

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 7, 2013
No. 3666

The Path to Reconciliation
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear fellow saints in the church of Jesus Christ,

We continue today our series of messages on the life of Joseph. Today we are going to look at the first 25 verses of Genesis, chapter 42. Joseph is now the prime minister in Egypt. During seven years of prosperity, he has gathered and stored so much grain in Egypt that it cannot be counted. And now the seven years of famine have come. It is a famine that affects the entire Mediterranean region. The world hears that there is grain in Egypt, and people come from all over to Joseph for food.

In this chapter, Joseph's ten brothers come to Egypt for grain and we have, not only the first meeting between Joseph and his brothers, but also the beginning of the road to reconciliation in the Joseph's family—a reconciliation not only between Joseph and his brothers, but also between Jacob and his sons.

Genesis 42 is very straight forward in its layout. There are three movements. First, Jacob sends his sons to Egypt for food. Then, second, there is the encounter between the ten brothers and the ruler of Egypt, who is Joseph their brother. And then third, the brothers return to Jacob their father and tell him about their visit to Egypt.

In this message we want to look at the first two parts of this story, but I want, not just to tell you the familiar story, but to see in it the beginning of reconciliation in this family.

Reconciliation in a family is sweet, but usually also very painful. When an estranged husband and wife are reconciled, we who look on rejoice, but the road to their reconciliation, especially for them, is very difficult. It requires the uncovering and confession of sin. Sometimes years of guilt or bad behavior are brought to the surface, and the process of working through such things is very painful. That is the kind of pain that we see here in Joseph's family as they go down the road to reconciliation.

We see in this chapter, which take us back to Canaan and the house of Jacob, the need for reconciliation. The real rift in this family is not between Joseph and his ten brothers who hated and sold him, at least not from Joseph's point of view. No, Joseph is very ready to forgive for that. The real rift is between Jacob and his ten sons.

There are two things here, the grief of Jacob, and the guilt of his sons. These stand in the way of restoration in this family. You remember that back in chapter 37, when they lied to their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast, Jacob refused to be comforted, and said, "I will go down into the grave unto my son, mourning." After 20 years, nothing has really changed. The passing of time has not erased Jacob's grief or the guilt of his sons. Instead, Jacob's daily grief serves to keep alive the guilt of his sons, and their guilt makes it impossible for them really to comfort their father.

The chapter begins this way, verse 1. Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, he said unto his sons, "Why do ye look one upon another?"

What's going on? This. From the last verses of the previous chapter we learn two things. 1) that the famine extended over the face of all the earth. Jacob and his sons experience this too.

Each day, there's less to eat. There's no food for their cattle. Their children's portions are getting smaller and smaller. And, 2) that all the countries came to Egypt to Joseph to buy corn. Everyone knew that there was food in Egypt. Jacob did, and his sons did too.

Now remember, these are grown men. Joseph, younger than all of them, is already at least 37 years old. But what do they do about the famine? Nothing. They sit around and look at each other because the last thing they want to do is go to Egypt. They have a previous association with Egypt, and they do not want to go there. They want to stay away from where they know their brother Joseph now lives. Do you not see here their guilt? It is still there.

Jacob does not know this, but listen to how harshly he speaks to his sons. "Why do ye look one upon another? Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt, get you down thither and buy for us from thence, that we may live and not die."

Those words of Jacob reveal a strained relationship. Is this how he's been talking to his sons for 20 years? It is very likely. "Quit staring at one another, get your act together and get down to Egypt, or we're all gonna die."

So, guilty brothers, and harsh father.

And then verse three tells us that Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy corn in Egypt. Why ten? Well, because there is safety in numbers and because the more of them that went, the more food they could bring back for their clan of 70 people.

But why only ten? Why not 11, why not Benjamin? Verse four tells us that Jacob would not let him go, with this reason, "lest peradventure mischief befall him." Understand, that is totally unreasonable. Benjamin is not a child. He is well past 20 years of age, the time that Joseph has been away. The real reason is that Benjamin has become to Jacob what Joseph was.

And so, for twenty years now, the brothers have been dealing with the same thing in their father. Selling Joseph did not take the favoritism and spite out of their family. No, it was all transferred from Joseph to Benjamin. And you see, Jacob has not changed. He is still the same man with a grief that he would not let go, and a favoritism that causes hatred between his children. There is no love in this family. They need reconciliation.

The story continues in verse 6. "And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth."

Let us pause here and remember that God is at work in this history, and of all the people involved, Joseph is the only one who sees it.

Joseph was the governor. Joseph sold the corn. Joseph knew about the famine over all the earth. Joseph had prepared for the famine. And I dare say, Joseph was not surprised to see his brothers. He expected that God would bring them to Egypt.

Verse seven tells us that Joseph saw his brethren and he knew them. Now you can imagine that they were easy to recognize. They stood out. Ten foreigners, dressed in shepherd's clothes, maybe looking a little older, but unmistakably his brothers.

But verse 8, they knew him not. They did not recognize him. Why not? There are several things. For one, his attire. He was clean shaven, and wore the silk robes of a ruler, maybe with a head dressing of some sort. And, of course, he had matured. How many of you look, at 40, like you did when you were 17?

But, also, there was Joseph's position. Perhaps when the brothers came to Egypt they were nervous that they might see Joseph, but they did not look up into the rulers eyes to see if that was their brother. Instead, they looked around at the servants and slaves. And then, too, Joseph spoke to them through an interpreter, so they did not know that he spoke their language or understood them.

Now what an encounter it is. God brings the brothers to Egypt and to Joseph, to bring their guilt to the surface, and to begin the road to reconciliation in this family.

That is what this meeting is all about—it is about the brothers admitting their guilt to one another, talking about it. Let us see how that unfolds.

Even though Joseph recognizes that these ten men are his brothers, he does not reveal himself to them. Instead, he is very harsh.

First, he accuses them of being spies who have come to see where the land of Egypt may be vulnerable. Then, when they tell him that they are all brothers, not spies, and that they have simply come to buy food, he will not believe them.

And so they go into a long explanation concerning their family. Thy servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan. And behold, the youngest brother is this day with our father; and the other brother is not.

Joseph retains his composure. You can imagine how difficult that was.

He replies. "No, you're spies. You're making this up. This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to put you all in prison, and one of you will go back and fetch your younger brother, of whom you speak, and when I meet him, then I'll believe your story." And then Joseph puts them all in prison together for three days, to think and to talk.

At the end of the three days, we learn what they have been thinking and talking about.

Joseph draws it out of them. He comes to them and says this. "I am a God-fearing man. Do this and you'll live. Pick out one of your brothers to be bound in prison here, and the rest may carry food back to your family in Canaan so that they don't die, and then, come back with your younger brother, and I'll believe your story."

And then it all comes out. What they have been hiding, and lying about, all comes out.

In their language, not knowing that Joseph can understand them, they say to one another, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he cried out to us, and we wouldn't hear him. This is why all this distress is happening to us."

What they are experiencing is this: Numbers 32:23, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

For 20 years they've tried to hide this. They thought it was done. They buried their guilt. But all through those years they had to watch their father's pain. They had to see it all play out again in Benjamin. And they had to sleep at night hearing in their ears the echo of Joseph's begging and pleading that they set him free, that they not hurt him or sell him.

You cannot bury guilt. It will come to the surface. Unrepentant sin will not leave you alone, it will plague you. It will visit you in your dreams. It will change your behavior. It will steal your joy. It will corrode your life and your relationships. It will put you on edge. See how sensitive these men are—in Egypt, they do not want to see Joseph, and now these apparently unrelated things awaken their conscience. They are on edge.

And then Reuben, the oldest brother speaks. It's an accusation. "Didn't I tell you not to hurt Joseph?" Remember, he saved Joseph from murder, and he was gone when the others sold him to the Midianites. Now, "I had nothing to do with it, and I told you." And he adds this, "His blood is required." In other words, this is justice, poetic justice. God is not going to let you, or let us, get away with what we did.

The brothers are beginning to see the hand of God awakening their consciences. If we look down to verse 28, where they find money in their bags of grain, and are troubled by it, they say, "What is this that God hath done unto us?"

And what a mercy that is. So many bury their guilt and go on in their life of sin. Oh yes, they do. I don't say their conscience is not troubled, but they find a way to put it out of their minds. But you see, God will not let that happen to those whom He has determined to save. The guilt that He awakens in the conscience of His children is a mercy that brings them to repentance. That is what is happening here. And that is the road to reconciliation. Confession of guilt. The brothers are not there yet. They are not ready to come clean with Jacob. But God is beginning this work of grace in their hearts.

Now what about Joseph? Does he not seem vindictive and unreasonably harsh? Why does he not just tell them who he is? Why does he deal with them so roughly? Why does he throw them in prison? Why keep Simeon, when he knows this will cause pain to his father? Why?

The key is in verse 9. When his brothers first come and bow to him, Joseph remembers his dreams. That is the key here. Joseph remembers what God had said would happen. He remembers God's revelation. We have seen all through his life that this was central to Joseph, that he lived before the face of God. And now he remembers that God had revealed in two dreams 20 years earlier that his brothers and his parents would bow to him.

And just as Joseph responded to the dreams of Pharaoh with a carefully laid out plan, so here, he has a plan.

There were two dreams. In the first, the sheaves of his ten older brothers bowed down to his sheaf. That was the first dream. That is what Joseph sees happening here. And instead of it making him swell with pride and saying to his brothers, "Told you so," Joseph remembers that God had given him a second dream in which not only did his ten brothers bow to him, but there were eleven stars and the sun and moon, his father. And, you see, Joseph understands that this means that Benjamin and Jacob will also come and bow before him in Egypt.

And he comes up with a carefully devised plan to make that happen—to bring his entire family, peacefully, together, with him.

That was not possible right now. Imagine if he had simply told his brothers who he was. They would have bolted in fear and guilt. They were not ready yet to own their sin, or to face their father with what they had done. Joseph's harsh response is a careful plan to bring them to repentance, and to bring reconciliation and salvation to his family, to his brothers. In love, Joseph is harsh.

Can you not see that love here? If he really wanted to be vindictive, he could have hurt his brothers much more. But in love, he sends them all back with food for their families. In mercy, he puts their money, and not rocks, in their food sacks. And when he hears them speaking of their guilt, he does not accuse them, but he turns and goes to weep in private.

I imagine the three days that his brothers were in prison, and the weeks and months that Simeon was in prison, were the toughest times of his life. How he would have longed to hear about Jacob and about Benjamin and about the 20 years that had transpired. But more important to Joseph is what God has said would happen, a reconciled family, together in Egypt. This is what Joseph wants, and it is because he so firmly believes in God's revelation.

Jacob is tortured by grief. The ten brothers are tormented by guilt. And Joseph is transformed by grace. And it is that grace that will bring forgiveness and reconciliation in this family. Joseph won't push things under the rug, but seeking peace in his family, peace with God for his family, he is used to awaken guilt and bring confession. That may be painful, but so necessary for reconciliation.

And that's true also with regard to God. Sin, our sin, your sin, stands between you and God. Are you guilty before God? Yes, we all are. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And with the God of justice, it's blood for blood.

But now the question is, how do you deal with that guilt? Are you trying to smother it with your own works? Do you try to hide and conceal it with a front of kindness and morality? Are you in denial, trying to bury your guilt?

Oh, are you not weary of it?

There is only one thing that can overcome our guilt, and that is grace. Not the grace of a man, Joseph, but the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He says, to all who are weary and burdened with the guilt of sin, Come, come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Just as joy in your earthly relationships can come only through confession, repentance, and forgiveness, so it is with God. You come to Him through confession and repentance, and you find rest for your soul.

You cannot hide from God. He knows your sin. But His infinite grace is a grace greater than all our sins.

May you find peace, in Him.

Let us pray.

Father, we are grateful for Thy grace and Thy Word that pursue us when we wander in sin, and that do this with the goal of bringing us back into a life of joy and peace with God. Oh Lord, do not leave us, but preserve us by Thy grace. And Father, if there are any listening today who are hiding the guilt of their sins, work by Thy Spirit and Word in their lives to bring repentance and reconciliation. We pray it for Jesus' sake, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 14, 2013 When It Seems That Everything Is Against You
No. 3667

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Has it ever seemed to you that everything in your life is against you? That your life is a crescendo of problems, one after another, piling up, so that everything looks black and hopeless?

In our series on the life of Joseph, we have again and again run across the important truth of God's sovereign providence, which is a theme in the story of Joseph. Providence teaches us that God is sovereignly in control of everything that happens in this world, and that in His love He works in and through every circumstance of the lives of His people for their good. At the end of this story, in Genesis 50:20, when Joseph's brothers are afraid that he will retaliate against them for the evils they did against him, Joseph says, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Joseph does not only look at the evil his brothers determined, but he sees God's hand; he lives constantly and consciously before the face of God. All through his life this is Joseph's perspective, and because of this we observe in him a series of amazing responses to difficult providences.

Today, in contrast to that, we see Jacob's unbelieving response to God's providence. And it is recorded in Scripture, not only as a contrast to Joseph, but also to teach us how not to respond to the difficult troubles of life in this world. In this life we will have trials and tribulations. That is undisputed. We could list many different trials that believers have to face. But the important question is not, what are your trials? or do you have a difficult life? No, the important question is, "How are you responding to the troubles of life?" Jacob, in the passage we look at today, has two sinful responses.

First, at the end of chapter 42, verse 36, he says, "All these things are against me." That is an unbelieving response. Now, I didn't say that Jacob was an unbeliever. No, he was a child of God, but in a period of sinful reaction, when he took his eye of faith from God, he uttered these unbelieving words. The child of God, the believer, should never respond to the troubles of life this way.

Now before we judge Jacob too harshly, let us look at ourselves, and realize, that very often this is exactly our response to the troubles of life, and let us see that Jacob's response was quite understandable, considering his circumstances. If we were in his situation, we would be tempted to say exactly the same thing. This is not to justify or excuse it, but simply to put it in perspective. Jacob has had a troubled life.

Think of his experiences. He experienced hatred. For most of his life, his brother Esau wanted to kill him, so that he even had to run away from home for decades.

He experienced abuse and mistreatment. His father-in-law, who was also his boss for many years, first gave him the wrong daughter to be his wife, and then changed his wages again and again.

He experienced grief through death. First the death of his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, and then the death of his most loved wife, Rachel. And then, following that, his most loved son, Joseph, had suddenly gone missing, apparently eaten by a wild animal. For 20 years now, he has been grieving over this.

He experienced trouble in his family life. His four wives were always competing for his love, and competing with one another, and in turn they produce children that are at odds with each other. Of course, he was largely to blame for this, not only in marrying multiple women, but also in favoring one wife and her children, Joseph and Benjamin. Of course this would breed resentment. But now, since Joseph is missing, he has had to deal with the guilt of that.

He has experienced the pain of having unbelieving and wicked children. Joseph was such a godly young man, a son with whom he could freely speak of the things of God, the best of his boys. His other sons were wretchedly wicked. The oldest had violated Jacob's own marriage by incest with one of Jacob's wives. The next two sons had committed genocide in the city of Shechem, ruining the reputation and the witness of Jacob's family in Canaan. The fourth son had committed adultery with his own daughter-in-law, thinking she was a harlot. Two of his grandsons had been killed, by God, because of their wickedness. No wonder he missed Joseph so sorely.

What a troubled life. What a cloud seems to hang over this man's life and over his family. And now recently, his family has been experiencing famine. There is no food, and the situation gets so desperate that his sons have to travel for weeks to Egypt to get food, otherwise they face starvation and extinction.

And so, he sends them to Egypt. At least then, they have hope of surviving. Spiritually, physically, emotionally, and mentally, Jacob is simply surviving. He is in survival mode.

And then his sons, who are always getting themselves into trouble, come back from Egypt with more bad news. Jacob had kept his youngest son, Benjamin, home. He did not let him go to Egypt, because he did not want anything bad to happen to Benjamin. Imagine that you are one of the other sons—"our life does not matter, but beloved Benjamin, he must be protected!" And now, here is the bad news from his sons returning. Yes, they have food, but in Egypt they were roughly treated by the ruler. He accused them of being spies, and said that he would believe that they were not only when they returned with Benjamin, and meanwhile he held Simeon, another son, imprisoned as a ransom.

And then when they open the sacks containing their grain, there was all their money. They are also going to be accused of theft.

So this is the troubled life of Jacob. I wonder if perhaps you can identify with some of his troubles—perhaps the grief of the family troubles, or being hated, or experiencing famine and poverty. How do you respond?

In despair, Jacob says to his sons, and to God, "ME have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." He means, everything in my life is against me. He is referring not only to a few things in his life, but all things. He believes that they are all calculated against him, to destroy him, and that their increasing intensity means he is simply going to die under the burdens of life.

Back in chapter 37, when Joseph goes missing, he simply says, "I will go down into the grave mourning"—I will bear this grief the rest of my life. Now, he says that if mischief should befall Benjamin, "ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." He means, this will kill me. So deep is his trouble. He is not just sad and afraid, but overwhelmed by his trouble.

And so his response. All these things are against me.

But was everything against him? No. It only seemed that way to Jacob, and that was because Jacob took his eyes off God. He was not living by faith. Taking his eyes off God and his promises, Jacob looked at his experiences and circumstances, he looked at everything from an earthly point of view, and it seemed black. Instead of looking at his earthly circumstances from God's point of view, he turned that around and looked at God from his earthly point of view, and he complained against God. He charged God with foolishness. He said here, to God, "You don't know what you're doing. You've made a mistake. You don't love me and you're destroying my life."

And Jacob said this, even though he knew better. Back in Genesis chapter 28, when Jacob is alone at Bethel, fleeing from Esau, God came to him and promised, not that his life would be trouble free, but "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." And there God made the covenant promise to Jacob, which meant that He would not destroy him and his family, but would give them the promised land of Canaan, and would preserve them so that the Messiah could come. Jacob takes his eye off God's promises.

To make matters worse, Jacob becomes very selfish and he begins to accuse the people around him. ME, he says, ME have YE bereaved of my children. This is your fault, he says to his sons. Yes it was, but Jacob had no way of knowing that. Instead of saying, "Oh, my children, all these things seem to be against us," he resorts to self pity and introspection. Instead of seeing his own sin in the history of his family, and instead of seeing God's hand in the events of his life, he blames others.

And you see, when we do not respond in faith to the troubles of life, this is exactly what we will do too. We will exaggerate our grief, we'll start a pity-party for ourselves, we will not be able to see the needs of others, we will not see our own sins, and we will start hurling accusations at others. Jacob's response, though we can understand it, is sinful and unbelieving. This is how not to respond to the troubles of life. Whenever we complain about our life, no matter how difficult it may be, we are complaining against God and His providence. We are not trusting His love and promises.

The proper response should be the response of Job, when God afflicted him: "The Lord has the right to do this to me, and blessed be the name of the Lord." Rather than opening our mouths to complain about how difficult our troubles are, we should respond like the psalmist in Psalm 39:9: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." The psalmist is talking of a severe blow in his life. He speaks of how his heart burned within him and his soul stirred him up to speak. But he refrained, he held his tongue, lest he should defame the name of his God. Instead, he quietly prayed, "Lord, make me to know my end, to know how frail I am, so that Lord, I trust in thee." That should be our response.

In the beginning of chapter 43, we have another response of Jacob to providence. It is not the same response, but it is another sinful response.

At the end of chapter 42, Jacob says to Reuben concerning Benjamin, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone." But, in chapter 43, circumstances have changed. Now they are out of food again, and so Jacob tells his sons to go back to Egypt for more food. Apparently, for a good while, as long as their food lasted, they had been silent about the demands of the ruler of Egypt. But now Judah speaks and says to his Father, "If you don't send Benjamin with us, we will not go down to get food. You must send him, or we and our little ones will die of hunger."

Now, let us pause and see God's hand of providence in this. Jacob had perhaps thought that the famine would be soon over and they would not need to go back to Egypt for food. But God had different plans. The famine would last seven years, and so the circumstances would force Jacob to do something he did not want to do. God would make him face the inevitable question of Benjamin going to Egypt.

Sometimes God will do that with us too. Sometimes circumstances will make our lives very difficult, and other times they will force us to make a decision that we might not want to make, or to do something that we might not want to do. That is what God is doing in His providence, here, in the life of Jacob.

How does Jacob respond? First, he tells his sons to take a gift of nuts and spices to the ruler. Second, he says, take your brother. And third, he says this, "And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin."

So far so good. But then this, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

What's that? It's fatalism. Jacob admits that God has hand in his life. He admits that he cannot change the purposes and the ways of God. He admits that he needs mercy from God. But still he does not trust in God, but rather he simply resigns himself to what he sees as the inevitable. Things happen in your life that are bad, and you just cannot do anything about it, so bite your lip and go on.

Here we might again be inclined to excuse Jacob's response, maybe even to praise him a little for it. At least now he's not resisting God's way, and he is not vocalizing a complaint against God. But still, this is another sinful and unbelieving response to the sovereign providence of God.

How so? Well, this is equivalent to saying that the God who loves me is powerless to help me. It is a denial of the sovereign control of God in the circumstances of my life. It is saying, God cannot change the course of this world, He does not control evil in this world. The best He can do is help me to bear it. It denies the loving purpose of God in the things that happen to us in this life.

And again, this is how not to respond to the troubles of life. We may not complain against God, but we also must not simply resign ourselves to the inevitable. Instead, we must see that God loves us and that in faithfulness to us He afflicts us. In Psalm 119:75, David says exactly that, "Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Job says, "though he slay me, yet will I trust him." That is not blind resignation, but Job realizing and confessing that if God brings death to him, God does that in love, and so he will trust Him.

Now I want to conclude with the positive truth that we should take from this passage. We should not just see a negative rebuke here of Jacob's sinful responses, but rather we should see how things really were for Jacob. We should look at Jacob's life from God's perspective.

But before I finish with that, I want to say this. The things that I am going to say about the providence of God are not generally true for all people. In His love, God works all things together for good to those who love Him, but He does not work everything out for good for everyone. If you are unbeliever, I do not want you to take comfort from this message. If you are an unbeliever, I want to tell you that the only way to know this comfort is to repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ. All things are for our good only when we love God and when we are those whom He has purposed to save. The book of Proverbs tells us that the curse of the Lord is

on the house of the wicked. If you are living a life of sin and unbelief, then everything will be against you. Everything is against the reprobate and leads to their eternal destruction. The Bible says that those who are without God in this world are without hope. But if you are an unbeliever you must not take a fatalistic attitude toward this. You must not say, well, it is what it is, I am on the road to hell. No, you must repent and turn to the Lord in love and faith, so that you can have this confidence that all things are for your good. May God graciously work that in your heart.

Well, let us finish with the positive truth here. It seemed to Jacob that everything was against him, but in fact, at this point in his life, everything was *for* him. Jacob's response was not true. The truth is, in Romans 8:28, that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. The truth is that, if God be for us, who can be against us? The truth is that, if God loves us, nothing can destroy us.

Never in all of Jacob's life was God's providence *for* him so much as at this moment. Jacob is on the threshold of discovering that his son Joseph is alive, and that Joseph is in fact the one man in the earth with food. Jacob is on the verge of his family being saved, not only of food being provided for them, but of his wicked sons coming to repentance, and of there being a marvelous reconciliation in his family. This is the truth of the situation. This is what God is doing in all these things. It is not all *against* him, but *for* him. Jacob is wrong.

And, dear child of God, as you look at the black circumstances of your life, and it seems that everything is against you, remember this, it is not as it seems. Do not look at God through the eyes of your life, but look at your life through the eyes of God and His promises.

Because of His love, nothing can stand against us to destroy us. Because of His power, He is able to control all things in our lives to work for our good. Because Jesus, His son, experienced on the cross that all things, including God, were against Him, we can be sure that nothing will ever be against us.

Does this mean life will be easy and free of troubles? NO! but it does teach us to keep our eyes fixed on heaven and on God.

Father, we give thanks for the confidence that we can have that nothing shall ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Lord, we believe, help Thou our unbelief. We do not always respond as we should to the troubles of life. We fail to see Thy love. We sometimes foolishly charge Thee with sin. Lord, forgive us, and give us faith and grace to persevere with joy. For Jesus' sake we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 21, 2013
No. 3668

Loving Discipline
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Among all the stories recorded in Scripture, there is hardly one so dramatic as the story of Joseph. It is a story of twists and turns, of ups and downs, something like riding a roller coaster. I remember as a child loving this story and reading it over and over. And perhaps, because of our familiarity with the story, we as adults do not catch the raw emotion and the drastic changes in this story. The experience of each person in the story is a kind of roller coaster.

That is true for Joseph as he goes from favored son, to Egyptian slave, to property manager, to federal prisoner, to prime minister. What is God doing, and where is God leading?

That is also true for Jacob, the patriarch, who has the promise of God, "I will be with thee whithersoever thou goest." When he looks at his life, it seems the opposite is true, and so he cries out, "All these things are against me."

That is also true for Joseph's brothers. Guilty of selling their brother into slavery and hiding the sin for more than 20 years, they are suddenly faced with their guilt in Egypt when an Egyptian ruler treats them harshly, accuses them of being spies, and keeps one of them in prison. You remember that, back in chapter 42, verse 21, as Joseph the ruler imposed these things on them, they looked at one another and said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." For 20 years this had been their secret and they had been silent about it, but there it was, right below the surface, plaguing their consciences. They feel the shame and the guilt. They are on edge. That comes out as they leave to return home and find in their sacks the money they had used to purchase the grain. Now, fearful they'll be accused of theft, they return to Egypt the second time, with extra money in their hands, with a gift for the ruler of nuts and spices, and with their brother Benjamin along to verify to the ruler that they are not spies.

In the passage we look at today, from Genesis 43:15 through chapter 44:13, we will consider the second appearance of these brothers before Joseph. In it, their roller-coaster ride continues—and it is not all fun either. There are moments of joy, and moments of fear. They are treated to a royal feast with the ruler, and it seems that God is working things out for their safe return to Canaan with both Benjamin and Simeon, and then there is the silver-cup incident and the arrest of Benjamin.

As we know, the one operating the roller coaster is Joseph, and we might ask, why does he do this to them? Is he just teasing them? Is he having fun or being vindictive? I remember as a child being quite gleeful as the brothers stood in their misery before Joseph, not knowing what was going on. The bad guys were getting beat by the good guy. Is that what is going on? The answer is NO. To understand the story, we have to go deeper.

What Joseph wants is to see the repentance of his brothers, and Joseph's goal is the full reconciliation and salvation of his family. Spiritually, Joseph has something that he wants his brothers to share. Joseph knows his own salvation, and Joseph is working here to bring his brothers to that too, through true repentance. On their first visit, they acknowledged their guilt

before him. And remember, they did not know that he could understand what they were saying. Now Joseph wants to see that their hearts are sorry. He wants to see that their character and not just their behavior has changed.

That is what is going on in the passage we look at today. In love, Joseph puts his brothers to the test. We could call it loving discipline. And the brothers experience it, not as Joseph working on their consciences, but God working on them. Judah says, chapter 44:16, “God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants.” There is something for us to learn from that too, that this is the way we should take all the troubles of life—as from God’s hand. That is what Joseph always did. He lived before the face of God. That’s what Jacob has to learn to do in the troubles of his life. And that’s what the brothers learn to do here too. They realize that one cannot hide his sins from God.

So, first, we have in the second half of chapter 43, from verse 15 to the end of the chapter, Joseph treating his brothers to a royal feast.

When Joseph sees his brothers have returned to buy corn, and that they have brought Benjamin with them, rather than greetings them and talking to them in the marketplace, he tells his steward to invite them to a feast at his home.

He does this to show them that he is not against them, that his goal is not to destroy them. The feast is set up in such a way that they experience the mercy of the ruler and see that the hand of God is with them. Joseph uses the feast to put them at ease.

At first, however, the eleven brothers are not at all thrilled to be invited to this feast. On the contrary, they are quite shocked. There are three things that shock them.

The first is the very fact that they are invited to the feast. Why would the ruler of Egypt want us to eat with him? No one else who is here to buy grain gets invited to his home? It makes them afraid, suspicious, and defensive. In Genesis 43:18, we read, “And the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph’s house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses.” The ruler thinks we have stolen the money, he is going to capture us and enslave all of us. Nothing good can come of this. And they get very defensive. In verses 19-22 we read that before they enter the house to eat they stand at the door and give a long explanation to Joseph’s steward, explaining that they did not take the silver and that they have brought it back. The reason they are so nervous is their guilt. This is what guilt will do. It will not let you rest. So, first, the invite itself is a shock.

Then second, the response of the steward shocks them even more. Joseph’s steward was an interesting fellow. He held the same position in relation to Joseph that Joseph had held earlier in relation to Potiphar. He was in charge of everything in Joseph’s house, so that Joseph did not have to be concerned about anything he had. It is obvious that this man knew how Joseph his master thought, and that he was in on the plan Joseph had for his brothers. Joseph would have handpicked him, and it seems from his responses that, through Joseph’s influence, he may well have been a believer himself. The brothers, however, have no idea of this. How startling it must have been to them, then, when in response to their fear, he says, “Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money.” This whole reply rings with recognition of who these brothers are, of who their God is, and even of the covenant promises that Jehovah has made to their families.

First, he greets them with the Hebrew greeting, Shalom. Peace to you. Do not be afraid. He wants to put them at ease. There will be no accusations of theft. And then, “Your God, and the God of your Father,” that is, the covenant God, the God who made promises to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, this God is being faithful to you. He has given you treasure, not silver, but treasure in your sacks. I received your payment.

The only way the brothers could receive these words is as a rebuke, another smiting of their conscience. Here they are in a foreign land, among heathen people, and they are not trusting their God, and a man who to them would have been an unbeliever reminds them of who they are and of the faithfulness of their covenant God. Do not be afraid, do you not believe and trust in the God of heaven and earth?

Have you ever had that happen to you? An unbeliever, maybe a neighbor or someone you work with, someone who has heard your testimony about your God, and this person sees you anxious or angry, or maybe he hears you sin with your words, and he says, “What about your faith? Do you not believe a sovereign God? Is He not in control? Have you not rebuked me for speaking like that in the past?” And your conscience is smitten. You have opened your mouth and defamed the name of God and spoiled your testimony. Sometimes our children will pull us up like this too.

What a reproof the words of this Egyptian were to these men. Where did he learn about their God and the promise in their generations? How did he know to talk like this?

And then the third thing that shocks them is their seating arrangement. They are seated before the ruler from the oldest to the youngest and they look at one another in astonishment. Is this a coincidence? How could he know? There’s something going on, and it troubles their conscience.

But at the same time, their host is so gracious.

The clock strikes noon and Joseph is home for lunch. Nervously they present him with their gift, and they *bow* themselves down to the ground before him. There is no accusation about them being spies or thieves. Simeon is restored to them. Joseph asks them about their aged father and how he is coping with the famine. And they answer (v. 28), “Thy servant, our father, is in good health, he is yet alive.” And they bow to him again. And then, there is a sumptuous feast. Eleven men, who have been suffering through a famine, are treated to an abundance of food. The meal is extravagant and sumptuous. The ruler is friendly and generous. And soon all their fears are forgotten. The wine comes out. They drink and are merry. This ruler is not such a harsh man after all.

You see here that Joseph is not heartless. For a second time, this time after seeing his full brother Benjamin, and saying to him, “God be gracious unto thee, my son,” he is overcome with emotion and has to go to another room to cry and dry his tears and wash his face.

Now maybe you ask, why does he not just tell them now who he is? Why does he not say, “I am Joseph, God has brought you to me, now, go get our father Jacob and come here to live?” Why not?

And the answer is that Joseph has one more test. These brothers feel their guilt, but has their heart changed? Given the circumstances, would they commit the same wicked deed again that they have committed in the past? And so what Joseph does is reconstruct the setting of 20 years earlier when he was hated and sold, only this time Benjamin will be the brother they are tempted

to get rid of, for their own well-being. Joseph is going to force them to make a choice between themselves and Benjamin.

He does not do this out of spite. Joseph is ready to extend forgiveness, but for reconciliation there needs to be a change of heart and behavior. Gently and lovingly, Joseph is leading them to that point. There is no accusation, he is simply letting God work on their consciences and in their lives.

So, this is what he does, and it is masterful. And again the steward handles the whole situation with amazing expertise.

First, at the feast, he spoils Benjamin by giving him a portion five times the size of his brothers. He did not do that for Benjamin's sake. Benjamin did not need five meals worth of food at once. No, he did this for the brothers to see. He did this to separate Benjamin from the others as the special, the spoiled, the loved, the favored brother. Joseph knew this was still going on back at home, that it has been going on for 20 years. That is why Benjamin did not come to Egypt the first time. And Joseph wants to know, how are the brothers responding to it now? How is Benjamin being treated by them? Is it the same hatred and envy that led them to get rid of him so that they could be happy? Joseph wants to know what is going on in their hearts. They had to notice that Benjamin was given five times what they received. You can see them all looking down to the end of the table where Benjamin is. But how will they respond? Will this bring jealousy and envy?

That is the purpose, also, of the silver cup in Benjamin's bag, to discover what is going on in their hearts. First, Joseph sets Benjamin apart as the spoiled one, and then he forces them to make a choice between the spoiled one and themselves. He is going to give them an opportunity to turn on and get rid of Benjamin, as they did him.

And so, next morning, the brothers head out on the road, happy and relieved. Things could not have gone better in Egypt. They have Benjamin with them, they have Simeon, they have food for their families, and they were treated to the best of Egypt. All the suspicion about their being spies and thieves is gone. What a relief.

They are not long gone, however, and Joseph sends his steward after them with careful instructions. He needs to arrest Benjamin, and bring him back, and give the brothers the opportunity to go on home without their youngest brother. More than 20 years earlier they had said of Joseph, "We will not have this dreamer rule over us, and so we're going to get rid of him." Now how will they respond? This will show whether their hearts are changed.

When the steward catches up to them, he repeats exactly what Joseph told him to say in verse 4: "Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good? Why have you stolen my master's silver cup?" The brothers are offended at the accusation. A false accusation is very difficult to take. They become extremely defensive, and reply in this vein, "That's impossible. We would never do something like that. We were bringing money back, so why would we steal?"

I think there is a lesson right there in repentance. Too often we reply to accusations, and to the accusation of the Word of God concerning our sin, this way. We get defensive and think we are above certain sins. We should never think that way. Was this sin really below these men? Had not they sold their brother as a slave for a few pieces of silver, and stolen more than 20 years of his life from him? Why is this such an absurd accusation?

But they are indignant. Far be it from us. God forbid that we should do such a thing. And they make a rash vow. “With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord’s bondmen.”

That is extreme, and the steward recognizes it, so he changes the terms of this vow. “He with whom it is found shall be my servant, and ye shall be blameless.”

And so, hastily we are told, they each took down his sack and opened it to prove his innocence. And, methodically, from the oldest to the youngest, one by one, the steward searches their sacks. And then as he comes to the last one, as they were collectively breathing a sigh of relief, the silver cup is found in Benjamin’s sack.

Here is the moment of truth—the test. Will they go home, and say to their father, Benjamin stole the silver cup, so he is now a slave in Egypt? Will they wash their hands of their spoiled brother?

How do they respond?

The Bible records no words here, only actions, because their actions speak louder than their words. They tore their clothes, and, to a man, they turned back to Egypt to face the ruler. And, coming before Joseph, they fall before him on the ground.

What do we have here? We have family love and solidarity. That means they have repented. Their hearts are changed. Not only do they not want what’s easiest for themselves, but they do not want their brother to be a slave in Egypt, and they do not want their father to be hurt and to die of grief. As Judah will go on to explain (and we will look at this in the next message), they are ready to give up themselves and their own life and happiness for the sake of others.

Guilt has brought repentance, which is not only a change in conduct but a change of heart.

We are going to stop in the story right here, but I just want to close with a couple of comments regarding true repentance and conversion.

First this, that true conversion is repentance. Conversion is not simply saying, I believe in Jesus. Conversion is not simply identifying a moment when you feel Jesus came into your heart. Conversion is not simply identifying yourself with a group of people or a church that calls itself Christian. Nor is conversion simply being delivered from one or several very bad sins of your past. No, conversion, true conversion, is heartfelt repentance over sin, and a turning and forsaking of sin to follow Christ in love.

That conversion goes deep, because God’s Word goes deep. The truly converted one does not say, “Far be it from me to sin. Don’t call me a sinner, I find that offensive.” No, the truly converted one cries out, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” The truly converted one says with Paul, “I am the chief of sinners.” The truly converted one understands the depths of sin and hatred and envy and lust and anger and bitterness that are resident in his own soul.

God’s Word exposes that to me. It is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And so, if I’m truly converted I see my need of salvation in Jesus Christ alone. I trust in Him and not myself or my worth. I am saved by grace alone.

True conversion also means a change of heart and life. The question is not, when was I converted, or do I go to church, but the question is, am I living in daily repentance over sin, and am I fighting against sin, and am I holy, as God is holy? True Christians don’t go on in sin. They hate sin, because God hates sin. And, like Judah and his brothers now, they will give up

their all to serve others in love, and to serve their savior in love. The true Christian says, "I am not my own, and I am not here for me, but I belong to the Lord. His I am, and Him I serve."

And, finally, when that is our perspective of conversion, we are not looking for decisions in others. We are not waiting for that moment when our kids will accept the Lord into their hearts. No, we are trusting that God will work in their hearts, and we are teaching them heart change and heart sorrow, and we are looking for the fruits of the Spirit in their lives. This is how the gospel works. It is not simply a message of forgiveness, but a powerful message that brings change to people's lives.

Joseph understood that, and that is where he wanted to lead his brothers.

Oh, may God so work in us.

Let us pray.

Father, we pray for hearts that know their sinfulness, mouths that are ready to confess guilt, and lives that are transformed by the power of the gospel. And in this way, give us peace and joy. For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 28, 2013
No. 3669

I Am Joseph
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

What do you do when you have been wronged or hurt by another? What do you do when it is in your power to get even by harming the person who has hurt you?

Jesus says, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you,” and “whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” And Paul says, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

But how on earth do you do that?

Every one of us understands the pain of being wronged by another. Of all the pains we have to bear, this is probably the worst. Someone you loved, someone you prayed with and cared about, someone you helped, has turned on you, become your enemy, maligned your character, and deliberately hurt you. How is it possible to repay such evil with good—when naturally every fiber of our being wants to get back at that person, to hurt him?

Well, the answer to that, we find in the story of Joseph and his brothers, especially in the beginning of Genesis chapter 45, when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

This story has a background. Genesis 45 begins with the words, “Then Joseph...” and we ask, when? The answer is found in the last section of chapter 44, verses 14-34, which contain Judah’s plea to Joseph.

You remember that when the eleven brothers left for home, Joseph planted the silver cup in Benjamin’s sack, and then sent his servant to arrest Benjamin. He did this to test his brothers by recreating the circumstances of 22 years earlier. Now Benjamin has become the favored son. What will the brothers do when they have opportunity to get rid of Benjamin? Will they treat him as they had treated Joseph? Joseph gives them the perfect opportunity to get rid of him. They could go home to their father and, without lying this time, say, “Benjamin messed up. He stole the cup. Your favored son was not such an angel, after all.”

But instead, they turn around and together, as one, they go back to stand before the Egyptian ruler. There is family solidarity now. And this is the repentance, the change of heart, that Joseph has been looking for.

When they come back to Joseph, they fall down before him on the ground. This is the third or fourth time they have done this. And Joseph asks them, “Why, why have you stolen my silver cup?” Judah speaks for the brothers. “What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? How shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants.”

What iniquity? The sin of stealing the silver cup? NO, the guilt of selling Joseph. Just as their money was planted in their sacks, so was the silver cup—they knew that. God has found out their iniquity in selling their brother Joseph 22 years earlier. This is what Judah is talking about. Remember, back in chapter 42, on their first visit, after being imprisoned for three days,

they say, “We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, and we would not hear.” This is a confession: God has uncovered our guilt.

Notice, Judah is not pointing fingers at Benjamin, and saying, he stole the cup. Rather, we, we all are guilty. And we, all of us, will be your servants. We will not leave anyone behind this time.

Joseph has constructed this scene, and he says, “No, only Benjamin. Only the one who has stolen the cup will be my servant. The rest of you, go home in peace to your father.” Now, Joseph had to know there would be no peace if they went home. But again, it is an out for them. Just go home to your father, and tell him what happened.

Then, beginning in verse 18, all the way through verse 34, Judah speaks. It is the longest speech in the entire book of Genesis, and in it Judah not only pleads with Joseph for Benjamin, but he shows how deep and genuine his love and repentance are. Let me just highlight a few features of the speech.

First, it is all about Jacob, and Judah’s love for his father. Fourteen times he mentions his father. He talks about the pain of his father in the past, in the apparent death of his most loved son, Joseph. He talks about the pain of his father in the present, and the reluctance of Jacob to let Benjamin come down to Egypt. And he talks about what will happen to his father if Benjamin does not come home. This, he says, will kill my father. The gist of it is that, for Jacob’s sake, for my father’s sake, Benjamin has to go home. There is no alternative.

This comes from Judah, who 22 years earlier did not care a snap about how his father felt, who not only treated Joseph with cruelty, but who with a cruel lie had presented a shredded coat to Jacob, and then for 20 years had watched all the pain that this caused his father. Now, the guilt of that has brought him to repentance.

This is genuine!

How do we know that? Because of the fruits of repentance. The sin of the brothers was a sin against their family, against their brother and their father, a sin that tore apart and brought immense pain to their family. A notable sin. But now there’s a repentance that is just as obvious.

That is expressed in verses 33 and 34, of chapter 44. Judah says to Joseph, “Let me stay here in the place of Benjamin, and let me become your slave, and let Benjamin go home. I can’t go back and bring more pain to my father. He’s gone through enough.”

Do you understand the personal ramifications for Judah of what he is saying here? He is giving up the rest of his life, to live as a slave in a foreign land. He is willing to bear what he inflicted on his brother Joseph. He is letting go of his family back home, his part in his father’s inheritance. He is sacrificing all. And his motivation is love—love for his father, Jacob, who does not always love him fairly, but who favors other sons over him. And love for Benjamin, the favored, the spoiled son.

Earlier, Judah had responded to this kind of favoritism in the family with hatred. But now, he so loves his father that he is willing to give up himself. He is a changed man. This is not just a conscience that feels guilty, but this is a heart that has been changed, a mouth that confesses sin. This is a man who is willing to bear the consequences of his sin himself, who takes ownership of his sin. And this is a man who out of love will do whatever it takes to avoid causing hurt again in his family.

And this is the kind of repentance that is needed in our families and in our marriages. We live in a society where divorce is almost as common as marriage itself. There are different reasons for this, the main one probably being selfishness, and that selfishness will often express itself in an unwillingness really to own up to sin, and really to seek in love the good of your partner. Judah is willing to go to the ends of the earth, he is willing to give up everything, to keep peace in his family. This is true repentance.

And now, the tables are turned. The ball is in Joseph's court. And, you see, that is the thing about confession and repentance. When you say, "I was wrong, and will you please forgive me?" that puts you in a strong position. Not a position of power, but it is liberating, and it puts a kind of pressure on the one to whom you have confessed your wrongs. Reconciliation requires not only a willingness to confess, but also a willingness to forgive. And that forgiveness is as difficult and as rare as confession. It requires as much grace to forgive as it does to confess.

After Judah's confession, everything is in place for full reconciliation in this family. The question is, how will Joseph respond?

And that brings us to chapter 45, the climax in the story of Joseph, which is not just a story of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers, but is an amazing account of genuine and gracious forgiveness. There is no bitterness, no resentment, no hard feelings, no retribution, but rather an amazing display of grace, love, and forgiveness.

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him." He broke down again. This is the third time, and this time it is not just because he sees his brothers, or hears them talking in their Hebrew about their sin of 20 years ago. No, this time it is because of what Judah said. His brothers are sorry. They've changed. There is hope for his family. And Joseph forgives them.

Through tears, he cried out to all the Egyptians in the building, "Get out!" Why? He did this partly because what was about to happen was a very private and personal affair. His position of ruler made him a public figure, but this was a private matter, a family matter. But, the real reason was to protect his brothers, to keep them safe.

Just imagine the consequences if their cruelty to Joseph in the past came out publicly. Joseph is the most loved man in Egypt. Pharaoh and the people owe their lives to him. Imagine if this were exposed. Joseph does not want it exposed. Why? Because out of love he desires to protect the reputation and character of his brothers. There is no vengeance in his heart, no desire to expose and to humiliate and to defame them. Instead, with a Christ-like love that covers a multitude of sins, Joseph speaks to his brothers, alone. Jesus says in Matthew 18, "if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." That requires a lot of love. The temptation is there to spread it. Joseph wants to talk to his brothers, alone. His concern is for them.

And so, with all the Egyptians out of the room, Joseph speaks for the first time to his brothers with no interpreter and says, "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?" And he does not mean, is he alive, but rather, How is he really doing? Judah, you have told me he is alive, you have told me in general terms about his grief, but how is he?

And the brothers? Verse 3 tells us, they do not answer him, because they could not answer him, because they were troubled at Joseph's presence. The idea of troubled here is "shell-shocked." It is the experience of terror that a soldier has the first time he escapes death on the battlefield. Joseph's words are a bombshell. Can this really be Joseph? This man is Joseph?

They do not say a word, but you can imagine that their minds were racing back over all that this ruler had said and done to them? This is Joseph. And now, his rough treatment does not seem so rough after all. There is so much more he could have done to get back at them. Probably they remember the dreams for which they hated him so much, and yes, here they were, bowing to him. This is Joseph? Is it possible? We sold him as a slave, and now he stands before us with absolute power. What is next?

And then in verse four you see again the graciousness of Joseph to them. “Come,” he says, “Come near to me.” When you stand before a ruler, you give him his space. Now Joseph invites them into his personal space. He calls them forward to fellowship and intimacy. He wants to touch them, he wants them to be comfortable with him. He reaches out to them.

When they come close to him, and you can imagine it was a hesitant shuffle, he says, “I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.” Notice, they still have not said a word, and they know that what he has just told them is true. This is our brother, the one we hated and sold. Now they are facing reality. Now truth is in front of them. Why did Joseph say that? “I am your brother whom ye sold as a slave.” Verse 5 tells us why. Out of a massive heart of empathy, Joseph says, “Be not grieved or angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither.” In other words, do not be distressed about this. Do not let the guilt of what you have done trouble you. It does not matter anymore. I’ve forgiven it and forgotten it.

What consumes Joseph now is a desire to affirm in the minds of his brothers that they are forgiven. He wants to relieve the suffering of their guilty consciences. He does not want them to feel any pain or anguish over what they have done to him. There is no vengeance, no retaliation, no bitterness, no animosity, nothing but grace, love, concern, and desire for fellowship and restoration. This is amazing.

But where on earth does that come from? How is it possible, when you’ve been wronged, to repay evil with good?

The key to it, the key to forgiveness, is here in the passage. There are two elements to it. The first is that Joseph has a correct theology of God.

How do you persevere through the trials of life? How do you endure the deep pain of being hurt by someone you love? How do you repay evil with good? How do you overcome bitterness and resentment? How do you restrain yourself from getting even? How do you hold your tongue so as not to damage the reputation of someone who has hurt you?

For Joseph, the key is that God is sovereign over all. That God in His providence rules over everything in this universe, so that nothing can move without His will, and nothing can happen to me, no hair can fall from my head, no evil can come against me, apart from the will of God. Even the wicked and hate-filled actions of sinful people who intend to hurt me come according to God’s will. That is the big God that Joseph confesses here.

Notice, three times in verses 5 through 8 he says, “God sent me.” In verse 5, “for God did send me before you to preserve life.” In verse 7, “And God sent me before you.” And in verse 8, “So now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God.” He says this to console his brothers. He saw God’s purpose in it. God determined it to be this way. And in all that he says to his brothers there is no resentment, no accusation, and no retaliation. He does not take what they have done to him and rub it in their faces.

You see, when we by faith embrace the reality of the sovereign providence of God, then that frees us, not just to be able to endure all the different trials that come our way because we see that they come from God's hand and are under His control and that He has a purpose in them, but it frees us also to forgive the evils that others commit against us. I have a good friend in the ministry who will often remind me, and others, of this. If I dare to raise with him a criticism that I have heard that someone has of my ministry, his response is, "But God wanted you to hear that. Even if it is not true, God wanted you to hear that."

What a marvelous perspective, a liberating perspective, because then it is not about the person who has done me wrong, it is not about what your spouse accused you of that wasn't true, it is not about the terrible things that people have done to you, it is not about the dreadful abuse you received as a child, it is not about getting back at those people, or exposing what they have done, but, like Joseph, it is about living before the face of God, and understanding that even if I do not see it now, God has a purpose in the present evils of my life. Joseph sees that purpose here—God sent him to Egypt, to save lives. This was God's sovereign and providential purpose. But understand, Joseph didn't have a script written out ahead of time that told him what God's purpose was. No, it must have taken Joseph years, at least 13 years of slavery and imprisonment, to see any purpose of God in it. His life was just like yours and mine—we do not always see the specific purposes of God. And yet, Joseph kept responding, not to people or circumstances, but to God who was over all.

And he could do that because he knew that he was a child of God. He knew that he belonged to God. He knew the promises to the house of Abraham, and he knew that the God whom he loved worked all things for his good.

It was this knowledge that he was a child of God that is the second part of the key to Joseph's forgiveness. Joseph knew the grace of God to him, and knowing God's grace and forgiveness himself, he was enabled to forgive others. "God," he says, "hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." He is saying, God has shown immense and undeserved favor and grace to me, and now what can I do, but show the same grace to you?

This is such an important biblical principle underlying forgiveness. If you as a believer really understand the gospel of grace and forgiveness, the grace and forgiveness that God has shown to you in Jesus Christ, then it is impossible for you to harbor resentment and bitterness and desire for revenge in your heart. And if you do, oh I encourage you to dig into Scripture in order to understand the greatness of God's grace to us sinners.

Do you understand what you deserve as a sinner? Really? And do you understand the greatness of God's love in giving His Son, and in putting on Him our sins? God's grace toward His people is free, it is full, it is complete, and it is wholly undeserved. And we who have tasted His grace, and understood it and experienced it, should be ready to forgive those who sin against us. We should have no bitterness or desire for revenge, and we should be ready also for complete reconciliation upon their repentance. Joseph in love, without thought of revenge, sought the repentance of his brothers, and when it came, his forgiveness was complete.

That led to a full and beautiful family reconciliation. That begins in these verses. Joseph fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brethren and wept on them. And after that his brothers talked with him.

What a wonderful conversation that must have been. Twenty-two years of catching up, and such hope for the future for them all. Joseph gives them gifts of love, and supplies to get the family, including Jacob, back down to Egypt, and he says to his brothers, “Tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.”

And that is where we will pick up the story next time—a family reunion.

Father, we give thanks for Thy forgiving grace toward us undeserving sinners. And we give thanks for Thy sovereign providence and care of all the affairs of our life. Lord, give us grace to receive whatever comes our way, as coming from Thy fatherly hand. And give us grace so that hearts of vengeance may be replaced with hearts of love. We pray it for Jesus’ sake. Amen