

The Story of Joseph

Hidden Treasure

Part 41 – February 24, 2013

Joseph's imprisoned brothers select Simeon to stay, when Joseph says they can leave, if they leave a brother as a 'return deposit'.



He [Joseph] had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes. Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack ... – Genesis 42:24b-25a NIV

Culturally, it was considered the depth of disrespectful deeds to charge a hungry family member for food. This is a declaration that to Joseph, these once-wicked men are once again family.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. – 2 Corinthians 5:17-19a NIV

The silver they offered symbolized their sins against him: they betrayed him and sold him for 20 shekels of silver. (37:28) What he gave in return is a sterling symbol of grace and reconciliation.



But, **reconciliation requires reciprocation**; otherwise, it's just half an equation. It's like adjoining hotel rooms. Adam's selfish decision in the 1st garden dead-bolted both sides between man and God. But, Jesus' selfless decision in the 2nd garden re-opened God's door. And now He knocks on ours. (Rev 3:20) **The silver isn't a test; it's a treasure.** Later, when they'll try to repay it, Joseph's helper will help them to gratefully receive what was graciously given to them by God Himself.

... "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." [He received their silver] – Genesis 43:23b NIV

Though offered freely, legally, somebody has to pay. So, the *one* man in *all* Egypt who should *never* have to pay for the grain that he prophesied, planned, and provided, Joseph, paid the price! And notice, it wasn't *just* to give them their grain ...

... and to give them provisions for their journey. – Genesis 42:25b NIV

Since Joseph was returning their silver, he didn't want them to spend it in the marketplace, and lose it forever. So, **he takes everything they have, in exchange for everything they need.** Likewise, we *lay down* worldly things to *lay up* Heavenly treasure. **We can't earn our salvation but we must surrender all to our Savior.** That's *how* you make Him *Lord* of your life.



We must see *everything* we have as *His* and be ready to respond when He leads.

[Jesus said] “The kingdom of heaven [which He says *must rule and reign within (Luke 17:21)*] is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” [So, do we buy it, or is it free?] – Matthew 13:44 NIV

Salvation is the free gift that will cost me *everything!* And I’ll *gladly, joyfully* pay! We get *infinitely more* than we bargain for! Everything we gain *and* everything we *give* is always and only for our eternal best.



After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. – Genesis 42:25c-26 NIV

Our lesson? Once the Lord has set you free, freely provided salvation, and given you His provisions for your journey, He expects you to **get your donkey in gear, and get going!**

Go to those He’s called you to, and offer what you’ve received.

Carved-wood donkeys, Egypt, 1990-1786 BC

And he has committed to us [like that silver to those sacks] the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. [Slipping sterling symbols of grace and reconciliation ‘under the door’] – 2 Corinthians 5:19b-20 NIV



It’s a long road home: 350 miles at about 20 miles a day. That’s His Place to Eugene, Oregon. Plenty of time to ponder, *again returning* to their father minus one brother.

At the place where they stopped for the night ... [About 20 miles from the capitol city, Itjtawy, which means, they’re still deep in the enemy’s territory] – Genesis 42:27a NIV



They would’ve been very near the step Pyramid of Djoser, [Zoe-sur] in Saqqara. [suh-KAR-uh] It’s 22 miles from the city they left, and about 800 years old when they stopped for the night.

When they fed their donkeys grain, the silver was down too deep to be discovered. But, one sack had tilted in a way that exposed the hidden treasure.

Step Pyramid of Djoser, c. 2658 BC

... one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. [The rest won’t be discovered until they’re home, “emptying”, not “opening”, their sacks] “My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. “Here it is in my sack.” Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?” [Notice they say “God”, not “the Egyptians”; this is the first time they mention God!] – Genesis 42:27b-28 NIV



He's got these brothers' attention, just not their contrition. He displays His grace, but their own guilt owns *them* and *condemns* them. **Un-repentant sin blinds us to God's grace.** When we're not right with God, even *free bags of money* can feel like curses! **God's grace amplifies whatever guilt we won't confess.** Joseph's generosity must suddenly feel like a set-up. They're 30 miles from the major grain city of On (with its *huge* military presence). And with each step closer, the tension builds.

They *rightly see* God's hand in all this. *And they ask* the exact question God wants 'em to answer: "What is this that God has done to us?" Trouble is, their answer ... *they don't*. They just go home agreeing they'll keep whatever they think God is doing, to themselves.

They were *so close*. If *only* they would've *answered the question!*

Do you see *yourself* in the people who populate God's Word: Joseph? His dad, Jacob? His brothers? The disciples? The Pharisees? Judas? Those who seek, stumble, follow, leave, return, rebel, or repent? Do you relate to their pain, sorrow, joy, fear, courage, confusion, disobedience, or trust? Jesus asks about 173 questions throughout the Gospels, the *exact questions* God wants *you* to answer.

"Why are you troubled?" (Lk 24:38) **"Why do you entertain evil thoughts?"** (Mt 9:4) **"Who do you say I am?"** (Mk 8:29) **"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"** (Lk 6:46) **"Why are you so afraid?"** (Mt 8:26) **"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"** (Mt 6:27) **"Is not life more important than food?"** (Mt 6:25) **"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"** (Mt 16:26) **"Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"** (Lk 22:48)

When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, **[with carefully prearranged words]** "The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies. We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.' Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, 'This is how I will know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade in the land.'" – Genesis 42:29-34 NIV

No mention of their three days in prison. No mention of the silver in the grain sack. And one other teeny-tiny detail: no mention of why they thought God was doing all this to them. Too bad; it's about to make them look *very guilty* ... *of something*.

As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man's sack was his pouch of silver! **[Jacob's imagination runs wild: did they steal the money or the grain? Was Simeon caught during the crime? Was he killed? Did they sell him? Are they going to sell Benjamin?]** When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. – Genesis 42:35 NIV

Joseph had warned them to return with Benjamin so their words may be verified and they may not *die*. (42:20) He was referring to the famine, but *their* guilt-ridden imaginations are *running wild*. He asked for *their* names, their *father's* name, their *tribe*, their *hometown*, and *now* he has justification for sending a *death-squad!*

What a glaring reminder of their guilt: the last time they came to their father, minus a brother, they possessed *hidden* silver! But, Jacob had never suspected them of wrong-doing ... *had he?*

[After 21 years, Jacob finally vents his suspicions] Their father Jacob said to them, "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more ["He's dead!" v.38] and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin." ["You told me Joseph was consumed by an evil beast. No trace left. Now you say Simon is being held by Egypt's second-in-command. Can you not at least dream up something *halfway believable?*"] "Everything is against me!" – Genesis 42:36 NIV

Actually, *everything* is working *incredibly* in your *favor!* The son you think is dead sits on a throne of gold. And He has slipped sterling silver symbols of grace and restoration under your door. Two people look at the same situation. One thinks, "God is *against* me, *punishing* me." The other, "God is asking me to dig down deep and discover the silver."

Then Reuben [apparently in a panic to return before the brute-squad arrives] said to his father, "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. [i.e. "If Benjamin *dies*, you can kill two of your grandsons and *triple* your grief!"] Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back." But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. [Benjamin is the last remaining trace of Jacob's first love, Rachel, and favorite son, Joseph] If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow." – Genesis 42:37-38 NIV



Wow, Jacob. God *personally appeared* to him, promised to bless *him*, and the world *through him*, to be with him, watch over him, and stay until every promise was fulfilled! (Gen 28:13-15) What happened? Remember when he wrestled with God? (Gen 32:24-28) There's a reason: **he saw God as an adversary**. Same reason we wrestle with Him. And the Lord is confronting him with the same questions He asked in the Gospels, the same exact questions He asks *us* to answer.

"Do you still have no faith?" (Mk 4:40) **"Why did you doubt?"** (Mt 14:31) **"Do you truly love me?"** (Jn 21:16) **"Will you really lay down your life for me?"** (Jn 13:38) **"What do you want?"** (Jn 1:38) **"Do you want to get well?"** (Jn 5:6) **"What do you want me to do for you?"** (Mt 20:32) **"Do you understand what I have done for you?"** (Jn 13:12) **"Why is my language not clear to you?"** (Jn 8:43)

You know when God *really* turns up the heat on Jacob? Next week, because, *this* is where we have to close God's story for today.