

Main Idea: In Genesis 43, we learn something about God through the actions of His servant Joseph. He is the God who pursues forgiveness, as do His people when they reflect Him rightly. There are two points to this message.

- I. We learn about pursuing forgiveness from the story of Genesis 43.
 - A. We see the dilemma (1-2).
 - B. We see the dialogue (3-10).
 - C. We see the decision (11-14).
 - D. We see the drama (15-34).
 1. The brothers could not comprehend grace.
 2. Many today try to earn what God offers freely.
 - II. We learn about pursuing forgiveness by considering the significance of Genesis 43.
 - A. Pursuing forgiveness involves more than words.
 1. It did for Joseph.
 2. It does for God.
 3. It will for us.
 - B. Pursuing forgiveness involves overcoming evil with good.
- Response: What are you doing with God's offer of forgiveness?
1. Accept it thankfully.
 2. Share it joyfully.

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

Illust: Church Board examining pastoral candidate who "bluffed" his way...

I love to study and teach the Bible. I know you love to learn the Bible. That's why you're here. God's Word is so relevant. It hits us where we live. We're not here to tickle our ears with Bible trivia. Our aim is to hear what God has revealed to us.

I love to delve into familiar stories, like the story of Joseph in Genesis.

God devoted only 2 chapters in the book of Genesis to tell us how the Universe got here. Only 2. Yet He gave us some 39 chapters to tell us how the nation of Israel came into existence. And of those, 13 chapters are a story about Joseph (Gen 37-50).

Why is that? Who wrote Genesis? Moses. When? 1400 BC. Why? God gave the first 5 books of the Bible to the Israelites after He redeemed them from Egypt, and before they entered the Promised Land. He gave them the Torah, the Pentateuch, the Law. For what reason? So they would know how to live for Him once they reached the land flowing with milk and honey. That wouldn't be easy. Why not? The Canaanites lived there, the corrupt, pagan, polytheistic Canaanites. The Canaanites had many, false gods, known as Baal.

Of course, God was and is not like those false gods. He could have told His people that (which He did). But He made a greater impact on them by showing them what He was like. That's what He did in the story of Joseph.

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message is adapted from two series at WBC in 1992 and 2002.

In Genesis 43, God gives us a picture of this simple truth. Forgiving involves more than words.

Illust: 2 children fighting..."I SAID I was sorry!" "I SAID it was OK!"

I. We learn about pursuing forgiveness from the story of Genesis 43.

The story of Joseph is an incredible story! It began back in Gen 37 when Joseph was a 17 year old teenager. His father, Jacob, spoiled him with favoritism. His brothers hated him for it. When they had their chance, they sold him to a caravan of gypsey-like traders heading to Egypt, and then convinced their dad he had been mauled by a ferocious animal.

Things seemed to go from bad to worse in Egypt for Joseph.

Key Verse: 39:2 "But the LORD was with Joseph."

Eventually, God executed His sovereign plan, and promoted Joseph to the number 2 position in Egypt, next to Pharaoh. Why? To prepare the world for a coming famine. And to prepare a family for a dramatic reunion.

There are 4 scenes to the story in Gen 43.

A. We see the dilemma (1-2).

Vv 1-2 "And the famine was severe in the land..."

"Now the famine was still severe in the land. ² So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food."

Here's the dilemma. The food is gone. And the famine is still severe. The Scriptures don't tell us how much time elapsed between 42:38 and 43:1. We know it's been less than 2 years (45:6).

Once again, food is scarce in Canaan. Jacob addresses his sons, "Go get some more food." Easier said than done! Why? The brothers didn't leave Egypt on too good of terms the last time.

Judah speaks up, and reminds his dad that in Scene 2...

B. We see the dialogue (3-10).

³ But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.' ⁴ If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. ⁵ But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'"

⁶ Israel asked, "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?"

⁷ They replied, "The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. 'Is your father still living?' he asked us. 'Do you have another brother?' We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, 'Bring your brother down here?'"

⁸ Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. ⁹ I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. ¹⁰ As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice."

V 3 "And Judah spoke unto him...You shall not see my face except your brother..."

Remember what happened? When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but not vice versa. He accused them of being spies. Trembling in their saddles, they denied the charge. Then Joseph devised a test. He kept one brother, Simeon, as hostage. He told the rest to return home with food for their families, and bring their youngest brother back. But his instructions were clear--No younger brother, no more food.

The dialog continued, and Judah informed his father...

Vv 4-5 "If thou wilt send our brother, we will go...but if not..."

Those words didn't settle well with Jacob.

V 6 "And Israel (= Jacob) said, Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me...?"

My paraphrase--"Why did you tell the Egyptian ruler about Benjamin?!"

V 7 "And they said, "The man asked us..."

Illust: Commercial, "How'd your investor know?" He asked!

V 7 "...Could we certainly know he would say...?"

You can just hear the sons' plea, "We had no way of knowing this would happen! We just answered his questions!"

Then Judah made an offer.

Vv 8-10 "And Judah said to Israel, Send the lad with me...I will be surety for him..."

It's ironic to me that 25 years earlier, it was this same Judah that came up with a plan regarding another son of Rachel (37:26).

Look carefully at the word "surety." The word in the verb form means "to give or to take in pledge; to exchange." As a noun, it represents a "pledge" or "token." What did Judah mean? Look at 44:32, "If I bring him (Ben) not up unto thee, then I SHALL BEAR THE BLAME to my father forever." I'll take full responsibility. I'll bear the blame. My life for his.

Think about it. 18 centuries later, a descendant of Judah himself would enter the world as a "surety," a "pledge," a "token." He came to bear the blame of the world. Who was that? None other than the Messiah, the Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ!

But there's a big difference. Judah made a promise he couldn't fulfill. It was out of his control. Not so with Jesus. Jesus made a pledge He could keep.

Q: What did Jesus say about Himself?

Jn 10:11 "I am the good shepherd; the shepherd gives His life FOR the sheep."

Jn 10:15 "...I lay down My life FOR the sheep."

Jn 10:18 "...I lay it down of Myself. I have power..."

Judah told his dad, "I'll take the blame." But how could he? There were too many factors out of his control. But think of Jesus! He willingly submitted to His Father's will. He said, "I'll take the blame. I'll give my life to pay the debt of sinful men!"

Illust:

Scene 1, the Dilemma. Scene 2, the Dialogue. In scene 3, Dad responds...

C. We see the decision (11-14).

¹¹ Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift—a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. ¹² Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake. ¹³ Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. ¹⁴ And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved."

Vv 11-13 "And their father, Israel, said..."

The deadlock was broken. Moses uses Jacob's God-given name, Israel, in vv 6, 11. Jacob knew he had no choice. Judah was right. If he didn't send Benjamin, the others couldn't go get more food. And if they didn't get more food, they'd all die anyway!

Look at the instructions Jacob gave his sons. Take:

1. Best fruits (11)

The grocery list included delicacies not available in Egypt:

Balm--a produce of the storax, which grew in northern Palestine, used for medicinal purposes (like "the balm of Gilead" Jer 8:22)

Honey--another popular export from the land of Canaan

Myrrh--a clear substance derived from the leaves and branches of a type of rose plant; used both in perfume and for medicinal purposes

Pistachio nuts and almonds--produced in Palestine

2. Double Money (12)--"Maybe there's been a mistake!"

3. Benjamin (13)

Q: How old is Benjamin? 23, acc to Deilitsch

I find it interesting that he has NO say in this decision!

One final thing. Before they left, Jacob offered a halfhearted prayer of blessing. I say half-hearted because of his fatalistic attitude following the prayer.

V 14 "And God Almighty give you..."

What did Name of God did Jacob use in his prayer? "God Almighty." El Shaddai. Is that significant? It sure is. That's God's covenant name. That's the name God used when He appeared to Abraham in Gen 17:1, "I am the Almighty God...And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." Then in Gen 17:7, "And I will establish my cov't between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting cov't..."

Q: In his darkest hour, in the deepest valley of decision, what did Jacob do?

A: He clung to the very character and covenant of God. So must we.

Illust:

Take a good look at Jacob. He's one of the ancient pillars of biblical history. Yet he struggled. He had walked with God for decades. Yet he worried. He was anxious. He was so overwhelmed by his fear he didn't seem to comprehend the wisdom in his advice to his sons. But at least he looked for help in the right place! At least he looked to God!

That's what makes great men and women of God in the Bible great. Not that they didn't have problems. They did. But when they were down, they looked to God.

Illust: David did in Ps 142 "I cried...When my spirit was overwhelmed"

That's scene 3. Jacob made a decision. He looked to God, and acted.

D. We see the drama (15-34).

1. *The brothers could not comprehend grace.*
2. *Many today try to earn what God offers freely.*

¹⁵ So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. ¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; they are to eat with me at noon."

¹⁷ The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸ Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, "We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys."

¹⁹ So they went up to Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. ²⁰ "Please, sir," they said, "we came down here the first time to buy food. ²¹ But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. ²² We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks."

²³ "It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

²⁴ The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. ²⁵ They prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there.

²⁶ When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. ²⁷ He asked them how they were, and then he said, "How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?"

²⁸ They replied, "Your servant our father is still alive and well." And they bowed low to pay him honor.

²⁹ As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he said, "God be gracious to

you, my son.”³⁰ Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

³¹ After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, “Serve the food.”

³² They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. ³³ The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. ³⁴ When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Remember last week, we talked about the Guilt of the Brothers? In Gen 42, Joseph tried to help his brothers come to grips with their sin and their Guilt. They'd been playing coverup for more than 2 decades. They thought they were succeeding. But in a mysterious turn of events, they started feeling the pressure of God's hand. And it shook them up! They were convinced of Num 32:23, "Be sure your sins will find you out."

Watch the drama develop.

READ vv 15-17 "And the men took...stood before Joseph."

Q: What caught Joseph's attention when he saw his brothers?

A: V 16--Benjamin. When he saw Benjamin, he knew his brothers had passed the test. They'd been honest with him. So what does he do? He invites them to a meal at his house. What a nice gesture on Joseph's part! Right?

The brothers didn't think so. Why not? They were paranoid.

V 18 "And the men were afraid..."

Why were they afraid? I get the feeling that the brothers sense they are living under a dark cloud, that they expect God soon to lower the boom on them. Why? Because of the sin they committed 25 years before. Past sin petrified them with fear.

You know, it's tough to hide guilt!

Quote: Shakespeare once wrote, "Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind."

Illust: When I was an RD, I found Mike O. with a toaster in his room!

Illust:

The brothers thought Joseph was going to ambush them. So...

Vv 19-22 "And they came near to the steward..."

They tried to explain their predicament to Joseph's aid. Remember, he's a perfect stranger, who can do nothing about it! He responded...

Vv 23-25 "And he said, Peace be to you, fear not; your God..."

That's incredible. Do you know what the brother's problem was? They looked at their problem from a totally horizontal perspective. But this polytheistic Egyptian is different. He's the first one to suggest that maybe God had a part in their predicament!

Stop here for a minute. We're a lot like the brothers. How? When it comes to receiving God's forgiveness. The brothers thought Joseph's gracious offer was too good to be true. They couldn't comprehend grace. They had the idea that they had to earn forgiveness. A lot of us are like that.

Illust: C. Stanley story about Sem Prof, illust of grace (43)

Some of us here today are trying to earn what God offers to you freely.

Illust: "Oh, I'm interested in getting saved, but I've got to straighten things up in my life first..."

Q: Have you ever received God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ? It's a gift. You can't earn it. You can't buy it. You can't barter with God for it. Just acknowledge your need for His forgiveness, and ask Him for it.

Here's the summary of the rest of the drama. Joseph came home (26). The brothers bowed down before him in fulfillment of the dream he had in ch 37. In fact, they bowed down twice (26, 28).

Vv 29-31 are heart-gripping.

Vv 29-30 "And he lifted up his eyes, and saw Benjamin...weep..."

I chuckle when I read v 33. Do you know what Joseph did? Remember, the brothers have no idea who he is. But he knows them. He does something that really blows them away!

V 33 "And they sat... acc to his birthright..."

Quote: In his commentary on Genesis, Henry Morris suggests there are no less than 39,917,000 different orders in which 11 individuals could have been seated!

No wonder the brothers "marveled one to another" (33)! It's a miracle!

Illust:

Tran: "OK, great story, but what's the point?"

II. We learn about pursuing forgiveness by considering the significance of Genesis 43.

Forgiving involves more than words...

A. Pursuing forgiveness involves more than words.

1. It did for Joseph.

Q: Look at Joseph's actions. What did he do for the brothers that had hurt him?

A: I see 6 positive actions in ch 43...

1. He invited them to his house (16).
2. He returned Simeon (23).
3. He allowed the dusty travelers to wash their feet, and fed animals (24).
4. He invited them to eat with him (25, 31).
5. He talked with them. He took an interest in "their welfare" (27).
6. He let them enjoy a "merry" time with him (34).

Q: What's the point?

Forgiving involved more than words for Joseph. It involved taking positive action towards the people that had hurt him. So for us.

Listen. It's not enough merely to say, "Well I forgave him. Now I hope he stays out of my life!" That's not biblical forgiveness. Joseph forgave (he didn't forget). And because he forgave, he did kind things towards his brothers.

Q: Are there people you need to forgive?

Illust: C. Stanley suggests "5 symptoms of an unforgiving spirit."

2. It does for God.

Illust: Story about grandfather who burnt himself rescuing grandson (Stanley 30)

Forgiving involved more than words for God. It involved action, costly action.
Rom 5:6-8

Do you know what it cost God to forgive us? The life of His own Son!

Illust:

3. It will for us.

B. Pursuing forgiveness involves overcoming evil with good.

Romans 12:9ff

Response: What are you doing with God's offer of forgiveness?

- 1. Accept it thankfully.*
- 2. Share it joyfully.*