egypt. Before, when Joseph was taken as a slave they said, “Good riddance!” But now they’re willing to stand w/Benjamin facing slavery or even death. If they wanted to get rid of the little punk, this was their chance, but their hearts have changed... As they’re headed back, Judah is no doubt reeling, he makes a decision to come clean & make full confession...

Vs 14-17

You see Joseph is giving them an easy out. “Do you want to get rid of him like you did me? Now’s your chance.”

But notice Judah steps up & he doesn’t even try to make an excuse. He just says, “What can we say? How could we even begin to clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, you slaves...” **Now he’s not talking about the iniquity of stealing a cup, he knows they’re innocent of that. He’s talking about the iniquity of how they dealt w/Joseph 22 yrs ago, time didn’t erase the guilt of their sin. He’s saying it’s finally caught up to them; there’s no escaping it, their sin has found them out. (Num 32:23).**

They’re done trying to hide it, they’re out w/it, they sold Joseph to be a slave in Egypt & now they’re prepared to be Egypt’s slaves for the rest of their lives. We’re seeing a godly sorrow in these boys & it’s led them to repentance.

Now Judah intercedes for his brother in the longest words recorded in one sitting in all of Genesis & one of the most heartfelt appeals in all of the word of God.

Vs 18-34

What change is exuded here. 22 yrs ago they didn’t care about their brother or their dad. But now they’ve gone from selling their brother into slavery to being will to sell themselves into slavery to save their brother & preserve the welfare of their father. Judah was the root of Joseph’s demise; he didn’t want to be the cause of his father’s death.

So what does he do? He begs Joseph to let himself be enslaved so that Benjamin might go free. He’s willing (out of his love for his father & his brethren) to lay down *his* life for *their* sake.

Of course in so doing he becomes a picture of Jesus Himself (who would come forth from Judah) Who out of his love for His Father & for you & me, offered to lay down *His* life in our place, to assume our penalty that we might be set free from the bonds of sin & death. But He did more than offer didn't He? As to where Judah would be absolved, Jesus bore the full weight of our sin & while we were still sinners Christ died for us...

You guys we were guilty as charged. The full weight of judgment bearing down upon us & there was nothing we could do about it. But Jesus stepped in & took our place. Now may we learn what it means to stand in the gap on behalf of others, to intercede for them that they in turn might be set free & given life, in Christ. Amen? Amen.

Prayer Points:

God You are so good. We thank You for the beautiful portrait of Jesus that You've painted for us in Your word today. May we never take for granted the gift of life we've been given in Him. Break our walls down, help us to stand in humility before You. Change our lives that we might be like Jesus.

Listen, time does not absolve the guilt of sin in your life. Only the blood of J.C. will do that. Maybe you feel like you've gone too far, you've sinned too greatly, but I want you to know that where sin abounds, grace abounds still more. God wants to set you free today, humble yourself under the righteous right hand of God today & He will lift you up & give you new life, clean slate, fresh start in Christ.