

Text: Genesis 43

Title: "God's work of providence calls us to faithful forgiveness"

Time: August 16, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: During our week of Vacation Bible School, we had a lot going on, and part of what went on involved a squatter on our property for the week. Brother Tim Dippiro helped a great deal and slept in his tent with Brandon most of the week in our yard. Adrian and Austin Yates also helped us with VBS, and the four of them spent some time in the afternoons doing something called *geocaching*.

I had never heard of it, but evidently geocaching involves traveling all over the world searching for hidden caches, kind of like a treasure hunt. The GPS coordinates of these caches are logged into a website, and you use your GPS guidance system to find these things. The boys only had their bikes, so they did not get really far around the world, but they did have a great time searching for hidden treasure. They found some exciting things on their adventures.

Did you notice that our passage this morning refers to treasure (v. 23)? The word translated *treasure* here is an interesting word. It comes from the Hebrew verb meaning *to hide*. Joseph's servant tells the brothers, not only that God had put in their sacks treasure, but also that God had put in their sacks hidden treasure.

Going to the bank and making a withdrawal is different from going geocaching. Both involve finding treasure, but only in one case is the treasure hidden. The servant knows something that Joseph's brothers do not when he tells them that God had given them hidden treasure in their sack. He knew that God had given them the money, yes, but that was only the tip of the iceberg. What God had given them in the sack was the

hidden treasure of Joseph's forgiveness, and because of this there was a whole lot more blessing of this kind to come.

We see this theme of forgiveness throughout the passage as Joseph is reconciled with his estranged brothers. Verse 14 of our passage gives us one of the best definitions of forgiveness we have in the Bible: "may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man." To experience forgiveness is to have God give you compassion in the sight of the one you have offended.

This passage is about the providence of God in Joseph's life as are all these chapters about Joseph, but here we have the emphasis that God's providence calls us to the response of faithful forgiveness. Because we are a people who believe that God is working His plan, we must be a forgiving people. We must seek what Joseph sought for his brothers, that the Lord would grant our offenders compassion in our sight. I want us to see three things about forgiveness from this passage this morning.

I. The need for forgiveness is inevitable (Gen. 43:1-10).

Illustration: Our town has a number of claims to fame, but perhaps none of these is cherished by New Bostonians quite as much as our title to "The Gravity Center of the World." We are called that, evidently, because Roger Babson organized the Gravity Research Foundation in 1948 near the center of town.

Evidently, one of the things Babson tried to do with his foundation early on was develop various antigravity technologies. He worked on making antigravity aircraft wings to help prevent plane crashes and antigravity walking shoes to make people feel lighter as they walked. Ultimately, his efforts to defy gravity in this way failed, and the foundation focused simply on studying the phenomenon to understand it better. As far as we know, what goes up must come down. The effects of gravity are inevitable and unavoidable.

Application: Joseph's eleven brothers have been trying to avoid something for some time now. They thought that they were simply avoiding an inevitable trip to Egypt for food. Yet Joseph's treatment had taught them also that they needed more than food in Egypt; they also needed forgiveness to get the food.

They struggle about how to get down there and back in one piece given the fact that they have to go through "the man" (vv. 3, 5, 6, 7). These men were avoiding Egypt because they were avoiding "the man," Joseph. Their need for the forgiveness of the man was just as inevitable as their need for grain.

The day will come when we need forgiveness. In this world of sin, with the sinful natures of ourselves and everyone around us, the time when we need forgiveness is surely coming. It is unavoidable. We think of the need for forgiveness as something exceptional and unusual, but the Bible speaks of it as something as common and inevitable in this world of sin as the force of gravity itself.

My brother made this point in a message I heard him preach on Prov. 28:13, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." Solomon does not say, "Whoso sins shall not prosper," but "Whoso covers or hides his sins." In other words, he assumes that the sins are going to happen. The only question is whether we will cover them or confess them. As God works His plan out in our lives, we are going to need forgiveness, and we are going to need to forgive others with that need. We should not pretend that we can avoid this need.

Nor should we delay when the need for forgiveness arises. Judah makes an excellent point in verse 10. What if the brothers had not delayed? Would they not have had incredible blessings, which they were missing out on? Since our need for

forgiveness is inevitable, may we seek the blessing of securing it or providing it without delay. The need for forgiveness is inevitable.

II. Making restitution is indispensable (Gen. 43:11-15).

Illustration: Have you ever been surprised by the size of a bill you received in the mail? We received a tax bill from the town of Danbury CT about a month ago that surprised me. We have not lived in Danbury for about a decade now, and so it was strange getting a bill for about four hundred dollars from them. That was an unexpected and unpleasant request for restitution.

Application: Jacob understood the importance of restitution as a demonstration of a true desire to make things right. That is a scriptural principle. This is not the first time we have seen Jacob demonstrate this sensitivity. Remember the gift he arranged to give to Esau?

Later in the Torah, the Lord describes procedures for the guilt offering that the people of God were to employ when they had defrauded one of their neighbors (Lev. 6:1-6). Zacchaeus, who restored sevenfold to those he had robbed, was a great New Testament example of this (Luke 19:1-10). The Lord Jesus understood that repentance had come to his house. We are not truly sorry for something until we are willing to try to make restitution, until we are willing to bear the penalty for what we have done.

But think with me for a minute about the Zacchaeus example. Imagine that there were a Jewish family who was not able to buy medicine for their sick child because Zacchaeus had defrauded them. Imagine that this child had died. It is a wonderful gesture that Zacchaeus was going to give back sevenfold, but that would not have equaled the loss of a child for lack of medical care.

Even Jacob's generous gift to Esau seems rather paltry when compared to the stolen blessing of their father. Here, Jacob and the 10 brothers think that they owe this man in Egypt a little honey, balm, and double their money, but they are about to be surprised by the bill that they had actually run up with Joseph. They could never give Joseph those years of his life back again.

You see, although an indispensable sign of the sincerity of the repentance that brings reconciliation, restitution brought by offenders is rarely great enough to truly serve as the basis of forgiveness. Jacob refers to the basis of forgiveness in verse 14: "May God Almighty grant you compassion." We forgive, because God tells us to, not because we have received complete restitution from our offender. Joseph had already forgiven because of his fear of God (42:18, 50:15-21). Restitution is indispensable, but rarely sufficient. We forgive for a different reason given to us by the Lord, not our offenders.

III. The treasures of restoration are invaluable (Gen. 43:16-34).

Illustration: I mentioned the geocaching that some of our kids have been doing. I can remember that they brought their neat treasures home, but as I was preparing this message I found it impossible to remember exactly what those treasures were. To be perfectly honest, in spite of the boys' extreme excitement, their findings all looked like a bunch of junk to me.

Application: The treasure chest of forgiveness, however, is not like that. The treasures of restoration awaiting those who practice forgiveness are truly life-changing, transforming, healing, and splendidly memorable. Our passage highlights four of these treasures.

A. Restoration conquers fear (43:23). The forgiven brothers were told to fear no more. Apart from forgiveness they had

lived a life of fear. They even fear the generosity of the invitation to Joseph's house for dinner (vv. 16-18).

Did you notice that what they feared was precisely what they had done to Joseph? They were ready to accuse "the man" of wanting to do what they had done to their own brother. This is the fear of guilt. This is the fear of forgiveness not found.

1 John 4:17-21 teaches us that there is a different way to live: "By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

Love perfected is the love made ready for judgment through forgiveness. Perfect love is a love that forgives brothers because God has forgiven us. Perfect love casts out fear, and anxiety, and worry, and troubled souls. Restoration brings the joy of conquered fear.

B. Restoration corrects communication (43:26-29). Joseph, the one who forgives, is able to communicate in a way with his brothers that administers to them the grace of God. The Hebrew word for *peace* is repeated in this section — Joseph is speaking peaceably with the brothers who offended him, and he is able to do that because of the forgiveness that was in his heart for them.

Contrast how a lack of forgiveness and bitterness took that ability away from the brothers many years before (37:4). Restoration brings the joy of corrected communication. If there is

someone that you cannot speak peaceably with, there is a need for a work of forgiveness in that relationship.

C. Restoration unburdens hearts (43:30-31). We noted earlier the perfect love of forgiveness from 1 John. That is what is described in verse 30. If the text tells us the role that Benjamin played in the sin and deception of the sons of Jacob against Joseph, I have missed it somewhere. What we do know is that Benjamin was either unable or unwilling to take the initiative to correct the situation himself. Perhaps more than any of the others, Benjamin needed forgiveness from Joseph.

What happens to Joseph emotionally here is described by a phrase that is used only here and in 1 Kings 3:26 of the emotion of a mother for her infant, which is about to be slain before King Solomon. Years of separation, years of betrayal, years of wondering why, years of callous silence, these things had burdened the heart of Joseph for a long time, and now forgiveness unburdens his heart of them all. The joy of the relief of a burdened and broken heart is too much for Joseph to contain. He needs a place to weep. When we experience the joy of forgiveness, we often need a place to weep.

D. Restoration brings powerful fellowship (43:32-34). As we finish chapter 43, the brothers still have no idea who Joseph is. They have not come close to making anything up to him of the offense with which they had ruined his life.

And yet here he has a great time with his brothers. This is the power of forgiveness to empower fellowship. You may ask, "How could Joseph allow his brothers to eat and drink and be merry like that after he had been so wronged?" We certainly cannot find in the answer in the power of their apology. No, it is the power of the forgiveness that God had given Joseph for his brothers that allowed the family to experience fellowship again in this way. Where the joy of powerful fellowship is impossible, there is still a need for real forgiveness.

Conclusion: As we conclude our thoughts about our need for forgiveness this morning, we must do so with Judah's complaint to his father ringing in our ears: "For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time!"

Why linger when the treasures of forgiveness lie before us for the taking? We respond, "But this!" and "But that!", and so we linger in our bitterness and lack of forgiveness.

To our objections, God simply instructs us the way He did Joseph: "I am the God of providence; I am working my plan; I expect you to forgive."

"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