

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS REPENT

Genesis 42:1-44:34
Key Verse: 44:33

Lesson 16a

"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."

God is the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth. From the time of man's fall in Genesis 3, God has been concerned about man's salvation. God is righteous; he cannot ignore sin. He must either judge and destroy sinful man or open a way for him to repent and be forgiven and come back to God. God chose the latter way. In many ways, Joseph bears the image of Christ. In these chapters we can see how Joseph was used by God to save the lives of his brothers. He not only saved them physically; he was also used to bring them to repentance and to new life in God.

1. Joseph remembers his dreams (42:1-38)

The famine extended throughout the whole known world, and touched Jacob and his sons in Canaan. Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, so he sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain. He did not risk sending his precious youngest son Benjamin.

Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all the people. When his brothers were ushered into his presence, he immediately recognized them. His heart must have been flooded with all kinds of emotions. They bowed low before him, and he remembered the dreams of his youth. (42:9) How angry and upset they had been when he innocently told them about how, in his dreams, their sheaves had bowed down to his and how the sun, moon and stars had bowed to him. He had not understood the meaning of the dreams, but he had never forgotten them. They were God's word of promise to him. They were hidden in his heart during all those years of suffering, and they kept him from losing hope. Now, God was fulfilling the prophecy of those dreams exactly. Joseph realized that his life had a great purpose and that everything that had happened to him was a part of God's sovereign plan. When his brothers bowed before him he did not use

the moment to exult in his victory; he remembered the faithfulness of God and sought God's will. He realized that God had sent him to Egypt for a purpose, and that purpose was becoming clear. God wanted to use him not only to save the physical lives of these patriarchs-to-be from starvation, but he also wanted to use Joseph to redeem his brothers spiritually. God wanted to work in them to change them from evil murders, full of Jealousy and hatred, into men of God, patriarchs of the nation of God's own people.

When his brothers came in and bowed before him, Joseph recognized them, but he did not reveal himself to them. He spoke harshly to them and accused them of being spies. This gave him leverage to question them about his father and younger brother. Then he put them in jail as suspicious characters and kept them there for three days. He agreed to release them only if their youngest brother came to Egypt to prove that what they had said was true. Finally, he released all of them but Simeon, whom he held as a hostage. He sent the others home with grain for their hungry families. He told them not to come back unless they brought Benjamin.

At first, we might think that Joseph was giving his brothers a hard time in order to get revenge for the way they had mistreated him. But as we carefully examine the events in chapters 42-44, we can see that he was not just harassing them for his own pleasure. He frequently felt real pain and he turned aside and wept, suffering with them. Joseph was leading his brothers, step by step to repent of their sins.

Joseph created many problems for his brothers to lead them toward repentance. Look at 42:21. "They said to one another, 'Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; *That's why this distress has come upon us.*" Their trouble stirred their guilty consciences and they began to talk about what they had done. They confessed to one another the evilness of their deed. This was a giant step toward true repentance. Their guilty consciences made them interpret even the good things that he did for them in a negative way. When they discovered that their money had been put back in their grain sacks, they were terrified. Look at 42:28. "My silver has been returned,' he said to his

brothers. 'Here it is in my sack.' Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, *'What is this that God has done to us?'* Fear of God came into their hearts.

When they returned home with the grain and reported to their father all that had happened, he was distressed. When they emptied their sacks and found that all of their money--not just the money in one sack--had been returned they were really upset, and very frightened. Jacob would not agree to send Benjamin back--even though Simeon was a hostage and they needed grain in order to survive.

2. Judah's great change (43:1-44:34)

In chapter 43 the brothers make their second journey to Egypt. The famine was very severe. They had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, and Jacob finally suggested that they go back for more. It had become a matter of life and death. (43:8) The brothers adamantly refused to go without Benjamin. Reuben's emotional and irresponsible offer had been ignored by Jacob (42:37). Now Judah came forward. See 43:8,9. "Then 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. You can hold me personally responsible for him.'"

Jacob relented. They prepared a double amount of money and gifts for the terrifying man they must meet again, and set out. When they arrived in Egypt they were invited to Joseph's house for lunch. This luncheon invitation terrified them. They suspected his motives. They thought that they would be arrested for failing to pay for the grain they had previously gotten, and their donkeys would be confiscated. When guilt and fear occupy a person's heart, even the kindnesses of others seem to be harassment.

Joseph's steward assured them that he did not want their silver. He said, "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you your treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then he restored Simeon to them.

When they sat down to eat, they were truly mystified, for they were seated in the order of their age--from the firstborn to the youngest. How could this great prime minister

of all Egypt know so much about them? "They looked at each other in astonishment." Joseph had them served with royal food from his own table. Benjamin was given 5 times more than anyone else. Perhaps Joseph wanted to see if they hated Benjamin as much as they had hated him in his youth. They were very hungry, so they feasted and drank freely with Joseph.

There was one final and climactic event. Joseph sent his brothers home laden with grain, but he had his own special silver cup placed in Benjamin's grain sack--and, as before, he returned their money. Then he sent his steward after them. They were stopped and searched and there was Joseph's cup--in Benjamin's sack.

There were 2 options: Just leave the guilty man and go home; or go back to the city and take responsibility with him. They loaded up their donkeys and went back. After a quick hearing, the prime minister decreed that the guilty party must remain and serve as a slave, and the rest of them could go back to their father.

At this, Judah stepped forward. When he saw the silver cup in Benjamin's sack he was thunder-struck. Now he stood before the fearsome Egyptian and pled for his youngest brother. He laid his heart before Joseph. He spoke of his father's love for Benjamin; he mentioned the brother who had been snatched away and presumably eaten by wild animals, and his father's sorrow. He said, "If the boy 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." (30,31) He went on to say, "I promised to bring the boy back. I took responsibility." Then he said, "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. 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." (33-34) Judah volunteered to take Benjamin's place and serve as a slave in Egypt in his stead. What an amazing change! Judah's unselfish act was the fruit of real repentance.

Joseph loved his brothers. When they suffered from their guilty consciences, he turned away with a broken heart (42:24). He sent them home with grain for their starving families--and returned their money. Later, when he saw his brother Benjamin, he could not contain his feelings; he had to leave the room to go and weep. When they repented, he kissed them and wept over them (45:2,15). But Joseph's love was redemptive love. It was tough love. God was with Joseph to clothe him in holy love. His brothers had committed a great sin against him by selling him into Egypt as a slave. God hates sin but he loves sinners. Joseph did not hate his brothers or hold a grudge against them. He only wanted his brothers to recognize their sins and repent. He wanted this because God wanted it. God wants us to confess our sins. "When we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1Jn 1:9) In order to lead his brothers to repent before God and be forgiven, he made them suffer anguish for a short time. Because his brothers lived with unrepented sin in their lives they suffered in their guilt, fear and fatalism. When Judah saw the silver cup in Benjamin's sack, he completely despaired. But this was the time that Judah really repented. He thought of his father and offered to take Benjamin's place as Joseph's slave. Judah had been the ring-leader in their terrible crime. He had brought unspeakable sorrow to his father when he vented his jealousy and hatred of his young brother by selling him as a slave. He had tried to escape the responsibility for what he had done by leaving his family for many years. By God's grace, he had come home. Now, he became a man who kept his promises, a responsible son and brother. He was a sinner who had truly repented. He could be the patriarch of faith, the covenant son, the bearer of God's redemptive history and the ancestor of David and Jesus.

Joseph teaches what real love is. Real love is not self-centered. Real love is redemptive. It is loving from God's point of view. To help the loved one to repent is real love. Joseph endured much personal pain in order to lead his brothers to repentance. He saw how they suffered from their guilty consciences, and he wept. He didn't know when his old father would die, and he wanted to see him so much, but he waited (43:27). He wanted to

hug Benjamin, but he waited. Real love is always accompanied by pain. Man's problems are really love problems. Like Potiphar's wife, people try to satisfy their desire for love by satisfying their lust, but this doesn't work. Jacob's love for Joseph seemed to be real love, but it was human love, and it was selfish love. Real love is helping the one we love to come to God and repent and live in a right relationship with God. Monica really loved her son Augustine, and she led him to repentance. Our Lord Jesus shows real love for human beings when he says, "Repent and believe the good news!"