

Rejected but reconciled

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[0 : 00] Then Judah went up to him and said, O my Lord, please let your servant speak a word in my Lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself.

My Lord asked his servants, saying, Have you a father or a brother? And we said to my Lord, We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age.

His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him. Then you said to your servants, Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.

We said to my Lord, The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die. Then you said to your servants, Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.

When we went back to your servant, my father, we told him the words of my Lord. And when our father said, Go again, buy us a little food, we said, We cannot go down.

[1 : 02] If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us. Then your servant, my father, said to us, You know that my wife bore me two sons.

One left me. And I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces, and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my grey hairs in evil to Sheol.

Now, therefore, as soon as I come to your servant, my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant, our father, with sorrow to Sheol.

For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life. Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father. Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him.

[2 : 23] He cried, Make everyone go out from me. So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

And Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me, please.

And they came near. And he said, I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here.

For God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.

And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

[3 : 26] He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry, and go up to my father and say to him, Thus says your son Joseph.

God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children, and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have.

There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty. And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you.

You must tell my father of all my honour in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry, and bring my father down here. Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept.

And Benjamin wept upon his neck, and he kissed all his brothers, and wept upon them. After that, his brothers talked with him. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

[4 : 38] We thank you that you reveal yourself through it. You have not left us in a dark. Please help us to know great things about you this morning. Amen. Do keep the Bible open, and we've got a server sheet to help us know where we're going in Genesis.

We're going to look a bit more of what was just read, but that's okay. I wonder if you've read Prince Harry's memoir, Spare. If you have, you're not alone.

It became the fastest-selling non-fiction book ever, selling 1.43 million copies during its first day on sale back in January. And maybe you've seen the Netflix series or the ITV documentary earlier in the year.

Whatever you feel about the Harriet and Meghan and the royal family, whether you're Team Willie or Team Harold, as they call themselves, or Team Kate or Team Meghan, we can all agree, I think, that this is a family in desperate need of reconciliation.

In fact, that's what Prince Harry has been saying that he wants. And the question, when every state occasion comes around, is will there be steps towards that reconciliation?

[5 : 52] I suspect that's going to rumble on and on and on. What would it take for reconciliation? We may think it would need a miracle.

But it's not the royal family that's messy. All families are messy, if we're honest, because we live in a messy world. And we live in a messy world of sin, and we are also the creators of the mess ourselves.

And Jacob's family in Genesis, that we've been looking at over the number of weeks, is in a different league of messy, isn't it? A little reminder, 12 sons, one dad, four mothers.

Two of the sons are mass murderers. The oldest son has slept with his dad's mistress. Number four son, Judah, has gotten his own daughter-in-law pregnant.

And ten of the brothers have sold the younger boy, Joseph, into slavery. I mean, this is Premier League messy, isn't it? This is top-tier messy. Now, what would it take for this mess to change?

[6 : 58] Indeed, for these brothers to change? For reconciliation? Well, the big message of Genesis is that it would take God to work. It would take God to be at work through his chosen man.

Look down again at chapter 45, because this is exactly what Joseph sees as he looks back on his life. So chapter 45, verse 5.

Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you. And then verse 7, and God sent me before you.

And then verse 8. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. Through the mess and the chaos in this story, God was at work.

He was at work to save his people and bring blessing to the world. And this story is teaching us that he will indeed save his people. And he will bring them to a right relationship again.

[8 : 01] And that is the big point, as we see over these chapters in this part of the story. God is at work. He is bringing repentance and reconciliation through his chosen man.

Well, we left Joseph plucked from prison and made prime minister of Egypt, with people coming to him from all over for food.

But what about the brothers? That's a great kind of ending for Joseph. But this is not just a story about Joseph. It's a story about Joseph, Jacob and Jacob's descendants. What about the brothers? Well, flick back to chapter 42. Because chapter 42 starts with a meanwhile back in Canaan. A meanwhile back in the promised land.

So Pharaoh's dreams have come true. The bountiful harvests have been and gone and famine has struck. But there was hope. Verse 2.

[9 : 01] Jacob has heard that there's grain in Egypt. And so ten of the brothers depart, all except Benjamin. They arrive in Egypt and who should greet them but Joseph.

Twenty years have now passed. And the brothers don't recognise him. But Joseph definitely recognises them. Verse 7.

The brothers bow down to Joseph. And then comes verse 9. If you look down. And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. Here's a marker.

The dreams Joseph dreamt back in chapter 37. About his brothers bowing down to him are now coming true. This encounter, this arrival is no coincidence.

God is at work. And God uses his man Joseph to test his brothers. And bring them to a point where they admit their guilt.

[10:02] That's the first sub-point on the handout. They admit their guilt. You see, Joseph questions the brothers in verse 9. 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.

Well, they may not be spies. But they're hardly honest men, are they? They have been lying for years about the fate of their very brother who is standing in front of them.

And Joseph puts them in prison for three days. A bit of calling off time. There's not much to do in prison in those days apart from think over their lives. And there, these brothers, they've been dishonest to their dad all these years.

But now they begin to be honest with themselves. They remember their sin and it cuts like a knife. Look at chapter 42, verse 21.

[11:10] Then they said to one another, 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. And Reuben answered them, Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen.

So now there comes a reckoning for his blood. Here we get a flashback to chapter 37 with the extra detail of Joseph begging for his life.

And they admit to one another how wrong they had been. And their actions now bring a reckoning. That they deserve judgment. A price must be paid.

It's not immediately clear if they know who to. But there does seem to be an increasing awareness in the brothers' lives that God is in control of this situation.

[12:15] So verse 28, when they see the money back in their sacks later on, they say, What is this that God has done to us? You see, these ice-cold brothers are beginning to thaw.

Even their description of Joseph has changed. He's gone from that dreamer, in chapter 37, to now their brother. And with a tinge of affection, the boy.

Well, the story progresses and Simeon is bound as a collateral. And Joseph says, he lays it out to his brothers. Unless you bring Benjamin back to me, you're not going to see Simeon again.

Now, if you're Simeon at this point, would you have much hope of getting out? If you knew your brothers? Not likely. But amazingly, the brothers, well, they turn from their sin.

That's the next sub-point. We see the brothers turn from their sin. You see, chapter 43, if you flick over, it opens with a sense of déjà vu. They've run out of food again. And Jacob wants them to go back to Egypt.

[13:21] But they know they can't go without Benjamin. Jacob is not so keen. He knows what's happened to his other favourite son, Joseph. Joseph probably doesn't trust these brothers.

And up steps Judah to break the impasse. If you look at chapter 43, verse 8. And Judah said to Israel, his father, send the boy with me.

And we will arise and go. That we may live and not die. Both we and you and also our little ones. I will be a pledge of his safety.

From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to ye and set him before ye, then let me bear the blame forever.

Do we see the change in Judah? He's gone from a brother killer to a brother protector. If he doesn't come back, I will take the blame, he says.

[14:21] He's self-serving Judah becomes self-sacrificing Judah. And so Jacob agrees to send Benjamin. And they arrive in Egypt to an audience with the PM.

Who is deeply moved by seeing his full brother Benjamin after such a long time. And after composing himself, dinner is served.

And Joseph designs another test. Verse 33. And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth.

And the men looked at one another in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table. But Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were

merry with him.

You know, you imagine their brothers sitting around for their meal. They're getting their two lamb chops and couscous or whatever they have back then. But Benjamin doesn't get two, he gets ten. [15:24] He gets ten lamb chops stacked high. Benjamin gets supersized. It's famine time. Food is a big commodity. Will history repeat itself?

Here's the test. Will favoritism to Benjamin bring jealousy in the brothers? That's the test.

Amazingly, no. Verse 34.

They all get drunk together. They're happy. A hint they have turned from their sin. But then Joseph turns the screw with a final test in chapter 44 and plants his silver cup in Benjamin's sack.

Nothing sobers a person up faster than sirens and flashing lights. And before the brothers knew it, they're pulled over on the hard shoulder on the way home. The action slows right down.

A stop and search is carried out to catch the thief. Could it possibly be Benjamin? Yes, yes, yes.

Again, here's the test. Will the brothers hang out Benjamin to dry?

[16:32] Well, verse 13 of chapter 44. Then they tore their clothes and every man loaded his donkey and they returned to the city.

Benjamin's caught with the cup in his sack and they grieve. They're beside themselves with grief.

When Joseph disappeared back in chapter 37, it was just Jacob who tore his clothes.

Now all the brothers do. And they refuse to abandon Benjamin. More evidence. They've truly turned from their sin.

They have changed. They're brought before Joseph. And when their lives are on the line, they throw themselves at Joseph's feet. And through Judah, who's kind of risen to the family spokesperson at this point, will the brothers plead for mercy?

That's the next sub-point. The brothers plead for mercy. Verse 16. And Judah said, what shall we say to my Lord?

[17:39] What shall we speak or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants. Behold, we are my Lord's servants. Both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.

They confess their guilt to Joseph. Not of stealing the cup. But of the treatment of their brother Joseph. And they know their only hope is for Joseph to have mercy.

They put their lives in his hands. God's man. Joseph gives his brother, brothers, one last chance to escape. In effect says, abandon Benjamin.

He can be my slave. You can all go home to your father. You can tell him whatever story you want.

Again, it's another rerun of what happened to Joseph. And up steps Judah again.

Remember Judah in chapter 37. He's the one who's, whilst eating lunch, hatched a plan to sell his brother into slavery. Remember him from chapter 38.

[18:45] He is the uncaring and unjust. How would we expect a human trafficker to react here? Maybe take him, actually.

No skin off my nose. Actually do me a favour, to be honest. But remarkably, Judah, he jumps to Benjamin's aid. And the summary is, take me instead.

Let's jump to the end of his speech, which is the longest speech in Genesis. Verse 33. Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my Lord.

And let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.

Judah is transformed. He's come from a favourite killer to a favourite protector. A father crusher to a father carer. A self-serving to self-sacrificing.

[19:49] He is convicted of his guilt. Judah knows he deserves judgement. And he gives up his life into the hands of Joseph, the ruler, and pleads for mercy.

That is enough for Joseph. He recognises this wholehearted change in Judah. The representative brother, if you like. And there's no need for Joseph to keep his disguise any longer.

And so lastly, the brothers are reconciled. The brothers are reconciled. That's what goes on.

Chapter 45, verse 1 and 2. There's a lot of crying. And then after the initial shock, there's more crying and hugging.

If you cut to the end. Chapter 45, verse 14. Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept. And Benjamin wept upon his neck.

And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that, his brothers talked with him. I wonder what they're talking about. You think that?

[20 : 56] They were just chatting together. The brothers have received this mercy and forgiveness from Joseph. And they're reconciled to him. It's an amazing story, isn't it?

But what have we seen? Well, overall, God is at work. Through the words and actions of his chosen man, Joseph, he brings his people to their knees in repentance.

And throughout our time in Genesis, we've been seeing that Joseph is a picture of the Lord Jesus. He was rejected and went down into seeming death.

But God was with him and lifted him out and raised him to the right hand of Pharaoh. And the most powerful person in a known world. And people were coming to him for life. For food.

For life. Well, likewise, Jesus. He was rejected. As God's chosen man. He went down into actual death. But God was still with him.

[21 : 59] And God raised him up and seated him at the right hand of the Father in heaven. So one day, every knee shall bow. We saw that in Philippians chapter 2 last week. And in Judah, we get, in these chapters, we get a picture of the work God does in somebody to bring them to their knees before Jesus.

And this is what we need to see because everyone is actually in the position of these brothers. We might not have sold our brother into slavery as much as we would have liked to, perhaps.

But we've all rejected the chosen ruler Jesus. And we are in desperate need of his mercy. Our sin leaves us guilty before God and deserving of a reckoning.

But these verses from Romans chapter 5 show us the glorious message of the gospel. And let me read them out. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we are reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

[23 : 22] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we now have now received reconciliation. What glorious verses, when we admit our guilt before Jesus and when we turn from our sin and put our lives in Jesus' hands as God's ruler and we plead for mercy, well, wonderfully, we are saved from judgment.

We are reconciled, not just to each other like Joseph and his brothers, but to God himself. All because of Jesus' death for us, that brings that everlasting peace.

What would it take for the Harry and William to be reconciled? Maybe it could take a miracle. And what would it take for reconciliation with God for each of us?

That definitely does take a miracle. And wonderfully, God provides that miracle in the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

Repentance and reconciliation. And so as we come to what this means for us and kind of lines for application, well, these chapters in Genesis are driving the point home that we are to have confidence in God.

[24 : 42] We are to have confidence in God because God alone saves. That is the message right through the whole Bible and all of history and through this story. These brothers are helpless.

They're starving. They're deeply in need of reconciliation and life. And yet chapter 45, verse 7 and 8, Joseph said, God sent me.

God sent me. He's just very clear, isn't he, on who it is who saves. It's not a job share like you might have at work. Bit God and bit me. Not you, but God, Joseph says.

God is in complete control of this story and of the Bible and of all of history. He orders events and graciously puts people in situations that causes them to admit their guilt, their need for repentance and to come back to him.

I wonder if you've seen the 1998 film Sliding Doors. I think that's that Gwyneth Paltrow? Yeah, Gwyneth Paltrow. It's a film that explores the seemingly inconsequential moments that alter the trajectory of future events.

[25 : 52] It's a rom-com, so it's probably not that deep. But the film cuts between two alternate storylines of Gwyneth Paltrow managing to get on a train or not managing to get on a train and how her life would have been different had that one moment happened or not happened, hence the title Sliding Doors.

I think it's the film that borne the phrase, a sliding doors moment, if you've heard that phrase, about a moment that alters the trajectory of future events. I guess coming back to the royal family, the sliding doors moment for Harry and William is maybe Princess Diana's last minute decision to make a trip to Paris, a decision that has affected their lives today.

Well, perhaps some of us can think back to sliding doors moments in our lives. If I hadn't studied that or lived there, I wouldn't have met that person, wouldn't have married them, I wouldn't have got that job, I wouldn't have lived here, wouldn't have had the children I've got.

All those kind of things we can think about, those sliding doors moments in our lives. And then if we are Christians, we can think of the sliding doors moments that led to trusting in Jesus.

If I hadn't made friends with that person, if that person hadn't kept kind of talking to me about Jesus, if that person didn't invite me to that summer camp or the event, if that person didn't want to open the Bible with me, well, they wouldn't have heard about Jesus.

[27 : 28] Wouldn't have become a Christian. And yet with the same perspective as Joseph, we can have confidence that God was at work. God is still at work in bringing us to repentance and faith through the situations and the people, however tough that we met along the way.

And now in Genesis, God uses his man, Joseph, to bring about that conviction and that repentance and reconciliation. Well, today he uses his man, Jesus, and his spirit to do that work through the words we have in front of us in the Bible.

God says as much to his disciples just before he dies. In those verses, I won't read them for the sake of time, but he says it's basically really good that I go away because the Holy Spirit will come and he's going to be at work in the world.

He is going to bring people to the point of repentance and reconciliation. And that is what has been going on ever since Jesus went to heaven, when the Holy Spirit came.

That's what's been going on. And that's what's going on today. Jesus gives life. Not just food in a famine, but spiritual life. He brings dysfunctional rogues like these brothers, dysfunctional people like me and you into a right relationship with himself.

[28 : 52] And so we are to have confidence in this God, our God. He is at work saving his people. I was at a conference recently and the speaker asked us to think about someone near us least likely to come to church or the person that we know least likely to become a Christian.

I wonder who that would be for you. I'll give you five seconds. That person. Well, I spoke afterwards to a friend who thought of the comedian Ricky Gervais who lives near him and they often see each other walking their dogs.

A comedian who, very vocal in his anti-God beliefs. And we were just saying, what would it be like if Ricky Gervais became a Christian? How amazing if God could do that?

And of course the Genesis story tells us that God can do that. If Judah can receive forgiveness, then so can Ricky Gervais.

And so can that person we thought of, so can anyone. Because the same God who was at work in the brothers' lives is at work today, bringing people to repentance and reconciliation, saving his people.

[30 : 14] And then very briefly, just as we close, these chapters show us that we can't hide from a God like this. The brothers couldn't hide their guilt from Joseph.

He recognised them instantly after 20 years. And likewise with us, there's nothing we've done in our lives that God is not aware of.

We are accountable to him who knows all and from whom no secrets are hidden. And yet in Joseph, we get a picture of the wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus.

When God presented Joseph with a golden opportunity to make his brothers pay for their crime, he passed it up. Instead, he devised a plan for their redemption, their reconciliation.

And at the end of the journey, he welcomed them back into his presence, not as his slaves, but as family. And when it comes to us and our sin, Jesus doesn't just pursue justice against us.

[31 : 28] Instead, he advanced a plan to save us. A plan that would both satisfy God's justice and show mercy. A plan that led to his own sacrificial death for us.

And so if you're not a Christian here this morning, then this reconciliation is on offer. And with God himself, when we come before his man Jesus on our knees in mercy, ask for mercy, wonderfully we receive forgiveness.

And that same God who was at work then is still at work. He is bringing people to repentance and reconciliation. We are to have complete confidence in this God.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this wonderful story that shows us that you are indeed in charge. That you are the one who saves your people. You are the one who brings them on their knees before you.

And we pray, Father, that we would have complete confidence in you to do that work today. Amen.