

The Good and Bad

Genesis 42:18-28, 30 (37:18-36 – His brothers put him in a pit)

Christ Alone

Sermon Outline

A. The Past (vs. 18-20):

1. Now Joseph said – After Joseph recognized his brother, he spoke harshly to them harshly (vs. 7, 30), he accused them of being spies and locked them in prison for three days. He then began speaking to them with no intention of ever stopping, as if he did not care what they had to say.
2. Do this and live – Joseph commands his brothers to become very diligent with, emphasizing a deep sense of obligation to labor and toil, doing whatever it takes to preserve their lives from certain death. Joseph seems very angry.
3. I fear God – To terrify or reverence – The only checkpoint for Joseph, with the level of anger he is experiencing, has a positive feeling of awe or reverence for God's power and authority. This recognition causes him to be submissive to the will of God.
 - a) Here, Joseph gave his brothers a clue about who he was. In effect, Joseph told them, "I fear the one God" (41:32). For all of his more than twenty years in Egypt, Joseph had not lost his belief in the true God.[\[1\]](#)
4. I fear God – To terrify or reverence – Everyone has a free will, but no one can control results. God directed Joseph's brothers to Egypt by creating a famine that was in every land (41:57), He had the Ishmaelites (by sending Ishmael away to become a nation) take Joseph to Egypt, a land that believes in dreams, because God made Joseph have a dream and learn how to interpret dreams. God allowed Potiphar's wife to accuse Joseph of evil, knowing that Potiphar has access to the king's jail, so that when the Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker went to jail, Joseph would be there to interpret their dreams. When Pharaoh has a dream, the chief cupbearer would be right in place to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph learned how to manage Potiphar's house, Pharaoh's jail and now a nation.

5. If you are honest men – Because of everything they had done to Joseph (they said that Joseph was dead, vs. 13) the major issue became whether they would function in with integrity. Honesty is not something that can simply be accepted because an offender claims to be truthful; it must be tested over time and through actions. Scripture encourages us to test every spirit (1 John 4:1). Joseph, therefore, decided to place Simeon in prison. Even though Simeon was confined, Joseph made sure he was safe. Joseph acted as though Simeon would never be released. This is probably why Jacob said Simeon was no more (vs. 36).
6. Bring your youngest brother to me - Benjamin is a great test because he was not born from the same mother as the other brothers, and Jacob openly showed favoritism toward him. Just like in the case of Joseph, Benjamin would be a test to learn if the spirit of honesty exists in them. If Jacob refused to send Benjamin, it would demonstrate that he still did not trust his sons because of their past actions.
7. And they did so – Joseph appears to have intentionally kept his brothers in a state of fear by repeatedly warning them that they would die if they failed to obey his instructions. Egypt was a powerful nation, and the brothers already seemed intimidated by the strength and power of the nation (Genesis 42:1).
8. Then they said to one another truly – They collectively and repeatedly spoke of their guilt with no relief or resolution in sight. They forcefully commanded each other's attention, continually returning to the same painful conclusion again and again.
9. We are guilty concerning our brother – They all acknowledged that they committed a serious sin against Joseph, one worthy of punishment and they were now having to deal with the consequences of that sin.
10. We are guilty concerning our brother – People often try to help others recognize the wrongfulness of their sin, yet many times true conviction only comes through the work of God. When we continually keep obeying His Word, like Joseph did, *"all things work together for good."* (Rom. 8:28)
11. We saw the distress of his soul – The brothers clearly and intelligently understood how much emotional and psychological anguish Joseph was experiencing. They were completely committed to following through on the decision they were making. They clearly understood that this decision could cost Joseph his life. Even though they heard their brother in anguish they sat down and ate a meal (Gen. 37:25). Their intent was for Joseph to die, but God used Reuben and Judah to save his life.
12. We saw the distress of his soul – Even though their intent was to take Joseph's life, God was already ahead of their plans allowing another family drama (Abraham, Sarah and Hagar - Ishmael) to become Joseph's salvation. Our faithfulness to God rescues us and leads to our healing.

- a) But now his brothers graphically describe his appeals for mercy (cf. Deut 3:23; 2 Kgs 1:13) and his distress of soul. צרה “distress” is more common in poetry than in prose and seems to refer to extreme situations (cf. 35:3; Deut 31:17; 2 Kgs 19:3). They equate their present situation with his, then, perhaps overdramatically, but it shows their awareness of divine providence overruling their affairs and requiring restitution.[\[2\]](#)

13. When he pleaded with us - Joseph loudly begged for mercy.

- a) A taste of retribution began to awaken feelings in the brothers, feelings that Joseph’s cries for mercy (v. 21) and Jacob’s tears (37:34–35) had failed to awaken. They sensed that having to bring Benjamin back to Egypt against the wishes of their father would be punishment for their having sold Joseph. Since Jacob was still distressed, now *they* were in distress. As they spoke, they were unaware that Joseph understood them for he was using an interpreter. Seeing their sense of remorse touched Joseph and he turned away and wept (cf. 43:30; 45:2, 14; 50:1, 17).[\[3\]](#)

14. Listen – They were so completely determined to get rid of Joseph that they gave absolutely no attention to his cries.

15. This distress has come upon us - The anguish that Joseph experienced had now come upon his brothers. They recognized that they were being held accountable and they have no power to escape judgment.

16. Reuben answered them – Reuben, the brother who previously spoke up for Joseph and rescued him from his brothers (37:22-23) responded by crying out to all of his brothers.

- a) Only Reuben had tried to save Joseph on that awful day (37:22). His plan to rescue Joseph was thwarted when the brothers decided to sell him to the Midianite traders instead of abandoning him in a pit to die. his blood: According to Reuben, the brothers would be punished for killing Joseph.[\[4\]](#)
- b) Reuben’s outburst is even more important for Joseph, for now he realizes that his eldest brother had not consented to his sale, and this may be the reason he decides to detain Simeon, the second oldest in the family, rather than Reuben. But Sternberg (*Poetics*, 291) thinks it is because he wanted Benjamin, Rachel’s second son, that he held Simeon, Leah’s second son, as hostage.[\[5\]](#)

17. Saying, did I not tell you – Speaking to his brothers, Ruben firmly reminded them how he commanded them not to take their brother’s life, now they all have to deal with the present circumstances.
18. Do not sin – Ruben sought to stop them because he clearly understood that this is a sin that will remain with them forever.
19. They did not listen - They were totally unwilling to do anything Ruben asked of them even though they completely understood the sin they were committing. We “*do not struggle against flesh and blood.*” (Eph. 6:12)
20. Now comes the reckoning – They have no authority or power to stop God from avenging this sin against Joseph. They are fully aware that this judgement is upon them.

B. The Present (vs. 23-25):

1. They did not know – So much time had passed, they believed Joseph to be dead, even though they sold him to the Ishmaelites, they did not recognize Joseph.
2. Joseph understood everything – Joseph gave them his undivided attention and had a full intellectual understanding of all that was said and he must have remembered what Ruben and Judah sought to do to help him.
3. He turned away from them and wept - Joseph did not merely shed tears; he wept deeply and intensely, as though he could hardly stop himself. It was extremely emotional with a strong expression of anguish. It is recorded that Joseph repeated these nine more times (27:38; 33:4; 37:35; 43:30; 45:2, 14, 15; 46:29; 50:1, 17).
 - a) In the course of the conversation, Joseph saw that his brothers were greatly concerned and remorseful. He sensed their loyalty to Jacob and their solid family spirit. He ... wept as he thought of the old days and the suffering the men had caused by their hostility and cruelty, and as he recognized their change of heart.[\[6\]](#)
 - b) At this point, Joseph’s pent-up emotions simply had to come out, so he left the room and wept privately. This is the first of six such experiences; for Joseph also wept when he saw his brother Benjamin (43:29–30), when he revealed himself to his brothers (45:2), when he met his father in Egypt (46:29), when his father died (50:1), and when he assured his brothers that they were truly forgiven (v. 17). What makes a person weep is a good test of character. Wiersbe, W. W. (1997). *Be authentic* (pp. 110–111). Chariot Victor Pub.

4. When he returned to them and spoke to them - Joseph must have stepped away while weeping loudly. He returned, seemingly determined to remain engaged in confronting his brothers. Through an interpreter, Joseph continued speaking and addressing them verbally. Although the interpreter conveyed the words, Joseph remained in direct interaction with his brothers throughout the exchange.
5. He took Simeon and bound him - Joseph fully engaged himself in taking Simeon, one of the oldest brothers, into his hands as if he planned to keep him and bound him as if he is not going to be released. It is not entirely clear whether Joseph physically carried this out himself or directed it as part of his authority, but the action clearly served as a decisive demonstration of control within the situation. Jewish tradition says that the reason Joseph picked Simeon was because he was the harshest brother towards him when he was bound and put in a pit. Additionally, Simeon, along with Levi, is earlier seen as taking a leading role in the violent retaliation of Shechem (Gen. 34). Jacob later specifically mentions their fierce anger in Gen. 49:5-7.
 - a) Simeon was also known to be a cruel man (34:25; 49:5-7), and perhaps Joseph hoped to teach him a lesson. We don't know how many family secrets Jacob shared with his favorite son Joseph or what part they played in this decision.[\[7\]](#)
 - b) Jacob's second son (see 29:32-33) is imprisoned instead of the firstborn Reuben, perhaps because the latter had saved Joseph's life years earlier (37:21-22).
6. Then Joseph gave orders - Joseph exercised his position of authority by repeatedly commanding his servants to fill the brothers' sacks with grain and secretly restore each man's money. A strong message that Simeon was remaining and the rest of the brothers must be on their way home.
 - a) He is deeply moved by the signs of their penitence. Joseph's weeping is the harbinger of further tears on their next journey, when he sees Benjamin (43:30), when Judah offers to remain as slave instead of Benjamin and Joseph reveals his identity (45:2), and on the third journey when he is reunited with his father (46:29). For all his apparent harshness toward his brothers, this action proves that he still loves them and that if they continue to show a change of heart, reconciliation will be possible ultimately.[\[8\]](#)
7. And give them provisions for the journey – Despite how highly emotional Joseph is, he did not allow his brothers to depart without food to survive their trip especially since there was a severe famine everywhere.
 - a) The God-fearing man is one who cares for the needy and hungry (cf. Job 29:12-13; Prov 31:20; cf. 30).[\[9\]](#)

8. Was done for them - This verse ends, “it was done for them” (42:9 – ‘Joseph remembered the dream.’) as if to imply Joseph’s disposition was now focused on family restoration (bring your youngest brother to me...;’ 42:20). His initial reaction was well spent, the security blanket of Simeon remaining was established, now it is time to reunite with his family because this was always God’s intent based on his dream (42:9). This is Joseph’s ethical obligation before the Lord whom he feared. No matter what we may experience remember God’s Word and remain in it because this is how we bear fruit (John 15:1-10; Romans 8:28).

C. The Future (vs. 28, 30-37):

1. Then they said the money has been returned –Once a good distance from Egypt and the money was discovered to be in the bags all of Joseph’s brothers went into panic mode. They could not speak about it.
 - a) The very fact that the brothers possessed both the grain and their silver potentially confirms the accusation that they are scouts’ intent on stealing grain. Frequently we might see trade in grain or herds, but Jacob’s family has no grain, and the herds are difficult to transport. It is no surprise, then, that they have brought silver with which to trade. Walton, J. H. (2009). Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (Vol. 1, pp. 132–133). Zondervan.
 - b) Why did Joseph put their money back in their sacks? Was it out of brotherly kindness to show they were his guests (von Rad), to make them appear as thieves (cf. 44:1–13), or to reproduce the earlier situation when they were happy to exchange Joseph for money? Would they now decide to hold onto their cash and leave Simeon in prison (so Sternberg, *Poetics*)? It may not be necessary to choose between these ideas; Joseph may have had multiple motives (so Westermann).[\[10\]](#)
2. And their hearts sank – All of their deepest, inner most emotions were in constant motion. Their fear, anxiety, and insecurities welled up inside of them as they became completely overwhelmed by the discovery of the money in their bags. The most powerful nation with the most powerful military under the direction of the second most powerful man in the country can come after them and kill them. They have already been told twice they were going to die because they were spies (42:9, 18-20).

- a) The sense of guilt already aroused made the group quickly see the hand of God in the governor's action. So the question, What is this that God has done to us? was, as far as it went, a fruitful reaction to trouble. They apparently felt that Joseph would accuse them of theft, which would support his contention that they were spies.^[11]
3. They turned trembling to one another – The tables had turned. They must go back, they are now at the mercy of Joseph, after he was at their mercy and now, they have no power to change any of it. They were literally shaking in fear. These men, who once appeared invincible, strong, and confident, were now humbled, weakened, and dethroned by circumstances beyond their control. They needed God's mercy even more than Joseph's favor.
4. God has done to us – Joseph's brothers recognized that God created and controlled all the circumstances they were experiencing, and they had no answer as to what God would do next. They understood they were not at Joseph's mercy, but ultimately at the mercy of God Himself. Earlier they had already confessed their guilt concerning Joseph (vs. 21), and that they had sinned against God. Joseph feared God and became blessed. They sinned against God and are now under His judgment.

[1] Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). [Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary](#) (p. 75). T. Nelson Publishers.

[2] Wenham, G. J. (1994). [Genesis 16–50](#) (Vol. 2, p. 408). Word, Incorporated.

[3] Ross, A. P. (1985). [Genesis](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 92). Victor Books.

[4] Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). [Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary](#) (p. 75). T. Nelson Publishers.

[5] Wenham, G. J. (1994). [Genesis 16–50](#) (Vol. 2, p. 409). Word, Incorporated.

[6] Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament](#) (Ge 42:21). Moody Press.

[7] Wiersbe, W. W. (1997). [Be authentic](#) (p. 111). Chariot Victor Pub.

[8] Wenham, G. J. (1994). [Genesis 16–50](#) (Vol. 2, p. 409). Word, Incorporated.

[9] Wenham, G. J. (1994). [Genesis 16–50](#) (Vol. 2, p. 408). Word, Incorporated.

[10] Wenham, G. J. (1994). [Genesis 16–50](#) (Vol. 2, p. 409). Word, Incorporated.

[11] Ross, A. P. (1985). [Genesis](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 92–93). Victor Books.