

52. The painful and perplexing path from famine to feasting (2007)

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Let's turn now to our Bibles and our reading for this morning. We're going back to our studies in the book of Genesis. So you'll find that if you have one of our church visitors Bibles, I think on page 36.

But if not, you'll find it very near the beginning of whatever Bible you have, because it's the first book of the Bible. And we're going to read this morning the whole of Genesis chapter 43. And we're in, just for orientation, we're in the last major section of the book of Genesis, which begins at chapter 37. Genesis, you remember, consists of 10 stories, if you like, or accounts, or generations.

Each begins with a heading, this is the account of, or these are the generations of. And last of all, it's the account of Jacob. Jacob, his sons, and his family, and how these 12 sons become the 12 tribes of Israel.

And thus far, we've seen Joseph, the firstborn son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, but despised by the rest of his brothers because of that.

[1 : 13] We've seen him sold into slavery, put into prison, and yet make a remarkable rise to become the prime minister, if you like, of all Egypt.

And he takes charge of the whole of the land, and in particular, of preparing for a great famine that was to come, so that the whole of the surrounding world was in famine, but only in Egypt was there food.

And back in Canaan, his old family, 20 years later, having long forgotten him, are starving, and make a journey down to Egypt.

And unknown to them, meet this ruler of Egypt, who they don't know is their brother. And Joseph begins to bring about what will be the reconciliation of this whole family.

But it's a long and complicated and really quite painful process for everybody. Joseph sends all the brothers back, but keeps one of them, Simeon, in custody, because he's desperate for the brothers to come back and to bring his own full brother, his young brother, Benjamin.

[2 : 25] But Jacob, the patriarch, the father, when the brothers go back and tell them what has happened, is distraught. And the very last thing he wants to do is ever lose Benjamin, the only other son of his beloved wife, Rachel.

So we pick up the story at the beginning of chapter 43 at verse 1, reminding us that the famine was severe in the land.

And when they'd eaten the grain that they had bought from Egypt, their father said to them, Go again, buy us a little food. But Judah said to him, The man solemnly warned us, saying, You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.

If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you will not send him, we will not go down. For the man said to us, You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.

Israel said, Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother? They replied, The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, Is your father still alive?

[3 : 38] Do you have another brother? What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, Bring your brother down? And Judah said to Israel his father, Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones.

I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.

If we had not delayed, we could have now returned twice. Then their father Israel said to them, If it must be so, then do this.

Take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags and carry a present down to the man, a little balm, a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds.

Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sex. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother and arise, go again to the man.

[4 : 55] May God Almighty, El Shaddai, grant you mercy or compassion before the man. May he send back your other brother and Benjamin.

But as for me, if I'm bereaved, I'm bereaved. So the men took this present and they took double the money with them and Benjamin.

They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, Bring the men into the house and slaughter an animal and make ready for the men are to dine with me at noon.

The man did as Joseph told them and brought the men to Joseph's house. And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house and they said, It's because of the money which was replaced in our sex the first time that we're brought in.

So he may assault us and fall upon us and make us slaves and seize our donkeys. So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the door of the house and said, Oh my Lord, we came down the first time to buy food and when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight.

[6 : 12] So we've brought it again with us and we brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put the money in our sacks. He replied, Peace to you.

Do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money. And then he brought Simeon out to them.

And when the man had brought the men into Joseph's house and given them water and they had washed their feet and when he had given their donkeys fodder they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon for they heard that they should eat bread there.

When Joseph came home they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and they bowed down to him on the ground. He inquired about their welfare, their peace.

He said, Is your father at peace, the old man of whom you also spoke? Is he alive? And he said, Your servant our father is at peace. He is alive.

[7 : 21] And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son. And he said, Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?

God be gracious to you, my son. Then Joseph hurried out for his compassion, his mercy grew warm for his brother and he sought a place to weep and he entered his chamber and he wept there.

Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself, he said, Serve the food. They served him by himself and them by themselves and the Egyptians who ate with them by themselves because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews but that's an abomination to the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. That means they were all set in age order at the table.

And the men looked at one another in amazement. And portions were taken to them from Joseph's table but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs.

[8 : 40] And they drank and were merry with him. Amen. May God bless to us this reading of his word.

Genesis chapter 43.

Chapter all about the painful and perplexing path from famine to feasting. We're going back to Genesis this morning where we broke off back in November from this final section chapter 37 to 50 which as I said is not as often supposed the account of Joseph but in fact the account of Jacob. That's the heading in chapter 37 verse 2 because it is the story of Israel. The formation of the 12 tribes of this chosen seed through whom God promised Abraham that worldwide blessing would come.

And yet as we've seen they are a rotten lot aren't they? A family marked by deceit by lies by favoritism by jealousy by violence even by murder and even fratricide wanting to kill their own brother.

[10:11] And so this savior family if you like needs saving from itself and from its own sin never mind saving anybody else from theirs. And yet this is God's chosen family his people his church.

It's sobering isn't it how realistic the Bible is about the Christian church and God has chosen very unpromising material to work through. And I'm afraid that's a reality not just in the church in the Old Testament just read the pages of the New Testament just look around you at the church today in the world.

But you see that's why these stories are just so relevant for us because these chapters unfold the complicated saga in such detail to show us God's amazing patience and his power as he allows extraordinary events to unfold even permitting grievous sin and family strife and fracture and all sorts in order to both further the purposes of his coming kingdom but also to bless his chosen people in the midst of it.

And he does so even when these people have created a mess of almighty proportions in their own lives because of their sin. And this story shows us that even when God seems to be absent and silent as in fact he is through nearly all of these chapters you hardly get a word from God but he is anything but absent.

He's present and he's powerful and he takes not only the complications and the struggles of life in a fallen world but also the shortcomings and even the catastrophes wrought by our fallen natures and he uses all of this for good to serve the purposes of his kingdom and to save the people of his kingdom.

[12:22] And friends what a great comfort that is to us is it not? To know that when God seems absent in fact he is absolutely not he is very near us and that even in the greatest catastrophe and calamity that we can create in our own lives in our families in our marriage with our children it's not only not beyond his power but it can be the very theater of his power to display his wonderful redeeming and reconciling love.

John Calvin reminds us that these scriptures are here for us so that when it seems to us that God is not present to help us then he says fighting with the same arms with which they conquered we also might stand invincible.

Well Paul says exactly the same doesn't he? We need he says the whole armor of God so that we too will stand firm in the evil day. And these stories you see are part of that armor because they remind us who our armor bearer is.

The great God of Israel made known to us of course fully in the Lord Jesus Christ. Well last time a while ago we read in chapter 42 about the brothers' first journey down to Egypt and now in fact chapters 43 to 45 describe their second journey and it's a much longer account than the first. If you read it carefully I think you'll find that it's almost an exact parallel deliberately so. It begins and ends in Canaan with Jacob and his family speaking together and in the midst all the events unfold down in the land of Egypt with two encounters with Joseph each punctuated by an arrest and custody for the brothers.

[14:16] Exactly the same pattern in chapter 42 and in 43 to 45. By the way just another clue that these three chapters all belong together that right at the very beginning here in chapter 43 you'll see it in verse 7 and 8 or verse 6 and 8 and 11 Jacob is called Israel and Jacob is called Israel also in the very last verse of chapter 45.

So it's a long section and it's full of lots of detail and that actually is deliberate so I don't want us to rush it. I think it's important to see the point that's being made by all this detail.

Yes, although it is part of a much bigger story of God's plan for the world and for his people unfolding it's part of the bigger story of how Israel moves down to Egypt where they'll multiply and become a great nation.

Nevertheless in the midst of that God's great big plans never eclipse his plans and his care for his little people in the midst for every individual family for every child that he calls to be his own.

That's so important to remember isn't it that our God cares determinedly for his covenant yes he does but he cares just as deeply for every one of his children and he's beginning here to bring rescue and redemption to Israel as a whole but not without restoration and reconciliation within this real family of flesh and blood.

[15 : 54] God is a patient and a powerful healer and reconciler and those he calls to be his he will transform into the image of his holy son whatever it takes.

I think that's what the detail of these chapters are here to remind us and I don't want us to miss it it's so important. So today we're going to focus just on the first part of this extraordinary journey chapter 43 and it describes as I've said the beginning of a painful and perplexing path from famine to feasting for Joseph's brothers and later also for his father.

I think we'll see that what the writer invites us to do is to dig deeper and to see what God is doing in their lives here when it seems that God is most invisible.

And the focus of the camera is first of all on Judah and then on Jacob and then finally on Joseph. So let's look first at verses 1 to 10 where the story hinges on a courageous pledge.

A courageous pledge that reveals Judah as a man that has been changed by God. A Judah really transformed by God's sovereign purpose.

[17 : 16] The story begins, as I say, back in the land of Canaan with a family still in crisis. The famine is severe, says verse 1, and they're starving. Verse 2 says the grain that they'd previously bought in Egypt was finished.

They're still starving and clearly they're still in strife. Joseph says, go and buy some food and the brothers say, no, we're not going because Jacob has refused to let Benjamin go with them.

But that was the condition on them being received in Egypt. And so that was the condition on the brothers being willing to go. And these brothers have been deeply shaken by their experience in Egypt and what happened on the journey home.

But their father Jacob was not yet stirred to action. And so the picture is one of prevailing famine and prevailing fear. The brothers feared who they called the man.

You notice that's what Joseph is called in verse 3 and all the way right down to verse 13. He's the man. That's who they fear. But Jacob fears the brothers, his own sons.

[18 : 25] There was no threat from Egypt to Benjamin but Jacob's worry was that he was suspicious about his own sons and about what they might do to Benjamin.

He suspected deep down, I think, that it was the brothers who had done away with Joseph. Jacob was no fool. And that's why there was stalemate. We're told in verse 11 they could have been down and back to Egypt twice with food in this time.

And no doubt this discussion in verses 6 and 7 between the brothers and the father, no doubt it had been repeated ad nauseam over those years, perhaps a couple of years. And then at last a decisive step is taken by Judah.

Judah sees that the real issue is Jacob's distrust of them, his own sons, and he knows why. Just read the history of their hot tempers, of their violence, of their lies, and their deception.

There was no point in pretending it away. Jacob knew what they were like. So in verse 8, Judah faces the issue head on, and the stakes are very high.

[19 : 36] Do you see, he says, it's life or death, Jacob, for you and for us and for our little ones, the whole family. He's deliberately emotive. He's not just, though, appealing to Jacob's natural parental instincts, he's appealing to something more.

He's appealing to his patriarchal responsibilities. Judah's father is not just any man, verse 8. You notice, he is Israel.

He's the man called to be the father of a company of nations. And yet, he is risking his entire seed by his stubbornness. Isn't that striking that Judah emerges as the leader of the family as he decisively grasps hold of the destiny of the covenant family and its importance, the seed of promise. And he's willing to put his whole life on the line in order to protect that destiny. I think there's a word of real challenge, isn't there, to every father in the church this morning with that.

That is what real leadership is. Pledging our whole life to the future of our covenant household in every sense. And Judah is risking his entire life, indeed his whole destiny here.

[20 : 52] It's a courageous plea in verse 9. Make no mistake, from my hand you shall require him, he says. That seems to echo what God said to Noah way back in Genesis chapter 9.

For your lifeblood I will require a reckoning, God said. It seems Judah is consciously putting his own life on the line as a pledge for Benjamin.

And more than that, do you see, if I don't bring him back, he says, I'll bear the blame forever. You see, Judah knows that Jacob as a patriarch has the power to promise blessing and cursing that far, far overshadows even his present life and existence.

You'll see that when we come to chapter 49. And Judah knows that it's a desperately serious thing he's dealing with. He's dealing with lasting matters.

He's dealing with eternal matters. And it is indeed a deeply courageous pledge. My life for his, my guilt forever.

[21 : 59] A pledge. pledge. That word pledge, by the way, is a deliberate signal in the story here. It should ring a bell. Does it ring a bell with you?

Do you remember? Back in chapter 38, the only other place apart from here and in chapter 44 that word's used. Judah gave a pledge. Do you remember?

To Tamar, who we thought was a prostitute, his seal and his signet. But what a change in Judah from that pledge to this.

What a transformation from sordid selfishness to sacrificial servanthood. Judah's own life, of course, had known plenty of tragedy. You remember that.

In the two decades since he sold his brother into Egypt for 20 pieces of silver, he was bereaved of his own two sons. They were judged by God, remember, for their own wickedness and evil. And his own life had descended into paganism, into promiscuity, into profligacy.

[23 : 04] And yet God had allowed him to fall into the gutter so that he might be humbled and so that he might be saved and restored. And here in Genesis chapter 43, we're seeing the fruit of genuine change and transformation in this man's life.

It's Judah's action here, and as we'll see later on, it's Judah's intercession before Joseph in chapter 44, that is the climax of this whole story. Judah becomes the surety, he becomes the pledge, the protector, the savior at the cost of his own life for his brother Benjamin, indeed for his whole brothers and his father.

Isn't that a wonderful evidence of what God can do and what God is doing and what God does do in people's lives? Not just convicting them of their sin and their past and forgiving them, but changing them.

Changing people to give them a glorious future in the service of his kingdom. Changing them to do with them things that make us marvel with astonishment.

Can a leopard change his spots? Can a liar or a drunkard or a man of violence or an adulterer or a sexual predator, can somebody like that really change?

[24 : 34] Tabloid newspapers would say no, never. Most people would say that, wouldn't they? But you see, the answer is yes, they can.

When the God of transforming grace changes them gloriously by his mighty saving power. You remember when Judah was born, he made his mother praise the Lord, and that's what his name means.

But what a terrible disappointment, what a terrible agony his life must have become to his parents in the years that follow, don't you think? Many tears were shed, I'm sure, as Judah plowed his own furrow in a far country, far, far from the Lord and his people, and effectively a complete pagan Canaanite.

But in that far away place, God touched him, and God humbled him, and God restored him. And it was this man, Judah, who became the great savior and leader of God's people.

I wonder if that could be a comfort, perhaps, to some parents here this morning, for whom the praise and the joy of earlier days turned to tears and pain and sorrow because of a beloved child far away.

[26 : 05] Or maybe to somebody here themselves who feels that, well, my background and my mess and my baggage, maybe I can be forgiven, but surely I can never really have a place like everybody else among God's people.

Surely I can never really have a place serving the kingdom of Christ. Well, friends, remember Judah. Go back and read Genesis chapter 38, and then read this chapter and the next chapter. That's why these chapters are here, to remind us and to assure us that in God's hands change, real change, transformation is possible.

Even from the most sordid and desperate of messes. It's what God loves to do. It's what God does do. Sometimes, yes, it's true, it does take a big fall.

Sometimes it takes a long famine. But the courageous pledge that we see here is testimony to a man truly changed by the grace of God.

[27 : 11] A man who is transformed according to the sovereign purpose of God. And God's purpose for each one whom he calls to himself, friends, has not changed.

Has not changed. If you don't believe me, read Ephesians chapter 1 or read Romans 8 from 26 to the end. He transforms by his grace and does wonderful things.

A terrible mess. Well, we must keep moving. Verses 11 to 14, you'll see that the focus moves from Judah to Jacob.

And especially to a covenant prayer. A covenant prayer that reveals Jacob's capitulation to God. What we see here is a man surrendering to God's sovereign power.

Judah's been very persuasive. And perhaps his pledge is just enough to make Jacob think twice about his son's complete untrustworthiness. But at any rate, Jacob suddenly becomes very practical and very decisive.

[28 : 21] Verse 11, take some gifts, he says. Things the Egyptians obviously value. It's the same things the traders were carrying in chapter 37 to Egypt. And verse 12, take double the money.

Show honesty and good faith. And last of all, verse 13, notice, take your brother also. And arise and go to the man, this great man in whom all their destiny rests.

It's ironic, isn't it? It's marvelous. But don't underestimate the magnitude of the decision that Jacob makes here. Commentators and preachers, I find, are very quick to beat up on Jacob all through and certainly in these chapters also.

Oh, here's Jacob, they say, wallowing in self-indulgent grief, utterly self-obsessed, all that sort of thing. Well, I wonder how many of them know what it's really like to have lost a beloved son on the cusp of adulthood with his whole life before him.

Least of all, with a violent accident or worse, as Jacob has been told happened to Joseph. Or even worse still, with the nagging doubts and uncertainty about the whole affair and the possibility that your own sons, your own flesh and blood, were actually complicit in murder.

[29 : 48] Jacob's grief may have been very severe. It may have even been abnormally severe. I wonder whether rather than sulking in self-pity, it's just the case that he still finds himself every day struggling through searing pain.

So I'd want to be careful about over-pious pronouncements. On Jacob's grief. But I think there's even more to be said here. Because you see, Jacob's prayer in verse 14 reveals an even deeper aspect of his grief.

Do you see? It's a covenant prayer. It's a prayer to El Shaddai, to God Almighty, the covenant God who spoke to Abraham in Genesis 17 and who promised that his offspring would be the seed of blessing.

The same El Shaddai who appeared to Jacob at Bethel in chapter 28 and again when Jacob returned to Bethel in chapter 35 and in each case promising him blessings for his seed and that kings, rulers, would come from his own body.

And Jacob had believed God. He trusted God. And that's why I think he clung so deeply to Joseph. To Joseph, the firstborn son and heir of Rachel, his beloved wife, his true wife in his eyes.

[31 : 12] Not Leah who he'd been tricked into marrying by his father-in-law. That's why Joseph was his anointed one and given the special royal robe of kingship to wear.

Even back in chapter 37, you remember when Jacob was irked with Joseph's dream about bowing down to them. He didn't dismiss it. He was specially told.

He kept it in mind and pondered it. That's why Jacob's grief was so severe at Joseph's death.

Because the seed, the promised seed in his mind was gone.

His grief was full of great perplexity as well as great pain. How could the line of promise that God made be thus disrupted? Now I think if that's a right view of things, and I think it is, I think it explains, doesn't it, why he felt so protective of Benjamin.

Because in his eyes, Benjamin was the only other truly legitimate covenant son and heir, the seed of promise. So I think we need to go easy on Jacob.

[32 : 21] It's not just natural grief. Far less an indulgent grief that he has. It's covenant grief. It's grief that has shaken his whole faith and understanding of God right to the core of his being.

That sort of thing can happen sometimes in our lives, can't it? Perhaps often it is some kind of loss.

Some kind of grief that shakes the whole foundation of what we believe, what we built our life on.

think of the disciples' grief after Jesus' death that totally destroyed all their sense of hope that they had in the promised Messiah, the promised seed.

And that's what had happened, I think, to Jacob. And God had left him in the dark for a long, long time. How would you be feeling if it was you?

And yet now, here in verse 14, although he's still in the dark, he still can't grasp it all, he capitulates to the Lord.

[33 : 26] He hands over his son, his beloved son. Now his only true son, covenant son of promise, as he believes him to be.

And he hands him over into the hands of El Shaddai, the almighty God. And he throws himself on God's mercy as well. May he grant you mercy or compassion with the man, he says.

You see, Jacob is being brought to the point of utter trust and resignation before God. And if I'm bereaved, he says, I'm bereaved. That's not a cry of despair.

That's a confession of faith. That's what the three men said in Daniel chapter 3. Do you remember last Sunday morning? Facing the fiery furnace. If we die, we die. Because they trusted and had faith in God, they could say that.

It's what David says in 2 Samuel 24. When he'd sinned, he throws himself utterly into God's hands. He says, for his mercy is great. Same word as here.

[34 : 32] Jacob is capitulating to God. He's surrendering to his sovereign power and he's trusting utterly and only in his great mercy. That is just what God had to teach Abraham to do, wasn't it?

Surely this also is the climax of Jacob's faith, just as offering up Isaac on the altar in Genesis chapter 22 was for Abraham. Jacob learned here that to have Benjamin and to trust God, he must give him up and trust in God's mercy alone.

Jacob meant well, of course, in trying to protect Benjamin. But he had to learn that even in the matter of God's covenant promise, as Paul says in Romans chapter 9, it depends not on human will and exertion but upon God who has mercy.

That's what Paul says was the message of Jacob's own birth and his choice over Esau. And here Jacob's having to learn exactly the same thing about his own offspring, his own sons.

It's not going to be the way that he thought it was going to be. So he doesn't know what God is doing. He doesn't know how the plan of God's kingdom is unfolding.

[35 : 56] But at last, at last he's willing to capitulate to God and to let the sovereign, all-sufficient God, El Shaddai, let him do it his way.

And friends, that is a monumental lesson for every believer to have to learn. To let God be God. And to surrender and to say, okay, Lord, you are God and you know best. And I can trust you even when I don't understand everything you're doing. That's what God tells us clearly in his word that we must give up ourselves something very precious, something that feels so wrong to have to give up. Something which we love and cherish and we want to hold on to. But we must do so because it does not fit with God's way for his kingdom.

Some kind of behavior, perhaps. Certain relationship, perhaps. A particular career path or a social arena or whatever it might be.

[37 : 09] Even worshiping in a particular building, perhaps. It's a triumphant prayer of faith in that situation to be able to pray as Jacob did. Lord, I'm staking everything on your mercy, on your compassion.

If I'm bereaved of this, then I'm bereaved. But I trust in your mercy. See, sometimes we think we know what God's plan is, don't we?

We think we've got God's secret providence taped. We know he's going to do this or that in this particular way or that with our own life or our own church life or whatever it is. But then we're faced with a challenge of God's clear command that seems to put that whole vision that we've had in jeopardy.

And we can let our idea of God's providential plans, we can let our idea of how that ought to be worked out, keep us from clear obedience to his word and what we know that God requires of us.

That's so very easy and so very common. And that was Jacob until he surrendered to God's sovereignty, until he obeyed what he knew that he had a responsibility to do.

[38 : 29] And he trusted the all-sufficient God in his mercy for all the things he couldn't yet understand. And God was just teaching him that inviolable law of spiritual harvest that Jesus taught.

That the way up in his kingdom is down. That the way of life is the way of death. Death to self. Death to our self-rule.

Death to our self-belief. And surrender to the sovereign God of mercy. And that's what we see here in Jacob as he capitulates to God.

And it's the beginning. It's the beginning. Of the road of his family's restoration. Well, that road leads to Egypt.

And the story moves there in verse 15. And all the focus now comes upon Joseph. And this whole scene is about a costly peace. A costly peace that reveals Joseph as a man full of the mercy, the compassion of God.

[39 : 37] And a man who manifests the saving presence of God and his peace. It's a longer section, but the focus really comes towards the end at the climax. And it's on Joseph.

Notice in this section he's no longer the man. Not called that anymore. Now it's the brothers you see all the way through who are just called the men. They're not named apart from Joseph and Benjamin.

And all the action flows from Joseph at last seeing his true brother, Benjamin. And now with all the 12 brothers there in the same place, the path to peace and restoration is open.

And peace is the key word in this section. You see it there in verse 23. But it's also there as I read in verses 27 and 28. It's translated well or well-being or welfare.

And it's very significant, that word. If you remember back to chapter 37, the brothers, we're told, hated Joseph so much they couldn't speak a word to him in peace.

[40 : 40] And when Jacob sends Joseph out to see his brothers, he says, go and inquire about their peace, their well-being. And what happens? They try to kill him. But this scene ends with a glorious scene of peaceful and happy feasting.

And it's there to foreshadow the full reconciliation that is about to come. But the path to that final peace is far from painless. Real peace is costly both for the brothers and for Joseph because all true reconciliation has a price.

It begins in verse 18 with panic for the brothers. They've got guilty consciences. And of course, that tends to make you panic very easily, doesn't it? But they're also worried about the whole money in the sack business.

So before they're even into the door of Jacob's house, they're up to the steward and blubbering out everything. But what a surprise they get, verse 23, do you see? It's not punishment they're met with, but it's peace.

Shalom, he says. All is well. All is better than well. Your God, the God of your father, has done all this. So they get a lesson in theology from this pagan Egyptian.

[41 : 54] Or maybe he isn't still a pagan. Maybe Joseph has been teaching him about the covenant God and the wonderful gifts that this God does give to his children, treasures of grace despite all that they deserve.

God, he says, has given you treasure. And the good news goes on, do you see? Verse 23, Simeon's brought out to him alive and well.

And here they are like royal guests having their feet washed and their animals fed and being ready for a banquet with the ruler of all Egypt. They must have been astonished.

And all this talk about God, the God that they'd given scant attention to for plenty time. Of course, they'd sensed, hadn't they, in the last chapter, that God was on their case. But it made them fear.

It was a reckoning for Joseph's blood that was coming to them. What is God doing to us? They had cried out on their journey home. Do you see, when you forget God, when you ignore God, when you put God at arm's length, your whole perspective about who God is gets totally warped.

[43 : 05] You fear him wrongly. Because you paint him in your mind as other than he really is. You paint him as an enemy. You have a warped view of God. That's why people fear in that wrong sense.

Like the one talent man, do you remember in Jesus' parable? I knew you were a hard man, he said. You had no understanding, no sense of the master whose house was the place of joy.

Okay. But God is teaching these brothers that he is a God of grace and of mercy and of forgiveness.

A God they needn't fear in that way. No doubt they were waiting nervously when Joseph returned. And immediately, verse 26, they bowed down to the ground.

Irony again. And yet his first words to them also are words of peace. Are you well, he says. Are you at peace? And your father, is he at peace? Heavy with iron, isn't it?

[44 : 04] They hated him all these years ago and couldn't speak a word of peace and wanted to kill him. And yet here, when he could have killed them all instantly, he's anxious about their peace.

And where they sat down callously and ate their sandwiches on the day when he was weeping at the bottom of a pit. Here is a scene of peace and harmony and merriment with fine food and wine flowing.

Again, to foreshadow the wonderful, full reconciliation that's soon to come. But that full reconciliation isn't quite yet.

Because full peace never can come just that easily, can it? It's a costly peace. And these brothers still do have lessons to learn.

God's megaphone is still unsettling them. In the astonishing place settings of verse 33, every one of them seated in perfect age order.

[45 : 08] How on earth could he know that? And then in this lavish favoritism shown to Benjamin, five times what all the rest of them were given.

How would they react to that? Like they did to Joseph when wonderful things were lavished on him and not on them?

Or have they really changed? See, like Jacob, the brothers too had to learn the ways of God's mercy and God's grace.

That it's not by merit. That it's not by natural rank or privilege. But it's by God's mercy and God's choice alone. And that's the scandal of grace, friends.

And every single human being naturally hates that. And you know it. God be gracious to you, my son. He says to Benjamin.

[46 : 07] And we say, that's not fair. What about me? God gives an abundance of gifts of whatever kind it is to somebody else. Five times more than anything you have.

And you say to yourself, that's not right. Why can't I have that? Why can't I have that position in life? Why can't I have that position in the church? Why can't I have that recognition for my ministry? Why can't I have that reputation among others? Why should he have that and I don't? You see, we have to learn what the brothers here had to learn.

That it's submission to God's ways and God's choice and God's grace alone. That is the path to peace, to shalom in life. Unless the seed falls into the ground and dies, says Jesus, it bears no fruit. Because the way up is down in my kingdom. The way of life is the way of death. Jacob wouldn't bow to God's way before. And the brothers wouldn't either. They would never bow down to Joseph.

[47 : 15] Not ever. But yes, they must. Says the Lord. And the Lord's teaching them.

It's hard and it's costly. Friends, the way of submission to God's grace in our lives always is. But it is the only way. The only way to peace with God and the only way to peace with one another in the church.

That's why Paul tells us, submit to one another. It was costly for the brothers. But, and don't miss this because this is the most important thing of all.

The path to peace was costly not only for the brothers who must be humbled in order to receive and be restored. It was costly, far more profoundly and deeply costly for Joseph.

For Joseph who was humbled utterly so that he could become the peacemaker and the reconciler of his brothers. Just how much do you think is hidden in that one little verse, verse 30.

[48 : 21] About what it cost Joseph to bring his brothers to that table in peace. We're told that his compassion or his mercy.

It's the same word Jacob had prayed for in verse 14. That his compassion grew warm. Literally his mercy boiled up. And yet with his mercy.

The tears. Tears that spoke of pain and of anguish. Surely. Of memories old and bitter.

Of loneliness. Of darkness. Of all the loss and the despair and the forsakenness of one who alone had trodden a painful and perplexing path.

A path of huge personal cost. All in order that now his brothers who had hated him. And who had despised and rejected him.

[49 : 26] So that they could find themselves walking a path leading. Not only from famine. To the place of feasting. But from fear and family fracture.

To the place of fellowship and shalom. Real peace. With the covenant God and with one another. A costly peace.

That reveals the true wonder of God's mercy. But we must close. And of course the story isn't finished. But even in this chapter.

In the pledge. In the prayer. In the peace. I'm sure. That you can't fail to see a pattern. A characteristic pattern.

That we see all through the stories of the scriptures. That points us inexorably. To where the whole story ultimately ends. In the wonderful Christ of God. In the Lord Jesus himself.

[50 : 26] His fragrance is everywhere in this chapter. And that's because it's a chapter full of the compassionate mercy of God. The grace of God. The peace of God.

It's a chapter full of the gospel of God. A father's prayer for mercy met in his beloved son's overwhelming mercy. For brothers who had despised and rejected him.

Yet who extends his grace to them. And who weeps great tears at the cost that he has borne. But who overcomes.

And brings them to his table in peace and marvelous joy. You see God seems invisible.

To everyone who's in this story acting it out. God seems silent and absent. And everything seems so perplexing and so painful in the path that they're being forced to walk.

[51 : 27] And that's a very familiar feeling. In the family of God's people isn't it? Maybe it's very close and familiar to some of us this morning.

But friends that's why this story is here. So that we too will see the pattern. And see that God is on the field even when he is most invisible as the hymn says.

That his grace and his mercy and his peace are all around. In all of these perplexing paths. And though the path may be often painful.

Deeply perplexing and costly. It is the path and it's the only path of real peace. You see.

The end of the road. For those who walk with our God. The covenant God. Isn't famine. The end of the road always is a great feast.

[52 : 30] In the presence of the king. So let's pray. Lord through many.

Painful and perplexing paths you have led us. And many more you must lead us. That we also. Might become people.

Willing to surrender all to your sovereignty. To your power. That we might be people. Transformed. Changed from within. By. The beauty of the spirit of Christ. Washing away our past. And forging for us a future. In his image. That we might also be brought at last.

To the place of peace. Costly peace. For us. For the peace. One for us.

[53 : 30] At infinite cost to you. Teach us your way we pray. Give us in our hearts trust.

And obedience. That we might follow you until the great day. When at last. All who are yours. Will rejoice.

At the table of the king. For we ask it in his name. Amen.