

(Genesis) 58 - the Persistent Power of a Guilty Conscience

by S. Lewis Johnson

The sermon explores the theme of the persistent power of a guilty conscience, using the story of Joseph's brothers in Genesis 42 as a case study.

Duration: 54:50

Scripture: Genesis 37:12-36, Genesis 42, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Guilty Conscience"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Joseph and his brothers from the book of Genesis. He highlights Joseph's plan to test his brothers' character and remorse by putting one of them in prison while allowing the rest to go home. The preacher emphasizes how Joseph's intentions were misunderstood by his brothers, leading to their disbelief and fear. He also mentions Jacob's reluctance to send Benjamin to Egypt, as he fears losing another son. The sermon concludes by highlighting Joseph's interrogation tactics and the opportunity for the brothers to reflect on their past actions.

Transcript

Now let's turn to Genesis chapter 42 for our scripture reading. We are in that part of the book of Genesis that has to do with the life of Jacob and Joseph. Joseph has been sold into captivity and by the providence of God, Pharaoh has had a dream or two that Joseph was able to interpret and therefore Joseph has been exalted to be the equivalent of the prime minister of Egypt.

He has made preparation for the years of famine that were prophesied through the dreams of Pharaoh. And now the famine is extending over all of that part of the earth. In fact the last verse of chapter 41 reads, And the people of the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth.

And so Jacob back in the land of Palestine was beginning to feel the crunch just as were many others. So chapter 42 begins at that point. Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt and Jacob said to his sons, Why are you staring at one another? And he said, Behold I have heard that there is grain in Egypt.

Go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die. Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his

brothers, for he said, I am afraid that harm may befall him.

So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. Now Joseph was the ruler over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land.

And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, Where have you come from? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them and said to them, You are spies. You have come to look at the undefended parts of the land.

Then they said to him, No my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men.

Your servants are not spies. Yet he said to them, No, but you've come to look at the undefended parts of the land. But they said, Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan.

And behold, the youngest is with us, with our father today, and one is no more. And Joseph said to them, It is as I said to you, you are spies. He reminds us of a good communist interrogator, because that's what they keep saying.

They keep saying the same thing over and over again, hoping to convince you by the repetition of it. You can offer them all kinds of rational reasons why a certain thing is not so. But they just keep repeating it.

And so that is the way Joseph is treating the brothers now. And he says in the 15th verse, By this you will be tested by the life of Pharaoh. You shall not go out from this place unless your youngest brother comes here.

Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies. So he put them all together in prison for three days.

Now Joseph said to them on the third day, Do this and live, for I fear God. If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison. But as for the rest of you, go carry grain for the famine of your households.

And bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die. And they did so. Then they said to one another, Truly we are guilty concerning our brother.

They're referring to Joseph. Because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us. They refer all the way back to the time when they put Joseph in the pit.

Twenty years before this, and heard his cries from the pit. Because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen. Therefore this distress has come upon us.

And Reuben answered them saying, Did I not tell you, do not sin against the boy. And you would not listen. Now comes the reckoning for his blood.

They did not know however that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. And he turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

Evidently he turned and went off into a small room by the side. Because it says he returned to them. And he went and he wept in the room.

And then he came back. Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack. And to give them provisions for the journey.

And thus it was done for them. So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there. And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money.

And behold it was in the mouth of his sack. Then he said to his brothers, my money has been returned. And behold it is even in my sack.

And their hearts sank. And they turned trembling to one another saying, what is this that God has done to us? They realized that now they were laid open to the charge of theft. And that is why they are so concerned.

When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. Saying, the man, the Lord of the land spoke harshly with us and took us for spies of the country. But we said to him, we are honest men.

We are not spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.

And the man, the Lord of the land said to us, by this I shall know that you are honest men. Leave one of your brothers with me and take grain for the famine of your households and go. But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies but honest men.

I will give your brother to you and you may trade in the land. Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks that behold every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money they were dismayed.

And their father Jacob said to them, you have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more and you would take Benjamin. All these things are against me.

In the Hebrew text at that point there's a great deal of stress resting upon Jacob. Me ye have bereaved of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more and you would take Benjamin.

All these things are against me. And even in the position of the words in certain of the clauses. Stress rests upon the fact that Jacob is thinking primarily of himself.

So his remark is self-orientated. And of course it is very, very irrational for a believer to ever say all these things are against me. We shall see he was terribly wrong right at this point.

Then Reuben spoke to his father saying you may put my two sons to death if I do not bring them back to you. Put him in my care and I will return him to you. That was an extravagant strange kind of thing for Reuben to say.

Why would the death of two grandchildren more console Jacob for the loss of his son. But Jacob said my son shall not go down with you for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. The subject for today in the exposition of the book of Genesis is the persistent power of a guilty conscience. Chapter 42 records the first visit of Joseph's brethren into Egypt.

And that of course is not an especially notable matter. On another score however it is a very notable chapter. It's one of the Bible's greatest on the overwhelming power of a nagging guilty conscience.

One of man's greatest punishments comes from guilt from past sinful deed. As most of us who have experienced this know. These very ordinary events of chapter 52 the visit into Egypt, the appearance before the Lord of the land, and then the return to the land are just ordinary events.

But they combine to recall with great intensity an old sinful deed on the part of the brothers of Joseph. I think even the very name of the land to the south Egypt must have spoken fear into their hearts. And then when they went down into the land and the Lord of the land spoke harshly to them.

No doubt that had an influence upon them also. When they were put in prison they could hardly help but remember the events of twenty years before when they had so shamefully treated their brother Joseph. The Bible says be sure your sin will find you out.

And God gives us guilt and a guilty conscience because well be sure your sin will find you out. And therefore we may expect that when we have sinned and if there is no reconciliation we may expect that God will continue to deal with us until there is a resolution of that particular problem. They came finally to the conclusion that it was retribution for this great crime of their lives.

And so they expressed that. Now comes the reckoning for his blood. Therefore is this distress come upon us they say.

It's rather interesting to observe in the Bible what is said about conscience. Now conscience is something that hardly appears in the Old Testament at all. But it certainly appears in the New Testament.

Someone has said conscience doesn't conscience does not tell us what is right and wrong. But whether we are what we are doing agrees with the principles we know. Now since we do know a great deal of the principles of right and wrong conscience does at times speak of that which is right as over against that which is wrong.

But primarily it tells us whether what we are doing agrees with the principles that we believe are correct. The Bible speaks of a weak conscience. The Bible speaks of a defiled conscience.

The Bible speaks of an evil conscience. The Bible speaks of a sacred conscience. The Bible speaks of a pure conscience.

It speaks of a good conscience and it even speaks of a beautiful conscience. That last point I think is something special. There is a conscience which while intrinsically good is not very outwardly attractive to others because it's filled with scruples.

We all know individuals who are in bondage to certain little scruples. They are not taught necessarily in Scripture. But there are things that they have thought are in Scripture.

But the Bible speaks of a beautiful conscience. That is an individual who is guided by the principles of the Word of God and not by a handful of scruples which he himself may have interpreted as being scriptural principles. The Bible speaks of a conscience being seared and so it is possible for the conscience to speak wrongly to us.

Therefore it's not an unfailing guide. So perhaps it is true to say that conscience does not really tell us what is right and wrong primarily, but it rather tells us whether what we are doing agrees with the principles that we know. Now there are other lessons here in this chapter besides that one, a persistent power of a guilty conscience.

For example there is again taught here with very great emphasis this continuing lesson that we see in almost every chapter, the providence of God. God is interested in bringing the nation of Israel down into the land of Egypt in order to preserve the nation from the evil of the land of Canaan. But when they come down into the land, those eleven brothers and Jacob, they must come down there as a unified family because if they enter into the land of Egypt not unified then disintegration will follow and there will be loss of racial identity and absorption into the Egyptians and consequently Israel will not remain a people that are alone and separate from others as they have done down to this present day by the providence of God.

And the one thing that might disturb their unity and cause this disintegration is this great sin of which the brothers are guilty against Joseph. And so this family shattering sin against Joseph must be settled by reconciliation. And so that is, it seems to me what God is doing by bringing the brothers down into Egypt, bringing them into contact with Joseph who is now the prime minister in order that the questions that remain between them may be settled.

Therefore we see not only the persistence of the divine purpose that is the fulfilling of the decrees of God, but we also see some other lessons as well. I don't want to pass by that fulfillment of the decrees or promises of God because you can see how in all of these events he is working out his purposes. Griffith Thomas has written a rather helpful little book on the book of Genesis and he has said in these days when law is said to reign supreme, when science can only speak of cause and effect, and when Christian people are apt to concentrate attention on methods, principles, and laws rather than on the source of all these things, it's particularly necessary to hold fast the old foundation belief that there is a divinity that shapes our ends.

Refuse them how we will. It is important we remember that it is God personally who is controlling all of these events and making them ultimately conform to the purpose that he has in the life of Joseph and in the life of Jacob and in the life of those brothers. One of the other lessons that you learn is that true repentance involves not only the recognition of our sin, but a conduct in accordance with it.

Now the repentance is the change of mind, but the change of mind is manifested in the forsaking of the evil works. Mr. Thomas goes on to say that in our childhood's days many of us learn what are still the very best definitions of repentance. One is in the church catechism.

He speaks of the Anglican church. Repentance, whereby we forsake sin. And he said the other was in our hymn book, though it is not often found in children's hymn books today.

It is not enough to say I'm sorry and repent and then go on from day to day just as we always went. Repentance is to leave the sins we loved before and show that we in earnest grieve by doing them no more. So repentance is not simply awareness of sin.

Repentance is awareness of sin, confession of sin, conviction over our sin, and then the forsaking of that particular power. And I guess the last lesson and the one I want to emphasize in the conclusion is the blind irrationality of a believer's human reasoning. Jacob says all these things are against me, but oh how wrong Jacob was, as we shall see.

Now let me remind you of the situation. Joseph is in the land of Egypt. He's living in lavish circumstances.

We know from archeology that the Egyptians at this time were a great people. The walls of Egyptian palaces still exist, and they attest the magnificence of the life of the pharaohs of Joseph's day. Even the furniture which exists shows that it was an elegant kind of life in which Joseph had now found a place.

There were the choirs of musicians who were singing everywhere. There were rare perfumes that rose from vases of gold and bronze and alabaster, and they had very thick carpets that the feet sank deeply into as they walked upon them. They lived in very luxurious times.

Jacob of course was in the land, and the famine was beginning to touch the land. And the brothers were brothers who now twenty years after the time that they had put Joseph into that pit were nevertheless still deep down within their hearts feeling guilt over what they had done. They had never told Jacob, their father, what had really happened.

So far as he knew, Joseph was dead. And so far as they knew, he may well have been dead, but they did not know it definitely. So here we have Jacob thinking that things were going against him.

The brothers who were hiding guilt over their sin. And Joseph now living in very lavish circumstances in the land of Egypt. A very important man in one of the greatest kingdoms of that time.

Well when the famine began to touch the land, Jacob having heard a report that there was grain in the land of Egypt said to the brothers as they were standing around evidently in perplexity, go back and buy us a little food. So he said to them to do that. He referred to the fact that they were standing around perplexed and looking at one another and said, why are you looking at one another? Go get us something to eat.

Still Jacob is a man of decision and so he tells them to go down to Egypt. Egypt, that word must have struck terror to their hearts because it brought back all the memories of what they had done to Joseph. But Jacob specified, now don't take Benjamin with you.

So it's clear that after all these years he still distrusts these brothers. Dr. Barnhouse in his commentary on the book of Genesis says the word Egypt like the word rope must have sounded like the word rope in the house of a man who hanged himself. So when he said to them go down to Egypt.

There was this sinking feeling that came into their hearts. One of the ways in which God deals with us is to touch the point where we need it most. The thing that we try to hide up and hide and cover up from him is

the thing that he will touch.

And so occasionally he just comes in and he just shakes the nest. And the thing that really was the controversy between the Lord God and those brothers was what they had done to Joseph. And so now after all these years he's going to speak the word and the men are forced now to deal with the problem of their lives.

It's the way that he deals with all of us. And he afflicts us when we refuse to confess our sin and to make it right. The psalmist says before I was afflicted I went astray but now I keep thy word.

Afflictions are God's ways of bringing us to obedience when we will not obey through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. Well when the brothers come down to the land of Egypt there is Joseph. I wonder the Bible doesn't say so far as I can tell anything about Joseph's mind but I wonder if Joseph had really planned this.

I wonder if he had said to some of his servants now when Hebrew men come down I want you to tell me because I want to be there when the Hebrew men come to buy grain. He knew that ultimately they were going to have to come down to the land. So it may well have been he planned all of this.

And so when those brothers appeared word was sent to the prime minister some Hebrews are here and you said that we should notify you when they're here if you want to see them. They're going to meet with us at 10 o'clock this morning and they're going to make arrangements for buying grain. So Joseph was there.

Now whether it was because he had planned it or whether it was simply the providence of God that he happened to be there that morning the Bible doesn't say. And it may well have been just that he happened to be there that morning and there the brothers were. But at any rate he came into touch with the brothers and we read in the sixth verse of chapter 42 and Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

Now remember he had had those dreams earlier which he had told to his brothers and that their sheaves of grain had bowed down to him. And they had interpreted it and so had he as a time is to come when you're going to bow down and worship me. And so here we have unconscious fulfillment on the part of these men of those early dreams.

But so far as Joseph was concerned those early dreams were of all the brothers bowing down before him. One of them is missing here. And so Joseph remembered those dreams and he may have remembered there are only 10 here but all of the brothers were to bow down.

What about the 11th? And that may have brought to his mind the question of Benjamin. At any rate when he sees them he recognizes them. They don't recognize him because he was only a young boy of 17 when they put him in the pit and they were grown men.

Grown men don't change a lot between the ages of 25 and 50. Now when they get beyond 50 the change is fast. And also when they're below 25 the change is fast too.

You all have seen young boys 15 and when you see them at 20 you wouldn't recognize them. They look so bad when they're 20 as over against 15. But at any rate there's a lot of change in the early part of the life.

Not much change in the middle part of the life. A lot of change later on. So when Joseph now a man of 37 years of age met these men.

They were much older. He remembered them because they have not changed that much. But he's changed a great deal.

And so when they look at him they don't recognize him. Joseph is speaking to them by means of an interpreter too. And he's speaking the Egyptian language.

And in addition he was dressed like the Egyptians. He was clean shaven. And they had these long beards because they were men who came from the land of Canaan.

So you can understand then this interview. And as he saw them he recognized them. He saw to it they would not recognize him by continuing to speak to them.

And he spoke to them harshly. Now we should not feel sorry for these brothers because Joseph gave them some rough handling. In the first place it was not vengeance on his part.

The context makes it plain that he has a great deal of warm affection for them and much mercy is exhibited to them. He doesn't even charge them for the grain. He moves out of the room and weeps over his feelings for them.

And then we should remember that they were hard men. These are the men who had massacred a whole village. And not only that they are the men who had put Joseph in prison and sat down to eat a meal.

Tantalized him. Sitting down to eat a meal while he is in the pit crying to let them out. Let him out to show some mercy to him.

So we shouldn't feel sorry for them. And in addition no doubt Joseph whether intentionally or whether guided by God is going to test the mettle of these brothers to see if there is any change in them since twenty years when they put him in that pit. The methods that he uses with them Luther says are the same methods that God uses when he deals with us to bring us to repentance.

He must deal roughly with us at times. And so Joseph is dealing roughly with them from that standpoint. He tells them that they are spies.

You've come to look at the undefended parts of the land. They say no we have come to buy food. We're the sons of one man.

And that was true. They were the sons of more than one woman but they were the sons of one man. And furthermore the youngest is with our father today.

And then they say and one is no more. Now their honesty tails off into vagueness here. Because of course that's a reference to Joseph.

And when they say one is no more. That's all they've ever said evidently to Jacob. They've never told him the truth and they do not tell Joseph the full truth here.

They say one is no more and the impression one gets is well he must be dead. But they are not telling the truth. John Ruskin has some very good words about truth.

Mr. Ruskin points out that a person can lie even by saying nothing. Because the essence of lying is in deception. Not in words.

A lie may be told by silence. A lie may be told by equivocation. A lie may be told even by an accent on a syllable.

A lie may be told by a glance of the eye that attaches a peculiar significance to a sentence. All these kinds of lies Mr. Ruskin goes on to point out are worse and baser by many degrees than a lie plainly worded. So the essence of lying is not in the words that we use.

The essence of lying is in the deception that we practice. Now they are practicing deception. They say one is no more.

That's true as far as they go. As far as they know one is no more. But that does not tell the real truth.

And they have never told Jacob the real truth since that time. Well Joseph in a stroke of genius says I think that you boys need to be confined. And so he confines them.

And again God uses this confinement because this is precisely what they have done to Joseph so many years before. And therefore they have three days in which to remember their crime. Now Joseph is a very merciful man because he himself spent three years in prison.

They spend three days. And so every opportunity is given for them to reflect upon the fact that they're in Egypt. This is the place to which they've sold Joseph.

And they're in Egypt. And they're in prison. And as far as they know Joseph is a slave in the land.

So they're getting an opportunity to think over their past. Well Joseph comes on afterwards and makes a new offer to them. He had made an offer.

Now I'm going to put all eleven of you in prison and let one of you go back and get your younger brother. And if you bring him down well then that will show that you're honest men and you're not spies. You can sense his excitement in this situation even in the account because you see him wavering in what he's going to do.

He comes back after three days and says no we're not going to do it that way. We're going to put one of you in prison and we're going to let the rest of you go home. And then you bring the brother down and we will release the one.

And he takes Simeon of the eleven of the ten brothers. And he binds Simeon right before their eyes. So again they are caused to reflect upon what they did to him twenty years before.

He thought evidently three days was enough to start their conscience working. So he makes this new offer. Well their conscience has been awakened and so they say to one another truly we are guilty concerning our brother because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us yet we would not listen.

Therefore this distress has come upon us. So their conscience is awakened. This incidentally so far as we know is the only acknowledgment of guilt in all the book in all of the book of Genesis.

Isn't that an interesting thing? The only person who has the only persons who have acknowledged their guilt in the book of Genesis are the seven men who say we are guilty concerning our brother because we saw the distress of his soul. So their conscience is awakened. Their memory recalls their deed and their reason explains why all of this is happening.

Therefore this distress has come upon us. Well Reuben speaks up at this time. Now Reuben is a very weak one.

And so weakness reproaches badness which is always not so good. So Reuben's statement which is to the effect did not tell you. I told you so.

He's had 20 years in order to right the wrong and he's done nothing about it and so he reproaches the others. Well as they leave they leave with their grain and Joseph has the money put back into the sacks. Later on a day or two later when they one of them goes to one of the sacks in order to get some of the grain.

He opens it up and there in the mouth of his sack is the money that he had paid for the grain. That strikes terror into his heart because now he says the man down who's the Lord of the land is going to think that I'm a thief. And so they all trembling look around at one another and they say what is this that God has done to us.

That by the way is the first mention of the Lord's name by these brothers here in this chapter. Well when they get back they tell the story to Jacob. This is the first time that they're ever honest with Jacob so far as we can tell.

And it's not surprising that Jacob has a hard time believing them because he's had 20 years of dealing with these brothers and he's been suspicious the whole 20 years that they have not told him the full truth about Joseph. And so he listens but he listens very suspiciously to the things that they say while they are finally being generally honest with him. Well as they reach and record what has happened they open up their sacks and they discover that every single individual who went down there has their money in their sacks.

And then they are truly dismayed because all of them now face the charge of thievery. And they realize that this may mean even dire punishment for them. You can see that they misunderstand the intentions of Joseph.

They do not understand that this is really something that is a reflection of the mercy that he has for them. This past week I was reading of a reading about a preacher who went to a minister's conference that was his first mistake. But anyway he went to this minister's conference and that morning they had four long hours of unproductive discussion.

And finally he arose in the meeting for the first time. And the man who was the moderator said the chairman recognizes the standing minister. And he said brother chairman I'm not standing for recognition I'm standing for recreation.

Intentions are often misunderstood and they did not understand the good intentions that Joseph had. And so Jacob when he hears the story says I'm bereaved of my children. Joseph is no more.

Simeon is no more. And now you want to take Benjamin. I want I'm in danger of losing three of my sons.

I'm not going to do it. His sober courage fails him. And so he says all these things are against me.

Now that is most irrational. And it's not surprising now that Jacob refuses for the moment because he's not in a very good state of mind. Now let me close by just pointing out two or three of the lessons that stand out here in this chapter.

The first is the one that I've used as the title of this message. And it is the persistent power of a guilty conscience. You can see it in the mention of the word Egypt.

They have to go down into the land. They are in prison. They must face Joseph.

All of these things are designed by the Lord God to bring home to them their guilt. Even when they speak and have to say one is no more. They are caused to reflect upon the story of Joseph and their relationship to him.

Bring the youngest to me is also a reminder to them of their guilt. And the return of the money exposes them to further difficulty with this man in Egypt. So the whole situation has become very, very difficult for them.

It's not surprising then that in the midst of it they blurt out not having been asked about this. Truly we are guilty concerning our brother because we saw the distress of his soul and yet we would not listen. Therefore this distress is come upon us.

Reminds me of King Herod. King Herod had a feast and at his feast Salome danced. And in the midst of it in the midst of his cups he said to Salome I'll give you anything you ask up to a half of my kingdom.

She rushed home to Mama and the mother said I want the head of John the Baptist on a platter. And so John the Baptist's head is brought on a platter because Herod says he must keep his word. That was a very evil thing.

When something is against the will of God one should never keep his word. It's more important to keep God's word than man's word. But nevertheless John the Baptist's head was brought and Herod didn't like it.

But nevertheless in order to be faithful to his word he had John's head cut off. Wasn't long after that till reports reached King Herod. King Herod of a man who was going about in the land and performing mighty miracles and preaching with great power and conviction.

And he said John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. His conscience spoke before his mind had had an opportunity to marshal arguments against the resurrection of Christ. I remember the story of a man who was debating with another man about the existence of hell.

They had this long lengthy discussion. He kept insisting no there is no such thing as a fiery hell. And so far as he was concerned he had won the argument.

That night he went home to his hotel room and in the midst of the night about two o'clock and he was on the front of the hotel. There was a street and then some buildings on the other side. One of those buildings caught on fire.

And in the middle of the night he was awakened from his bed and he saw the windows just covered with flames. He said afterwards my first thought is I'm in hell. And again his conscience had spoken before his mind had had a chance to marshal all of those good arguments with which he had won the argument the night before.

And the conscience, the persistent power of a guilty conscience. And I want to say to you ladies and gentlemen that there is nothing that is more of a divine punishment for our sin than a guilty conscience. Be sure your sin will find you out.

Now the next thing that this chapter stresses to me is the nature of true repentance. They have confessed their sin. But confession of sin is not repentance.

The acknowledgement of guilt is not repentance. Judas himself said I have betrayed an innocent man. Went out and committed suicide.

Judas never repented. He regretted what he had done. But there is a great deal of difference between regret and repentance.

And the nature of true repentance is such that it is more than the confession of sin. True repentance is manifested in works of repentance that follow. As John the Baptist said bring forth works meet for repentance.

It's not enough to say I have sinned. But there must be the forsaking that follows. That is the evidence of genuine repentance.

Repentance is a change of mind with respect to the Lord. With respect to our form of life. But if it is true it will manifest itself in fruit.

This past week I read a very short treatise on the life of Thomas Chalmers. He was one of the greatest of the Scots in the 19th century in the preaching of the word. Mr. Chalmers was not a great theologian.

Although he was a professor of divinity at New College in Edinburgh. But he was a man who was used of God in a remarkable way. He had been in a little country parish in Fifeshire by the name of a little town by the name of Kilmarney.

And there he had been as so many of the Scottish ministers of the 19th century in the early 19th century. He had just been going through the motions. People were coming to church.

The glory of the Church of Scotland had departed. They had many ministers but most of them were moderate and liberal. Mr. Chalmers himself said that the ministry was a great thing to be in because all you needed was a couple of hours of preparation on Saturday night for the sermon on Sunday morning and you had the rest of the week to yourself.

And he also was extremely interested in science and in other matters and became rather expert in some of those things during those days. I can remember years ago at Dallas Seminary after the fall semester began at the end of about ten days or two weeks a young man came up to me and said, Dr. Johnson I have a question I'd like to ask you. He said, what does a minister do? Well that really floored me.

I thought that a man who was coming to seminary might have some idea of what a minister might do. I said, what do you mean? Well he said you're responsible to preach a sermon on Sunday morning which

will last about an hour the total service. But what do you do the rest of the week? And I remember saying I don't think you're going to be very long here at Dallas Theological Seminary.

In fact I'm wondering exactly how you happen to get in. Well I tried to answer him as best I could and two weeks later he was no more as the brother said about Joseph. Where that fellow is today I don't know.

But I hope he's got a better idea of what it means to attempt to minister the word of God. Well Thomas Chalmers had a very interesting experience. He came into a deep relationship with the Lord God.

Finally became very much disturbed about his own spiritual condition. He later spoke about how he had thought about eternity from the standpoint of silence. But now came to think about eternity from the standpoint of the word of God.

He became one of the outstanding ministers in Scotland with a great personal relationship to the Lord God and communicated that to many people. He was not a great theologian, though he was a very learned man. But he was an extremely influential man in the Church of Scotland and many of the greatest of the preachers in the 19th century studied under Thomas Chalmers.

One man who also was at New College in Edinburgh the same time that Chalmers was there was a man by the name of John Duncan. He taught Old Testament. And they called him in Scotland Rabby or Rabbi.

They pronounced it Rabby. Rabby Duncan. And he was a very influential man.

When I was studying at the University of Edinburgh some of the faculty members occasionally would quote John Duncan or Rabby Duncan. A man once went to Mr. Duncan and said to him how he asked him how he got along with Mr. Chalmers who was very influential in the in the Church of Scotland. He said oh nobly though very inferior I took the liberty of differing with him sometimes about doctrine.

One day when he came down to my house for a little refreshment. That means tea among the Scots. I found fault with his definition of faith.

My doctrine about faith was better than his. But he went to prayer and his faith was better than mine. It is possible to have a better doctrine of faith but not have a better faith.

And Rabby Duncan acknowledged that Thomas Chalmers had a better faith. Now Mr. Chalmers has a great sermon on 1st Corinthians chapter 2 in which he talks about the importance of moving from dead orthodoxy into living faith. And he speaks about congregations such as this congregation right here that begin the year under the ministry of a man who teaches the truth of God.

He comments upon the fact that there are often congregations that love to come and hear the exposition of the word of God. They agree with the things that they hear because the things are orthodox. But at the end of the year they are no different from that state in which they began the year.

They are not seeking to know the law of God in a more in a deeper way at the end of the year. There is no real earnest humbling produced by the word of God. There is no growth in piety.

No growth in the understanding of the word of God in an experiential way. That's a great challenge. You know that's a great challenge to a congregation and a great challenge to an individual.

Is it true that we finished last year listening to expositions of the word of God that are orthodox and true in general to the word of God but we are no different? Is it possible that after all of these Sundays together hearing the word of God and the days in between thinking about the things of the Lord that we are no better, no farther along the road of a relationship with the law of God that is experiential in growth, in piety, and worship, and love for God, and love for the lost? Is it possible in the chapel where we hear the word of God that that is true? True repentance involves the forsaking of our sin. It's possible to be convicted of our sin, convinced concerning things in the word of God, but the effects are missing. May the Lord God give us those effects.

Now I must say one last thing. Jacob was a very irrational man when he said all these things are against me. Now Joseph he took for dead.

Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt. Mysterious hands were trying to clutch Benjamin and drag him from the sheltering of home. In this long and tortuous life of Jacob he truly had reached a low point so he thought.

The loss of Joseph when it stood alone was perhaps not enough to overthrow him completely. After all he had a noble heart produced by the grace of God. But it was the coming together of these many things, Joseph, Simeon, and now Benjamin, and it's when all things seem to press down upon us at the same time.

This simultaneous dark concurrence and incident of the things, incidents of the things that causes us to cry out all these things are against me. And so in this dark hour Joseph looked around and said that everything seemed to be pressing down against him. Now mind you this is the person who knows the Lord God who will later say that nothing can stand against him.

That when we have him we have everything. What shall we say to these things if God be for us who can be against us the scriptures say. Now the delightful thing about this from the standpoint of the believer is that Jacob was so utterly mistaken.

As a matter of fact when he said all these things are against me all these things really were for him. He just didn't know the end from the beginning. He took it for granted that Joseph had been slain but Joseph was the prime minister in Egypt.

He took it for granted that Simeon was now in an alien prison and while he was detained the most important man in Egypt was his own brother who was longing to make himself known to him. And when he shrank from horror for the loss of Benjamin his full blood brother Joseph. For they had not only the same father but the same mother Rachel was yearning over Benjamin and longing to bless him if he could just get him down to the land of Egypt.

And Jacob thinking of the famine and thinking of the harm that that was working in the midst of his family. Little realized that he now had entree into the source of all of the supplies of the land of Egypt built up by Joseph as a result of the sovereign providence of God. Things never seemed darker to Jacob and so in the agony of despair he calls out all these things are against me.

But at that very moment he didn't know it but at that very moment everything was brightening toward the sunrise. And it's almost as if the Lord God was all right at this very moment just about to say beloved it's the morning time now. That's not an unusual experience for a believer.

Take the apostle Paul. He had been called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles to the Gentile world and they laid hands upon him and put him in a Roman prison. Can you not imagine Paul Lord you said I was an apostle to the Gentiles.

There are many Gentiles that I'm not reached yet. I've got to write letters and so he wrote letters not thinking about that great commission which would be fulfilled by those very letters which he poured out from his warm heart in the midst of his imprisonment. So we have Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians and Philemon.

We have those great epistles which have ministered to the Gentiles over the face of the earth brought about by the imprisonment that he wondered how it could possibly be in the will of God. Now you know when we get to heaven we're going to have some very interesting experiences. I love the thing that Mr. Moody said when he got to heaven he was going to spend one thousand years in the presence of the Lord Jesus and then he was going to say where is Paul.

Well there are lots of things that I want to do when I get to heaven. But I can imagine that Paul and Jacob occasionally run into each other in heaven. You know what I think they say.

We sure were stupid when we were down here on the earth. You said Jacob all these things are against me and all these things were really for your good. Working by the will of a father who works all things together for good to those who love him to those who are the called, elected according to his purpose.

And then Jacob said yes but what about you. You were in prison and you wondered about that commission to the whole world and you were writing letters which God has used since that time. We truly were stupid.

And if I was listening to that conversation I'd say I'd like to tell you how stupid I've been too. And I'm sure you'd want to chime in also because for the saints of God if God is for us who can be against us. There is never a time when all these things are against us unless we have a guilty conscience.

And then God works for our good even then to bring us to face the fact of our iniquity to confess it and to forsake it. If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ we invite you to put your trust in him. Pass from death into life, receive everlasting life the forgiveness of sins and join the happy company of the saints as they make their way toward the city of God.

Let's stand for the benediction. Father we are so grateful to thee for the lessons that come to us from Holy Scripture. How wonderful to realize that all these things are really for us.

Deliver us from our sins. Bring conviction when we have sinned against thee and give us oh God the grace to confess and to forsake our sins. And for those who may be here who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ oh God at this very moment may they lift their voices in thanksgiving for the blood that was shed that they might have the forgiveness of sins apart from works, apart from any good thing that we might do.

May grace, mercy and peace go with us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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