

“Reconciliation Accomplished”
(Genesis 44-45:15)

Last time we were in Genesis, we saw how the famine compelled the brothers to return to Egypt, this time with Benjamin. We saw what a trial this was to Jacob. He didn't want to send Benjamin because he loved him so much and because he didn't know whether or not he would ever see him again, or his son Simeon. But he had to let him go. He knew Benjamin would die anyway if they didn't get more food. If he had only trusted in the promise of the Lord more than he did, he wouldn't have had this problem. He didn't believe that God was working these things together for his good. He thought the hand of God was against him, when in fact, He was really working his deliverance. Of course, this is easier said than done. We have the same promise that God will work all things together in our lives for good, and yet how many times have we doubted that promise and walked in fear and worry, rather than in faith? We also saw how Judah had become surety for Benjamin – he guaranteed his father that he would bring him back, because he also needed food for his household and because he knew how much his father loved this son. But lastly, we also saw how Joseph tested his brothers one more time by giving Benjamin five times as much as any of them. He favored Benjamin to see if the brothers would become jealous of him, in the same way they had of him so many years before, but they didn't. There was an indication that they had changed. Still there was one more test that was needed – had they repented to the point where they now had brotherly love for their brother? If the situation required it, would they now be willing to lay down their lives for this favorite son of Jacob, or would they hand him over to be a slave in Egypt the same way they had done to him so many years ago? This is what Joseph now sets out to find. What we'll see this evening is first, Joseph's final test, and second, Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers.

First, let's look at Joseph's final test. Joseph commanded his house steward to fill the men's sacks with food, to put their money back in the sacks, but to put his silver cup in Benjamin's sack. Here Joseph was apparently showing his brothers more kindness by giving them the food without charging them for it. But he was also setting them up to test them one final time. Of course, if Joseph had done all these things out of a desire for revenge, hoping to frame his brothers only to make them suffer, he would have been sinning against them, even though he might justly take them to court for their crimes against him. But we know from what we have already seen that his intention was to test them to see if they had repented. He wanted to make sure that they had before he revealed himself to them, otherwise, they might leave in anger and end up destroying their and their father's households. After the food, the money and the cup were all safely packed on their donkeys, the men departed. Then Joseph commanded the steward to follow the men after they had left the city, to search their bags, and to bring back the guilty party, which, of course, would be Benjamin. When the steward met them, they pleaded their innocence. They pointed to the money they had returned as proof that they were sincere. They were *so* certain that the cup wouldn't be found among their possessions that they even offered to hand the one who had it over to death and for the rest of them to become Joseph's slaves. The steward agreed, but changed the terms to make it more just: Only the one who had the

cup would be his slave. The rest would go free. He searched each man's sack, beginning with the oldest, and the cup was found in the sack of the youngest – Benjamin. It's interesting that the money was again put in each man's sack, which would have made them all look like thieves. But no mention is made of it, probably because the silver cup was a much more serious matter. Benjamin had it, which meant that Benjamin must now become Joseph's slave, unless one of the brothers did something about it. I think it's also interesting that once the cup was found, no one said a word to defend Benjamin. They might have either thought that Benjamin took it and was caught red-handed, or that the Lord had put it there to punish them for their sins. They really couldn't blame Joseph for putting it there, or they would really have been in trouble.

When they returned, Joseph reproved them for taking his cup. Didn't they know that he could practice divination? Didn't they know that he could find out who had taken it? It appears as though they believed he could, that the Lord had revealed their sin to him – the sin of taking the cup. But they also believed that the Lord was punishing them for their sin against Joseph. This is why all these things were happening to them. This is why Benjamin was caught with the stolen cup, and why they were now standing before Joseph for sentencing. Notice that Benjamin was now in the same situation that Joseph had been in earlier – he was falsely accused of a crime that he didn't commit, just as Joseph was in the case of Potiphar's wife. But notice too that Benjamin, like Joseph, appears to have said nothing in his defense. Perhaps he too thought there wasn't anything he could say. Or maybe he was too young or too afraid to say anything. In this sense, both of them were like Jesus, who when he was accused for crimes He didn't commit, remained silent, but kept committing Himself to the One who judges righteously (1 Pet. 2:23). Jesus knew that He hadn't done anything wrong. He knew that His Father would vindicate Him. It was all a part of His plan. Perhaps Joseph and Benjamin also had this kind of faith that enabled them to trust God enough not to worry about these false witnesses that had risen against him. This is the blessing of having a clear conscience – when you're accused, you know that your accusers don't really have a case against you in God's eyes. Even if you should die for doing what is right, God will vindicate you in the end.

At this point, Judah offers for all of them to become his slaves, but Joseph wants only the one who had the cup. The others could go free. Now here was the test. Would they sacrifice Benjamin for their own sakes? Did they really secretly hate Benjamin the way they had hated him, because he was their father's favorite? Would they leave him in Egypt and return home only to tell their father another lie about him? If they had done this, Joseph might well have kept Benjamin, sent for his father to come to Egypt and left his brothers to suffer the famine in Canaan. Or he might have had them all thrown into prison for their crime against him. But he didn't have to do this. Judah and his brothers had repented. Judah now stepped forward to perform his vow as surety for Benjamin. He who wanted to sell Joseph because of jealousy, now declared his willingness to lay down his life to spare the boy. The Lord can change even the hardest of hearts to make them do what is right. No one is beyond His grace, if the Lord purposes to save. Judah tells Joseph everything that had happened after they returned home the first time. He told him how precious Benjamin was to his father, and how his father would surely die if they returned without him. He told him that he had become surety for the boy and pled with him to take him in the boy's place. His main reason was that he could not bear to see what would happen to his father. Benjamin was all Jacob had left of his wife Rachel. The other son

was dead. Even though that was just a story they had made up to tell their father, perhaps by this time even they believed it. If their father lost the only remaining son of his dear wife, he would either die right there or waste away in a few days from grief. – Perhaps it was his father’s love for Benjamin, or Judah’s love for his father, that moved him to guarantee the boy’s safety in the first place. But if Benjamin didn’t return, he didn’t want to go back either. Far from being grieved at his father’s love for Benjamin, as he was at his father’s love for Joseph, he was actually willing to give his life to protect him. – Judah didn’t base his plea on Benjamin’s honesty, for that would have impugned someone else, perhaps even Joseph. Instead, he decided to make his plea based on pity. He asked Joseph to show mercy to his old father, and to take him in his place. This changed character on Judah’s part may be the reason why Jacob will later bless Judah as he does, because he stepped forward and became surety for Benjamin. This may also be the reason why the tribe of Benjamin will later be so closely connected with the tribe of Judah, almost becoming one with it; Cf. 1 Kings 12:20-21. Remember too that Jesus will later come from the line of Judah. Perhaps the Lord purposed to do this because of the kind of person He would make Judah into – one who would intercede and become surety for his brother. Jesus also would become surety for His brothers, His people, in the Covenant of Grace, and would insure their salvation through His intercession on their behalf.

Well Joseph’s final test worked. Only Benjamin was implicated in the crime. He alone was to be punished for it. But far from letting Benjamin be lost as a slave in Egypt, Judah stood up and was willing to sacrifice himself so that he might spare Benjamin and his father. The brothers had passed the test. Now it was time for Joseph to reveal himself and to be reconciled with them.

When Joseph heard what Judah had to say, he couldn’t contain his emotions any longer. Even the hardest heart would have been moved by this tender plea for Benjamin and Jacob, how much more would someone who cares more for them than Judah? Joseph had all his servants leave. It wouldn’t be fitting for them to see this outpouring of love, since he would now reveal himself to his brothers as a brother and no longer as a statesman. When Jesus revealed Himself as our brother, He did so in private, away from the world. To the world, He reveals Himself as a fearful Judge; but to those who are His own, as a loving brother. When they left, however, the tears came forth so profusely that those who were in his house heard of it, as well as Pharaoh’s house. He now threw off all his harshness and turned to them in love and compassion because they had repented, just as the Father does when His wayward children repent and turn to Him in Christ. As long as we are unrepentant, all we see is the harsh side of God’s justice and discipline. But when we repent, He reveals to us the loving face of His kindness and mercy in Christ. Then Joseph told his brothers who he was, and asked if his father was still alive. But they were so shocked by what he said, they didn’t know what to say. They were expecting to face a severe judge, and instead they were confronted by a compassionate brother.

He then told them to come closer, probably because he was wanted to talk to them about what they had done, and didn’t want the Egyptians to hear, lest they might hate the Hebrews even more. He said again, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.” These words would have both humbled them for their sins and given them hope to expect mercy, for Joseph still considered them to be his brothers. He told them not to be grieved or angry with themselves because of what they had done, for this had been God’s plan to preserve their lives. God had used their sin for good purposes. This didn’t mean

that they shouldn't be sorry for their sins. We should never allow anything to keep us from hating our sins. But they could be thankful that the Lord had worked them all together for good. Certainly the fact that Joseph knew that the Lord had been working all these things together for good made it easier for him to forgive. He knew from His dreams long ago, and from the things that had happened lately, that this was indeed God's plan to save His covenant people. The famine had been going on now for two years, but there were still five more to come. God had sent him ahead to preserve a remnant of His people, to keep them alive by a great deliverance. They did not send him there, but God, and the Lord had made him a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his house and a ruler in Egypt. Before these things happened, he could have done nothing. But now he was in a position to help them. This is the blessing of having great wealth – you can use it to help others who are in need, especially those who are of the household of the faith. Notice again that the Lord didn't do all these things for the Egyptians, but for the good of His people. Every good gift the Lord gives this earth is solely on behalf of His own, those whom He has chosen, those whom He has purposed to give His Son. Notice too that God works well in advance to care for His people. His providence extends far into the future, even to the end of this world. Therefore, we should never judge what the Lord is doing before we see what He has planned. We don't know yet what He will bring out of our circumstances in His wisdom. God often works through in ways that seem so contrary to what He is doing. In this case, the man they sought to kill ended up saving their lives. They tried to put an end once and for all to his dreams, but in doing so, they actually fulfilled his dreams, to their own salvation. In the same way, Jesus was put to death, so that He might save His people. Even some of the elect Jews hated Jesus and wanted to put Him to death, but in doing so, they were saved by His death (Acts 2:36-41). Joseph was hated and rejected and sold as a slave into Egypt where he was exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh in order to save his people. So also the Lord Jesus was hated and rejected and was crucified on the cross, only to be exalted to the right hand of the Father in order to save His people.

Finally, Joseph told them to go and tell his father these things and to bring him and his household and all that he had down into Egypt. They would be able to live in Goshen. There, Joseph would provide for them. As proof of what he said, they saw him and heard him speaking to them himself, now no longer through an interpreter. Then he wept on Benjamin's neck and Benjamin on his, and he kissed his brothers and wept on them, and they talked with him. Reconciliation was accomplished. Joseph was reconciled to his brothers, and they to him. He forgave them, even though they had done such evil things against him. All of this happened so that the Lord would be able to provide for His people in Egypt, so that He might bring His Savior into the world. But it also provides a picture of what Christ has done for us. We, like the brothers, had rejected Jesus and were the cause of His death. But then Jesus rose from the dead and called us to be His people. He offered Himself to us, His enemies, as a Savior. And He forgave us when we came to Him, just as Joseph forgave his brothers when they repented. As we read this story about Joseph, let's not forget that it not only gives us a picture of the salvation we have received in Christ, it is actually a part of the story of our salvation, of our reconciliation with God. Amen.