

Genesis 44: 1-34; "The Silver Cup in the Sack", Sermon # 107 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 12, 2007, in the Morning Worship Service.

In these sermons on the life of Joseph, I have been using Joseph's life as a type of Christ, which it is, and drawing lessons from the way that he deals with his brothers, in relation to their being taught the lessons that they needed to learn about their own sinfulness and their own salvation. I am applying these same lessons to all who would come to know God through Jesus Christ. They did not know or recognize him, but he knows and remembers them; the way that they had treated him twenty years before. The brothers have come down to Egypt this second time seeking grain, but not knowing that the man who is in charge of selling them the grain, this man in the high position of second in command to Pharaoh, is their brother. Joseph loves them and he has sold them grain both these times, and then had his steward place the money back in their sacks. He did this to show them his good-will and his love to them. He would most surely provide them with the grain that they needed to live. But because he had a special love for them, he will also test them to find out whether they have really changed or not. This is the same thing that the Lord Jesus Christ does for each person who seeking grace from him. We have spoken of this before, but the grain that Joseph is selling is a good picture of the grace that Jesus Christ freely gives to sinners who are seeking Him.

Sometimes sinners do not realize that Jesus Christ knows all about their lives. He remembers the things that we have done to shun Him, to oppose Him, to refuse to have Him to rule over us. And yet, He is very willing to give a special grace to those who come to Him looking to be forgiven. We have come to the verge of the revelation of that special grace of salvation in the story of Joseph. Joseph put the silver cup in the sack of Benjamin in order to test the repentance of his brothers in relation to their former sins against himself, and also to test their love for Benjamin and their father. In a similar fashion the Lord Jesus Christ tests all those whom he has chosen to eternal life, by bringing them into situations in which they are forced to reveal whether they are seeking a complete change of heart. He would show them the kind of love that it will take to bring about the restoration of their broken relationship with him. And He will test their willingness to exercise that same kind of love toward another member of the family; his brother Benjamin, who is in a very similar position to what Joseph was 20 years before. He is special, and he is favored by his father;

especially since Jacob has believed for some years now that Joseph was dead. How do the brothers view his being seen in this special way by their father at this time in their lives? Do they envy him? Do they despise him? Do they love him? Joseph is going to find out, by means of the placement of his special silver cup in the mouth of Benjamin's sack. The question that we are asking this morning is this: "What does Joseph's putting the silver cup in the sack of Benjamin teach us about the love of Jesus Christ for those whom he intends to save from their sins? Joseph's putting the silver cup in the sack teaches those who are looking for saving grace from Jesus Christ, 3 things.

1st of all- It teaches us that Jesus Christ, out of love, will deliberately order the circumstances which will show Him whether our consciences are working in the right way or not.

(Verses 1-10)

You remember that the brothers were all invited to Joseph's house in the last chapter. They were afraid because on the return trip from their first journey down, they had found that someone had returned their money to them in their sacks, along with the grain. I said to you that this is a picture of how Jesus Christ does not want any seeking sinner, who is coming to Him looking for salvation and deliverance from their sins to think that they are going to pay for it. Salvation is all of grace. We do not pay for it with our good works, our best efforts, our best intentions, or with anything else that we can bring to God. When they were invited into Joseph's house, I said to you that this is a picture of the sinner who comes to an Evangelical Bible believing church for the first time, and for the first time they are beginning to understand the riches of the grace of Christ. They sat at their own table and He took servings to them "from before him", but Benjamin's serving was five times as much as any of theirs. It says that they drank and were merry with him. Persons who are worldly, like the Egyptians, sit at their own table and they will not eat food with the Hebrews. Even so, worldly people who come to church to be satisfied with worldly things will not partake of spiritual food with God's people. They will be satisfied with their own ways, rather than those that Christ would teach them.

Now they have finished the meal, and Joseph sends them away home with this rich time of feasting and merriment in their minds. They are very happy men at this point, but they still do not know Joseph, who he is, or what he is seeking to find out about them. He has helped them, but they are still not saved from their sins. It is just as true that many come to church seeking to be religious, seeking to be helped, and they may feast with God's people and enjoy many of the same influences of the Holy Spirit

and rejoice in the good word of God, and yet they go away from church, not really knowing Christ yet. He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother. But they do not understand this as of yet. So what our Lord does, is that He will further order the circumstances in the lives of those who are like this, to test them in regard to whether their consciences are working rightly or not. Our consciences are a witness within ourselves, telling us whether what we are doing or saying is right or wrong; whether we are honest men or not. And sometimes our consciences are performing their function faithfully and commending us where we are right and convicting us when we are wrong. And sometimes our consciences do not perform faithfully. They are silent or they justify us when there is actually still much sin lurking in our hearts. In the life of the person who is being drawn by Christ, or who already knows Christ, their conscience has the work of the Holy Spirit attending the operations of their conscience to help to instruct them whether they should feel guilty or not about what they have done in the past. This work is faithfully performed by the Spirit until we see ourselves rightly; as sinners in the sight of a perfectly holy God. And when we believe in Christ, as saints only by His grace.

I have said to you that this steward of Joseph's is a type of the Holy Spirit in this story. He and Joseph work hand and hand together to arrange the circumstances so that the testing will take place, and also that hopefully the lessons will be learned. So too, when Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit work together in the salvation of souls they begin in the conscience. In Romans 8: 27, it says, "Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Jesus Christ would see a certain sinner saved. He knows what it is going to take. He works in conjunction with the Holy Spirit as He has access to our minds and our consciences. He knows whether we are fully telling the truth or not. He knows and will prove to us where we are innocent and where we are guilty. What Joseph did was to tell his steward to place the silver cup in Benjamin's sack and to pretend then, that he suspected that some one of the brothers had taken it. had stolen it. And then "as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys." And "when they had gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph said to his steward, "Get up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good?' "Is not this the one from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination?" "You have done evil in so doing." Joseph and the steward arranged all these circumstances as a test, but it was a test born out of love to his brothers and especially to his younger brother Benjamin. The Lord

Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit arrange all the circumstances related to our salvation but there is never any sin in their testing of our hearts. You might say to me that you do not think that it was right for Joseph to do the things that he did in this test; to conceal his identity from them, to plant the silver cup as though they had stolen it, and to pursue after them in the person of his steward and then accuse them of something that they had never done. But Joseph had the authority from Pharaoh that, "without his consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. He had the earthly authority to do this, and I believe that he also had been directed by God Himself in this most important matter of how he was to test them and how he was to reveal himself to them.

For Jesus Christ not only has the authority upon the earth to test men's sincerity. He has all power in heaven and earth also to bring the truth of the state of our hearts to light. And He will do so in due time and in accordance with the fulfillment of all of His purposes to make those who are seeking Him, into holy men and women. The first thing that He tests is to see whether our conscience is working rightly or not. Joseph's steward is wise. He will begin the test by bringing to them to a false accusation. He will test their outward sincerity and integrity. "Why have you repaid evil for good?" "Why have you taken the silver cup?" "You have done evil in so doing." Immediately their conscience vindicates them. They defend themselves with good logic. "Why does my Lord say these words?" "Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing." "Look, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks." "How then could we steal silver or gold from your Lord's house?" In the way that they had conducted themselves before Joseph they were blameless in this matter. Their consciences were working in the right way. It gives them great confidence in their speech. "If our heart does not condemn us we have confidence before God." In fact they go too far in their speech, they are so confident that they have done no wrong. One of them says, "With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." This was a very rash statement, but it indicates how self-justifying these men were in their hearts. They were concerned for the way that they were seen by men, more than the way that they were seen by God. When the Holy Spirit perceives this in those whom He is working with, in order to bring them to a better knowledge of themselves, he will do what Joseph's steward did here. Verse 10 - "And he said, 'Now also let it be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and you shall be blameless. The steward tempers the strong words of the brothers with loving righteous judgment. This is not a

matter deserving of death, but rather a lesser punishment." They, however, shall be judged according to their own words. This reminds me very much of what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 12: 36 and 37, "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment." "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Their consciences were working rightly in this particular matter, but not so well in regard to their past sins, which they would rather forget, than deal with. And this leads me to say -

2ndly- that Joseph's putting the silver cup in the sack teaches us that Jesus Christ will so order our circumstances as to show us where our true innocence and guilt lie. (Verses 11-16)

Verse 11 says, "Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. In spiritual terms they are saying, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." "So he searched," verse 12 says. "He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack." "Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city." "Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city." They are innocent in the matter of stealing the cup. They do not believe that Benjamin could have done this; but they cannot clear themselves. Why is this? It is because there are more serious sins, sins in their past in relation to Joseph, in which they are guilty, and they have not owned up to them. In matters related to truth, the truth of what we have done wrong in the past, it is always the right thing to do; to confess it frankly and freely to God, and to own the guilt of it and to let that guilt sink down into our souls, so that we are pleading with God for mercy. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them will have mercy," it says in Proverbs 28: 13. These men were indeed innocent in the matter of stealing Joseph's cup, but they are still very guilty in relation to Joseph's attempted murder, and the sale of him to the Midianite traders. This should show us something which is very important in relation to our own hearts. Remember Jeremiah 17: 9? "The heart is deceitful above all things and is desperately wicked; who can know it?" "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." We may all too easily want to forget our sins of the past and our sinful weaknesses in the present and want to declare our innocence, when God the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ see our hearts clearly, and they know that there are many issues related to sin that remain in our hearts. We may indeed be innocent and trying to do the right

thing now in the present but because we have not sufficiently come to terms with our past sins, we find that God is still dealing with us over them. The brothers have now come to this terrible realization. Verse 14 says, "So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there; and they fell before him on the ground." "And Joseph said to them, 'What deed is this you have done?' "Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?" "Then Judah said, 'What shall we say to my lord?' 'What shall we speak?' "Or how shall we clear ourselves?" "God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and he also with whom the cup was found." This truly, is the beginning of their conversion to Christ. Their eyes have been opened to fear God. They know that they are innocent in this matter of the cup, but they know that God knows that they are guilty of the sins against Joseph long ago.

Have you come to realize the truth that the Lord through His Word is bringing to us this day? It is very important to our coming to know God and having the assurance that we are a true Christian, that we understand that there may be sins which we have committed in the past which may be brought to our mind and our conscience by the Lord at the very time where we perceive ourselves most innocent. Why is this? The brothers did not understand. The reason for it is, that Joseph knew what they were concealing in terms of their past sin. Their confident attitude before, where they declared that they were innocent was inconsistent with the seriousness of their unconfessed sins of the past. The silver cup in the sack proved to them that God knew and He had found out their sin. Judah calls himself and his brothers, "my lord's slaves." And certainly this was best possible thing that he could have said. It showed Joseph that they were willing to bear the reproach of being guilty of the false charge, in order to show the Lord God that they were guilty of the true charge of their sins of long ago. This was the right approach to take for more than selfish reasons. It showed their love and support of Benjamin in this trial as well.

And this is my final point - Joseph's putting the silver cup in Benjamin's sack shows us that Jesus Christ will so order circumstances as to draw out the truth of whether we will lovingly lay down our lives for the brethren. (Verses 17 -34)

The brothers, when they found out that the silver cup was in the sack of Benjamin could have distanced themselves from his predicament. They could have left him with Joseph's steward and have said, "Let him bear the consequences of this." "Either he has sinned and is guilty of this, or he is not, but we cannot help him." "We will leave him to face it himself." "We will go back to Canaan." "Our consciences are clear." But they did not.

They returned to Joseph's house. And when they returned to Joseph's house, they were making a statement of their love for Benjamin by returning with him. They were identifying with his predicament. They believed that he was innocent. But whether he was innocent or whether he was guilty, they thought it right to stand with him. They could have allowed Benjamin to fend for himself, to become this man's slave, but they did not. And the reason that these things did not happen is because time and grace had changed these men. Matthew Henry says, "We cannot judge what men are by what they have been formerly, nor what they will do by what they have done: age and experience may make men wiser and better." "Those that had sold Joseph would not now abandon Benjamin." "The worst may mend in time." There was now a brotherly love in their hearts for Benjamin. "Here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and he also with whom the cup was found." They will all stick together. But Joseph will test them even more. In Verse 17 Joseph says, "Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave." "As for you, go up in peace to your father." Joseph would seek to know how far their love will go. Will they leave Benjamin when they are told that they are off the hook?

And so now, up steps Judah, the spokesman for the group, to explain that their concern is for more than themselves. And it is one of the finest examples of righteous pleading that we find in all the Word of God. As he approaches Joseph he does so with great respect and honor for his office. He not only has not become upset about what he suspects is a false charge, but he shows great respect for Joseph's authority. "O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even like Pharaoh." Then he gently reminds Joseph that he had asked whether they had a father or a brother and that they had told him that Benjamin alone was left of his mother's children, and that his father loved him. He reminds him that he had insisted that Benjamin come down on the next visit, and that he would not see them at all to give them grain unless Benjamin came with them. He explains to Joseph the reaction of his father when he was told that Benjamin must go down with them to purchase the grain. "You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, 'surely he is torn to pieces'; and I have not seen him since." "But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave."

This is where the reality of Judah's faith in God and his repentance over his past sins shines forth. He was the one who concocted the plan to sell Joseph into slavery. But now, he thinks not cruelly, and he does not even

think of himself most; but rather of his father and his sorrows, and how Benjamin's slavery would affect him. "Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, it will happen, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die." "So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave." Christian love is always that which thinks deeply about what our actions, or what the actions of others, will do to those whom we love. Our life is bound up with the lives of other brethren. It wants to prevent the sorrow and grief of mind that comes to them when that which is most precious to them is taken from them. So Judah reveals what Joseph had not known before. (Verse 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 forever.'" And he follows it up with this great demonstration of his love for both Benjamin and his father. "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." "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?"

Let me close this sermon by asking you to think about the nature of Christian love. The love of Christ is something that we learn over time when we are placed in various situations by the Lord which require us to either think about ourselves first, or others before ourselves. Christian love will lead us to the place where we consciously try to put ourselves into the place where we will stand surety and even suffer in the place of the ones that we love, rather than see them suffer. This is something that is only learned when we have the love of Jesus Christ at work in our hearts. Do you have this love at work in your heart this morning? If you do not have it, you will come to have it through faith in Jesus Christ. It is learned by grace when we look at what Jesus Christ did on the cross for us, as sinners. Jesus did not simply lay down his life for the better people among us, but He laid down His life for sinners; those who are unworthy and undeserving of being shown mercy and grace. We as Christians will come to understand more of what it will mean for us to exercise that kind of love as we are placed in circumstances where we will be forced to make a choice even as these brethren were, and even as Judah did. Will we lay down our life for the brethren? Will we be willing to bear the reproach of a false charge against us in order that our repentance over our past sins be fully established? Will we so love our brethren that we demonstrate the surety-love of Christ love in relation to them? This is what will honor and glorify God. I pray the Lord will give each of us the grace to learn this love. This is what we should

plead for in prayer to our Lord Jesus Christ, our greater Joseph. We shall see Joseph reveal himself to his brethren in the next sermon and learn further lessons about coming to know Christ in Chapter 45.