

Repentance and Reconciliation

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Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Great to be here again to have a look at this story. A big welcome. Let me add my welcome to Andrews for Holy Trinity and St John's regulars.

And a big welcome to other people who are joining us. A shout out particularly to the folks in Padthaway in South Australia and the crew down at Lee and Gatha in Gippsland. Thank you so much for joining in with us this morning.

If you're like me watching the news this week, it's clear that things in America have gotten toxic. The killing of George Floyd, looting and destruction, President Trump holding up Bibles.

The US is in desperate need of reconciliation. Hong Kong and China too. Closer to home here in Australia last week was National Sorry Day where we acknowledged the deep wounds caused by the stolen generation.

It's currently National Reconciliation Week because when it comes to indigenous issues, Australia is in desperate need of reconciliation.

[1 : 08] And so it is in our series. We've been looking at what Genesis calls the account of Jacob's family line. Jacob's family are crying out, weeping because of the deep wounds and the brokenness.

Like Australia, the US and China. This family is in desperate need of reconciliation. Well, today our story is one of reconciliation between people.

Jacob's family are the chosen ones. His sons will one day form the 12 tribes of Israel. In many ways, Israel is a precursor to the church.

Today is for Christians who were once family, but now enemies and in desperate need of reconciliation. But it's not enough to understand this only at a horizontal level.

Today's story is also about sinful brothers and their God. Joseph is a Christ figure, a precursor to Jesus. God makes him ruler, endows him with wisdom, exalts him above everyone else.

[2 : 17] He uses him to bring blessing and salvation to the nations. Today is also about reconciliation between people and God. This vertical aspect that started coming through last week when the brothers recognized their guilt.

So 42 verse 20 last week. Surely we are being punished because of our brothers. 42, 28. What is this that God has done to us?

And today, 44 verse 16. God has uncovered your servant's guilt. This story isn't only about reconciliation between people, but about reconciliation with God.

You remember the equation that we used. It's on your screen now. We said there are two stages involved, two stages for reconciliation. Recognition and repentance.

The two follow one another. Unless you recognize your guilt, you won't repent of your sins. I think that's fairly logical stuff. Last week, the brothers, they got to stage one.

[3 : 27] They admitted their guilt, but they didn't change their sinful ways. And so the family was left unreconciled and dysfunctional. Today, we're going to see if they make any more progress.

And so please keep the handouts open. The handouts, I think, will be on your screen, sort of above my head there, wherever that is, on the link. But you'll absolutely need your Bibles open today. We're going to skim over quite a few chapters, but I'll pause at the key verses. So we're at point one. We're in chapter 43, verse one.

Now, the famine was still severe in the land. So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, Go back and buy us a little more food.

Getting grain from Egypt, it won't be that easy. Last week, the Egyptian prime minister tested these brothers, whether they were honest men or spies. Verse three.

[4 : 26] You see, ever since Joseph disappeared, Benjamin is the new favorite.

Benjamin and Joseph are two sons that Jacob had with his beloved Rachel. The rest of the sons are all children he had with other women.

Benjamin and Joseph are Jacob's favorites because their mother Rachel was the favorite. And so Jacob is in a rough spot.

They've run out of grain. There are five more years of famine to go. Either his family starves to death or he risks losing Benjamin down in Egypt. Verse six.

Israel, that is Jacob, asked, Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother? In verse eight, Judah reassures him.

[5 : 26] Judah said to his father, to Israel, his father, Send the boy along with me and we will go at once so that we and you and our children may live and not die. I myself will guarantee his safety.

You can hold me personally responsible for him. And Judah's guarantee, it contrasts with Reuben's guarantee last week. Reuben was the eldest son.

Remember last week he proposed that if any harm came to Benjamin, that they could kill two of his own children. You see, Reuben thought that Jacob would be comforted from the loss of his favorite son by killing two of the grandkids.

It may have been well intentioned, but Reuben's plan would only make matters worse. But Judah's guarantee seems much better.

Verse nine. If I don't bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. There's no need for anyone else to die.

[6 : 30] This seems to do the trick. And Jacob lets precious Benjamin go. So 43 verse 29. The family, they face Joseph again, although he's still in disguise.

As Joseph looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about? And he said, God be gracious to you, my son.

You see, Benjamin is Joseph's favorite too. Verse 30. Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

Verse 34. When portions were served to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's. Can you imagine the dinner table squabbles if one child gets more chicken nuggets and ice cream than his brother's?

Well, here, Benjamin gets five times the portions. Clearly, he is Joseph's favorite too. And as they all feast together, it appears to be happy families.

[7 : 40] Job done. But Joseph still won't reveal himself. Instead, he plants another trap. This is point two. We're now in chapter 44.

Now, Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house. Fill them in sacks with as much food as they can carry and put each man's silver in the mouth of his sack.

Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain. And he did as Joseph said. The brothers, they set off for home, but they don't get very far past the city limits before they are caught.

And like last week, they protest their innocence. 44 verse 9. If any of your servants is found to have the cup, he will die.

Very strong stuff. But in verse 10, the steward says, no, no, no. He'll just become a slave instead.

Verse 16. The brothers are before the Egyptian prime minister.

[8 : 44] Their charge was stealing his personal cup. Verse 16. What can we say to my Lord? Judah replied. How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servant's guilt.

Now, this is very important because this is right about where they were last week. Innocent of stealing, but recognizing their guilt from all those years earlier, what they did to Joseph.

That is stage one. But last week, they refused to repent of their sinful ways. They refused to get to stage two. But today, let's see what Judah does.

Verse 30. 44 verse 30. So now, if the boy Benjamin is not with us, when I go back to your servant, my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die.

Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said to him, if I don't bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life.

[9 : 54] You see, the situation is a total rerun of years earlier. When Joseph's life was in the balance, back then, there was a favored son.

There were some jealous brothers. They wanted to kill him, but reduced it to slavery. Deceptive silver was involved. And today is every opportunity for the same jealousy, the same sin.

When the cup is found in Benjamin's sack, Judah could have said what he did before. We never liked him anyway. Take him, he's yours. We don't care.

Years ago, it was Judah. It was Judah's plan to sell Joseph for silver. There's every opportunity to repeat the same sin of chapter 37.

But this time, Judah does everything to keep him safe. Verse 32. I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life.

[10:57] Verse 33. Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord slave in place of the boy. And let the boy return with his brothers.

It is a totally different attitude to a favored son. And why? Because of a totally different attitude to their father.

You see, back in chapter 37, when they made Joseph disappear, they lied to their father, Jacob.

Here are the scraps of his technicolor dream coat. Sorry, dad. It must have been a wild animal.

They just didn't care. But now, the worst rotter in the family, Judah, he begs for the sake of his father.

Verse 30. If my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Verse 31. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow.

[11:57] And verse 34. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No. Don't let me see the misery that would come on my father.

I myself will bear the guilt. You see, he is repentant. Because when faced with the same situation, he acts totally differently.

He's not the same person he was in chapter 37. Last week, they recognized their guilt. That is step one. This week, they repent and turn away from their sin.

That is step two. And that was the clincher. Look at chapter 45. Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants.

And he cried out, have everyone leave my presence. So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. This is point three. Verse two.

[12:59] And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him. And Pharaoh's household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph.

It is incredible stuff. It is incredible stuff. But instead of weeping with him, the brothers, verse three, were not able to answer him because they were terrified at his presence.

You see, for the brothers, the big R on their mind wasn't reconciliation, but revenge. They took everything away from Joseph. But now he has the power.

They are right to be terrified. If there's going to be justice. If there's going to be justice, doesn't Joseph owe them as their sins deserve? I've been calling it revenge.

But wouldn't getting their comeuppance, wouldn't that be a just outcome for these sinners? But in verse four, he said, I am your brother, Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt.

[14:04] And now do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

You see, before the brothers had shown any contrition, God was already working to save. Verse seven.

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. Verse eight. So then it was not you who sent me, but God.

Three times, Joseph says that God sent way before they had recognized anything. Even while they were wicked, God was working and sending to save and deliver, not because he owed it to them, but because God was merciful and gracious in the first place.

In fact, the author has been dropping clues the whole time. Look at 43 verse 14. Jacob said, may God almighty grant you mercy. 43 verse 29.

[15:17] God be gracious to you, my son. 45 verse seven. God sent me to preserve for you a remnant to save your lives.

You see, for two weeks now, we've been running with this equation, which is on your screen. And the equation makes it seem like one plus one equals two.

It looks as if they, you know, recognize their guilt and are repentant enough that God spits out reconciliation like some sort of slot machine. But really, they're not judged as their sins deserve. They needn't be terrified. Why? Because God is merciful. And so instead they get reconciliation and salvation.

Why? Because God was gracious in the first place. Verse 14. 45, 14. And we might ask, why didn't God do all of this sooner?

[16:31] Why didn't Joseph reveal himself earlier? After all, God promised to give this family land and offspring and blessing. He wants this family. But the truth is that God didn't want them as they were.

Guilty, unrepentant, dysfunctional. He was waiting on these brothers to change. Recognition and repentance. They don't earn salvation, but they are 100% necessary for our part.

See, this is a story for Israel about reconciliation in his family. This is a story for the church about reconciliation in our family.

And so as we apply this, with a church as large as ours, I think it's reasonable to assume that there'll be a few odd grudges going on.

A few quiet resentments. A few quiet resentments. A few situations where we hurry out the door rather than speak to someone in particular. And even though God blesses in spite of our sin, when we carry on like this, we're hardly being the family that he wants.

[17:46] Next week, we are taking the Lord's Supper, as Andrew said. And as you prepare and gather your symbols, please also use this week to recognize your guilt and to repent of your sins.

People ask, is it possible to have reconciliation if one party is not sorry? And I'm not. I can't really see a way that that is possible.

And it may be that you have to be like Joseph and like Christ. That is, you have to be the gracious one to make the first move. That way, we can all share that family meal next week in what Paul calls a worthy manner.

That is reconciliation between people. But we said that this story is about reconciliation between people and God. The brothers said, what is this that God has done to us?

Judah said, God has uncovered your servant's guilt. And whether we are Christians or maybe you aren't a Christian, nothing we have done is so buried or so small or so in the past that God won't uncover it.

[19:00] Facing Jesus, still bearing your guilt, that is a matter of life and death. And so come clean is the message. He sees it all anyway.

But when we do, it is vital that we take that next step, that we repent. Like Judah, it is vital that when faced with the same situation, we turn 180 degrees on what we did before.

And people will ask this. They will say, well, how good can my repentance be if I keep making the same mistakes? And the answer is that God graciously keeps giving us opportunities to change.

He's hoping that each new time we will do the right thing. It is a bit crushing, isn't it? When we sin and then repent and sin and then repent and then keep sinning again.

But I think that that is part and parcel of the Christian life. By the Spirit, he will make us like Jesus. Hopefully we will be sinning less and less.

[20:07] But the danger in this passage is not poor repentance, but unrepentance. The danger is that we get to a point and we stop battling sin and we say, well, I don't.

I just don't care anymore. I'm not going to try. Unrepentance is the danger. I think poor repentance is part of the Christian life.

Some people will then ask, well, why does it matter whether I repent or not? And the Apostle Paul has this to say. What shall we say then?

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means. We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? You see, God's grace is not a free pass for our sin, but a wake up call so that we no longer live in it.

There was no reconciliation till those brothers had repented. And it's not that God owed it to them. But because he was merciful and gracious in the first place, because way ahead of time, while they were still sinners, God sent Joseph to save and deliver and reconcile this family.

[21:24] And so it is with us. Our peace with God is not because we felt the right amount of guilt or showed the right level of repentance, but because way ahead of time, while we were still sinners, he sent the Lord Jesus to save us, to deliver us, to die for us.

So we could be reconciled back to him. A New Testament passage, it was that great story of the prodigal son. You'll remember that it says, while he was still a long way off, his father was watching out for him.

The son didn't even get through all the words of his confession before the father ran to him and hugged him and kissed him and reinstated him in the family. What sort of father is God? God, a gracious and merciful one. The brothers were terrified when the Christ figure was revealed. But we don't have to be because God is merciful.

And in Jesus, he graciously makes the first move. He's ready and waiting to reconcile us when we repent, recognize our guilt and repent of our sins.

[22 : 42] And so let me pray. Our father God, we praise you that you are gracious and merciful, that in Jesus, while we were still sinners, you sent him to die for us.

We praise you that you made the first move. Father, please, by your spirit. Please, would we make the move? Would we recognize our guilt?

And please, father, give us the strength to repent of our sins. Help us to turn a 180 on the behavior that we showed before.

Please, father, when faced with the same situation, please, would we not make the same mistakes? Would we battle hard in sin? Amen.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.