

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

Senior Pastor Titus Green

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JOSEPH: Our God Is Always Faithful (Caveat Emptor)

Genesis 42:1-38

As I was preparing for this morning, I remembered a Latin phrase my 8th-grade social studies teacher taught us – caveat emptor. That phrase might not be familiar to you, but the concept probably is. Caveat emptor can be translated buyer beware. And the thing a buyer should be aware of is the fact that a seller usually has more information than the buyer. So, if you are going to buy something, like a home or a used car, you'll want to exercise due diligence because the seller might not disclose everything they know. And you just might get more than you bargained for. Caveat emptor.

And our text illustrates that dynamic well.

Remember where we are in our study of the life of Joseph. Famine has spread throughout the world. As people from all over make their way to Egypt to buy grain, Joseph's brothers make the trip for their family. And they wind up getting a whole lot more than they bargained for. The person who is selling them grain knows a lot more than he discloses to the brothers. Caveat emptor. Buyers beware.

Genesis 42:1–5

When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” 2 And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” 3 So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. 5 Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

As famine is ripping through Canaan, the family of Jacob is feeling the effects. And in a classic dad moment, Jacob says, “Guys, how about you make yourselves useful and go get some food from Egypt? Why are you just standing around looking at each other?”

And, with that, the 10 hard-hearted, miscreant sons of Jacob head out for Egypt. Notice something that's happening here. The limelight is no longer centered on Joseph.

In many ways, the story of Joseph is kind of like a two-act play. Up until now, we've been in Act One. Joseph is sort of the central character. He gets sold into slavery by his brothers and we follow him from slavery to prison to prime minister of Egypt. Act One is largely a story of God's faithfulness and providence amid one man's pain and suffering.

But now we are in Act Two. And, in many ways, the spotlight expands to include the rest of Joseph's family. Act Two is largely a story about God's faithfulness and providence amid an entire family's restoration. You see, God is bringing Joseph and his family back together. He is giving us a powerful picture of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration.

Keep that in mind and let's keep reading.

Genesis 42:6-17

Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. 7 Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of

Canaan, to buy food.” 8 And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9 And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.” 10 They said to him, “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.” 12 He said to them, “No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.” 13 And they said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.” 14 But Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you. You are spies. 15 By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16 Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” 17 And he put them all together in custody for three days.

Joseph’s brothers get to Egypt and attempt to buy grain. Verse 6 says Joseph was the one in charge of selling grain to all the people. Now, that doesn’t mean he handled every transaction personally. He’s described as the governor. He oversaw the whole operation. It wouldn’t be possible for hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world to come to Egypt to buy grain and only have one checkout lane open.

But Joseph’s brothers just so happen to come face to face with the governor himself. Just like all the other “just so happened” events in Joseph’s story, this is the hand of God. He is orchestrating these events.

The brothers bow down before Joseph since he is a ruler of Egypt, which is the fulfillment of the dreams God gave Joseph as a young man. And Joseph recognizes them right away. But they don’t recognize him. Some people find that hard to believe, but I think it makes a lot of sense. It’s been over 20 years since they last saw him. He was 17. He’s almost 40 now. Instead of a full head of hair and a beard, like the Hebrews would have had, Joseph’s head and face were probably clean-shaven. That was the custom in Egypt. He likely had his eyes painted, like the images of ancient Egyptian royalty you’ve probably seen. He was speaking in a different language, which would have made his voice sound different in their ears. I think it’s easy to understand how Joseph’s brothers wouldn’t recognize him. But Joseph knows exactly who they are.

And he begins an interesting exchange. He asks where they are from. They answer that they are from Canaan. But rather than make himself known, he speaks harshly to them through an interpreter and accuses them of being spies.

What do the brothers say in response? **11 We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.”**

They make this statement: we are honest men. Cue the laugh track. The seller of grain knows more than they realize. These guys make the Gambino crime syndicate look like the Boy Scouts. The last time we saw them together, they were actively deceiving their own father to cover up the fact they had just sold their own brother as a slave. We know from the next chapter that they’ve never come clean, meaning they have perpetuated a massive lie for over 20 years but are claiming to be honest men. They aren’t honest men. At least not completely honest men.

And Joseph isn’t buying it just yet. He responds by insisting that they are spies. The brothers deny it again. But they say something that piques Joseph’s interest. They say they have two other brothers. One is at home with their father. The other is no longer with them. Joseph is intrigued. His dad

might still be alive, which means he might be reunited with him. His little brother who wasn't part of his other brothers' gang might still be alive.

For good reason, Joseph doesn't yet trust that his brothers are changed men. So, he lays out a test for them to start to earn his trust. He says they can send one brother home to bring back their youngest brother. Then he throws them into custody for a few days.

Now, some of you might be thinking that I was off my rocker to claim this is a story of restoration. So far, the family reunion has essentially sounded like this:

"You are all a bunch of lying spies."

"No, we aren't."

"Yes, you are."

"No, we aren't."

"Yes, you are. Now get out of my face 'cause I'm calling the cops and you're all going to jail."

I can see why you might not think that's a promising start to restoration. But remember, God is at work. His hand has guided them toward this moment. Right now, there is no restoration because there is no evidence of repentance in the lives of those who sinned against Joseph.

But let's skip ahead a few chapters so I can show you where this is heading.

Genesis 45:14–15

Then [Joseph] fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

God is bringing the brothers back together. They are going to be restored.

But something has to happen between what we've read in this morning's text and the moment of true restoration that's coming up. What is it? It's a process called repentance. God will soften the hearts of these men who have been hardened by a lifetime of sin. In their repentance, their lives will demonstrate the reality of their repentance. That will provide the opportunity for Joseph to extend forgiveness, for trust and relationship to be rebuilt, and for all of them to be restored to God and one another.

And that's our big idea for this morning.

Big Idea: The pathway to restoration from sin begins with true repentance.

As we have been walking through the story of Joseph, we have witnessed the devastating impact that sin has on our lives. Sin disrupts our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. Joseph's brothers are the poster children for the destruction brought by sin. Their family was torn apart. Their brother was enslaved and imprisoned. Their father was heartbroken. Their reputations were destroyed. Judah's daughter-in-law was made destitute and disgraced. The men of the city of Shechem were murdered in cold blood. Sin destroys lives.

But God is a God of redemption and restoration. He desires to restore what sin has broken. And the pathway to restoration begins by stepping into true repentance, a turning away from sin to our Savior, a change of heart and mind that leads to a change of life. That's what true repentance is. It is more than remorse and it's definitely more than words.

Romans 2:4

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

God shows us kindness by leading us to repentance. He knows there is no true restoration apart from a heart of true repentance

Genesis 42:18-20

On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so.

Joseph changes the terms of their release. Instead of sending one of them to get their youngest brother, he decides to only have one of them stay behind. We'll come back to this in a couple of weeks when we learn what it looks like to give people an opportunity to show their repentance is sincere and not fake. But he starts by showing them grace and allowing 9 of them to return home.

And notice that verse 20 ends with the words, "And they did so," meaning they left one brother behind so the rest of them could return home. They did what Joseph said to do. And you would think the next verse would be about their return trip. But it isn't. The next verse starts to reveal the work God is doing in them that is beginning true repentance. And it gives us the first sign of true repentance.

1. True Repentance Takes Personal Responsibility For Sin

Genesis 42:21

Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother,

This is the start of true repentance. They acknowledge that they have sinned. In the original language of the Bible, the word "we" is emphatic. It's emphasizing the fact that WE did this. They are owning up to the fact that they have sinned.

And that's what true repentance looks like. True repentance doesn't make excuses or minimize our actions or blame-shift to other people. True repentance clearly and emphatically says, "I have sinned."

If you want genuine restoration with God and others, it starts here. And that's one of the reasons we have so little restoration in our world today. We have become experts at minimizing and excusing and blame-shifting our sin, to the point that the only sin still left in existence is to say that sin actually exists. No wonder our world and our lives are in a mess. Restoration requires repentance and repentance requires a heart that is willing to take personal responsibility by saying without excuse, "I have sinned against God. I have sinned against you."

2. True Repentance Gets Specific With Our Sin

Genesis 42:21

Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen.

They get specific. They recount what they know they did wrong. "We saw him in distress, and we didn't show compassion. We heard him cry for help and we didn't listen." They get specific.

They don't use the age-old tactic of generally acknowledging that they are sinners so that they can quickly follow it up with "but nobody's perfect." They recount the specifics of their sin.

And, when we are truly repentant of our sins, we are willing to get specific. We don't just say, "I've sinned." We say, "Here's how I've sinned." Now, I'm not suggesting that we have to name every sin we have ever committed. That would be impossible and could lead us down a dead-end road of obsessing over sin rather than enjoying our Savior. What I am saying is that when we are truly repentant, we don't sweep our actual sins under a rug and refuse to acknowledge them by name.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The confession of sins isn't general here. It's specific. It's willing to acknowledge the actual ways we have sinned against God and others. There's a big difference between saying, "I'm sorry I haven't been a perfect father" and saying, "I'm sorry that I did this specific thing to you."

True repentance gets specific with sin.

3. True Repentance Acknowledges The Consequences

Genesis 42:21-22

That is why this distress has come upon us." And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood."

As they begin to acknowledge their sin, they accept the reality that sin comes with consequences. They acknowledge that they are in the mess they're in because of their own actions.

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

God has embedded a law into our lives called the Law of the Harvest. There are God-ordained consequences for our actions. Our sin will bring corruption to every good thing in our lives. Ultimately, our sin will result in us spending eternity separated from God. And that's what we actually deserve.

I firmly believe that one of the reasons we aren't enamored with the saving work of Jesus is that we don't believe we deserve to go to hell. We've minimized the heinous nature of our sin and, in doing so, we've minimized how amazing it is that Jesus would save us from it.

True repentance doesn't do that. It acknowledges that our sin comes with consequences. When we sin against our spouse, there are God-ordained consequences. When we sin against our children or our parents, there are God-ordained consequences. And, in all of our sin, we have sinned against God and there are consequences and that's closely connected to the next sign of true repentance.

4. True Repentance Is Not Entitled To Grace

Genesis 42:23-28; 35

They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. 24 Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. 25 And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them. 26 Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. 27 And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. 28 He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!" At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

35 As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid.

As the brothers begin to confess their sin and show genuine repentance, Joseph overhears them. His heart is stirred to tears. He turns away and regathers himself. And even though he doesn't reveal himself to them yet, he shows them more grace. He has their bags filled with grain. He instructs the servants to give them extra provisions for their journey. And, he has all their money returned to them. He shows them grace. They get blessings they don't deserve that cost them nothing.

On their journey home, one of them discovers that his money has been returned to him. Once they get home, they realize that all of them have had their money returned. And the way they respond is that they are afraid. They don't want to be seen as thieves, taking something without paying for it. There's more going on here, but they don't feel entitled to receive blessings they don't deserve that cost them nothing.

And that's how true repentance looks in our lives as well. When we realize the truth about our sin and acknowledge what our lives should be like as a result, we are blown away by grace. When we open up the blessings God has poured out onto our lives that we haven't paid to receive, we are blown away by grace, not entitled to it.

And the grace that Joseph showed his brothers is nothing compared to the grace God has shown us.

God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners, He sent His Son Jesus to die for us.

By grace through faith in Jesus, God forgives all our sins.

By grace through faith in Jesus, God saves us from hell.

By grace through faith in Jesus, God adopts us as His children.

By grace through faith in Jesus, God gives us a home in heaven.

By grace through faith in Jesus, God places His Spirit in us so that we can experience the life of Christ in us.

By grace through faith in Jesus, God redeems and restores everything that is broken by our sin.

By grace through faith in Jesus, God secures us for eternity so that we will never be lost again.

By grace through faith in Jesus, God works everything in our lives – including the pain and brokenness of sin – for our good and His glory.

And truly repentant people are amazed by grace. They enjoy grace forever, but they never feel entitled to it. It's always amazing.

Friend, are you amazed by grace? Or is the work of Jesus no big deal? It should cause us to question whether or not we have come to grips with our sin if we don't stand in awe of our Savior. It

is right to rest in grace. It is right to enjoy grace. It is right to glory in grace. It is tragic to feel entitled to it as though it's no big deal.

And that brings me to the last sign of true repentance.

5. True Repentance Begins New Patterns

Genesis 42:29-34

When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, 30 "The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. 31 But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we have never been spies. 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.'

This scene is so important in the story of Joseph's brothers. The last time we saw them in chapter 37, they were returning from selling Joseph into slavery. What did they do? They lied and deceived their own father. They didn't tell him anything that happened out in the fields.

But verse 29 says they told him all that happened to them this time. They don't twist the truth. They don't make up a story about why Simeon isn't with them. They tell him the truth.

True repentance puts a stop to old patterns of sin and begins to live a new way. This is what ultimately will enable true restoration between Joseph and his brothers. They begin to demonstrate new patterns that rebuild trust and reveal that they are genuinely changed.

And that change isn't something we do by our own power. It's part of God's gracious work for us through Jesus. You see, repentance isn't just turning away from sin. Repentance is turning to the Savior.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,

The way we lay aside sin and step into the life God desires for us is by looking to Jesus. Repentance acknowledges sin and its consequences. But the focal point of repentance isn't sin. The focal point of repentance is the Savior. And when we look to Jesus to do for us what we can't do for ourselves, that's exactly what we get, a Savior who transforms our lives by doing for us what we can't do for ourselves.

So, look to Jesus today. Not your sin. Not your earthly relationships. Not yourself. Look to Jesus.

Have you ever placed your faith and trust in Jesus? Are there relationships that are broken by your sin? How is Jesus stirring you to step into repentance?