

1-16-11 – Sunday 10:00 AM Service

Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt – Gen. 42:1-24

Corinne and I were talking about our daily Bible reading plan last week. When we are home together we sometimes read the daily reading together and discuss it. We had a snow day off last Wednesday, so we read the daily reading, and we were talking about how we wish more of the congregation read along with us. We mentioned how the reading schedule is in the weekly bulletin but very few read it. It is also listed for three months in the From the Heart Newsletter that is mailed home to all of you. Again, great, but who really keeps that page and follows along with the daily readings in the Bible? This time, due to an error in the December readings, Pastor Jerry emailed the corrected reading plan for the winter quarter so you would have an accurate copy. We want you to be in the Word – it's that important.

So, Corinne suggested that we do the reading for today, Sunday 1/16/11, together and preach from that passage. Good idea, don't you think? I am so passionate about the Word of God, but it is hard to impart that to all of you. If you haven't been following our church reading plan, you will start today. I hope you go from here and continue on your own. Today's reading is found in Genesis 42, and you can see that listed in your bulletin. Take the bulletin home with you so you have the readings for the entire week. If you are not on Pastor Jerry's Good Morning email list, then send him your address. He posts the reading for each day in that email. He usually posts a couple of sentences from the text for the day. That doesn't mean that's all you should read. It's not like that is the only thing important for us to grasp. Read the entire passage yourself and let God speak to you personally about it. Corinne chose this reading plan that will take us through the entire Bible in one year. We won't read every chapter and verse, but it lays out the major stories of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation – with a title for each reading. Today I used the text and the title from the reading as our sermon text and title.

The book of Genesis or "beginnings" as it is called in Hebrew, is the story of God from the beginning of our world to the beginning of the people of God – the Hebrews. It is a book of faith and redemption as seen in its deep symbolism. The story of Joseph is extremely important to the overall plot of the Bible, and it takes up nearly one third of the book of Genesis. We are coming into the middle of an existing story, so I need to give you the backdrop leading to this passage and take it from there.

I will begin our story preface by saying that Joseph was the son of Jacob and Rachel (the wife he loved most from the beginning and who he was tricked out of). She gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin, and she died in childbirth delivering Benjamin. These two sons were the favorites of Jacob – even though favoritism is not a good thing. This alone could be a cause or root of jealousy between Joseph and his ten brothers of different mothers. While Joseph was already hated by his brothers, he then dreams two dreams where it is interpreted that his brothers and father and mother figure would bow down before him. He doesn't act discretely about this, but he tells everyone his dreams and pays dearly for this.

His brothers especially and even his father are upset with his dreams. However, his brothers become very jealous and plot to kill him. They capture him but find an opportunity to sell him to gypsies rather than kill him, but they tell their father that he was killed by wild animals. Jacob never stops mourning the loss of his favorite son as we migrate into the passage for today.

Twenty years have passed since Joseph was sold into slavery and brought to Egypt. In all this, he has remained faithful to the Lord God. He was taken to the house of Potiphar as a servant and exalted to a high position until falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and put into prison. In prison he was exalted to the highest position of the prisoners. He interpreted dreams that came to pass exactly as he said. Then, because of his dream interpretation, he was called to appear before Pharaoh to interpret his dream that was very disturbing to the king. Joseph is elevated to the highest position in Egypt under Pharaoh because of his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and the wisdom he shows, which is from God. Things work out exactly according to the dream adding credibility to Joseph. God was at work in his life and even in his family. The dream revealed that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine – severe famine. This is exactly what happened and the famine reached even to Jacob and the land of Canaan. Joseph tells Pharaoh that he had two similar dreams because this is something certain to happen and soon. Joseph had two similar dreams back in Ch. 37 too. This is where we pick up our story today.

READ: Gen. 42:1-24 (NIV) -- Let's look at our reading for today. OK – check it off. You're done!

This chapter marks a new phase in the history of Jacob. He has lived with his other sons in the land of Canaan, but he has never gotten over the loss of his favorite son, Joseph. Meanwhile, Joseph has gone through a lot in his 20 years away from the family that has betrayed him. In Ch. 41, he named his first son, Manasseh (forgets) – because he says that God made him forget his trouble and his father's house (41:51). After 20 years, Jacob comes back onto the scene. Jacob reappears in the story, and he hears there is food in Egypt. He is old, but he is still the head of his household. He orders his sons to go and buy food, since they seem to be procrastinating (v. 1b). Even though they are in need, it seems they have money to buy food. He sends his ten sons to Egypt to buy food from the governor of the land who is selling grain to outsiders on a regular basis. Joseph, the governor, is evaluating the requests of hundreds of people needing help at this time. But, when he sees his brothers, he recognizes them, but they don't recognize him. This was no CHANCE meeting. We have to put ourselves in Joseph's shoes here.

Joseph knows what his brothers are capable of. They intended to murder him, but settled to just get rid of him without bloodshed. Their motives were the same. Jealousy motivated them to eventually want to kill him. He was favored over them by their father. He had dreams of seeing all of them bow down to him. They were capable of anything. What really happened to their father or his brother? We have a reader's advantage, but what did he know? Have you ever had someone hurt you - I mean really hurt you? Isn't it hard to trust them ever again? I mean – you say you forgive them, and time definitely helps, but then you see them and all bets are off. The pain returns and you have to make some decisions about your trust of them – fast. This is the situation Joseph found himself in at this point.

How would you react? Joseph thought it best to interrogate his brothers to see if they were the same old characters, or if they had somehow changed. Joseph is THE MAN at this point in Egypt and the world (for that matter). He is the only one in the world who has surplus of food to sell to those in need. This was as a result of Pharaoh's dream that Joseph interpreted. He entertains hundreds of requests each day to ration out the food supply, so he is careful and within his right to scrutinize every request. His

brothers seem sincere. Joseph has been fully engulfed into the Egyptian culture. He doesn't look the same, and he uses an interpreter to speak to his brothers. They have no clue it is their brother, Joseph. This adds to the drama. This chapter is crucial to the Joseph story, and it presupposes all that has gone on before it, especially ch. 37 and ch. 41.

So, how can he find out about his father and brother, Benjamin? Did they do the same thing to Ben as they did to him since he would be the next favored in the family? Is he still alive? Did they trick him and sell him off to slave traders too? What about dad? Is he still alive? Does he still remember Joseph? For 20 years Joseph has tried to forget the pain and the loss. What about his family left behind in Canaan? Their visit brought back all the memories, all the pain, and all the questions. He didn't expect it. He is brought to tears as all this floods his mind.

We all experience triggers in our lives. Things we don't expect or plan on happening, but then they are in our face. How do we react? What do we do about it? Joseph chose to interrogate his brothers to see what they would say – to see if they would lie or fess up to the truth. So he accuses them of being spies. There were large nations out there wanting to take advantage of Egypt's wealth and power. How better than to send in a battalion to scope out the territory and find the weaknesses. However, Joseph's brothers begin to tell him about their family origin. Spies would never travel on a mission as a family. It would be too easy to leverage them by torture or cause them to be partial to one another. No, these were true brothers and not spies. Joseph pushes them further since they are starting to spill their guts about their family history. It is then revealed that his father is alive still, and his brother is alive and with their father. But are they telling the truth or being deceptive as he knows they can be? There is only one real way to tell – put them to the test.

He requires that his brother be brought to Egypt, and he puts them all in prison for three days. He would send one back home to get Benjamin while the others remain in prison. After the three days, he changes the plan. He will let them all go back except one who will remain imprisoned until Benjamin is brought to him. This way they can bring back an ample supply of food for their starving clan. Also, it would be better leverage for their father. If all but one are in prison, he would be less likely to send his favored son back, but if all have returned safely except one, he might be more trusting. This was a wise change of plans on Joseph's part.

Not knowing Joseph could understand them, they talk among themselves. Their evil must have finally caught up with them. They feel they are being punished because of what they did to Joseph over twenty years earlier. They reveal a piece of that story we haven't seen in earlier chapters. Joseph pleaded with them for his life, and they ignored him. They were cold, bitter, calculated, and this is why this is coming back to haunt them now. Reuben, the oldest brother and firstborn of Leah, jumps in with an, "I told you so!" He came to Joseph's rescue originally to sway them away from killing him. Now he is throwing that in their faces. Meanwhile, Joseph is hearing all that is said. They believe Joseph is dead, and they are now being held accountable – by God.

They are sent back home and their money is returned into their sacks without them knowing. Joseph keeps Simeon in prison. The fact that Simeon is the second son of Leah and Benjamin is the second

son of Rachel may have some bearing on Joseph's choice here. They return to Canaan and tell their father, Jacob, of the events that took place and about the demand for Benjamin to go to Egypt. They also find their money returned and freak out even more. Jacob is distraught over this demand. Obviously, he has never gotten over the loss of Joseph; how can he bear the thought of losing Benjamin as well? This last bit goes a few verses beyond our reading for today, but that's OK.

OK – So how do you begin to get beyond the boring task of sticking to a reading plan and checking off your daily obligation, to discovering the richness found in every story of this holy book?

The first step and simple way to get more out of the Bible is to pray before you read the passage. This book and these words were inspired by God to be penned in the first place. That means the Holy Spirit is the one to prompt people to write what they did. The Holy Spirit is the One who knows the truth of what is written here and the true interpreter of the Scriptures. Pray and ask the Spirit of God to enlighten your understanding of what He has for you personally. Then read slowly and methodically. God, by His Spirit will guide you into all the truth (as he promised in the gospels to do).

Another thing you can do is to ask the text questions. No questions you think of are stupid or unacceptable. You are asking yourself these questions and for God to help you get the answer in the passage or supportive chapters. You may not get all the answers in one sitting or even in one time span. That's why a notebook can help you. Write down your questions in the passage. Maybe as you read through the Bible the next time, you will get answer from this time. You could ask of our passage today: Why is Joseph so mean to his brothers? Why doesn't he reveal himself to them sooner? Why does he put them through such torture if he is going to help them and even return their money? Why does he insist on seeing Benjamin when he knows how his father felt about him? Why don't they recognize him?

As you read and study further, you will begin to see the answers to these questions in the Bible. We saw the answers to some of these questions even in our short time together today. I pray you continue from this point and make your Bible reading time more fruitful for yourself. Write the answer down. The answers may spark more questions – write them down. The lack of answers may cause you to want to investigate further with extra resources, like a commentary, dictionary, a good study bible. I recently bought the Life Application Study Bible in the NLT, and I am enjoying some new notes on various readings. The NIV Study Bible is a wonderful tool as is the Open Bible in various translations.

Another part of following a reading plan is that you don't have to figure out what to read each day. If you follow along in a daily reading plan, you will have a prescribed passage to read for that day. God will speak to you through that passage. This is His living and active Word. He desires for you to read, understand and be affected by it.

Finally, with any Bible reading or study, how is the Word of God speaking to you now – today – to your personal struggles and spiritual life? Scripture is so powerful because it not only tells of historical events of centuries past, but it also speaks to our lives today. That's what we as pastors and teachers try to do

for you each week. We aim to discover what the scripture meant for the time it was written, what their context was, and then apply it to today to help us walk with the Lord in every area of our lives.

It doesn't have to be as difficult as solving a murder mystery. Let me read you a crazy story... **MURDER MYSTERY**

I think many of us believe trying to understand the Bible and apply it to our lives is as difficult as solving a murder mystery. God wants you to know His Word. It may not be easy all the time, but it should not be a mystery either.

So what are some things we can take away with us from today's passage? Maybe we can see the effect showing favoritism has on not only the favored one but all the others in the picture. Maybe we can see that being favored can cause one to be a spoiled brat who is prideful and feels better than others even in their own family. Maybe we can see that this sort of prejudice causes jealousy and jealousy, if left to fester, can lead one as far as plans of murder or at least harm. Maybe we can see that broken trust is very difficult to resolve even after many years. Maybe we can see that reconciliation is possible no matter how bad the offense, if we trust the Lord. We will be reading the rest of the story of Joseph's life this week. I would encourage you to read the entire portion of Genesis and not just the reading plan for each day, so you can get the full details of this magnificent story of God's plan for His people and even for us today. He can turn any situation around. What others might mean for evil, he can use for good (you'll see those words in this story at the end if you stick with it).

Maybe you can see that God has a plan for your life. No matter what you've been through in the past. No matter how bleak the circumstances may seem today. He has a plan that will be brought to fulfillment if you remain faithful to the Lord. It may take hours, days, weeks, months or even years (like the twenty years in the Joseph story), but He will bring it to pass at exactly the right time. I know some of you have been going through serious stuff for years and some have just entered a dark time in your life, but I am here to say that if you have put your faith in Christ, He has a plan and will see it through with you. "He will never leave you or forsake you." He is God – bigger and more powerful than your circumstances – "able to do exceedingly and abundantly more than you can think or imagine." Trust Him. Stay in His Word – read it – study it – take notes – pray – grab the nuggets of truth He has for you and don't let go –ever.

Get into a small group Bible study where you can ask questions and learn from others in the faith. You can't do that in a Sunday service only. Pastor Jerry and I love you. We pray for you. We try our best to instruct and teach and even model a life of faith, but we can't live it for you. Sometimes that breaks our hearts, because we love you. You must take responsibility for your own spiritual development. God wants more for you than you are currently allowing Him to give you. That goes for all of us. No matter where we are now in our spiritual life, God wants more for us, but we have to be willing to let Him work in us to accomplish it.