

The Rock: 07-05-2020

Long-term faithfulness:

The journey of Joseph

First reading: Philippians 2:12-13

Title: Confronting their sin

Scripture: Genesis 43 (read 1-14 only)

Theme:

One of the hardest things in the life of a follower of Jesus, is the thought that the most difficult person we have to do business with everyday looks back at us in the mirror each morning. That person, more than anyone, keeps us from growing as God desires us to.

Introduction:

I sometimes wonder, in a world and a culture that increasingly tries to avoid the difficult things, the hard confrontation, the reflective and restorative justice of God, do we miss the fact that His discipline is always tempered with love.

Broken homes, broken marriages, broken lives, all come as a result of at least one person not wanting to deal with the hard things in front of them.

Confronting the sin, the bad choices and thought patterns in our lives never seem to be high on the list of fun things to do on a Sunday afternoon.

The Bible and the gospel itself, in many ways today, is paraded around as a self-help book of suggested ways to modify our behavior in order to please God and somehow obtain blessings and "the good life".

That is a false and dangerous narrative.

The prodigal son, from our talk last week came to the realization that it was actually himself who was his own worst enemy.

Having realized that and repenting of it before God, he could have gone about his life from right where he was. But he didn't. He went home to his father, whom he knew was full of mercy and love.

Telling his Dad that, "Hey, I blew it Dad. I messed up big time and I am sorry." Acknowledgment of his sin was not for his father's sake. His dad already knew.

It was for his sake. He had to confront his sin, and through the punishment of the pigsty, (discipline) he was restored.

The Story:

Joseph's brothers are on a collision course with the decision made twenty something years in the past. They've headed home as instructed, but didn't return with Benjamin.

They brought the food, and because their bellies were satisfied, they settled back in, at least for a time. But the past, in the words of Ryan Bingham, is never far behind.

The one thing they haven't done yet is to confront the past, tell their dad what they did. That's the one thing that needs to be dealt with.

They have now lost two of their brothers, and the trust issue between them is probably at an all-time low.

On their return journey home, they found the money that they had given for the food was actually in the bag of food with them.

Emptying them before their father he becomes concerned, afraid actually because of this. He already didn't trust his boys as it was, and now this.

You went and told this guy in Egypt that you had a younger brother and the only way we can get more food is if I send him with you. That's not happening!

"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."

-Genesis 42:36b ESV

Every time I send you to do something you come home with one less. And in a bizarre twist, Reuben offers his own sons in pledge.

"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."

-Genesis 42:37-38a ESV

Undealt with sin, hidden mistakes, never go away. They grow in the dark corners of our lives, and much more is impacted if we leave them to fester.

Like mushrooms after a bad rain, they just keep coming back to haunt. And if we belong to God, He won't let us get away from dealing with them.

But these boys, it seems, are doing everything they can to avoid the inevitable. Cultural truth or not, I can only imagine the conversation around the

dinner table at Reubens' house that night when his wife found out that he offered up their kids as guarantee.

Reuben and his brothers don't have a good track record here, and to think that the odds were in his favor and his boys would be safe, was not high on her mind, I am sure.

Jacob says: "Not a chance in...You ain't taking my boy anywhere."

But the famine. It just got worse and the food ran out. They were in need again and the only place to go was Egypt to that guy. This time it was Judah who spoke up, and what he said was not what Reuben offered:

"And Judah said to Israel his father,
 "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever."

-Genesis 43:8-9 ESV

Maybe it's just me, but the contrast between Reuben and Judah just kept gnawing at me as I studied. Being reminded that Reuben was the one who had

tried to save Joseph back in Chapter 37, all those years ago.

And that it was Judah who came up with the plan to sell his own brother into slavery just to be rid of him. How much their choices must have weighed on them!

Now they've lost another brother in Simeon, and need to risk a third just to get more food. What a divine mess. If you were going to write a story about a family who was called to save humanity, this is NOT that story.

Oh, but it is. This is the story of redemption. The one that declares, "God so loved the world, that he gave His one and only son..."

The lion of the tribe of Judah, who will take away the sins of the world. Here is his ancestor, Judah himself offering himself up.

"Listen Dad, if I don't bring both Simeon and Benjamin back, it will be my life for theirs."

This is the Jesus story. This is what is meant when we say that the whole Bible points to Jesus. In some way we are reminded of what he has done for us. Broken clay pots, prodigal sons and daughters.

Jacob's response at this point is what we need to see in the remainder of our time this morning:

"Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man."

-Genesis 43:11-13 ESV

This grace and mercy piece again, lingering in the background. Salvation and forgiveness are free -FOR US- but nothing is ever really free, it always cost someone.

And right now, it is costing Jacob his son's. God, it seems, is drawing these boys to that place, not because he is mean and vindictive.

Anyone who thinks that is missing the truth of who God is and what it means to be a father. A father disciplines in love AND always with the intent of reconciliation and restoration.

The writer to the Hebrews:

"In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

-Hebrews 12:4-6 ESV

We are called to consider Christ, this Jesus of Nazareth and then ask ourselves how we, in light of His suffering for us, ought to walk in this world.

If God, His son not sparing, as the old hymn goes, would we think that as adopted kids, HE wouldn't discipline us?

We cannot hide from our sin, our past. But the beauty of the Gospel and the Bible is that it says: We don't have to! Why?

Because in Jesus, we have been made right. If we believe, if we just acknowledge that Jesus is who he said he was, and that what He did on the cross fixed every broken thing and every wrong thing I did.

But I, me, have to acknowledge that I'm broken, I need Jesus to fix me and make me whole.

You see, Jacob's sons are products of their environment, of their father in fact.

These men, just like their dad, have to confront what they did in order for things to be made right. Jacob, in order to be blessed by God had to tell him his name.

Why? Because all those years before he had lied about who he was in order to get a blessing. I am Jacob! Yes, you are-deceiver. But now, you are Israel.

God wanted to give the blessing, but never on Jacob's terms. Never on our terms. Jacob needed to confront his past deception, and his own sons are stepping into, have stepped into, the exact same dilemma.

But instead of, "What is your name?" they have to deal with the question of: "What have you done?"

Make no mistake, the enemy of our souls wants to keep us in grief, guilt, and fear. That is never where God desires us to be. But, to get us to the point of restoration, He will, out of genuine and pure love, discipline us.

He will force us to confront our very selves, and that is a very good thing because it is for our benefit.

Verse 14 is such a hard thing to read:

"May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

-Genesis 43:14 ESV

I read it and see the heart of God in Jacob's words. How God must look at His good creation, His image bearers, divided, fighting, angry and tearing one another apart.

The value of life, from the moment of conception all the way to the grave has been so minimized in our world, most especially in our selfish effort to always have our own way.

Thinking that somehow happiness is in the complete denial of any wrongs we've ever done. No, at the end of the day and at our wits end we have to acknowledge that God alone can (and wants) to fix it all.

Hamilton makes these observations, and I found them helpful to me.

"It is fitting, therefore, that Jacob invokes EL SHADDAI...He is the deity who is blessing, making promises, and covenants, AND revealing Himself."

-NICOT Pg. 545

May HE grant mercy and send back your brother (Simeon) AND Benjamin...

Restoration. The "and Benjamin", Hamilton says:

"Hangs like a resigned sigh of a Father trapped between the need to live and the possibility of a life made utterly empty through another loss."

-NICOT Pg. 548

You see? This is why verse 14 hangs so heavy. Reckless selfishness and the brokenness of this family has brought them to this point.

It is amazing that God in His goodness, had chosen this very family -broken humanity- to fix broken humanity.

Carrying out His salvation plan to the world through the very ones who are causing the problems, will ultimately bring about the fixing of the problem.

Namely- Jesus. We are trapped in sin, pride, and selfish desires. If you don't

think so, please just take some time to observe the world around you.

BUT GOD-In Christ, stepped into time and space as one of us, through the incarnation. He, in the person of His son Jesus, would be the one who will fix us.

Jesus himself, much like the offer of Judah, would be the sacrifice that brings us home. This is Hebrews 12 again:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

-Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV

We are surrounded by witnesses -Joseph and his father Jacob being two of them, point us forward to the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus.

"By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites

and gave directions concerning his bones.”

-Hebrews 11:21-22 ESV

Because of all these witnesses, let's get rid of the extra weight and the sin that holds tight, even when we want to let go.

Joseph's brothers are a great example of this. They are doing all they can at the moment to avoid confronting their sin, and it is costing not only themselves, but their entire family.

EL SHADDAI, the covenant making, promise keeping God, who revealed Himself in Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, is calling me, you and any who would: Come, come home to me.

Application:

Our faith begins and ends with Him. No matter what happens in the in-betweens. All of the ups and downs, the good and bad, the trials and suffering, the victories and joys, the mountain tops and deep valleys -

Jesus is the one and only constant, our anchor in every storm in this ever-changing world full of chaos.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not (cannot) overcome it.

That light leads you home to the Father,
through Jesus.

If you haven't yet, would you consider
this Jesus? He desires to reconcile you
and to restore you to God the Father.

Are you in Christ already? I want to
encourage you once again to hold the
line, stay the course and as Paul tells
us all:

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have
always obeyed, so now, not only as in my
presence but much more in my absence,
work out your own salvation with fear and
trembling, for it is God who works in
you, both to will and to work for his
good pleasure."

-Philippians 2:12-13 ESV

Work out what He is working in you. That
is your responsibility in the sanctifying
work of God in your life.

Continue to pray for one another, support
one another, love one another.