

Persistent Faith and Boundless Mercy

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A Sermon Series on the Life of Joseph

Gen 42-45:1-8

We move to chapter 42 and here is when Joseph will see his brothers for the first time in 20 years. It happened exactly like what Joseph had told Pharaoh. There were seven years of abundance, and then there were seven years of drought. The drought was all over the area, even in the land of Jacob. Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to get food. Benjamin stayed with him.

-The brothers came to Egypt and they bowed to Joseph. They did not recognize him. Do not forget that 20 years had passed. Joseph was wearing Egyptian clothes and, according to tradition, he had shaved his head. Joseph told them they were spies and eventually put them in jail.

-Why did Joseph not reveal himself quickly?

He delayed his revelation, and he was harsh with them. We read: **but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them** (Gen 42:7 ESV).

We also read about Joseph: **and Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.** (Gen 42:9 ESV) He remembered how his dreams that put him in trouble came to fulfillment. **Joseph accuses them with spying:** “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land...”(42:9) and thus put them in jail. After three days he released them.

Was Joseph playing games? I don't think so. Now read his answer to his brothers:

On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰and bring your youngest brother to me. (42:18-20)

Joseph is teaching them to be trustworthy. Joseph is teaching them to be loyal to their oaths. Joseph is not playing games, watch out.

In his book Studies in Genesis, Robert Candlish writes: "If Joseph had been left to himself, he would have revealed his identity in a moment, but he was restrained by God, who was using him for the salvation of the brothers." (p 652)

I look at the story, and I see God's hand in leading Joseph not to reveal himself in the beginning. Joseph tested his brothers. He wanted to see if they changed in 20 years. I repeat again, he wanted to see **if they were trustworthy**. They said, "**We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies**" (42:11). They said they were honest (I don't think so). Yes, they were not spies (they are right), but were they honest? Did they confess their sin to their father? To God?

God is using Joseph to **bring real change** in the lives of his household. Let us not forget the great picture of **God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**. God will use Joseph **not just to feed the hungry mouths** of Jacob's family; God will use Joseph to bring His chosen people **on their knees and repent**.

-Repentance: Joseph was harsh with his brothers; but the response was important. We read

Then they said to one another, "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." ²²And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." (42:21-22)

Joseph heard those words in Hebrew and went inside and **wept** (42:24). It was not easy for him to hear this conversation.

-Tough situations are good to awaken people.

- Sometimes God uses severe measures to bring healing and restoration to His people. God is interested in seeing that **we turn to Him** and **restore** our relationships.

-**Ruth's** story starts with famine in the land (Ruth 1:1)

-**Jonah** went through severe storms. He finally woke up.

-**The prodigal son** came to himself and turned back to his father only when he was extremely hungry (Luke 15:14)

Sometimes **we need a shock to be awakened**.

Going back to our story, after **20 years of ignoring their sin**, Joseph's brothers were faced with what they had done.

Joseph allows the ten brothers to go and keeps one of them (Simeon) so that they would go and bring Benjamin with them. He is not sure if Benjamin is alive. Although they say he is, but Joseph cannot trust them anymore. He also gives them the grain they wanted to buy but puts their money back in the sacks. This shows Joseph is not taking revenge, wanting to punish them. On the contrary, he wants the food to arrive home. And he does not want their money.

When the brothers find out that the money is in their sacks, they are terrified. They go to their father and tell him the story. Jacob refuses to send Benjamin with them. For a while, they eat what they have, until they run out of food again.

-God is teaching them to trust Him. Especially Jacob needs to learn to trust God.

He needs to remember his place as a patriarch. He needs to remember how he wanted to take his father's blessing to become the successor. He needs to remember how he "wrestled" with God and how God blessed him. He was attached to Benjamin, the only remaining favorite son. He is learning to give up his emotional attachments. He is learning that favoritism among his sons is not good. So he decides to send his last "beloved son" Benjamin. **The time has come when Jacob would learn to trust God.**

-Now Judah is learning to be responsible. He takes the leadership role. Let me quote:

And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. ⁹**I will be a pledge of his safety.** (*I myself will guarantee his safety* NIV). From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. ¹⁰If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice." (43:8-10 ESV)

We see a different Judah here. We see a man who is learning from life experiences that he needs to take responsibilities. He was ready to protect his younger brother at all costs.

Jacob allows Benjamin to go and asks the sons to take more than money. He asks them to **take along gifts**, "a **little balm** and a **little honey**, some **spices and myrrh**, some pistachio nuts and almonds" (43:11). It is interesting to see that three of these gifts, balm, spices and myrrh were the things carried by the Ishmaelite caravans that bought Joseph (37:25). **Do you see God's hand in helping restore the relationship? Do you see God's hand in bringing reconciliation?**

The brothers arrive back in Egypt along with Benjamin this time. Joseph finds his brothers and asks his men to prepare a good banquet. We read that when Joseph saw his brothers, once again he went inside and wept (43:30).

Joseph plays another trick with them. He orders his servants to fill the sacks with grain, and place his own private cup in Benjamin's sack as a stolen cup. So when the brothers are on their way back to their land, the guards catch them and bring them back accusing them of stealing. Joseph wants Benjamin to stay with him while the others return home. Here we see **Judah taking action and responsibility again.** **Judah says,** "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. 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 upon my father.'" (44:33-34)

The climax of the story: We read chapter 45:1-8

Joseph burst into tears. He could not hold it anymore. "And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it." (45:2)

What did Joseph say here that is very important? I see **severe mercy and persistent trust and faith in God.**

"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... But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Gen 45:5,7).

Application:

1. Genuine repentance is essential in our lives.

20 years passed in Joseph's story, and his brothers lived a "covered" life trying to hide their sin. Finally, they were faced with sin. God "shocked" them so they would restore their relationship with God and each other. The prodigal son learned to go back to his father; **"he came to his senses,"** says the Bible (Luke 15:17).

We need to be "shaken" in our lives. Each person needs repentance on a daily basis. We need this in our churches. You and I need to learn to repent. God is interested in restored relationships, not offerings, but mercy.

2. Persistence in his faith, under all circumstances.

At different stages in his life, (in the pit, a chief of the household, in prison, chief of the prison, Egypt's highest man after Pharaoh), **under all circumstances**, he was faithful to God. I see persistent, not circumstantial, faith. God is faithful whatever our situation.

Speaking about Egypt, today in Egypt there are more than 10 million Christians. Today Egyptian Christians faces persecution and they face hostility because they are followers of Christ (faithful in all circumstances). Funny, the land where Joseph received new name "God speaks and lives" continues being the land with Christian testimony. Indeed God is speaking and He is ALIVE in Egypt. Those Christians are faithful under all circumstances. (Remember how ISIS beheaded 30 Coptic Christians because of their faith).

3. Boundless (Severe) Mercy.

Joseph could easily take revenge. Perhaps he had the "right" for revenge. We do not see that kind of man. Joseph did not blame his brothers, nor condemned them. On the contrary, he showed mercy, and gave a theological reason why he was in Egypt. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). We often misquote this verse. When something bad happens, we say, "Oh, something good will come out of this." No, this is not what the verse says. For those who love God, God has a plan. For those who trust God, all things can turn into "good". God will define what is good.

Three words: Genuine repentance, persistent faith (trusting God under all circumstances), and severe mercy that only Jesus can teach us.

I don't know where you stand today in your life. Take time for repentance. Ask Jesus to be your personal Savior. Without him we cannot have genuine repentance. Remember Joseph's action helped the family come together. We need this today. There are many broken relationships in families. Ask God to help you make this decision.

Amen

Let us approach the table.