

Facing Fears 2-17-08

Genesis 43

Last week we were presented with a life-altering lesson. We can never know the reality of what is happening in our life at any given moment. The reason we can't interpret our circumstances is because our point of observation is so limited. Jacob was just certain that everything was against him when in fact everything was working favorably for him. (Genesis 42:36) He just couldn't see it from his vantage point. If we can grasp that, it will change the way we look at stressful and trying times. Instead of the "poor me" depressed and desperate mind set, we can have a positive, curious, and optimistic perspective. It doesn't mean we will like the road we are on, or choose to enter difficulties. It does mean that when they come, we have a whole different outlook from those who have no hope. (1Thessalonians 4:13) Believe me, God is testing me this week to see if I really believe it. He is driving it home, and that isn't always an enjoyable experience, but it is a priceless one.

In our passage for today, that misunderstanding of what is actually happening, that fear of the immediate circumstances, intensifies. The brothers have returned and left Simeon imprisoned. They didn't turn around and head back with little brother Benjamin in tow because Dad couldn't part with him. ¹ *Now the famine was still severe in the land.* ² *So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food."*

Dad is in denial. You know how something you must face is looming in the future and you just pretend you will never have to face it? Jacob told them to just go back and get some more. Then they began the conversation I think they must have had at least a dozen times. "We can't go back without taking Benjamin." "Why did you tell the ruler you had a younger brother?" "Because he asked us. What did you want us to do, lie? How could we have known he would have said, 'Bring your brother if you come again or you can't buy more grain'?"

Have you ever had one of those conversations that seem to get repeated over and over with a spouse or parent? The question is the same and the answer is the same no matter how many times you go over it. We aren't really communicating; we are just voicing our heart over and over. It never gets anywhere. When we recognize that is happening, stop and hear what is really being said. (Proverbs 2:2) Jacob is really saying, "I'm so grieved the conversation went that way. I don't know how to deal with it. How I wish it never happened. I can't lose Benjamin."

The brothers keep answering the same thing, but what they are really saying is, "It's not our fault. We didn't do this on purpose." Hear one another first, and then try to address the issues of the heart with gentleness and love. (Matthew 13:9)

⁸ *Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die.* Judah is explaining to his father that they have no options. It is die a slow death of starvation, or take a shot at bringing Benjamin to Egypt with them.

Commented [notes1]: Genesis 42:36 (NIV)
36 Their father Jacob said to them, "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!"

Commented [notes2]: 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (NIV)
13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

Commented [notes3]: Proverbs 2:2 (NIV)
2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,

Commented [notes4]: Matthew 13:9 (NIV)
9 He who has ears, let him hear."

There are times when God will make us face our worst fears. That is a necessary thing because fear can torment your life. (1John 4:18) On the other hand, it isn't an enjoyable process. We dread going there. If we could just see how freeing it is to face your fears, we would do it much more readily. Jacob feared losing the last son of Rachael, Benjamin. She is gone. Joseph was thought to be gone, and only Benjamin remained. Apparently Israel was so attached to him, he must have given him the rights of the firstborn and a double inheritance. He can't imagine losing him. He must face this fear to really be free. (John 8:32)

Commented [notes5]: 1 John 4:18 (NIV)
18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

If you've ever seen a parent that is attached to their child, you know it isn't a pretty picture. The child is usually as spoiled as can be. The clinging parent stifles the child's freedom and often makes them into a self-centered, codependent monster. God is prying Benjamin out of the clutches of Israel's hands. I would guess that Benjamin would be excited about going. It was Dad that wasn't excited.

Commented [notes6]: John 8:32 (NIV)
32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Judah went on to say, ⁹ *I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life.* God is certainly working in Judah's heart. Remember back in chapter 38 he had left the family behind and fathered a child through what he thought was a shrine prostitute. (Genesis 38:1) Now he is offering himself to save the family. That's a change!

Commented [notes7]: Genesis 38:1 (NIV)
1 At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah.

If Joseph was looking for a sign that his brothers had changed, it's too bad that he couldn't see this one. The one who suggested that Joseph be sold was now the one who stood in the gap and was willing to bear the blame if anything happened. God was working not only in Joseph's heart, but in Judah's as well.

¹⁰ *As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice.*" Now that is the voice of faith. Judah not only believed it would be all right and Simeon could be home, but he believed it should have been done long ago. Judah had that positive forward looking attitude we've talked about Joseph having. He's saying, "Come on Dad. Face your fear and get it over. We are all suffering because of the way you cling to Benjamin. Let's get on with what must be done." Sound advice from a man who has lost a couple sons of his own. If anyone could understand Israel's heart it was Judah. Surely Israel knew that. Judah's dead sons were Israel's grandsons. (Genesis 38:11)

Commented [notes8]: Genesis 38:11 (NIV)
11 Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "He may die too, just like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

Judah had learned a lesson from the way he withheld his youngest from Tamar. He feared losing him just like his dad feared losing Benjamin. Trying to get around what should have been done just made a mess of things. He's trying to get his father not to repeat mistakes he has made. Yes, Judah is being changed by God.

¹¹ *Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift--a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds.* ¹² *Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake.* ¹³ *Take your brother also and go back to the man at once.* "If it must be..." He finally faced that fact that to delay would be to starve to death. Then he gave some very

practical advice. If you are going before a king, bring a gift. "Take back the money and bring extra to purchase more. Take your brother and go now before I change my mind." Did it cross their minds that they were bringing the same items that the Ishmaelites traded when they took Joseph down into Egypt? (Genesis 37:25)

Israel went on to say, ¹⁴ *And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.* "God Almighty (El Shaddai) grant you mercy with the man (his long lost favorite son) so that your brother, what's his name, the guy you left down there, and Benjamin come back with you. If I suffer the loss of another child, then so be it." Israel (Jacob) pronounced a blessing of mercy over their trip, though it seems he had a fatalistic attitude. Sometimes it does us good to look at the worse case scenario. What if Benjamin died? Well, maybe some of the other sons would survive. What if they all died? It happened to Job. (Job 1:18-19) But that is what will happen if they don't go! Face your fear and deal with it. Look it in the eye and tell that fear you won't let it hold you captive.

What are you afraid of? Is it meeting someone from your past? Losing a child? Financial destitution? Disease? Whatever it is, face it by declaring that God can see you through anything! There is always hope. Let go and trust God. And if there is some way to deal with it now, do so. Write that letter, or call that person, or do whatever it takes. Don't let fear keep you captive. (Genesis 26:24) Some people won't go to Israel with us because they are afraid what might happen. If you are afraid of what might happen, what are you going to do? Most accidents happen within a mile of home. Just lock yourself in the house. No wait, that's where a higher percentage of accidents occur. So statistically speaking your better off taking a trip.

When you go down that road of fear, you limit your life and stress yourself out. Face it and get over it. Our fear is really doubt that God is watching over us. It is fearing that things can get out of His hands. You know that isn't possible, but have you told your heart that it isn't possible?

They packed and hurried down to Egypt. I think they hurried because they had waited so long that their situation was desperate. ¹⁶ *When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; they are to eat with me at noon."*

Doesn't that sound great? The ruler wants them to dine with them. Only problem is that they have a guilty conscience from selling Joseph, so they are afraid God is dealing with them. (Genesis 42:21-22) They interpret what should have been taken as a good sign as something that is dreadful. Guilt creates fear and fear imagines scenarios that torment us. Egyptian nobility often had dungeons in their basements. Were they headed to his own personal torture chamber?

¹⁸ *Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, "We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys."* What an illogical conclusion, but it is one generated by fear. If Joseph

Commented [notes9]: Genesis 37:25 (NIV)
25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Commented [notes10]: Job 1:18-19 (NIV)
18 While he still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

Commented [notes11]: Genesis 26:24 (NIV)
24 That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

Commented [notes12]: Genesis 42:21-22 (NIV)
21 They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."
22 Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood."

wanted to take them as slaves and take their donkeys, he could have done so at any time. He didn't need to take them to his house. (Genesis 41:40) What an imagination we have when we are living in fear.

Commented [notes13]: Genesis 41:40 (NIV) 40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

As soon as they could talk to Joseph's steward they explained about the silver found in their sacks and how they had brought it back. The steward first pronounced peace to them, shalom. Strange thing for an Egyptian to do! Do you think he converted to the God of the Hebrews? I do. He declared that God had given it back. Well, that is true. God gave it back through Joseph. He said that he had received their silver. He had. He just didn't mention that he was ordered to give it back. Again we see how things aren't always as they appear.

Joseph first asked if they had shalom. He then asked if their father had shalom and learned he was well (had shalom). Joseph had to ask if the youngest was Benjamin. He was just a child when Joseph was carried away. Now he was a young man. When he found out it was his brother, he pronounced a blessing over him that would later be part of the Aaronic blessing, "God be gracious to you." (Numbers 6:25) He couldn't contain himself. The compassion in his heart welled up into tears. He retreated to a private room to weep. After washing off the mascara that had run down his cheeks, he returned.

Commented [notes14]: Numbers 6:25 (NIV) 25 the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

Verse 32 shows the distaste the Egyptians had for Hebrews. They had to sit at separate tables. This probably had more to do with their idea of religious purity than any other issue. Joseph sat alone, not with either group, but the food from his table was served to his brothers. Joseph brought the meal at the time he was sold as a slave, and now he is hosting the meal again as a conquering ruler. (Genesis 37:25) What a change from that meal to this one! It reminds me of the difference between the Last Supper and the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

Commented [notes15]: Genesis 37:25 (NIV) 25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

The brothers were seated in the order of age. That amazed them. Perhaps they thought this man had some way of divining things. Benjamin was served five times as much as the others. It was a test. Would they show their envy as they had with Joseph? Apparently not! Not a word is said about the favoritism. They had changed.

They ate their fill, something they hadn't done in some time, and the wine flowed freely. Perhaps Joseph was hoping to hear more about their father and life back in Canaan if he plied them with wine.

Once the meal was over, the grain was packed and they were all headed back home. Their father's prayer for El Shaddai to be gracious to them had been answered well beyond their expectations. Surely Simeon told them how he was treated well the last year or two in jail and understood how it was so hard for them to convince dad to let them take Benjamin. What a relief they must have all felt, that is, until they opened their bags that evening. But that is the next chapter.

The roller coaster ride of Genesis has hit another high point, and you know what happens after a peak on a one of those rides. Get ready to raise your hands and scream. The last chapter ended with doom and gloom when we knew it was headed toward something much better. This chapter ends with everyone feeling happy and

blessed when they were about to enter one of the most stressful times in their life. God is reinforcing the message that we can't tell from one minute to the next what is really happening in our life. (James 4:14) Are the wonderful encounters we had today a blessing or will they end in strife? Will the events of today, as gloomy as they might be, really end in disaster or a blessing? Only God knows, you and I don't. But we do know one thing. God is with us. (Matthew 28:20)

Commented [notes16]: James 4:14 (NIV)
14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

We are in the only hands that can see us safely through this life. I will more than likely misinterpret the events of a day, but the Scriptures assure me that I am not misinterpreting the character of God. (Hebrews 13:8)

Commented [notes17]: Matthew 28:20 (NIV)
20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We've watched for the pictures of Jesus in the life of Joseph, but this week and next we see them in the life of Judah. Someone had to step forward and make a sacrifice or the whole family would perish. Someone had to leave the father and offer to sacrifice himself to save the one his father loved. (John 16:28) Many generations later, the ultimate son of Judah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, told His Father he would come and rescue us. (Matthew 1:3) He offered to take our place. You see, you and I are the Benjamins that the Father does not want to lose. We are precious to Him. Unless we received the bread of life we would die. But the Son of God stepped in and gave himself as our guarantor. He would give His life for ours. We'll see this more clearly in the next chapter.

Commented [notes18]: Hebrews 13:8 (NIV)
8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Our lessons this week:

God will make us face our fears. The sooner you face them the freer you will live before Him. Put it all in God's hands and trust Him.

Commented [notes19]: John 16:28 (NIV)
28 I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

You can't interpret the day. Your vantage point is too limited, but you can interpret the attributes of God from Scripture. He is faithful, merciful, loving, good, holy, and just. Whatever He is allowing in your life will be in line with who He is. That is for certain.

Commented [notes20]: Matthew 1:3 (NIV)
3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,

You are your Abba Father's Benjamin, the son of His right hand. The Son of God left the Father to make a way for you to live by coming to bring you the Bread of Life. (John 6:58) He put His life on the line because the Father loved you so much. He knew that unless He did, you would perish. Praise be to God for His love for us! Praise be to the Son that was willing to take our place. Praise be to the Holy Spirit for painting this picture throughout the ages.

Commented [notes21]: John 6:58 (NIV)
58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."