

Recognizing Guilt

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Date: 31 May 2020

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[0 : 00] We asked that question during the break there. When have you faced a life and death situation? I wonder what you said. Was it a road accident? Maybe someone in a shopping centre has collapsed in front of you or you're desperately waiting for the ambulance or the police to arrive.

Last Monday, my nephew, he came over for a visit. He's only two. And we're in the front garden and playing there. And I opened the gate to grab something. But in about three seconds, he'd gotten from the front garden to the very middle of Church Road, just out there.

And we could hear a car coming in the distance. His mother screamed, ran out and grabbed him. You see, if someone told me that he was a runner, that it's a matter of life and death, I wouldn't have left the gate open.

I recently bought a fishing kayak so I could get farther out into Port Phillip Bay. It's secondhand. It's pretty cheap. It needs a lot of work. But when it came to my life vest, I spared no expense.

I bought the best one on the market. Because if that cheap kayak sinks, the quality of my vest is a matter of life and death. Coronavirus, a global pandemic.

[1 : 14] We're planning now how best to ease ourselves out of lockdown. But correct planning is a matter of life and death. And that is the theme of our passage today.

Jacob's family, they're facing their own global pandemic. Look above chapter 42, the end of chapter 41. It says, all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe everywhere.

You see, the world is starving. It is life and death. But on another level, we'll see it's life and death of the spiritual kind.

Because today we meet Joseph's idiot brothers again. We left them in chapter 37 when they'd sinned terribly against him. And for 20 years, they've been living the lie about what they did.

But today their guilt, their past catches up with them as all the brothers are reunited. And because Joseph is God's man, we can read their sin against Joseph as sins against God.

[2 : 23] On the surface, life and death due to famine. But really, for the brothers, life and death because of their guilt before God.

These brothers are terrible sinners. They need to be reconciled to God or else they'll face his judgment. And for the next two weeks, we're going to see that reconciliation with God is spelled with two R's.

There's a slide on your handout. Slide on your screen, sorry. So recognition of guilt plus repentance of sin leads us to reconciliation with God.

If we don't recognize our guilt, we won't repent of our sin. Pretty obvious. We won't be reconciled to God. Today we're dealing with that first R, recognizing guilt.

It is a matter of life and death. And so please keep Genesis 42 open. And above my head, just on your screen about there, you should find a link to the handout.

[3 : 27] That will help you as well. Let's read from verse 1. 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've heard that there is grain in Egypt.

Go down there and buy some for us so that we may live and not die. If there was a global famine, finding food is a matter of life and death.

Verse 5. So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain. For there was a famine in the land of Canaan also. When the brothers get to Egypt, they meet the minister for agriculture.

And so in verse 6, they practice good social etiquette. They bow before him. But despite their manners, this Egyptian minister accuses them of something very terrible.

You are spies, verse 9. You have come to see where our land is unprotected. No, my lord. Your servants have come to buy food. We're all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.

[4 : 27] And all the way through today, the issue is whether we are dealing with honest men or not. Honest men. Verse 15. This is how you will be tested.

As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your younger brother comes here.

Send one of your number to get your brother. The rest of you will be kept in prison. Why?

So that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are honest men or if you are spies. I don't know if you've ever been accused of a crime.

If you've ever been locked in prison unjustly. Years ago, I was detained by the Secret Service at the White House when I was visiting Washington. It wasn't that serious.

It wasn't life or death. It was the George W. Bush years. I don't know what that means. Anyway. But in verse 18 to 20, listen to how serious it is. Verse 18.

[5 : 25] Do this and you will live. This time, the plan. One brother stays in custody while the rest takes grain back to the family. Verse 20.

But you must bring your brother back to me so that your words may be verified and that you may not die. Verse 25 to 27. They're accused of stealing.

Their money is planted in their bags. They're being set up to look like thieves. Verse 28. My silver has been returned. Here it is in my sack.

Their hearts sank. And they turned to each other, trembling. I don't know if that's ever happened to you either. Have you ever been to the Woolies self-checkout and you accidentally scan your groceries and walk off?

And you forget to pay. And your heart sinks. And you tremble. Because you know it looks like you're a great big shoplifter. You see, on one level, life and death because of a famine.

[6 : 25] Life and death if they are spies. Life and death if they are stealing. But at a deeper level, life and death of the spiritual kind. Because for 20 years, these brothers have been walking around with the guilt of what they did to their brother, Joseph.

In every situation, God brings their past catching up with them. And this is point two. So let's look again through some of the verses and see if you can recognize God bringing their past to catch up with them.

So verse 1, when Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, Why do you just keep looking at each other? Obviously, they need grain from Egypt.

But that is where Joseph is. Egypt is a sign of their sin. They're too numb with guilt to get grain. Instead, they just keep staring at one another.

Let me ask you, if there was a famine, are these the ten men you would trust? To bring your family grain? Poor old Jacob. He has no choice.

[7 : 36] As you say, as they say, you can't choose your family. And you can hear his mistrust. Verse 4. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others.

Because he was afraid that harm might come to him. See, the last time Jacob sent a favorite son amongst these brothers, he never saw him again. So this time, he keeps Benjamin at home.

They're too dishonest to trust. They can't outrun their guilt. And in verse 6, you can see God orchestrating things. Now, Joseph was the governor of the land.

The person who sold grain to all its people. There's no way the brothers are going to miss him. God has put them all on a collision course. Verse 6. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

Do you remember when Joseph was 17 that he dreamed this dream, which is now on your screens? We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose up and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.

[8 : 47] It's no coincidence the brothers are bowing down, literally asking for Joseph's sheaves of grain. God has done this.

Verse 7. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger. Verse 8. Although Joseph recognized the brothers, they didn't recognize him.

You see, the brothers don't recognize Joseph just as they don't recognize God's hand in all of this. And it's such a huge moment because now he's in a position of power.

Finally, the brothers are at his mercy and revenge is sweet. Verse 9. Then he remembered his dreams about them. This is God's family, after all.

God's chosen ones. His plans of land and offspring and blessing, they can't come true if Joseph exacts his revenge. And so instead, he sets about rebuilding this family, remaking them.

[9 : 55] You see, on one level, verse 9 to 17 are all about spying. But really, God is breaking these brothers down. He humbles them. He throws them in jail, just as they did to Joseph.

A dose of their own medicine. God is waking them up to their guilty past. Verse 18 to 19. 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. See, once before, they left a brother in prison. And like a dose of their own medicine or a wicked sense of déjà vu, their past has caught up with them.

The penny finally drops. They finally recognize what God has been doing to them. Verse 21. They said to one another, surely we are being punished for because of our brother.

We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen. That is why this distress has come on us. Reuben replied, didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy, but you wouldn't listen.

[11 : 04] Now we must give an accounting for his blood. And so let us do some accounting today. On one side of the ledger, they plotted to kill Joseph, stripped him of his privilege, threw him in a cave, sold him to slavery, told their father that he was torn to pieces by a wild animal, and they've been living that lie ever since.

When it comes to reconciliation with God, their account is way in the red. The only way to balance the ledger is by their death.

That's the payment God demands for sin. And we all say, get him, Joseph. Revenge is sweet. But instead, something remarkable.

Verse 24. He turned away from them and began to weep. You see, Joseph's heart is God's heart. God is so personally hurt by our sins that he weeps.

When we recognize our guilt, instead of judging us as our sins deserve, God weeps. God has orchestrated these events to wake these brothers up so they would recognize their guilt before him.

[12 : 22] Surely we are being punished because of our brother, they said. They're starting to get it. Verse 25 to 27. When Joseph planted the silver in their sacks, reminds them of the last time they had lots of silver.

When they sold Joseph to slavery in Egypt. Verse 28. Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, What is this that God has done to us?

You see, on one level, an Egyptian minister has them on trumped up charges. But really, God has been setting them up since they arrived. Needling them. Exposing their guilt within.

Are you spies? No. Are you thieves? No. Are you honest men? No. Because one day we left our brother for dead.

In prison. We sold him for silver. And have been lying to our father ever since. Surely we are being punished because of our brother, they said. What is this that God has done to us?

[13 : 29] You see, for the first time in their lives, their eyes are open. They've been woken up by a life and death situation. So they would reach that first R.

Recognition of their guilt. Maybe God is ready to build them up again. Maybe they are totally changed individuals. What do you think?

But the truth is, as we've seen, that God has had to drag them kicking and screaming the entire way. And for the rest of the chapter, we see just how far they have to go.

Let me show you how unrepentant they are. This is point three. So in verse 29 to 34, they recount to their father, Jacob, their time in Egypt.

But notice how many things they leave out of the story. They don't mention three days in jail. Verse 33, they claim to have left one of the brothers with the Egyptian official.

[14 : 31] But we know that Simeon was bound up. He's actually in jail. Verse 34, they claim that once they produce Benjamin, they'll be free to trade in the land, free to come and go as they please.

But really, they have to bring Benjamin so that they won't die. Most of all, they still won't come clean to their father about what they did to his son.

These honest men can't stop lying. Bending the truth has always been so helpful, useful for getting them out of a tricky situation. They're not ready to give up the lies.

There's no repentance here. And that is why there's no reconciliation in the family. The remaining verses show us how dysfunctional this family is.

This is point four. So verse 35, the brothers and this time the father, they all open their sacks. And when they and their father saw the money pouches, they were all frightened.

[15:34] The men are frightened because, again, it looks like they're thieves. But Jacob is frightened for a very different reason. Verse 36, the father Jacob said to them, you have deprived me of my children.

You see, the last time the brothers came home with a bunch of silver, Jacob says, Joseph was no more. This time they come home with a bunch of silver, Simeon is no more.

And now you want to take my favorite son, Benjamin? Everything is against me. Verse 37, eldest brother Reuben, he tries to step up to the plate.

He tries to guarantee Benjamin's safety against the life of his own two sons. You see, only in a family this dysfunctional would granddad be comforted from the loss of his favorite son by the death of two of the grandkids.

And I think that's why in verse 38, Jacob still plays favorites. Jacob said, my son, Benjamin, will not go down with you. His brother is dead. He is the only one left.

[16:41] There is only one son in this family that matters to him. The rest are all unrepentant rotters. You see, even though God wants this family, he doesn't want them as they are.

We have to come back next week to see if they change. Read ahead to chapter 45 for next week. See if you can find whether or not they repent.

But today, we'll give them their credit. They've still taken a vital step. Our equation says we can't be reconciled to God if we don't first recognize our guilt.

They've taken that first step on your screen, that R step at the top, recognition of guilt. And so for us, as we apply this passage today, maybe we are like the brothers, guilty of sinning against members of the family, of our own families.

Over the next two weeks, before we take Lord's Supper again, this is a perfect time to seek out that person, to recognize your guilt with them and with God.

[17:56] Maybe, like the brothers, we're innocent of little things, all the while guilty of bigger things. Maybe we put on a good public face, but all the while carrying guilt for secret things.

Maybe, actually, we're not like the brothers. Maybe we don't have skeletons in the closet, no scandals to speak of, but maybe it's our acceptable sins that we fail to recognize.

So, maybe we haven't stolen anything from Woolies, but like every other Aussie, are our tax returns completely up to scratch? We don't violently attack one another, but when are we going to start taking our anger and impatience seriously?

We don't sell people to slavery in Egypt, but do we love a good gossip or grumbling session? I don't look at dodgy things on my phone, but I'm really good at driving and texting.

But that's okay. It's much less bad. I think one of the problems of recognizing guilt with God is that our culture doesn't believe it exists. People think if there is any red in our ledger, then we can balance it up, balance the books with some equal and opposite good behavior.

[19:19] Our culture disagrees that guilt with God is a matter of life and death. Because if God is there at all, then he's only a soft, fuzzy, fluffy, warm God.

He's certainly not a judge. A good life and death situation should wake us up. It's designed to open our eyes so that we do business with God.

I mean, that's what the coronavirus is, a matter of life and death. Over 350,000 people have been lost. One of our prayers during this season is that it would wake people up to how fragile life is so that they do business with God.

They recognize their guilt and sort out their situation with him. My auntie Christine, she is dying of cancer. The doctors gave her nine months to 12 months to live.

A literal life and death situation. But also a matter of life and death. If she meets God with her guilt.

[20:26] And so every week I go and see her, I talk to her about handing over her sin and her guilt to Jesus. It's the only way for her to be saved. God's word to us today is come clean.

Recognize our guilt or face him with a guilty conscience tomorrow. In a moment we're going to confess our sins, confess our guilt as one family.

But before we do that, let me just give you some motivation so that we come clean. Remember we saw that Joseph didn't judge his brothers as they deserve.

He didn't get his revenge. But he wept. See, far from smiting us from heaven, God's heart breaks when we confess our sins.

He weeps. He's more grieved by our sin and shame than we are. He urges us to take it to him. And that's why he sent Jesus to die, to take our death, the death that our guilt deserves.

[21 : 32] So we could be counted righteousness as righteous. And so I'm going to pray and then we'll confess our sins together. So let me pray.

Father God, we thank you that you don't judge us as our sins deserve, but you weep over our guilt. Thank you that you sent Jesus so that we could be counted righteousness. Please drag us, even if we're kicking and screaming, please drag us to recognize our guilt, the wrongdoing that we have committed.

Please convict us by your spirit who wakes us up, who opens our eyes. In your name. Amen. And so as we confess, listen to this verse from 1 John.

It's just in line with what we talked about this morning. If we claim to be without sin, without guilt, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

[22 : 39] And so let us be honest people. Little sins, big sins, hidden sins, acceptable sins, sins against outsiders, sins against the family.

Let's use these words on your screen as a confession. Let's take a moment to have a look at them. And so together.

Almighty God, our heavenly father, we admit we have gone our own way, not loving you as we ought, nor loving our neighbor as ourselves.

We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed and in what we have failed to do. We deserve your condemnation. Father, forgive us.

Help us to love you and our neighbor and to live for your honor and glory. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. This from 1 John.

[23 : 38] This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for all our sins.

The crucial piece of reconciliation with God is that his gracious love sent Jesus to atone for us. More about that next week. For now, let us sing our next song.