

Facing Up to Sin

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 June 2013

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together now to Genesis 42. Genesis 42, we'll look at this passage from verse 1 through to verse 28 where we finished our reading.

Continuing with our studies of Joseph's life and his experience here in coming to meet his brothers for the first time since they abandoned him and sold him to Egypt.

Now we know there's a world crisis on as you read this part of Joseph's life history. We saw that last time the previous chapter ends in that way.

All the earth came to Joseph to buy grain because the famine was severe over all the earth. And the whole of that known world that was under a famine caused a huge crisis.

Obviously a famine is a crisis but when it's as widespread as that then it's a massive crisis. There's a huge movement of people from all around Egypt all heading for Egypt to buy grain to get something to prevent starvation and then heading back as Joseph's brothers did to their own families wherever they lived.

[1 : 1 3] And yet, it's all about one family. And isn't that itself significant? Here we are, we've been told about this worldwide crisis and all of these people moving to Egypt and back again and yet, in the Bible's account, all of this is happening for the sake of one family.

One man's family as the people of God. And it does show us the lengths that God will go to in order to provide for his own, in order to bring his plans for his own people to fulfilment.

You know, sometimes we have a great crisis in the world whether it's a war, turmoil, rebellion, whatever it is, the collapse of empires.

And yet beneath all of that, this kind of thing is actually the main story. The story of God and his people. The story of the way God is actually bringing things to their final conclusion for his own people.

And that fits in with what the New Testament tells us about Christ and where Christ is today. He has been made head over all things for his church.

[2 : 3 7] Everything that Jesus does in ruling over the whole universe in moving people and empires, comings and goings, one generation after another.

It is all directed ultimately for the benefit of his people. What a tremendous thing to belong to that Lord. To be part of that family that God is moving heaven and earth for.

What a privilege. What an advantage that is. And you see here in verse 5 that interesting, significantly, they are called the sons of Israel.

Remember, Israel is the name that God gave to Jacob after the wrestling that's described earlier in Genesis where he wrestled with the angel in which God himself was present.

And God gave him this new name, Israel. That became the name of the people that descended from him, beginning with his own sons and following on, as you know, into the people of Israel.

[3 : 46] And this is where they're called, the sons of Israel. Fitting in with the fact that it's all about this, although there's this worldwide crisis, this is really what is narrowing the focus down to us to this particular matter.

It's about the sons of Israel. It's about the people of God. Here is the beginnings of the people formed into a nation as they would become.

And you know, when you go to Revelation chapter 21 and it describes the new Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, this picture that you've got of the final state of God's church brought to glory and set forevermore the way God is going to set it finally at last.

There's a description of that city. And it has names inscribed into it. And the names are the names of the twelve sons of Jacob.

This lot are the very people who have their names given to God's church. Now that's amazing grace.

[5 : 02] Because this lot, as we've seen and as we'll see today, are a very dysfunctional lot right now. They're not a very dependable lot. They're full of failure, sin.

They're not dependable. You can't trust them. And even their father knows that. And yet God in his grace has a great future for Israel.

For a people who are named by these very people. You know, if we were going to choose who would be foundational to the church, who would actually give their names to the church that is God's people, would you have chosen this family?

Would you have chosen the likes of these people? Of course not. But then we wouldn't have chosen the genealogy of Jesus either, would we? If we had, we would have chosen, we wouldn't have chosen the likes of Judah from this family.

As the tribe from which Jesus came to be born. The Judah whose sins are very clearly spelled out for us. Nor would we have included Rahab the prostitute.

[6 : 15] None of these would have been included by us, but that's not God. God takes broken, misshapen human lives.

He changes them. And his grace makes them the kind of people they should be. And that's you and I as well. So here is an incident where we're going to look at it under the issue of facing up to sin.

That's really what these brothers had to do as Joseph dealt with them here. And you can see a connection there too between this and the way Jesus as our Lord treats ourselves.

In order to bring us to see our faults, in order to bring us to bow to him and ultimately to accept him as his brothers did Joseph, that's what really this is teaching us too.

And that's what's going to continue on until we've come to the point where Joseph reveals himself to his brother. A fantastic moment, really. Such a great high point in the story when Joseph reveals himself to his brother at last.

[7 : 23] So, first of all, let's look at them making their way to Egypt. Now, we're taken back to Canaan, beginning of chapter 42. The previous chapters there have been about, chapter 37 is where he was sold to Egypt.

Then the focus has been on Joseph and his place in Egypt, what happened to him in Egypt. But now we're back in Canaan. And the focus is back in this home in Canaan where Joseph himself was brought up.

What's happening in the home meantime, in other words. That's what the story is about. That's what God is bringing us back to. All the time this has been happening in Egypt, this is how it is back home.

And the scene is one where the brothers are, well, you get the impression distinctly from that that they're very reluctant to think about going to Egypt.

I'm sure they knew that there was grain in Egypt. Certainly their father here told them when he learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt. He said, Why do you look at one another?

[8 : 27] Behold, I've heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there that we may live and not die. Now when you put that against the way you know the story develops, there's a reluctance on the part of these brothers to think about going to Egypt because the mention of Egypt has bad memories for them.

And the point to this story, this part of it itself that we're looking at today is that these bad memories actually come to haunt them. And the fact that their bad memories come to the fore in their minds means that they've come to at last acknowledge they've got a bad conscience about what they did to Joseph.

And their reluctance to go to Egypt is addressed by their father. Why do you look at one another? It's almost to be saying, Why are you standing around here just looking at one another idly?

Go to Egypt. That's where there's food. That's where we will get something to prevent us starving. God, you see, is bringing them to face up to their reluctance and facing up to their reluctance to go to Egypt.

He's going to bring them to face up to their sin. He's going to bring them to face up to what they've done and actually come to see it as it really is and no longer to kind of put it to the back of their minds, no longer to live life just not thinking about it, lying at the back of their minds, knowing it's there but not really dealing with it.

[9 : 59] God is going to bring them to face up to it and he uses Joseph to do that. And that's God's way for ourselves too.

We can go through life putting things to the back of our minds. We can do that especially with the most important issues in our lives including the issue of our fallenness, our sinfulness, our guilt in the presence of God as he sees us.

Even if we live an outwardly decent life, you know very well that the Bible tells us the very best people in the world need to have their life changed, their hearts changed, their sin forgiven, given the righteousness from God that they don't have of themselves.

And that's what Paul for example was saying about himself. You couldn't have found in the whole world of the time a man more committed to pleasing God than Paul when he was Saul of Tarsus.

He was absolutely meticulous in trying to keep every single law of God, every regulation that he had as a Pharisee, every single aspect of his life was meticulously arranged and his one aim in life was to please God.

[11 : 16] But he came to see I was entirely wrong because although I was very good in the way I saw myself to be very good, I was very bad when I realised how God saw me.

I needed a standard, a righteousness that I couldn't produce myself. I needed my sin taken away he's telling us and the righteousness of Jesus Christ given to me instead of my own.

That's what God brings us to face up to. And that's what we need to face up to. And it's actually as we'll see in the kindness of God that he did this to his brothers and brought Joseph to deal with them in a way that brought them to face up to their sin.

Now today that's unimperative, unessential for you and for me to face up to our need of Christ's righteousness and to get rid of our guilt and our sin by accepting him who's taken the guilt to himself.

That's how they made their way then to Egypt and you notice that their father didn't send Benjamin with them. And that's interesting itself. He just couldn't trust these brothers and he didn't want to lose Benjamin.

[12 : 50] He was of the view that they had been responsible some way or another although they spun a story Jacob really didn't believe their story. He knew that Joseph or he believed Joseph was dead but he knew that they had something to do with it.

And he didn't trust them. he didn't want to send Benjamin as well because he was afraid the same thing would happen to him as happened to Joseph.

So the ten of them came down to Egypt and then we come to their meeting with Joseph. And the first thing you're told about it is when he came and met them or they met with him he recognised them but they didn't recognise him.

And of course it's twenty years since he disappeared or since they abandoned him and left him to sell him to Egypt. And in that time Joseph as we know has come to be next to Pharaoh himself.

He'd have been dressed as an Egyptian with all the finery of Egyptian clothes. His appearance would be the appearance of an Egyptian. It would have been quite unlike, totally different to the Joseph they had known as a young man.

[14 : 05] It's not surprising that they wouldn't have known him at all. And of course the last thing they would expect is that he was the governor of Egypt. So he recognised them but they didn't recognise him.

And the first thing you read about it is Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. Now the narrative there is going out of its way to tell us that they came before Joseph and immediately prostrated themselves before him.

That of course would have been proper coming to someone next to Pharaoh. That's what you would do. You're coming into the presence of the most important man in the land apart from Pharaoh himself.

The most powerful person in the world apart from Pharaoh. And you acknowledge that authority and you bow in the presence. But there's more than that to it because Joseph remembered his dreams and we remember Joseph's dreams and the dreams that he had was of his father and his brothers bowing down to him.

Coming to acknowledge him as their Lord, as their superior, as their master. They hated him for that. They dismissed the idea. How was he? This young upstart as they saw it, he was going to actually be over them and they were going to come to bow to him.

[15 : 28] Their view of it then was it's not going to happen. They're mistaken. as rubbish. It's just your own pride. And that's why they called him the dreamer.

Not just because he had dreams but because they thought he was just deluded. But he wasn't. And you know there's a connection there with Jesus as well.

Jesus was examined and then rejected by those who should have known him. by those who knew the Old Testament and the prophecies about the coming of the Saviour and yet having examined him he did not fit with their own expectations and so they dismissed him and handed him over to be crucified.

died. He was not recognized by those who should have known him. He came to his own as John says and his own received him not.

And here Joseph's brothers bowed down to him. But Jesus came also to be exalted. Although dismissed he came to be exalted.

[16 : 41] And the Bible tells us that even though Christ is dismissed by so many millions of people in the world and in our own nation no less. He's still going to appear as the king.

And we're told that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's going to be some day that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Every tongue. Well here they are. They're before Joseph and they're bowing down. And that's of course for ourselves such an important thing as well. Our relationship to Jesus Christ defeats our saviour today and our Lord is one in which we pay homage to him.

Our lives are a life, our lives that bow down to him. Our whole life is a life that bows down to him. That's what being under this lordship really means.

That we have accepted that lordship as something which invades every single aspect of our lives. How we think about ourselves, how we think about other people, how we think about God, how we think about the scriptures, how we think about his church, how we think about the world in which we live, how we behave, how we live, what we think of other people.

[18 : 00] It's all there. Every single aspect of life. You bring it under the lordship of Christ and you, as Psalm 2 puts it, you kiss the sun. And kissing, as you still see people with royalty doing, is a sign of paying homage to them.

You're accepting their authority, their position, their lordship over you. And that's what made the act of Judas Iscariot such a despicable one.

When he betrayed the lord to be handed over to be crucified, he betrayed him with a kiss. The kiss of homage.

The kiss of accepting lordship. death. And yet beneath the kiss, there's the poisonous sting of betrayal. What a despicable act.

Outwardly to kiss as if this indeed is the one you're accepting as your lord, and underneath in your heart you're handing him over to be crucified.

[19 : 13] That's what Judas did. That's why it was so despicable. Not just because he handed him over, but he handed him over under the guise of homage.

Well, they bow down, and it tells us how we too, in our lives, bow down to Christ. He is the lord, he's the master, he dictates, we obey.

And then comes the testing, because he accuses them of being spies, as we know from the story. And the testing then follows on from that, the various ways down through this chapter and on into the next one as well, and into chapter 44, where you have the series of testings as they go on.

We're just looking at the beginnings of that today. But let's look at the testing through which Joseph puts them in terms of its purpose and its effects, just briefly. Its purpose, it's not about Joseph getting his own back.

It's not Joseph being vindictive. Joseph sees God's hand in all of this. That's what's meant when he remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. He was seeing God's hand in their coming now to be before him and him being over them as their master, as their lord.

[20 : 29] And he wants to see them come to face their sin, to face their fault, to deal with that properly. You know, verse 16 there, having accused them of being spies, he says, let him bring your brother while you are a man, that your words may be tested whether there is truth in you.

How important these words are. Joseph knew that these were not truthful men, that they were prone to telling lies, that they would lie to protect their own self, their own reputation, their own lives if necessary.

He knew that from the way they had dealt with him. And that's where you put it against verse 11, where they insist, no my lord, your servants are counted by food, we are all sons of one man, we are honest men.

No, they're not. Joseph knows they're not, that's why he's putting them to the test. Will they go on being dishonest men? Will their lives change? Will they face up to their sin, what they have done?

Will they actually come to God and acknowledge in the presence of God, more important than Joseph, that this is what they are and that they need to face up to it?

[21 : 48] That's why the way Joseph dealt with them was difficult for them. He treated them roughly, we're told, spoke to them roughly. He treated them like strangers, spoke roughly to them.

That's what the gospel does to us, that's how God brings us to face up to the problem of our sin, our own reluctance to come to acknowledge it, to come to confess it, to come to face up to it and treat it as it is.

God brings in the gospel the painful sense of that sin to us. He deals with us in a way that will bring us to face up to the sin, but in order to do that, he makes us face up to the fact, yes, we are guilty.

God's right. Our sin is serious. We can't put it to the back of our mind. You remember in 2 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul, writing the second letter to the people in Corinth, reminded them of another letter he had sent to them, where he had been very cutting, and where he knew that he had hurt them.

But he tells them he's glad that that was the case, because he's heard from Titus returning with a report, how they had responded to that, and they had responded to that by facing up to the things that he actually had specified, and they had repented, and they had turned to the Lord, and they were different people.

[23 : 20] Now he's saying, I'm not sorry that I sent this letter to you, because I see what it produced in you. You can read through it yourselves later on, but it's in 2 Corinthians chapter 7, and in verses 6 to 11 of that chapter, where he says that this is in fact how he had responded.

Titus comforted us by telling us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, for even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it, though I did regret it.

You see, when he sent the letter, Paul had some misgivings. Was he being a bit too hard on them? Was he being a bit too harsh in saying the things he did the way he said it?

But now he's saying, no, I'm rejoicing now, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repentance, for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

[24 : 30] That's such an important verse. Godly grief produces sorrow that leads to salvation without regret, whereas the sorrow of the world leads to death.

Sorrow for sin, but not towards salvation, not towards facing up to it, leads to death. Whereas God's way is really in a sense the way of a surgeon dealing with a serious tumor.

He has to get it out. He has to excise it from your body, otherwise it will kill you. pain. And in order to excise it from your body, when you wake up after a serious operation, yes, you've got painkillers, yes, you've been under anesthetic, pain, but you feel the pain.

It's hurting. And you're spending many days, perhaps even weeks feeling that pain. But if it meant that the surgeon has taken away what would kill you, well the pain is worth it, isn't it?

It's beneficial pain. It's pain through which you've received healing. And that's how God is with the gospel. And that's why the gospel is so unattractive to people today in the world we live in who don't want to face up to their sin.

[26 : 00] Who don't believe in the idea of sin in the way the Bible defines it as something that is offensive to God that we have done against God and in breaking God's standard. Because when you try and bring up the concept of sin and something because it's sin therefore it's wrong, you're dismissed, you're laughed at, you're told you're completely out of date.

There is no such thing. as right and wrong except in the most serious issues of murder perhaps, otherwise you're only right and wrong according to your own standard.

word. And there are so many types of behavior that in today's world you are discouraged from calling wrong.

Why do people not see certain things as wrong anymore? Because they've dismissed the standard of God, the word of God, the law of God through which we come to have defined for us what is right and wrong.

if you take the law of God out of our society, out of human thinking, out of the process of reaching conclusions, then you see where you are.

[27 : 11] It's only right and wrong then in human eyes. You make up what's right and wrong. the gospel cuts into our experience because God wants to cut out what will bring us ultimately to death forever.

And in order to cut it out, it hurts. Nobody likes having their sin exposed by God. Nobody likes God coming into their mind and saying, I've got something against you.

And unless you deal with it, well, you'll be lost forever. That's not easy. Comfortable. When God brings that home to you.

When the guilt that God is saying is true of us is brought to the fore. But that's what's happening with these brothers and that's how God deals with ourselves. Because that's the purpose of the testing.

That's the purpose of treating them roughly and putting them through these tests. And then you can see the effects of it. Verses 21 and 22. And also in verse 28 itself.

[28 : 29] Their guilt is brought to the fore. They've spent these 20 years and what they did to Joseph has been lying at the back of their mind or buried, if you like, in their consciousness. They haven't forgotten about it, but they're living in a way as if it wasn't really true, as if it wasn't something that happened that they did.

But now it's brought right up to the forefront, right up to the top of their agenda in their thoughts. This is really what they can't get away from. And what they've come to realize and to confess here is that the reason they're being treated this way is because of the way they dealt with Joseph.

It's not because they've recognized him, but because all that they've done and now that they're in Egypt, it's brought all of that flooding back. And they feel their guilt.

Notice how they put it. 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. Notice the interesting way they're putting it. They put him in the pit. We noticed at the time there's nothing in the chapter to say he was crying out, although he would have been begging them to take him out of the pit to release him from that.

[29 : 51] They heard his cries, they're now confessing, but they didn't actually listen. They were cries of distress from this younger brother that they wanted to be rid of.

And they ignored it. And now the distress is theirs. And the distress that's theirs now, they're a tribute to the fact they ignored his distress then.

Their sin has come to confront them. And when you go on with it to verse 28, you can see there as well, while Reuben first of all said, you did not listen to me, now there comes a reckoning for his blood.

And at verse 28 when they come to see their money put back in their sack, they're trembling even more. This is an addition to the test. What is this that God has done to us?

You see, for the first time in the whole story of Joseph, these brothers are actually using the name of God. Nowhere before this can you actually find them speaking about God.

[31 : 00] Not that they weren't believers, but it's as if we're being told that, well, their relationship with God was one that wasn't all that significant to them.

They were really interested in themselves and in advancing themselves. But now you see, they're saying, what is this that God has done to us?

Not Joseph. They're seeing God in it. God has done to us in God's eyes.

And God brings you to face up to it. The circumstances bring it to the fore. And now you see, I can't escape. It's God that's doing it.

He's bringing me to face up to my sin. What is this that God has done to us? The whole point, you see, of us being convicted of our sin is that that will bring us to God.

[32 : 23] God doesn't hurt us just because he takes pleasure. God doesn't hurt us because he takes pleasure in hurting us. God hurts us by the gospel because his purpose is to heal, to make us face up to sin, to make us bring this to himself.

Only he can put it right. But we have to bring it to him by facing up to it, confessing it, bringing it to him for healing. In other words, the rough treatment of Joseph actually in the highest sense turns out to be a kindness.

Joseph's kindness is actually what leads or governs the way he treated his brothers because ultimately his purpose is for reconciliation and for these brothers to face up to the wrong and for them to come to acknowledge it and to embrace as they finally do their long lost brother Joseph and to rejoice together and to live in Egypt with them.

That's what he's aiming at. And in order to get there, he has to hurt them first in order to bring them to face up to their sin. Well, the Bible tells us the same is true about God.

In Romans chapter 2 and verse 4, do you not know, says Paul, that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.

[33 : 58] If God is hurting you today, if God is putting his finger on your sin, if God is actually probing your conscience, if God through the gospel is speaking to you today and saying to you, you've got to face up to your sin in order that I treat it.

Don't think he's being unkind to you. It's actually kindness on the part of God to point out our need and where we can have it dealt with.

And that's why in 1 John chapter 1, we have these great words that John wrote. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his truth is not in us.

If, on the other hand, we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let's pray. Lord, our God, we acknowledge your kindness to us in the gospel. For it is a kindness on your part for us to have our fault and our sin pointed out to us.

[35 : 21] We know that we are so blind to it ourselves. Lord, we confess that we are so ready to defend ourselves and our own reputation that our pride leads us to margin that we are nothing like as bad as your word describes.

But we confess, Lord, when we come to know you that we are a whole lot worse. Worse than we ever think we are and worse than we could imagine when we take our relationship with you into account.

But we bless you, Lord, for your provision that in Jesus Christ you bring us to be better than we could ever imagine. and Lord, we thank you for that, that your purpose is to point our sin to us, to bring us to face it, that we will come ultimately to be sinless, to be with you in the inheritance of glory, where you will remove every tear from our eyes.

Hear us, we pray for Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.