

# A silver cup

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Date: 25 November 2018

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[0:00] with a history, traditions, culture, language and behaviours which are so very different to their own past and they're almost all unable to read or write and how are they going to know and remember the stories of God's ways with them from the past?

By hearing the stories again and again and when, as it is thought, Moses, the one member who had been educated in Pharaoh's palace eventually wrote down the Genesis account it was probably 400 years since Joseph had first come to Egypt the family of Jacob had been telling each other the stories of creation, the fall, the nations then of God's call and promise to Abraham and Isaac and now in Egypt this family would become a nation and the stories that once could be told in just a few tents in Canaan now needed to be told to a thousand gatherings of people who eventually became slaves in danger of losing their identity and God in his wisdom spoke to them by the stories and not just any stories but stories full of repetition and deliberate connection so that the content and meaning would never get lost and the jigsaw picture of God's unchanging purposes could be recognised they're family stories and every family has their own stories

I'll let you into the secret of some of my family's stories so my grandmother, she always had a cigar on Christmas Day it was absolutely shocking why is she just a revolting thing, a cigar? she'd always have that, that was an absolute tradition and that's sort of part of our family family storyline you've all got those sort of stories in your own families that you remember and these are family stories the old and the young all ages and situations they gather in their family groups and it's a solemn responsibility given to the storyteller to tell the stories so that all might hear and remember year after year and generation after generation and what vivid stories where people's characters warts and all are revealed there's no airbrushing is there in the book of Genesis they make good and bad life choices there is tension, there's pathos there is disappointment and there is humour if you were sitting in a family group of Israelites hearing the stories of Joseph and his brothers there would be audible response yes not again there would be knowing nudges people catching one another's eyes a smile, a frown, a tear all caught up in the storyline and we need to read the Bible stories as we would read any stories catching the mood understanding the characters carefully watching the storyline unfold of course we believe that these Bible stories are wonderfully invested in Holy Spirit truth but they're not robotic and they're not unemotional there is a way of reading the Bible which appears to be just like that a good example I think and I'm going to probably tread on a few toes when I mention this a good example I think is the reading of the Christmas story in the radio broadcast of the nine lessons and carols from King College Cambridge on Christmas Eve every year it's hugely popular and an essential part of some people's Christmas experience but it seems that all who are tasked to read the Bible passages have gone on some kind of course that requires their speaking to strip the words of any kind of real life content do you know what I'm talking about when there's a kind of a monotone dun dun dun no texture no change of inflection no pauses it is just perfect but lifeless they might be reading the telephone directory but the Christmas story is absolutely full of real life and we're surely meant to experience that and one more thing about stories is that we're hardly satisfied to read a page and leave it at that so my grandchildren seem to want a whole series of admittedly rather short books to be read at bedtime and not only that but to have a story repeated two or three times we might feel a bit daunted by reading two chapters of Genesis tonight but that's probably because we're used to reading very small sections of the Bible but it's very hard to follow the story if you deal with it paragraph by paragraph so voice permitting

I'm going to do my best to read Genesis 44 and 45 tonight as a story God's story involving people like you and me now look out for repetitions Genesis is full of repetitions something is said by a

character in one chapter and many verses later the same thing is reported speech to another character and sometimes there are subtle changes in the repetitions that reflect how the story is unfolding look out for silver there's going to be a lot of silver here Joseph was sold as a slave for 20 shekels of silver Moses would later establish this as a cost of redemption of a male adult dedicated to the Lord 1500 years later Jesus would as in all things identify with us as he humbled himself to become a sin offering via the betrayal price of 30 pieces of silver and there's a cup that would have meant something to Joseph as his life involved

[6:57] Pharaoh's cup bearer and now he had his own cup but it ends up in different hands so look out for repetitions silver and a cup so please turn with me to Genesis chapter 44 I've tried hard to find the theme through the silver cup but I haven't made enough of that apart from what I've already said to you about the repetition of silver but I do think there is something very important that comes out from these two chapters and indeed the preceding chapters as well and I want to speak tonight about what is happening with Jacob's family we could go right back to chapter 41 verse 57 where we read that the famine was severe in all the world and from that particular moment in the Genesis account up to chapter 45 verse 3 when Joseph makes himself known to his brothers well the story might have taken us anywhere in this famine ravaged world the famine was severe in all the world but here's the wonder of the Bible rather than casting its net so wide to embrace the nations the story sits simply with just one family the family of Jacob and what happens to them so so what what is happening

I want to just raise the idea of karma you know what karma is it's quite a sort of a well understood thought process in Hinduism and Buddhism and goes back to the mists of time good intent and good deeds contribute to good karma and future happiness while bad intent and bad deeds contribute to bad karma and future suffering and for those strands of religion that believe in reincarnation then the thought of my bad deeds in this world being replicated in some dreadful reincarnation or form is a big deterrent who was telling me the other day how it was safe to walk around Nathan was it and you were saying something along the lines of that that it was in India yeah just in case they ended up being born as a worm the next life yeah interesting thought isn't it could be an aspect of policing in Brighton cause and effect in the biggest sense the family of Jacob is suffering and is desperate more personally each of the brothers and the father goes through a period of personal suffering does this all stem from the bad intent and bad actions of 22 years ago Jacob insensitively favouring one brother beyond all the others eight brothers conspiring to kill their brother Joseph and making do the end with selling him into slavery

Reuben the firstborn trying to save Joseph's life but apparently compromising and joining in the deceitful story of what had happened when they told their father Jacob Judah the second born saving Joseph's life but suggesting slavery instead he too compromising in deceit to Jacob and the false mourning that all the brothers engaged in with their distraught father they're all guilty aren't they Judah also getting soiled with unrighteous behaviour to his daughter-in-law Tamar and then there is the youngest Benjamin inevitably caught up in all the others misbehaviour is even Joseph entirely innocent in his dream telling not once but twice to his brothers and did he need to speak and if so to speak then and if then to speak to everyone no one comes out of the story very well and in the succeeding months and years everyone suffers reaching a peak of trouble and trial and the Bible has something to say to it and I put on there Hosea 8 verse 7 which reads they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind and Galatians 6 7 says do not be deceived God is not mocked a man reaps what he sows perhaps that's something we do need to reckon with tonight as unpleasant and unpalatable as it may be this is the way God's world is hardwired there is a connection between what we do and the outcomes but the thought of cause and effect isn't sufficient to explain what's going on here the Bible God's word deliberately highlights the active role of Joseph in what happens to the rest of his family remember the dreams that Joseph had 22 years ago when a young man of 17

[13:30] I don't think Joseph ever forgotten 11 years ago he had rightly interpreted two dreams from other people and 9 years ago he'd rightly interpreted two dreams from Pharaoh each time the stakes grew higher and

each time the interpretation came to pass so where did that leave Joseph's pair of dreams of 22 years ago unfulfilled but surely to be fulfilled then for the first time in those 22 years he sees his brothers again please turn to Genesis 42 verse 7 as soon as

Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them 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 it all comes flooding back the sight of his brothers reminds him of his dreams more than that the reminder of his dreams is a call for action on his part there are dreams to be fulfilled but he has a role to play just as he ended the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams with a specific plan of suggested action so

Joseph sees that this is now the time for him to act and we read on and he said to them you are spies you have come to see where our land is unprotected it's a rather extraordinary statement he knew they weren't spies but he's wanting to find out their reaction to the provocation to test their character are these the same kinds of brothers he'd had 22 years ago has anything changed does Joseph have a well developed strategy like a chess player I don't think so it was on the hoof one set of events leading to another he plays his role but he's not in charge how could he be with so many aspects of the story of the next two chapters were entirely beyond his control in fact

Joseph is having a hard time dealing with his own emotions as well as caring for the welfare of a world which is coming to him for famine relief so the role of Joseph is clearly there but it's not enough to explain what happens to the brothers so we come to the hand of God for the truest answer we may note Joseph's clear understanding that the hand of God was in everything in chapter 45 there were four clear statements that Joseph made one that God was saving lives two that God was preserving his remnant and saving their lives three that although the brothers had sent Joseph off to slavery in Egypt God's hand was in it all and four that God had made Joseph lord over Egypt so God is at work in all these things and at all times bringing something wonderful out of wickedness and wretchedness but there is more the fulfillment of those four statements about God could have been done immediately after chapter 42 verse 6 now Joseph was the governor of the land the one who sold grain to all his people so when

Joseph's brothers arrived they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground which feels remarkably similar to the dreams he'd already had and you might say at that particular point well this dream is getting fulfilled but we have to wait until chapter 45 and verse 3 for things to reach their proper final condition and there's a lot of heartache a lot of anguish a lot of upset a lot of frustration and disappointment that takes place between 42 verse 6 and 45 verse 3 there are many months to pass before all is in its right place because there is heart work to be done dealing with famine and dream fulfillment are wonderful works of

[19:21] God but there is something more amazing and even more wonderful which is a changed heart and this is the painstaking work of God that occupies the rest of chapter 42 43 and 44 the light begins to dawn in chapter 42 verse 21 where the brothers said to one another surely we're being punished because of our brother we saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life but we wouldn't listen that's why this distress has come upon us have you ever said that to one another in the last 22 years what they say now is in response to a common feeling that they have that there is punishment that's coming their way and that

God's hand is upon that and he's bringing out into the open their behavior of 22 years before 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 remember they don't know they've just seen Joseph but God brings back to their memory a wickedness of 22 years ago it's just a start but it's a wonderful start then they find the silver that they had taken to buy food returned in their sacks and they see the hand of God in this strange event chapter 42 verse 28 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 blessing it was that they saw the hand of

God in that rather than just an accident something that just had occurred by some strange providence they're beginning to notice that stuff is happening which is not just coincidence but is God's handiwork and over the next months they have experiences of hope and despair

bewilderment and confusion and they're being humbled and their hearts are being softened Reuben puts the life of his own sons on the line Judah takes personal responsibility for Benjamin and offers to become a slave in Egypt they learn to face and tell the truth to turn their back on deceit and lies to take personal responsibility for their actions and to take responsibility for others we're given these telling words in Genesis 44 when the brothers are forced to return to Joseph's house following the discovery of Joseph's silver cup Joseph pretends astonishment that the brothers thought they could get away with the theft and then look at 44 verse 16 what can we say to my

Lord Judah replied what can we say how can we prove our innocence God has uncovered your servants guilt of course they were guiltless in the matter of robbery of Joseph's silver cup but horribly guilty in respect of their robbery of Joseph's life by forcing him into slavery and covering it up for 22 years the silver cup incident is just the vehicle to clinch the reality of felt guilt in their lives this is the work of God not just to change a circumstance but to change a life and what lengths God has to go to to change the hearts of these brothers you might think this was all unnecessary let bygones be bygones why rake over the past especially when it's uncomfortable and least the feelings of guilt and indeed if you're a modern person you might well say the last thing I need in my life is guilt but in

God's eyes the first thing you lead in your life is guilt this is exactly what God needs to do to change their hearts and this is the work of God today so I'm making an application here you too have a story to tell like these brothers because it's your story we have all things in our past and present that are wrong in God's sight and the record gets longer and bigger because God knows it all from the very beginning there have been consequences for all of us because of our past actions but perhaps God is also at work in your life story to bring you to a point of realization that you have not just made a few mistakes but actually done what is wrong in God's sight and rather than justify yourself or blame others or complain about your circumstances you might humble yourself confess your fault and ask for God's forgiveness turning your back on your old way of thinking and living which blocked out God and his ways and come to your senses and embrace a life which has him at the centre and the goal and this is what the Bible calls repentance repentance and we all need to come to this point and understanding if we are to come to truly know the God who has made us and if all this seems amazing then how amazing it is that God should send his own son from heaven to earth to live and die on a cross on our behalf to pay all the punishment for all of our sins so that we might not go to our graves unforgiven and facing

[26:26] God's terrible judgment but released into life eternal with the God who made us for himself amen Jesus who saves us from the guilt and power of sin we have a great song to sing at the end the number is remind me Phil ending ending ending!

ending ending ending ending