

Eternal Provision

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[0 : 00] If we could turn back for a short time this evening to Genesis chapter 42.

Genesis 42 and we can take our text this evening from verses 1 and 2 of this chapter. When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, Why do you look at one another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us that we may live and not die.

Amen. Often in scripture it's the simplest stories that convey the most profound biblical truths. You'll remember last week we saw that Christ himself, he taught through parables. It's pictures of the world as we know it, yet pictures that were used to teach the great truths of the kingdom.

[1 : 28] Yet it's important for us to remember that it's not only in the New Testament, in parables, that we find stories that can be applied in a deeper way.

Because as we see here in this story that we have before us, we have a story that has a meaning that is perhaps a little deeper than we might think on first reading it.

Here we have the story of Joseph and his brothers. This is a story that we've all grown up knowing fairly well.

A story that perhaps we learned in Sunday school. A story that we've even seen on the television made into films or cartoons.

But yet, like so many of the stories that we have in scripture, it's important that we don't allow ourselves to leave these stories in our childhood.

[2 : 35] That we don't think of these stories as being only for children. That they are childish stories with childish meanings. Henry Law, when speaking of the story that we have before us here, he said that the grand value of this narrative is not the simple style, the tender pathos, the amazing events, the winding thread of providential arrangement, or even the happy end.

These do lead the mind through luxuriant fields of captivating interest. But of this be all, if this is all that this story does, the prophet is as fading as a flower or as a morning gleam.

He only gains who gains a blessing for his soul. And so, in other words, if we read this story that we have before us tonight, as we would read any other story, any other novel, if you like, we are completely missing out in all of the rich spiritual meanings and imagery that is so clearly being conveyed in these words.

And so, with this in mind, I'd like us to look at the words in the text that we have before us tonight under three headings. I'd like us firstly to look at the pride of Joseph's brothers.

Then we'll look at the problem that they were faced with. And lastly, I'd like us to look at the provision that was made for them.

[4 : 19] The pride, the problem, and the provision. And although our text is in chapter 42 this evening, we will refer to some of the surrounding chapters in order to flesh out what the story here is telling us.

Firstly then, let's look at the pride of Joseph's brothers. It was J.C. Ryle who said that no sin is so deeply rooted in our nature as pride.

It cleaves to us like our skin. And I think it's fair to say that pride is indeed the besetting sin of humanity, the sin that we all struggle with at one point or another, a sin that can be so hidden, so subtle, but yet it's there.

And isn't it interesting in the word sin that the middle letter, when you think about it, is I? And isn't that what sin is?

Sin is so caught up in I, in me, myself. And you know, there's nothing new under the sun.

[5 : 39] Because when we think back to eternity past, when we think back to what we read of before the earth was, you'll remember reading that the devil and his angels, they weren't happy with

their lot.

They were there as angels of God in heaven, but yet, no matter what they had, they weren't content. They wanted more. They wanted even to be equal with God.

And because they didn't get that status that they were looking for, we read that they rebelled. They rebelled against God himself, and they were cast out of heaven.

The Puritan Thomas Manton notes that the pride, that pride was the sin that changed the angels to devils. And so it was. Now friends, isn't that solemn?

And doesn't it highlight to us this evening the power of the sin of pride? A sin that perhaps we don't talk about enough, we don't even think about enough, but a sin that is in your life and that is in mine.

[6 : 55] A sin that can have an effect on our own lives and can also have an effect on those who are around us, which brings us back here to our text.

Because we only have to go back a few chapters to chapter 37, where we start seeing the rot that set in amongst Joseph's brothers.

You remember when we read in verse 3 of chapter 37, that Jacob loved Joseph more than all of his other sons.

Now of course, naturally, this would have been hurtful to the other brothers. You can imagine if your parents loved your brothers or your sisters more than they loved you, you would be hurt.

Because of this, resentment grew. The brothers didn't like the fact that Joseph had a higher place in the estimation of their father than they did.

[8 : 04] And so we read in verse 4 of chapter 37 that Joseph's brothers hated him and they could not speak peacefully to him. And then, as if to add insult to injury, if you like, we see that Joseph announces that he's had a dream.

And in this dream, he sees his brothers bowing down before him. And he shares this dream with his brothers, as often we do share dreams with those who are near and dear to us, telling them what we have seen.

And so as well as being loved more by his father than the others, here Joseph appears to be making himself out to be better than his brothers.

He's making out as if they should be bowing down before him. And so at this point, you may be forgiven for thinking that it's actually Joseph that's got the problem here with pride.

But it wasn't Joseph's fault that his father loved him more than the others. It wasn't even Joseph's fault that he saw what he saw in a dream.

[9 : 23] Yes, fair enough, he should maybe have restricted what he shared with his brothers when he told them about this dream. But yet their response to this was completely disproportionate.

We read in verse 18 of chapter 37 that they conspired against him to kill him. They wanted him dead. And so they devised a plan to get rid of their brother.

They simply didn't like him. And so they put him into a pit. They cast him into a pit. And they decided what they would do with him.

Some of the brothers wanted him dead. But then Reuben said, well, again looking for his own selfish gain, he said, perhaps our brother Joseph will be of more worth to us if we sell him on.

And so that's what they did. They sold him on to the passing Midianite traders for 20 shekels of silver. Their proud, jealous attitudes had ensured that this would be the last time that they would ever see their brother, that they had turned their back on him, and that he was gone now from their lives.

[10 : 46] Or so they thought. But of course, as sin so often did, this one sin led to another.

And in getting rid of their brother, Joseph's brothers then devised another plan to cover up what they'd done. They had to somehow explain this to their father, what had happened to his beloved son.

And so you'll remember that they tore Joseph's robe that they'd taken from him, that colourful coat. They dipped it in blood, and they pretended to their father that in fact their brother had been eaten by a wild animal.

They were happy to use the most outrageous of stories to cover them, to cover their sins. And so often that's the way we too can be.

We can do all that we possibly can to cover our sins, to hide what we've done to others. But you know, as I said at the beginning, we would truly be missing the point of this story if we just read it as it is.

[12:03] If we read it as a story about brothers who didn't treat their brother very well, and learn some kind of nice moral lesson from that story.

But yet there's so much more to see here. Because if we don't apply the story that we have before us tonight to our own souls, friends, we will not see Christ in it.

He's here. He's before us. Because it's true to say that just like Joseph, Christ himself was envied. He was hated. Money was exchanged in order to get rid of him. He was despised and rejected of men, as we read in Isaiah. He was hated so much so that proud hearts then called out, crucify him, crucify him.

Those around him simply couldn't bear the fact that he told them that they were sinners in need of grace. How dare he suggest such a thing?

[13:15] Who did he think that he was? And you know, this is so like our own hearts by nature. At times our pride finds it so difficult to accept that we might just be wrong, that we may even be sinners.

You might be sitting here tonight and you might think, well, I'm a good person. I'm good to my neighbor. I'm good to my community.

I'm good to the church. I pay the church. I'm not a sinner. Well, friends, if you are not a sinner, why do you need a Savior? If you are not a sinner, it makes the whole story of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross a meaningless sham.

It makes the whole Christian faith a fraud. For then, the fact is, we all have that pride in our hearts towards Christ in one degree or another.

It may be that, yes, we know we are sinners, that we know we need to be saved by him, but yet our pride is holding us back.

[14:37] Our pride is not allowing us to allow him, to allow Christ to dwell within us. Our pride is telling us that perhaps if we allow him into our hearts, we will be missing out on something in life.

Our pride is telling us that we know what's best, well, friends, let me tell you that as sure as you are sitting here tonight, this is nothing but a lie from the devil.

He is telling you that you don't need this. What you have is better. You're a better person than these Christians anyway.

Look at how they're behaving. Look at how they let their Lord down. Well, friends, do you honestly think that when you come face to face with the Lord on the last day, that you will be able to say to him, well, I did not come to you because of him or her.

Friends, you need to make your calling and election sure. Don't look to others. Yes, as Christians, we let the cause of Christ down each and every day.

[15:54] But you, if you are unsafe tonight, you cannot rest upon that. You cannot allow your pride to say, I am better than that person.

Because as we read in Proverbs 16, 18, such pride has disastrous consequences. Pride comes before a fall.

Pride comes before a fall. And you know, it's so true. And Joseph's brothers would soon realize that this was true.

The years went by, and no doubt as these men got on with their lives, they perhaps thought that they'd put this nasty little episode behind them that all was well.

they were rid of Joseph and they were now free to enjoy their lives. But that was until, which brings us to our second point, that was until they were stopped completely in their tracks.

[17:03] They were faced with this problem that could potentially be the end of them. We read at the end of chapter 41 in verse 54 that there was famine in all the lands.

They had run out of food. And food is something that we all take for granted. We only have to open our cupboards or our fridges or our freezers and we are faced with plenty good things to eat.

And so it's difficult for us perhaps to know what it's like to be in a time of famine, to be in a time of want, in a time where we don't know where our next meal is going to come from.

Perhaps you have had that experience. I don't know. But when you're in that place, when you're in that place where you have nothing to drink or nothing to eat, you become desperate.

You begin to panic. This was a problem. This was a very real problem that would have deeply affected Joseph's estranged family.

[18:16] Now at this point, bearing in mind that the years have gone by, Joseph's brothers, they now have children of their own. Even the youngest of the family, Benjamin, he would have had ten

children of his own.

And so including Jacob himself, there would have been around 66 mouths to feed, mouths of children to feed. But there was no food.

We praise the Lord tonight that we are not starving. We praise the Lord tonight, perhaps as a result of the prayers of our forefathers, that we have plenty when it comes to food for our bodies.

But yet I put it to you, I put it to you that there are those in this very church tonight who are hungry.

There are those sitting before me here who are indeed starving.

There are those who are hungry and perhaps do not even realize it. How do I know this? I know this, friends, because although the demands of the physically hungry are great, I know that the demands of the malnourished soul, the Christless soul, are far, far greater.

[19 : 39] And you know, the fact is that until you've been fed by the love and the grace and the mercy of Christ, you will always be hungry.

You will constantly be looking for that one thing that's going to give you meaning and purpose and direction in your life.

you're always going to be looking for that something to fill that emptiness that you feel. And you know, the sad thing is there are so many good things in this world, good things for us to enjoy.

But no matter how much we enjoy them, no matter how much we enjoy their goodness, isn't it true to say that we're always looking for more.

Looking forward even to the next night out with our friends. Looking forward to our next holiday.

Looking forward to our next pay packet.

[20 : 49] And so it goes on and on and on and still you're not truly satisfied. Still you're looking for something else. You're hungry for something else.

It's as if you're living your life in the future waiting for that one thing to come. I wonder if you can relate tonight to what I'm saying.

You know, people say that Christians are narrow-minded. And you know, that is true in many ways.

We heard that in the morning when Mr. McKeever talked about the way.

narrow is the way that leads to eternal life. But yet how narrow-minded is it to think or to believe in your heart that this is it?

That you live, you die, you're born, that you have a few different experiences through life's journey. Some good, some not so good.

[21 : 55] Then you die and that's it. there's nothing else. Friends, can't you see how narrow that is?

Can't you see that no matter what you have in this world and perhaps you have everything that you want in terms of material possessions, can't you see that no matter what you have, if you do not have Christ tonight, you have nothing?

you are leading the most narrow life that is. You cannot see past time into the endless ages of eternity to that glorious hope that lies in store for the Lord's people.

Friends, you are just treading water, if you like, in a dry and in a barren land and your soul is starving.

Joseph's brothers were starving. They didn't know where their next meal was going to come from.

But then out of nowhere came that good news which brings us to our final point, provision.

Just then when things seemed so bleak, Jacob shares these words with his sons, Behold, I have heard there is grain for sale in Egypt.

[23 : 26] These were the words that they were looking for. All was not lost. Now they could go and they could buy and they could provide for themselves and for their families.

But notice in verse 1 of chapter 42 that amidst this news, Jacob says to his sons, Why do you look at one another? They get this news and we're reading at this point they're looking at one another.

Why are they looking at one another? Is it because Jacob had mentioned the word Egypt? No doubt the brothers would have, as I said earlier, tried to put the Joseph incident to the back of their mind.

whenever his name would have been mentioned, they would have felt uneasy. No doubt harboring such a great secret would have weighed them down.

And so when the name of the place that they had sold him to was mentioned, they would have felt uneasy at that also. Perhaps Judah would have looked at Reuben and Reuben would have looked at Simeon.

[24 : 36] Perhaps Levi would have thrown anguished glances towards Zebulun. And so Jacob asks, Why are you looking at each other? But you know, in that looking at each other, there may be something good.

Because perhaps this is showing that for the first time, the conscience of these men are indeed being stirred. It was William Gurnell that said, Better to have a dog that will by his barking tell us a thief is in our yard than one that will sit still and let us be robbed before we have any notice of danger.

Now we don't know if these men were being convicted or if they were just being worried about being found out. There is, of course, a difference. But we do know that it's a blessing when our conscience is stirred.

It's a blessing when our conscience alerts us to the fact that we are doing something wrong, that we are not in the right place with the Lord. I wonder if you have that tonight.

Perhaps your conscience is numb. Perhaps you're completely oblivious to your Christless state.

[26 : 07] Yes, you know it because you hear it from the pulpit, but in your heart you're oblivious. You're oblivious because your conscience has been numbed, it's been seared, as it were, by a hot iron, it's been numbed by sin so that it doesn't even bother you.

Friends, the fact is our conscience can only be relied upon in the light of God's word shining upon it. It's easy for us even as Christians to condone our behavior, our actions, by saying that because we're not convicted by doing a certain thing or going to a certain place, because we're not convicted by it, it's okay.

It's okay with God. Let me ask you this question on the back of that. When you don't feel convicted of doing certain things that perhaps other people do, do you have your conscience bathed daily in the light of God's word?

If we don't, we will have that dog that will not bark, and we will be oblivious to the devil as he seeks to break into our hearts and to rob us of our joy and of our peace.

Now, Egypt was the last place on earth that these brothers would have chosen to go. What if they'd met Joseph? What if they were found out for all that they'd done all these years ago?

[27 : 52] But yet there was no getting away from the fact that here there was a famine. There was a need in Canaan and there was a provision to be found in Egypt. Crops were failing, livestock was dying and people needed fed.

So they had no choice. They could either go to Egypt or they could perish. They knew that they needed help.

They were made to see that they needed help. And you know, that's the first stage surely in getting help. Being able to see our need, admitting to ourselves that indeed we are unsatisfied with the emptiness of a life without Christ.

You may be scared tonight. You may be scared about taking that step. Joseph's brothers were scared about what they may encounter on the way, but they knew they had no choice.

Like these brothers, you may have fears about seeking that food that you so desperately need for your soul, seeking after Christ, but yet you're scared.

[29 : 24] What will people say? What will my friends say? What will my husband say? what will my wife say? I can't do that. You may be scared of the obstacles that may be put in your way along the way, and so you hesitate.

You put one foot out, and then you step back. You may have been in this very position year after year after year, yet as you halter between two opinions, the fact is you're still dying of spiritual hunger.

And so meanwhile, Joseph is no longer the man that he was when his brothers had abandoned him. He'd worked his way up to what scripture describes as a successful man.

In fact, his success was so that he'd rose to power in the house of Pharaoh and at the point that we have before us here. He's in charge of the whole of the land of Egypt.

We read that it was he that had stored up the grain in the years of plenty, so much so that there was enough for everyone. It couldn't be numbered.

[30 : 43] It was like the sand of the sea. And as the famine spread, we read that Joseph opened up all his storehouses. He made the grain available to all those who were hungry.

And what a picture this is of the provision that we have tonight in Christ. As Jesus himself said, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

There was grain in Egypt for all those who hungered. It's true to say that these brothers certainly didn't deserve this provision, yet it was made.

It was there for them. And yet tonight, if you are not in Christ, if you are sitting here and you're unconverted, there is mercy to be found in him.

His storehouses are so full of the grain of his kingdom, the grain of his mercy and his love and his grace. This is grain, friends, that it will nourish, it will feed.

[31 : 53] grain that will not leave you looking for something else. It is grain that will truly satisfy. And you know, there is absolutely no reason that anyone here should go hungry tonight.

And so Jacob told them, go down and buy grain for us there that we may live and not die. They had to make a move, the brothers at this point.

Their lives depended on it. And so they followed the advice. They got their empty sacks and they made their way to Egypt. It's true to say that yes, the grain would have nourished when they would have got that grain and they would have eaten that grain, it would have nourished their bodies.

But yet they physically had to go and get it for themselves. They had their part to play.

They had their part to play to ensure that they didn't starve. And so friends, it is with you tonight.

Yes, we know that salvation is indeed the Lord's work.

[33 : 13] We know that you must be born again, born of the Spirit. But yet it's true to say also that we need to go looking for that grace.

We need to go to the places that we know we will be fed. It's all very well saying, yes, I am seeking the Lord. Well, let me ask you, are you?

Are you truly seeking the Lord? Are you seeking him wherever you know he will be found? Are you in his word? Are you with his people worshipping his name at every given opportunity?

Or are you saying, yes, I'm seeking, but yet you refuse to go to the storehouse? When they got to Egypt, they found that grain for themselves.

and we read that there were storehouses of grain in all the different cities. There were many different storehouses, but what's amazing here is that providentially the storehouse that these brothers go to is the very one that Joseph himself is selling the grain.

[34 : 36] Isn't it wonderful the way the Lord works things together, even the smallest of details? He recognised his brothers, but they didn't recognise him.

And through to form, as he stood there with that provision there for them, he saw them once again in their true colours. Because when he inquired who they were and what their motives were, what did they say?

They said, we are honest men. Now, of course, their past behaviour told us that they were anything but honest men. They were liars at best.

And you know, often when the Holy Spirit starts working in our lives, we too don't always recognise who it is and what is happening. and we may even tell lies to ourselves and to those around us as to this work that is taking place within us.

I wonder if I'm speaking to anyone in here tonight. That you know something's happening in your heart, but you just, you don't want to entertain the fact.

[35 : 53] You're trying to hide it. You're almost trying to get rid of it. you're scared because of the fear of the unknown. But if that's you tonight, friends, there is no need to fear because the Lord has never ever sent away those who have come to his storehouses.

He's never sent them away empty-handed. And not only that, when they've come to him, when they've come to him in repentance, when we come to him in repentance, he overflows our cup in a way that we couldn't imagine.

He gives us his grace and his mercy and his peace and his love in such great abundance that we wonder why we didn't come before.

Joseph's brothers had to undergo a variety of different tests before they would fully enjoy the fullness of what Joseph had to offer.

We'll read that in chapters 42 to 44. But friends, thankfully tonight, we don't have to go through such hoops when we come to Christ.

[37 : 18] We don't even have to pay for the grace that is on offer to us tonight. in fact, the truth be told, we have nothing that we can bring to him.

As the hymn writer so aptly said, nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling. He wants us to come to him so that we will receive freely and abundantly.

Then in chapter 45, Joseph reveals who he is. I am Joseph. Now, bear in mind, these are the brothers who sold him to Egypt, the proud brothers who would quite happily have left him for dead. And so if that was you or I, we may have been plotting our revenge. We may have said, I am not going to give you any grain. I am not going to give you any food. You simply do not deserve it. But listen to his words. Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here for God sent me before you to preserve life.

[38 : 32] Isn't that wonderful? Not only had he forgiven his brothers, but he was willing to ensure that they had all that they needed to live. And you know, with this I close so it is with Christ.

He was hated, he was mocked, he was flogged, he was beaten, he was crucified on that cross. Why? So that in the same way that Joseph had to go through all that he did to save his brothers, they didn't deserve it, remember?

In the same way, Christ went through all that he did so that we may have life in him. None of us are worthy of his love, and at times, many times, our selfish pride, yours and mine with you, has led us to do all that we could to turn our back on him.

But yet, even tonight, there is grain in Egypt. Even tonight, there is grace to be found in Christ. No matter how hungry we are, we have in him all that we could possibly want, and we are invited to come and to eat.

[39 : 59] Won't you come? Won't you taste? Won't you see that God is good? Dear friends, you have heard tonight that grace is freely available in Christ.

And my prayer is that as you leave this building tonight, that you would go to him and that you would receive it freely for yourself so that you too, like Joseph's brothers, that you may live and not die.

Amen, and we pray that the Lord would bless these few thoughts to us. We'll conclude now by singing to God's praise in Psalm 130 in the Scottish Psalter, that's on page 421 of the Blue Psalm books.

Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice Lord, do thou hear, and to my supplications voice, give an attentive ear. We can sing the whole psalm to the tune martyr Lord, from the depths.

Lord, from the depths, to thee I cry, my voice Lord, you love me, unto my son, énergie, eu speak, than me me, load on the fire?

[42 : 02] I am in liberty, again with thee, for given message, that near thou mayest be.

I wait for God, my soul awake, my hope is in His word.

O'er land lay up, our morning watch, my soul waits for the Lord.

I say, O'er land lay up to watch, the morning light to see.

Let Israel open the door, for with mercy be.

[43 : 43] On ventia's redemption is ever come within.

And from all His iniquities, the Israel shall redeem.

I'll go to the main door after a word of prayer. Amen. Amen. Gracious and ever-blessed God, we praise thee for thy word. And we pray that thy spirit would now be pleased to accompany it to our souls, that we may grow thereby.

And as we meet one with another over the provisions that have been prepared, we pray that thou wouldst bless them to our bodies' use, bless our time together, and that above all else thy name would receive all the glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen.