

CAPITOL STUDIES

MARCH 15, 2023 • WEEK 10



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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Verse of the Week

Genesis 43:23

Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money.

How Grace Leads to Repentance



THE GRACE OF GOD is a crucial theological concept. Grace is at the heart of salvation, for we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Grace is essential for holy living. Because we are not under law but under grace, sin does not have to master us (Romans 6:14). Grace is the motivation for serving God. Paul knew that it was only through God's grace that he was who he was. To show that God's grace was not given him in vain, Paul labored "more than all," yet he says it wasn't really he that accomplished anything, but "the grace of God" with him (I Corinthians 15:10).

In today's world, the prevailing idea is that grace implies being easy on sin. Properly understood, however, grace does not lead to a tolerance of sin, but to the fear of God, causing one to turn away from sin (Ps. 130:3-4; Titus 2:11-14). This is illustrated in today's story of Joseph's second meeting with his brothers.

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INTRODUCTION

Joseph's brothers finally convince their father, Jacob, that he must part with Benjamin if they want to buy more grain and, hopefully, see their brother Simeon again. So, the brothers take Benjamin, the money to buy grain, and the money that was returned to them, along with a present of all the very best produce their land still has to offer, and return to Egypt.

Previous chapters indicate that Joseph's brothers recognize their suffering as the result of their sin, but at best they feel only regret. This is what we would expect from anyone faced with the unpleasant consequences of their sin. Regret is a good beginning, but it is not enough. Repentance is more than regret. Joseph has been testing his brothers to find out if they are truly repentant. Joseph's love for his brothers motivates all that he does, even the things which seem to be harsh. His actions parallel God's actions in leading us to repentance.

I. GOD'S GRACE LEADS TO REPENTANCE BY REVEALING HIS GREAT LOVE

A. Guilt Causes Man to Fear

Genesis 43:15-25

So the men took this present, and they took double the money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. ¹⁶When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Bring the men into the house, and slay an animal and make ready; for the men are to dine with me at noon." ¹⁷So the man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, "It is because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in, that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys." ¹⁹So they came near to Joseph's house steward, and spoke to him at the entrance of the house, ²⁰and said, "Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food, ²¹and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand. ²²We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks." ²³He said, "Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them. ²⁴Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys fodder. ²⁵So they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there.¹

On the brothers' first trip to Egypt, Joseph has their money returned to them. This act of kindness makes the brothers fearful. A similar thing happens on this second journey. The brothers arrive, and Joseph tells his steward to take them to his house for lunch. Joseph likely desires to offer



them a good meal and find out news from home. The brothers, however, panic, thinking that he is going to take them as slaves. What else can they say or do? Their attempt to return the money hasn't made the impression they desired. All that is left is their "gift." It must be just right, so they spend their time preparing it as they wait for Joseph. They are counting on this gift as their hope for acceptance.

Our sinful heart typically tries to appease God with our own efforts. We are nervous coming before a holy God with our sin, so we say, "Maybe if I give some money at church, God will accept me. Maybe I'll add some other good deeds, too, like volunteering at the mission or fasting." We bring our "gifts" to placate our guilty conscience and hopefully be accepted by God. But God's response is the same as Joseph's: He completely ignores our gifts! Joseph doesn't even comment on their elaborate present.

There is a good reason, of course, for us to be afraid of approaching God: We **are** guilty; He is absolutely holy. He has the power to do to us whatever He wants, just as Joseph could have sold his brothers into slavery if he had chosen to do so. If that were all we knew of God, we would never dare to approach Him. But there is another side, God's kindness and grace.

B. Grace Begins to Relieve Man's Fear

Genesis 43:26-34

When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him. ²⁷Then he asked them about their welfare, and said, "Is your old father well, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" ²⁸They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." They bowed down in homage. ²⁹As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son." ³⁰Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. ³¹Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, "Serve the meal." ³²So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians. ³³Now they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. ³⁴He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Note the many ways Joseph's love and grace are shown to his brothers: First, the steward responds to their desire to return the money with, "Be at ease!" Literally, "Shalom! Peace to you, don't be afraid. I received your money, but somehow your God returned it to you. Take it as a gift from Him." Joseph must have talked about his God with his steward. Next, Simeon is returned. The brothers didn't know if he would even be alive. Then, the steward brings out water to wash their feet and provides





fodder for their donkeys (43:24). They aren't being treated roughly, as prisoners, but with the respect given to honored guests.

When Joseph arrives home, he asks them (still using an interpreter) about their welfare and especially about their father. Then Joseph sees Benjamin. He had seen him from a distance earlier in the day (43:16), but now he can clearly see him. Joseph is 16 years older than Benjamin, his only full brother. Benjamin was only a year old the last time Joseph had seen him. As Joseph gazes upon Benjamin, thoughts of his family and his mother, who died giving birth to this child, flood over him. He manages to say, "May God be gracious to you, my son," before he is overcome with emotion and leaves the room to weep. Then he treats them to a great feast. Joseph, being the master, sits at a table by himself. His Egyptian servants sit at another table, not wanting to defile themselves. They probably wonder why Joseph keeps giving these people portions from his table, a sign of special honor.

The final expression of Joseph's love is seen when he tells his steward to fill each man's sack with as much food as he can carry and to return each man's money again to his sack. Joseph doesn't want them to have to pay for their food, but he supplies it freely because he loves them. Joseph marvelously illustrates what theologians call "common grace," God's undeserved kindness shown to every person.

The kind treatment the brothers have received from Joseph has almost taken away the fear caused by their guilt—almost, but not quite. When they sit down to the meal, to their astonishment they are seated in the exact order of their birth. And, contrary to custom, the youngest is given the most. Benjamin gets five times as much. (Perhaps this is a way Joseph is testing the other brothers to see if they will be jealous.) At any rate, they are undoubtedly very nervous because this man has some uncanny power to know things which they have not revealed.

As you begin to warm up to God's love, your fears due to your guilt are almost relieved—almost, because you begin to sense that this One with whom you have to do is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of your heart, that all things are laid bare before Him. His grace peels back layer after layer, until you stand naked and defenseless before Him.

II. GOD'S GRACE LEADS TO REPENTANCE BY REVEALING MAN'S GREAT SIN

Genesis 44:1-15

Then he commanded his house steward, saying, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. ²Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph had told him. ³As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. ⁴They had just gone out of the city, and were not far off, when Joseph said to his house steward, "Up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good?' ⁵Is not this the one from which my lord drinks and which he



indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.”⁶ So he overtook them and spoke these words to them.⁷ They said to him, “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing.⁸ Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house?⁹ With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves.”¹⁰ So he said, “Now let it also be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be innocent.”¹¹ Then they hurried, each man lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack.¹² He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack.¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city.¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him.¹⁵ Joseph said to them, “What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?”

Joseph’s final test, placing his drinking cup in Benjamin’s sack, will reveal whether or not his brothers are truly repentant of the wrong done to him years before, because it gives them the chance to treat Benjamin just as they had treated Joseph. They can leave Benjamin in slavery in Egypt, tell their father what happened to his second “favorite” son, and move on with their own lives.

A. Our Inclination is to Extol Our Innocence

When the steward overtakes the brothers and accuses them of stealing Joseph’s cup, they protest their innocence. Of course, they **are** innocent of this charge. As each sack comes up empty, the brothers self-confidently nod their heads saying, “See, there’s no cup. You’re wasting your time.” But then the steward comes to Benjamin’s sack, pulls out the cup, and the brothers are in big trouble. God uses this to strip these brothers of their self-confidence and cast them upon Joseph’s mercy. He has to bring us all to the place where we give up trusting our own integrity and our gifts so that we fall before Him and seek His undeserved favor.

Genesis 44:16-17

So Judah said, “What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found.”¹⁷ But he said, “Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father.”

B. God’s Intent is to Expose Our Iniquity

Even though the brothers knew they were innocent of taking this cup, they also knew they were guilty of a whole lot more. Judah speaks for them saying, “God has found out the iniquity of your servants.”





True repentance doesn't make up a defense for the small area where you're innocent but rather admits the larger sphere where you're guilty. Joseph offers: "I'll keep as my slave the one who took the cup; the rest of you, go in peace to your father." How can they go in peace to their father if they leave Benjamin as a slave? Years ago, they had determined to do away with Joseph regardless of the impact upon Jacob. Now, just the opposite is true. They tear their clothes in anguish. Judah, though innocent, is willing to become a slave to protect his youngest brother and not bring his father grief. He cannot stand the thought of causing any further suffering. Now Joseph knows they have fully repented.² This leads him to reveal his identity.

CONCLUSION

Like Joseph's brothers, who had sinned terribly against him, every person has sinned against God. Because God is perfectly holy, He hates sin and cannot be in its presence. He must judge it. Think on this truth ("whatever is true")—all sin **will** be judged. As you look at the capitol rotunda angel of justice, remind yourself that God will be just in His judgment. And "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). One sin is enough to make us guilty.

If God gave us what we deserve, we would all go straight to hell. But as Jesus said, "He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35), desiring that we all turn from our sin. Romans 2:4 asks, "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" If you have not turned from your sin to faith in Christ, you are shrugging off the kindness of God. The next verse warns, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." In other words, now, when God has graciously shown you His kindness, you must turn to Him. If you shrug it off, the day of judgment lies ahead.

The Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died to save us from the penalty for our sins. When we see His great love and our own great sin, the only proper response is to turn from our sin to His loving arms. As we come to Him in repentance and faith, He covers our sin with His righteousness. Then one day when we stand to be judged at the Great White Throne by God, He will not see our sin, only Jesus' righteousness. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). We will not be condemned to hell but instead be free to enter God's presence and enjoy the delights of Heaven for eternity.

Pastor Arin Hess

Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

*Finally, brethren,
whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is right,
whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.*

Questions to Consider:

- Do we emphasize God’s love: a) too much? b) not enough? c) about right? What about His wrath and judgment?
- How do repentance and faith fit together? Is repentance necessary for salvation or is faith alone sufficient?

FOOTNOTES

1. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update.

2. Bob Deffinbaugh, “The Final Test: Dothan Relived,” <http://bible.org/seriespage/final-test-dothan-relived-genesis-441-34>.

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Some of this material was gathered from Pastor Steven Cole’s work found at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-72-how-grace-leads-repentance-genesis-4315-4417>.

Personal Study Notes



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