

Text: Genesis 44

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

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Introduction: In his book *Mere Christianity*, the famed British Christian apologist C. S. Lewis includes a chapter he entitles, "The Great Sin." This is how he describes what he calls "the great sin":

"I now come to that part of Christian morals where they differ most sharply from all other morals. There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice. And at the same time I have very seldom met anyone, who was not a Christian, who showed the slightest mercy to it in others. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.

"The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility" (p. 121). Some of you may remember this quote from our study last April of the topic of pride and temper in Proverbs on Tuesday nights.

Genesis 44 is the last chapter in the story of Joseph during which the brothers are kept in the dark about the amazing work of God's providence in the life of Joseph. Joseph reveals himself at the beginning of the next chapter. We have seen that God's plan is known to him long before He executes it,

that it is relentless and unstoppable, that He is always with us and working His plan for our good, and that part of the good He is accomplishing is the way His providential plan calls us to respond faithfully.

Beginning with Chapter 37, we saw the need to respond with submission, surrender, purity, patience, wisdom, thankfulness, perceptivity, and forgiveness. The final lesson the brothers learn, prior to their reunion with Joseph, is the Bible answer to the great sin: God's work of providence calls us to faithful humility.

Especially in the person of Judah, Joseph's brothers demonstrate a humility in this chapter that has heretofore eluded them. Let's notice four things about humility from their example this morning.

I. The humble person is a chastened person (44:1-13).

Illustration: It is said that there are some things that you cannot teach. You hear that a lot in the world of sports. I like to coach basketball, and one of the things you cannot teach in the game of basketball is how to be 6' 5" tall in the 8th grade. I wish I could teach that, but I cannot. You cannot teach big hands. My hands are stubby and small for a basketball player. I found that I could make my hands smaller (while working at a wood-working shop in college), but I cannot make them any bigger. There are some things you cannot teach.

Application: Humility is not one of these things. In fact, the only way you and I can learn anything of humility is by having it taught to us through the chastening hand of the Lord.

C. S. Lewis was right when he spoke of the universality of the sin of pride: "There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in

someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves.”

All humble people began as proud people, and the thing about pride is that it goes before destruction. A haughty spirit always leads to a fall. So the humble person is normally that person who has failed miserably in pride at some point and has been chastened by the Lord for his failure.

In our passage, the brothers of Joseph experience this kind of humbling and chastening. They reach the point at which they tear their clothes (v. 13). The last time someone expressed this kind of despair in the book of Genesis was Jacob who tore his clothes after being told that Joseph was mauled by a wild animal.

The pressure Joseph brought to bear on his brothers by not revealing his true identity was designed to enable his brothers to experience what their deception had put their father through. As the brothers return to Egypt, our text says they literally fall to the ground before Joseph (v. 14). On the previous two occasions (42:6; 43:26), the brothers had bowed politely, but there was no sense of humble desperation like there is here.

God’s plan brings difficult things into our lives to humble us. Remember when the apostle Peter became a humble man? It was after denying Christ three times. The humble person is a chastened person.

Even Jesus learned humble obedience through the things that He suffered (Heb. 5:8 – “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered”). God brought suffering to His Son such that Jesus had to learn humble obedience. Jesus had no humble obedience prior to His suffering, not because He was proud, but rather because He is God. Although far different from the chastening we go through over

our pride, the Lord does understand what it means to learn obedience and humility through suffering. It had to come to Him that way because He is God. It must come to us that way, because we are naturally proud, people who want to be treated as though we were God.

II. The humble person is a servant of others (“servant” is used 19 times in the chapter; “my lord” is used 11 times).

Application: The brothers reach a point at which they are willing to be slaves (v. 16, “behold, we are my lord’s slaves”). This had been what really bothered them about Joseph’s dreams originally (37:8). They could not stand the thought that Joseph would rule over them – that they should serve him. That is why they hated his dreams and did everything they could to reject the plan of God that these dreams revealed.

Illustration: Thursday was Maureen’s and my wedding anniversary, and we took the day for a family trip to Hampton Beach. After getting lost a bit and finally finding some quarters for parking, we enjoyed a great time together at the North Hampton State Beach park.

If you have been to the ocean or a beach like that, you know that your feet get a bit sandy. As we were climbing into the van to leave, I was cleaning the sand off of my feet, which was an arduous process, and just as I finished, one of my children (the one with the biggest feet) thrust his foot my way and asked for a cleaning. He was just goofing around, but the answer he got was still, “No, clean your own feet.”

Application: We were teasing around a bit, but we both remembered together that the Lord Jesus was someone who would clean someone else’s feet. It was a nice reminder for us. Do you remember that occasion (John 13:1-5, 12-17)?

It is one thing to know we should serve one another, but it is another to actually serve one another. We more easily take on lordship over one another; we more readily judge, criticize, and correct one another than we do serve one another.

On another occasion, when the sons of thunder were asking for the chief place in the kingdom, Jesus summed up His entire reason for coming as that of service: "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'" (Matt. 20:25-28).

Can you say this morning that you are here to serve or be served? Is your attitude the attitude of the slave or the attitude of the master? The humble person is someone who serves others.

III. The humble person is a contrite person (44:14-16).

Illustration: One of the criticisms conservatives had regarding George W. Bush was that he did not defend himself enough. This was a complaint that Rush Limbaugh had on a few occasions:

"It is amazing how much hatred there is for Bush, simply because he doesn't speak well. So people think he's embarrassing our country in Europe, when Europe loves Bush! Tony Blair loves Bush. Sarkozy loves Bush. Angela Merkel loves Bush. The Pope loves Bush. None of what is said about Bush is true, and he doesn't refute it -- which is, I think, why his [pole] numbers are so low. It is because he doesn't defend himself. It's not because he's hated."

I do not know whether you agree with that assessment, but I think there is an element of truth in it, and I always thought that this characteristic of our former president was part of his Christian character coming out in his leadership style.

Application: To be contrite is to be done defending yourself. The brothers reach a point at which they no longer seek to justify themselves (44:16). Humble people are contrite people, and contrite people refuse to justify themselves. If you or I are concerned about self-vindication and self-justification, we are missing something about humility. For sinners saved by grace alone, there should not be much motivation for self-justification.

Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God in Him. Becoming sin is the opposite of becoming righteous. Remember when that crowd shouted to our crucified Savior to come down off the cross? Remember when Pilate derided Christ for failing to defend Himself?

As the Lamb of God bearing all the sins of mankind in His own body on the tree, our dear Savior was contrite. He sought no self-justification. Certainly, since Christ was willing to assume full responsibility for the sin of others and claim no rights to self-justification, how much more should we be humbly contrite, who deserve the condemnation He freely bore?

If self-justification is one of the causes we are constantly trumpeting, then we know very little of our Savior's humility.

IV. The humble person is a selfless person (44:17-34).

Illustration: Lewis points to the selfishness of pride in his chapter on the great sin: "Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive – is competitive by its very nature – while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having

something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking, there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest" (p. 122).

Application: Judah reaches the point in the passage we read at which he considered the well-being of Benjamin and his father Jacob to be more important than his own well-being. In so doing, he humbly demonstrates the mind of Christ in two very significant ways:

First, he refused to assert his own claims and rights over the well-being of his brother (vv. 30-31; Jesus Christ did the same for us - Phil. 2:6-7, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men").

Second, Judah offered himself as a vicarious sacrifice for his brother (vv. 32-34; Jesus Christ did the same for us - Phil. 2:8, "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross").

Are we living lives that are characterized by the selflessness of Christ in our care for our brothers and sisters in Christ? Paul spoke of how to follow Christ's example in this regard (Phil. 2:3-4, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others").

Conclusion: The humble person is a selfless person, a contrite person, a serving person, and a chastened person. Are you a

humble person this morning? If not, you need to confess to the Lord a great sin, the sin of pride. May our response to God's wonderful plan for us include the response of a true, Spirit-filled humility.

“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*