

# Shattered Family, Saving Famine

*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: 19 January 2025

Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] Good, well let's turn now to Genesis chapter 42. Genesis 42, our senior minister Willie. Willie Philip is continuing his series of sermons on the book of Genesis.

And we're very much in the life of Joseph now. So Genesis, the very first book of the Bible. If you can have your eyes on the text, you will find that helpful.

Chapter 42. The scene is a great famine.

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 that 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. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him.

[ 1 : 06 ] 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 all 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.

They 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've come to see the nakedness of the land.

They said to him, no, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. We're all sons of one man.

We're honest men. Your servants have never been spies. He said to them, no, it is the nakedness of the land that you've come to see.

[ 2 : 09 ] And they said, we, your servants, are 12 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 households. And bring your youngest brother to me, so your words will be verified and you shall not die.

[ 3 : 16 ] 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. Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them.

And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. 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 : 21 ] 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. Then I shall know that you are not spies, but honest men. And I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land. As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack.

[ 5 : 28 ] And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to them, 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. Then 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 shale. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us.

Well, good morning. And do turn with me to Genesis chapter 42, where we meet a shattered family, but also at the beginning of a saving famine.

[ 6 : 37 ] Now, God's eternal purpose, from before even the world's creation, is that his people, his church, will manifest God's wisdom, and display it to earth and heaven forever and ever.

That's what the Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 3. And yet, all through the Bible's story, we see the utter dysfunction, the folly, the sin, of God's people writ large, all the way through.

It's not censored, it's not hidden, it's not covered up, as it seems the police and the politicians and the BBC have been so keen to do, and the grooming gang scandal, and many other affairs.

Now, what we see with every generation of God's own chosen people, is that they themselves are in desperate need of rescue from their own sin, from their grim failures.

And in Genesis 42 to 45 now, the camera zooms out from the focus on Joseph, and his preparation as Israel's savior. It zooms out to remind us what his family needs saving from.

[ 7 : 49 ] And there is indeed a threat from without. There's the starvation from famine. But there's a far greater threat from within, from within their own hearts.

Not a deadly starvation, but deadly sinfulness. And it's this that explains the complications in the events that unfold in this story, because God is dealing not only with the earthly dimension, but with the eternal.

God's providence is like a labyrinth, says John Calvin. And that is because the matrix of human sin is so dark, it's so deep, it's so complicated, that it can only be dealt with by the extraordinary depths of the wisdom and the knowledge of God, whose ways are so far beyond our ways.

And that's why so much in this story seems baffling to Jacob's family, just as it was to Jacob, in what he in his own life went through. And just as I suppose as so often things may seem baffling in our own lives.

Because the sheer cornucopia of human sin is so vast and so catastrophic. But God is working his purpose out with consummate skill and with commanding power.

[ 9 : 11 ] And so the real story is always, always much deeper than we can understand. And Israel here, in the family, they're concerned entirely with the immediate problem, the problem of food, to save their bodies from starvation.

But you see, God is concerned with something far deeper, their need for forgiveness to save their souls from sin. And what we see here is the beginning of how God's shattered family is to be rescued through God's saving famine.

In a way, far deeper than any of them could ever have imagined. So let's look then at the chapter carefully. If you look carefully, you'll see geography gives us the structure of this story.

Begins and ends with the spotlight on the family dynamics in Canaan with the brothers and their discussion with their father Jacob. And then in the middle, we have events unfolding in Egypt and the brothers encounter with Joseph.

So verses 1 to 5 and verses 29 to 38 are the bread and the sandwich, as Phil Copeland would say. And verses 6 to 28 are the meat in the middle. So we'll look at the bread first, where the focus is very much on a shattered family.

[10:25] The sad disaster of the covenant family. Verses 1 to 5, verses 29 to 38, and I suppose especially verses 35 to 38, they give us a window, don't they, into the family dynamics of Jacob's household in Canaan.

And what these verses reveal so very clearly is I suppose the real problem in every human family, in every human life, and it is the sinful perversity of the human heart.

Verses 1 to 5 begin by showing us a starving family and a sarcastic and very suspicious father. We're back with a bump, aren't we, to the sad and sorry dysfunction of this family and its long history of strife and of disharmony and of relationship breakdown.

And the crisis that it faces in a famine, it was very severe over all the earth, remember as chapter 41 told us last week.

And that included, as verse 5 here says, the land of Canaan. And it was clearly, as verse 2 indicates, it was life-threatening. They may well die if they don't get food from Egypt.

[11:34] So this is a real crisis. And crises are often acutely revealing of truth, aren't they? Think of these fires in California in this last week or so, revealing all kinds of things, empty reservoirs, mismanagement, denuded fire and rescue services because money was diverted to all sorts of other things, diversity and inclusion, it seems.

Crises so often reveal truth. And the truth that's revealed about this family here is pretty dark. Remember chapter 34, how the brothers engaged in a merciless slaughter of a whole city in revenge for what had happened to their sister, Dinah, remember?

Remember chapter 37, where these brothers callously kidnapped and sold their own brother Joseph into slavery. Chapter 38, remember how Judah, one of the other leading brothers, how he declined, went off, descended into complete Canaanite paganism and all the sexual perversity that surrounded it.

Well now some 20 years have elapsed, 20 years of grief and resentment for Jacob and of living with guilt and with lies for his sons.

And you can imagine, can't you, the tensions, the suspicions, the general atmosphere of unease, unhappiness in the family. And what we see here in these verses is that really very little has changed.

[13:06] There's fracture in the relationship between father and son. Look at verse 1. It's a very sarcastic comment. Why are you useless bunch just staring at each other and not doing anything? Do something. And then there's still the favoritism, isn't there?

Verse 4. Benjamin now has taken Joseph's place as the special boy. And then there's real fear. Jacob is clearly suspicious of his sons.

Surely that's why he won't let Benjamin go with them. Last time they were away all together as brothers, what happened? Well he lost Joseph, never came back. And clearly here the main reason he's fearful is that O'Harm will come to Benjamin in just the same way.

It's the journey with the brothers that he fears, not anything that might happen in Egypt. They say time is a great healer. But that isn't necessarily so, is it?

Time alone may simply make wounds fester and become even more poisoned. Time only heals if a healing poultice is applied, if there's something to cleanse, to disinfect, to bring healing to bitter wounds.

[14:19] And it seems that no such cleansing has come to this shattered family. So it was a shattered family that went down to Egypt in verse 5 along with all the others who were seeking famine relief.

A sad disaster of a family despite being God's own covenant family, despite being a people chosen by God to bring about a great purpose for God, for the world.

Well, let's skip forward to their return back to Canaan and their father. And let's peep through the other window that the text gives us here as we eavesdrop on that conversation with the father from verses 29 to verse 38.

These verses reveal a shaken family, but still a very stubborn and self-pitying father. They had a very eventful journey to and from Egypt, but it was far from a happy reunion in this homecoming. In fact, its very unhappiness recalls that very fraught scene at the end of chapter 37. Do you remember when the brothers returned to Jacob with news of Joseph's loss when they brought that bloody robe of his as evidence?

[15:28] So first, in verse 29 to 34, they recount the story to Jacob. They told him all that happened to them, verse 29, but they didn't really tell him all that happened, did they?

It's all about their pretensions of honesty. We are honest men, we told them, verse 31. That's not exactly an honest account, is it? There's no mention of the three days in prison. In verse 33, when they repeat Joseph saying, leave one of your brothers with me, it sort of sounds like he's staying as an honored house guest in the palace, doesn't it?

Not being banged up in prison and bound before their eyes, which is what actually happened. they don't mention anything about Joseph's threat of death that he made to all of them there in verse 20. Instead, if you look at verse 34, it looks as though they're sort of saying, well, he's offering us a great trade concession. Come back with your brother and we'll offer you a free market to trade with us. I suppose when you become practiced liars and deceivers, you actually start to believe your own rhetoric, don't you?

And sadly, that can happen even in the family of God, even in the professing church, as some of us know very well. Perhaps that was what the case was here, or perhaps these shaken brothers were beginning to have a conscience about the sins that they'd visited on their father.

[16:57] Perhaps they were just wanting to shield him from at least some of the bitter sorrow and new pain. that might come upon him. We're not told, are we, what Jacob made of any of this at this point.

But when the men emptied their sacks into the family store, no doubt at Jacob's behest in verse 35, there's another stunning revelation. Look, a further fact that they'd withheld from Jacob was that on the way back they'd found silver in one of their sacks.

But now, verse 35, behold, look, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack. Now, that did not look good, did it? Not at all. Highly suspicious.

And so they're afraid. And the brothers, no doubt, were very, very shaken given all that they'd been through. But they're even more spooked now. What on earth is going on? But Jacob, think about him.

What was his fear? It may well be that Jacob saw the silver, and the awful thought hit home to him, they've sold Simeon.

[18:04] He'd always been suspicious about Joseph's disappearance. Maybe he remembered the apparent coincidence that after Joseph disappeared, suddenly there was a lot more silver circulating in the family. And the sight of this hidden stash confirmed his worst fears about his rotten offspring.

And that would explain verse 36, wouldn't it? You've bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more. And now you want to take Benjamin. He just doesn't trust him at all, does he, anymore?

It's a horrible thing, isn't it? It's an unnerving feeling. Therefore you cannot trust somebody anymore. Especially if it's somebody close, somebody in your family.

Terrible thing to suspect that your spouse may be cheating on you. Or a child, perhaps. who's turned against you and become an enemy.

It's awful, it's terrible to be in that situation. But Jacob, alas, is just reaping what he sowed, isn't he? And it's just reality. You can't have dream relationships in your family or among your friends if you've used people, if you've mistreated others, if you've deceived them, if you've exploited them, if you've abused people that you're close to.

[19:22] what a mess of sad disaster all of this is. But it's not that foreign, is it? It's the story of many, many families in our world today.

If verse 36 shows that Jacob is just full of self-pity, all of this has come against me, I'm a victim. And stubborn selfishness, verse 38, you will never take Benjamin with you.

What about poor Simeon? Doesn't seem to have a thought about him, does he? It's all about himself, it's all about me, it's all about my life, it's all about my grief. I'm a victim of all of this. Pathetic, isn't it?

But people can so often be like that, can't we? At least Reuben, verse 37, seems to want to go and get Simeon back, but what on earth is he thinking?

Kill my two sons if I don't bring Simeon back. Quite how he thought Joseph would be consoled in the event of Simeon's death by the murder of two of his grandchildren.

[ 20 : 27 ] I mean, it just shows, doesn't it, the utter depth of dysfunction in this family. What a sad disaster. This covenant family really is. You see what the text here is shouting to us so loudly?

They think their real problem is a threat that comes from without, the threat of starvation. But the reality is quite, quite different. It's the far, far greater threat from within, from within the family, from within their own hearts.

It's the deadly threat of their own sinfulness. Their real need, their crying need, isn't for food from the ruler of Egypt. It's forgiveness from the ruler of heaven.

And so often, you know, when it is matters of family life, yes, or friendships, or work strife, or marriage, or church life, whatever, so often we see only the superficial problem, don't we?

And we seek a superficial solution to ease the famine by seeking better work conditions, or better housing conditions, or better education, or better sex, or better whatever, whatever.

[ 21 : 39 ] But it takes God, doesn't it, to uncover the deeper issues, the real problem, deep in our human hearts, the real root cause that spills out to bring all kinds of misery to bear, and all kinds of dissatisfaction to our lives and to others.

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

It's what comes from within the human heart, isn't it, that can destroy so easily the things that we value in life. Not just in our present life, but forever.

And only the exposure of that is the beginning of the road to recovery, the road to redemption, the road to true restoration with God, and therefore the real road to reconciliation with others.

But that, in fact, is what has begun for this family. And that's what the events at the heart of the chapter show. Jacob could not have been more wrong in verse 36.

[ 22 : 55 ] All this has come against him. No, what has come against him is nothing less than the saving mercy of God at work for his good, and at work for the good of his whole fractured family.

For sure, it's a severe mercy, it's a painful mercy, but it is a saving mercy. At the end of the chapter, we're left hanging, aren't we?

What's going to happen? Will Simeon be saved? Will the brothers return? Will Jacob allow Benjamin to go to Egypt? Well, we know the answer, of course, because God has spoken. All that he revealed, remember, long ago in Joseph's dream, it must come to pass.

And of course, what the heart of this chapter shows is that God has begun already to bring that fulfillment to pass in a far, far more wonderful way than any of them could have imagined. Because Joseph will not simply be the ruler over his shattered family, he will be the reconciler of his saved family.

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

[ 24 : 09 ] This shattered family is being shaped already by God's saving famine. And these verses show us the saving discipline of the covenant God.

And that's what the window into this encounter with Joseph in Egypt shows us in verses 6-28. They reveal the only real solution for the sinful perversity of the human heart lies in the sovereign power and in the saving purpose of God's heart.

Sometimes it takes a great deal, doesn't it, to break down the stubbornness, the deafness of the human heart so that people can begin to hear God's voice. C.S.

Lewis put it so memorably, didn't he, when he said, God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It's his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

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, his church, they're brought to humiliation in Egypt.

[ 25 : 23 ] And little could they know that this is all happening so that they will be confronted by the power of Joseph and through that be convicted by the power of God. Verses 6-17 shows the brothers being confronted by the power of Joseph.

And what irony, look at verse 6, willingly they're bowing down to the ground with their faces before the very one that they had despised and rejected and sold as a slave and thought must be dead. They didn't recognize him, but he recognized them. It's delicious, isn't it? And there's so many things here that recall chapter 37 and the dreams and then the rejection. Not least the play on the word recognized. That's the same word that was used when they came to with that robe dripped in blood.

Do you remember they said to their father, do you recognize this? So cruelly it broke his heart didn't they? But now how different things are.

[ 26 : 27 ] The shoe is on the other foot big time. They say revenge is a dish best served cold. And here surely now Joseph's revenge is going to be sweet.

But no, verse 9. Look, Joseph remembers all right, but his mind is full of remembrance not of the depravity of his brothers, but rather of the dreams from God.

In other words, God's revelation to him about his purpose for him and for his family. He remembered God's promise. And a world of truth dawned on him.

see, this is the Joseph remember who had forgotten his bitterness, who rejoiced in being fruitful for God all through his affliction. Remember naming his sons fruitfulness and forgetfulness.

And he has sensed, hasn't he, that God's hand of destiny is upon him. And suddenly here, I think, he realizes what later he so famously expresses in chapter 45, verse 5. He was sent before them in order now to preserve his family's life.

[ 27 : 36 ] And he understands at last what God's doing. That he's there to save his whole family, to rescue them, but to rescue them from far, far more than mere famine.

And it's astonishing, isn't it? He loves, these rotten brothers. And he wants to bring healing and restoration for the sake of God's great covenant purpose and his promise.

And that's what explains his actions that follow here. You see, God will save the family from starvation through Joseph. He will give them food, but not without a ransom. And God also, far more importantly, will save this family from their sins through Joseph.

He will bring them forgiveness, but also not without repentance. You see, Joseph himself wants to forgive his brothers. He wants to bring reconciliation, but Joseph of all people knows what it means to deal with the reality, with the bitterness of sin.

He knows that just can't be magicked away. No relationship breakdown can just be magic back to health and happiness, can it? That's just not real. He wants to forgive his brothers, but they need to want to be forgiven, don't they?

[ 28 : 56 ] That's the only way you can receive forgiveness, to recognize that you need it and you want it. And that's why Joseph's tactics here, you see, seem so harsh, so tough.

His heart isn't hard. His heart is acutely tender. Look at his tears in verse 24. It shows it so clearly. He has the power to bring a real reckoning for sure.

But no, he wants to bring real reconciliation, real reconciliation. And he's motivated by powerful and real love. But real love, real love won't pretend, won't pretend that sins haven't been committed when they have been committed.

And real love will demand that these brothers are confronted with their sin. And so, three days in the slammer, the same pit that Joseph had suffered, that was God's way of jogging their memory, God's megaphone.

That's what's going on, you see, because this wasn't just a confrontation with the power of Joseph, whom they'd forgotten, whom they didn't recognize. It was all a means to conviction by the power of God, whom likewise they'd forgotten and didn't recognize anymore.

[ 30 : 22 ] That's what verses 18 to 28, you see, go on to make so clear to us. You see how that section begins and ends with reference to God. I fear God, verse 18, says this Egyptian ruler.

And by verse 28, look, the brothers are echoing that. What has God done to us? That's what they cry out as their hearts fail them. And that's the key to everything that's going on here.

Taking Simeon hostage, you see, in verse 19, served a double purpose. It encouraged the rest to return with Benjamin, Joseph's full brother. He longed to see his brother. But it also posed a test for the brothers.

Will they abandon Simeon, as they'd abandoned Joseph all these years before? And you see, all of this has touched the raw nerve with the interrogation, the mention of Benjamin, the mention of Joseph, who is no more, the incarceration, and now the threat of their father facing up to another

loss, and it hits them in the conscience, doesn't it?

Look at verse 21, they're confessing their guilt to one another. In truth, we are guilty. That's why this distress has come upon us. Herich Kidna says, a taste of retribution was awakening feeling which a brother's cries and a father's tears had left totally untouched.

[ 31 : 45 ] You see, God's megaphone. And friends, the truth is it's often like that for us, isn't it? John Calvin makes a very penetrating comment here.

He says, 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.

whenever others proudly despise us, reflect whether others have not experienced similar hardship from us. That's a sobering word, isn't it?

God's God's God's megaphone that has got through to me only, sadly.

It's made me realize things that I've done that are wrong. And the brothers are filled with real fear here. The beginning of godly sorrow which alone will lead to true repentance.

[ 32 : 51 ] repentance. And you see, Joseph's sorrow, Joseph's tears are surely mixed with love and joy in a sense that he sees that his brothers are being touched.

They're oblivious to the fact that he sees and hears and understands it all, but he does. And his tears reveal, don't they, that it's not retribution, but that it is reconciliation, it's restoration that he desires.

But he knows that that can't come without real repentance. And so in his deep love, he allows God's severe mercy to do its work.

Puts the money in their sacks, verse 25. Why? Well, maybe a token of generosity to show the true goodness that repays evil only with good. Maybe it's to test the brothers' loyalty to Simeon over the gain of silver.

But at any rate, God's purpose in it, is to give another merciful shock to the brothers. And that comes, doesn't it, in verse 28, in the near collective heart attack that they had. Their hearts failed them.

[ 33 : 55 ] What is this that God has done to us, they say? You see, they're more God-conscious now, aren't they, than they have ever been before in their whole lives. Through these inexplicable series of events, as Derek Kidner puts it, the alternating sun and frost broke them open to God.

God, and they're very afraid. But you see, the Bible tells us that the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of real wisdom.

And this is just the beginning. The brothers will be tested much further, as we'll see, and Jacob too. Will he rate God's covenant purpose for his whole family above his own selfishness, above his own self-pity?

it's a beginning, but it is a beginning. God is at work. And God is back in their thinking, isn't it, for the first time in a very, very long time. And maybe that's so for some this morning.

It's shock treatment, certainly. But without such a challenge, there'll be no conviction. And without real conviction, there will be no real conversion, no change of heart.

[ 35 : 07 ] And therefore, no real reconciliation in all their relationships in their family, never mind any real restoration to their destiny as the people of God.

Or was it all really necessary? Well, in one sense, no, Joseph could have just kept quiet, couldn't he? Given them grain, saved them from famine. They've gone on their way, their belly's full.

But their hearts, their souls, would have been empty, wouldn't they, of God's real saving grace. grace and mercy. No, when God sends his chosen saviors to his people all through history, like Joseph here, it's always, always for a far greater purpose than merely to improve their earthly lot.

It's for a far greater purpose. Later, Joseph will say, God sent me to preserve a remnant on earth to save his people, the family that God had promised to be his people, not just here on earth, but forever to share his glory.

Because his great eternal purpose in and through all history transcends all history. He is saving a people for his name, a household, who will be the dwelling place of his spirit forever and ever.

[ 36 : 29 ] And that's why this chapter, you see, is the way it is. God is not content to dispense food through Joseph. He's bringing forgiveness to his brothers through his work.

Because our God is a God whose salvation transcends all mere earthly rescue from starvation. He's the God who has promised to bring his people real salvation, salvation from their sins.

So let me just conclude with some key lessons we mustn't miss in this passage. First, God's purpose for his people is always far greater than the mere temporal. God's purposes are eternal and therefore his dealings with his people will always go far deeper than the merely superficial. And therefore, temporally speaking, they may be very painful. What kindness is it for a doctor to give a superficial ointment for a patient's itch when he knows that the real cause is a malignant cancer deep inside the body that needs to be cut out? [ 37 : 40 ] Well, God is the great physician. And that's why the Christian gospel can never be, as Terry always likes to put it, it can never be just a matter of soup and soap, therapy, personal fulfillment, moral correction, spiritual exercises.

No, it is a gospel of salvation from sin eternally, from the deep cancerous perversity of the human heart from which all evil in our world stems. The whole purpose of this famine was that God's providential way of leading his people to salvation would be worked out. And sometimes God's megaphone, his discipline needs to be a very real threat to life in order to teach someone their need for repentance. That's what's happened to John Newton, do you remember?

The great storm in the Atlantic Ocean when that slave trader was touched by God's amazing grace, not just to save him from the storm, but to save him from his sins and transform his life forever. [ 38 : 48 ] And friends, that is an ongoing pattern too in the lives of those who are saved as God's children. And the New Testament teaches that very plainly. He goes on disciplining those he loved in so many ways.

And sometimes that's very hard. Sometimes it means, Hebrews tells us, the plundering of property so that people can come to learn that what they really possess eternally in Christ is a far better possession than an abiding one.

To remind us that of what God taught the patriarchs, that we truly are strangers and exiles on this earth, but that God has prepared for us a city, a kingdom that cannot be shaken, not ever. That's why James, the apostle, begins his letter exhorting us to count it all joy, my brothers, when we meet trials, famines, he could have said, of many kinds, because you know that such testing produces steadfastness.

And that's what matters eternally. God's purpose is always, always far greater than the mere temporal. And therefore, God's true servants must be tough. [ 40 : 02 ] The most loving thing for God's servants, whether Joseph or any other servant, is to bring the saving discipline of God to people by confronting them with the real eternal truth about God.

Joseph had God's clear revelation, didn't he, about the future, through his dreams. He knew that God would do what God had promised to do. And therefore, he sought to bring his brothers into their true destiny.

But that could only happen by them bowing down to God's sovereignty, and therefore bowing the knee to God's appointed ruler and Lord. And we also know that true famine relief, true relief from starvation of the human heart, true salvation from the fractures of all human relationships, true salvation from the fears of the human mind, all of these things come only from bowing the knee to the one that Joseph so clearly foreshadows, the great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Lord of every land, the Lord of earth and heaven.

That's a painfully humbling thing, isn't it, for people to do? People so often object to a harsh message that confronts sin. He spoke harshly to us, is what the brothers said of Joseph in verse 30. Well, yes, God's servants must show tough love like Joseph. God's mercy is a severe mercy in order to be a saving mercy.

[ 41 : 38 ] And so we can't hide it, can we? Our gospel must confront people with the truth, the whole truth about God, and with the truth therefore about sin in their lives. And the conviction, which is often very painful, that is the powerful beginning of the essential transformation by God's grace without which no one, no one, whether inside or outside the professing church, without which no one will see God in glory.

God's servants must be tough love. If there be truly loving conducts of God's mercy, as Joseph was. But finally, and don't miss this, this passage also surely reminds us that God's servants will shed tears.

That tough love is always truly tender love. God's love. Because true servants of God, however exalted, however personally wronged they may be, even by those very close to them, within the professing church, the true servant of God will reflect in their heart the heart of God himself, the heart that weeps over human sin.

It's interesting, in this whole passage, we're only given two insights into Joseph's inner feelings. first is in verse 9, where he remembers the dreams, he remembers God's promise. And the second is in verse 24, when he weeps, surely revealing God's passion.

Tears, yes, that surely speak of the sadness and the sorrow of sins committed, but also wonderfully tears of gladness and joy that sins are being repented of, that there is hope of forgiving grace.

[ 43 : 33 ] It cost Joseph, didn't it? It cost Joseph greatly to be the savior of his brothers. Many tears were shed in the pit, in the prison, and these tears now surely recall those ones.

And yet, it also hurt him, didn't it, to see his brothers being so painfully humbled by God's severe mercy. And just as the Lord Jesus himself wept at the tragic consequences of sin, even as he confronted people fully and powerfully with the command to repent, so also every true servant of the gospel, everyone, will be as tender as Joseph, as tender as Jesus, as we do the same, confronting people and longing for their forgiveness.

forgiveness. So my brothers and sisters, the question for us is, will we be true servants of this God of grace, who seek his eternal purpose above all other things, therefore who don't flinch from the costly gospel of his saving mercy, but who also weep tears of pain with those who are caught up in the famines that God may send to humble them, but also tears of joy in the forgiving grace that God will bring, he promises to bring to every single one who will humble himself before the Lord of every land, the Lord of earth and heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let's pray together. Lord, we find ourselves humbled before you, and we ask that whether we are confronted by you today for the very first time, or whether having known and loved you for many long years, we ask that you would humble us before you, show us, Lord, the reality of the sin and the guilt in our own hearts, but show us also the wonderful grace of your saving mercy, and bring us to our knees before the one who not only confronts us and convicts us, but who promises us that glorious forgiveness, that restoration, that transforming grace, one for us, at the cost not only of imprisonment and slavery like Joseph, but of the infinite cost of the blood of our great Savior, Jesus Christ, your Son. So, help us, Lord, turn our eyes to Him, and may He be forever our great Savior, and our glorious Lord.

[ 46 : 45 ] Amen.