

Text: Genesis 42

Title: "God's Work of Providence Calls Us to Faithful Perceptivity [the power to perceive, see, or understand]"

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Introduction: Night vision technology has been a key advantage for our military in recent wars. This technology enables our troops to see what normally cannot be seen because it is too dark. I read parts of an article about these devices this past week, and I learned that there are two kinds of night vision technologies: thermal imaging and image enhancement.

The image enhancement technology takes the tiny amounts of light being emitted by an object and magnifies and enhances those so as to make them clear to the human eye. It makes the barely noticeable more noticeable. Thermal imaging technology captures infrared light, a kind of light wave that is normally too long for us to see, and then translates it into something we can see. It converts what is normally invisible to the human eye into a form that is visible. Night vision is valuable to our troops because it is able to notice the barely noticeable and see the normally invisible.

One of the themes that runs through Genesis 42 concerns what people can and cannot see. We call the ability to see "perceptivity" or "good perception." In this chapter the Lord is pointing out to us repeatedly the difference between those who could see something, those with perceptivity, and those who could not see what they needed to, those who lacked perceptivity.

Let's trace this theme as it appears in the chapter (v. 1 "Jacob saw", "why are you . . . looking at each other?"; v. 7, "Joseph saw . . . recognized", the brothers could not see because "Joseph . . . disguised himself"; v. 8, "Joseph recognized", "his brothers did not recognize"; v. 21, "the brothers saw Joseph's

distress"; v. 23, "the brothers did not know that Joseph heard"; v. 27 & 35, "the brothers see their money (somewhat late because it was previously hidden); and vv. 33-34, Joseph needed to see proof that his brothers were honest men.

Clearly, in this chapter Joseph is the one who can see some things that his brothers cannot see. He was the one who noticed the barely noticeable and saw the invisible. It is almost like he had an advantage like night vision. The story of Joseph from Genesis 37 onward is an exposition of God's work of providence, the fact that He has an unstoppable plan and that He is with us on every step of the way. He is the God who sees everything at all times.

From this chapter I want us to see that God's work of providence calls us to faithful perceptivity. It calls us to an ability to notice what is barely noticeable to others, and to see the reality of things that are invisible to most. We will notice five things the Lord wants us to see in response to His work of providence in our lives.

I. See that the sons of Israel stand out in a crowd (42:1-5).

Illustration: Have you ever lost a child in a crowded area? When we lived in Arlington, TX, my family made it a point to get to the Texas State fair in Dallas each year. It was a great time with a lot of exciting rides and shows. Our kids were preschool age then, so we would go to things suitable for their age especially.

One year we went to one of those dog shows, where the owners of the dogs have the frisbees and throw them around and the dogs run and catch the frisbees. It was a great show and the place was mobbed with people.

On the way out of the building, Brandon became separated from us. I can still remember the feeling of terror we felt as we

frantically rushed around looking for our 4 or 5 year old, asking people if they had seen him. After just a few minutes, which seemed like a few eternities, we saw Brandon on the shoulders of a fellow Texan coming our way out of the dog show tent. There was a crowd of people coming out of the tent that day, but only one had the special focus of Kevin and Maureen. He stuck out in the crowd because he is our child, and we love him and wanted him to be ok.

Application: Verse 5 tells us that Joseph's ten brothers came to buy grain from Egypt "among those who were coming." They were part of a crowd. But notice that the verse calls them "the sons of Israel."

That phrase stands out in this crowd because *Israel* is the covenant name that God gave to Jacob. It defines the special relationship that God had with Jacob and his sons. They were not merely a part of the crowd in Egypt; they were the sons of Israel among the crowd in Egypt. God was going to do some things for them in Egypt that He was not going to do for anyone else in that crowd of people.

These brothers undoubtedly felt like a God-forsaken part of a needy crowd. They were not that at all. They stood out in the crowd in the eyes of God. Unlike moms and dads of pre-school kids, God never loses sight of his people in the crowd. We always stand out to Him; He always has His eye on us; He never loses, forsakes, or forgets us. We need eyes to see that, when our circumstances make us feel as though God has lost us in the crowd somewhere, He knows the sons of Israel.

II. See that God's revelation is unfailingly certain (42:6-9a).

Application: All of this must have happened very quickly for Joseph. He was no doubt going through his daily routine, seeing hundreds of needing applicants for grain, and suddenly

there are his brothers bowing before him. He remembers the dreams God gave him to reveal to him what would happen.

All at once Joseph is hit with the wonder of the reliability of the unfailing certainty of God's revelation. Up to that moment, there was much evidence from Joseph's life that argued that God's Word was not necessarily certain, that maybe it could fail to be true.

Remember what Joseph's brothers had said about his dreams? (37:20, "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"). For some twenty plus years now, it had looked as though the brothers were right. God's revelation had not proven true to Joseph's experience.

But then he walks into work one day and there are his brothers, just like God said! Satan has from the beginning denied the unfailing certainty of God's revelation, and he wants to convince us to do the same. In spite of his best efforts, however, God's Word is unfailing certain and worth of our trust.

Illustration: We remember Thomas Paine as one of our country's founding fathers, the man who wrote *Common Sense*, the pamphlet that perhaps more than anything else prepared the colonies for revolution.

Paine fell out of favor with our God-fearing land, however, after he authored his *Age of Reason*, a book in which he derides the Bible as something less than the true Word of God. In spite of all his contributions to the founding of our nation, only six people attended his funeral in 1809. He was heavily involved in the failed French Revolution, which ultimately ended in the tyranny of Napoleon.

In summing up his criticism of the Old Testament, Paine wrote the following: "I have now gone through the Bible, as a man would go through a wood with an axe on his shoulder, and fell trees. Here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never make them grow."

Application: Paine was convinced that his pen had managed to put an end to the notion that God's revelation is unfailingly certain and absolute truth. The brothers thought that they had proven the same thing when they sold Joseph into slavery. These men were sadly mistaken. If we fail to understand the unfailingly certain absolute truth and reliability of God's revelation this morning, we are blind indeed.

III. See that God is not mocked (42:9b-17, 21-22).

Application: Joseph treats the brothers in such a way that to make them understand that God was judging them for not having compassion on their brother's agony. This realization was preparation for God's tremendous blessing on them. God was not really judging them; He was saving them.

To perceive that God is not mocked, that we reap what we sow, is to be rescued from reprobation. Reprobation is God's work in a life that allows one to be given over to sin without the conviction and consequences the work of the Holy Spirit might bring to that life (Rom. 1:28-32). God did not let reprobation happen to Joseph's brothers. God was not done with Joseph's brothers. We know this because He allowed them to reap what they sowed.

When we reap what we sow, when we come under the conviction and consequences of our sin, we need to see God at work in our lives to bring us back to the place of usefulness and fellowship with Him. We either perceive that God is not

mocked, or we go blindly on to ultimate judgment as those whom God has given over to a reprobate mind.

IV. See that the fear of God must be in control (42:18-20, 23-26).

Application: Joseph is obviously working through a lot of pain in this passage, which has come to him through the personal injuries that his brothers have inflicted on him. We need to say more about the role of forgiveness in our response to the providence of God over our lives in the weeks ahead, but what we see here in a preliminary way is the control mechanism that produces in Joseph the response of forgiveness.

It is Joseph's fear of God; his relationship with God that dictates how he is going to treat his brothers. It is not his relationship with his brothers that is going to dictate his response to them. In spite of his own personal pain, Joseph responds to his brothers in agreement with his fear of God rather than in agreement with his injuries from them.

The brothers never possess the wherewithal to completely compensate Joseph for the injuries they had incurred. They feel bad about what they did, but only bad enough to complain about the trouble they were going through because of it. In fact, they even make up another hide-saving lie after Jacob dies to try to continue to manipulate and use their brother (Gen. 50:15-21).

Yet Joseph's forgiveness persists. How so? His fear of God persisted. He understood that he was not in God's place; God had a plan in all the injuries he suffered at the hands of his brothers, and God wanted him to forgive.

V. See that God is for you, not against you (42:27-38).

Application: The very things that made these men tremble, fearful, and discouraged (discovering the money, the request

for Benjamin, the need to return to Egypt), would have been causes of great rejoicing had they the perceptivity to understand them for what they really were. Jacob says all these things are against me (v. 36), but the truth of the matter was that all these things were for him.

Rom. 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Whatever God is doing with us, He is doing for us, not against us. He is making us more like our Savior.

Conclusion: We who understand that God is working His providential plan ought to be able to see some things that others cannot.

Remember the question of the servant of Elisha on that day that the King of Aram had sent out his entire army to capture this one man of God? As he stared at the surrounding army and their military equipment, he asked Elisha, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15).

Elisha's answer was "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them," and then he prayed, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Suddenly, Elisha's servant could see that the mountains were filled with horses and chariots of fire there to protect them. Together these men of God saw what others could not.

Paul prays that same kind of prayer for New Testament believers, and it is one we should pray this morning (Eph. 1:18-19, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power").

May we be a people who believe in God's work of providence, and may we be able to see what others cannot: that He never forgets us as His own, that His Word is unfailingly true, that God is not mocked, that we must forgive if we fear God, and that whatever He is doing, it is for us, not against us.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*