

## Week 8 – A Radical Change – Genesis 44:1-34

### Scripture Reading: Romans 5:1-11

#### Introduction

[Stuart Smalley clip]

Mental health experts widely agree that America has a problem with self-esteem and self-confidence

However, they tend to disagree as to whether we have too little or too much of those traits

That's probably because a look at reality tells us that it's both

A few decades ago, a movement started to bolster self-esteem in our children and mental health experts told us if we just made a child feel good about himself or herself they would naturally excel and be well-adjusted

And so we had parents, teachers, counselors, coaches, and others tell every child just how special they were

We began to hand out trophies and ribbons to every participant and we even got rid of failing grades changing an "F" to "NI" meaning "needs improvement" because we wouldn't want any child to believe they had failed

I even heard recently of some young parents who were strenuously avoiding telling their child they had done a good job because using those words implied that it was possible for them to have done a bad job

Unfortunately, those well-intentioned efforts to bolster self-esteem and self-confidence have led to the phenomenon of people who have a false sense of self-importance that is based on nothing more than the fact that they exist

And the exchange of the backpack for the briefcase often results in a titanic clash in expectations as things get real all of a sudden and they realize their sense of self-importance is based on an illusion

But, really, most of us have a self-esteem problem when it comes to our own righteousness

And just as most people tend to think they are above average in intelligence, looks and various skills, most people look around and determine that they are doing better than those around them on the righteousness scale

**It's kind of funny that we don't really need to be taught to be spiritually self-confident but that our natural tendency is to believe that our efforts, our successes, and even our intentions must be recognized by God and rewarded**

And that holds true even when those things are earned in our own strength and even when they are achieved while violating God's moral laws

But God's economy doesn't work that way and God often has to strip us completely of our sense of self-confidence before he can do his work in and through us

In previous sermons we've been seeing how God was working in the lives of Joseph's brothers

For 22 years those hard men had lived with the secret guilt of having sold their younger brother into slavery

They had kept quiet and as far as they knew no one else knew what they had done – but God knew

And he was working to expose their sin and bring about genuine healing through their open confession and repentance

To this point God has used the pinch of hunger to force them to go to Egypt for grain twice, he used harsh treatment by Joseph and the seclusion of prison to cause them to remember what they had done, and he used Joseph's unexpected demonstration of graciousness to put them at ease

All of those actions had served their purpose of softening the brothers us and causing them to recognize that God was present and doing something in their lives – but they still had not openly confessed their sin and sought forgiveness for it

Now as we open our Bibles to **Genesis 44** (page 38) we are going to see that God is going to suddenly bring things to a climax just as the brothers had to be feeling pretty good about themselves as they headed home to Canaan

And as God brings the brothers to the end of themselves we will see the **radical change** that God desired finally occur

Chapter 44 is notable for how rapidly the events that open it occur

The first five verses are told in a breathless manner that seems to be in a rush to tell the story

Follow along as I read them (**Genesis 44:1-5**) –

*Then he commanded the steward of his house, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.” And he did as Joseph told him.*

*As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, “Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good? Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this.’”*

- Joseph orders his steward to give the brothers as much food as they can carry and to put all of their money into the mouths of their sacks just as before
- And he further tells his steward to put his special cup into the mouth of Benjamin's sack
- The brothers are sent out at daybreak (as soon as the morning was light)
- And Joseph sent his steward to overtake them as soon as they had cleared the city limits (possibly to prevent the discovery and return of the cup thereby thwarting his plans)

Try to put yourself into the place of Joseph’s brothers as they were riding out of the city

They had to be flying high

They had come back to Egypt reluctantly only because their need for food had forced their hand and they expected to be treated harshly as they had been on their previous trip

They probably had only the faintest hope that they might see Simeon again having left him bound and imprisoned on their previous visit

In fact, you will remember how they thought that Joseph was going to rob and enslave them when he ordered them to be taken to his home for lunch

But, surprisingly, the prime minister had released Simeon immediately and had shown a peculiar interest in them as he inquired about their welfare and the welfare of their father back home

He had wined and dined them and treated them as honored guests in his own home and he had showered even greater honor on Benjamin, the youngest brother

And now, as the 11 of them were sent on their way with as much food as they could carry, they had to be congratulating themselves on just how easily they had escaped the horrors they had feared when they had been forced by necessity to travel to Egypt the second time

I can almost hear them as they gloated over showing that Egyptian how they were men of their word

They had spoken truthfully on their first trip when the prime minister had falsely accused them of being spies

And now their word had been vindicated and, of course, the prime minister had to act accordingly

Also, they had returned the money that had somehow ended up in their sacks on the previous trip

And, being men of significant financial means, they had come with sufficient money to buy even more grain

They had told the prime minister they were honest men and now he knew that to be true

So they had to be a bit smug in the self-confidence department as they headed north to Canaan with their bounty of grain – they were secure in the confidence they had in their word, their wealth, and their integrity

But that was all about to change as we are going to see that they were **stripped of self-confidence** when Joseph’s steward caught up with them

## **I. Stripped of Self-Confidence**

In **verse 6** we see that when Joseph's steward caught up to them he said exactly the words that Joseph had commanded  
And the brothers reacted as any innocent person would

They were mildly indignant at the accusation and they protested their innocence

In protest, they put forth the evidence that they were honest men who had even gone so far as to return the money that they believed had inadvertently been placed in their sacks on their previous visit

And in **verse 9** we see the outrageous and, frankly, over the top offer that, if the cup were found, whoever took it should be put to death and the rest of them would become Joseph's slaves

This offer shows just how supremely confident they were in themselves as it demonstrated they had no doubts about each other's honesty in this matter

In reality, they *could* be supremely confident because they were truly innocent of the crime of stealing the cup

But the truth was that **all except Benjamin were guilty of a far greater sin than stealing Joseph's silver cup**

And that was the sin that God was bringing to light so that it could be properly dealt with

You can just picture the brothers each taking down their bag and standing behind it with complete confidence as the steward and his men opened each sack in turn beginning with Reuben's to inspect its contents

It's interesting that nothing is said and no issue is made about the fact that the money had once again made its way back into the brothers' sacks

They must have been utterly perplexed and even dismayed when they saw it because it seemed as if they could not possibly pay for the grain no matter how they tried

When they found their money returned to them after their first visit they asked out loud, "*What is this that God has done to us?*"

And they had to wonder again what God was doing as each man's sack was opened and their money was found and they discovered that they hadn't paid their own way at all taking away any boasting about their wealth

Then, in one fell swoop, when the cup was discovered in Benjamin's sack, their protests were proven by hard, physical evidence to be false

The veracity of their word and their claims of integrity as honest men were utterly destroyed and they were left with nothing in and of themselves to rely on

### ***Benjamin***

And that's why the cup had to be found in Benjamin's sack

Up to this point in the narrative Benjamin has been presented as a relatively innocent figure – he wasn't in on the selling of Joseph into slavery and almost certainly didn't even know it had happened

But Benjamin also had to be seen as guilty for God's plan to work – so Joseph had his cup hidden in Benjamin's sack

See, none of us is innocent – we are all guilty sinners

And it's only when we compare ourselves to those we think are worse sinners that we can even pretend to be innocent

Sure, murderers, adulterers, sexual deviants, and the like all need to be plunged in the blood of Christ but the rest of us can do with just a bit of washing up

At least that's the way most people seem to think

But that's because they fail to compare themselves to the perfect standard

A look at this figure [**Contrast.png**] helps make the point

Both center rectangles are the exact same shade and A only appears lighter because it's on a dark background

The reaction of the brothers to the cup being found in Benjamin's possession is interesting - they don't inquire of him as to why he took it or berate him for having taken it

They don't even seem to believe that Benjamin could possibly be guilty even as they had to accept his apparent guilt Stripped of all measures of self-confidence and having no defense left, they simply tear their clothes in grief, reload their donkeys, and head back to the city to face their fate

And it's here that we see the brothers demonstrate that they are changed men from the men who sold Joseph into slavery 22 years ago as there doesn't seem to even be a question of not **standing in solidarity** with Benjamin

## **II. Standing in Solidarity**

22 years ago they had hated the favored son and they didn't care how much they hurt him or their father

But now the very idea of harm coming to Benjamin and the pain that it would cause their father caused them to tear their clothing in the classical expression of grief

It was as if the very thought of either one of them experiencing pain made the brothers feel and react the same way they would if someone had died

In fact, their extreme grief caused them to overlook a few obvious explanations for the cup being found in Benjamin's sack

They only seem to have considered their duty to stand with Benjamin and try to protect him and Jacob as much as possible

And that was the test that Joseph had set up with God's leading

### ***Deja vu***

Think about it, when the cup was found in Benjamin's possession the scene of the selling of Joseph was set up again

Perhaps the brothers even had a moment of *déjà vu* as the situation played out

The brothers once again found themselves in a position of relative control and power over the fate of a younger brother Benjamin had taken Joseph's place as their father's favorite son and even the Egyptian prime minister had shown him affection beyond reason

Now Benjamin was in jeopardy

And the brothers could have easily determined that they had no other recourse than to leave him to his fate

After all, Judah had proposed that the one who stole the cup should die and the rest of them become slaves

But Joseph's steward was in on the plan and he modified that proposal to say that the one who stole the cup would be a slave and the others would go free

It was virtually the same scenario that had played out 22 years earlier on the plains of Dothan as the brothers had first sentenced Joseph to death and then relented and sold him to the Midianite traders

That was the beauty and essential nature of Joseph's God-ordained trap that tested his brothers

### **It was the perfect test to show what manner of men they truly were**

They could easily reason that Benjamin wouldn't be killed – he would just be enslaved – and, you will recall, it was Judah who had come up with that very rationale when Joseph was the one in question

They could abandon Benjamin and go free – they would only need to come up with a plausible story for Jacob when they arrived at home without him

Maybe they could pretend that an animal had devoured him on the way home – that had worked for them before...

### **But, thanks to God, it seems that none of the brothers thought anything remotely like that**

Whereas they had years earlier mercilessly and with mercenary intent sold Joseph it seems now like there wasn't a one of them who didn't wish that the cup had been found in his bag rather than Benjamin's

And so, when Benjamin was taken back to Egypt, they all trudged back to Egypt to meet their fate together as one man in perfect solidarity

The experiences God had taken them through had their effect and these were truly changed men who unwittingly stood once more before their brother, Joseph

In verse 14 (**Genesis 44:14**) we see them arrive at Joseph's house and the text says, *"They fell before him to the ground"*

Note that this is the third time Joseph's brothers have fulfilled the dreams of his youth by bowing before him

And in **verse 16** Judah as spokesman for the group brings their plight and their helplessness into sharp focus by asking three rapid-fire questions and then making a statement that acknowledged their guilt

*"What can we say to my lord?" "What shall we speak?" "Or how can we clear ourselves?"*

They had no defense because as Judah says next:

*"God has found out the guilt of your servants..."*

With those words Judah threw back the curtain that had hidden their sin against Joseph for so long and in doing so revealed the effect of what God had been doing in them through all of the circumstances recorded in these pages

Judah could not possibly have been speaking of the crime of stealing the cup when he admitted the brothers' guilt

They were innocent of that charge – but they all knew they were guilty of a far greater sin

And as far as Judah was concerned, the brothers were now condemned to living out the remainder of their lives as slaves to this Egyptian all because they had sold Joseph into slavery 22 years earlier

To paraphrase Donald Grey Barnhouse [**barnhouse.jpg**], it had taken a mere fraction of a second for Joseph's anguished cries for mercy to reach their ears as they sat down to eat their lunch after throwing him into the pit

But it took 22 years for the effect of those cries to travel from their eardrums to their hearts

And after Judah's admission of guilt on behalf of him and his brothers we see Joseph render the verdict that Benjamin would remain as a slave and the other 10 brothers would be allowed to return home to their father

And in the remainder of the chapter we have recorded what many have called the most impassioned speech in the Bible

Follow along as I read verses 18-34 (**Genesis 44:18-34**)

*Then Judah went up to him and said, "Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.'*

*"When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One left me, and I said, "Surely he has been torn to pieces," and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.'*

*"Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.' Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father."*

Judah's impassioned speech contains five sections

**First**, he begged Joseph to listen to him and to give him a favorable hearing

**Second**, he reminded Joseph of his past dealings with them

**Third**, he reported what had taken place when they returned to Canaan after their first visit

**Fourth**, he somewhat surprisingly presents the present dilemma not in terms of their true innocence or as a plea for mercy for themselves but rather he speaks of the threat to the life of their elderly father back home

22 years earlier none of the brothers cared a whit about Jacob's feelings and only began to be concerned when they saw just how profound and prolonged his grief was

Now, however, Judah shows that he clearly has come to love and care about his father and doesn't want to see him hurt further

And in the **fifth** section we see Judah make the suggestion that he sacrifice himself for Benjamin

### **III. Suggestion of Self-Sacrifice**

Judah, the one who counseled his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery so that they could make a little money now offers to remain as a slave if only Benjamin can be allowed to go free

Years later, after the Israelites long sojourn in Egypt, Moses will make a similar offer

Turn with me to **Exodus 32** (page 73) where we see the incident when Moses had been up on the mountain with God to receive the tablets containing the Ten Commandments – and all the while the people were down below breaking them all by making a golden calf and worshipping it in a pagan manner

Moses descended and broke the tablets in anger as he confronted the people and commanded that those who were still with him to kill those who were not and the sons of Levi took their swords and killed about 3,000 of their brethren who had sinned

We pick up the account in verse 30 where we see that Moses went back up the mountain to attempt to make some atonement for the sin of the people (**Exodus 32:30-32**)

*The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written."*

In a great display of love for a people who had turned against him and against God, Moses offered to allow himself to be blotted out of God's book of life if only his people could be spared

He wanted to save them just as Judah wanted to save Benjamin and Jacob

We see much the same kind of love demonstrated by **the apostle Paul in Romans 9** where Paul writes about the present unbelief and future destiny of his Jewish kinsmen

Look with me at **Romans 9:1-4** –

*I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.*

Paul feared greatly for his people because he saw no chance that they were going to turn to Christ and he feared God's great judgement was going to fall on them

So Paul stated that he would consent to being sent to hell – just as Moses had done – if it would result in the salvation of the sinful, rebellious, unbelieving people he loved

As we saw in our Scripture reading this morning **Romans 5:7** tells us the offer to sacrifice oneself for another is not a natural inclination

And the connection that we see between all three of these men – Judah, Moses, and Paul is that all had the Spirit of Christ come upon them and their attitudes and behaviors had been transformed to be like his

Judah was willing to be enslaved for the sake of Benjamin

Moses was willing to be blotted out of God's book for the sake of his people

And Paul was willing to be accursed if his countrymen who he loved could only be saved

Each of those men had undergone a radical change that only a saving knowledge of Christ can bring about

## **Conclusion**

I believe I see evidence of God's hand in the fact that this chapter is the one that landed on the first Sunday of the month when we observe the Lord's Table

Because it helps us to understand just what we are remembering when we observe that ordinance

We read about the offers of Judah and Moses and Paul and we recognize just how commendable they were

In Judah's case it certainly shows just how thoroughly he had been changed by God's working on him and his brothers

He, and they, had been confronted by their sins, confessed and been converted into the godly men God would use to head the twelve tribes of his people

But there is one more thing we need to recognize

**As commendable as it was for Judah, Moses, and Paul to sincerely offer to sacrifice themselves for others; none of them actually had to carry through with their offer – and even if they had they would have been sacrificing themselves for people very much like themselves**

But Jesus actually did sacrifice himself and his sacrifice was made for those who were in many ways quite different

Jesus is the Creator and we are the creatures; he is the holy, sinless One while we are sinful down to our DNA;

While we have proven ourselves to be unlovely and unloving he possesses the perfect love that reaches out to those who are his enemies engaged in open rebellion to him and blatant rejection of him to offer salvation to them

Only Jesus could possibly make the sacrifice that was necessary to do what Judah, Moses, and Paul were willing to do

And when he condescended to be born in human flesh, to live as a man, be rejected and reviled by those he created and was seeking to save, to be nailed unjustly to a cross and to die a sinner's death

God the Father said, "Okay, this sacrifice I will accept. You will be cursed that others might be saved. My wrath that they deserve will fall on you instead and on the basis of your sacrifice I will deal mercifully with all who accept it. I will save them for your sake."

It's that sacrifice that we are remembering this morning and every time we partake of the elements at the Lord's Table

The sacrifice that has the power to transform any who will recognize their need and accept the payment that was made for it some 2,000 years ago

The sacrifice that has the power to transform just as radically we have seen happen in Judah this morning

I'm going to close in prayer as the Worship Team comes to lead us in singing hymn #312 Calvary Covers It All and I urge you to take a few moments to prepare your hearts for partaking of the elements as we sing

Servers, please make your way to the front as we sing the fourth and final verse of the hymn

Let's pray