

The Story of Joseph

Passing the Test

Part 48 – June 2, 2013



When we left off, Joseph's full brother, Benjamin, was falsely accused of what his other *ten* brothers were *actually* guilty of: taking his symbol of authority.

Rabbinical tradition says they believed he stole the silver cup, and beat him on the shoulders, all the way back. But, they didn't abandon him, as they had Joseph. The rabbis taught that since Benjamin bore their guilt, shame, and abuse, God chose to dwell between his shoulders, in the land of Benjamin, in His holy Temple, in Jerusalem.



That is, until the One, born in the land of Judah, willingly took the cup of God's wrath on our behalf and died for our sins.¹

And, to express His grief, the Father tore His royal robe, the Temple veil, to open the way for our *restoration*.² And now, when the grief-stricken brothers return with *their* clothes torn, **Joseph gives 'em the one thing they most need and least expect ... the opportunity to lose their lives.**



[Anxiously waiting] Joseph was still in the house when Judah [leading the charge] and his brothers [following his lead] came in ... – Genesis 44:14a NIV

It was Judah's idea to sell Joseph. Then he abandoned his grieving father, spent 20 years of hard-learned lessons in chapter 38, and returned home, broken but transformed.



Judah, the man who'll form the tribe of the lion, from which the Messiah would come, has *again* left his father, but this time with a promise, to reunite him with Benjamin, whatever the cost.

... and they threw themselves to the ground before him. [No longer bowing like the sheaves, but falling before him like the stars] – Genesis 44:14b NIV

When young Joseph dreamt of them bowing, he assumed they'd serve *him*. But, after years and years of his *own* hard-learned lessons, he knows that **God wants them to bow so he can serve them.**

¹ We covered this in the sermon "The Silver Cup" (05/12/13)

² We covered this in the sermon "Out of the Bag" (05/19/13)

There's a great little hidden parallel, regarding this moment, back when the brothers were busy throwing *Joseph* to the ground.



“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.” [And so they did, and so they now have, from the ground floor!] – Genesis 37:19-20 NIV

They didn’t come to negotiate, they came to beg. Pride-be-damned, and it will be; **their only goal is to express their abject need.**

The begging is unnecessary, but the attitude isn’t. **God longs to meet our needs, but He’s restricted to the degree we acknowledge them.** And, why wouldn’t we, when we know *He* knows everything?!

Joseph said to them, “What is this you have done? Don’t you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?” – Genesis 44:15 NIV



He doesn’t need divination to know his *brothers!* He’s pretending to use magic for the same reason he’s pretending to be Egyptian, and to be angry, and to accuse ‘em of stealing: it’s a *test*. It’s a test with *huge* consequences. And it’s the same test you and I are given, over and over, again and again. And, the main question isn’t, “Will they pass?” it’s, “*What’s being tested?*” **Is he testing to see if they’re worthy?** He knows they’re not. **If they’ve become righteous and holy?** They haven’t. And he’s already accepted them as family.

So, what’s being tested ... *in each of us?*

“What can we say to my lord?” Judah replied. “What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. [In other words, this has nothing to do with your cup, but it doesn’t matter, we’re guilty of far greater sins, and we’re done running from the only One who can restore us or destroy us, so we’re submitting to God by submitting to you] We are now my lord’s slaves — we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.” [Wow. No excuses. No justification. They *seem* ready] But Joseph said, “Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace.” – Genesis 44:16-17 NIV



He knows they can’t, but, what he doesn’t know is if they *care*. **The real reason they rejected his authority, was a lack of love for their father.** If they still love themselves *more* than they love their father, their pride won’t allow ‘em to receive Joseph.

So you see: **He’s not testing them to see if they deserve what he longs to give, but if they’re capable of receiving it!**



We went to an incredible resort in Mexico. I was told all about it; I saw photos. Still, when I walked in, I went, “Wow!” Why is that? I didn’t get *new information*. But, **something powerful happens when you experience what you know to be true**. It’s not enough to just *know* that God loves you.

We root for Judah to deny himself because we know who Joseph is! We think, “Yes! Deny yourself. You have no idea what you’ll receive in return!”

And, then we turn around and read ...

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” – Mark 8:34-36 NIV

And we think, “Hmm. I have to *give myself up*, eh?” No! **I have to open myself up to receive everything Jesus longs to give!** God’s power comes when I deny my self-centeredness and love as *He* loves.

The resort had a bunch of swim-up bars, where people sit too long, drink too much, and get too loud and obnoxious. My son said, “You know not to put your face in the water at a pool bar, right?” No. I didn’t!

I started thinking about the poverty of the people who worked there. And I felt really ashamed of how demanding people can be in their empty attempts to increase their joy by *being served*. **The surest path to misery is the pursuit of happiness.**

So, I started carrying 100-peso bills (about \$10). And, when someone was rude, I waited till they turned, handed their server a bill, nodded toward ‘em, grinned, and said, “Gracious.”

Oh, the joy! The laughter I shared with the workers! I gave away at least \$300. Best money I ever spent! I felt like I found the way to buy happiness. If this is *denying* yourself, sign me up!

I tried to let a few people in on it, but they couldn’t *receive it*. Looked at me like I was crazy ... as did the two housekeepers I called into the hall to tip. I have *no idea* whose room it was.

Don’t underestimate your pride, it can’t be ignored, it must be denied. How weird our pride really is. **It has the power to set you in your own demanding filth and convince you it’s paradise.**

I met a nice guy, Craig; tested him with a couple comments. He seemed capable of receiving my secret to joy. And he *was!* He got a big kick out of it!

But, we should get back to Joseph’s test ...

Then Judah went up to him [and looked him in the eyes, and everything else disappeared. Maybe it's the weight of what he did to Joseph, maybe it's the relief of repentance, perhaps it's a perspective born of the death of his own two sons, but he suddenly seems to be void of self-concern] and [he] said: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. [Judah is about to do something unbelievably bold; he's going to tell the second-most-powerful man in Egypt, the Seer, the Diviner, the Interpreter of Dreams, that his order, to go back to their father in peace, is impossible. Now listen, along with Joseph, to see if you can detect any hint of genuine love for his father] My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, [which Judah probably believes, and that it's why God is dealing with them so harshly] and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.' "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.' And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.' But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said. Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.' But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since. [for the first time, Joseph hears what his father was told, and believed] If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.' So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!' "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father." – Genesis 44:18-34 NIV

The brothers' jaws were slack with shock. They'd never heard a man speak with such exposed, impassioned, selfless authenticity, pathetically pleading to become a substitutionary sacrifice. Joseph couldn't speak, couldn't blink, couldn't breathe; the one who *sold him*, was begging to be enslaved *by him*, to lay down his life to serve his brothers, out of love for his father.

This is the moment everything changed. This is the moment Judah denied himself and died to himself. And *this* is why Jesus chose the line of Judah. He didn't just pass the test, he *nailed it!* Jesus wants to come in, but **there's no room in the 'in' until you push yourself out.** Judah's pride and selfishness once doomed poor Joseph; but now, his Christ-like selflessness is about to resurrect him!

Then Joseph could no longer control himself ... – Genesis 45:1a NIV

Oh, wait. That's next week! This is where we have to close God's story for today.