

The gospel according to Joseph pt5 - Genesis 42:1-38

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[0 : 00] Genesis 42, which you can find in the church Bible on page 47. The story of Joseph began with him, a young man of 17, giving dreams by God that one day he would be raised to a position of authority where his family would bow to him.

His brothers, hating that message, hating Joseph as his father's favorite, sell him into slavery. He finds himself sold to Potiphar down in Egypt, and he's falsely accused and he lands in prison. So he spends some 13 years either a slave or a servant or a prisoner before we saw last week at the age of 30.

Pharaoh has a dream, two dreams, about a time of plenty followed by a time of famine. Joseph reveals from God the truth of that dream.

Joseph is now established to the place of prominence in Egypt. The nations are coming to Joseph in order to buy grain because of the famine.

[1 : 20] And now attention turns back to Joseph and back to the other brothers. Chapter 42, verse 1. Let's hear the word of God together.

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, why do you just keep looking at each other? He continued, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so that we may live and not die.

Then 10 of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others because he was afraid that harm might come to him.

So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people.

So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.

[2 : 28] Where do you come from? He asked. From the land of Canaan, they replied, to buy food. Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, you are spies.

You have come to see where our land is unprotected. No, my Lord, they answered, your servants have come to buy food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies. No, he said to them, you have come to see where our land is unprotected. But they replied, your servants were 12 brothers, the sons of one man who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father and one is no more.

Joseph said to them, it's just as I told you, you are spies. And this is how you will be tested. As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number to get your brother. The rest of you will be kept in prison so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies.

[3 : 32] And he put them all in custody for three days. On the third day, Joseph said to them, do this and you will live for I fear God. If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households.

But you must bring your youngest brother to me so that your words may be verified and that you may not die. This they proceeded to do. They said to one another, surely we are being punished because of our brother.

We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen. That's why this distress has come upon us. Reuben replied, didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen. Now we must give an accounting for his blood. They did not realize that Joseph could understand them since he was using an interpreter. He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again.

He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes. Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack and to give them provisions for their journey. [4 : 37] After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. At the place where they stopped for the night, one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack.

My silver has been returned, he said to his brothers. Here it is in my sack. Their hearts sank. And they turned to each other, trembling, and said, What is this that God has done to us? When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, The man who was lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land.

But we said to him, We are honest men. We are not spies. We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more. And the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.

Then the man who was lord over the land said to us, This is how I will know whether you are honest men. Leave one of your brothers here with me and take food for your starving households and go.

[5 : 37] But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you and you can trade in the land. As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man's sack was his pouch of silver.

When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. Their father Jacob said to them, You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more.

And now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me. Then Reuben said to his father, You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you.

Entrust him to my care and I will bring him back. But Jacob said, My son will not go down there with you. His brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.

Amen. This is God's word. Now before we turn to sing again and then to look at this passage, let's once again come to God in prayer. Let's pray.

[6 : 48] It's chapter 42. Genesis 42. We want to think about the truth today that when life is dark, we can look to God's light.

One of the wonderful things about the Bible, think about the picture of the Bible as being like a mirror. One of the things the Bible as a mirror does for us is it gives us an accurate and an honest reflection of human life.

When we read the events, the stories of the Bible, if we let them, we will discover they reveal truths about our own situation, truths about our own hearts and lives.

So Genesis 42, when you look through it, there's really a catalog in this chapter of fears and troubles facing the family of Jacob.

So I want us, as we enter into this story, to think how these troubles and fears perhaps speak into our own stories too.

[8 : 04] The Bible is very honest and Jesus is very honest. When he spoke to his disciples, he said, in this world you will have trouble. One of the great mistakes that can be made when trying to share the Christian faith is the suggestion that I believe in Jesus and all your troubles will go away.

That's not what the Bible says. That's not what Jesus says. In this world you will have trouble. But in the middle of that trouble, in the middle of darkness, the Bible also speaks hope.

The Bible also speaks light and grace. And so I hope that today we'll see that no matter how dark your life is, and by that we might be thinking about failures in our past or in our present.

We might be thinking of guilt or shame that we have lived with perhaps for a long time. It might be fear, fear for the future, fear even about death and facing God.

No matter how dark our life is, in knowing God, in knowing Jesus, there is light. There is hope in this chapter, even for the family of Jacob, if they would have eyes to see it.

[9 : 23] And again, Jesus spoke of that. Jesus said, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world.

And we will see in this chapter, the light for this family is that God's promise is coming true. God's plan is coming about. God's deliverer is in the right place.

But they don't see it just yet. It will take them some time to see how it all resolves. So let's think for a few moments with Jacob and his family here about when life is dark.

I just want to sketch out some of the challenges facing Jacob and the ten brothers. Benjamin's still very much in the background here, but the struggles facing the family of Jacob.

First of all, fears about the future. Verse 1 and 2. Remember the context. There's famine in all the world.

[10:25] There's famine in Canaan. Jacob says to his sons, why do you just keep looking at each other? There's grain in Egypt. Go and buy some so that we may live and not die.

Two ways we see trouble and crisis here. We see the brothers, ten brothers, who are lost, who are clueless, who are hopeless as to finding any solution to the famine that is affecting them.

And then we also hear the words of Jacob, where he makes clear that this is a life or death situation that they find themselves in. This is a real crisis.

That's not our story. But when we look around the world, we know that there are tens of millions of people in our world today where famine and starvation are a very present challenge.

Wondering where that next meal might come from. Wondering how parents will provide for their children. And so one of the things we want to do is we want to pray for the global church as they suffer and as they look to show mercy to those who are suffering.

[11:42] But in our context, where do we have those fears about the future? Maybe for some of us, we are wondering where that next paycheck is going to come from. How are we going to meet all our financial responsibilities?

Perhaps our concern is, what will the doctor say when I have to go and visit again? Perhaps we're thinking, how am I going to pass these studies that I have committed myself to?

And what comes afterwards? What kind of job am I going to find? In so many ways, our future is unknown. Of course it is, because we're not sovereign.

We don't know what's coming next. But that can make us feel weak. It can make us feel fearful. And we like to know, we like to feel in control. Jacob and his sons, they're not the first to have fears for the future.

And they're not the last. Perhaps that's the darkness that you find, that dark cloud hanging over your life today. Perhaps that's how you identify with this story.

[12:51] But it's not just fears about the future. We also see trouble within the family. Verse 4 is one of those verses that highlights it.

Ten brothers get sent to buy grain, but Jacob did not send Benjamin with the others because he was afraid that harm might come to him. So again, at the beginning of the Joseph story, we discover the problem of favoritism and how that is split apart, these brothers.

And we can still see that divide is there and that brings problems always. But we also see, fundamentally as well, a lack of trust between Jacob and these ten brothers.

He doesn't send Benjamin because he doesn't trust that they will be able to care for him. He doesn't trust in their character to look after this son that he loves.

There is clearly significant problems at the heart of this family. And then you flip to the end of our story, verse 36, and we see the heartache here at the center of family life.

[14:02] As Jacob says, you have deprived me of my children. Everything is against me. Notice where he lays the blame. He says, it's your fault.

You, ten brothers, you've cost me two sons. I wonder today, can we identify with the reality that family brings with it much joy, but also pain and fear and trouble?

As parents, we have worries and fears for our children about their friendships and relationships, about the influences on their lives.

If we are Christians, we want them to have faith that would be strong and that would be able to persevere. We have worries and fears for our parents, perhaps as they grow older and they wrestle with illness of various kinds.

We worry for siblings who perhaps have got themselves in difficult situations. Again, as Christians, perhaps we have a particular heartache because of those who in our family have no interest in knowing anything about Jesus, those who have walked away from the faith, who are spiritually prodigals.

[15:29] Maybe as you think about your family, your household as you were growing up or in your present circumstances, you knew the pain of dysfunction. You can identify with Jacob's family here, with having family members who you weren't able to trust, who you couldn't trust to care for you, and you know the pain that that brings.

Maybe many of us know that those we love the most are also the ones who cause us the most pain and can bring the most sadness.

So again, Jacob is not on his own in this experience. Perhaps in our grief, we're wondering where can we find peace? Where can we find comfort in all that's going on in our families?

But that's not the only trouble this family is facing. There's also the very real problem of guilt and shame. So the brothers, they go down to Egypt and they meet with Joseph.

They don't recognize him. Joseph sets them a test. He's going to keep one behind and he's going to send the rest home so they can bring Benjamin. How do they respond to this test?

[16:42] It's very telling how they respond to this test. Look at verse 21. They said to one another, surely we are being punished because of our brother.

We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen. That's why this distress has come upon us. And then Reuben's word in verse 22, we must give an accounting for his blood.

20-something years later, their minds are drawn instantly back to the way that they treated Joseph. This is why this test has come.

This is why we're facing this hardship because of how we treated our brother. So 20 years on, that sense of guilt and shame, the lies and deception is still raw in their hearts.

They were tempted by the bait 20 years before. Well, let's get rid of the favorite son. Let's get rid of the dreamer. But they didn't see the devil's trap.

[17:52] They didn't recognize that they would then live the next 20 years having to deal with that sense of guilt and shame and moral responsibility for selling their brother into slavery.

Perhaps you can identify with that sense of regret sucked in by the short-term gain of sin for them. Well, let's make some money and let's get rid of the problem, brother. And then having to live with the long-term pain. Trapped in that prison of past failure.

Trapped in that prison of regret and bitterness. I wonder today, does past sin, failure, regret define your life and experience?

Just as it does for the 10 brothers in our story. Condemnation is something that we can heap on ourselves and it can weigh us down and it is real.

[18:59] Like those huge bags of luggage that you see people carrying around when they go on their holidays. Have you found how to unload that luggage of condemnation?

Do you know how to lose it and to be free from it? Perhaps that's your situation. Perhaps that's how you identify with this story.

Leading on from that, there is another trouble facing these brothers. Another fear that's weighing on them and it's the fear of the judgment of God.

In verse 22, Reuben has already alluded to it when he talks about giving and accounting for Joseph's blood. But look at verse 28.

When they discover that silver has been returned into the sack of grain, their hearts sink.

[20:04] They are trembling and they say, what is this that God has done to us? Why do they not celebrate?

Hey, we've got some food for free. We've got some money in our sacks. This is great news. This is a great providence. No, they have guilty consciences.

Here they are. Put yourself in their shoes. The last time we hear of them on a journey and returning to their father, they have sold their brother Joseph and they have lined their pockets with silver.

Here they are again on another journey, returning back to their father. They've left behind another brother and they have money in their pockets once again.

If you know Shakespeare and you know Macbeth, maybe we can think of Lady Macbeth having killed the king. She finds herself riddled with guilt and constantly washing her hands to try and remove the guilt from them.

[21:10] To these brothers, this silver is blood money. Because they remember how they treated Joseph. The Bible says, be sure your sins will find you out.

And they're feeling that weight of conviction and they're living with the fear of the judgment of God. Now we will see by God's mercy, he is convicting them in order to bring spiritual change. And we'll see that especially in the life of Judah. But that conviction and that fear of judgment, it is part of that process. I can still remember the first time I really had a sense of the weight of God's judgment.

Being brought up in the church all my days. But it wasn't until just before sort of my teenage years that I had that sense that God broke into my story to reveal to me in a very personal and a real way that all was not well between me and God.

I had thought that my good efforts would surely be good enough. Because I wasn't like my classmates. I didn't do major sins. So I thought.

[22 : 30] But when I felt that weight of judgment for the first time, I realized that even though I thought I was good, compared to God's perfect standard, I was not. And because of that, I deserved God's judgment.

I deserved to face eternity in hell. That God, as he stood, was my judge. He was not my father in heaven. And that was a stark and a shocking revelation.

But for me, that was also the turning point towards receiving Jesus dying on the cross as good news for me. That was a message that had washed over me.

Because I didn't really grasp my need of it until I felt that realization of my sin and my guilt and the reality of the judgment of God. I wonder if that's where some of us are today.

I wonder as we look at this story, do we recognize in ourselves fears and troubles? You know, we have catalogued them in brief here. And if we were to stop here, great, the Bible is really honest.

[23 : 36] And it shows that we all have trouble and we all suffer and we all live with guilt. That would be a terrible place to stop, wouldn't it? It would be like going to the doctor and getting the diagnosis, but not hearing about the cure or the treatment plan.

Praise God, the Bible isn't just a mirror that reflects our troubles. It's also the light of God's grace for us. So it's important for us to see this.

It's important for us to see that Jacob is somebody who'd received rich promises from God. He has been told that God will bless him, God will bless his family, and his family will be God's means of blessing the world.

So he has that on the one hand, but he's also experiencing significant pain and trouble at the same time. And that's something we need to be really careful to stress.

It's so important that we understand that faith in Jesus is not a silver bullet to take all our troubles away. That the Christian life still brings with it trouble and it brings suffering.

[24 : 49] So for us as Christians, how do you and I know that God loves us? How do you know that God loves you?

It's not in the first instance by looking to your experiences. It's not from looking at our providences, because sometimes those situations and providences are hard.

And if that's all we had, it might cause us to question, does God still love me? We don't look there, we look to the cross. And when we look to the cross, we see the extent of God's love for his people. In the father being willing to send his son, in the son being willing to come and die in our place for our sins, to give us forgiveness and eternal life. So we look to the cross to know God loves us, not to our experiences.

That's our hope. If we're not a Christian here today, if you're here with worries, if you're here with a sense of guilt and shame and fear, there is good news. The Bible doesn't just expose the problem, it also offers the solution.

[25 : 56] It promises salvation. There is salvation promised even in Genesis 42. And there is hope for you and for me, if we have eyes to see it.

And the hope is that God has raised up his rescuer. So having seen the reality that life is dark, when life is dark, we are always being invited to look to God's light.

So this story, we place this story in a wider story. We place it in the story of God's salvation. We place it in God's plan to use this family to bring blessing to the world.

We also place it in the story of Joseph. Joseph was given that dream that he would be raised up, that his family would bow to him, that God had established him as his chosen deliverer.

And so part of his journey into Egypt, hard as it was, ultimately is for good, good in God's plan, good for his family. So how does Genesis 42 offer light to Jacob's family?

[27 : 06] And by extension, how can it offer light to us? Well, we need to see Joseph's position, don't we? We need to look at verses five to seven.

So we saw the tension for this family. What if the family doesn't survive? If this family doesn't survive, then God's blessing won't come. God's word won't come true. But there is good news for these brothers.

Israel's sons. Israel, covenant name, reminder of God's promises. Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain. Verse six, now Joseph was the governor of the land.

So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. Here very simply is the good news.

God's promise has come true. That prophetic announcement through the dream 20 years earlier has come to pass.

[28 : 11] God's plan of saving and blessing will go on. That their evil deeds as brothers doesn't stop it. Prison, slavery doesn't stop it.

God has his plan. God will bless. And it's good news for these brothers. You know, we speak about the value of having friends in high places, don't we?

Someone who can speak for us. Somebody who can represent us. Someone who has the ear of the person who's in charge. Well, they have a brother in the highest place who will save them.

And by extension will save the world. Joseph is God's man in God's place. He is for them.

At this stage in the story, they don't see that clearly. They only see darkness and fears. They can't recognize their brother. They don't see God working in their story to get their attention just yet.

[29 : 18] They fail to see the light that God, as he promised, has raised up their brother to be their source of salvation. But they will. They will. And I wonder, as we close, have we got to that place?

Have we come to see where our salvation lies? Have we come to see Jesus, the one who is raised up for us? Because we need to connect this story with the story of Jesus.

We need to see Jesus is our brother who's raised up for our salvation. Let's think again about the journey of Jesus. He left his father's home in glory to become one of us.

And over time, as he announced that he was the king, bringing the kingdom, and people should repent and believe, he was rejected. He was hated. He was sold by his brothers.

But in God's plan, in God's providence, he is raised up. How is Jesus raised up? He is raised up in glory, dying on a cross as our Savior before he's then raised at the resurrection and then raised to glory in heaven so that Jesus truly is our brother in the highest place.

[30 : 35] He is the one we need to look to. And it was Jesus who said, I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to me. Jesus understood that his raising on the cross was the source of hope for the world, for you and me today.

How is that hope? How is Jesus raised to die on a cross hope? When we think about the things that trouble us, we think about our guilt and shame.

Here is the answer. Here is the answer to that condemnation that we so often face and feel in our own lives. When we're honest with ourselves, when we're honest about our standing before God, we know that we can never be good enough for God.

And we know that we can never atone for our past sin and failure. But when we look to Jesus dying on the cross, we understand that Jesus did. He has made full atonement for the sins of his people. That by ourselves, you and I could never earn the love and acceptance of God, our Father. Our obedience could never be that good. But Jesus did on our behalf, through his perfect obedience, through his willingly dying as our substitute.

[31 : 53] when our faith is in him, we can be loved and accepted. We can be brought into the family of God. There is good news for us.

There is hope for us that Jesus is raised up on the cross for us if we will confess our sin and if we will trust in Jesus and what he's come to do for us in dying on the cross.

And there's also hope for you and for me as we remember that Jesus has now been raised up and is seated in glory. What does that journey, what does that movement mean for us? It means that the victory has been won.

Jesus conquered Satan's sin and death. Those realities no longer hold fear for the people of God. Now Jesus has won that victory for his people. Now he is ruling in heaven as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And as he sits on the throne, he is pleading our cause. He is praying for us. He is the basis for our acceptance.

[32 : 58] His sacrifice is how we can pray and call God our Father. His sacrifice, his pleading our cause, his being our mediator is the way we can know the joy of being adopted into the family of God.

And this Jesus who's now raised up in glory, he will return in glory to bring his people home to be with him one day. So that whatever our trouble today, the raised up Jesus is our hope and our comfort.

He is the answer to all the longings and all the hurtings of our heart. So I wonder, have you seen him yet? Have you seen Jesus with the eyes of faith?

Have you seen him as the son of God? The one who loved us and gave himself for us. The one who has come as God's suffering servant to die in our place for our sins, to give us that gift of forgiveness and new life.

And if you have seen that, have you responded? Have you responded to his loving invitation? Have you asked him to forgive your sin?

[34 : 19] Are you trusting him to be your Lord and Savior? Savior? Jesus said, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

Let's pray together.