

Genesis in Biblical Perspective: The Gospel of Christ from Genesis – The Life of Joseph #7: Tough Words and Tender Heart

Genesis 42

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We are in the 42nd chapter of Genesis and we'll cover about half of it in this study. This is the study of the life of Joseph in the book of Jacob. The book of Genesis is made up of ten books. We are in the tenth book of the book of Genesis which is about Jacob but is really about the development of the life of Joseph, the preserver of Israel. This is the Word of God. It's the truth. Genesis 42:1–5 says

[1] When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" [2] And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." [3] So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. [4] But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. [5] Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and may it be preached for you.

Before we get into our study I have three questions to ask you. Joseph, this astounding man who has taught us about the multi-faceted use that God has of adversity and prosperity, has taken us beyond the thought that adversity is displeasure and prosperity is God's pleasure when in fact adversity may be God's pleasure and prosperity may be God's judgment and that God uses adversity to humble and grow us and prosperity to position us. The question is how do we embrace adversity like Joseph was able to embrace it because circumstance were not his life? Five times it tells us that God was with him. God was enough. His relationship with the living God was enough. His relationship wasn't built on the circumstances but upon the presence and power of God in his life. Now what is he going to do now that he is in prosperity?

Here are the three questions. Question number one, why is it in this text, inspired by the Holy Spirit, does Moses, the first author of Scripture, we have the first time that the sons of Jacob refer to God with His name? Out of our full examination of

the book of Genesis and the narratives of Joseph and his brothers, this is the first time the brothers have used the name of God in confession, in dependence and with reverence. The second question is why is it in this text in which the sons of Jacob are for the first time now called by their patriarchal title, the sons of Israel? The third question is, does Joseph have anything to do with the first two questions?

Let's go back and look at those first five verses we just read. We have been in Egypt for quite a while looking at what has been happening in the life of Joseph and now we've gone back to Canaan. Let me set the time here. Joseph was sold into slavery when he was 17. Thirteen years later he is made the Prime Minister. He goes from a slavery pit to Potiphar's house to prison and the day he walks out of prison he becomes the Prime Minister of Egypt. He is in control having declared the Word of God through the dreams given to a pagan king. He has been in this position at least seven years in which the seven years of feasting have already transpired. We are somewhere into the seven years of famine and we're far enough along that the people in the land Canaan are feeling the pinch. They are starting to get hungry up in Canaan. In other words, we are over two decades from when Joseph has been sold into slavery.

It's at that time that Jacob asks a question. It's one of those questions that you don't expect an answer and in fact you don't want an answer. What are you looking for? We're sitting here going hungry and even I, an old man, have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Why aren't you in Egypt? Why aren't you getting us grain? Your mother used to ask those questions and they weren't designed for an answer. They were designed for action. On Saturday morning you decide to sleep in a little bit and your mom comes in and says "Are you going to stay in bed all day?" You are not supposed to answer that question. In fact, you're in serious trouble if you try to. "Is it going to take you all day to do that job?" You don't want to answer 'yes.' It just means you're supposed to get it done.

I wonder why the sons of Jacob aren't too interested in going to Egypt? Selling someone into slavery is a death sentence but they don't even want to hear the word Egypt much less go down to it. He sends them anyway but he doesn't send eleven, he sends ten. We found out back in Genesis 37 that part of the problem in that family was the idolatry of Joseph by Jacob in favoritism. Jacob as far as he knows has lost Joseph but he hasn't learned a lesson. He has a new idol and it's Benjamin. He used to idolize the "son of his old age" but now he is idolizing the son of his older age. Another reason he idolizes him is because he is one of the two sons of Rachel whom he loved. So that's why he only sends the ten brothers down for fear he may lose Benjamin since he has already lost Joseph. I'm sure the rest of the ten brothers think they are just potted plants in that home but Jacob's favoritism continues and note one other thing. I know Jacob is a believer but in this context he is not ruled by faith but by fear. He has planned from fear and not faith.

Let's go to scene two which I have called a dream come true. Genesis 42:6–17 says

[6] Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. [7] 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." [8] And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. [9] And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land." [10] They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. [11] We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies." [12] He said to them, "No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see." [13] And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more." [14] But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you. You are spies. [15] By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. [16] 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." [17] And he put them all together in custody for three days.

We have already seen that Joseph is not a hands off administrator. In the last study we saw how Joseph was going through the land as he was setting up the administration of taking care of the feasting to handle the day of the famine. He is right there in the handing off and taking place when people come to buy food. So I'm speculating a little here and my guess he is in another room and an attendant comes in and says there is another group here from Canaan to buy some grain. Joseph comes around the corner and immediately for it tells us two times that he recognizes them but they don't recognize him. Can you imagine the jolt he must have felt to see the ten brothers who sold him into slavery which was a death sentence?

There is only one other person in Genesis that I think might have gotten jolted more. Every time I have read about the inauguration of Joseph becoming Prime Minister of Egypt where he was given Pharaoh's ring, new clothes, a new chariot etc there is one person I've always thought about during that celebration and it was Mrs. Potiphar. That's the man who she made up a charge against and now he's prime minister. If I had been her at that time and saw him as prime minister I think I would have applied for a visa somewhere else but obviously Joseph did not bring vengeance or vindication. Now what is he going to do?

As challenged as I am looking at the life of Joseph as a trophy of God's grace so that when he is in adversity he doesn't crumble or play the victim but he is the same because his life is built not upon the circumstances but the presence and power of God. God was with him so he was faithful, compassionate and courageous and as much as that challenged me of what grace can do as you are being humbled and God is growing you, the real test for people many times is what do you do when you get in power. How many of us have been discouraged when someone we have elected got inside beltway of power? What happened to them? Not only that, you're right for you've got might, right, power and the position to do what you want to do.

Now Joseph's brothers come up. They are guilty of conspiracy not simply for his slavery but for his supposed murder. In the back of Joseph's mind is his dream. We have had six dreams in the study of Joseph's life. The first one was that his brothers would come and bow down to me like sheaves. Then Joseph had a second dream that not only his brothers would bow down but the parents would come and bow down. I'm sure he remembers these dreams as these ten brothers come in looking for food but they don't recognize him, although that's not unusual because this is two decades later. It's not the cleanest life in the world to run around taking care of sheep and yet as they come in there is this clean shaven, well-clothed Egyptian prince and yet his brothers actually think Joseph is dead. Slavery back then was a death sentence. Notice how Joseph takes great pains not to talk to them in their language but through a translator.

He knows that the dreams haven't been fulfilled yet, why? In the dream it wasn't ten brothers that bowed to him but eleven. So the dream hasn't quite come true yet. Immediately Joseph shifts into a strategic game plan to deal with the hearts of these men. Is this game plan a power play to vindicate himself and bring vengeance upon them or this a game plan for them? That game plan starts off by treating them like strangers for there is no recognition. Secondly, it tells you twice he speaks roughly with them and they'll even tell their father that he does that. There is very rough, abrasive, and challenging language that he speaks to with them. He hides who he is from them. He knows who they are. Then he makes an accusation by saying "You've come here in these days of famine being without food and you're looking for our weak spots for you want to take over our land. I know what you're here to do!" It is a very reasonable accusation and then his brothers respond by saying "Oh no!"

Have you ever played the game two truths and a lie? The lying part isn't great but it's a great game. The brothers do a two truth and a lie. They say "We are not spies. We are the sons of one man. We are honest men." Which one is the lie? They are sons of one man, yes. They are not spies, yes. They are honest men, no. So Joseph carries out his test upon their heart. He is testing their heart. He says "Oh no, you say you're not spies and you say you have another brother so let's see if you are honest and telling the truth. I'll keep all of you but one who will go back and get the other brother and then I'll know you're telling the truth. If the

one doesn't come back with the brother then the nine will be killed." Then he threw them into prison, very explicitly for three days. After three days we move to the third scene. Genesis 42:18–25 says

[18] On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: [19] 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, [20] and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so. [21] 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." [22] 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." [23] They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. [24] 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. [25] 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.

On the third day they come out and it seems as if Joseph had a change of mind. It is my conviction that he didn't have a change of mind but I think he had this in mind all along. After their three days in prison he says "I fear God" and bears a verbal confession of his relationship with the living God. Notice he attaches to them a witness. Not only did he confess God but he then did something else. Therefore I'm going to do something else for he attached his behavior to his belief. So he says "Here's what I'm going to do. Instead of nine stay and one go, I'm going to keep one and if the nine bring the other one back..." What will the nine do?

After he says that and they not knowing that he could understand what they were saying, they began to confess the reality of their sins. It is twenty years of a guilty conscience. Remember Joseph's plea from the pit and we didn't listen to him. Now our sin has come upon us. Reuben is giving them Romans 6:23 which says the wages of sin is death. They hear this word from the one who fears God and immediately among themselves they begin to pour out their consciences. We sinned against God, against our brother, our father and they are fully aware of the fact of their sin and confess the sinfulness of their actions. The question now is there repentance yet? Is there a turning from that sin? Is this worldly sorrow, for we just got caught or this Godly repentance that brings change as well as forgiveness? You see the fact that the man with the tough words has a tender heart when he hears their confessions for the last twenty years. He has to leave the room to hide his weeping. He has tears of grief and tears of joy mingled down. Then he comes back. Now his plan moves to binding one in front of them and that's Simeon. Then he sends the other nine on their way but before he

sends them away he fills their sacks with grain and takes the money they paid for the grain and buries it in the sack. Now what happens? Here is the final scene we'll look at in this study. Genesis 42:26–28 says

[26] Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. [27] 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. [28] 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?"

This is the first time record in Scripture that the brothers use the name of God in reverence. The confession of their sin and the conviction of it has now reached the point that at this moment, this occasion brings upon them heart failure. Their hearts failed them. With trembling they acknowledge not only the sin but the sinfulness of their sin and they have been tracked down over two decades by the hand of a just and righteous God and they confess that they deserve it and are guilty. Now we stand undone before this God. Now they have arrived at that point.

I don't think I'm over-speculating here. If this same thing had happened twenty years ago I think they would have said "We got money back, we have food and it only cost us one brother." Now the conscience has been laid hold of for there is the true guilt of sin and the sinfulness of sin. They see not a windfall profit. They see the hand of God's judgment. In the next study we'll see what happens when they get home and we'll see some amazing things to learn from that but before we leave this text I want to give you three very practical things that you and I can learn from this man in power and what Joseph shouts to me.

This is not because Joseph is a perfect man because he is a sinner saved by grace but God's grace that took him through adversity that he embraced now takes him to prosperity when God has exalted him and put him in a very specific position. What is it that he will do now? Now he has power, might, right, position and is in absolute control and those treacherous brother gave him a death sentence so is it time that he could give them what they have coming? Instead of a pronouncement of judgment it instigates a probe of mercy and grace. Many times you have to use tough words.

Renewal begins with forgiveness. Forgiveness comes with confession. Confession comes with conviction and for conviction to take place somebody has graciously got to say the tough words with a tender heart. We are sinners and we can't save ourselves. We stand under the judgment of God and that's tough words. Our sins are before us. You're not a victim. Yes your father was doing things wrong but you made those choices.

If you're a believer today I know somewhere along the line somebody said the tough words. You need a Savior. You can't save yourself and God willing they said it from a tender heart but those tough words with their tender heart brought you to the One who did save you. Now you and I by God's grace have been humbled. Even though we may be going through adversity now, we're also exalted for we have been seated at the right hand with the living God. We have been saved from our sins and now this God who has humbled us, brought us to Himself and declared us as His sons and daughters and now that we're in that position what will people see in us? Self-righteousness? Self-promotion? Or will they see men and women who know that God has put me where I am not because I deserved it but by His grace and He has positioned me in order to be His instrument in the lives of others.

Joseph not only knew that tough words begin to the process to a redeemed life but he also knew that he was where he was not for self-vindication or self-advancement because God had brought him there for a purpose. It is just like Paul. Paul wrote back to the Corinthians in II Corinthians 10 'I am grieved that my words brought you sorrow but I rejoice that it was not a worldly sorrow but that you have been brought to a Godly repentance.' These are tough words brought with a tender heart. Joseph is in the position not to create or not to assume a position. If it were me I probably would have told them who I was and then asked them if they remembered the dream I had about 20 years ago. It would have been so easy to say 'I told you so. Look what you did. I have plenty of food. You're hungry. I have a clean conscience. I'm forgiven. You're wracked with guilt.' No, Joseph puts in place a strategic initiative, not to pronounce himself vindicated but to probe the hearts of his brothers.

His name is Joshua Chamberlain. Joshua Chamberlain was a Bible teacher. He had a great title at the Bowdoin College in Maine for he was a professor of Natural and Revealed Religion. In 1862 he volunteered to go into the Civil War. He humbly rejected a commission in order to stay under a West Pointe officer who then rose to the ranks all the way to Major General. He saw the hero of Little Roundtop. He was arguably the key to winning the battle at Gettysburg. He was wounded six times. He received the congressional medal of honor and he was the only man to ever be promoted on the battle field by Ulysses S. Grant. At the end of the war when the surrenders are taking place Grant reaches for Chamberlain and puts him in charge of the surrender. All night he prayed, 'what do you do at a moment like this?'

In his book *The Passing of the Armies* he writes 'it was not celebration, it must be reconciliation.' His heart was moved to do something and he told no one what he was going to do. The next day the remnants of the confederate army marched up with their arms to the ground and shoulders stooped with four years of valiant warfare, now to surrender. As they marched up that muddy road there is a place you can stand today called the surrender triangle. There was John Brown Gordon who became fast friends with Chamberlain and he became four time

governor of Georgia and Chamberlain became the governor of Maine. They would be the most sought after speakers and there they meet for the first time. Gordon leads the defeated army up and Chamberlain is in command to receive it as the victorious army. Chamberlain upon his horse cried out "Order!" and twenty thousand troops came to attention. The soldiers salute as the victor honored the valor of the vanquished.

John Brown Gordon realized what had happened and took his spurs and flicked them beside the flanks of his horse and while his horse was in the air Gordon pulled his sword, touched his boot and returned the salute back to Chamberlain. Then he gave the orders to his men and they came to their feet, their heads came up and then they returned the salute – the vanquished to the victor. That moment may have given you your country. It is the moment you are in power, might and right, what will you do? Will you restore the dignity of the fallen? Would you point them to the One who forgives and transforms? As I look at the field where we try to teach young men and women about life, it's called sports, my heart breaks constantly. I see a man hit a homerun and he shoots the pitcher with his imaginary gun as he circles the bases. I see people score a basket and they come down and beat their chest and get in the face of the man defending them. I will never accept that, particularly where we are trying to teach people how to live life. Anytime you have to beat someone at the expense of someone you just became a nobody. The believer at that moment does everything to point defeated to dignity and victory in the grace that is found in Christ, while they exhibit that grace in a relationship. There is no triumphalistic pronouncement by Joseph but just a probe for he wants to get to the heart of his brothers.

Secondly, it was a probe with a purpose. He wanted to touch their hearts. He wanted to restore them. Do you know who we are dealing with? I would not send my family to spend the afternoon or a campfire with these ten men. Rueben was a man who committed incest with his father's concubine. Simeon and Levi committed genocide and holocaust among the Shechemites. Judah was involved with prostitution and ends up in a relationship with his daughter-in-law of incest, unknown but it was still there because of immorality. The rest of the brothers would respond with conspiracy to engage a genocide and murder. Those are the sons of Jacob but now they become the sons of Israel because a man of God refused to exalt himself but gave himself to probe their hearts and they confessed their sin. Now they are standing at a key moment.

F.B. Meyer and Jim Boyce say with a little speculation that what Joseph has done was a repeat of what happened to him. In Genesis 37 when Joseph walks up to his brothers the first thing they say to him is "Are you here to spy on us for father?" Hence the term Joseph uses as they were spies in the land. The brothers spoke roughly with Joseph for they didn't treat him as a brother but treated him as a stranger. Hence is what Joseph did when his brothers came to Egypt to get grain. They put Joseph in a pit for maybe three days and refused to listen to his pleas. Joseph puts his brothers in prison for three days and refuses

to listen to them. Then when they come out and Joseph hears their confession but not a repentance, he puts the money into their sacks of grain. Now will these nine men sell out another brother or is this not worldly sorrow but Godly repentance?

Because this man of God probed the hearts of these sons of Jacob, you and I now have twelve patriarchs. You and I are now challenged for what do we do when we see our brothers walk away and sin? How do we view the lost who don't know Christ? Is it some kind of self-righteousness or anger? Certainly anger can lead to sin but where do we stand? Are we probed to lost people that they might be brought to Christ that these who are sons of the world might become sons of the living God? When our brothers and sisters wander do we probe to win them even if it has to be tough words to bring with a tender heart that they might be brought to Christ? Are we instruments of God's grace so that we see the same kind of transformation by the power of God's grace as instruments of His grace in their life or do we take our positions as believers with self-righteousness or triumphalism or self-exaltation or vindication?

I would challenge us. A world stands before us to win for Christ. We have brothers and sisters that stray. Go and probe and find them even if it has to be tough words with a tender heart. Joseph has done us one more favor. Joseph has probed because Joseph was the trophy from a probe from heaven. He was in the midst of a pit in Potiphar's prison. The Lord sent the probe from heaven and was with him. Now Joseph brings God's probe from heaven to the earth.

How far will God go to save you? The Probe from heaven sent His Son into the world to save sinners. The Probe from heaven sent the Holy Spirit. The Puritans used to call Him the Hound of Heaven who will track us down no matter where we go. Where did the sons of Jacob become the sons of Israel? It was in Egypt as they were tracked down by God through Joseph. So God has probed for you and me.

I wish I could plead with you. Is your conscience bearing the guilt of sin? It isn't a religion that can relieve it. It isn't a ritual that can relieve it. It is not play the victim and blaming it on your parents that can relieve it. There is only One relief and praise the Lord when you come to Him you don't have to look back over your shoulder for 20 years wracked with grief and the treachery that is in our life. You can come to Him for He has come for you. He has probed for you and now He invites you to Him. Come, for He has come for you.

The Probe from heaven went into the garden calling "Adam, did you eat of the tree?" God wasn't looking for information. The Probe of heaven tracked Jonah through pagan sailors, threw him in the ocean and was swallowed by a fish and brought him back to obedience. The Probe of heaven sought out a Daniel. The Probe of heaven met a Joshua before a Jericho. The Probe of heaven sought out the disciples. Children have you caught anything? After the resurrection the

Probe of heaven went after Peter. Peter do you love Me more than these? These are tough words with a tender heart. God's probe has found you and me. If you haven't been found yet He has said and I plead with you not from a pit but a pulpit "Come to Him and don't ignore the plea." Come to Him. If you have come to Him then the Probe from heaven is to go through you and me throughout all the world. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in this Your Word. Father would You seal these truths? Friend, if you have never come to this Christ then the plea has come to you. Lord, I don't want to be a son of the world. I want to be a son of the living God. Say "Jesus forgive me of my sins. I put my trust in You alone." He will forgive you and cleanse you. Oh the joy of being cleansed with forgiveness from Christ! Brothers and sisters, we have been humbled and exalted to salvation in Christ that we like Joseph will probe among our brothers and sisters when they wander and probe throughout all the world with the Gospel. Lord, I pray that You would renew within us that heart of grace, willing to say tough words but always from a tender heart. Father, allow us to see You make sons of the living God from the sons of this age for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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