

53. A Revealing Reconciliation (2007)

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[0 : 0 0] But we're going to turn now to our reading for this morning, and we're back in the latter chapters of the book of Genesis, and reading this morning chapter 44 and the first part of chapter 45.

That's page 38 in our Church Visitors Bibles, but very near the beginning of whatever Bible it is that you might have in front of you.

We read chapter 43 last week, the first installment of this second journey of the brothers of Joseph down to Egypt and their encounter with their long-lost brother, whom they'd sold into slavery and almost certain death, but who it turns out has been exalted to the highest position as the ruler under Pharaoh of all Egypt.

At the end of the chapter, they were feasting with their brother, although still they don't know who he is. And now we pick up the story on the next morning.

Then he commanded, that is, Joseph commanded the steward of his house, fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest with his money for the grain.

[1 : 2 8] And he did, as Joseph told him. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. They'd gone only a short distance from the city. And Joseph said to the steward, up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, why have you repaid evil for good?

Is it not from this that my Lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this. When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words.

They said to him, why does my Lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan.

How then could we steal silver or gold from your Lord's house? Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my Lord's servants or slaves. He said, let it be as you say, he who is fine with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent.

Not quite what they had said, is it? Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest.

[2 : 4 3] And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. Joseph said to them, what deed is this that you have done?

Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination? And Judah said, what shall we say to my Lord? Or what shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves or prove our innocence?

God has found out the guilt of your servants. Behold, we are my Lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found. But he said, far be it from me that I should do so.

Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant, my slave. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.

[3 : 48] Then Judah went up to him and said, oh, my Lord, please let your servant speak a word in my Lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself.

My Lord asked his servant, saying, have you a father or a brother? And we said to my Lord, we have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age.

His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him. Then you said to your servants, bring him down to me that I may set my eyes on him.

We said to my Lord, the boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die. Then you said to your servants, unless your youngest brother comes down again with you, you shall not see my face again.

When we went back to your servant, my father, we told him the words of my Lord. And when our father said, go again, buy us a little food, we said, we cannot go down.

[4 : 46] If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us. Then your servant, my father, said to us, you know that my wife bore me two sons.

One left me, and I said, surely he has been torn to pieces, and I've never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to shale.

Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant, my father, and the boy is not with us, then as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die.

And your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant, our father, with sorrow to shale. For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, if I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.

Now therefore, please, let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my Lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me?

[5 : 57] I fear to see the evil that would find my father. Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him.

He cried, make everyone go out from me. So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud so that the Egyptians heard it and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

And Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed, petrified at his presence.

So Joseph said to his brothers, come near to me, please. And they came near. And he said, I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. For God sent me before you to preserve life.

[7 : 01] For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors.

So it wasn't you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, the lord of all his house and the ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me.

Do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. And there I will provide for you.

For there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household and all that you have do not come to poverty. Now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth that speaks to you.

[8 : 08] You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here. Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept.

And Benjamin wept upon his neck, and he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. And after that his brothers talked with him.

Amen. And may God bless to us this his word. Amen.

Amen. Well now would you turn to the passage we read together there in Genesis.

And this section from 44 to midway through chapter 45. All about a very revealing reconciliation. creation. So often it is in the crucible of crisis that the truth is forced out into the open, and the revelation is made that changes everything. It may be in the storm that shows up whether a house is going to stand or whether the flood defenses will hold, or in the test, perhaps, that reveals whether you're as fit as you thought you were, or that you have as much knowledge as you hoped you had. Well, God also provides such tests and crises in the lives of men in order to reveal to us, and indeed to others, the real truth. Because unless we as human beings come to terms with the truth, the truth about ourselves and the truth about God, then there can be no hope for us, no hope for purpose in this life, and no hope of peace when we face the judgment that is to come. And our passage today reveals the last great test for Joseph's brothers on the long and perplexing and painful road of reconciliation for this whole family. As the old hymn says, God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year. God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near. In this case, the time is drawing near for the great reconciliation and restoration. But the climax of this story of reconciliation comes only through a great crisis that brings great revelation and great reconciliation together. And indeed, the reconciliation comes through the great revelation, the revelation of what God has actually been doing all throughout this extraordinary story, both through the brothers' actions and Joseph's actions, but above all, in all of their hearts, as their wandering and their wayward paths have been quietly and inexplicably woven together by God's invisible hand, a hand that can never be overcome even by the worst evil of man. Now, one writer calls this passage the anatomy of reconciliation, but I'm calling it a revealing reconciliation because it's what is revealed about all of the brothers and above all about God himself that makes this wonderful reconciliation possible. And that revelation is also for us today, who likewise claim to belong to the household of faith, the Israel of God.

[11 : 58] It's very striking that in Romans chapter 15, when the Apostle Paul reminds us that all of these scriptures are written for us and for our instruction, he immediately tells us that purpose, that we, he says, should also live in harmony with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, that together we may with one voice glorify our God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. What he's saying is that the covenant family of faith today still needs to learn all these things about forgiveness and about reconciliation. And we need to keep learning these things all the time. So let's look then at this very real and revealing reconciliation. The text, I think, divides into three movements, the steward's trap, and then Joseph's test, and then finally Joseph's tears.

And each of these prove very revealing indeed. So first look at verses 1 to 13, where the steward's trap reveals the spirit of real repentance in the brothers. The brothers' resolute solidarity with Benjamin proves that these men are not just convicted about their past, but they are truly chastened and changed. To use John the Baptist's words, they are bearing fruit in keeping with true repentance.

Now this section charts the beginning of the last leg of the brothers' journey on the long road to reconciliation. They've been convicted of their sin against Joseph. Remember back in chapter 42, verse 21, in their first encounter with Joseph, their hearts had been pierced, hadn't they? We are guilty concerning our brother, they said. And so now there comes a reckoning for his blood. They were convicted.

And they sensed that God was on their case, that God was dealing with them. But they were still confused. Remember at the end of that, it's like, what is God doing to us, they said, when they found their money in the sacks. They were confused and they were bemused at God's apparent intervention, not least now in the favors that had been lavished upon them in Egypt. They were both amazed but also perturbed at this ruler who was lavishing his gifts and hospitality on them and whose servant spoke to them about the God of their father. And this servant who seemed to know how to set their places at the table exactly in the order of their ages. Perhaps they had begun to feel that God was showing himself on their side after all. That they were getting right with God again, despite all that was in the past. Perhaps they were awakening to God's grace and his goodness. Perhaps they were feeling encouraged by a renewed consciousness of the covenant God. El Shaddai, whose mercy and grace their father had called upon in prayer as he sent them off to Egypt. But don't forget that the grace of the covenant God of Abraham always demands a response. Walk before me and be blameless that I may establish my covenant with you.

That's what El Shaddai said to Abraham in Genesis 17 verse 1. You see, the call of God's grace is always a call to obedience, the obedience of faith. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance, says John.

[15 : 34] It is by their fruit you will know them who are truly mine, says Jesus. El Shaddai in the flesh himself. So have these brothers, for all their chastening by God, for all their conviction under God's gracious probing of their lives, have they really changed? See, people can hear the gospel and they can respond to the gospel. And they can seem genuinely contrite about the past, chastened about their sin, even now committed to the church. As Jesus says in his parable of the sower, they hear the word and they receive it with joy. And yet, Jesus says, they can prove to have no real root. So they endure for a while, but then either when the persecutions and hardship comes or when the delights and the cares of this world arise and choke them, they fall away. They prove unfruitful according to Jesus. So how do we know when faith is real?

If people really have been genuine in their response to the Spirit of God? Well, real fruit is that which endures through these testings in life, through the cares and the delights of the word and the hardships and the persecutions, which all are God's tests that both produce and also prove true steadfastness in faith.

And that's what these brothers are experiencing in these verses. And the steward's trap will reveal where there has been real change in the brothers. Not just words of repentance, but fruit in keeping with that true repentance. It's one thing, isn't it, to regret what they had done to Joseph all those years ago? But would they really do differently if they were faced with the same situation again?

And especially if the stakes were even higher, would they? Not just 20 pieces of silver, but their whole life and their liberty on the line. One thing, isn't it, to feel convicted and sorry for our sins in the past, but the question really is, if the circumstances are favorable, if we have opportunity, will we actually do the same thing all over again? Well, here are circumstances made to test the brothers' hearts and to show if their attitude really is just one of regret and remorse because of all the fallout for their sin against Joseph, or to see if they truly are penitent and therefore truly changed. So, the beginning of the chapter, they're fresh from the banquet, or perhaps they're not so fresh. A lot of Joseph's wine seemed to be flowing the night before. The fresh from that, fresh from the lavish favoritism shown to Benjamin. Favoritism, remember, which had so enraged them when it was shown to Joseph all those years ago. Fresh from all of that, off they set on their journey.

But what they don't know is they've got an unexploded bomb in their luggage in the form of the silver cup planted by the steward. And then, there's the rapid pursuit, and the sudden accusation of theft, verse 5, and the immediate protesting of innocence there in verse 7. It's uncannily like a previous episode, isn't it, back in chapter 31, where, do you remember, the whole family was pursued just like that by Laban. And the search went on then, just as it did here, with the same tension, verse 12. Do you see?

[19 : 31] Imagine the scene, each sack being opened, starting with the oldest. One by one, each proving clean. Reuben, clear. Simeon, clear. All the way down. Isaacar, clear. Zebulun, clear. Only one left.

We, Benji, were absolutely in the clear now, surely. Sure that's what they thought, wasn't it? And then, bang. The cup, verse 12, is found in Benjamin's sack. As Derek Kidner puts it, that sudden threat to Benjamin was a thrust to the heart. And in a moment, the brothers stood revealed.

All the conditions are there, aren't they, for another betrayal. They'd rashly promised death to the culprit and the rest of slaves, in verse 9. But notice how the steward had clearly changed that and set the trap. No, he said, only the culprit needs suffer. He'll be a slave. The rest, they'll be innocent, free to go off home with your food.

Now, they hadn't hesitated, had they, all those years ago, to trade Joseph, their brother, for silver. And now look at verse 13. They don't hesitate either, do they? But how different their action is.

In unison, they tear their clothes in a scene of anguish and grief. Remember when Joseph's clothes were presented to Jacob? Only Jacob tore his clothes in grief, not them.

[21 : 03] You see, chastening has done its gracious work in them. And a true spirit of repentance is being revealed in these brothers, in the solidarity that they show to their own brother, in the loyalty that they show to him.

It may well be that they thought that Benjamin was guilty. I mean, that's the most obvious conclusion. He was being so favored at the feast. Maybe this was the very cup that he'd been given to drink. Maybe he'd drunk too much of Joseph's wine from it, they thought, and done something really stupid and stolen it.

But you see, this is the point. They stood with him anyway, out of concern for him and out of great concern for their father.

What a transformation. What a real transformation in these brothers. It's interesting, isn't it? I think how the Bible so often makes love for our brothers in the household of faith a test of true faith.

Whoever receives you, receives me, says Jesus. Whoever gives one of these little ones, your brothers, a cup of cold water, because he's a disciple, will by no means lose his reward.

[22 : 19] Truly I say to you, you did it as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers. You did it to me. Solidarity and loyalty to Christian brothers is a great test, according to Jesus, of whether your faith is real and whether that faith will stand on the day of judgment.

Apostle John in 1 John 3 says this, We know we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

It's pretty clear, isn't it? And real love, you see, like real repentance, is a visible thing. It's a tangible thing. It bears fruit.

When it's put to the test, it's found to be real in brotherly loyalty and solidarity with believing brothers, especially, especially in times of danger and suffering and great need.

It's a big challenge that, isn't it? The Lord often tests his people to see if they will stand in solidarity with those who are his.

[23 : 27] Even when it might look like a very dangerous situation. Or perhaps it might look like they're actually guilty or in the wrong. Or perhaps when to associate them might bring great harm to you, might bring you trouble and opprobrium and a bad reputation.

Like associating with a Christian preacher like Paul who's been put in prison. Many were ashamed of his chains. Indeed, most of them were and deserted him.

Read 2 Timothy chapter 1. Or perhaps like associating with Christians in your school who go to the SU group and who witness to Christ but are scorned and teased because of it.

You don't have to join with them. You'll be a lot more popular perhaps if you don't. Or with Christians in your office or in your lab or in your college or wherever it is who make public testimony to their faith in Christ at cost.

Or maybe with a church fellowship that's under a cloud in polite establishment circles. Or with believers in many places who suffer real violence and hardship and persecution because of their loyalty to Jesus Christ.

[24 : 40] Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness, says John. But whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

Verse John 2 verse 10. This steward's trap reveals a spirit of true repentance, of genuine love and light in Joseph's brothers, doesn't it?

What would it have revealed in you or me, I wonder? Well, the revelations continue in verses 14 to 34.

Therefore, we see the response to Joseph's test, which reveals the spirit of the true redeemer in Judah. You see that all the focus in these verses now is on Judah as the clear leader.

Verse 14. When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house. And Joseph confronts them. Verse 15. What is this that you've done? Don't you know that I can practice divination?

[25 : 43] By the way, I think the writer here is having a joke at the Egyptians' expense and on their religious practices. If divination was so great, how come they had to search all the Saxons instead of just knowing it was Joseph?

And how come Joseph has to ask him all sorts of questions now? But at any rate, Judah, verse 16, speaks for them all. And he protests their innocence.

But he acknowledges that they can't possibly clear themselves given the apparent evidence. And then do you see he says something deeply significant. He does confess that nevertheless they are guilty men.

God has found out our real guilt is what he's saying. Now, I'm sure the Egyptians listening in just thought he meant the theft. But Joseph knew that he was referring to something far deeper.

To all of their guilt concerning their former lives. Crowned by their great sin against him, their own brother. And Judah seems genuinely penitent.

[26 : 46] We shall all have to become your slaves, he says. But again, in verse 17, Joseph thrusts in the knife. Once again, he puts liberty before them at the cost of losing Benjamin, the beloved son, forever.

Do that, he says. Leave Benjamin. And all of you can go up in peace to your father. But you see, the juxtaposition of those two words, peace and your father, just crystallizes the tragic dilemma, doesn't it?

Because Judah knows, indeed Joseph knows, that there can never possibly be peace in the family if Benjamin is lost to Jacob. There can be only pain, desperate pain and sorrow.

And very probably, as Judah says, untimely death for the old man. Not to say a perpetual, permanent destruction of peace for the whole of the covenant family forever.

So what will these brothers do? What will Judah do? Well, in verse 18, Judah appeals to Joseph and he delivers this extraordinary oration, which is the longest speech, by the way, in the whole book of Genesis.

[28 : 03] And what a revelation it is. It's full, isn't it, of pathos and of emotion. Fourteen times he repeats the reference to his father, your father.

The old man, verse 20. The old man, verse 22, at risk of despair and death. And all these references to Benjamin, the young brother, the youngest brother, the only surviving brother and son of Joseph's wife.

And the emotive references to Joseph, torn to pieces and never seen again. It's an extraordinary and a passionate speech. As Derek Kidner says, it bears the cumulative weight of factual reminder in verses 19 to 23 of graphic portraiture of Jacob and Benjamin and Joseph.

And a selfless concern proved to the hilt in the plea, not for mercy, but for leave to suffer vicariously in Benjamin's place.

What a revelation we're given here into the heart of this man, Judah. The brother who offers himself as a substitute, as a sacrifice, so that Benjamin might go free and so that his own father's heart might not be broken.

[29 : 25] What a transformation in this man. We spoke about that last time from the callousness of chapter 37, where he wasn't content merely to kill Joseph, but wanted to make money on the deal.

To the carelessness and the dreadful corruption of chapter 38 and his desolate lifestyle. And yet through the chastening and the conviction of God's patient but very painful mercy, through his own personal failures and through the family's travails in famine, now he's revealed at last as a man full of great compassion.

A man full of true courage and of deep, deep character. No doubt to the Egyptians listening, it was a noble and admirable speech to save his brother.

But to Joseph, and to us, of course, who know what's really going on, it is a revelation of total transformation. What has brought about this change?

It's simply the grace of the covenant God, the great Redeemer of his people, that has touched and changed this man's life.

[30 : 41] And the wonderful heart of the Redeemer has touched his heart. And the Spirit of the Lord himself was being formed in him to become like him.

That's why Judah was able to humble himself before God's sovereignty. You can see in verse 27, an example of just what a submission there was.

When he accepts Jacob's attitude to Rachel's sons as though they were his only true heirs, the only ones that mattered. Not people like Judah and the others. Now, Jacob was wrong in that, of course.

What pain that attitude caused to the whole family. And yet, Judah here seems to embrace it and accept it. And he's able to seek his father's good and love his father anyway, even to the point of his own life.

I think that shows us that Judah had learned the great secret of spiritual life. not to allow men's sins to make our hearts bitter towards God, but rather to allow God's sovereignty to make our hearts bow before God.

[31 : 55] God whose ways are perfect even when man's ways are not. And it was this Spirit, you see, that enabled Judah to submit himself to the will of his father.

to sacrifice himself out of real and deep love for his own father and his brothers. Even when it seemed so hard and so painful and perplexing and such a terrible loss.

Look at verses 32 and 33. One writer says that the language Judah uses in these verses has a strange familiarity for us who live in the New Testament age.

And that is because, of course, it is a foreshadowing of the great sacrifice, of the great substitution, that find its fullest and most complete expression in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus.

Jesus, the great seed of Judah, who gave himself for his brethren out of love for his father on the cross at Calvary to save us from our sins. You see, the Bible teaches us that at the very heart of every human experience of God's salvation is not just that his people are saved by the Redeemer's life and death, but that his people are called to share in the Redeemer's life, to be united with him forever, to become like him.

[33 : 27] All he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed into the image of his son, says Paul, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

That's what we see in a most striking and particular way here in Judah, revealed as the true servant leader, the true priestly intercessor for his brothers, who gives his life out of love for his father and love for his brothers.

Another extraordinary and revealing test, revealing the spirit of the Redeemer that shapes this man's life. And yet it's not just history, is it?

Because you see, it's still true today that God's purpose for his people is not just true repentance, but also true confirmation into the image of the Redeemer.

Just as this family of faith way back then couldn't fulfill their destiny as God's chosen servants, as his agents of blessing for the world, without being forged by grace, without being forged on the anvil of God's testing and discipline.

[34 : 42] Well, it's just the same today. God's people today must be tested and proved for the work that God has for us to do. Because we too need to be like him.

His spirit needs to shape us, the spirit of the Redeemer, if we're to be people to bring that redemption to the world. Again, John in his letter, by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Little children, let us love not in word and talk, but in deed and in truth. Verse John 3. There was a very great deal of painful humbling, wasn't there, to bring Judah to this great height of his life's work.

But as someone has said, no one who is destined for God's service can hope to escape God's gracious disciplines. He spares us no sorrow in making us what we ought to be.

But wasn't that worth it here? In Judah's life? Because it was Judah's words that finally opened the way to full reconciliation for his family.

[36 : 07] And that's what is at last displayed in these first 15 verses of chapter 45. Displayed so marvelously through Joseph's tears.

Joseph's tears that reveal the spirit of the great reconciler himself in Joseph. These verses give us a wonderful revelation of Joseph's extraordinary grace.

Joseph's grace is both visible and audible in his tears.

Apparently the Egyptians didn't approve of displays of emotion. They valued a cool, controlled spirit. Maybe like some of us Brits, the stiff upper lip attitude. Perhaps a little bit like some people's view of God.

That he is cool and dark and distant and without emotions. But that is not how the Bible portrays our God, the true God. And it's not how the Bible displays those whose lives are full of the life of the true God.

[37 : 13] And Joseph's passion here is absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. He isn't ashamed of it. That's not why he sends everybody out of his presence. It's not so that nobody hears his tears. We're told plainly the whole of Egypt heard him.

No, he puts them all out, surely, so as not to expose his brothers' dreadful sins in front of all of them. John Calvin, I'm sure you know, was no softy.

But John Calvin says it's a heroic virtue to be thus touched with compassion. And he says that Joseph's softness and tenderness here is a wonderful thing.

And it is. Because it reflects, doesn't it, the reconciling love of God himself. The God who shows love to the loveless that they might lovely be, as the hymn says.

The God who reconciled those who were still his enemies by the death of his son on the cross. That's Joseph's grace revealed here.

[38 : 22] But of course, his brothers, we're told in verse 3, are terrified, dismayed. Well, no wonder, here they were at last, utterly in his power with their guilt, utterly exposed.

And yet are Joseph's words of grace not absolutely staggering verse 4? I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold to Egypt, and now do not be distressed or even angry with yourselves.

You see, real love, reconciling love, must be tender love, mustn't it, as well as tough love. Joseph, it had to be tough to break open the hardened hearts of these men, to humble their pride.

Indeed, it was God who was breaking them open like that and using Joseph to be part of it. But look how tender he is and how ready he is to bring healing and forgiveness to these convicted brothers.

John Calvin, again, has a beautiful, entrenchant word here. He says, By this example we are taught to take heed, lest sadness should overwhelm those who are truly and seriously humbled.

[39 : 32] Under a sense of shame. That's the grace of the great reconciler spirit, isn't it? That other hymn of Bernard of Clairvaux we sang last week also puts it so beautifully.

Oh, hope of every contrite heart, oh, joy of all the meek, to those who fall, how kind thou art, how good to those who seek.

I find a characteristic comment of William Still this week on this also. He says, This should not be forgotten by very righteous folk who ruthlessly drive sinners to their knees.

What do you do when you get them there and they turn out to be more penitent than you bargained for and appeal for your mercy? Are you as merciful as you are righteous? If not, your righteousness is self-righteousness, a vile thing, as far removed from the grace and truce of Christ's righteousness as heaven from hell.

But Joseph's tears, they reveal the tender mercy of the great reconciler and his fruitful grace at work in his life.

- [40 : 46] Through the many trials and the tribulations in life, he too, like Judah in a different way, had come to terms with the God of sovereign grace. And that is what made this reconciliation possible.

The great reconciliation, as we see it portrayed in the last few verses we read, verses 12 to 15, with Jacob, his father, to be sent for to bring the family together, with the peace and the intimacy of the brothers being restored.

They're weeping, they're kissing, they're talking to one another. That's an intimacy they never had even before Joseph was sent to be a slave. They wouldn't talk to him. Such was the hatred.

Yes, this was Joseph's gracious doing and all that he'd hoped for since he first saw his brothers coming down to Egypt. And yes, it was Judah's courageous action that at last opened the way for this reconciliation.

But you see, Joseph knew more, didn't he? He knew that this was all ultimately God's doing. And he's determined that in this marvelous moment of great reconciliation, the wonderful revelation of God's supreme workings, God's great grace, will not be eclipsed, will not be set aside.

- [42 : 12] And that's why he points his brothers in all their confusion, in all their fear, in all their consternation and in their relief, he points them to God.

Do you see? Because you see, the real heart, not only of this passage, but the whole of this story of Jacob and Joseph and the brothers, it lies there in verses 5 to 9.

It's the revelation that we have here about Joseph's extraordinary God and his amazing, sovereign, providential control over even man's worst evil to work glorious good and grace for his people.

We'll come to it again in chapter 50 in verse 20. Just look here in verses 5 to 9 at the three marvelous things that he reveals about God's amazing, sovereign control, not only over their own lives and their family life, but indeed over the whole of world history.

Verse 5, he speaks about God's mighty, sovereign power. Joseph doesn't deny the real responsibility and the sin of his brothers. Yes, you sold me here, he says.

- [43 : 27] But what he says is that what they meant for evil, God meant for good. God sent me before you, he says. What a wonderful thing.

But not even his people's worst mistakes and folly and sin can ever upset God's plans for good. His power is mighty, it is invincible.

And at verse 7, he points them to God's marvelous, the steadfast purpose to keep alive his remnant, his people, and to save them forever. You see, no matter how embattled the church may seem, no matter what opposition there might seem to be from without or corruption from sin within, God's purpose for his people is absolutely sure and certain.

I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against them. A marvelously steadfast purpose of this sovereign God.

And see also, though, how in these verses he speaks of God's mysterious saving pattern. God sent me, says Joseph, to preserve life, to save many.

- [44 : 42] Me, whom God has exalted to be Lord over all Egypt. You see the pattern of a deliverer, despised and rejected and suffering at the hands of his own, and yet at last exalted by God to glory, to bring many brothers to glory also.

His pattern is to bring reconciliation and salvation to many through lives that are shaped by the pattern of his own son, the great redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What an extraordinarily revealing reconciliation this is. Above all, revealing this, the power and the purpose and the pattern of the extraordinary God of the Bible who brings reconciliation to his covenant people in order that through them he might bring reconciliation to the whole world.

What a comfort it was for Joseph to have come to rest in the knowledge of God's sovereignty over all his own life and his family's life indeed, over all life and history.

His power and his purpose and his pattern. And friends, what a great source of peace and serenity and comfort it is for us when we can come to understand and embrace that pattern also and that knowledge.

[46 : 19] because the power and the purpose and the pattern of God's great reconciling work hasn't changed. It hasn't. Not one bit.

God is still at work always for good through all the changing scenes of life in trouble and in joy as we sang. Even in the most tangled and apparently tragic complexities wrought by our own mistakes and our own folly and our own sin and rebelliousness.

God is at work to reveal himself to us and in us and therefore through us to others as he works in us as he worked in the brothers a spirit of real repentance and as he shapes us by the spirit of the true redeemer to make us at one with the great reconciler himself.

That's his purpose. It can't be changed. And to that end his power is at work in us confirming us also conforming us just as with Judah just as with Joseph conforming us into the pattern of his son the Lord Jesus Christ so that we too might become instruments of great reconciliation to others.

doesn't that encourage us especially when the Christian life is hard especially when congregational life can be perplexing and painful.

[47 : 58] We may feel that the church but this church is a pretty unimpressive family and of course that's true but this family was pretty bad and yet God was at work wasn't he forging loyalty and brotherly love and confession and honesty about sin and self-sacrifice and submission to others is more important than self compassion and great tenderness and real forgiveness and marvelous fulsome reconciliation even after great and grievous sin and as one writer puts it a dysfunctional family that allows these graces to embrace it will become a light to the world so may we be such a people who reveal in us and through us to the world our great reconciling God let's pray heavenly father how we thank you that you are the God of mighty sovereign power that your marvelous steadfast purpose is that all whom you've called you are conforming into the image of your son that he might be firstborn among many countless numbers of brothers so Lord help us to understand and bow to your sovereignty even as you call us to walk in the path of our savior the Lord

Jesus Christ to carry his cross and for our lives to be shaped in the pattern of his but the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ might shine even from us in our dysfunctional lives in our dysfunctional family so Lord to that end lead us we pray for Jesus sake Amen thank God I thank God for to God you I I word my full and I love