

Sacrificial Love

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[0 : 00] Good morning, St. Silas. If we've not met, my name is Martin Ayers. I'm the lead pastor here, and it would be great for me and for you if you could keep your Bibles open at pages 47 to 49, Genesis 42 to 44 that we're looking at today.

Thanks, Ruth, for reading. Such a long reading, so helpfully and well. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet. You can find that helpful as we cover these three chapters together. And I almost stick to the outline. So it's like a little puzzle on the way to see where it's a bit different. But hopefully it will still help what's printed on the notice sheet.

Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Gracious God and Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have made yourself known to us by your word.

And we thank you for this opportunity to hear you speak to us this morning. We pray that wherever we stand with you, you will open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word.

[1 : 07] For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this morning we're seeing a family transformed so that it can be reunited, reconciled.

And reconciliation is something that really matters to us. Lots of us will have relationships that have become broken as we've gone through life. Broken relationships within our family, or perhaps with colleagues or with neighbours, where there's resentment, where there are wounds that haven't been healed, wrong things that people have said to us that we dwell on and that fester, or wrong things that we've said.

And we wonder, could those relationships ever be put right? Well, here we are with Jacob and his sons, this family in this section of the Bible. And this is the family that were descended from Abraham.

So they are the family who become the Israelites, the Old Testament people of God, as they have descendants. They become a great nation. And so we're looking at, even though it's just one family, this is the church in their generation.

They are the people who've inherited God's promises, and they are called to live in obedient trust of God, so that the world will come to know God through them.

[2 : 20] But in recent weeks, what we've seen is this was a family tearing itself apart. Now, last week, the TV series Succession had its last episode, 39th episode, four seasons it's been on, a massive critical acclaim for the show.

And the series was about a family, the Roy family, where the father, Logan Roy, was born in Dundee, and he's become a billionaire, and he lives in New York with his family.

And on the way back from his 80th birthday party, this was all at the very beginning, he announces that he's going to continue as the CEO of his media empire, which they weren't expecting.

And he has a stroke, so he's got this uncertain health issue, and no one quite knows who's going to inherit the media empire, and all the wealth, and all the power. Will it be the oldest son, Connor, who was estranged from the family, or will it be Kendall, or Roman, or one of the others?

And what gripped people all through the four seasons was that this was a completely toxic family. There was no love, there was fabulous wealth, and it was an utterly poisoned family because of jealousy, and greed, and spite.

[3 : 29] One of the characters, Connor, said, the good thing about having a family that doesn't love you is you learn to live without it. And so people have been enthralled by this family in meltdown as the Roys and their spouses and kids won't change, and it was felt inevitable that it was heading to this kind of feel-bad ending.

Well, as we look at Jacob's family in Genesis, we could have been wondering whether there's any hope of a better ending for this family. We've heard that Jacob had 12 sons from four different

women, but the sons that he really loved were the sons born to the woman he really loved, Rachel. So Benjamin and Joseph grew up knowing Dad loves us best, and so the brothers knew that as well. And then he gave Joseph, the eldest of the two, an ornate robe, and then one day the other brothers, in their hatred for Joseph, sold him into slavery in Egypt and went back to Jacob with the robe, covered in blood, to deceive their father into thinking the brother had been killed. In Egypt, Joseph was then wrongly imprisoned, but God has been at work, we saw last week, to exalt Joseph so that he became the lord of the land, the prime minister of Egypt, and he's overseen this governance through seven years of plenty in the harvest, he's stored grain, and now a famine has hit the whole region, just as Pharaoh had been warned through dreams that Joseph interpreted. And so he has provisions for this famine. Now, Jacob and the other brothers are back in Canaan, and it's a family that's lost its way.

[5 : 05] So we join them again in chapter 42, verse 1. When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, why do you just keep looking at each other?

He continued, 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 just before we dive in, the last thing, just to point out here, is we must remember this isn't just a story of a dysfunctional family, like the Roy family in succession.

It's the story of a sinful family chosen by God. So God needs to bring them back to himself. And it's them coming back to God, in reconciliation with God, that will reunite them as a family.

So they show us what God's people need in every generation to be transformed and brought back to God and united together.

So we're going to see three things the brothers need. They need to admit their guilt, they need a Lord who offers mercy, and they need a saviour who will take their place. That's what we're going to see.

[6 : 15] So we'll pick up the story and the first point is the brothers admit their guilt thanks to Joseph's plan. That's chapter 42, the brothers admit their guilt. Ten of the brothers head to Egypt, Jacob won't let Benjamin go with them because he's afraid for Benjamin's safety.

And when the brothers get to Egypt for grain, Joseph sees them. He recognizes the brothers, but in verse 7, we're told that they don't recognize him. So he pretends to be a stranger and is harsh with them.

He accuses them of being spies. He interrogates them to find out whether his father's still alive. And then he comes up with his first scheme. He takes Simeon from them, one of the brothers, and he puts Simeon in prison.

And he says in verse 20, just have a look down, you must bring your youngest brother to me so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.

So the brothers are overcome with distress about this, that they've got to bring Benjamin back, otherwise Simeon stays in jail. And their response is fascinating.

[7 : 22] Have a look at verse 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 on us. Clearly this guilt has been hanging over the whole family for years. Their memory of Joseph crying out from the cistern when they dropped him in, begging for mercy from them while they ate their lunch.

And then his distress as they sold him as a slave to the Midnight traders. It's haunted them. They've lived with that guilt for years. And they're convicted as they look back to that day.

And it's something we see today in life. How much guilt, regret, can fester in our lives. if we've done wrong and we just try and keep it covered up, it's consuming for us.

In Psalm 32, the writer David talks about how wonderful it is to be forgiven by God. He says, Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them.

[8 : 36] But then he remembers what it was like before he confessed his sin to God. And he says, When I kept silent, my bones wasted away. My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

In other words, it's when we bring our guilt out from covering it up and we confess it to God and to other people that we've wronged and seek forgiveness, it breaks the crushing power of guilt.

If you're feeling guilty about something and you're holding it as a secret, is there someone you can speak to? Could you confess it to someone? To break the power of it over your life?

Let's notice as well that Joseph's behavior towards his brothers, it looks harsh, but actually, he's achieving something good from it. This family is not going to be saved until their guilt comes out into the open.

And Joseph is making sure that happens. In fact, one thing that's helped me understand these chapters this week was a writer, Bruce Walker, talks about this section of Genesis and how it's all about God at work with his hidden hand.

[9 : 45] And he says, Joseph, in these chapters, is the God figure. He is representing God in the way that, if you think about it, he's the one with all the knowledge. The brothers don't know who he is, he knows.

And he's the one with all the power in his position of influence. And he works in their lives to bring transformation in the way that last week we saw God working in his life to bring transformation. He's the Lord. Judah addresses him later on as, my Lord. So what we're seeing is that through the kindness he shows later and the harshness he shows here, he's acting in the way that God acts in our lives for our good.

So Joseph then takes this further step of bringing the guilt out of his brothers. In verse 25, he orders his stewards that when they fill the bags with the grain for the brothers to take back to Canaan, they put the silver that they've come to buy the grain with back in the bags.

Now what is Joseph up to here returning the silver? Well when they get home to Jacob, they're going to be one brother down, Simeon's in Jacob, jail, and they've got silver with them, will Jacob remember how years ago they went away on a trip and they came back without Joseph, the son he most loved, and they had extra silver with them that day as well?

[11 : 17] Would Jacob put two and two together and think, you've sold Simeon and you've sold Joseph as well? I think we see that suspicion in Jacob's reaction on, if you just look at verse 35, they empty their sacks and there's the silver and look at verse 36, their father Jacob said to them, you have deprived me of my children, Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more and now you want to take Benjamin, everything is against me.

See what's going on? He can't trust his sons and what Joseph is doing there is just bringing out into the open the guilt of his brothers so that they can admit it and transformation can happen.

So that's the first point, the brothers admit their guilt thanks to Joseph's plan, then there's a second critical step, the brothers receive the Lord's mercy thanks to Joseph's feast, they receive the Lord's mercy.

So they stay in Canaan, leaving Simeon in jail in Egypt because their dad won't let them go back with Benjamin but the famine lasts longer than they expected so it gets to a point where they've run out of grain again and they have to go back but as Jacob gives them permission to go and to take Benjamin we see progress in them coming back to God so there's a prayer on Jacob's lips in verse 14 of chapter 43 he says, and may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your older brother and Benjamin come back with you as for me if I am bereaved I am bereaved.

So you see Jacob there leading the family and submitting to God's will and praying for God's mercy. So they arrive before Joseph they're terrified what's he going to think when we come back?

[13 : 06] How on earth do we have our silver? And Joseph is this God-like figure and they appear before him in desperate need of bread their lives are in his hands and yet this is the same brother who they wronged so badly years ago.

How will he treat them as they throw themselves on his mercy? Well verse 16 when Joseph saw Benjamin with them he said to the steward of his house take these men to my house slaughter an animal and prepare a meal they are to eat with me at noon.

And let's remember Joseph is representing God here in these chapters. So here he's giving us a wonderful picture of the welcome that the living God the God of all this the welcome he gives to anyone who comes to him aware of their guilt and looking for mercy.

The brothers go to Joseph knowing that he alone has the grain to keep them alive and we come to God today knowing it's only he who can give us spiritual food living bread the bread of life so that we can have spiritual life knowing him life that lasts forever.

And yet at the same time as they go to Joseph they are guilty before him far more than they realize he's the one they betrayed just as when we go towards God today we're guilty of having sinned against him and far more than we realize when we first turn to God.

[14 : 42] And so here is the picture of how God treats people who come to him for mercy. The brothers appeal to Joseph's steward they try and explain what happened with the silver that it was

back in their sacks and he says to them in verse 23 peace don't be afraid.

Verse 23 it's alright he said don't be afraid your God the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks I received your silver then he brought Simeon out to them.

So they fall at Joseph's feet and Joseph meets Benjamin and he prays God be gracious to you my son he's leading them in turning to God and then in verse 30 we read deeply moved at the sight of his brother Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep then he comes back in and the food is served and the chapter ends with verse 34 so they feasted and drank freely with him.

So for any of us today the offer is the same we come to God guilty and he says peace don't be afraid we come to him in famine spiritually and he says come feast with me he prepares a table and he welcomes us and Jesus promises in Luke 15 sorry Luke 13 about heaven that it will be like a banquet and he says people will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

For the brothers they're on a journey through Joseph's actions of rediscovering what God is like they went from when they found the silver in the sacks they remembered God but they remembered him with terror and they said what is this that God has done to us so in their guilt they're thinking God is angry with us and they're terrified but now they're seeing the kindness of God towards them as they come to they find Joseph's favour as the blessing of God.

[16 : 41] So the brothers have admitted their guilt they've experienced mercy but now Joseph wants to see if they've really changed given the chance to do to him what they did before would they do the same thing?

That's our third point the brothers are invited to show they've changed by Joseph's test they're invited to show they've changed they hated Joseph because he was the favourite and at the end of chapter 43 Joseph gives them the chance to hate Benjamin just as much in verse 34 after he seated the men in order of their ages at the dinner in verse 34 it says when portions were served to them from Joseph's table Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's and as they see Benjamin getting dished all this extra food from Joseph's table maybe they would remember their dad's words about Benjamin back in chapter 42 verse 38 just over the page there look at what Jacob said to his sons when they asked to take Benjamin to Egypt my son so not your brother my son will not go down there with you his brother is dead and he is the only one left what an extraordinary thing to hear from your dad years on their father has not changed but have the brothers changed well Joseph wants to find out so he recreates the kind of opportunity they had to sell him into slavery in a foreign land and he does it with this cup he gets the steward to put his silver cup in Benjamin's sack and then to go after them and say one of you has stolen Joseph's silver cup my master's cup and they think they're all innocent so they protest in verse 9 if any of your servants is found to have it he will die and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves so the steward searches the bags one by one oldest to youngest so finally they get to Benjamin's last and there's the silver cup so in verse 14 Judah and his brothers throw themselves to the ground before Joseph and Judah's first response in verse 16 is what can we say to my lord how can we prove our innocence God has uncovered your servant's guilt we are now my lord's slaves we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup and this is where Joseph sets the trap you see verse 17 he says far be it from me to do such a thing only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave the rest of you go back to your father in peace so you see now they have the opportunity to go back to their father with the grain and the silver and leave behind Benjamin who their father loves more than them leave him to be a slave in a foreign land like they did to Joseph and more than that presumably at the moment they think Benjamin is guilty and Joseph wants to see have they repented over the years given the chance would they do the same thing again it's a great picture of what repentance really is repentance turning away from sin turning back to God it's not just apologizing I think we apologize for things when we're just kind of saying look it doesn't matter does it I know I did that wrong but I apologize I'm not saying I wouldn't do it again but I apologize I used to run a youth holiday for a Christian youth holiday in the summers where we rented a boarding school to use for our accommodation and site and I got to know the site manager

Dave Davey from the Navy he was really strict basically about the site and what I grew to learn over the first couple of years working with Davey was that whenever I ask for anything can we use that pitch for this can we borrow this sports equipment can we use this room the answer was always no when I asked okay so we started using this phrase on camp sometimes it's better to seek

