

Remorse and Repentance

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Date: 15 May 2016

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[0 : 00] I could confidently say a minute ago that we can be assured that God is concerned and committed to our well-being. Another word for blessed is happy.

When Jesus talks about blessed are the poor in spirit, another translation of that would be happy are the poor in spirit. So this promise of blessing to all nations, not just to a select few, but to people from all nations is at the heart of God's will for humanity.

God is a God of blessing, a God of bringing happiness to his people. And I've got a quote here from Andy a few weeks ago because he said it better than I could have.

In many ways, this promise that Paul is talking about back in Genesis 12 is the great promise of the Bible. A wonderful, generous, entirely undeserved, made-by-God promise to put right all the stuff that went so badly wrong in Genesis 1 to 11.

The promise is made to Abraham. It's repeated to Isaac, his son, and then it's repeated to Jacob, his grandson. So even the context of the promise is in the middle of mess, the mess of Genesis 1 to 11.

[1 : 19] If you haven't looked at it recently, it's appalling. Basically, by the end of Genesis 11, the world is a complete and utter mess. And yet into that mess, God speaks this promise of blessing.

And that's this idea that I started with, that in the middle of our mess, the mess of our lives at times, we again can be assured of this blessing.

And the story tonight illustrates that beautifully. So that's the big picture. There's a problem, however, by Genesis 42.

And the problem is that this family that God promises to bring this blessing through, this commitment to the happiness of people from all the nations, it depends on this family.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. And now where the story tonight is Jacob's sons, his 12 sons of the brothers that we've been reading about tonight.

[2 : 22] And again, if you've not been around the last few weeks, let me just remind you of some of the stuff that's happened in the previous few chapters. Simeon and Levi, two of his sons, are guilty of having slaughtered an unsuspecting village, just wiping them out.

Reuben, his oldest son, has committed incest with the mother of two of his brothers. Jacob, the father, has shown this foolish favoritism to one of his sons, Joseph.

That's led all the other brothers to betray Joseph and to deceive their father by telling him that he'd been attacked by a wild animal, when in fact they'd sold him into slavery and he'd been taken down to Egypt.

And then we also read a few weeks ago, Gordon helped us to make sense of this, that Judah, one of his other sons, had had a child by his daughter-in-law disguised as a prostitute. So as Andy said a few weeks ago, a very distressing family history.

He's putting it mildly. That's a pretty damning list of behavior. From this family that God has promised this universal blessing would come through.

[3 : 45] So a very distressing family history of a very important family. The gospel hinges on this family. The good news of what God has done in the world hinges on this family.

And yet, humanly speaking, we look at that list, we look back over the previous chapters, and we think, how is that going to work? How is that going to come to pass?

How is this blessing going to come to all nations through this family? So at the start of 42, chapter 42, we should be thinking, there's a lot of work to be done here.

There's a lot of work to do to transform these scheming, sinful brothers into agents of God's blessing to all the world. It doesn't look good at the start of chapter 42.

So I want us to read chapter 42 in the light of that, that there is a major problem at the start of it. How is God going to bring this blessing to all the world through this family, this dysfunctional, sinful family?

[4 : 52] Well, we're going to look at the story, and we're going to whiz through it relatively quickly. And I've got a wee structure outline here, just so that we can begin to get our heads around it.

So the next one, yep. I didn't see this myself. It was pointed out to me. But basically, the chapter that we've just read follows this structure. And this isn't uncommon in a lot of the biblical stories that are told.

This sort of ABC, and then it starts to repeat, but in the reverse order. So ABC, and then C repeats, B repeats, and A repeats.

And you can see it sketched there. And what we're going to do is just very briefly skim each of those sections. And the first question I'm asking as we go through it is, what do we learn about ourselves as we read this?

Six things about ourselves, one from each of those sections. So let's just dive straight into that first section. So the story starts with Jacob and the brothers, the 11 brothers.

[5 : 57] Joseph has been living in Egypt now for about 20 years. So 20 years have passed since they sold him into slavery. So we've got Jacob and his other 11 sons sitting up in Canaan, where they had settled.

And we read in that first few verses that when Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, why do you just keep looking at each other? I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so that we may live and not die. And we know from the previous chapter that there is a famine. There is a famine across the whole region.

And we know that it's severe. It's going to last for seven years. We read that last week. So the start of this chapter is even more desperate than we'd already realized.

Not only does the character of this family that God wants to bless, the whole world through, have major issues, but actually their physical survival is questioned.

[7 : 06] That actually, this famine could actually wipe out that family. And where would that leave this promise that God made to Abraham back in Genesis 12? Where would it leave the gospel?

Again, humanly speaking, it doesn't look good. And actually, Gordon last week reminded us that famine is actually a very powerful metaphor, a very powerful picture of our natural condition, this natural state of lostness, and the need that we each have of rescue.

So the famine, in a way, pictures, is a picture of the human condition, spiritually speaking. We are desperate. And we also get the sense in these verses that things aren't good in this family.

You know, they're on the verge of starvation, and yet the brothers, the 11 brothers, what does Jacob say? They just keep looking at each other. You know, there's sort of this inertia.

There's this, maybe it's a hopelessness. Maybe it's a resignation that things are just going downhill. But of course, Jacob's heard, and we presume all the brothers have heard, that there is grain, there is food, but the food is down in Egypt.

[8 : 26] And we know from the previous chapter why that is. It's because God has put Joseph where he is, and through dreams and interpretations, Egypt has got a supply of food.

So maybe we're meant to see in these first few verses that there's something going on in the brothers right at the outset, that they know about Egypt, they know there's food down there, but they're not rushing down there.

And people have suggested that, this is suggesting that there's a bit of a conscience issue going on, that the brothers are thinking, well, wait a minute, the last time we saw our brother, the one we betrayed, the one we basically gave over to death, he was being taken down to Egypt.

So is there a reluctance to go there because of what it stirs up in them, the memories it brings back? Perhaps we're getting the first hints of guilty consciences coming through.

But Jacob, being the father, basically says, on your camels, get down there. If you don't, we die.

[9 : 35] So a wee lesson, I wonder, for all of us, is spiritually speaking, we're all in that place. We're all in that place of needing saving.

Spiritually speaking, in our natural state, we are all desperate. Just like this family was at the start of the story. The next section is super brief.

It's just one verse. So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan. So it tells us, basically, they went as Jacob told them.

And so a very quick thought based on that is we need to engage. And sometimes we need a bit of encouragement or more to do that.

So had the brothers just stayed in Canaan, end of story. The end of this family, the end of this promise. But actually, they go. They don't know why they're going, they don't know what God's going to do as a result of them going, but they go.

[10:41] And I wonder if there's a wee message in there for some of us tonight that a step needs to be taken. We need to engage. It's not just, it's not good enough just to sit and stew or wallow.

Some sort of engagement is necessary. Then, of course, they arrive, the next section. They arrive in Egypt. And we read these verses. They appear before Joseph to buy food.

And although Joseph recognizes his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembers his dreams about them back in chapter 37 and said to them, you are spies.

A few verses later, Joseph says to them, and this is how you will be tested. As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your younger brother comes here.

Send one of your number to get your brother. The rest of you will be kept in prison so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. So we read here that because of what we know has happened in the previous chapters, Joseph's in this position of power.

[11:54] God has strategically placed Joseph in a position of power with the resources and the means available to help, indeed, to save the family.

And we can see a lot of symbolism in that. A lot of just how God is at work through this whole, through all the circumstances that we've been reading about over the last few weeks.

And perhaps we're a bit surprised at how things turn out. Certainly, humanly speaking, I was trying to picture myself in this scenario, I don't know how Joseph contained it.

I don't know how he managed to keep his identity hidden. He recognized them straight away, but he doesn't reveal who he is.

And maybe the wee clue as to why he doesn't do this is because it tells us that he remembers his dreams about them and then goes down this path of accusing them of being spies.

[12:57] Now, remember the dreams that he had back in chapter 37. He had two dreams, one of them was of the, essentially the brothers bowing before him, and essentially that's exactly what's happening in this chapter.

But there was a second dream, and the second dream involved the whole family, including the father, bowing before him. So, perhaps at some level, Joseph knows that it's not the end of the story.

The dreams haven't been completely fulfilled, partly fulfilled, in his brothers arriving, but there's more to come. And in the course of this conversation, the brothers actually reveal quite a lot.

They're sort of put on the spot. He's accused them of being spies, so they begin to reveal that they're sons, they're brothers, that they're, they were originally 12, but one is up with his father, and the other one, they say, is no more.

So they're obviously very conscious of Joseph, even though it's been 20 years since this, the betrayal happened, and then, very ironically, they describe themselves as honest men.

[14:04] And in response to this sort of disclosure, Joseph says here that he's going to test them. He wants to test their story. And the way he's going to test them, he says, is by putting them in prison and then just sending one of them back, and they can bring this younger brother who they say exists, but he wants to see if this is true.

It's quite a harsh reaction on Joseph's part. You can imagine the brothers, they're just starting to, I would imagine, lose it. You know, they've come in desperation to buy food, they're now being accused of being spies, they're now going to be put in prison, only one of them is going to be allowed to return, their world is crumbling.

You know, again, I think they're looking down this, into this abyss of hopelessness. And it reminds me of a few verses in one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, where he wrote about a letter that he'd sent them, and he says that that first letter caused them sorrow, and that the letter hurt them.

Similarly here, Joseph's reaction, Joseph's decision is painful, it's hurtful to the brothers, on all sorts of levels, not least the imprisonment.

But as Paul goes on in his letter, he says, you were made sorry, you were hurt, but yes, but only for a little while. You were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance, and you became sorrowful as God intended, and so were not harmed in any way.

[15 : 52] And I think that's part of what's going on here. Joseph is following the leading of God, the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and he's realizing that the brothers need some harsh words, and they need some harsh treatment in order to develop further what God is doing in them.

And as Paul says, it's sorrow that leads to repentance. repentance, and we see that very clearly as the story goes on. So the wee lesson I wonder if we could take from that is sometimes, maybe even often, it's actually through the hard times that we begin to see ourselves honestly.

Often it's through hard things coming into our lives that we're forced to reflect on what's really inside. When things are going well, when life's good, there's not a need for that self-examination, self-reflection, but when things get tough, often one of the things that can come from that is this reflective self-examination.

And as Paul reminds us, that can be used by God to lead us to this place of repentance. And I think that's what's happening here. Joseph's playing his part in God, working in the brothers to bring them to this place, this place of repentance.

The next scene is another audience with Joseph, and we read in this scene that after three days in prison, Joseph says to them, do this and you will live, for I fear God.

[17 : 31] And then he goes on to explain that he's going to let all of them go back to their father and bring the younger brother back with them.

So it's a change of plan. Originally he was going to just let one of them return and keep the nine in prison, but three days later he's changed his plan, and only one of them needs stay, and the nine can go and then return with the younger brother.

And Joseph explains this or prefaces it with this statement, do this and you will live, for I fear God.

So he's reassuring them that this is actually going to work out for their good, they will live as a result of this, and he admits that he's doing it out of a fear for God, a reverence for God.

He's acknowledging that God's at work in his heart, changing his plan, giving them a new way forward. God. So the motive of this change of plan is to bless them, that they would live, and it's out of reverence for God.

That's what he's saying to them. And I wonder if what he's doing here is he's modeling something to them. He's giving them a little bit of an example of really where they need to get to in their own journey with God.

[18 : 58] He's modeling how God is at work through his own conscience and indirectly telling them that they need to fear God and change their own ways. He's giving them this little lived out sermon.

Reverence for God, change of plan that leads to life. And then it has this effect on the brothers.

Verse 21. They say to one another, surely we are being punished because of our brother, Joseph.

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 on us. Now this verse I think is the whole pivot of the chapter.

And even I think it's the pivot of the whole story of Jacob's sons. Because it's the first and the only time in Genesis that anyone confesses their sin.

The only time in Genesis that someone comes out and says, this is happening because we sinned. And they're confessing, they're owning their sin.

[20 : 12] They're seeing God's hand in it. They're seeing this sense of righteous judgment, this moral judgment being executed. They did this to their brother 20 years ago.

Now this is coming on them. But notice that their interpretation of the events is just one of judgment. They don't see good coming out of it.

So they're aware of their guilt, they're aware of their sin, but all they can see in what Joseph's doing is judgment. And I think that resonates with me.

If you're sort of brought up about something, if someone says, oh, can I have a word with you about something, I don't know if you're anything like me, but my heart automatically goes to, what have I done?

What have I said? Who have I offended? That's my natural reaction. And I feel the judgment coming. I anticipate the judgment.

[21 : 11] I anticipate the condemnation. Even if I have to sort of try and quickly find what it is that I'm going to be judged for. love. So I think the brother is a human reaction, but it's actually the start of a very positive process, even if at this point they haven't understood where it's going to lead them.

So the wee point to take from this wee section, I think, is that the path, I've got it here, the path to life, or blessing, starts with us owning our stuff.

I was going to use another word for that, but let's stick with stuff, the bad stuff, the rubbish in our lives. The brothers are confessing. There's the start of repentance coming in here, and they're beginning to realize the truth of that statement again in Galatians, do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that he will reap also.

So there's this sense of God's moral judgment coming to them. And that's part of their journey. Part of their journey is owning this, confessing it, repenting of it.

And again, maybe the Holy Spirit's going to start to put his finger on some stuff in our lives that we need to start by confessing, owning, repenting.

[22 : 44] Then, of course, they make the journey back to Egypt. And we read that on the journey, or just before the journey, Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain to put each man's silver back in his sack and to give them provisions for their whole journey.

So basically, what Joseph's decided to do here is just give them all the money that they brought to buy the grain. He's giving it back to them, and he's adding to that provisions for the journey.

So they get what they brought and more. And then, of course, we read that at the place where they stopped for the night, one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack.

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?

Now, interestingly, this is the first mention of God by the brothers in this Joseph story, in the chapters that we've been looking at.

[23 : 50] And what are they reacting to? They're reacting to this act of grace. They're reacting to the fact that Joseph graciously, generously, gives them back the money that they brought to buy for the grain, and then adds to it the provisions that they need.

And yet the brothers, again, they don't get it. They don't see the motive behind it. They don't see the goodness behind it. All they see is more condemnation, more trouble coming on them.

And again, I think that's a good picture of humanity. I don't think we naturally react well to grace. We don't naturally receive grace.

And I was reminded of an incident in my life a good nearly 20 years ago, and a good older spiritual brother in my life at that time.

I met with him. I shared with him some of the stuff in my life. I have a recollection that it involved pornography at that point.

[25 : 07] I was confessing, I was sharing, I was deeply troubled by it. And we prayed together. He spoke words of encouragement and reminded me of God's forgiveness.

And then as I was leaving, he just put 20 pounds in my pocket and just said, go and just treat yourself. Go and have a meal, go and go to the cinema.

And that moment has stayed with me ever since. Because what he was doing for me was really helping me really begin to understand God's grace.

God's grace wasn't just, you know, the minimum forgiveness forgiveness or the minimum that I needed to sort of hobble on in life.

But actually God's grace was lavish. And that little, that 20 pound note was his way of just showing me how lavish God's grace was.

[26 : 11] And I remember the emotional reaction to it. You know, what's this about? You know, I've just confessed this stuff that was going on for me. I felt like dirt.

I felt worthless. And here he is telling me to go and treat myself. Go and bless yourself. As a picture of what God's grace is like. So I can identify with the brothers.

What's this about? This doesn't compute. So the wee lesson I've got is that grace is often an alien concept which I think we instinctively reject.

And we need to grow in our appreciation, in our belief, in our reception of that grace. The very last point in this story is when the brothers return to Egypt, when they arrive back and they're with their father.

And we read these verses when they get back to Egypt. Their father, Jacob, said to them after they told him what had happened, he says to them, you have deprived me of my children.

[27 : 17] Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, the brother they left behind. Now you want to take Benjamin, the younger brother. Everything is against me. But Jacob said, my son will not go down there with you.

His brother is dead and he is the only one left of that mother. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.

So Jacob is distraught at this thought. He's already lost Joseph. He now thinks he's lost Simeon, the brother they left in Egypt, and they want to take Benjamin, his new favorite, away.

There's a real despair in Jacob. He doesn't get it. He doesn't see any good coming out of this. And this is despite the promise that God gave him back in Genesis 35, which we haven't looked at, but God speaks to him and says, I am God Almighty.

Be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you and kings will be among your descendants. So God has promised him face to face that his family will prosper, his descendants will prosper, and yet how does Jacob react?

[28 : 28] He reacts in complete desperation, complete despair. So this little incident teaches us that Jacob needs eyes to see that God is at work and to trust those promises that God had already spoken to us.

So the wee lesson, I wonder if we could take from this, is that we too need to learn to live trusting in God's sovereign grace. We need to learn from Jacob's reaction, his wrong understanding of the situation, and take from this the lesson that we need to learn living, that God is at work, that God is, God's sovereign grace is at work in this situation.

And that's what I want to finish with. I just want to finish with just three obvious, to me, examples of this sovereign grace at work in this story. So the wee little survey we've just done there was to help us sort of take some of maybe the lessons that we need to learn.

And if you've got that little handout with the summary of those six, I wonder if there's one of those that sort of really stands out for you. Is there one of those applications, if you like, that is really for you?

And if it is, I really encourage you to take it away and to live it out, to act on it. But as we finish, let's just finish with the most important thing in this story, which is what it reveals about God.

[29 : 47] Not what it reveals about us, that's helpful, but what it reveals about God is essential.

Three things to finish. First thing is, God's saving grace works through everything.

Think back to the previous chapters. Joseph's been betrayed, sold into slavery, taken into captivity as a slave in Egypt. Potiphar then sets him up, accuses him of adultery, gets him imprisoned.

His fellow prison mates again betray him, the one that lives. Awful, awful, awful situation after situation, yet God is at work bringing Joseph to this place of position of authority, that he can save the family.

So God is at work through everything, and Romans 8 tells us that. God works all things together for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. The second point is that God's saving grace is costly.

It cost Joseph a lot to be into this position where he could help his family, he could save his family.

And we know that that's a picture, of course, of what Jesus went through to save his people, to save his family.

[30 : 58] And we read in 2 Corinthians that, you know, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

So again, we have this played out in Jesus' life. He becomes poor in order to bring blessing to his people. And then the last point to finish on is that God's saving grace needs nor accepts anything from us, but it's received through repentance.

And that echoes Romans 2 4. Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, God's kindness, God's forbearance, God's patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

God's grace is so lavish, it doesn't require anything from us. The brothers didn't even need to buy the grain. Joseph gave them the grain and added to it.

It's a picture of God. It's a picture of this grace that is meant to, our only response is meant to be repentance and faith, repentance and trust.

[32 : 20] So as we close, I just pray for us all that God would really bring us to that point. Like he brought the brothers, it might be hard, it'll be through some tough things, perhaps that we have to journey, but that we'd arrive in this place of realizing that the grace of God is so huge that it works through everything.

God has paid the price that's necessary in sending Jesus and that he saves us not because of anything we bring, only because we choose, we receive it through repentance and faith.

Let's pray for ourselves as we finish. Father God, thank you for the picture of this story. Thank you for what it reminds us of who you are, of what you've done for us in Jesus.

Thank you as well for the little insights it gives us into how we can respond, how we can follow your path, how we can go with you in all that you're doing in our lives.

And I pray for each of us, wherever we are, whatever our circumstances, whatever life is bringing to us at this moment, that we would be able to just put our hope and our trust in you, bringing repentance and confession where we need to, Lord, but then realizing just how lavish your love and your grace is.

[33 : 35] And may we see Jesus more and more clearly so that we can understand the extent of your love and the sovereign power of your grace, regardless of our circumstances. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.