

# The Story of Joseph

## *A Skunk in the Offering*

Part 43 – March 17, 2013

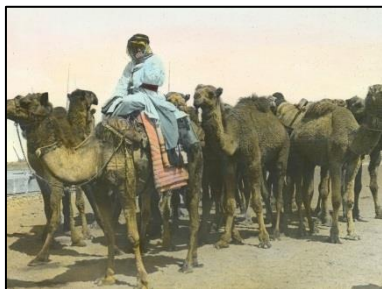


Adam and Jesus: the only two men without a biological father. Both are referred to as “the Son of God”. And Paul tells us that the dust-man had to come first, the Spirit-Man second. (1 Cor 15:45-47) And every second-born son, chosen over a firstborn, in Joseph’s family, depicts them.<sup>1</sup> Joseph’s father, Jacob, a second-born twin, took the father’s blessing and birthright from his firstborn brother Esau, who scorned it, and traded it for a bite to eat.



But, Jesus is only second in ‘earth time’. He *created* Adam. At creation, the Spirit hovered over the water, like a bird, (Gen 1:2) God spoke: “**Let there be light,**” (Gen 1:3) and Jesus was the Word through which all was made. (John 1:1-3) At His baptism, the Spirit descended like a dove, (Mat 3:16) God Spoke, “**This is my Son,**” (Mat 1:17) and Jesus was the Word, made flesh (John 1:14) through which all are saved.

We saw how second-born Simeon, was made to pay the price for all his brothers, to guarantee the coming of the second-born Benjamin, whose name means *son of his father’s power*. And together they portray Jesus’ purpose in paying the price of our sin, through the power of the Spirit, to bring us into God’s presence.



When Joseph was young, his father, Jacob, heard that his twin, Esau, was coming. So, he sent on ahead over 900 goats, sheep, camels, cows, and donkeys, in five herds, to appease Esau.

[He told each servant] “And be sure to say, ‘Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’” For he thought, “I will pacify him [Esau] with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.” – Genesis 32:20 NIV

But, Esau held no grudge. He hugged and kissed Jacob, and refused his gifts of appeasement. The lesson? **Good gifts with wrong motives will be rejected.**

Esau asked, “What do you mean by all these droves I met?” “To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said. But Esau said, [To find, or purchase?] “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.” “No, please!” said Jacob. [Sounding sincere] “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, [which no one can see and live, (Ex 33:20) except through Christ, the second Adam, who came to bring us face-to-face with God (1 Cor 13:12)] now that you have received me favorably.” [Esau accepts them as gifts of gratitude] – Genesis 33:8-10 NIV

<sup>1</sup> We covered this in the sermon “Selecting Simeon” (02/17/13)



Jacob is deceiving Esau again! He doesn't trust him. After pretending to accept Esau's gracious offer to accompany and protect him and his family, he flees. **So often we do right things for wrong reasons:** to earn favor, appease, and manipulate, for approval, praise, or acceptance, because we're insecure, fearful, or we lack of boundaries. As history repeats itself, old, old Jacob prepares his sons to fearfully meet *their* forgiving brother, though they don't know it.



Then their father Israel [Jacob] 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 [Jacob doesn't trust *the man* who had told his sons plainly that the *only thing* he desired them to return with, the only thing that'll save them, is their youngest brother; but, he sends] — a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds." – Genesis 43:11 NIV



Do you like honey? Pistachios? Almonds? These are valuable gifts in a famine. **He's giving his best, but with selfish motives.** He's just 'hedging his bets' to buy favor and appease an angry heart. **Selfless acts, motivated by gratitude, are fragrant to God,** like when Martha's sister, Mary, poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair: "*And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*" (John 12:3)



When you go in someone's home what do you notice right off? The odor! Smell is a powerful thing. Is that fresh baked bread? Roses? Or is somebody boiling Brussels sprouts and vitamins?! **Sacrifices that aren't sincerely selfless just stink!** And they *mask* whatever beautiful fragrance accompanies them. Remember Joseph being taken to Egypt retching on the sickeningly sweet, skunk-like smell of the spice traders' raw materials?



As believers, **the enemy will try to slip a skunk in our offering, by whispering in the subtlest of ways,** that your efforts can't help but influence God, in your favor, in some small way. 'Cause look how cute my little skunks are! How can God not like ... *WOW-they-stink!* **By hedging his bets, Jacob only masks God's glorious mercy** (as well as Joseph's), toward his chosen, functionally-flawed family. And Jacob not only hedges his bets, he doubles down!

"Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return [repay] the silver [symbols of sterling grace and reconciliation] that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake." – Genesis 43:12 NIV

How many brothers first went to buy grain? 10. Each brother's bag of silver was returned. They double it. How many bags is that? They sold Joseph for 20 shekels of silver. (37:28) 21 years later, they go to the royal city to look for him, and because of it, get accused of being spies.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Covered in the sermon "Spy vs. Spy" (01/20/13)



Now, they're heading back, on the spice traders' route, with 20 *bags* of silver to try and undo what 20 *shekels* has done! **Sin always takes us further than we want to go, keeps us longer than we want to stay, and costs us more than we want to pay!** Imagine how God will speak to their hearts on this journey!

[So, Jacob, relented and said] "Take your brother [Benjamin] also and go back to the man at once." – Genesis 43:13 NIV



There's only *one reason* they'll be acceptable in Joseph's sight, and allowed in his presence, and it *ain't* the gifts! When Joseph took Simeon in their place, as a pledge for Benjamin, he said: "You will not see my face again [Now Joseph is representing God] unless your brother [Benjamin] is with you." (Gen 43:3)

The second-born pledge, Simeon, and second-born power, Benjamin, portray the Second Adam! "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6)

Just like Benjamin, who was born where Jesus was born,<sup>3</sup> and whose name his father changed, from a reference to God's curse on Adam, to "*the son of my right hand (i.e. power)*".<sup>4</sup> Jesus said, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:12) And Joseph said, "But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." (Gen 42:20) The brothers, by freewill and choice, must come to Joseph with the son of the father's right hand, or they won't see his face!

[So, Jacob hedges his bets, doubles down, and now *gambles* on God, praying] "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, [What's it gonna be: "I wait for you, O Lord" (Ps 38:15)? "In you, Oh Lord, I put my trust" (Ps 25:1)? "I trust in God's unfailing love" (Ps 13:5)? Not quite,] if I am bereaved, I am bereaved." [What?! God has made so many promises to Jacob!] – Genesis 43:14 NIV

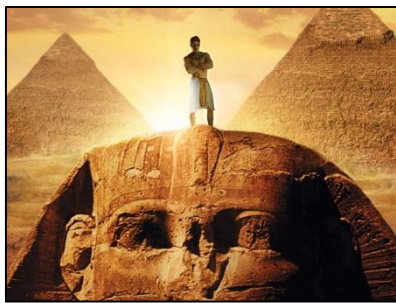
Jacob's prayer of despair shows that he sees God as a long shot and a last resort. "Let's bribe *the man*, cover our bases, say our prayers, genuflect, and whatever else we can think of, and then just resign ourselves to *fate*." **It's not our conditions, but our decisions, that shape us most.**

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. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, [The last time he saw his brother, he was holding him, feeding him, and changing him, as a baby without a mother] he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; [This implies a great feast] they are to eat with me at noon." [The longer you want the banquet to go, the earlier you start] The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph's house. [State mansion; these brothers weren't used to houses, let alone mansions] Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. [Midday banquets in state mansions are *highly abnormal for commoners!* "What's this guy's game?! We did what he said and brought Benjamin to prove we're not spies ... but, how can we prove Benjamin's really our brother?"] 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 ... [CONTINUED]

<sup>3</sup> Which we covered in the Christmas sermon, "Keeping Watch: The Rabbinical Shepherds of Bethlehem" (12/23/12)

<sup>4</sup> Which we covered this in the sermon "Selecting Simeon" (02/17/13)

[Somebody's guilty conscience speaking up?] and take our donkeys." [Yeah, 'cause the second most powerful man in Egypt wants your donkeys!] So they went up to Joseph's steward [who spoke Hebrew] and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. "Please, sir," they said, "we came down here the first time to buy food. But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver [Actually, only *one* did (42:27), the rest did when they got home (42:35);<sup>5</sup> but, the boys don't let the facts get in the way of a panic-stricken, rundown] — the exact weight — in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks." "It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father,<sup>6</sup> has given you treasure in your sacks; [was it the *silver* or the *grain*? Both! The free grain was their salvation (from starvation), and the silver represented Joseph's acceptance of them as family again (also in "Hidden Treasure"), and Joseph had actually *paid* their debt] I received your silver." [That's the *first shock* – and here's the *second*:] Then he brought Simeon out [of Joseph's mansion] to them. – Genesis 43:15-23 NIV



Ancient Jewish oral tradition says that Simeon had been so well fed, that he was no the heaviest and healthiest of the brothers! Joseph, symbolizing God, sends the helper, symbolizing the Spirit, to lead the sons of Israel to a banquet at his mansion, where they find the one punished on their behalf, has been waiting inside! And the only reason they can enter, is because Joseph saw that Benjamin, the second-son of the second wife, the father's right hand, accompanied them!

The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet [that *deserved* shackles! That's *so like* the Lord!] and provided fodder for their donkeys. [I *knew* he wasn't gonna steal 'em! And yet, just like their father, they won't trust the grace and mercy so freely offered; but still think it best to hedge their bets. So,] They prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon ... – Genesis 43:24-25a NIV

The original audience would be yelling, "No! You don't know what you're doing! You don't know who he is! You'll ruin *everything*!" 'Cause you know why? There were six gifts. I mentioned three. But, what was hiding in the honey, pistachios, and almonds: "balm" and "spices" and "myrrh". And what was the unforgettable, sickeningly sweet, skunk-like stench Joseph gagged on, all the way to Egypt, as he cried out to God to save him from his cruel, merciless brothers?

Their [The Midianite Ishmaelite Merchants'] camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh ... – Genesis 37:25b NIV

The boys brought a skunk to the banquet! What do you think that combination will conjure up when Joseph walks into his house?! If they knew whose mansion they were in, who was about to come through that door, they would've recoiled in fear, for they were arranging the worst possible gift: bitter memories of their sin! This is what we offer the Lord, whenever our gifts, deeds, and sacrifices to Him, or others in His name, are motivated by anything other than a grateful desire to bless our gracious God. And, you know when Joseph walks in? Next Sunday. Because, this is where we have to end God's story for today.

<sup>5</sup> As we saw in the sermon: "Hidden Treasure" (02/24/13)

<sup>6</sup> The steward speaks Hebrew, so it's not startling that he knows who they worship