

Walking Through the Famine

Genesis 42:1-38

As we read Genesis chapter 42, we are looking at a family in crisis. But more than that, we are looking at the hand of God working behind the scenes of human history. You see, God had given Pharaoh two dreams—the fat cows and the lean cows, the full heads of grain and the withered ones. God was showing Pharaoh that seven years of incredible abundance were coming, but they would be swallowed up by seven years of devastating famine.

God used a young Hebrew man named Joseph, who had been forgotten in a dungeon, to interpret those dreams. Because Joseph honored God, God honored Joseph. He was lifted out of that pit and placed in the palace, made second in command over all of Egypt. Joseph spent those seven years of plenty storing up grain, taxing the land twenty percent, and filling the granaries until they stopped counting.

But then, the wind changed. The green fields turned to dust. This wasn't just a local dry spell; it was a global catastrophe that reached all the way to the tents of Jacob in the land of Canaan.

The Stirring of a Guilty Conscience

When the famine hit Canaan, Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt. He looks at his sons—ten grown men—and says, "Why do you look at one another?" (Genesis 42:1).

That's an interesting question, isn't it? Why were they just standing there staring at each other? I suspect it was the "guilty conscience" look. You see, twenty-one years earlier, these brothers had sold their younger brother Joseph to a caravan heading for Egypt. For two decades, they had carried a dark secret. Every time someone mentioned "Egypt," their hearts probably skipped a beat. They wondered, "Is he still alive? Is he a slave? Will we run into him?" Jacob tells them, "Go down and buy for us from there, that we may live and not die" (Genesis 42:2). So the brothers head south. But notice, Jacob keeps Benjamin, the youngest, at home. Benjamin was the only other son of his beloved wife, Rachel, and after losing Joseph, Jacob had wrapped his whole heart around this boy. He was terrified that "mischief befall him" (Genesis 42:4).

The Recognition and the Test

When the brothers arrive in Egypt, they have to go through the governor to buy grain. They come and bow down before Joseph with their faces to the earth (Genesis 42:6).

Now, Joseph recognizes them immediately. It's been twenty-one years—he was seventeen when they sold him, and now he's thirty-eight. He's dressed like an Egyptian, speaks through an interpreter, and carries himself with the authority of a king. But the brothers have no clue. They are looking at a powerful Egyptian lord; they aren't looking for their little brother.

As they bow, Joseph remembers his dreams from all those years ago—the sheaves of grain bowing down. God's Word always comes to pass! Joseph decides to test them. He speaks roughly, accusing them of being spies: "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!" (Genesis 42:9).

They try to defend themselves, saying, "We are twelve brothers... the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not" (Genesis 42:13). Joseph uses this to set a trap of grace. He throws them in jail for three days to let them stew, and then he gives them an ultimatum: "Leave one brother here as a hostage, go home with grain for your families, but do not come back unless you bring your youngest brother with you" (Genesis 42:19-20).

The Weight of Unconfessed Sin

Listen to what the brothers say to one another while Joseph is listening (though they don't know he understands them):

"We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he pleaded with us and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (Genesis 42:21).

Isn't that amazing? Twenty-one years later, the first time they hit a "tight spot," their minds go straight back to their sin. You cannot outrun guilt. You can bury it, you can move to a different country, you can let decades pass, but unconfessed sin will eventually find you out.

Joseph has to turn away and weep because he sees their hearts are finally breaking. He keeps Simeon as the hostage—Simeon was likely the one who led the cruelty against him—and sends the others back. But he does something beautiful: he fills their sacks with grain and secretly puts their money back in the top of the sacks (Genesis 42:25).

The False Cry of Despair

When they get home and find the money, they are terrified. They tell Jacob everything, and Jacob falls into a deep, dark despair. He cries out:

"Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin away. All these things are against me" (Genesis 42:36).

Have you ever been there? Have you ever looked at your circumstances and said, "Everything is falling apart! God has abandoned me! All these things are against me!"?

Jacob's cry was a false cry. It was based on "fragmentary knowledge." He could only see the empty chair, the missing son, and the rough governor. He couldn't see that Joseph was alive! He couldn't see that Joseph was the one providing the food! He couldn't see that God was actually orchestrating a grand reunion to save his entire family!

If Jacob only knew the whole story, he wouldn't be crying; he'd be shouting for joy.

Practical Application & Challenge

We often measure God's love by our current circumstances. When things go well, we say, "God is good." When the famine hits or the "governor" is rough, we say, "All these things are against me."

But the Word tells us in Romans 8:28 that "all things work together for good to those who love God." It doesn't say all things are good, but that God works them together for good.

My challenge to you is this: Stop judging the end of the book by the middle of the chapter. If you are in a dark place today, remember that God is on the throne. He hasn't forgotten you. He is working

behind the scenes, even when you can't see His hand. Will you trust His heart when you cannot trace His hand?

An Invitation to Life

Perhaps you're like those brothers today—carrying a weight of guilt for something you did years ago. You've tried to bury it, but it keeps coming up. I have good news for you. You don't have to carry that weight anymore.

Jesus Christ came to this earth to pay the debt for every sin you've ever committed. When He shed His blood on the cross, He paid the price in full. When He rose from the dead, He proved that He is God, Savior, and Lord. He isn't looking to punish you; He's looking to restore you.

The Bible says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:9). You don't need to go to Egypt to find a savior; He is right here. Will you turn from your sin and give your life to Jesus today? He will take your "son of sorrow" and make him a "son of His right hand."

When we talk about giving our lives to Jesus, we aren't talking about signing a membership card or adopting a new set of rules. We are talking about coming home to God the Father.

Deciding to surrender your life to Jesus Christ is the single most important decision you will ever make in this life. It isn't about joining a religious institution or simply checking a "spiritual box" on a list of life goals. Rather, it is about entering into a living, breathing relationship with the Creator of the universe—the One who knit you together in your mother's womb and loves you with a depth that is truly beyond human measure.

Why This Matters

- **A Personal Connection:** God isn't a distant force; He is a personal Savior. He knows your name, your struggles, and your potential.
- **A Solid Foundation:** When we build our lives on the finished work of Jesus, we are building on a Rock that cannot be moved by the storms of life.
- **The Gift of Peace:** Through His shed blood on the cross, the barrier of sin is removed, and we can finally experience the "peace that surpasses all understanding."

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Reality of His Love

Think of Joseph in that Egyptian palace. He didn't want to punish his brothers; he longed to be reconciled to them. He wanted to provide for them and bring them close to his side. In an even greater way, Jesus stands ready to receive you. He doesn't look at your past with a finger pointed in accusation; He looks at you with arms open wide, inviting you to taste and see that the Lord is good.

Here is how you can begin that walk with Him today:

The Way Home

1. **Acknowledge the Need:** We have all missed the mark. The Bible says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Like Joseph's brothers, we've all carried the weight of things we've done wrong.
2. **Believe in the Finished Work:** Jesus didn't just die as a martyr; He died as a substitute. He took the "roughness" we deserved so we could receive the "grace" He earned. When He shed His blood on the cross, the debt was paid. When He rose from the dead, He demonstrated that death was conquered once and for all.
3. **Confess and Receive:** Salvation is a gift. You don't earn it by being "good enough"—if we could be good enough, Jesus wouldn't have had to die. You receive it by faith.

A Simple Prayer of Surrender

If you're ready to give your life to Him, you can speak to Him right now. There are no "magic words," but you can pray something like this from your heart:

"Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I believe You died for my sins and shed Your blood to wash me clean. I believe You rose from the grave and that You are Lord. I turn from my old life and I invite You to come into my heart. Be my Savior, my Lord, and my Friend. Help me to follow You all the days of my life. Amen."

A Challenge for the Road Ahead

Now that you've turned your heart toward Him, my challenge for you is this: Abide in Him. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it stays connected to the vine, we cannot live the Christ-life in our own strength. Make it your daily priority to sit at His feet through reading the Word and with prayer. Let His love be the compass that directs every choice you make from this moment forward.

What's Next?

If you sincerely prayed that prayer, the Bible says there is a party going on in heaven right now! You are a new creation. To grow in this new life, I encourage you to do four things:

- **Read the Word (i.e., the Bible):** Start in the Gospel of John. It's the best place to get to know the heart of Jesus.
- **Pray Daily:** Prayer is just talking to God. Share your fears, your joys, and your needs with Him.

- Find a Fellowship: Find a Bible study group that teaches the Bible verse-by-verse and emphasizes the grace of God.
- Tell Someone: Sharing what God has done for you strengthens your own faith.