

Week 7 – From Gruff to Gracious - Genesis 42:36-43:34

Scripture Reading: Psalm 145:1-9

Introduction

Psychologists believe that what you see when you look at this picture [glass.jpg] says a lot about you

If you see a half-empty glass they say you are likely a pessimist

If you see a half-full glass they say you probably tend to be an optimist

And, if you see a glass that's twice as big as necessary you are most definitely an engineer

I just have to take a moment and show you this image that I found when I was grabbing an image of a partially full glass because I thought it was pretty funny when I saw it [fish.jpg]

Perhaps it tells us that how you view the glass depends on your situation at a particular time

Review

When we left off last week, Joseph's brothers had just returned home after a very disconcerting visit to Egypt

They had unknowingly come face-to-face with their long-lost brother who they had grossly mistreated and sold into slavery and he had treated them quite harshly

Joseph had quite gruffly and obstinately accused the brothers of being spies and he had them cast into prison which would have brought to their minds the memory of him at the bottom of the pit in Dothan

When he let them out after three days he bound Simeon and kept him locked up while he sent the rest back to Canaan loaded down with the grain they had come for and provisions for their journey home

We also learned that he had secretly returned the money the brothers had used to pay for the grain to them – an act of grace that caused the brothers to finally acknowledge God in at least a small way

They were no doubt relieved to be away from Egypt with their lives intact but they had left a brother behind with the strict admonition that they would not be given an audience before Joseph again unless they brought Benjamin with them

And so they were forced to give their father, Jacob, the sad news that Simeon wouldn't be coming home unless Benjamin returned to Egypt with them to stand before the prime minister of Egypt and prove they truly weren't spies

This week

I purposely left the last three verses of Chapter 42 until this week because I thought they fit better with the theme for this week's sermon than they did with last week's

And in those verses and the beginning of Chapter 43 we see a glaring flaw in Jacob's character which serves as a negative example for us to avoid in our own lives

But we will also see how God works through the actions of Joseph to show how he freely bestows grace upon all if only we will recognize it and how we can rely on God's goodness even when things seem the bleakest

If you haven't done so already, I encourage you to open your Bible to Genesis 42 (page 36) and to follow along as I read verses 36-38 where we see Jacob's reaction to the news that his sons delivered to him upon their return from Egypt

Genesis 42:36-38 - *And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me." Then Reuben said to his father, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."*

Jacob was most certainly a "glass half empty" kind of guy

Notice here that he immediately goes all the way to pronouncing Simeon dead just as he thought Joseph was dead

After all, his sons had brought back Joseph's special coat to him covered in blood and led him to believe that Joseph had been killed and devoured by wild animals so he understandably thought Joseph was "no more"

But he says the same thing about Simeon who is only being held pending Benjamin's trip to Egypt

He was a lot like the character Eeyore [**Eeyore.jpg**] from the Winnie the Pooh comics – always thinking the worst and pronouncing that misfortune was his expected lot in life

Look at what he says to close out verse 36 (**Genesis 42:36b**) – "*All this has come against me.*"

Can't you just hear the self-pity in that statement?

But we're often just like Jacob aren't we?

When circumstances aren't perfectly favorable we suddenly begin to feel and declare that nothing has ever gone right for us in our entire lives and everyone is against us always

We might well take the song "Jesus Loves Me" and twist the lyrics to fit our mood by singing:

No one loves me this I know; my misfortunes tell me so...

And it's pathetic when you think about it and it's a pitiful testimony to display before others

Jacob not Israel

It's interesting, but we often see God change the names of people in the Bible to reflect their new character when they trust in him

And we saw that happen back in **Genesis 32:28** when God gave Jacob the name Israel because, as he said, "*...you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed*"

But have you notice that Scripture still repeatedly refers to him as Jacob rather than Israel

I believe that's because he continued to lapse into his natural pattern of thinking and behaving like Jacob even though he had his limp to remind him of his new name and nature

And if we aren't careful we can likewise fall back to our default nature and forget that we are children of the King, that God loves us and only wants the best for us, and that he will therefore sustain us through anything that comes our way

That was Jacob at the end of Chapter 42 – his outlook and behavior was completely negative

But now as we turn our attention to Chapter 43 the first thing we are going to see is that **necessity trumps negativity**

I. Necessity Trumps Negativity

Nothing overcomes reluctance like not having a viable alternative

And that's what we see in the opening verses of Chapter 43 – look with me at verses 1-2 (**Genesis 43:1-2**)

Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food."

The famine was continuing and the food the brothers had purchased was gone so Jacob undertook to send his sons to buy more

We aren't told how much time elapsed between the brothers' return and this proposed trip but it likely couldn't have been more than a couple of months at most

But still, it seems that Jacob was willing to write Simeon off until he got hungry again and even then his orders were to go and get more food not to retrieve Simeon

Perhaps, as far as Jacob was concerned, Simeon was indeed going to perish in Egypt if his release meant the risk of losing Benjamin

And it seems that Jacob was trying to ignore the fact that Joseph had commanded Benjamin's appearance if the brothers were to get another audience with him

This was rather foolish on Jacob's part because, as we saw last week, anyone who wished to buy grain had to go before Joseph – there was really no way to avoid it

A fact that Judah reminded him of – even going so far as to go against his father's orders by refusing to return to Egypt without Benjamin

And in verses 6-7 (**Genesis 43:6-7**) we read the words of a conversation that I suspect had been had many times before as Jacob questioned why his sons had even told the prime minister they had a brother and the brothers protesting they had no reason to think anything at all of the question when the prime minister asked them

After all, they had not volunteered the information without being asked and had only innocently answered a question about their family that seemed perfectly reasonable at the time

But in this exchange we once more see a little bit of the old Jacob the deceiver make an appearance as he would have preferred that his sons had been less honest so as to spare him this difficulty

In the final analysis, their options were limited

Since Egypt was the only place where food could be found and Joseph had given no indication of flexibility they could either stay in Canaan and starve or go back to Egypt with Benjamin in tow and take their chances

And Judah continued as the spokesman for the brothers he laid his own life on the line as he promised his father that he would do everything in his power to protect Benjamin

Then, in **verse 11**, we see Jacob called by his new name, Israel, once more as he gives in to the inevitability of the situation and agrees to send Benjamin to Egypt

But we see him fall back on a ploy that he had successfully used in the past when going to meet his brother, Esau who he knew was likely out for blood – he sent a lavish gift in the hope of soothing a potential enemy

He tells his sons to take produce from Canaan and to take double the price of the grain so as to make restitution for the grain they had already received and to buy more

Israel will continue to wrestle with his inner Jacob for the rest of his days because he continued to wrestle against God from time to time as he struggled with ever securing abiding faith in God

Fatalism not faith

We see his wavering on display in verse 14 (**Genesis 43:14a**) where Jacob says, *"May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin."*

First, Jacob prays for God's mercy and protection as they go to stand before this Egyptian authority which we would think demonstrates faith in God

But then, in the very next breath, he reveals that what he is demonstrating is a bit more fatalism than faith as he says (**Genesis 43:14b**), *"And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."*

Jacob is resigned to this course of action and he is wishing for the safe return of his sons but he is sending them forth without any sense of assurance or peace about the matter

He has put his situation in God's hands out of necessity but he really appears to have no confidence or trust in God's goodness here

We might wish it were otherwise with Jacob

After all, he had wrestled God face-to-face and prevailed and he had the limp to remind him of that night

God had promised him prosperity for him and his progeny and told him that his lineage would contain kings

But in spite of all that God had already shown him, here we see Jacob as an old man about to be left alone and not trusting in any real sense that he would ever see his sons again

And we can empathize with him to a degree because we often struggle with the same malady

Still, he did demonstrate enough faith to act and, sometimes, that's got to be enough if that's all we've got

But how much better it would be for us to read this account and others like it in God's Word and for us to read and hear the stories of God's provision to who came later and those around us today and for us to remember his provision to us
And then to demonstrate true, abiding faith as we move forward in confidence rather than merely taking an unavoidable step and hoping that, somehow, some way, God will make things work out

In the end, God used necessity once again to get Joseph's brothers where he wanted them to be and we read in verse 15 (**Genesis 43:15**) that they have brought their gift, the money, and Benjamin and are standing once more before Joseph

I would suspect that they initially stood before Joseph with a significant amount of unease, dread, and fear

After all, Joseph had treated them quite harshly during their previous visit so they would have no reason to suspect that **their fear would soon be replaced by Joseph's demonstration of favor toward them**

II. Favor Replaces Fear

We see in **verse 16** that as soon as Joseph saw his brothers had returned and that they had Benjamin with them he began to treat them like royalty

Imagine how confusing that turnaround had to have been

Joseph immediately ordered the manager of his household to take the brothers to his home and prepare a banquet for them

Apparently, the brothers didn't catch on to the fact they were going to lunch and they engaged in a bit of projection as they presumed Joseph was preparing to rob them of their goods and enslave them

After all, that was precisely what they had done to their younger brother when he came to them in Dothan

And when the men of Shechem had tried to make amends for the rape of their sister Dinah, they feigned cordiality as a ruse to get the men to drop their guard so they could kill them while they were incapacitated

They knew what they might have done if they had been in Joseph's place so that's the direction their minds went as soon as they realized they were being taken to Joseph's home

So they endeavored to head things off as they stopped at the door to Joseph's home to explain to Joseph's steward the whole money situation and how they had mysteriously found their money hidden in their sacks of grain after their previous visit

It appears that Joseph had told his servant about his God because the steward spoke to the brothers urging peace upon them

And he sought to alleviate their fears by saying their God and the God of their father had returned their money to them
He assured them that he had indeed received their money for the grain

That wasn't a direct lie even as it was meant to conceal the whole truth because he had actually received the money before he put it in their grain sacks and it was because of God's grace they had received it back

And then, lo and behold, Simeon was brought to join them as they entered Joseph's house

Joseph was a man of his word and he was quick to fulfill his promise to them – a fact that had to impress them and I'm sure seeing Simeon released and in good health did much to settle their fears

Then as soon as they entered the home, they were given water to wash their feet and their donkeys were tended to while they prepared to present their gift to Joseph

While they thought for sure they would be treated harshly as enemies; they were instead being treated with the utmost kindness as friends

Then, when Joseph arrived, rather than speak to them harshly as he had done before, he spoke to them kindly as he inquired first about their health and then asked about their father

Up to this point, Joseph appears to have been in control of his emotions but he had to be on the verge of exploding

Because when he finally turned his gaze upon Benjamin and asked if this was the youngest brother they had told him about, he was barely able to get out a word of blessing before he had to flee their presence to weep with joy

After he had regained his composure and made himself presentable he rejoined the brothers and a lavish feast was laid before them

Remember a day before they had been on the brink of starvation making their return trip to Egypt necessary and now they were eating abundantly from the prime minister's table

And while they all received plenty, Benjamin's portion we're told was five times as big as everyone else's

Joseph's gracious hospitality quickly broke down any barriers their fear had erected and our text says they drank and were merry with Joseph

Frankly, I'm surprised all that Joseph did didn't make the brothers even more suspicious

Perhaps they were just so relieved that their worst fears hadn't come true that they didn't question why this Egyptian official had such a deep interest and concern for them and their father

And while our text tells us they were amazed that Joseph had them seated precisely according to their birth order they seem to have quickly forgotten just how unlikely that would be

In fact, just so you know, the odds of the brothers being randomly assigned seats and having them seated in birth order was just shy of 1 in 40 million!

Clearly, Joseph knew the brothers intimately but, while the seating chart amazed them, they still didn't catch on that Joseph actually knew them

Neither did they squawk as they previously might have over Benjamin receiving such obvious favor as they had when Jacob favored Joseph as a lad

It appears their hearts had been changed and that the men before him were no longer the same men who threw him into the pit and then sat down to eat lunch as he cried for mercy

Seating arrangement

There is one more detail I want to be sure we don't overlook regarding the seating arrangement for the banquet

It's noted in our text that Joseph ate alone – separate from his brothers but also separate from his servants and any other Egyptians that were present at the banquet – that's significant

The reason for this seemingly odd arrangement is given to us in verse 32 (**Genesis 43:32**) –

They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.

Joseph couldn't show familiarity and solidarity with his brothers because that would have been a gross impropriety and would that would have caused eyebrows to be raised

It's notable that the *real* Egyptians wouldn't even eat at the same table with Joseph in spite of his position as the most powerful man under pharaoh himself

And to see why this is important, we need to remember what God is doing through all of these circumstances in the first place

He was preparing to bring his people to Egypt where they will sojourn for the next 400 years

By the time the book of Genesis ends, Jacob and his entire family will be secure in Egypt

There they would be free from the corrupting influence of the people of Canaan and among the people of Egypt who thought it was an abomination to even eat with a foreigner let alone marry and intermingle with them

A fact that makes Joseph's marriage to Asenath all the more remarkable as Pharaoh tried to make him as palatable to the Egyptian people as possible – even giving him the Egyptian name Zaphenath-paneah

But Joseph's case was a rare exception and it was not completely successful in its effects as we see here

And had Jacob's family been allowed to remain in Canaan there is the possibility that they might have simply assimilated and become integrated with the godless people that surrounded them because the people there had no such scruples

And based on what we see recorded about the behavior of the children of Israel when they ultimately returned to Canaan we might be excused for thinking their assimilation would have been more of a probability than a possibility

But God in his wisdom prepared a place among a people who were typically insistent about maintaining racial separation so that his people could grow in number without fear of pagan intermarriage and the influence it would bring

Conclusion

When Jacob's nine sons returned from Egypt the first time he was feeling sorry for himself

In spite of his long association with God he had not yet learned that he could actually trust God

We too can forget that God has our best interest in mind at all times

And, if we're not careful, we can slip into feelings of negativity where we think everything is against us and no one cares for us – including God

Without a doubt there are forces in this world that are against us as God's children but in spite of appearances to the contrary we can be confident that God is using even the evil forces in this fallen world to achieve his ends

After all, **Romans 8:28** is still in effect so it's not possible for everything to be against us

How do you think Jacob's attitude and response might have differed had he known what God was doing?

That's a good question isn't it?

And it gets right to the nub of the matter

I think the issue is really one of control – we want to be in control or at least be informed so we can give consent

We want to have our hand on the wheel and our foot on the pedal and we want to know where we are headed and how and when we'll get there

And we bristle when we don't know every detail in advance

God says in **Jeremiah 29:11** – *"...I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope"*

But here's the kicker – nowhere does it say that God is obligated to reveal those plans to us

He wants us to trust him without knowing all the details – and often without even knowing the broad strokes

So, sometimes, God has to take control away from us and put us into circumstances where we have no choice but to rely on him and trust in his goodness

And it's in those times we demonstrate the quality of our faith – whether we actually trust God to see us through or not

The truly sad thing is that people are watching us to see what being a Christ-follower is all about

And when we walk around with long faces, wringing our hands in despair, and moan about how wrong everything is in our lives we put forth a very dismal testimony

The late John Stott [stott.jpg] once conducted a survey at the church he pastored and asked what it was that had brought the people to Christ

And he was surprised that it wasn't an acute awareness of their sin and the coming punishment for it as he supposed it would be but, rather, it was the winsomeness of Christ displayed in the gospel that drew people

I think if we were to dig in and study the issue we would probably find it would actually be a mixture of both

Because without a sense of sin we would be tempted to see Christ's goodness toward us as our just due for being as awesome as we are

And without the goodness of Christ in spite of our sinfulness we would be tempted to despair and lose all hope of redemption

That was the state we left the brothers in last week as Joseph had reenacted their crime against him and made them aware of their sin without providing any means of relief

And when there was no other course of action to be had, Jacob reluctantly sent his sons to Egypt again and they went, I'm certain, with a fair measure of trepidation and fear

But Joseph treated them with warmth and welcomed them into his home to feast with him and their fears were allayed

And in so doing we see a picture of Jesus and how he loved us while we were still sinners and treated us kindly and invited us to come into his presence to fellowship with him

We have the benefit of being able to read ahead in the account and see how God orchestrated all these events to lead to the offer and acceptance of forgiveness and redemption and ultimately the preservation and prospering of his people
But in our lives it doesn't work that way and we have to trust God and rely upon his goodness and providential care each step of the way even when we can't see where we're headed or when we think we're headed the wrong way

Unfortunately, Jacob will continue to struggle with relying fully on God and his goodness and we will see him vacillate between being Israel and Jacob as long as he continues to live

But as things continue to unfold he will do so less and less

And our association with God and his goodness in all circumstances should do the same for us so that we might learn to trust him fully and show that trust in all circumstances to a watching world and so draw them to Christ

Jacob had no idea that God was preparing to preserve and protect his people and that he was using this hardship to do so

And Jacob had no idea that God was preparing his sons to be the promised patriarchs of twelve tribes so he needlessly despaired when things looked bleak

Does that describe you?

Do you despair when things aren't rosy or when you aren't fully in control of and directing your situation?

Do you find it difficult to rest and trust when you don't know all the details of what is going on?

If so, let Jacob's example serve as a corrective and remember that God is working all the time and he always wants precisely what is best for you

And learn to trust him and allow him to work in your life to bring about that best

Let's pray

