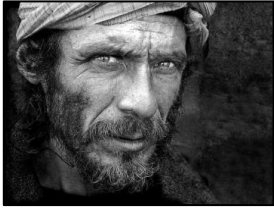


The Story of Joseph

Blast from the Past

Part 44 – March 24, 2013



Joseph keeps his brother, Simeon, in Egypt until the other brothers return with Joseph's only full-brother, Benji. And though Joseph made it clear that Benji is all they need to be received, they decide to return the silver they found in their sacks, and six gifts of appeasement, including three edible gifts.



[Jacob told his sons] “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.” – Genesis 43:11b NIV



But, there were three little ‘skunks’ hiding in their offering: “balm”, “spices”, and “myrrh”. This combination of aromatic gifts is *identical* to what Joseph had been bound to, and retching on, all the way to Egypt, when his wretched, traitorous brothers sold him to spice traders.¹

We're going to repeat several verses from last week, but this time from *Joseph's* perspective.

So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver **[half to return; half to purchase more grain]**, and Benjamin also. **[Look at their priorities; and look what's 'tacked on' at the end: “and Benji too, I guess”]** They hurried down to Egypt **[feverishly, to make up for about six weeks of lost time, waiting for dad's permission to take Benji]** and presented themselves to Joseph **[in all their sweat-soaked, road-dusted, anxiety-fatigued, travel-weary, grimy-toe-jammed splendor]**. When Joseph **[who was eagerly awaiting, and likely had guards posted to rush back and tell him the moment his brothers' blistered feet stepped foot in his city. When Joseph ...]** saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Take these men to my house, **[which, amazingly, means “Treat them exactly as you would me if I was in *their* condition”]** slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; **[which means “BBQ. Banquet. Buffet. Best china.”]** they are to eat with me at noon.” **[which means, “Waste no time. Spare no expense. And prepare a 12-hour feast!”]** The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph's house. – Genesis 43:15-17 NIV



Besides being part of a larger picture of God's sovereign, gracious plan, most of this story centers on a self-absorbed young man maturing and learning the *full meaning* of forgiveness. God is teaching Joseph that **the past does not equal the future, unless you choose to live in it**. Today is new! Move forward! If you drive using only your rearview mirror, what are you doing? Backing up! In the same way, **if you live life looking through a rearview mirror, you're going backwards**.

¹ (Genesis 37:25) Covered in the sermon, “**Scent to Serve**” (05/27/12)

The past should influence today's choices, but it shouldn't *determine* them. But, **if we aren't intentional about moving forward in Christ, we'll reflexively react out of past hurts.**

Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house [because, it's a state mansion, and they're poor nomads, and state mansions often have dungeons, and the guy in power appears to be unpredictable]. 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 [Ironically, *they* are the ones who will overpower *him*, with their pungent presentation, which will trigger the piercing memory of when *he* was seized as a slave] and take our donkeys." [That's just as asinine as thinking we have something to offer that God could possibly want ... *other than* our intimate love and grateful adoration, expressing itself in selfless acts aimed to bless a gracious God] – Genesis 43:18 NIV

But, unaware that he's dying to forgive, embrace, and bless 'em beyond their wildest dreams, they convince themselves the one who saved the world is out to get 'em ... *and your little donkeys too!* So, the sons of Israel refuse to enter, even as Joseph's helper stands at the door calling out and waving them in ... *awkwaaard*.

So they went up to Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house [certain that once inside they'll be *taken against their will*, and frantic to plead their case]. "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 [Joseph's sterling gift of grace, declaring them as his own by refusing to let them pay for their salvation, and instead, paying their debt himself] — the exact weight — [everything required, no more, no less, and leaving no room for anyone, anywhere, at any time, to add anything] in the mouth of his sack [just as we find the gift of salvation by grace through Christ, placed and made ready to be received in *our* mouth, whereby we confess Jesus as our Savior and Lord, and receive Him into our hearts]. So we have brought it back with us [lit. "in our hands/strength/power"]. We have also brought additional silver with us [Same meaning: "in our hands"²] to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our *sacks*." [lit. "flexible container"³, just as our body is the flexible container of our soul. "We're going to earn it with our hands because we don't know the One who put His gift of grace in the mouths of our flexible containers"] "It's all right," [lit. "Shalom", the word they refused to *speak* to 17-year-old Joseph (after he received his coat of authority over them⁴) is the *very word* they now most need spoken to them. It's all right ...] he said. [As gently as the Holy Spirit, knowing that they're ignorantly afraid of the very thing they would desire most if they could only trust and enter in and see for themselves what's inside] "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." ["Your debt has been paid in full; you shouldn't be overwhelmed with fear, but joy!"] Then [to relive their doubts and dread; and to demonstrate it was safe to come in.] he brought [according to rabbinic tradition, a very happy, healthy, and well-fed] Simeon out to them [and Simeon most likely said something like, "Brothers! Where've you *been*?! Why'd you wait?! You've missed out on so much! Why are you still standing outside?! Come inside! You won't *believe* this place! What a spread! I think I've died and gone to heaven!"]. [CONTINUED]

² The Hebrew word used twice here, and translated by the NIV as "with us", is 'yad' (Strong's #H3027).

³ The Hebrew word translated as "sack" or "sacks", is 'amtachath' (Strong's #H572).

⁴ "[They] could not speak a **kind word** [lit. "shalom"] to him." (Gen 37:4) *Shalom* is the Hebrew *hello* and *goodbye*, meaning "peace and wellbeing to you". When Joseph said, "Shalom", they basically said, "Buzz off!". We covered this in the sermon, "**Robe of Wrath**" (01/22/12)

The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet [I assume in silver bowls of scented water] and provided fodder for their [little] donkeys [too!]. [And, demonstrating continued ignorance of the identity, character, and nature of their host] They prepared their gifts [of diplomatic appeasement. Picture these manly men carefully, daintily, arranging, rearranging, and *arguing over* what'll make the best first impression? "Stick 'da nuts behind 'da honey, next 'ta 'da Myrrh. No! 'Dat's 'da balm! Get'cha stinkin' thumb out'a 'da balm, Reuben!"] for Joseph's arrival at noon, [What a strange word this "for" is. It is, no doubt, what's *meant*, but the expression used is so odd, that some translations let it alone; for instance, the KJV and ASV both say: "they made ready the present *against* Joseph". How odd] because they had heard that they were to eat there. – Genesis 43:19-25 NIV

Joseph is so excited to see Benjamin, so eager to forgive his brothers, so ready to reveal himself, and be reunited, and feast and celebrate, there's no way he's concentrating at work. He's canceling meetings, giving away grain, anything to close up shop. And then, racing home! Chariot thundering! Dust clouds billowing! And this time, he won't come to the stable! He pulls right up to the porch and jumps out and runs in and ...

When Joseph came home, [WHAM! A wall of putrid, retched, stink slaps him cold across the face, charging him with stomach churning adrenalin. Cold sweat. Gag reflex. Excruciating recollections firing through his mind in rapid succession. Uncontrollable tears. Injustice! Unfairness! And every bad thing that has ever happened to him, his whole life, can be traced back to the ten ugly men who've filled his house with the stench of their sins against him! And *then ...*] they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house ... – Genesis 43:26a NIV

This story centers on a young man learning the *full meaning* of forgiveness. God is making sure Joseph's forgiveness is going to reach into every nook and cranny and dark corner of his heart. **If we minimize how we've been hurt, we'll forgive superficially.** Joseph must fully recognize the deep suffering his brothers have caused him, or he can't come to full forgiveness in his heart. **If we forgive superficially, we'll be healed superficially.** To find full and complete healing, we must be willing to look our pain full in the face, and completely forgive those who caused it. And it doesn't stop there; **we must forgive the pain of the memories every time they return.** Each and every time that memory flares up, **forgive the offender and give the anger to God.**

Remember the man who said to Jesus: "I do believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) Sometimes *you* need to say to Jesus: "I do forgive; help my unforgiveness!" **"Well, those are nice church thoughts; but you don't know what it's like in my house. If you could see through my eyes you'd see that it's quite impossible."**

The three edible gifts were the best of the land Joseph lived in as a boy. And the best is always served at family celebrations and special occasions. They must hold *tremendously good memories*. It's always all about our choices. The brothers are presenting three fond memories and three nasty stinkers. Question is, will Joseph choose to focus on the good, or the bad and the ugly?

... and they bowed down before him to the ground. – Genesis 43:26b NIV

Joseph's first dream was fulfilled when 10 brothers came to buy grain, and bowed before him.⁵ Now, with Benjamin, 11 brothers bow, fulfilling Joseph's second dream ... *almost*.

⁵ We covered this in the sermon: "**Deeply Ingrained**" (01/13/13)



[FLASHBACK 22 years] “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” When he told his father [Jacob] as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your [step] mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” – Genesis 37:9b-10 NIV



Many have claimed that Joseph’s second dream is never fully fulfilled because Jacob, and Joseph’s step-mom, are never seen bowing to him, even when their reunion is described! It’s a quirk of the story often pointed out, and easily explained away: just because it’s not written, it doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. Except, there’s a slightly bigger problem, it *didn’t*.

It’s *impossible*. In a Hebrew patriarchy, in which the father is the primary social, political, and moral authority figure, it would’ve been a sin for Joseph to allow his father to bow. So, why would God give Joseph a dream in which the fulfillment would make him a party to sin? He wouldn’t. That’s why Joseph’s father, Jacob, rebukes him publically when he shares it. **“Joseph, no. That dream is not from God! God cannot sin, nor tempt man to sin.” “I’m very aware of that, father. But, I must tell you what God has shown me.” “It’s impossible! Your dreams are not of God! And I’ll have no more of this talk!”** And it’s *that rebuke* that seems to embolden the brothers against Joseph, and to sell him. And to convince Joseph that his father had turned against him.⁶ And to cause him to *forget* his dreams.⁷ And God knew that it would do all of that. And that it would lead to this moment, this impossible choice, in Joseph’s house.

He asked them how they were, and then he said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?” They replied, “Your servant our father is still alive and well.” And they bowed low to pay him honor. [Why do they bow again?] – Genesis 43:26b-28 NIV

The brothers couldn’t call their father his servant unless he’d directed them to do so. The second bow is on Jacob’s behalf. And since he’s the patriarch, it’s on behalf of his entire tribe. *That bow*, on behalf of the ‘sun and moon’, is when the second dream is fulfilled! And *that’s* why Jacob *isn’t* recorded bowing. And *that’s* why Joseph *is* recorded bowing ... to *Jacob!* (Gen 48:12) It’s not an oversight; it’s a demonstration of God’s sovereignty!

Jesus looked at them and said, **“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”** – Matthew 19:26 NIV

Joseph couldn’t have imagined a scenario in which God could fulfill what He’d shown him and yet remain a just and righteous God. But here it is, in front of his own eyes, in his own house. When his seemingly impossible dream is fulfilled, he sees God’s power. Likewise, **we must see God working in us, through us, and for us, to forgive those who’ve hurt us. You’re part of a bigger plan!**

Then you’ll grow in confidence that God is not only accomplishing the impossible, in the midst of your pain, but, knowing it was coming, He’d already woven it into your uniquely created purpose. And this is where we have to close God’s story for today.

⁶ We covered this in the sermon, “**Reuben’s Rescue**” (02/10/13)

⁷ We covered this in the sermon, “**Deeply Ingrained**” (01/13/13)