

Transforming Trials 2-24-08

Genesis 44 – 45:5

I warned you last week that we were at high point on the roller coaster of Genesis, and you know what follows those high points. Get ready to raise your hands and scream because we are going to come shooting down at breakneck speeds. The family were wined and dined by Joseph. Simeon is back with his brothers. ³ *As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys.* They were headed home with bags filled with grain. Benjamin was safe and sound. Dad is going to be so relieved. Then...

⁴ *They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once..."* "Wait! Why is that cloud of dust behind us getting ever closer?" No use trying to outrun galloping camels when all you have are donkeys! There is nowhere to hide in the desert. But why hide? They don't think they have done anything wrong. (Proverbs 28:1)

Joseph told his steward, *"When you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil?'⁵ Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done."* That was a question that had echoed in Joseph's mind for years. *"Why have you repaid good with evil?"* The day they sold him, he was simply bringing them some food and checking on their welfare. Why did they do what they did? The simple answer is jealousy. (Matthew 27:18) Did Joseph hope they would reflect on the question? It seems that from their later response that they may have. It might have helped that it was the "silver cup" to remind them of the silver they took as payment for Joseph. (Genesis 37:28) More than likely, in the tension of the immediate situation, they didn't catch the clues.

Notice that Joseph does not say that he used the cup for divination. He has the steward ask them IF it is the cup he uses for divination. He is asking them what they would expect of a heathen ruler without saying he actually does such a thing. Clever! He provokes their imagination and they come up with their own imagined scenario.

⁷ *But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that!"* They are shocked at the accusation. They reminded him about returning the silver as evidence of their honesty. They were so sure they don't have the cup that they offered the execution of the one that is found with it and for the rest of them to be Joseph's slaves if the cup is found with them.

The steward responded by saying that only the one that is found with the cup would become his slave and the rest of them could go free. I think this was by Joseph's specific order to thoroughly test them. They started with the oldest and worked down to the youngest. The tension builds as the steward and his soldiers check each one. There is no mention of the silver coins being discovered in the bags, but there must have been some exchange like before, about God replacing their silver. (Genesis 43:23) There in Benjamin's sack was the cup! Their hearts sank.

Commented [notes1]: 1 The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

Commented [notes2]: 18 For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.

Commented [notes3]: Genesis 37:28 (NIV)
28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Commented [notes4]: Genesis 43:23 (NIV)
23 "It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

This the turning point in the Joseph story. Some might say it was when he came to the throne, or when he revealed himself to them, but for me it is this moment. What would they do? They could abandon him like they abandoned their brother years earlier, or even like they abandoned Simeon just a short time ago. It would mean a larger share of the estate for each of them when Dad dies. No more favorite sons of Rachel to deal with. Just walk away and be better off, except for Judah who promised to bear the blame. (Genesis 43:9) That would be the easiest thing for them to do. It's certainly better than slavery or death!

Commented [notes5]: Genesis 43:9 (NIV)
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.

But these men have changed. None of them could bear going back to their father and seeing his grief. They couldn't again endure what the family went through when Jacob thought Joseph had been killed by wild animals. (Genesis 37:34-35) Nor did they want to leave their little brother behind and deal with years of guilt like they had when they sold Joseph. They wouldn't walk away this time. They aren't the same men.

Commented [notes6]: Genesis 37:34-35 (NIV)
34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.
35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.

When they saw the cup in his sack, ... *they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.* Before it was only Jacob who rent his clothing. Now they are as grieved for Benjamin as Jacob was for Joseph. What a change! (John 13:34-35)

Commented [notes7]: John 13:34-35 (NIV)
34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Instead of forsaking Benjamin and heading home, they went with him back to Joseph's palace. He was still there from the previous day's feast. They threw themselves on the ground in front of him. ¹⁵ *Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"* This was the third time they had bowed before him, fulfilling the dream. (Genesis 42:6) (Genesis 43:26) Each time shows more humility and desperation than the time before. Their fear was so great that they probably didn't even think of the dream Joseph had told them of so long ago. (Genesis 43:7)

Commented [notes8]: Genesis 42:6 (NIV)
6 Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.

Again, notice carefully the wording. He didn't say that he divined things. That is like looking at tealeaves or into a crystal ball to find answers from the spiritual realm. He asked if they knew that a man like him could do such things. He is once again playing on their imagination, not confessing to using divination.

Commented [notes9]: Genesis 43:26 (NIV)
26 When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground.

¹⁶ *"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves--we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."* Judah has become the spokesman of the group even though he is the fourth from eldest. He is the one who promised his father the safe return of Benjamin. Judah declared what they were all thinking. This whole scenario is an act of God. They knew Benjamin didn't steal the cup. They knew they were guilty before God of selling their brother into slavery and believed that God was finally requiring of them that they experience what they had done to their brother. (Job 4:8)

Commented [notes10]: Genesis 37:7 (NIV)
7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

Notice that they didn't try to leave Benjamin or even blame him. They just all seemed to be resolved that this is God's way of evening the books. It was much more than that. God was orchestrating events to show Joseph that the brothers had changed and that they not only deeply cared for their father but for their brother as

Commented [notes11]: Job 4:8 (KJV)
8 Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

well. They could not repeat the crime they had committed in selling Joseph. Their hearts were changed. (Ezekiel 18:31) That is how you know if you have truly repented. You can't do again what you repented of doing. It's unthinkable. You see sin in all its ugliness, and you'd do anything not to go that way again. (Deuteronomy 17:16)

Commented [notes12]: Ezekiel 18:31 (KJV)
31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

But Joseph tested that commitment. He said, *"Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."* Would they take their second offer to free themselves and dump the favorite son of their father? They could say the ruler insisted, but their hearts wouldn't allow it.

Commented [notes13]: Deuteronomy 17:16 (NIV)
16 The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again."

I think sometimes the Lord gives us the same test of our commitment. We think we have made a stand in life, crossed a bridge so to speak. We have decided to follow our conviction and then God gives us a second opportunity. It is not to cause us to give in, but to strengthen our resolve. If we fail, we hadn't really experienced a heart change, only wishful thinking. Whether we pass or fail, that second test is really a blessing because it reveals to us our heart's true condition. (1John 3:9) The brothers really were repentant. They were ready to face the consequences of their sin, even if it meant enslavement.

Commented [notes14]: 1 John 3:9 (NIV)
9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

Then Judah really stuck his neck out, approached Joseph, and pleaded for the opportunity to share their story. He reminded Joseph of their first visit. Little did he know it was burned clearly in Joseph's memory. He explained Jacob's attachment to the boy, since his older brother died, which was the person he was talking to. He went on to tell of how Joseph had demanded that the younger brother had to appear before they could buy grain, and how difficult it was for his father to let him go. He even relayed Jacob's words, *29 If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.'*

Commented [notes15]: Genesis 34:25 (NIV)
25 Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male.

He is telling Joseph exactly why it is that they cannot return without Benjamin. They would rather be slaves than return without him. They just couldn't bear to see their father's grief. What a transformation from the men who for so long held on to a lie that cut their father's heart so deeply, men who wiped out a town. (Genesis 34:25) The oldest selfishly violated his father's wife. (Genesis 35:22) And remember, the one who is speaking has sons by his son's wife whom he thought was a shrine prostitute. (Genesis 38:16) Now they are all willing to give up their own lives rather than see Benjamin be a slave and the pain on their father's face. That is transformation! That is love.

Commented [notes16]: Genesis 35:22 (NIV)
22 While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it. Jacob had twelve sons:

Commented [notes17]: Genesis 38:16 (NIV)
16 Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you." "And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked.

That is the love that would one day have Moses say, "If You will not forgive them, blot me out of Your book." (Exodus 32:32) It is the love that would have the Apostle say, "I would be accursed if it would mean the salvation of the Jews." (Romans 9:3) It is the love that said from the cross, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." This is the love that flows from the one who is a new creation in Christ. (1John 3:10)

Commented [notes18]: Exodus 32:32 (NIV)
32 But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."

Commented [notes19]: Romans 9:3 (NIV)
3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,

Then Judah explained how he had guaranteed Benjamin's safety. This had to be a bit of a shock to Joseph, because Joseph remembers him being the one that urged

Commented [notes20]: 1 John 3:10 (NIV)
10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

the brothers to sell him. (Genesis 37:26-27) If there were a hint of animosity toward anyone, it would be toward Judah. But here Judah was explaining how he saved the family by being the guarantor for Benjamin's safety. Then Joseph heard what had to break any animosity his heart may have harbored.

³³ "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. ³⁴ How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father." Judah was offering his life in exchange for letting Joseph's younger brother go free. Perhaps Judah felt that because he was the one that suggested selling Joseph that the blame should fall on him.

This is one of the clearest pictures of substitutionary atonement in Scripture. Can a person give their life for the crimes of another? Judah was trying to take the punishment that belonged to his brother Benjamin. The cup was in Benjamin's sack, but Judah had pledged the safety of his brother. Now he was willing to stand by that pledge even if it cost his life! He loved his father that much. He loved his brother that much.

This is exactly what Jesus did for you. (1John 3:16) He saw you condemned and sentenced to death. Yet, He knew how much the Father loves you. He loves you too. So He committed Himself to see you safely home. He offered Himself in your place. (1John 2:2) He was willing to take your sentence. Not only was He willing, but he actually bore it, because unlike Benjamin, we are guilty and justice must be served. (Ezekiel 18:4)

That is where the chapter ends, but I decided I couldn't leave you hanging at this climactic point until I returned from Israel. Please stand as I read Genesis 45:1-5 Joseph was sure his brothers had changed. They loved his brother as much as he did. They loved his father like he loved him. The paintbrush of time in the hand of God had indeed painted a new picture. He had a family again. He couldn't keep the charade up any longer.

"Everyone out!" He ordered in Egyptian. Suddenly he burst out in great heaving sobs. The brothers wondered what in the world was happening. Surely the plea of Judah wasn't that good. Why would this Egyptian ruler cry like that after hearing the story? But it wasn't the story. It was the transformation of his brothers and the suffering of his father. It was the joy of seeing God working in them and the sorrow for all the lost years of separation. It was all too much to contain.

The next time Joseph's lips opened, he was speaking Hebrew. "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. "What! What did he say? Is this a trick? Could it really be? And if it is so, we are as good as dead. He'll finish this game with a quick execution."

The dreams had come true. They mocked those dreams before, and even taunted him as he was dragged away. "Let us see what comes of his dreams now." (Genesis

Commented [notes21]: Genesis 37:26-27 (NIV)
26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?
27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

Commented [notes22]: 1 John 3:16 (NIV)
16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Commented [notes23]: 1 John 2:2 (NIV)
2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Commented [notes24]: Ezekiel 18:4 (NIV)
4 For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son--both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

37:20) But the Giver of the dreams was not hindered by their attempts to keep them from being fulfilled. Instead, they aided Him. (2 Corinthians 13:8)

Stunned, minds swimming, mouths agape, they could not say a word. So Joseph spoke again in Hebrew. *"Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!"*

Slowly it began to sink in. They could see through the makeup and the Egyptian clothing, the same features they saw on the teenager's face the day they sold him. But the reminder that they sold him had them trembling. God was making them face what they had done. Their understanding of why all this was happening was partially true. God was indeed making them face their sin. But their imagined outcome being enslaved or imprisoned couldn't have been further from what was about to happen.

Joseph could read the fear on their faces so he continued, ⁵ *And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.* Joseph wanted to relieve them of the guilt and anguish they were enduring. What a godly man! Some of us would have wanted to rub it in a little longer, see them squirm a little more, but not Joseph. It hurt him to see them hurting. You see, God had worked compassion and understanding into Joseph's heart. Has He done the same in your heart?

But what was Joseph saying? "God sent me ahead of you to save lives." "I came first so many people would not starve to death." I can imagine their amazement as they began to realize the dreams had come to pass in spite of all they had done. The dreams' meanings were so different from what they took them to mean. They saw it as Joseph flaunting his favored status. In reality, it was Joseph saving their lives. How often we misinterpret what God is trying to show us! As Joseph had told the butler and baker, interpretations belong to God. (Genesis 40:7)

What a plan God had executed! It exposed sinful hearts and transformed them in the process. It dealt with pride and prepared a shepherd to lead a nation in a time of crisis. It drew pictures of the big plan so we could see the pattern. It displayed the sovereignty of God at which generations that followed have marveled. What a story! What a God!

Commented [notes25]: Genesis 37:20 (NIV)
20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

Commented [notes26]: 2 Corinthians 13:8 (KJV)
8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

Commented [notes27]: Genesis 37:20 (KJV)
20 Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.