

A SILVER CUP AND THE JIG IS UP**Genesis 44**

Intro: Last week I was called to the bedside of a woman who, as it turned out, had less than 24 hours to live. All life support had been removed and she had actually rallied a bit. As I walked into the room, her daughter turned and saw I was there and said, “Mom, Keith is here to see you.” And then she looked back at me and said, “She’s worried about where she’s going to go when she dies.”

Well, that’s music to a preacher’s ears! We have information on that. So, I took the 90-year old’s hand and called her by name and said, “You can know. The Bible says . . .”

And she, in a manner that was typical for her, interrupted me and said, “Well, I’ve never been very religious.” Which was, if you knew her, pretty much of an understatement. But I assured her, that how religious one is, is less important than what one believes about Jesus Christ, and I gave her the assurance that is found in Romans which is, *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* Romans 10:9-13 (NIV).

Her response was a simple “I believe.” And I responded then it’s all up to him. She replied with, and I’m paraphrasing, that it just didn’t seem fair to live all of life for oneself and then, practically at the last minute, surrender to Jesus. I responded that, in the world’s eyes it isn’t fair, but that’s what so amazing about grace. She died the next day, one week ago today, and she is in God’s hands.

Not everybody has the opportunity this woman had. Some people come driving around a curve in a country backroad, looking down at their cell phone and driving left of center, and are hit head-on by a car coming in the opposite direction. They never knew what hit them, let alone where they stood with Jesus.

But think about the thief who hung next to Jesus at the crucifixion. He simply said to Jesus *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* Luke 23:42, and did Jesus reply, *“Once you’ve been baptized and once you clean up your act, and once you attend synagogue regularly, THEN I’ll remember you.”*? No, Jesus’s answer was immediate, *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”* Luke 23:43.

You see, as we’ve pointed out before in this Lessons from Joseph series, our God is in the redemption business, and its very clear here in Genesis 44 which was your reading for this past week. I am going to read through the chapter today so listen as I read the first half. (Read Genesis 44:1-16)

(By the way, read Genesis 45 for next time)

Here we see that over 1500 years before Christ God gave a foretaste of what he would do once and for all through the Cross by using Joseph as his instrument for redeeming the seemingly unredeemable. He began with . . .

A sacred set-up

- Joseph had a Spirit directed method to his madness. It is fun to think that maybe he enjoyed toying with his brothers like a cat plays with a helpless mouse. But think about this logically: Benjamin was his beloved full brother and of all the characters in this story was truly without guilt. Joseph used Benjamin as a pawn in a powerful lesson to the other 10. It was a classic, *“This is gonna hurt me more than it hurts you.”* scenario.
- It was a silver cup in a grain sack. People who want to make a distraction through details, as is so often the case, especially with the Old Testament, zero in on the fact that Joseph’s cup was what he used for divination, which the steward does, indeed, point out. Detractors rightfully point out that divination is wrong, but taking that bunny trail is much ado about nothing. It was one of the props in Joseph’s elaborate life lesson. The cup was merely a vehicle to bring the men back to Joseph for the final act in his quest for redemption.
- The trap is set and the trap snaps. Benjamin, who, as we have pointed out, is the one truly innocent character, and is the one who is singled out. Finally, after many years and having been the ones who dealt so unjustly with Joseph, his brothers, at long last, are incredibly aware of the injustice of it all as they see Benjamin victimized.

- What once were rash words – “*Let whoever is guilty be dealt with harshly.*” – now have great meaning as slavery together is better than going home without their youngest brother. And that is what shows the beauty of the love of God. In his mercy . . .

God knows and God shows

- First, let’s finish the chapter, (Read Genesis 44:17-34)
- One commentator points out that God “inflamed the brothers’ awareness of his activity” through these events. We see this in Judah’s words to Joseph “*What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt.*” Genesis 44:16b. It was a huge admission of guilt that Judah still had no idea had such great meaning to Joseph. For all he knew this was some stern Egyptian official, when actually he was the very victim of the treachery that had been the launching pad of their persistent guilt.
- Several weeks ago, I talked about the beauty of guilt – how it is evidence of God’s love for us – here we have a vivid picture of it at work. From the very beginning of humanity, when Adam and Eve tried to hide from God, we humans have thought we could conceal our sin from our all-knowing God. It’s wishful thinking. God knows and we might as well own up to it. Instead of denial, let’s admit that . . .

God gets us where he wants us, sooner or later

- It’s all part of his mercy. Truthfully, in the case of Joseph’s brothers, it’s God wooing them back. Sometimes his wooing is softly and tenderly like the old hymn says – *Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me.* But other times God’s wooing is more like a baseball bat on particularly hard-headed people like Judah and his brothers – or Keith Tyson – or fill in the blank...
- Finally, after a lifetime of selfishness, Judah’s plea was completely other-centered – finally it was NOT about him. At long last, he was infinitely concerned about his baby brother’s welfare and his aged father’s broken heart and not so much himself.
- All of them were realizing a life-lesson. These brothers had come a long way as they owned up to their sins. Where they once had sold their brother into slavery, now they preferred slavery in Egypt to freedom without their little brother Benjamin. In the same way Jacob’s sons did . . .

We have much to learn from a 3500-year-old Bible account

- These men had had performed a terrible act of treachery and deserved no mercy. Yet, God engineered redemption for those who did not deserve it. They needed to know their need and even though it took years and much heartache it finally sank in. And to think, they still had not realized who Joseph was.
- These men are just like you and me. We may never have sold a sibling into slavery along with an elaborate cover story of deception, but we’ve all have our own kinds of treachery. We’ve all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). God would not have had to provide a way out of sin – but he did. We are entering into the season of celebrating the sacrifice that brought us mercy. It is when we see what Jesus did in our place on the Cross that we realize just how far God went to woo us back.
- Judah’s vicarious act is a picture of the Christian life. Most of the second half of this chapter is Judah’s eloquent appeal to Joseph. He recounts the entire story – all 20 or more years of it. He even implies that great sin was perpetrated by him and his brothers. Finally, he offers himself up to take the place of Benjamin who, by all appearances, is the thief who absconded with the silver cup. After all these years, Judah is ready to bear the burden for the sins he has committed. This is how we need come to Christ. We need to admit who and what we truly are. And what he does with that is he washes us clean and makes us new. As I said earlier, that’s what so amazing about grace.
- Finally, as commentator, Clyde Francisco, points out, Judah’s willingness to put himself in Benjamin’s place is a picture of the attitude Christ Followers need to have. That is, the bearing of our cross is not a duty to be dreaded but a sacrifice to be sought. When God says who will go, we need to step up and say, “*Here I am Lord, send me!*”

Conclusion: The story of Jacob’s sons is drawing to a climax. Next time we’ll cover the big reveal, where, to their near horror, they will realize that this Egyptian regent, the person who answers only to Pharaoh, is their long-lost brother Joseph. The jig is up and it’s worse than a silver cup. TO BE CONTINUED. Amen.