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# Tested in their Jealousy

## Genesis 43

Many people hated school, not because of the learning, but because of the testing. Regular quizzes and exams are a mark of a good education. A good test exposes a familiarity with facts and a facility in applying them. It is an opportunity to remember and reason. Sometimes, testing is different. When I was coaching, I regularly tested players. We ran them through mental drills designed to test their ability to withstand relentless pressure. We put them through combination drills and small game competition that exposed skill weaknesses or unwillingness to play both sides of the ball. And sometimes, we tested to see whether individuals were developing as a team. Would small jealousies and jockeying for favor, starting positions and even public acclaim come to surface when loyalty to the cause of the team was paramount.

This is the sort of testing we often face from God through trials. This is the kind of testing Joseph will put his brothers through. It is intended, through trials and unexpected providences, to expose their hearts, what they truly believe and deeply want. The brothers are tested for jealousy and fidelity. Will they be jealous of Benjamin and the favor shown him? Will they allow him to be taken away, or will Judah keep his word and stand up from his brother?

Much of these chapters are a studied contrast to the chapter 42. Joseph greets them differently, treats them differently, the brothers respond differently. Joseph is tender, solicitous, and congenial. The brothers are humble, curious, hesitant, and surprised at their treatment.

But these two chapters are not about judgment. They are about how mercy transforms people. Through Joseph, a severe mercy is extended, and radical transformation takes place. But all this is aimed at reconciliation and restoration.

Reconciliation without righteousness is a sham. Joseph well knows that to be truly reunited with his brothers, they need to have dealt with their sins. He is in a good position to expose their hearts and see if they have truly changed. These two chapters tell of these sons of Jacob being twice tested.

Their deep jealousy of Joseph had caused them to plan to kill him and eventually to sell him into slavery. This first test is designed to see if they will be jealous of another little brother's being favored.

## Through the Preparation for the Journey (v.1-14)

The sovereign Lord is working to bring the boys back to Egypt.

### The Difficult Struggle over Returning (v.1-7)

**43** Now the famine was severe in the land. <sup>2</sup>And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go again, buy us a little food.” <sup>3</sup>But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’ <sup>4</sup>If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. <sup>5</sup>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.’ ” <sup>6</sup>Israel said, “Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?” <sup>7</sup>They replied, “The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?’ What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’”

The sacks of grain that sustained them after the first journey are slowly disappearing. The famine is intensifying. A decision to return to Egypt for food is pressing on them. But Jacob and his sons are all aware that in order to return, the youngest, Benjamin, will have to go as well.

Jacob does not want him to go. He again questions why the brothers even told the Egyptian vice-regent about their younger brother. In Jacob’s mind, they should have kept their mouths shut and this wound not have happened. He has already lost the first son of Rachel. Now, Benjamin, the second son of Rachel has taken Joseph’s place in Jacob’s idolatrous, self-centered heart.

The brothers point out that “the man” had questioned them thoroughly. They seemed to miss the fact that the questions betrayed more knowledge of them than he should have had. But since they were being questioned under suspicion of being spies, they were careful to be truthful.

### The Noble Pledge for Safety (v.8-10)

Judah then stands to ensure the safety of Benjamin.

<sup>8</sup>And Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. <sup>9</sup>I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. <sup>10</sup>If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.”

Judah will bear the blame. He will pledge for the sake of the boy. There is also a sense of impatience with his father’s self-focus and child-centeredness. In the time it finally took to get his dad to agree, they could have made the journey twice. So, this has not been a simple one-time conversation, but a long discussion as hunger looms near.

### The Ample Provision under Mercy (v.11-14)

<sup>11</sup>Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. <sup>12</sup>Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. <sup>13</sup>Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man.

<sup>14</sup> May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”

Jacob resigns himself to the inevitable. So, he loads up his sons with expensive nuts and spices. He sends twice the amount of money. He prepares the sons to pay back the money that had been put in their bags on the last trip. He is reconciled to sending Benjamin, if necessary, to his death. But he does seem to hope for God’s mercy. And he seems resigned to whatever unfolds.

How often are we like this? We have a situation we really don’t like. We have to do something that may be a risk. We are not sure that God will do what we want. So, will we hope in God’s mercy while being ready to submit? We know the end of this story. But at this point Jacob does not. We don’t know the end of our own stories – but God does.

## **In the Summons before Joseph (v.15-25)**

They load their provisions and head down to Egypt. They report to stand before Joseph.

### **Their Call to the House (v.15-17)**

When Joseph sees that Benjamin has come, he sends his steward to prepare a feast.

<sup>15</sup> So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

<sup>16</sup> When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.” <sup>17</sup> The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph’s house.

He plans it for his own home, not in the public places. Through the steward, he summons them to his home to meet with him in private.

### **Their Fear for the Motivation (v.18-22)**

O, can you just smell their fear?

<sup>18</sup> And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph’s house, and they said, “It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys.” <sup>19</sup> So they went up to the steward of Joseph’s house and spoke with him at the door of the house, <sup>20</sup> and said, “Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. <sup>21</sup> And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man’s money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, <sup>22</sup> and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.” <sup>23</sup> He replied, “Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.”

They are both baffled and frightened. Among themselves they speculate that this Egyptian ruler is going to exact his revenge over the money. O, if they only knew who this was and the cause for true justice and revenge that could have lurked in his heart. So, they go to the steward to try to explain what had happened and that they are prepared to make amends.

### **Their Assurances from the Steward (v.23)**

But the steward has his instructions. He knows that they are heading, not toward something to fear but to a feast. The only slaughter today would be the beef for the table. He tells them

not to be afraid. He then attributes the appearing of their money to the God he serves. Ah, the Egyptian lord who fears and serves Yahweh has instructed his household in the ways of the Lord and seems to have brought even this steward to faith in the God of the Bible.

### **Their Preparations for the Meal (v.24-25)**

They seem to take him at his word.

Then he brought Simeon out to them. <sup>24</sup> And when the man had brought the men into Joseph's house and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, <sup>25</sup> they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there.

They settle in, taking care of their livestock. They wash and prepare themselves for a meal. What relief and joy when Simeon appears, unharmed. Things are really looking up. They are going to be dining with royalty.

### **With the Companionship around the Table (v.26-34)**

The day wanes on and Joseph arrives home from his work.

<sup>26</sup> When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground. <sup>27</sup> And he inquired about their welfare and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" <sup>28</sup> They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. <sup>29</sup> And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" <sup>30</sup> Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there

### **The Assurances by his Greeting (v.26-28)**

He meets with his guests and assures them in a kind and familial greeting. He inquires about their father. He is a kind and genial host. You can almost see them beginning to relax.

### **The Compassion for his Brother (v.29-30)**

Then he sees Benjamin. Ah, his closest brother! He greets him and then seems to remember and addresses him as "son". But, his heart is warmed to his brother. He has to hurry out to another room. There he weeps.

### **The Strangeness of his Setting (v.31-34)**

When he returns, they prepare to serve the meal. In typical Egyptian fashion, Joseph does not sit with Hebrews. This was an abomination, partly because they are not Egyptian but also because they are shepherds. Shepherds were a dirty, low class of people, an abomination (Genesis 46:34) not worthy to sit at table with the highborn.

. <sup>31</sup> Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself he said, "Serve the food." <sup>32</sup> They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. <sup>33</sup> And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. <sup>34</sup> Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.

To their amazement, they are given a seating order. The place of honor and authority was given to the oldest according to his birthright. Around the table they went, according to age with the youngest Benjamin at the expected place. They cannot help but notice. But they don't know what to make of it. So they sit down and are ready to eat. The chargers of food are brought to Joseph's table. The portions are served onto the plates. They watch as 5 times the amount is taken to Benjamin. Ah, but there is no jealousy. There are no green eyes among them. All is quiet and well in their souls. They eat and drink and make merry with him. They are happy together. They are just glad for what they are receiving.

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## Reflect and Respond

Jealousy is not always sin. There is the jealousy of God over His people and spouses in marriage. But, sinful jealousy can be a terrible thing. It has driven great sins. Jealousy led to the first murder. Jealousy fueled the sale of Joseph into slavery. Jealousy of David ruled the heart of King Saul. The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus' initial popularity. We see the dreadful effects of this sin all through the Bible. The Jews were jealous of the Paul and the church (Acts 17:5)

Jealousy was also an issue in the church of Paul's day. Consider Romans 13:13-14:

<sup>13</sup> Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Notice the connection between quarreling and jealousy. Jealousy can ruin relationships and corrupt ministry. Fighting and arguing often is rooted in ministry and personal jealousies. These kinds of heart cravings and behaviors are not the way we as Christians should live. So while we tend to minimize quarreling and jealousy as acceptable sins, look at the other sins in the same category: orgies, drunkenness, immorality and sensuality.

Paul confronts the church at Corinth by saying, "For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?" [1Corinthians 3:3] and "<sup>20</sup>For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder." [2 Corinthians 12:20] Look at jealousy's prominent place in the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:18-21

<sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Those so continually express the works of the flesh are not a part of God's kingdom. That is sobering. Joseph's brothers are repenting of their jealousy and are showing the fruits of that repentance. But we are taught something very important in the Romans text. We don't just stop being jealous. That would simply be moralism or at its worse, legalism.

No, listen again to what Paul wrote:

<sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

How do we overcome the cluster of sins of which jealousy is a part?

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ – consciously, intentionally and by faith clothe yourself in the graces of Jesus.

Make no provision for the flesh – do not make it easy to be jealous of others. Watch over your own life so that you tend to admire and congratulate people rather than covet their abilities and compete for their recognition.

Don't organize your life to satisfy the desires of the old person and the flesh – this is a purpose clause. In jealousy, this means that you do not script out being in the other person's place – what you would do instead, how much better things would be instead...

Here is the great test for you...

How would Joseph's brothers respond to the elevation and favor shown to Benjamin?

How will you respond to the favor, the recognition, the promotion of someone around you, in ministry, in the church?

May God grant that we will recognize the sin of jealousy, repent from it and put on Christ whose grace and love toward others is what we put on.