



DATE: February 22, 2009

TEXT: Genesis 42:3-15,18-24

TITLE: "Genesis XXVII: A test of Integrity"

As so often is the case, I thought I would have 3 or 4 sermons on Joseph but in reality I will have 9 or 10. This is my 7th sermon on Joseph. Why I have ended up taking so much time with Joseph is because I believe the story clearly teaches how God works with His children.

How God works with you and me in times of struggle and in times of joy. Joseph, his father, and his brothers are not some idolized characters of fiction. They were real humans.... in many ways very, very flawed, who worked on a relationship with God. Today we are going to see some positive change, maybe for the first time, in the brothers. I will share two lesson.

Lesson # 1 Notice the testing of the brothers by Joseph to prove their love and integrity.

This story takes three full chapters of Genesis. I just read the beginning in our Scripture reading.

Allow me to summarize the three chapters.

The 10 brothers appear before Joseph. He recognizes them... they do not recognize him.

Why should they... its been 22 years since they sold him as a slave. He is now Egyptian in appearance, they thought he was dead and he speaks to them through an interpreter. Joseph inquires about their family and discovers his father and his other brother, Benjamin is alive. He then accuses them of being spies. Eventually he comes up with a plan. He will send 9 brothers home with food and imprison one brother, Simeon. He tells them he will only release Simeon if they bring Benjamin back to him. As they are going away he orders their silver put back into the bags of grain. When they discover it there is great fear because the brothers fear they will be labeled thieves and they will never get Simeon back. They return home... Jacob, their father, is saddened by the news.... but refuses to send Benjamin. Finally after about 6 months, they again run out of food and face starvation. Jacob want the 9 to return. They refuse to go without Benjamin. Judah pledges the safety of Benjamin and they return a second time to Joseph. Joseph has a banquet for them but still does not reveal himself. He gives them food and sends all 11 back to Judah... but in Benjamin's bag he puts in an expensive silver cup. After a few hours they are searched and the cup is found in the bag. Benjamin is arrested and ordered back into the

presence of Joseph... all the brothers return to Joseph and Judah defends his brother. That is a summary of Genesis 42, 43 and 44.

Commentators disagree on his motives for this very harsh treatment of his brothers. Some say he was testing them from the very beginning trying to discover their integrity. Others say he was just plain angry at them and was not ready to move on.

The New American Commentary says this about these chapters....

Such microreadings of the chief participants fail to understand the wider purpose and goals of chapters 42-43. The motives and actions of Joseph and his family members are not patterns to be copied or avoided. The author's goal is to show that God's design for Israel's fathers are working toward the end of redeeming the household of faith. Testing produces spiritual reclamation. The mending of the family is now underway. Whatever the motivations and faults of the broken family, the divine plan for the embryonic nation would be achieved. God superintended the good and ill choices made by the family—even by a recalcitrant old man, a harsh master, or blind siblings— to bring about the greater good. But these are not cardboard figures whose choices and emotions do not count. The emotions are real and run the full range, including fear, anger, levity, and weeping.

God, and probably Joseph, was testing these men. What would they do? Would they abandon Simeon and leave him in prison or enslaved as they left Joseph? Jacob almost did. Would they abandon Benjamin and allow him to be sent to prison? Would they tell him the truth? Would there be any regret for their actions against Joseph? Would they show integrity or would they still be selfish, self centered individuals? Joseph and God would test them.

Lesson # 2 Notice the process of integrity that the brothers finally displayed. Allow me to show you this process in two major steps.

Step # 1 They showed true sorrow and repentance for the actions against Joseph. *Gen 42:21ff*

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." 23 They did not realize that Joseph could understand them

The first step to reconciliation with another person or with God is repentance. The realization that our actions or thoughts or motives were wrong and we need to admit the truth. Again as I was reading this text the words of Jesus came to my mind. I was reminded of the story of the Prodigal Son. You remember the story. The son goes to his father and demands his inheritance. He says something like "dad when you die I will get ½ of your assets.... lets just say you are dead and you can give them to me know." The father gives the son the money. He wastes the money on "women, wine and wild living." He comes to his senses and returns home. *Luke 15: 21* gives us these words of the prodigal son....

The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. 22" But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the

fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

The brothers of Joseph and the prodigal son were making the first steps to healing. They realized they had chosen a path away from God.

Isn't that true with each and every one of us. Do you remember a number of years ago I shared with you a sermon series on the 12 steps of recovery given to us by A.A. Let me share with you again the first seven steps. They are....

- 1.) We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.**
- 2.) We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**
- 3.) We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.**
- 4.) We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**
- 5.) We admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**
- 6.) We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**
- 7.) We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.**

Notice that 7 of the 12 all have to do with repentance. All of them are taking that first step that the brothers and the prodigal Son took. Facing ourselves and turning back to God.

Now, you may not be dealing with alcoholism. But I believe each and every one of us is dealing with a sinful addiction. Maybe it is anger. Maybe it is bitterness. Maybe it is sexual obsession. Maybe it is financial security at all cost. Maybe it is self centeredness. Each and

every one of us need an awareness of our sinfulness and the admission that we need to return to our heavenly Father. The Good news is this. The heavenly Father is awaiting for us. He will run to us. He will embrace us. He will kill the fattened cow. He will throw us a party. He loves us and desires our repentance.

Step 2. But there is a second step the brothers took. They finally chose a path of love and loyalty to each other. When Joseph ordered the return of Benjamin he said these words....

But Joseph 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."

Here was the moment of truth. Would they choose to abandon Benjamin and return home or would they stay with Benjamin. I have good news. Finally, they chose a path of love. They refused to abandon their brother. *Beth Moore* said this about this passage

I hope you noted the significance of their return to the city. They would not forsake Benjamin. They would face the accuser as one. All for one and one for all. Does this sound like Jacob's sons to you? Beloved, we must pause and not miss the change creeping over this fragile band of brothers. The emerging solidarity among these splintered siblings can't be overemphasized. I'd like to suggest that from God's perspective solidarity was the point of their 20 year ordeal.

Remember this fact. These brothers were destined to be the leaders of the tribes of Israel.

These tribes would have to endure 400 years of slavery in Egypt. These tribes would have to

endure the 40 years in the wilderness. These tribes would have to endure the forming of a nation in the promised land. God was training and teaching these men. Through these hundreds of years... they would have to stick together as a family. For 400 years they would have to avoid assimilation into the Egyptian society. They had to learn family loyalty. This is God teaching them loyalty.

We need family loyalty. We are the family of Christ. We are the children of God. We are the Church. We must refuse to assimilate into the world. In but not of the world. We must support each other because our refusal to assimilate will be seen as a threat by the world. We must love each other. We must rely on each other and on the power of the Holy Spirit. Hear these final words of Jesus. He is about to be arrested. He is about to be crucified. He had one more opportunity to speak with his beloved disciples. He teaches this lesson (*John 14*)

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live..... 27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

I think we need to be clear. The world will not understand our faith. I read a great article

this week in a magazine entitled Theology Matters. It was written by a man who lived the gay lifestyle. He writes this...

Let me say a hearty “THANK YOU” to my wife, and my parents and family, and my friends, who cared enough about me to offend me! I get a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach when I consider the ramifications in my life had people in my world brought into the lie that to love me was to affirm my homosexuality. My wife refused to divorce me. (My family and friends loved me and cared for me.) And each of them offended me. Each of them made me angry. I viewed them as bigoted and unenlightened, and ignorant and prejudiced and hateful. I told them that if they truly loved me they would accept my homosexuality and affirm my lifestyle. I did my best to sever the relationship I had with them. But they would not let me go....

Today my marriage is restored and has grown beyond my imagination. I have three beautiful children. Healing has happened in my family, and I am closer to my friends than ever. ... THANK YOU, dear friends, for your offense to me. At the time the Truth you shared was the aroma of death to me (2 Cor. 2:15) but today it is the sweet fragrance of LIFE.

I remind everyone of my first lesson. We are all in need of repentance. We must not point our fingers and others and say “what a terrible sin.” The greatest sinner you will see is the one you look at in the mirror. In others and in ourselves we must be honest and sweep away sin. Expect the world to not understand this truth. Be the Church. Love each other. Share together the power of the Holy Spirit. We need each other. I’ll begin with me. I need you. I get discouraged. I need you. I make mistakes. I need you. I have faced much grief. I need you. I could go on and on. We need each other. We need to be the church. Together, in the power of

the Holy Spirit we can “overcome the world.” Joseph’s brothers are progressing on their faith journey... as you and I are also progressing.

AMEN