

(Genesis) 60 - Consternation, Mediation and Reconciliation

by S. Lewis Johnson

The sermon explores the themes of consternation, mediation, and reconciliation in the story of Joseph and his brethren, highlighting the pursuit of sinners by God and the importance of repentance and submission.

Duration: 50:58

Scripture: Genesis 45:4-5, Genesis 45:7, Genesis 45:11, Genesis 45:14-15, Genesis 45:17-18, Genesis 45:25-28

Topics: "Reconciliation"

Description

In this sermon on the book of Genesis, the commentator highlights the powerful and sincere speech delivered by Judah, one of Joseph's brothers. The commentator praises the depth of feeling and sincerity of Judah's address, considering it one of the most moving in all of Scripture. They also note the transformation in Judah, who was once calloused and indifferent to his father's grief. The commentator emphasizes the significance of reconciliation, both between individuals and between humanity and God, highlighting the importance of taking the first step towards reconciliation. The sermon concludes by discussing Joseph's revelation of his identity to his brothers and his message of forgiveness and provision for them during the famine.

Transcript

By doing it now, I think we can save a little time in the time of the ministry of the Word, so I hope that you will pay good attention as we read these particular verses that have to do with the reconciliation of Joseph and his brethren. Remember the story, the brethren have come back to Egypt for the second time in order to buy from Joseph and Pharaoh grain. The famine has been in the land for two years, and Jacob has sent them back.

They have refused to come, however, without Benjamin, Joseph's uterine brother, and as a result, Benjamin is with them. And they have come, they have seen Joseph, he has asked about Jacob, and then he has had them come to his house, and they have had a meal together. Now beginning with chapter 44 and verse 1, we read, Then he commanded his house stewards, saying, Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain.

And he did as Joseph had told him. As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. They had just gone out of the city and were not far off, when Joseph said to his house steward, Up, follow the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, Why have you repaid evil for good? Is not this the one from which my Lord drinks, and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.

So he overtook them and spoke these words to them. And they said to him, Why does my Lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. Behold the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan, they referred to the first time they had come.

How then could we steal silver or gold from your Lord's house? With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my Lord's slaves. So he said, now this is the Now let it also be according to your words. He with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be innocent.

Then they hurried each man, lord, his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. And he searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city.

When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him. And Joseph said to them, What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination? So Judah said, What can we say to my Lord? What can we speak, and how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold, we are my Lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found.

But he said, Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave, but as for you, go up in peace to your father. Then Judah approached him and said, O my Lord, may your servant please speak a word in my Lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant, for you are equal to Pharaoh.

My Lord asked his servant, saying, Have you a father or a brother? And we said to my Lord, We have an old father and a little child of his old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him. Then you said to your servants, Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.

But we said to my Lord, The Lord the led cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die. You said to your servants, however, Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again. Thus it came about when we went up to your servant, my father, we told him the words of my Lord, and our father said, Go back and buy us a little food.

But we said, We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down, for we cannot see the man's face unless our younger brother is with us. And your servant, my father, said to us, You know that my wife bore two sons, and the one went out from me.

And I said, Surely he is torn in pieces, and I have not seen him since. And if you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow. Now therefore, when I come to your servant, my father, and the lad is not with me, with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, it will come about, when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die.

Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant, our father, down to Sheol in sorrow. For your servant became surety for the lad, to my father, saying, If I do not bring him back to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever. Now therefore, please let your servant remain, instead of the lad, a slave to my Lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers.

For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest I see the evil that would overtake my father? Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him and cried, Have everyone go out from me. So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, Please come closer to me.

And they came closer. And he said, I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

And he has made me a father to Pharaoh and Lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me Lord of all Egypt. Come down to me.

Do not delay. And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, lest you and your household and all that you have be impoverished.

And behold, your eyes see in the eyes of my brother Benjamin, see that it is my mouth, which is speaking to you. Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt and of all that you have seen, and you must hurry and bring my father down here. Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept.

And Benjamin wept on his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept on them. And afterward, his brothers talked with him.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. The subject for this morning in the exposition of the book of Genesis is consternation, mediation, and reconciliation. We have been following in our studies in the book of Genesis recently the activities of Joseph as he, the hand of the Lord, has sought to discipline the brethren who have many years previously sold him into captivity.

We've been trying to make the point that this was designed by the Lord God to prepare them for the future. He wanted to bring the nation Israel down into the land of Egypt as a united nation and to prepare them for their future service to the whole of mankind. And so it was very important that they be brought into a place of unity, but due to the sin of the eleven or ten in sending Joseph into captivity many years before, there was no unity among the twelve.

And consequently, Israel, if they had gone down into Egypt without this unity, they would have soon become part of the Egyptians and lost as a separate servant of the Lord. Now, whether Joseph understood all of this or not, that is not really our major question. It does seem at times as if he did have an understanding of what was transpiring because the things that he devised to bring them to conviction and repentance were so apropos and so successful that one gets the impression that he must have realized that he was the hand of God in bringing the brethren back into communion with the Lord God.

Now in this chapter, chapter forty-five, we reach the climax of the divine discipline of Jacob and his sons, and it is reached in a tender and tearful reconciliation of Joseph and his brethren. And the first thing that it testifies to, so far as I'm concerned, is the perseverance of the Lord God. Francis Thompson is famous as a poet who wrote the poem, The Hound of Heaven.

Mr. Thompson later said that he would like to be known as the poet of the return to God. It's a remarkable poem. I have it before me.

Many of the stanzas end on notes like this. Some of you may even remember the first few words of the poem, which have frequently been quoted by preachers. I fled him down the nights and down the days.

I fled him down the arches of the years. I fled him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind and in the midst of tears. I hid from him, and under running laughter, upvisted hopes I sped, and shot, precipitated, down titanic glooms and chasmed fears from those strong feet that followed, followed after.

But with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy, they beat, and a voice beat more instant than the feet. All things betray thee who betrayest me. And it's a poem in which is expressed in very beautiful language the fact that God pursues all men.

And ultimately, he will have all men at his side, either in mercy or in judgment. And for those who are followed after by him and brought by efficacious grace into the understanding of salvation, he's the hound of heaven for mercy and for grace. Most of you in this audience, no doubt, know something of the grace of God, and you know that it is God who has sought you and who has caught you.

He pursued you for a long time, some of you, and finally he caught you and brought you to himself. Others of you, he will continue to pursue, and he will pursue until finally you are in his presence. And if you do not, of course, come to the knowledge of the Son of God, whom to know is life everlasting, you shall feel in his presence the heat of the great white throne judgment and ultimately the lake of fire.

It is true, he is the hound of heaven. F. B. Meyer has called him the sleuth of heaven, and I think that he must be speaking about Mr. Thompson's poem when he uses that expression. And he remarks on how it may take years to run you down, but it will never leave the trail until it has discovered your hiding place and found you out.

Be sure your sin will find you out, he says. Tens of years may pass over your life, and like these brethren, you may be congratulating yourself that the sin is forgotten and you are safe. And then a train of circumstances, little suspected but manipulated by a divine hand, will suddenly bring the truth to light and write God's sentence in flaming characters upon the walls of the house in which you rot in careless ease.

The unforgiven sinner is never safe. Now, I think the brethren of Joseph understood that fully. Judah certainly did when he said, what can we say to my Lord? What can we speak? How can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants.

Mr. Meyer also speaks about an incident that occurred when John Donne was the preponderary of St. Paul's Cathedral, and there was some excavation going on in the cathedral yard nearby. And as the men were working, finally there was a skull that came to the surface with a nail in it. And Mr. Donne happened to be standing by, and he asked the old sexton who had been there for many years if he knew to whom this skull belonged.

And he said, yes, it's the skull of a very old man who died very suddenly some years ago. His wife is still living. She married again soon after his death.

Well, Mr. Donne suspected something because the nail was in the head, and he went to the old woman's house, and he confronted her with the skull. And he said the woman turned deadly pale and confessed that she had taken her husband's life and that she had no rest since by day or by night. It is true, God is the sleuth hound of heaven, and all of us must eventually face him in mercy or in judgment.

The pursuit of Joseph's brethren was for the purpose of their repentance. His pursuit of the lost is for judgment. If sin is not brought home to us in this world, it will be in the world to come.

The cross is the only escape. Now, the picture before us in Genesis chapter 44 and chapter 45 is a picture that is also profoundly typical. It points us forward to the reconciliation of the Lion of the tribe of Judah with national Israel.

The weeping over the brother they have rejected will render pale that of Joseph and his brethren. And what a glorious and touching day it will be when Israel the nation recognizes the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah and responds in weeping as one weeps for an only son when they see him whom they have pierced. And then there shall be a national reconciliation, an opening up of a fountain for sin and uncleanness, and Israel shall be saved.

Well, we'll say more about that later. I want to briefly run through this story which we have read in our Scripture reading, and we begin with Joseph and the brothers' consternation. Now, Joseph believes evidently that the time has come for the master stroke.

And so his strategy is now to be responsible for that, to bring it to pass, and to bring those brethren face to face with their sin. They've been convicted of their sin. He has sensed that.

He's heard them say to one another that their sin is the reason for some of the things that have happened to them. But now he wants to bring them finally to a genuine repentance that issues in works that are meat for repentance. The threat to Benjamin is a thrust to the heart.

It's a thrust to the heart of Jacob, but it's a thrust to the heart of those brothers who have brought Benjamin down to Egypt, knowing that Benjamin is dear to the heart of Jacob, and Judah has become surety for him. And so this threat that Joseph has mentioned and now brings to its fruition to Benjamin is something that will reveal the heart of these brothers. And the question, of course, that was on Joseph's mind, no doubt, is, are these eleven men still the same fierce men that they were when they sold me into captivity? Are they still the same cruel brothers who threw me into the pit, and while I was crying to be delivered, sat down and ate a meal right by the side of that pit? And in a master stroke, he's going to find out.

Would they abandon Benjamin as they did Judah, as they did Joseph? Because now they have the opportunity, when the cup is found in Benjamin's sack, they have the opportunity to say, well, we'll turn Benjamin over to you and we'll go on back to Canaan. And so you can see what a master stroke this is.

Joseph will find out about his brethren, and so will we, for that matter.

It's rather interesting to notice that Joseph had a silver cup, and this cup is said to be for divination. Now, we should remember, of course, that the prohibition against divination that one finds in the Mosaic law has not yet been written at this point. But then it's also possible that Joseph was simply posing.

After all, he was speaking in the language of the Egyptians. He was not using their language. We've already seen that.

He was also speaking brusquely and roughly to them, and so this may have been something of a pose. He may have called it a cup of divination, or it may be a reference to the fact that Joseph was an interpreter of dreams. And we've already seen that he was very skilled in that, but he himself said that he got his interpretations from the Lord God.

At any rate, as the men left early in the morning, they had just gotten out of the city, and Joseph evidently did not want them to put their hands in that sack and find that cup before the house steward arrived, and so he sent him to them just as they were outside the city. And they came, and the house steward told them that someone has stolen the silver cup used for divination, and the brothers are startled and thinking that surely this could not be one of them. They've even offered to give the life of the one with whom the cup is found, and the rest offer to be slaves.

Well, the house steward does not accept that. He says, no, the person in whose sack the cup is found will be the slave, and the rest of you can go free. And he began to search.

And he began to search at the oldest, and so you can just imagine as the house steward searched, each of the sacks found the money still there, but no silver cup, that they became more and more confident that nothing would be found until finally they came to Benjamin's sack, and out came the cup. And we read in verse 13, then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city. Isn't it interesting that they don't even ask any explanation from Benjamin, so far as the text is concerned.

They don't say, Benjamin, why did you do it? Or did you really do it? They don't even suspect any kind of deception. They do not even say, well, someone must have put that cup in there, because we did not. Benjamin does not even speak, so far as the text goes.

It's almost as if they are thunderstruck, and they cannot speak at all. It almost is as if they sense that there is a higher hand in the operation of these affairs. It's almost as if they sense that this is something that has been brought about by the Lord God, and they cannot say anything.

And will you notice also, too, that the brethren do not say, well, Benjamin, we are sorry, and we'll see you. But they immediately put their load back on their donkeys and returned to the city, because they have committed themselves to Benjamin. Now, you can already see a change in the brothers.

And so they go back, and then when they come into the presence of Joseph, the submission, the helplessness, is seen most vividly in the threefold question that Judah asks. What can we say to my Lord? What can we speak? How can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold, we are my Lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found.

Now, whether Judah is speaking as the representative of the eleven or not, and whether he's speaking only about the guilt of this cup, whether he goes far beyond that and speaks about that ultimate guilt which

so bothered them, about which they had spoken before in the presence of Joseph. Surely we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us. We don't know.

But many of the students feel that there is more in this than the guilt of the cup. In other words, Judah and the brethren, sensing the hand of God in their experience, have come to realize that finally divine retribution has caught up with them. The sleuth hound of heaven has finally them in his grip.

There is some evidence from this account that Judah is a converted man. He has confessed his sin. There is evidence of concern for Jacob.

There is a noble sacrifice of himself. He wants to take the place of Benjamin and let Benjamin go free. There are the things that we might say were evidences of a conversion experience.

Someone has said that true penitence, as distinguished from remorse, is marked by a sorrow for sin that does not regard the consequences of it. That seems to be true of Judah at this point. But at any rate, he comes forward now, and that last section of Genesis chapter 44 is one of the most magnificent sections in all of the Old Testament.

This appeal that Judah makes to Joseph for Benjamin, I don't think anyone who ever ponders it can ever forget it. I remember when I was reading Hebrew for the first time in theological seminary and we were reading this section, and I can still remember the professor speaking about what a tender appeal this was. At the time, reading it in Hebrew and wondering if the professor was going to call on me at the next verse to translate it, I did not really catch the full force of this.

But through the years, it's made an impression upon me. It truly is a magnificent appeal. Listen to what some of the commentators say.

Leupold, the Lutheran commentator who so often tells us we can't preach on chapters in Genesis, says this is one of the manliest, most straightforward speeches ever delivered by any man. For depth of feeling and sincerity of purpose, it stands unexcelled. What makes it most remarkable, however, is the fact that it comes from the lips of one who once upon a time was so calloused that he cared nothing about the grief he had caused his father.

Another commentator writes, Judah offered the most moving address in all the word of God. Here was the eloquence of true love. Indeed, this speech has been called the greatest example of natural oratory in all literature.

Still others have said the speech of Judah in behalf of his young brother Benjamin has been fittingly characterized as one of the masterpieces of Hebrew composition. One of the grandest and fairest to be found in the Old Testament, another commentator has written. A more moving oration than ever orator pronounced, still another.

One of the finest specimens of natural eloquence in the world, still someone else has said. It's characterized first of all by humility and simplicity. And Judah, you can just imagine the scene.

They are in the presence now of the man who is equal with Pharaoh, the man who is the representative of Pharaoh throughout the whole of the Egyptian kingdom. And the ten brothers are there, and before them stands the prime minister, who happens to be the twelfth brother, but they do not realize that. And there they are on the ground, bowing down before him, and one of them has moved forward and stands in front

of the prime minister and makes his appeal.

It's a very touching picture. And notice the humility of it. Exquisite tact.

He says, Oh my Lord, may your servant please speak a word in my Lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant, for you are equal to Pharaoh. There is a true lowliness here as well. And he goes on to tell the story of the situation, to explain what has happened.

And he reminds Joseph of the preceding interviews that they have had. And then comes the pathos in verse 27 through verse 32. Notice the 28th verse.

And one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces, and I have not seen him since. Joseph's sadness, Jacob's sadness and sorrow. In verse 30 he says that the life of Jacob is bound up in Benjamin.

In verse 29 and verse 31 he says that if we do not take Benjamin back, we'll bring down his, the gray hair of your servant, our father, to Sheol in sorrow. And then climaxes it in verse 32 with the fact that he has become surety for the land. And if I do not bring him back to Jacob, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.

And having said that, then in the final two verses, his mediation is a mediation of the offering of self-sacrifice, a kind of sublime heroism, in which this man now who incidentally had taken the lead in the bondage of Joseph. For remember, if you'll turn back to Genesis chapter 37, it was Judah who said, after they put Jacob, Joseph down in the pit, What profit is it for us if we leave him in the pit to die? Let's sell him to the Midianites who are passing by, and that way we'll get some money out of the deal. So it was Judah.

This is the same individual. And now he says, and Joseph of course is learning a great deal about what's happened to the heart of Judah since then. Now therefore please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my Lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers.

For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest I see the evil that would overtake my father? That is a sublime heroism. It's a beautiful offer of vicarious sacrifice. He'd rather perish than see the sorrow of his father Jacob.

Noble Judah, someone has said, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise. That is the word of Jacob, which Jacob will pronounce later on in Genesis chapter 49 concerning Judah. So it's a beautiful self-forgetful magnanimity that one sees in Judah.

It's doubtful that it's ever been eclipsed and seldom rivaled. And of course when you think about the union of this family now, you can see that this family is a united family. The eleven brothers, one standing for the other one, and they all stand for Jacob.

Joseph, if he were analyzing and assessing the situation would know at this point that the conditions are ripe for the revelation of himself as their brother. And the pain of the love that he has for them and the rapture of the love that he wishes to express for them can no longer endure restriction. Alexander McLaren in a very beautiful study of the reconciliation of Joseph and his brethren has this to say about the incident.

He says, if the writer of this inimitable scene of Joseph's reconciliation with his brethren was not simply an historian, now of course we believe he was simply an historian. He was simply recording what actually took place. But Mr. McLaren says if he was not simply a historian, he was one of the great dramatic geniuses of the world, master of a vivid minuteness like Defoe's and able to touch the springs of tears by a pathetic simplicity like his who painted the death of Lear.

Surely theories of legend and of mosaic fail here. It's a magnificent picture, and its magnificence is a testimony to the truthfulness of it. This is what happened.

Now someone has said that the first step toward reconciliation between two people should always come from the individual who is injured, not the one who did the injuring. And in this case, that is what happens. Incidentally, that is the case in the reconciliation of us with our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is we who have wronged God, and the first step in reconciliation is the step that comes from him. And so this incident is true to that. The first step toward reconciliation does come from the injured, and it is Joseph who speaks.

Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out at this point. His heart was full, and his throat, no doubt, was very constricted. If you've ever been in a situation like this on the point of tears, and you know the lump that comes in your throat, it must have been large in the throat of Joseph.

And I would imagine that he could hardly get out the words, have everyone go out from me. Now, if we see something good in the character of Judah here, we certainly see a great deal in the character of Joseph. There is a brilliant constellation of heavenly virtues and graces manifested in this great man.

Fraternal affection, that's something admirable. Fraternal affection today is something admirable. It's not something to be ashamed of.

Filial piety, the love of a son for a father, the love of a son for a brother. And then doctrinal good sense. He had theology.

He was the kind of man who understood things, and therefore he could be the kind of person that he was. I must confess I was rather disappointed this week in one of my former students. And in fact, one of my former students who used to attend Believer's Chapel, I read an article written by him.

He had reached the age of 40, and he was talking about how he had now rethought certain things. And what he was doing at this midpoint in his life, how he was reexamining things. In one of the sentences he said, the article was a good article, many good things in it, all in all a good article.

But one thing, I must confess, it disturbed me. He said, I've learned at this stage in life that theology is not quite so important, and that other things are not. I'd like to know where he got that theological statement.

Because that itself is a theological statement. But if there is anything that is true, it is this, that the more that we understand of the truth of God, the better able we are to cope with the experiences of life. Why just take Joseph here.

If he did not know the truth concerning the relationship of iniquity to the Lord God, if he did not know the truth of divine providence, if he did not know the truth of the sovereignty of God and the guidance of his

saints, how could he possibly have become the man that he became? Why, he explains here why he was able to carry on as he was under the blows of misfortune that struck him from the time that he was a youth, seventeen years of age, until he became the prime minister of the land of Egypt. So he had doctrinal sense, and he had exquisite sensibility in his emotions as they expressed themselves in tears and tears of love. Have everyone go out? His doubts are now answered concerning the brethren.

He knows that they will not treat Benjamin as they treated him, for their hearts have been transformed. And he can no longer damn the flood of forgiving love. And incidentally, he doesn't flaunt his emotions.

He doesn't do like a lot of people get up and cry and weep tears in front of a crowd in order to gain the impression that you are a man of emotion and that you really care because you weep before big crowds. No, he says, let them all go out. The time for tears is the time of prophecy.

And so they all go out. Well, he couldn't control himself. He began to weep and sob so that outside with the doors closed the Egyptians heard something that was going on and word even ultimately came to Pharaoh.

He said to his brothers who were standing before him, I am Joseph. That's the pathos of simplicity and the simplicity of pathos. It's a question, and there's a question that follows that reveals his agitation.

It's almost as if he could not say simply, I am Joseph, fearing that they might have even been struck in a way that would be too sharp, too severe. He says, I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? Now he's asked that question before and I must confess I've puzzled a little over that.

Perhaps he means, is he alive and well? That is, is he in good health? But it's a natural question that reveals his own agitation and perhaps a desire to relieve them to some extent. I am Joseph. Is my father still alive? And they were dismayed.

They couldn't answer him, dismayed at his presence, conscience stricken silence. Finally, the sleuth hound of heaven has caught up with them and they cannot even speak. While there isn't a man in the world who could pick up a pencil and describe this scene as it ought to be described.

You could talk about the profitlessness of crime, the profitlessness of trying to flee from the Lord God, but you cannot say anything more than is said right here. They were dismayed at his presence. And so he spoke to him again, please come closer to me.

And they came forward almost in a trance. I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And there the words are spoken.

But he goes on to explain. Now I think it's important that we know what he says. He says, and now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here for God sent me before you to preserve life.

You sold, God sent. Would you put those two little clauses together? You sold, it was God who sent. You sold, it was God who sent.

What's the first cause? Well, the first cause of course is God. He's the one who sent, but you sold. Now in a moment he will say, God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth.

He will say in the eighth verse, it was not you who sent me here but God. And so the ultimate cause is the Lord God. The primary cause is the Lord God.

The secondary cause is the action of the brothers. Now this capacity for ignoring secondary causes is one of the means by which we know that Joseph was a great man. And it's one of the means by which we know that he was a theologian who knew how to put his theology into practice and who knew how to live by it.

It is also one of the things that sustained him for those twenty years or so in the land of Egypt. It was the sense that he was an instrument of God even though he had been wronged by his brothers. So this capacity for ignoring secondary causes is tremendously important.

Three times he traces his captivity to the Lord God. And I want to say to you my dear Christian friends, if we do not reach the place where we are able to ignore the secondary causes and remember the primary cause of our existence as a Christian brother or sister, then we shall not have the greatness of Joseph nor shall we have the humility of a Joseph. Have you noticed as you read the Old Testament how often the psalmist says something like this? He will say something like, well it was men's hand, men did this to me but men were in the hand of the Lord God.

Over and over he will make statements like that. In the New Testament the apostle Paul will be in prison and he will call himself not a prisoner of the Romans, but he will call himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He will speak from the standpoint of the ultimate reason for things.

It's well for us to remember that when we have become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and have received the evidences of the hand of God upon us, then we should remember that all of the things that transpire are the things that are given us by the hand of a loving God. He makes all things work together for good to them that love him, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Now there was a reason for all of this and he expresses it.

God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. It was all to fulfill the promises of the Abrahamic covenant as they pertain to the four hundred years of captivity in the land of Egypt and then the great deliverance that would transpire even greater than the deliverance of Jacob and the men who came down with him. So he was sold as a slave but he was sent really to be a savior for the remainder of the children of Israel.

Well he gives Judah and the brethren a commission, the impatient love of a long absent son says, hurry, hurry, twice, hurry, get on with it, bring Jacob back. No elevation of office, no matter how a man reaches in life is sufficient to prevent him from remembering that he is the son of a particular man forever and Joseph loves Jacob and wants to see him. Well the chapter, that section concludes with the kisses of full reconciliation and the frank communion, tears answering to tears as they fall on each other's necks.

Reconciliation has taken place. You can certainly see in this incident the benefits of the divine discipline. Peace finally comes to the brethren after twenty years of having Joseph's crime upon their hearts.

Conviction has come and now finally repentance and works meet for repentance are done. And the result is they find themselves in the hands of a loving God who gives them peace, who gives them protection through the prime minister who will supply all of their needs. That's one of the things that happens to us when we try to fight the Lord God as believers, fighting him, failing to confess sin, continuing in a way that

is contrary to the teaching of the Word of God until finally that sleuth hound of heaven catches up with us and there comes the conviction and the repentance and the restoration to communion and we discover that we are blessed.

For the one thing that we naturally feel is that if we do the will of God we're going to suffer for it. That's part of the sense of the principle of sin that dwells within. I'd like to say just a word about the typical nature of this incident because almost all of the students of the book of Genesis have commented upon this.

It's such a universal thing that one gains the impression that it is the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Joseph and the brethren form a typical picture in two ways. First of all, it is a picture of individual sinners and their restoration.

The brethren in their crime against Joseph suggest the natural condition of the ungodly who are rebellious, who do not seek after the Lord God, who are under sin and under guilt and condemnation and lost. And Joseph illustrates our Lord Jesus Christ and the restoration and reconciliation illustrates the reconciliation of the lost to the Lord Jesus. And then I think this is a typical picture nationally.

For just as the brethren are national Israel and stand for national Israel, so their rebellion against Joseph, their crime against him, their rejection of him, their sending of him into captivity suggests the action of national Israel a couple of thousands of years ago when they rejected their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and have been scattered to the four corners of the earth under divine discipline. But the greater Joseph is still working towards their ultimate reconciliation. He is still moving the events of this world in such a way that finally they will be forced into dealing with their spiritual condition.

And he will finally bring them face to face after conviction with the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, at his second coming when they shall look upon him whom they have pierced just as these looked upon Joseph whom they had rejected and they shall hear him say to them, I am Jesus, your Messiah. And there shall be weeping, as Zechariah puts it, as one weeps for an only son. And the spirit of grace and supplication will reduce that nation to tears and those tears will be tears that far surpass the tears of Joseph and his brethren.

What a magnificent reconciliation still awaits this world. One of the greatest of the joys of the Christian believer is the realization that we are going to have an opportunity to see that great reconciliation. If you are here this morning and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, you are like the brothers.

You are in rebellion. You have committed a great crime. All sin is ultimately a sin against the Lord Jesus Christ.

All sin has in its essence and in its principle the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every particular sin finally is traceable to that. As the Bible says, it is really unbelief in him.

And if you are here and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, your state is the state of condemnation, the state of guilt, and the state of judgment. And the sleuth hound of heaven will not rest until you stand before him. And if you refuse to come to him, you must stand the heat of the judgment of the great white throne.

May God forbid that. We invite you to come to him who has offered the atoning sacrifice, whose blood was shed on Calvary's cross that you might be saved. Come to Christ.

Come to him. Confess your sin. Confess your lost estate.

Receive the free gift of everlasting life. That death of Jesus Christ is sufficient for the sins of this whole world. Come to Christ.

Your sins are not too deep. They are not too terrible that the blood of Christ is not able to wash them white. Come to Christ.

Put your trust in him. For believers, it's possible that some sin in your life has prevented restoration and communion. Come to Christ.

Receive the forgiveness that he freely offers. Shall we stand for the benediction? Father, we are grateful to thee for these ancient events which so beautifully illustrate spiritual truth. We thank thee for our greater Joseph, who has loved us and loosed us from our sins in his own precious blood.

If there are some in this audience who do not know him as their own personal Savior, O Father, through the Holy Spirit, in efficacious grace, draw them to him. May they confess their own unworthiness and sin and guilt and condemnation and receive as a free gift everlasting life. Hasten the day, Lord, when Israel shall be reconciled to him who is their Messiah, and we shall enjoy the fullness of the blessing of the triune God.

May grace, mercy, and peace be ours in Jesus' name. Amen.

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