Genesis (The Promise-Keeping God)

Week 7/8 "The Gracious God"
by the Rev'd Michael Marklew (15/11/2026)

Bible Passage: Genesis 42-45

Lord, open our hearts and minds to your word and your ways. In Jesus name. Amen.

Joseph's dream comes true, the brothers regret, the father blames, the innocent son is put on the line and a family is reconciled.

These chapters of God's story through Joseph are gripping.

I for one am glad that we are pushing through 4 chapters today, for to leave this story hanging before the reconciliation, would just be cruel.

Four things.

1-CONFRONTATION.

We already know that God is at work, the narrator has told us many times in the preceding chapters, not to mention all that has happened.

But here, we see through confrontation the confirmation that the first dream was part of God's story through Joseph.

2-REGRET.

With a little more information, we now know that they enjoyed a meal while Joseph pleaded for his life. It was callous and calculated. Clearly much has changed, and the regret that we see here is palpable.

3-BLAME.

Jacob blames the sons for the impossible choice that is ahead of him. Risk the beloved son, or let everyone perish?

And lastly

4-RECONCILIATION.

One can imagine the whole body convulsing with tears, joy and laughter as the reconciliation is realised. It is a powerful moment brought about by the grace of a good and faithful God.

Yet it is only a taste of the joy experienced in heaven by God and his angels, every time one of us comes to faith in the Lord Jesus and is reconciled to our heavenly father.

That's where this story points, and that's where we land today.

The Gracious God

Strap yourselves in as we have 4 chapters from one of the greatest stories ever told, and it starts with confrontation.

1-CONFRONTATION.
It is difficult, but with it comes growth and knowledge that God is at work.

Genesis chapter 42 verse 3

And this comes at the command of Jacob, as the possibility of starvation becomes a reality. Everything is playing out just as God had revealed through the dreams of Joseph and Pharaoh.

Verse 3

Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also. (Gen 42.3-5)

Clearly the favoritism of Jacob continues, or Israel as he is now known after his wrestling with God.

But still, we shouldn't be so hard on him.

If you remember, Rachel the mother of both Benjamin and Joseph was his first love, and he wanted to marry her, so he worked for seven years to earn that right, but was tricked into marrying her older sister Leah.

Jacob's love for Rachel remained and he worked another seven years so he could marry her.

Talk about committed, and repeatedly the Bible points out that his love for Rachel was the greatest.

Now these two boys that he favours, are all that is left of that love, for she died giving birth to Benjamin. And in a way Joseph should have been the eldest son and now Benjamin the eldest after him.

Meaning, the favouritism isn't as shallow as one might think, for it is built on a story of love, perseverance and heartbreak.

But for today, it is,

1 son lost, 10 sons go, 1 remains with Jacob, verse 6

Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. (Gen 42.6)

And in that moment, the dream of Joseph that had initially filled the brothers with a hate that contributed to this present situation, came true.

Tell them Joseph, tell them, we are tempted to cry out.

But no, there is a bigger picture here, God at work in not just dreams but in hearts too.

Verse 7

As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognised them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. 'Where do you come from?' he asked. 'From the land of Canaan,' they replied, 'to buy food.' Although Joseph recognised his brothers, they did not recognise him. (Gen 42.7-8)

Which is no surprise, for he is now older, shaved, dressed like an Egyptian, given a new name and a new family.

Even in the literal meanings of the names Manasseh and Ephraim that he gave his Egyptian children, is the reality of the trouble that he left behind and the blessing of God that Egypt was to be for him.

He had put all of this behind him, it would appear. But then.

Verse 9

Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, 'You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.' (Gen 42.9)

On one hand it is a surprising response to the knowledge that God is at work in this moment, but on the other hand it is totally human and perhaps a realization that God was not allowing him to forget all his troubles.

That he wasn't able to leave it all behind.

Well. The brothers protest as Joseph persists, and he takes them into custody, for how long, 3 days?

3 days, Jonah was in the belly of the fish

3 days, Jesus was in the grave

3 days is used repeatedly in the scriptures as a transition that often ends with a change of heart, a deliverance or a new beginning, and this is no different.

Verse 18

On the third day, Joseph said to them, 'Do this and you will live, for I fear God: (Gen 42.18)

Once again, it is the definite article, it is "the Elohim", "the God" that Joseph fears.

But why does this Egyptian fear the one God? They do not know. Yet his choice of words through an interpreter no less, may be the prompting that the brothers needed in order to recognise their regret.

Our second point.

2-REGRET.
Regret is a powerful motivator that can be used by God for our good.

Verse 21

They said to one another, 'Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us.' (Gen 42.21)

Joseph's distress from the pit as they threatened his life and sold him into slavery is now their distress. Distress that Joseph can see and it moves him. He turns away and begins to weep for the first time.

For me, this brings to mind how Jesus wept at the sisters' distress having just lost their brother Lazarus. In a similar way, Jesus wept out of empathy, but also with the knowledge that God will use their suffering for a greater good and he certainly does.

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Simeon is bound and taken from them before their very eyes to ensure that they will return, then they are given the grain and the first trap is set with their silver placed back in their sacks.

We are tempted to ask, why are you doing this Joseph? Your dream has come true, tell them. But no, a change of heart is brewing, a recognition of God on the way.

Verse 28

'My silver has been returned,' he said to his brothers. 'Here it is in my sack.' Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, 'What is this that God has done to us?' (Gen 42.28)

For the first time, the brothers acknowledge God and possibly begin to see his hand in the events.

Except, if they truly feared God as Joseph does, one would expect something different here, and what we have at this point feels more like blame than reverence, trust and faith in a good and gracious God.

Why God, Why?

The brothers are now confronted with the consequences of their sin. They regret their actions, and it is blame all-around.

Our 3rd point.

3-BLAME.
Blaming God and others avoids the real problem, me.

They blame God, they share the story with Jacob and he blames them, why?

For not deceiving the Egyptians. No surprise there, for Jacob, deception was his bread and butter, not to mention that lying to save one's own skin was a tool of his father and grandfather before him.

He blames them, but not before refusing to allow them to go back with Benjamin, and in doing so appears to sacrifice Simeon. "Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more", words from his own mouth.

One can only assume that if the famine came to an end, this is how it would be. Two sons lost and a bitter end for Jacob.

Except, this isn't the plan of any man, but a plan of God.

A gracious God, working through struggle and sin, to fulfill his purposes and promises.

Chapter 43

The famine is severe and they are faced with a choice, starve or return. At this choice, the brothers again try to convince Israel to let them take Benjamin and he finally relents, sending them on their way with double the silver and gifts of balm, honey, spices and nuts for the elusive man holding Simeon captive.

Considering the famine, this is generosity beyond expectation, a desperation likely driven by his grief at the possibility of losing Benjamin. "If I am bereaved, I am bereaved," he said, but not before offering a blessing with echoes of the covenant with Abraham.

“And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you”.

It is a sliver of hope, a testimony that it is God, who is the one in control here.

Verse 15

So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, ‘Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal; they are to eat with me at noon.’ (Gen 43.15-16)

In the foreshadowing of a prodigal son-like story, the brothers return to Egypt and Joseph has an animal slaughtered and a meal prepared, all the while the brothers are fearful and quickly confess the story of the silver in their bags to Joseph’s steward who says in verse 23.

‘It’s all right,’ he said. ‘Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver.’ Then he brought Simeon out to them. (Gen 43.23)

More words that echo the covenant with Abraham, more words that show that a gracious God is at work, and this time, the words are spoken by an Egyptian.

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Confrontation, regret, blame and reconciliation (well almost).

Verse 26.

When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. He asked them how they were, and then he said, ‘How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?’ They replied, ‘Your servant our father is still alive and well.’ And they bowed down, prostrating themselves before him. (Gen 43.26-28)

That's all of the brothers, bowing down before him. It is the first dream of Joseph's dreams in complete fulfillment and apart from the sun and the moon it is also the second dream, for now we have all 11 brothers bowing before Joseph.

Verse 29.

As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother’s son, he asked, ‘Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?’ And he said, ‘God be gracious to you, my son.’ Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there. (Gen 43.29-30)

This is the second time he has wept, meaning we are getting close; the story is almost at its climax, but not before a few more surprises, namely that this man had them seated at the table from oldest to the youngest.

How could he know their ages? The text says that this astonished them as they feasted and drank freely with him.

The NRSV translates this as “they drank and were merry with him”. One commentator says that it was, and I paraphrase, it was a sign of acceptance and camaraderie, an intoxicating time of companionship.

It was a party.

Why then? Why he didn’t give up the ruse at this point, only becomes clear in the larger narrative, and the additional trial. A test of character that points them back to the original crime against Joseph himself.

Chapter 44 verse 2

As the brothers leave, Joseph instructs the steward of the house.

Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.’ And he did as Joseph said. As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, ‘Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, “Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.”’ (Gen 44.2-5)

Let’s talk to the elephant in the room, divination, surely it is a sin and unacceptable for Joseph!

Firstly, Divination is looking at the liquid in a cup to acquire answers to questions from the deities, something that is named as a sin and later outlawed for God’s people, but here it is not yet seen in the same light, although we don’t expect that Joseph was actually practicing such a detestable thing and was more likely operating “in character”.

Whatever it was, from one angle it is rather fitting that a cup that is used for a deceptive practice is also used deceptively against the brothers.

Well They protest their innocence and rashly offer to put to death the one who stole the cup and offer themselves into unconditional slavery. Fortunately the offer is refused by the steward and a similar offer is refused by Joseph himself and only the one who stole the cup is to bear the cost of slavery.

Well, the cup was of course found, no divination required, it was planted after all, and at this they tore their clothes and returned to the city.

It is the climax, it is the start of the true

4-RECONCILIATION.
Reconciled by the grace of God.

No plan of man, no scheme of Joseph, this is ultimately a gracious God at work.
And it is also the longest speech in the Joseph story as Judah the eldest brother recounts the events that have brought them to this point of crisis.

Judah, the eldest, explains the loss of a brother, the love of the father for this one remaining son of Rachel, and how their very lives are interwoven.

How ironic it is that Judah now accepts the love that the father has for his son, when the same love had moved him to hatred and jealousy of Joseph.

And it all finishes with these words of Judah, Chapter 44 verse 33.

'Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father.' (Gen 44.33-34)

At this display of self sacrifice, Joseph could no longer control himself and he cried out for the attendants to leave and in chapter 45 verse 2

And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. (Gen 45.2)

Judah had clearly changed. He was not the same brother that we had encountered back in Genesis 38, and Joseph too has changed, now operating out of trickery and using a ruse to bring us to this point.

But was it Judah? Was it Joseph? No, it was God.

And explaining what had happened, Joseph in verse 7.

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 'So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. (Gen 45.7-8)

It is as Hosea will later say speaking for God. "I desire mercy (or standfast love as it is often translated), not sacrifice".

Confrontation, Regret, Blame, Reconciliation and a happy ending. What a great story.

Except.

Without Jesus that's all that it is. Without Jesus bringing this story to its true fulfilment, it is just a story.

But With Jesus, and by faith in his death and resurrection, this story can be our story, our neighbour's story, our friend's story and the story of those we love.

For this journey of Confrontation, Regret, Blame and Reconciliation, it is my story as I came to the father through the son. As I encounter the living God by his spirit and wept like I had never wept before.

God loves us.

Let's wrap up.

1-CONFRONTATION.

The hardest thing about evangelism is often confronting people with their sin, for we do not want to offend and we do not want to upset.

But the truth is all have sinned, all fall short.

And I expect most of us identify more with the brothers, I know I often do. Running from confrontation and correction.

But without these things we will struggle to grow.

2-REGRET.

Regret is a powerful motivator that can be used by God for our good.

C.S. Lewis writes in “The Great Divorce”

“Both good and evil, when they are full grown, become retrospective... That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, 'No future bliss can make up for it,' not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory”

Don’t hold onto regret, seek reconciliation, blame a little if you need to, our 3rd point.

3-BLAME.

In the blaming of God and others, the brothers and Jacob avoided dealing with the problem at hand.

Blame is much harder when we admit our part of the problem.

And lastly.

4-RECONCILIATION.

“God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” Joseph in Genesis 45 verse 7.

Let me put it this way

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John in John 3:16

No matter the sin, no matter how big a mess we find ourselves in, reconciliation with our God is always possible.

When we put our trust in the son, reconciliation with God is assured, our eternity is with him and the promises of our good and gracious God, are ours to enjoy forever.

That’s where this story takes us, that’s the story that everyone is invited to be part of.

Let it be your story, let’s pray,

Lord, help us to see the errors of our ways, convict us of our mistakes and grow us into the likeness of the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.
