

PM Genesis 42:1-38 Life of Joseph: Visit of Brothers

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[0 : 00] Well friends, good evening. We've come to another study in the life of Joseph. This time considering this first incident where Joseph's brothers appear before him, where they come and they seek to buy grain off him.

We find that recorded for us in Genesis 42. And we're going to read the whole of the chapter now. Genesis 42 is beginning to read at verse 1. This is the word of God.

When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, Why do you look at one another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt.

Go down and buy grain for us there so that we may live and not die. So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him.

Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land.

[1 : 04] And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them. But he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them.

Where do you come from, he said. They said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.

And he said to them, You are spies. You have come to see the nakedness of the land. They said to him, No, my lord. Your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men.

Your servants have never been spies. He said to them, No. It is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see. And they said, We, your servants, are twelve brothers. The sons of one man in the land of Canaan.

And behold, the youngest is this day with our father. And one is no more. But Joseph said to them, It is as I said to you, you are spies. By this you shall be tested.

[2 : 00] By the life of Pharaoh you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you and let him bring your brother. While you remain confined that your words may be tested. Whether there is truth in you.

Or else by the life of Pharaoh surely you are spies. And he put them all together 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 remain confined where you are in custody. And let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your household. And bring your youngest brother to me so your words will be verified.

And you shall not die. And they did so. Then they said to one another, In truth we are guilty concerning our brother. And that when we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen, this is why this distress has come upon us.

And Reuben answered then, Did I not tell you not to sit against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood. They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them.

[3 : 07] Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain. And to replace every man's money in his sack and to give them provisions for the journey.

This was done for them. Then they loaded their donkeys with grain and departed. And as one of them opened a sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack.

He said to his brothers, My money has been put back. Here it is in the mouth of my sack. At this their hearts failed them. And they turned trembling to one another, saying, What is this that God has done to us?

When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, The man, the Lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. But we said to him, We are honest men.

We have never been spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. Then the man, the Lord of the land, said to us, By this I shall know that you are honest men.

[4 : 11] Leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies, but honest men. And I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.

As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to them, You have bereaved me of my children.

Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more. And now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me. Then Reuben said to his father, Kill my two sons if I do not bring them back to you.

Put them in my hands, and I will bring them back to you. But he said, My son shall not go down with you. For his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring my grey hairs down with sorrow to shore.

Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let us turn to the Lord in prayer. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would be with us now.

[5 : 20] We pray that as we come to this passage that we would have insight and understanding. We pray that we would have clarity of thought, clarity of expression, clarity of ideas. May we see the big picture that is here.

May you and the Holy Spirit minister mightily to us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's have Genesis 42 open in front of us.

Genesis 42. And we'll think about the whole of the chapter. This chapter where the brothers go to visit Joseph for the first time. I was watching the Lego movie the other day with the boys.

For those of you who aren't familiar with the Lego movie, it follows the exploits of Emmett, the special. The one who can save the day. The one who will be the hero of the story.

His opponent in the film is a person called Lord Business who controls the city of Bricksburg. However, not everyone in Bricksburg sees Lord Business as evil.

[6 : 22] He is the man who keeps the town in supply of food and employment and entertainment. He is the one who controls everything. To some he is good, but in reality he is evil.

And here as we come to Genesis 42, we almost see the opposite of that, don't we? We almost see the mirror image of that, don't we? Because as the brothers come to Joseph, what's the constant refrain? What's the constant report that they bring?

That the man spoke harshly to us. For them, Joseph looks evil, but in reality he is good. He looks like he is speaking evil to them, but in reality he is testing them.

He is seeing whether they have learned their lesson from how they dealt with him or not. He looks evil, but in reality he is going to save their life. I want to think about three things together this evening.

You see three things from this passage. Firstly, we want to see how the brothers bow before their brother. Secondly, we want to see how the brothers remember their brother.

[7 : 27] And then thirdly, and finally, we'll see this great reluctance on the part of Jacob to send their brother. He won't send Benjamin on this journey for fear that something might happen to him.

So firstly, then we want to think about bowing before their brother. Bowing before their brother. And we see that in verses 1 to 14. As we do, every time we come to this life story of Joseph, we want to recap where we are.

We want to remember the things that we saw so far in Joseph's life. We started out by thinking about his birth. We saw how Jacob had these two wives. Well, four wives by the time we got to the end of the chapter.

But we saw how Jacob had these two wives primarily, Rachel and Leah. We saw how he loved Rachel but hated Leah. We saw that Joseph was the son of Rachel.

And the conflict that continued to cause throughout the rest of the family history, if you like. Joseph clearly was his father's favorite. And this caused all of Leah's children to hate him, essentially.

[8 : 28] They hate him so much to the point that they planned to kill him but eventually settle for selling him to a group of traitors who are passing by. Whilst in slavery, we saw Joseph come in to the service of Potiphar.

When in Potiphar's house, we saw him rise through the ranks to the point where Potiphar didn't worry about anything but the food that he ate. Because it was under Joseph's control. Finally, we saw Joseph being accused of rape and sent to prison.

Falsely accused of rape and sent to prison. Again in prison, we saw Joseph rise through the ranks. Again in prison, we saw how Joseph succeeded in everything he turned his hand to. He was in charge, in effect, of the prison.

We saw his gifts for interpreting dreams that led ultimately to interpreting dreams for Pharaoh. Which led ultimately to where we left him last week. Which was as Joseph as prime minister of the land of Egypt.

Joseph as second in command, really, in effect, of the land of Egypt. Joseph who was in charge of contingency planning for the famine that was coming. We finished last week by noticing the ominous words of verse 57 of chapter 41.

[9 : 38] Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain because the famine was severe over all the earth. Not in Egypt because of the wisdom of God.

Not in Egypt was the famine that severe because of the wisdom of Joseph. Not in Egypt was the famine that severe because they'd stored up grain. Because they knew that the famine was coming. And that explains what we read in verse 1 of chapter 42.

That explains where we are then as we come to verse 1 of chapter 42. Because Jacob learns that there's grain in Egypt. Jacob learns that there's food in Egypt. Jacob learns that there is a possibility of life in Egypt.

And he says to his sons, look effectively, verse 1, Look, look, look, what are you still doing here? Why are you sitting here looking at each other? Why are you not taking action? Why are you not doing something to help alleviate the famine?

Why don't you go and get yourselves off to Egypt? Why don't you go and buy some food there so that we might not perish with hunger? And notice what we read in verse 3 though.

[10 : 40] Jacob is still playing favourites. What are we told in verse 3? So 10 of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers. For he feared that harm might happen to him.

10 of the brothers go. Joseph's already in Egypt, albeit unknown to the rest of his family. So that takes us up to 11. Which leaves this one brother behind. Benjamin, the youngest.

The one, of course, who Rachel had died giving birth to. The one who's kept behind. The one who's kept back. Just the same way that we saw that Joseph was kept back whenever the brothers went out to pasture the flocks.

Having already lost Joseph, Jacob wasn't going to risk losing Benjamin as well. Having already, he thought, lost Joseph, he wasn't going to take any chances with Benjamin. And so Benjamin stays behind. The rest of the brothers are sent.

The rest of the brothers are told to go and get the grain. But Benjamin's kept behind. Still playing favorites.

[11 : 47] Still looking after and loving some members of the family more than others. We notice verse 6. Joseph has this official title, we're told.

Now, Joseph was governor over the land. He's the one in charge of the food. He's the one in charge of selling the food. He's the one who the people come to if they're looking to buy food.

He's the one who keeps an eye on the stockpile. He's the one who decides how much grain is going to be sold for. His brothers come and bow themselves before him with their faces to the ground, we're told.

Verse 6. Sound familiar? Sound like something we've seen before? Well, remember those dreams of all those years ago? Remember those dreams that got him into such trouble with his brothers?

Remember those dreams that caused so much tension within the family? Well, here they are being fulfilled. And there's lovely poetry, even in the way that the dream is fulfilled, isn't there?

[12 : 53] Remember what the dream was? What was the dream? That they were binding sheaves of grain in the field. And that Joseph's stock stood upright. And all of the other ears of grain came and bowed themselves before Joseph's stock.

And now I hear what's happening. Here the brothers have come to buy grain off Joseph. Here the brothers are bowing themselves before him, looking to buy grain off him.

There's a lovely poetry. There's a lovely symmetry in even that. It's a reminder to us that God always keeps his promises.

God always keeps his word. For Joseph and the brothers at the time, as Joseph had that dream, it would have been unthinkable. They couldn't have imagined any situation they would be in where they would be bowing before their younger brother, worshipping him.

And yet God always keeps his promises. Because here, a few years later, here they are, bowing before him, seeking to buy grain off him. Think about those men who crucified the Lord Jesus Christ.

[14 : 02] It would seem unthinkable to them that but three days later he would be raised from the dead. It would seem unthinkable to them that he would be the saviour of mankind from sin.

And yet, he was. Maybe this evening think about yourself. So mired in sin, so consciously aware of that sin that clings so closely, so consciously aware of that sin that entangles so easily.

The question on your mind might be, well, how on earth am I ever going to make it to heaven? Sometimes the question might even be, well, how on earth am I going to make it through this next day?

Well, you will. Why? Because God always keeps his promises. The one, if you are in Christ this evening, the one who has begun a good work in you, the one who has started a good work in you, will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ.

God always keeps his promises. But there's also a more difficult side to that, isn't there?

[15 : 14] Because we have that great assurance as Christians that if God has begun a good work in us, he will carry it on to completion. But there's also the side that God has set a day of judgment and it is coming.

God always keeps his promises. Now, Joseph knows who they are. He recognizes them, verse 7. He knows who they are.

He knows that they're his brothers. But he treats them like strangers and he speaks roughly to them. Now, it seems a bit harsh, doesn't it? It seems a bit vindictive, doesn't it? Why not, as soon as he sees them, run and embrace them?

Why not, as soon as he sees them, kiss them as we'll find out that he'll do later on? Well, as I said, I think he wants to figure out if they've learned their lesson or not. He wants to see how things are with the rest of the family.

He wants that reassurance. He wants to know what's happening. And so he speaks roughly to them. One of our children is fiercely, fiercely competitive.

[16 : 15] I won't tell you which one it is. But sometimes I wait the game that's being played in the favor of his siblings. Now, before you go ringing social services, I'll make a claim that I'm some sort of horrible, abusive father.

It has a purpose. I want to teach him a lesson. I want to show him something. I want to show him fundamentally that being competitive is fine. Trying your best is fine.

And if at the end of that, if you've tried your best, and you've been competitive, and someone else has been better than you, then you shake their hand and you move on. So every so often I check on his progress by waiting the game in favor of his brothers or sisters.

Every so often I check his progress by making him lose effectively. So Joseph here is checking his brothers' progress.

He's seeing how far they've come by speaking roughly to them, by being harsh with them. Where are you from? What do you want? He says. We are brothers come from the land of Canaan.

[17 : 29] We are brothers who have come to buy food. The famine is severe in the land of Canaan, and we are ten brothers who have come seeking to buy some grain. And Joseph says, No, no, no, no, no.

No, no, no. You are spies. You've come to check out if this is a good time to invade the land or not. You've come to check out the weakness of the land. You've come to see whether you can take it over or not. I know who you are.

And this continues back and forward. Back and forward. You are spies. We are brothers. You are spies. We are brothers. You are spies. We are brothers. And they respond, verse 10, finally, by saying, Well, look, no.

We've come to buy food. Verse 11. We're all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies. Now, of course, Joseph knows at this point that they're not honest men.

Joseph knows at this point that they've lied to their father about him. Joseph knows at this point that they're not honest men. So this continues until verse 13 where they say, Look, we, your servants, are twelve brothers.

[18 : 34] The youngest is this day with our father. One is no more. And one is no more. It's a reminder to us of how easy it is to downplay sin in our lives, isn't it?

The brothers have done something terrible. The brothers have sold off their brothers into slavery. And yet they say to this Egyptian ruler, they say, Look, we are honest men.

They're downplaying the level of their sin. They say to this Egyptian ruler, Look, one of our brothers is no more. They're downplaying the level of their sin.

They say we're honest men. Well, no, they weren't. We might today say, Well, we might say, Well, we're good people. We're honest, hardworking, good people, decent folk.

It might be true, friends. It might be. But unless this evening our sin is forgiven in Jesus Christ, unless we know him as our Lord and Savior, then all of our good works are as filthy rags.

[19 : 43] We can't downplay our sin in the face of a holy, righteous God. We can't minimize our sin when the standard is perfection. We can't downplay our sin comparing ourselves to a holy, righteous God.

Secondly then, we want to think about this remembrance of their brother. We've seen them bowing before their brother. But secondly, we want to see this remembrance of their brother. And we see that in verses 15 through 25.

Verses 15 through 25, the remembrance of their brother. So Joseph comes up with this test. It's backward and forward. It's going on. You're spies. No, we're brothers. You're spies. No, we're brothers. And so Joseph comes up with this test.

Verse 15. You shall not go out from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. This is how I'll know you're not spies. This is how you can prove the veracity of your words if you bring your youngest brother here.

One of you can go home. One of you can fetch him. The rest of you will stay here in prison while this other one goes home and fetches him. And then I'll know that you're not spies. If you aren't prepared to do that, if you aren't prepared to take that on, then it's clear that you are spies.

[20 : 56] And so they're put in prison together for three days. Verse 17. And eventually, verse 18, they're brought out. But notice that the plan changes somewhat by the time they're brought out.

Initially, the plan was, look, one of you can go and the rest can stay in prison. But by the time they get to verse 18, the plan has changed somewhat. Instead, now, one is going to remain behind in Egypt and all of the rest can go home.

Now, Joseph knows that they're brothers. Joseph knows who they are. So he might say, well, look, it would be too much to try and carry some, for the donkey to try and carry enough grain for, say, ten families.

So instead, what we'll do is, we'll leave one behind and the donkeys can carry the grain for the rest of the families while you go and fetch your younger brother. But notice that they have learned their lesson.

Because what do they say, verse 21? In truth, we are guilty concerning our brother in that we saw the distress of his soul when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.

[22 : 06] We saw his anguish. We saw the fear in his eyes. We saw the look of horror on his face. We saw Joseph's pain and anguish and we didn't do anything about it. We saw the pain that he was going through and yet we still decided to sell him to these traitors.

That's why all this has happened. That's why this disaster has come upon us. Because of our sin, this disaster has come. And Reuben says, well, look, I told you not to touch the boy.

I told you to leave him alone. I told you not to touch the hairs of his head. But you wouldn't listen. And now we have to pay for his blood.

Now the price must be paid. And you see, friends, that's the truth of sin. That it always has to be paid for.

It always has to be atoned for. That it always has to be made right. Now each of us in and of ourselves, we can't make it right ourselves.

[23 : 07] We can't pay the price ourselves. We can't pay the debt that we owe ourselves. And so we have to look to another to pay it for us. We have to look to someone else to pay it in our stead.

We have to look, of course, to Jesus Christ. He is the one who has come to atone for sin. He is the perfect, sinless, spotless Lamb of God. Sent to take away our sin.

Come to him tonight. Stop trying to pay a debt that you can't. Stop trying to atone for sin that you never can. But instead, come to Christ and know that he paid it all.

Joseph hears all this. They're talking amongst each other. Probably talking in Hebrew. And they think that Joseph can't understand them. They think that this Egyptian prince has no way of knowing Hebrew.

And all the more so because Joseph has been using an interpreter to speak to the brothers all this time. He's kept himself hidden from them. He's kept his true identity hidden from them.

[24 : 15] But he turns away. He understands what they're saying. And he turns away, verse 24, and weeps. It's because he knows that they've learned their lesson. He knows that they know what he did was wrong.

I remember a few months ago when I took the communion services in Carlyway on the island of Lewis. I had to make sure that I had Myrtle Campbell beside me pretty much the whole time.

Because when people would come to me and start talking to me in Gaelic, I'd have no idea what they were saying. I was reliant on Myrtle to translate for me, to help me. If I was left on Myrtle, I would have no mission of understanding, no way of knowing what people were saying.

And that's what the brothers thought was happening here. They thought that this interpreter was translating everything for Joseph, not knowing that Joseph understood full well everything that they were saying. They thought that they could talk freely about the sin they'd committed against their brother, but not knowing that Joseph heard everything they said.

He takes Simeon and binds him before their eyes, verse 24. And yet notice what Joseph does.

[25 : 28] He treats them with kindness. He treats them with grace. What does he say, verse 25? Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain. That's the first thing.

That's what they've bought. That's what they've earned, if you like. But secondly, to replace every man's money in his sack. They're getting free grain now effectively. And more than that, thirdly, to give them provisions for the journey.

This was done for them. It's a picture for us of the grace of God. You see, Joseph could have given them what they deserve. Joseph could have given them the grain. Joseph could have sold the grain to them and kept the money rightly.

That would have been what they deserved. That would have been what they'd paid for. But Joseph treats them with grace and kindness and gives them more than they deserve. In Jesus Christ this evening, God gives us not what our sins deserve.

You see, our sins deserve judgment and death. But he gives us grace. He gives us eternal life through faith in his son.

[26 : 28] He gives us abundantly more than we could ask or imagine. God doesn't treat us and give us what we deserve. It gives us more than we can imagine. Thirdly, finally then, we want to think about this reluctance to send their brother.

This reluctance to send their brother. And we see that in verses 26 through 38. So the brothers leave. The brothers return home and they relay to their father all that has happened. They relay to him the fact that Simeon has been kept behind.

They relay the fact to them that this man said that they won't see his face again unless they bring Benjamin with them. They've discovered the money in their sacks and they're afraid because they think that Joseph might think that they had stolen the grain.

They tell their father everything. And yet notice what Jacob says, verse 36. Jacob their father said to them, You have bereaved me of my children.

Joseph is no more. Simeon is no more. And now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me. Joseph's gone.

[27 : 35] Simeon's gone. And now you want to take Benjamin as well? There's no way I'm sending him. There's no way he is going to Egypt. There's no way he's going anywhere with you. I am keeping him with me.

He stays here. But again we see how they further learned their lesson perhaps. And again Reuben speaks up. Verse 37. He says to his father, Look, please send the boy.

Send him with me. If anything happens to him, by all means kill my two sons. If anything happens to him, I will be responsible. I'll guarantee his safety.

And if he doesn't come back, you can hold it on me. And yet Jacob won't be moved. You're not taking him. He's my only son that's left.

His brother is dead. And if anything were to happen to him, it would bring my grey hairs down to shore. He won't send him.

[28 : 34] He's too afraid of losing him. He's too afraid of something happening to him. But it takes us to another son. And another father.

Another son who was the only son of his father. But a son who the father would not hold on to, but rather a son that the father would send willingly.

A son that the father would send willingly, knowing that what awaited was pain and suffering and death. A son that the father would send willingly, knowing that what was waiting was rejection and suffering.

Another son that the father would send, knowing that he would be the propitiation for sin. Another son that the father would send, another son that the father would send, so that he might bring life, and bring it to the full.

Jacob held on because he couldn't imagine losing his son. God sent his son so that we might come to know God.

[29 : 52] Come to Jesus Christ tonight. Place your faith in him. Place your trust in him. The son who was sent, the son who laid down his life willingly, so that we might come to know God.
Come now, friends. Don't delay. Amen.