

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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JOSEPH: Our God Is Always Faithful (The Fruit of Repentance)

Genesis 44

In 1953, a tragic story of deceit and betrayal was published in newspapers across the nation. For the next 47 years, new layers of the story were revealed, not only in newspapers but in television specials that seemed to play on repeat. It's safe to say that our nation's conscience was deeply impacted by the tragedy. I'm sure most of you know what I'm talking about, but just in case, here's a picture that sums it up.



I'm talking about the annual tradition of Lucy van Pelt convincing Charlie Brown to try and kick the football.

Every year for nearly half a century, Charles Schulz made sure to include Lucy's football gag in his newspaper comic strip Peanuts. It always followed the same basic pattern: Lucy would talk Charlie Brown into trusting her to hold the football for him to kick. With hopeful optimism, Charlie would approach the football, putting all his energy into the kick, only to have Lucy pull the ball away at the last second. It happened every year and I hated it every time. I could never quite figure out how I was supposed to feel. On one hand, I wanted Charlie Brown to just walk away and stop falling for her tricks. On the other hand, I wanted Lucy to come to her senses and change her ways. But I never quite knew how that would look. How could Lucy prove that she had changed? What would Chuck need to see that would cause him to trust her? Why didn't someone make Pigpen take a bath? Such are the mysteries of life!

Our text for this morning reminded me of my struggle with Lucy and Charlie Brown. For nearly all their lives, Joseph's brothers had been awful men. Over and over, their patterns of sin hurt everyone around them. Those sins resulted in Joseph being ripped from his family and sold into slavery.

Twenty years later, those same brothers reenter Joseph's life. Joseph is now the Prime Minister of Egypt where he is overseeing the entire nation during 7 years of extreme famine. His brothers come

to Egypt to buy grain. Through the Providence of God, they find themselves standing in front of their long, lost brother. They don't recognize him, but he immediately knows who they are...or, does he?

You see, as we read this story, we get to see something Joseph can't see: God has been changing these men from the inside out over the last couple of chapters. Last week, we saw several ways God revealed His mercy and grace to them. And God's mercy and grace began to change them. By the end of last chapter, these men who had been riddled with sin and fear and guilt were enjoying a feast around Joseph's table. They were being transformed by God's grace.

And there's a word in the bible that is closely connected to that transformation. It's the word "repentance." Repentance is a change of heart and mind that leads to a change of action.

We don't manufacture that change. God does it by His grace. It's always a response to grace.

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?

The right response to God's mercy and grace is always repentance, it isn't presumption or entitlement. The right response is repentance. But what are indicators that we are responding to God's grace with truly repentant hearts? How does that response to God's grace take shape in our lives?

There are many biblically faithful ways to describe the answer to that question, but for this morning, I want to focus on one: Humility. Repentance looks like humility before God and the people in our lives. Let me say that another way. As we are being changed in response to God's grace to us, we begin to live in humility before God and others.

1 Peter 5:5-6

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

The change of heart that comes in response to God's grace (aka, repentance) is expressed in humility before God and the people in our lives. That's the Big Idea we will see in our text for this morning.

Big Idea: Humble Repentance is the right response to God's mercy and grace.

That's what our text shows us in the lives of Joseph's brothers. Joseph sees humble repentance in his brothers' lives in a way that causes him to trust them and take steps into reconciliation. These men have been transformed in response to God's grace through humble repentance.

Now, let's dig into our text and I'll show you what I mean.

Genesis 44:1-12

Then he commanded the steward of his house, "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, 2 and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. 3 As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. 4 They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you

repaid evil for good? 5 Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this.” 6 When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. 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 that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house? 9 Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord’s servants.” 10 He said, “Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent.” 11 Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. 12 And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack.

Remember, in the last chapter, Joseph gave his brothers a bit of a test. At dinner, he gave Benjamin 5 times more food than the others. Why is that significant? Well, at the beginning of Joseph’s story, he was the favored child who received more than his brothers...and they hated him for getting more than them. So, Joseph gave them an opportunity to show whether they’ve actually changed.

And he is doing a similar thing here in the opening scene of our text. He has his servant return all their money back into their sacks of grain and place Joseph’s silver cup into Benjamin’s. Then, shortly after they leave, Joseph sends the servant out to confront them.

Now, really quickly, some of you might wonder why the servant says that Joseph practiced divination using that cup. Divination was a pagan form of discerning future events, kind of like fortune-telling. It’s expressly forbidden in Scripture along with things like witchcraft. So, what’s going on? Is Joseph a pagan who worshiped the false gods of Egypt? I don’t think so. All throughout this study, we have seen Joseph living with faithfulness and fidelity to God alone. What I believe is happening is that Joseph is playing a part here. He wants his brothers to believe he is part of the Egyptian aristocracy. That’s why he says what he says in verse 15 – don’t you know a “man like me can practice divination.” He is very careful in that wording. He only claims to be like a man who is known to practice divination. I think he is playing a role here to keep his brothers from realizing who he is.

At any rate, Joseph’s cup is found in Benjamin’s possession. Once again, Joseph has recreated a scenario from his earlier years to see if his brothers have changed. Twenty-some years ago, when they sold him into slavery, the only things they cared about were getting rid of their younger half-brother (their father’s favorite) and making some money along the way. Now, they’ve got their chance again. Once again, they could get rid of their younger half-brother (Benjamin - who had clearly become their father’s favorite in Joseph’s absence) and they could make some money along the way since all of their silver had been returned.

It’s even possible that Joseph set Benjamin up with this divination cup precisely because it would have linked Benjamin with Joseph in his brothers’ minds. Joseph was the brother who claimed to be able to tell the future.

So, here’s their chance. They can repeat their patterns of sin or respond to God’s grace with repentance. What do they do?

Genesis 44:13-34

Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city. 14 When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. 15 Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?” 16 And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we and he also in whose hand

the cup has been found.” 17 But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.” 18 Then Judah went up to him and said, “Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. 19 My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father, or a brother?’ 20 And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother’s children, and his father loves him.’ 21 Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’ 22 We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ 23 Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.’ 24 “When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. 25 And when our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food,’ 26 we said, ‘We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’ 27 Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. 28 One left me, and I said, “Surely he has been torn to pieces,” and I have never seen him since. 29 If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.’ 30 “Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, 31 as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. 32 For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.’ 33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. 34 For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.”

When Joseph’s brothers have a golden opportunity to repeat the sins of their past, they prove by their actions that they have been genuinely changed in response to God’s mercy and grace. In fact, their humble repentance is so evident here that Joseph completely trusts that they are changed and immediately reconciles with them in the verses after our text.

So, let’s walk through the brothers’ response to Joseph’s test and see what there is to learn about the transformation humble repentance brings about.

1. Humble Repentance Grieves Sin’s Impact On Others

Notice the very first thing the brothers do when they realize Joseph’s cup is in with Benjamin’s grain.

13 Then they tore their clothes...

Throughout the bible, the act of tearing your clothes was a way to visibly display deep grief. I’m glad we don’t have this in our culture because being a Cleveland Browns fan would destroy my wardrobe. The very first time it is found in the bible is the beginning of the story of Joseph. Back in chapter 37, the brothers have Joseph in a pit. They had planned on killing him, but Reuben convinced them to think it over. His plan was to figure out a way to return Joseph to their dad. But there’s reason to believe Reuben’s motives were far from selfless. As the oldest child, Reuben would have been the one in charge and responsible for what happened when dad wasn’t around. And Reuben was already on thin ice with his dad for committing a terrible sin with one of his father’s wives. As a result, Reuben is more concerned about Reuben than he is about Joseph.

When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?"

Before his repentance in our text, Reuben's grief was completely self-centered. He doesn't say, "What's going to happen to Joseph?" He says, "What's going to happen to me?" But, after their repentance, the brothers aren't grieving over themselves. Who are they grieving over?

In verse 16, Judah says "**God has found out the guilt of your servants.**" He's not talking about stealing Joseph's cup because he knows they didn't steal that cup. He's talking about selling Joseph into slavery.

The first relationship that comes to their minds is their relationship with God. They realize that their sin has put them at odds with God. They have no justification or excuses. Just deep grief over what their sin has done to them in relationship with God. But, they realize that their sin has an impact on the lives of others, as well.

Look at verse 34: ***For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.***"

Judah is grieved over what will happen to his father as a result of their sin. He's says, "I can't bear to think about what this will do to dad."

And that's always part of humble repentance. It's humble because it isn't just concerned about self. It's concerned about God, and it's concerned about others – humble repentance is always accompanied by grief over sin.

Matthew 5:3-4

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Jesus says that God's gracious blessings are poured out upon people who realize that they are spiritually bankrupt in their sin and mourn because of it.

Has that work of grace occurred in your heart? As you think about your sin, has guilt been transformed into grief? I'm not saying that we are supposed to grieve forever over our sin. Jesus promises to comfort us through His saving grace. But there should be a God-honoring grief as we think about sin...not just our past sins but the thought of future sin. It should grieve our hearts to think we would grieve the heart of our father and impact the lives of others. God's Grace transforms us into people who value our Heavenly Father and the people in our lives more than we value the pleasure of sin.

Humble repentance grieves the impact of our sin on the lives of others.

The second way humble repentance transforms our lives is...

2. Humble Repentance Submits To Authority

14 When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. 16 And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants...

In humility, the brothers bow before Joseph as the one in authority over them. Ultimately, they recognize that God is the One in charge and He has placed them before Joseph as their earthly authority. The phrases “my lord” and “your servants” occur 23 times in this exchange between Judah and Joseph.

What a change! Do you remember how these same brothers responded to the dreams God gave Joseph at the beginning of their story? They basically said, “You will never rule over us.” Even though God gave that prophecy to Joseph, they weren’t about to submit to authority...not Joseph’s and not even God’s.

But here they are, changed by the grace of God into men who are willingly placing themselves in submission to authority. They are no longer rebellious in their pride. They are humble before the Lord and before the authority He has given to Joseph.

And that’s always the heart of humble repentance. The entire Christian life is predicated on this truth.

Romans 10:9

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

To be a follower of Jesus means that you willingly acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and yield your life to Him. It means you bow your life down before Jesus and surrender your will to Him. Has that happened in your life? Have you bowed before Jesus as Lord of all? Or is there part of your heart that is hanging on to a desire for control?

That’s directly connected to the third truth we see about humble repentance in our text.

3. Humble Repentance Sacrificially Serves Others Over Self

33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.

Judah asks to stay in Benjamin’s place. He’s willing to sacrifice his freedom so that someone he loves can be well. That’s humble repentance. When God’s grace leads us to the place of genuine repentance, we begin to willingly lay aside our rights in order to serve the people God has placed into our lives.

Humble repentance doesn’t make selfish demands of the people who have been harmed by our sin. Humble repentance doesn’t put selfish desires ahead of what other people need. Humble repentance places others above self.

Is that heart in you today? Do you serve others rather than self? Do you submit to the authority of the Lord? Do you mourn over sin because you love the Father? Is that heart in you today?

And you might ask, “How can we make our hearts like that?” The answer is, “You can’t. That’s why you need Jesus.” Only Jesus can transform our hearts in all these ways.

2000 years after Judah interceded on behalf of Benjamin, a descendent of Judah known as the lion of the tribe of Judah came to this earth. And his name was Jesus. In perfect grief over sin, Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and the impact their sin had on their relationship to God and one another. In perfect submission to authority, Jesus obeyed God the Father in every way we have failed to obey.

In perfect sacrificial service, Jesus became our substitute by dying on the cross as a payment for our sin.

And He did just give His life for us, He promises to live His life through us...He promises to transform our hearts and lives as we trust in Him.

Philippians 2:3-8

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The heart of humble repentance is a heart that looks to Jesus and says, "Jesus, I need you. Create in me a new heart. Live your life in me. My life belongs to you."