

The Story of Joseph

Out of the Bag

Part 47 – May 19, 2013

Joseph's feast for his unaware brothers has ended. But, his test for 'em has just begun. He hid their silver in their grain sacks, and the cup they think has magical power is in Benjamin's bag.



4,000-year-old Silver vessels

I showed these 4,000-year-old silver cups that were used as gifts by the royal Egyptian family¹ in our story. Here's one restored. It's likely similar to the silver 'cup of divination' Joseph uses for his big plan. He's recreating the conditions of his own betrayal, and setting 'em up **to die to their old self, so they can live in his kingdom.**



They just wanted to get Simeon out of jail, get some grain in their bags, and get Benjamin back home to their dad, none of which, by the way, would've met their deepest needs. This is why, **when we go to Jesus, we end up giving and getting far more than we expect.** And it *rarely* comes the way we think.

Joseph demands far more than they could imagine, because he longs to give 'em infinitely more than they can dream. So, he stages an extraordinary intervention.

When [Joseph's steward] caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. **[Accusing them of taking his master's cup, the symbol of his authority]** But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that!" – Genesis 44:6-7 NIV

Careful, boys; exactly *how* 'far be it'? 22 years? Because, this is the very crime they committed when they took Joseph's robe. In fact, **Benjamin is the only one among 'em who's innocent of betraying the master,** which is why **his return is the only one guaranteed** in the plan, which is why **he had to take their blame.** The plan is to make 'em think they're deciding their brother's fate, when in fact, they'll be choosing their own. Just like *us!*

"We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?" – Genesis 44:8 NIV

¹ Four bronze coffers, marked with the name of Amenemhat II, and containing 153 mostly silver vessels, and other various silver items, were discovered by F. Bisson de la Roque, under the temple of Montu, at El-Tod, in 1936.

Excellent point! Remember what happened when they found that silver?

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?” – Genesis 42:28b NIV

And when they tried to return it, remember what Joseph’s steward told ‘em?

“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.” – Genesis 43:23a NIV



The silver, and this statement, are crucial elements in Joseph’s intervention. If someone wrongs you in a way that can’t be undone, a debt is created. **You can make ‘em pay by tearing ‘em apart** (incurring your own debt), **or absorb the wrongdoing and work through the grief.**

As if they haven’t already said too much, the brothers add this ...

“If any of your servants is found to have it, [the silver cup] he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves.” – Genesis 44:9 NIV

BAM! They’ve taken the bait! Who else in their family was a thief? Joseph and Benjamin’s mom, Rachel. And, who else in their family practiced divination? Rachel’s dad, their grandpa, Laban.



After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. [Jacob had worked on his father-in-law’s farm for 14 years, for the right to marry Rachel] ... But Laban said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.” – Genesis 30:25-27 NIV

Jacob stayed six more years. (Gen 31:41)

[And when he was getting his boys ready to go] ... Rachel stole her father’s [Laban’s] household gods. – Genesis 31:19b NIV

And, grandpa Laban chased ‘em down, and accused ‘em, (Gen 31:30) just like Joseph’s steward. And, Jacob protested, and said to Laban ...

“... if you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live.” – Genesis 31:32a NIV

BAM! Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin. And, though we’re not told when, the shame she brought into Jacob’s house *is* found out. In fact, when God later allows His people to be conquered, because of rampant idolatry, Jeremiah says: “A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children ...” (Jer 31:15)

But, Jacob’s other Hebrew wife, Rachel’s sister, Leah, was faithful to God. And, her sons couldn’t tolerate submitting to their father’s favorite, Rachel’s arrogant, teenage son.

“Very well, then,” [Joseph’s steward] said, “let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; [on behalf of Joseph; however] the rest of you will be free from blame.” – Genesis 44:10 NIV

The silver cup will give ‘em a golden opportunity to condemn and forsake, Rachel’s only remaining son, as a thief *and* idolater. And, it can’t hurt that he’s the likely heir to their father’s sizable estate. And *this* is where that silver plays in.

Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. – Genesis 44:11-12a NIV

When each saw his bag of silver, he must’ve thought to an even *greater* degree: “What is this that God has done to us?!” And, as the steward again ignored it, thought: “Your God has given you treasure in your sacks.” Through the silver, **God looks ‘em in the eyes, and says, “Trust Me. Follow me. Lose your life. And I’ll save you.”** This test goes so far beyond what they expected. But, **a test isn’t a test unless it’s tough.** If you pray for a medical student to pass an exam, **you don’t pray for an easier test, but for the physician-in-training to be up to the challenge.** The same holds true with us, and them.

And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. – Genesis 44:12b NIV

We saw (in last week’s sermon, “The Silver Cup” 05/12/13) how this cup can be seen as foreshadowing Christ when He took the cup of God’s wrath on our behalf.



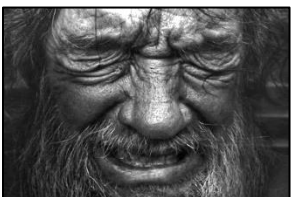
[God told Isaiah to tell his people, regarding the Messiah] “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.” – Isaiah 35:3-5 NIV

But, **Jesus didn’t smite anyone. He didn’t come with a sword. He didn’t take power, He gave power. He came with a vengeance to serve.** It’s a big part of why He was rejected. So, was Isaiah *wrong*? No.



Jesus didn’t come to bring divine retribution, but to bear it, so we can have true life through *His* death. But, **to receive it, we must, in turn, die to the self that denies His authority.** We must do, as the brothers do, when they see that silver cup in Benjamin’s parcel.

At this, they tore their clothes. – Genesis 44:13a NIV



It’s the **Hebrew way of expressing a torn/broken heart.** That’s why the prophet Joel later says to “rend your heart, not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate ...” (Joel 2:13) They’ve come full circle, beginning from when they tore off Joseph’s clothes, ripped his blood-soaked robe, and offered it to their father.

Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.” – Genesis 37:34-35a NIV

To have their deepest needs met, they must feel the grief they've inflicted, and die to self. And they do. And they tear their clothes. **Growth comes through grief, and life through death.**

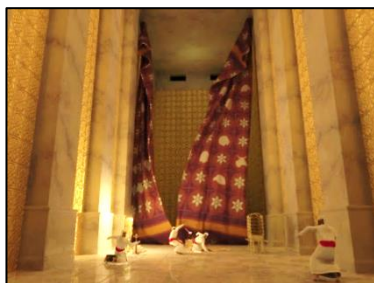


[Shortly before His death] Jesus [said], “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” [The silver cup was buried in a sack of wheat kernels] – John 12:23-24 NIV

That’s why, to provide for us eternal growth and life beyond life, **the Ultimate Life had to die, and the ultimate Father had to grieve.**

[Isaiah saw the Lord in full expression, Father, Son, and Spirit] “... I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train [skirt or hem (Strong’s H7757, shuwl)] of his robe filled the temple. [Glory and honor are signified by a train (that’s why wedding dresses have ‘em). God’s robe is spilling from heaven, and just the tail end of the hem fills the Temple!] Above him were seraphs, [fiery beings (Strong’s H8314, saraph)] each with six wings: [three sets] With two wings they covered their faces, [representing the Father, whose face cannot be seen] with two they covered their feet, [representing the Seed of Man, whose feet would be pierced, as foretold (Gen 3:15)] and with two they were flying. [Representing the Spirit who flew down as a dove at Jesus’ baptism] And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty ...’” [one “holy” for each] – Isaiah 6:1b-3a NIV

According to Jewish custom, the Temple veil, a six story, purple curtain-barrier, to the Holy of Holies, was referred to as the hem of God’s garment. What’s the Father do the moment Jesus dies?



And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. – Matthew 27:50-51a NIV

God’s heart is so torn, He rips His royal robe all the way down to the very end of the hem. **The Son absorbed our sin and died, and the Father’s grief opened the way to His presence.** And though the brothers were free to go their own way, it says ...

Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city. – Genesis 44:13b NIV



No longer brothers of betrayal, they’re brothers of devotion. But, they are brothers: Rabbinical tradition says they beat Benjamin on the shoulders on the way back, saying, “Thief, and son of a thief, you’ve brought the same shame upon us that your mother brought upon our father.” The rabbis also taught that because innocent Benjamin bore their guilt, shame, and abuse, God chose to dwell between his shoulders, in the land of Benjamin, behind the veil, in His holy Temple.

When they return, with their clothes torn, Joseph gives ‘em the one thing they most need and least expect, which is ... next time; because, this is where we have to close God’s story for today.