

Repentance and Reconciliation

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[0 : 00] If, like me, you've been watching the news this week, you realise that things have gotten really toxic in America. The killing of George Floyd, looting and violence, President Trump holding up Bibles.

The United States is in desperate need of reconciliation. China, Hong Kong, the protests there, the same thing. Closer to home last week was National Sorry Day, where we acknowledge the deep wounds caused by the stolen generation.

Currently, it is National Reconciliation Week, because in Australia, as far as Indigenous issues are concerned, we're in desperate need of reconciliation.

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 caused by brokenness and sin.

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

[1 : 16] Jacob's family are God's chosen ones. They'll one day form the 12 tribes of Israel. In many ways, they're a precursor to the church. Today is for Christians who were once family, but are now enemies, but in desperate need of reconciliation.

But it's not enough to understand this only on the horizontal level. Today is also about sinful brothers and their God. Joseph is a Christ figure, a precursor to Jesus.

God makes him ruler, endows him with divine wisdom, exalts him above everyone, uses him to bring blessing and salvation to the nations. Today is also about reconciliation between people and God.

This vertical aspect, it started coming through last week, actually, when the brothers recognized their guilt. So 42 verse 20 last week, surely we are being punished because of our brother.

42, 28, what is this that God has done to us? And today, chapter 44 verse 16, God has uncovered your servant's guilt.

[2 : 33] This story isn't only reconciliation between people, but also reconciliation with God. You'll remember this equation that I used last week.

It's on your screen now. Recognition plus repentance equals reconciliation. We said that there are two stages involved.

The two stages follow one another. If you don't recognize your guilt, you won't repent of your sin.

That's pretty logical stuff. Last week, the brothers, they got to stage one.

They recognized their guilt, but they didn't change their sinful ways. And so the family was left unreconciled. Today, we're going to see whether they make it any further.

And so please click on the handout, which is above my head, sort of about there on your screens.

And you'll absolutely need your Bibles open today. There's lots of verses.

[3 : 32] We're going to cover three chapters. I'll skim the story, but I'll pause at the key verses. So we're in chapter 43. Now, the famine was still severe in the land.

So when they'd 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's not going to be that easy.

Last week, the Egyptian prime minister, he tested the brothers to see whether they were honest men or spies. Verse three, the man warned us solemnly, you will not see my face again unless your brother Benjamin is with you.

You see, ever since Joseph disappeared, Benjamin is Jacob's favorite. Benjamin and Joseph are the two sons of his beloved Rachel.

All the other sons are children he had with other women. Benjamin and Joseph are Jacob's favorites because their mother Rachel was the favorite.

[4 : 34] And so Jacob is in a rough spot. They've run out of grain. There's five more years of famine left. Either his family starves to death or he risks losing his favorite.

Verse six, Israel asked, why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother? Verse eight, Judah tries to reassure him. Judah said 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. He can hold me personally responsible for him. And Judah's guarantee here, it contrasts with Reuben's guarantee last week.

Reuben is the eldest son. You'll remember that he proposed last week that if any harm was to come to Benjamin, Reuben thought that they could kill his own two sons.

Reuben thought that Jacob would be comforted from the loss of his favorite son by the killing of his two grandkids. He may have been well-intentioned, but his plan would only make matters worse.

[5 : 46] But Judah, his guarantee seems much better. Verse nine, if I do not 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 in this family to die. This seems to do the trick and Jacob lets precious Benjamin go down to Egypt. 43, verse 29, they face Joseph again, even though he's 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 your dinner table squabbles if one of your kids gets more chicken nuggets or ice cream than his brothers and sisters?

[7 : 02] Well, here, Benjamin gets five times the portions. Clearly, he is Joseph's favorite as well. And as they eat together, it appears to be happy families.

Job done. But Joseph still won't reveal himself. Instead, he plants another trap. This is point two. We're in chapter 44, verse one.

Now, Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house. Fill the men's 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 silver for his grain.

And he did as Joseph said. The brothers, they set off for home, but they don't make it past the city limits until they're caught. And like last week, they protest their innocence.

44, verse nine. If any of your servants is found to have the cup, he will die. It's pretty strong stuff from the brothers. But in verse 10, the steward says, no, no, he'll become a slave instead.

[8 : 15] In verse 16, the brothers, they're hauled before the Egyptian PM again. They're charged with 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. And this is really important because it's about where they were last week.

Innocent of stealing, but recognizing God's hand, recognizing their guilt because of what they did to their brother Joseph all those years earlier.

This is stage one. But last week, they didn't get any further because they refused to repent of their sinful ways. But today, have a listen to what Judah does.

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.

[9 : 19] 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, if I don't bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life.

You see, today's situation is a rerun of years earlier when Joseph's life were in the balance. Back then, chapter 37, a favored son, some jealous brothers.

They wanted to kill him, but reduced it to slavery. Deceptive silver was involved. Today is every opportunity for the same jealousy.

When the cup is found in Benjamin's sack, Judah could have said, well, take him. We hate favored sons here. We never liked him anyway. We don't care. Years ago, it was Judah's plan, in fact, 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.

[10:27] Verse 32, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life. Verse 33, Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's 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 the father. See, back in chapter 37, when the brothers made Joseph disappear, they lied to 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 this time, the worst rotter in the family, Judah, he begs for the sake of the father.

Jacob. Verse 30, If my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy's in there, he will die. Your servants, verse 31, Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow.

Verse 34, How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No, do not let me see the misery that would come on my father. I myself will bear the guilt.

[11:45] You see, Judah is repentant because when faced with a same situation, he acts totally different.

He is not the same person he was in chapter 37. Last week, they recognized their guilt. Step one. This week, they repent. That is, they 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. And so there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. This is point three. Verse two, 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. Is my father still living? 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.

[13:00] You see, for the brothers, the big R on their mind wasn't reconciliation, it was revenge. They took everything away from Joseph and now he's got the power.

They are right to be terrified. If there's going to be justice, doesn't Joseph owe them as their sins deserve? I mean, I've been calling it revenge, but getting their comeuppance, wouldn't that be a just outcome in this situation?

But in verse four, Joseph said, I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt 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 or remorse, God was 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, God sent. Way before they'd recognize anything wicked, even while they were sinners, God was working towards salvation.

[14:24] not because he owed it to them but because he was merciful and gracious in the first place. In fact, the author has been dropping clues about this all through the story.

In 43, verse 14, May God Almighty grant you mercy. 43, verse 29, God be gracious to you, my son. 45, verse 7, God sent me to preserve for you a remnant on earth to save your lives. You see, for two weeks now, we've been running with this equation which is on your screen again.

The equation there on your screen, it makes it look like one plus one equals two. It looks as if you recognize your guilt, you're repentant enough, then God spits out reconciliation like some sort of slot machine.

but really, they're not judged as their sins deserved. They needn't be terrified because God is merciful.

[15 : 31] They get reconciliation and salvation because God was gracious to them in the first place. Verse 14, chapter 45, verse 14, And we might ask, why didn't God do all of this sooner?

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, he doesn't want them as they are. Guilty, unrepentant, dysfunctional. He was waiting on these brothers to change. Recognition, 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 as we move to apply this story, with a church as large as ours, it's reasonable to assume that there are some grudges going on, some quiet resentments, maybe.

[17 : 02] Perhaps situations where we hurry out the door rather than speak to someone. Yes, God blesses us in spite of our sin, but when we carry on like this, we're hardly being the family that he wants.

We're taking the Lord's Supper next week, as Andrew said, and while you're preparing this week to get your symbols of bread and wine together, why not spend this week recognizing guilt, repenting of sins?

people might ask, can you have forgiveness? Can there be reconciliation if one party's not willing to say sorry? And I can't see a way that that is possible.

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

That's reconciliation between people. This is also a story about reconciliation with God. The brothers said, what is this that God has done to us?

[18 : 14] Judah says, God has uncovered your servant's guilt. Whether we're Christians, but even if you're not, nothing that we have done is so buried or so small or so in the past that God won't uncover it.

Facing Jesus, still bearing your guilt, that is a matter of life and death. You're in desperate need of reconciliation. And so the message is, come clean.

He sees it all anyway, and so come clean. And when we do, it is vital that we repent. Like Judah, when faced the same situation, it's vital we turn 180 degrees from what we did before.

Some people will ask, how good can my repentance be if I keep making the same mistakes over and over again? And the answer, I think, is that God graciously gives us more opportunities to change.

He's waiting for us, hoping that each new time will finally do the right thing. It is a bit crushing, isn't it? We sin and then we repent, and we sin and then we repent, and we keep sinning, making the same mistakes over and over again.

[19 : 32] But I think that's actually part of the Christian life. By the Spirit, he's making us more like Jesus. We should be sinning less, yes. But the danger in this passage is not poor repentance, but unrepentance.

The danger is we get to a point one day and we stop battling, and we say, I can't be bothered trying anymore. Unrepentance is the danger, but poor repentance seems to be part and parcel of the Christian life.

Some people will then ask, well, what does it matter if I repent then? If God is gracious, why can't I just carry on as I am? And from the slide on your screens, the Apostle Paul answers the exact same question.

He says, what shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? Why does it matter? By no means. We are those who have died to sin.

How can we live in it any longer? God's graciousness is not a free pass for our sin, but a wake-up call for us to come clean.

[20 : 46] A wake-up call so we don't live in it any longer. There was no reconciliation until the brothers had repented. 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 wicked, God sent Joseph to save and deliver and reconcile them. And so too, our peace with God God made the first move.

It's not because we felt the right amount of repentance, but because way ahead of time, while we were still sinners, that he sent the Lord Jesus to save us, deliver us, to die for us, to reconcile us back to him.

While we were still sinners, God made the first move. our New Testament passage, which Don read for us, the famous story of the prodigal son, you'll remember while the son was still way off, the father had compassion, was watching out for him.

The son didn't even get through all the words of his confession before his father ran and hugged and kissed and reinstated him, reconciled him back to the family.

[22 : 13] What sort of father is God? a gracious and merciful one. The brothers, they were terrified, weren't they? They were terrified when the Christ figure was revealed.

But we do not have to be, because God is merciful. And in Jesus, he graciously makes the first move. He's ready, he's waiting, he wants to reconcile us back when we recognize our guilt and repent of our sins.

And so let me pray that we would. Our father God, we thank you and praise you.

You are gracious and merciful. We see it most clearly in that while we were still sinners, you sent Christ to die for us.

praise you our father for your grace, your mercy, your love. And please would that wake us up.

Please father, by your spirit, please would we recognize our guilt.

[23 : 24] Would we repent of our sins? Help us to be gracious to others the way you have been gracious to us. And father, help us to stay hard and long in the battle with sin.

Please, would we always be fighting for repentance? Give us strength by your spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.