

51. Shattered Family, Saving Famine (2007)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 November 2012

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning. We continue in the book of Genesis, and we're at chapter 42. You'll find that on page 35 if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles.

And we're picking up the story where we left off last week at chapter 41. Let me just read from the last couple of verses of chapter 41, verse 56, which sets the scene.

The famine had spread over all the land, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, Why do you look at one another? And he said, Behold, I've heard there is grain for sale in Egypt.

Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die. So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.

[1 : 12] But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

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.

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. He said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 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. They said to him, No, my lords, your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man.

[2 : 18] We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies. He said to them, No, it is the nakedness of the land, the weakness of the land in this famine that you have come to see.

They said, We are servants. We 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.

But Joseph said to them, It is as I said to you, You are spies. By this you shall be tested by the life of Pharaoh. You shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here.

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. And he put them all together in custody for three days.

On the third day, Joseph said to them, Do this and you will live. For I fear God. 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 household, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words will be verified and you shall not die.

[3 : 34] And they did so. 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.

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.

They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. And 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. 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. Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. 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.

[4 : 44] 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?

When they came to Jacob, their father, in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, The man, the Lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land.

But we said to him, We are honest men. We have never been spies. 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.

Then the man, the Lord of the land, said to us, By this I shall know that you are honest men.

Leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies, but honest men.

And I shall deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.

They're putting really rather a positive complexion on things, don't you think? As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack.

[5 : 56] And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to him, You have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin.

All this has come against me. And Reuben said to his father, Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.

But he said, My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us. This is his word. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Genesis chapter 42.

To begin by reminding us that the purpose of God from the beginning of history, indeed from even before the foundation of the world, as Ephesians chapter 1 reminds us, the purpose of God is to call out a people for adoption through Jesus Christ into God's eternal family.

[7 : 29] So that, as Ephesians tells us, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might be made known and displayed in the whole universe, in heaven and earth, forever and ever.

That is the great eternal purpose of God. That is the goal of creation. And that is the goal, also, of the whole story of redemption that begins so very long ago, way back here in the book of Genesis. God will be glorified forever in the people that he is calling to be his own through the redeeming work of his great Savior. And that's why God called Abraham and gave him a promise that through his seed, all the families of the earth would ultimately find blessing and salvation.

But as we've seen, you don't have to read too far in the story of this family of Abraham's seed to realize that this family itself is in desperate need of salvation, both from threats without and from threats within.

And indeed, as the story of the Old Testament unfolds, the story of Israel shows us that more and more and more. God's family, in all its dysfunctional glory, is what is writ large on the pages of our Bibles all the way through.

[8 : 53] And there's no attempt to censor that. And yet, all the way through, God's promise is found also to be true. And God's providential power is at work, preserving his people and guarding the seed of salvation until at last, in the Lord Jesus Christ, his purpose for this world is fulfilled and the great salvation that he brings to all the nations.

But all the way through, the story of the coming Savior, we see that in every age, in every generation, God's people need a Savior to rescue them, to rescue them from their own folly and their unfaithfulness and their sin.

And that's certainly so way back here in the story of Jacob's family. In chapters 39 to 41 of Genesis, we've already seen God preparing that Savior, Joseph, the man that God has sent ahead of the rest of the family in order to bring salvation to his chosen seed.

And now, in chapters 42 to 45, the camera lens zooms right back from Joseph onto the rest of his family and shows us just how God is going to save this family that he's chosen to bless.

And this chapter 42 certainly reminds us about what it is that they need saving from. Certainly, there is indeed a great threat from without that would threaten their very survival, a threat of starvation.

[10:27] But in fact, as we'll see, the far greater threat comes from within, from within their own family and indeed from within their own hearts. And that is the deadly threat of their own sinfulness.

And it's that reality that explains the marvelously complicated pattern of the events that we see unfolding in this story because God is dealing with his people not only in an earthly dimension, but in an eternal one.

God's providence is indeed, as John Calvin says, a labyrinth. And that is because the matrix of human sin is so dark and so deep and so complicated that it simply cannot be dealt with, with triteness or with superficiality.

It can only be dealt with by the extraordinary depths of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are far beyond us, as Paul puts it.

That's why so much in this story is utterly baffling to Jacob's family, just as so much is baffling to Joseph in what he has gone through before.

[11:45] And friends, that is also why so much that happens to us in our own experience of life is also baffling and perplexing. because the monumental mess of the matrix of human sin is so vast and so catastrophic.

But God is working his purpose out with consummate skill and with commanding power. It's just that the real story is always so much deeper than the events on the surface of our lives can ever see or can ever understand.

And that's the way it is here in Genesis 42. Jacob's family, Israel, God's chosen people, they are concerned with the immediate problem of their need for food and of saving their bodies from starvation.

But God is concerned with a far, far deeper problem, their need for forgiveness and saving them from sin. And what we see here is the beginning, just the beginning of how God's shattered family is to be rescued through what turns out to be God's saving famine.

But rescued in a much, much deeper way than they could ever have imagined possible or ever even thought necessary. And the whole story unfolds over these next four chapters.

[13:09] But we're going to focus today just on chapter 42. And if you look at it, you'll see that the geography in this chapter gives us the structure for the story. You see, it begins and ends with a spotlight on the family dynamics in Canaan with the brothers in their discussion with Jacob.

And then in the middle, we have events as they unfold down in Egypt in the brothers' encounter with Joseph. So verses 1 to 5 and verses 29 to 38 are the bread, if you like, and verses 6 to 28 are the meat in the sandwich.

So let's look first at the bread where all the focus is on this shattered family, on the sad disaster of the covenant family. Verses 1 to 5 and verses 29 to 38 and especially verses 35 to 38, they give us a window into the family dynamics of Jacob's household in Canaan.

And what these verses reveal, only too clearly, is the real problem in every human family and in every human life. And that is the sinful perversity of the human heart.

Look at verses 1 to 5. It begins by showing us a starving family and a sarcastic, suspicious father. We're back with a real bump to the dysfunction of this family and its long history of disharmony and relationship breakdown.

[14:35] Now the crisis that it faces is a famine, which was severe over all the earth, as verse 41, as the last verse of chapter 41 tells us. And that includes, says verse 5, the land of Canaan.

And clearly, it was life-threatening, verse 2. They may very well die if they don't get food from Egypt.

So it was a real crisis. But you see, crises, crises are great revealers of the truth, aren't they?

Just like that storm in New York this past week. It revealed, didn't it, which flood defenses were signed and which were not. It revealed which trees were really healthy and which trees were not and were blown down by the wind.

I was jolly glad it was a couple of weeks ago. I was in New York, not last week, I must say. But crises reveal the truth, don't they? And the truth about this family here is pretty dark.

Remember chapter 34? The brothers massacring that whole city of Shechem in an act of vengeance on their sister? Remember chapter 37? And their callous, kidnapping and enslaving their brother for money?

[15 : 45] Remember chapter 38? And the dreadful decline and debauchery of Judah and his family descending into the total paganism and the sexual perversity of the Canaanites?

Well, here we are and about 20 years has elapsed since then. 20 years of grief and resentment for Jacob. 20 years of living with guilt and lies for his sons.

Can you imagine the tensions, the suspicions, the atmosphere of unease and unhappiness that there must have been in that family? And here we see that very little has changed. There's fracture, isn't there, in the relationship between Jacob and his sons, verse 1, his sarcastic comments.

What are you bunch doing just staring at each other? Get off down there and get some food for goodness sake. And there's favoritism, verse 4, still. Benjamin now has taken Joseph's place as the favored boy and there's real fear.

Jacob is very suspicious of his sons. Surely that's why he won't let Benjamin go off with them. The last time they were all away together, Joseph never returned. And he's worried, isn't he, that the same thing might happen to Benjamin.

[17 : 00] It seems to be the journey with the brothers that he fears far more than what might happen actually in Egypt. 20 years. They say time is a great healer.

But that isn't necessarily so, is it? Time alone might simply make wounds worse, more festering, even more poisoned. Time is only a healer if a healing poultice is applied, something to cleanse and disinfect, something to bring healing to a bitter wound.

And it seems there's been no such cleansing of this shattered family. So it was, indeed, a shattered family that went down to Egypt, verse 5, along with all the others who are seeking relief from the famine.

A sad disaster of a family. Despite being God's own covenant family, a people chosen by God for great purpose in God's plan.

man. Well, let's skip forward to see their return back to Canaan and their father. Let's peep through this other window that the text gives us as we eavesdrop on the conversation with their father recorded in verses 29 to 38, verses that reveal a shaken family but still a very stubborn and self-pitying father that had a very, very eventful journey to and from Egypt.

[18 : 27] But it was far from a happy reunion in their homecoming, wasn't it? In fact, the very unhappiness takes us back to that fraught scene at the end of chapter 37 when the brothers also return from a journey, this time reporting Joseph's loss and so cruelly showing Jacob that bloody robe of Joseph's as evidence.

Well, first of all, in verses 29 to 34, they recount the story to Jacob. They told him all that had happened to them, verse 29, but actually it's not quite all that happened, is it, when you read it carefully.

They talk about their protestations of honesty. We're honest men, verse 31. It's not exactly an honest account, is it? No mention is there of their three days in prison, for one thing.

In verse 33, when they talk about Joseph saying, oh, leave one of your brothers with me, it rather kind of sounds as though he's an honored house guest, instead of actually being in prison, as verse 19 makes clear.

Nor is there any mention of Joseph's threat of death upon all of them in verse 20. In fact, instead, they rather suggest that all they have to do is come back with Benjamin and they'll have a whole free trade agreement to trade in Egypt.

[19 : 43] I suppose when you're practiced deceivers and liars, you start to believe your own rhetoric, don't you? And that can happen. It can happen even in the professing church, as we know too well.

So perhaps that was the case here. They were just lying to their father. Or maybe these shaken brothers were just beginning to have a conscience about the sins that they'd visited on their father Jacob.

Just perhaps they were wanting to shield him from some of the worst of this new and bitter pain. Then they were not told what Jacob made of all of this at this point, but when the men emptied their sacks of grain into the family store, no doubt at Jacob's command, verse 35, when they did that, there's another stunning revelation.

A further fact that they had omitted to tell Jacob was the discovery of money in that one sack on their way back from Egypt. But now, verse 35, behold, look, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack.

Now, that did not look good, not at all. That looked highly suspicious, and we're told they're all afraid. Now, the brothers, no doubt, were very afraid, very shaken, given everything they'd been through, even more spooked now.

[21 : 06] What on earth was going on? But Jacob, why was Jacob afraid? What was his fear? Well, it may well be that Jacob saw all this silver, and an awful thought just hit home in his heart, that they had sold Simeon for money.

He'd always been suspicious of Joseph's disappearance. Maybe he remembered the apparent coincidence that at the time of Joseph's disappearance, all of a sudden, a whole lot of extra silver seemed to appear in the family bank account.

Maybe the sight of this hidden stash just convinced him of his worst fears about his rotten offspring. And that would explain, wouldn't it, verse 36?

You, he says, you have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Very, very horrible, unnerving feeling, isn't it, not to be able to trust somebody, especially if it's somebody so close, a real friend or somebody actually within the family. Devastating feeling to have no trust for a spouse, perhaps you suspect of unfaithfulness, or a child who's turned against the rest of the family or his parents.

[22 : 31] It's awful and terrible to be in that situation. But Jacob, Elias, is just reaping what he sowed, isn't he? The reality is that you can't have dream relationships if you've used others and mistreated others and deceived them and exploited them.

What a mess of sad disaster this whole family is. It's not unique, is it? Plenty of mess and disaster in many families like that in the world today.

And Jacob, verse 36, is full of self-pity. All this has come against me, he says. And he's full of stubborn selfishness.

Verse 38, you will never take Benjamin with you. What about poor Simeon? Doesn't seem to have a thought of care for him, does he? Pretty pathetic. It's all about me and my life and my grief and what's happened to me.

At least Reuben seems to want to go and rescue Simeon, but what on earth is he thinking in verse 37? Kill my two sons if I don't bring Simeon back. Quite how on earth he thought Jacob was going to be consoled when he heard that Simeon had been killed by another two of his family being murdered, I do not know.

[23 : 48] It just tells you the depth of dysfunction in this whole family. What a sad disaster this covenant family really is. You see what the text is shouting to us?

They think that their real problem is the threat from without, the threat of starvation. But the reality is far different. The far greater threat is from within, from within their own family, from within their own hearts.

It's the deadly threat of their own sinfulness. That's the threat that's destroying this family. And their real need, their great crying need is not for food from the ruler of Egypt, it's for forgiveness from the ruler of heaven.

heaven. And so often, isn't that true when it's matters of family life or friendships or work strife or marriage struggles or whatever it might be, so often we only see the superficial problem, don't we? And we seek therefore only the superficial solution, to ease the famine, better, more favorable working conditions, better education, better sex, more money, whatever it might be.

[24 : 58] But it takes God to uncover the deeper issues, the real problem deep down in our human hearts, the real root cause that spills out and brings all kinds of evil to bear, and brings about all the misery and the dissatisfaction in our human lives.

What was it Jesus said? From within, out of the heart of man comes all kinds of evil. It's what comes from within that defiles a person.

It's what comes from within the human heart that can destroy everything that we value in life, not only in this present life, but forever. And only the exposure of that can be the beginning of the road to recovery, the road to redemption, the road to true restoration with God, and therefore, to true reconciliation with one another.

father. But that, in fact, is what has begun for this family, as events that form the very heart of this chapter make clear to us. Jacob could not have been more wrong in verse 36.

All this has not come against him. All of this is nothing less than the mercy of God at work for good and for the good of his whole fractured family.

[26 : 20] For sure, it is a severe mercy. It's a painful mercy. But it is God's saving mercy. At the end of this chapter, we're left hanging, aren't we?

What's going to happen? Will Simeon be saved? Will the brothers return? Will Jacob let Benjamin go? And we know the answer, of course, because God has spoken. All that he revealed in Joseph's dream, all these years ago, must come to pass.

And of course, what the heart of this chapter shows us is that God has begun already to bring that fulfillment to pass in a far more wonderful way than anyone could ever imagine. But Joseph will not simply be the ruler of this shattered family to whom they all bow down, but he's going to be the great reconciler of this family.

Yes, there's a long way to go. Yes, Jacob will still have to let go of his idolatrous favoritism and self-pity. But what the heart of this chapter shows us clearly is that Joseph's brothers have begun to be changed.

That this shattered family is being shaped already by God's saving famine. And these verses in the middle show us the saving discipline of the covenant God.

[27 : 37] And that's what this window into the encounter of Joseph with his brothers in Egypt in verses 6 to 28 give us. They reveal the only real solution for the sinful perversity of the human heart lies in the sovereign power and the saving purpose of God's heart.

Sometimes it takes a great deal to break down the deafness and the stubbornness of the human heart so that people can hear God's voice. C.S. Lewis puts it characteristically so well, doesn't he, when he says God whispers in our pleasures, he speaks in our conscience, but he shouts in our pain.

It's God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world, he says. And sometimes it takes a famine to make people listen. And so it was here.

The sons of Israel, verse 5, God's chosen family are brought in humiliation to Egypt. And little could they know that this has all happened so that they'll be confronted by the power of Joseph and through that convicted by the power of God.

verses 6 to 17, see the brothers confronted by the power of Joseph. And what irony, verse 6, they're willingly bowing down with their faces to the ground before the one that they despised and rejected and sold as a slave and thought must be dead by now.

[29 : 03] They didn't recognize him, but he recognized them. It's delicious, isn't it? There's so many things that recall chapter 37, not least a play on the words recognized here in verse 7.

The very same words that the brothers used to Jacob when they brought that robe so cruelly and said, do you recognize this belonging to Joseph? But now how different they are.

Well, they say revenge is a dish best served cold. And surely we read this and think now Joseph's revenge must be sweet. But no, says verse 9.

Joseph remembers all right, but not the depravity of his brothers. What he remembers is the dreams from God. In other words, he remembers God's revelation to him about his purpose for him and for his family.

He remembers God's promise. He remembers the truth of God and suddenly a world of truth dawns on him. This is the Joseph, remember, we saw last time, who has forgotten his bitterness and who has rejoiced in being fruitful through his affliction.

[30 : 19] And he senses God's hand of destiny on him. And suddenly he realizes what he expresses later on in chapter 45 and verse 5, that he was sent here and now to preserve this family's life.

And he understands at last what God is actually doing. He is there to save his whole family, to rescue them, but from far, far more than merely from the famine.

Astonishing as it is, we see here how much love he has for his brothers and how he wants to bring healing and reconciliation. And how he wants to bring restoration to this family for the sake of God's covenant promise and purpose.

And that's what explains all his actions that follow. God will save this family from starvation through Joseph. He will give them food, although not without a ransom.

But he will also, and far more importantly, save this family from their sins through Joseph. God will also bring them to forgiveness, although not without repentance.

[31 : 29] Joseph himself clearly wants to forgive his brothers. He wants to bring reconciliation. But Joseph, of all people, knows what it means to have to deal with the reality, with the bitterness of sin.

Can't just be magicked away as if it didn't happen. No relationship breakdown can just be magicked away, can it? Just not real. Joseph wants to forgive his brothers, but they need to want to be forgiven.

That's the only way you can receive forgiveness. You need to recognize you need forgiveness, otherwise you won't want it, will you? And that's why Joseph's tactics here seem to be so tough and so harsh.

His heart isn't hard. His heart is acutely tender, as his tears in verse 24 make clear. Joseph certainly has the power to bring a real reckoning to his brothers here, but instead he wants to bring real reconciliation.

And Joseph is motivated by real and powerful love. But real love, real love cannot pretend that sins haven't been committed when they have been.

[32 : 42] And so real love demands that these brothers are confronted with their sins. And three days in the slammer, in the same pit where Joseph had suffered, was God's way, if you like, of jogging their memory.

God's megaphone. That's what's going on. Because it wasn't just a confrontation with the power of Joseph whom they'd forgotten and whom they didn't recognize any longer.

It was a means to conviction by the power of God, whom also they'd forgotten and didn't recognize any longer. And that's what verses 18 to 28 makes so clear to us.

You see how that section begins and ends with reference to God. I fear God, says this Egyptian ruler in verse 18. And by verse 28, the brothers are echoing that too. What has God done to us, they say?

And that's the key to what's going on here. Taking Simeon hostage in verse 19 served a double purpose. It encouraged the brothers to return with Benjamin, Joseph's full brother whom he longed to see.

[33 : 48] But it also posed a test for them. Well, he abandoned Simeon, as they had done Joseph all those years before. And all this going on touched clearly a raw nerve in these brothers.

The interrogation, the mention of Benjamin and of Joseph, who is no more, the incarceration. And now the thought of their father having to face up to another lost son.

It hits them, doesn't it, in their conscience. They're convicted. In verse 21, they confess their guilt. In truth, we are guilty. And that's why this distress has come upon us.

Derek Kidner says, a taste of retribution was awakening feelings which a brother's cries and a father's tears had left totally untouched. God's megaphone.

Now, lest, it often is like that, isn't it? I came across this very penetrating comment from John Calvin. He says this, if at any time it happens that we are treated roughly by men, at least let the question occur to us whether we ourselves have in anything acted unkindly to others.

[34 : 59] Whenever others proudly despise us, reflect whether others have not experienced similar hardships from us. That's a very sobering word, isn't it?

I know in my own life there have been many occasions when it's been God's megaphone alone in just exactly that kind of way that has floored me, that's made me say, yes, in truth, I'm guilty.

And what's happening to me is exactly what I've done to others. Very humbling that, isn't it? And the brothers are filled with real fear here.

It's the beginnings of a godly sorrow. And yet Joseph's sorrow, his tears, are surely mixed with love and joy as he sees his brothers being touched and changed, even though they're oblivious completely.

They don't know that he hears and understands everything. And his tears reveal that it's not retribution, but that it truly is reconciliation and restoration that he desires.

[36 : 01] But that can't come without real repentance. And so in his deep love, he allows God's God's severe mercy to do its transforming work.

He puts money in their sacks, verse 25. Why? Well, maybe it's a token of generosity, just to show goodness instead of evil.

Perhaps it's also to test his brother's loyalty to Simeon over the gain of silver. But at any rate, God's purpose is clearly to give them another merciful shock.

And we see that in the collective near heart attack they have in verse 28. Their hearts failed them when they found the money. What is this that God has done to us, they say? You see, they're more God conscious than they've ever been in their lives before.

And through this inexplicable series of events, as Derek Kidner puts it, the alternating sun and frost breaks them open to God.

[37 : 11] And they're very afraid. But the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, says the Bible. And this is just the beginning. God will certainly test the brothers further, as we're going to see.

And Jacob too is tested. Will he really rate God's covenant purpose for his whole family above his own selfishness, above the self-pity in his own heart.

But this is a beginning. And God is at work. And God is back in this family's thinking for the first time in a very long time.

It's shock treatment, certainly. But without such a challenge, there would be no conviction. And without real conviction, there would be no true conversion, no true change of heart, and therefore no reconciliation in their earthly relationships in the family, and no restoration to their true destiny as the chosen people of God.

Painful. Was it really necessary? Well, in one sense, I suppose no. Joseph could have just kept quiet, could have given them grain without revealing himself, could have saved them from famine.

[38 : 33] They would have gone on their way, their bellies full, but with their hearts and souls empty of God's real saving grace and mercy. But no, you see, when God sends his saviors to his people, all through history, like Joseph here, it's always for a far greater purpose than merely to improve their earthly lot.

It's for a far, far greater purpose. God sent me ahead of you, says Joseph in chapter 45, to preserve a remnant on earth, to save the people that God has promised will be his people, not only for their earthly sojourn, but forever, to share his glory eternally.

Because God's eternal purpose in and through all history always transcends history. He is saving a people for his name forever.

He's saving a household who will be the dwelling place for his spirit forever. And that's why this chapter is the way that it is. God is not content just to dispense food through Joseph.

He's bringing forgiveness through Joseph to his brothers. Because our God is a God whose salvation transcends always mere rescue from starvation.

[40 : 02] Our God is the God who has promised to save his people from their sins. So let me conclude just with three key lessons that we mustn't miss in this passage.

First, God's purpose for his people is always far greater than the mere temporal. God's great purposes are always eternal. And therefore his dealing with people will go so much deeper than the merely superficial.

And it may therefore be temporarily very, very painful. No kindness is it of a doctor to give out some superficial ointment to treat an itch that a patient has if he knows that the real root cause is a malignant tumor deep within that needs to be cut out.

And so it is with God, the great physician. And that's why the Christian gospel message can never, ever be, as Terry likes to say, never be just a matter of soup and soap, or therapy, or personal fulfillment, or moral correctness, or spiritual experiences, or whatever.

It is a gospel of salvation from sin eternally, from the deep, cancerous perversity of the human heart. From which all evil in this world stems.

[41 : 25] The whole purpose of the famine here was that it was God's providential way of leading his people to real salvation. And sometimes God's megaphone, his discipline, needs to be real, and sometimes even a real threat to life, in order to alert a man that he has need for eternal life.

That's what happened to John Newton, wasn't it? that vicious slave trader, when a storm in the Atlantic threatened his very life, but saved him, not just from that storm of life, but saved him from his sin, by God's amazing grace.

And you know, friends, that is also the ongoing pattern for those who are saved to be God's true children. And the New Testament teaches us that plainly God goes on disciplining those that he loves in time, in many, many ways, for his great eternal purpose.

And if you read Hebrews 10, verse 34, you will see that sometimes God makes believers accept the famine of the plundering of their property, so that they really can learn that what they possess eternally in Christ, he says, is a better possession and an abiding one.

Sometimes he has to do that to remind us of what God reminded the patriarchs, that we are, like them, strangers and exiles here on this earth, but that God has prepared for us a city and a

kingdom that can never be shaken, not ever.

[43 : 07] And surely that's why James, the apostle, begins his letter by saying, count it all my joy, brothers, when you meet trials, famines of various kinds, for you know that such testing produces steadfastness.

And that is what matters eternally. God's purposes are all always far greater than the merely temporal. Second, that means that God's true servants must therefore be tough.

The most loving thing for God's true servants, servants, whether Joseph or any other servant can do, is to bring the saving discipline of God to people by confronting them with the real eternal truth of God.

Joseph had God's clear revelation about the future in his dream, and he knew that God would do what he had promised, and therefore he sought to bring his brothers to their true destiny by confronting them with the truth of God.

God's God's God's God's God's sovereignty, and bowing the knee to God's appointed ruler and Lord over them, which was Joseph.

[44 : 19] And so also we know, don't we, that all true famine relief, all true satisfaction for the starvation of the human heart, for the fractures of human relationships, for the fears of the human mind, that that comes only through bowing the knee to the one whom Joseph so clearly foreshadows, to the great Savior, the Lord of every land, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But that's a painful thing and a humbling thing for people to do. And people will object to a message that demands that they do that. He spoke harshly to us.

This is what the brothers said of Joseph in verse 30. Well, God's servants must show tough love like Joseph. God's mercy is a severe mercy in order to be a saving mercy.

And so we can't hide it. Our gospel must confront people with the whole truth about God and the whole truth about sin. The conviction, which is very painful indeed, that is the powerful beginning of the ascension of the Jesus.

Because true servants of God, however exalted they may be, however personally wronged they may have been, even by those very close to them and within the family of faith, that the true servant of God always reflects in their heart the heart of God himself, the heart that weeps over sin.

[46 : 22] We're only given two insights into Joseph's inner feelings in this chapter. One is in verse 9 where he remembers the dreams, that is he remembers God's promise, and the other is in verse 24 where he weeps.

And surely there he is revealing God's passion. Tears that surely speak of the sadness and the sorrow of sins committed, but also that also speak wonderfully of the gladness and joy that he sees in sins being repented of, and in the hope of forgiving grace coming to the hearts of his brothers. It cost Joseph hugely to be the savior of his brothers. Many tears were shed by Joseph in the pit and in the prison, and I'm sure that these tears here also reflected those ones.

And yet do you see how it also hurt Joseph to see his brother's painful humbling under God's severe mercy? hurt him to see that. And just as the Lord Jesus Christ wept at the tragic consequences of sin, even as he confronted men fully and powerfully with the command to repent, so also every true servant of that saving gospel will be as tender as Joseph and as tender as Jesus, as we do the same.

So, brothers and sisters, may we be true servants of this God of grace, who seek his eternal purpose above every other purpose, who don't flinch from the costly gospel of his severe mercy, and who weep tears of pain with those who are caught up in the famines that God may have sent to humble them, but tears of joy also in the forgiving grace that he will bring to all, all who will humble themselves before the Lord of every land, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[48 : 33] May we be true servants bringing God's mercy to the fractured people of this world. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that your ways are so much higher than our ways, and that your goal for us is infinitely greater than all that we could ever begin to ask or imagine.

And we thank you, Lord, that you are willing, even though it may need to be through famine, to bring us to the great destiny that you have prepared for all who will love your Son.

And so help us, Lord, to find that way ourselves, bowing humbly to your mercy, and to point that way to others, even with tears, as we rejoice in the marvel of your mercy and the wonder of your grace.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.