

According to BBC, analysis of the ice-cores at Mt Kilimanjaro of Tanzania which provides for the river Nile showed that there was a drought about 3600 years ago who was about the time of this story of Joseph. Perhaps that caused the famine.

The situation is dire. Food is running out. There was no grain in Canaan.

So, Jacob send his sons down to buy grain from Egypt. But does he send all of them? No! He sends all his other sons but he doesn't send Benjamin. Benjamin is a favorite like his other son Joseph.

Surely every son needs to go down to get the grain. It's a famine. We need all the help we can get, right. What if someone attacks the caravan? One more son surely will help. But no... Jacob send his other 10 sons but not Benjamin. Just like Joseph was favored, so too is Benjamin. You see, Benjamin and Joseph were the sons of Rachel, the wife he loved. They were favored, extra precious. The other children didn't quite measure up in Jacob's eyes.

I think there's 2 lessons for us here.

First, is we should be careful not to have favor one child over another. One might think you love a child better if you give them better things or favor one over the other. No, we just spoil them. Let me tell you about my uncle. You see Chinese people have a bad habit of favoring boys over girls. My grandmother was no exception. My grandmother had 3 girls. The first child, a girl. Second child, a girl and third child also a girl. Now as for the fourth child... well my grandmother was walking on egg shells. My great grandmother had said that if grandma had one more girl, she was going to get another wife for my grandfather! Talk about pressure to have a boy. Thankfully, it was a boy. You can imagine the joy, the relief. A baby boy! I bet he was special. He must have been a princeling. My grandmother told me that during the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war in Malaysia, this boy wanted some noodles to eat. And they went to get it for him during that dangerous period. He was THAT spoiled. This spoiling in the end spoiled him. He didn't do well in his studies and could not get a good job. Furthermore, he did some really

bad thing and was disowned by the family, only to be partly reconciled years down the track. You see if you give too much of a good thing to your child, be it your only child or if you favor one child over another, you are spoiling them, you are not acting out of true love.

There's a 2<sup>nd</sup> important lesson. What is Jacob doing here? Jacob loved Rachel. She's the favorite wife. Her children are his favorites too. Too bad his wife Rachel is dead. All he has is Joseph and Benjamin. But Joseph is purportedly dead and all he really has left to remember Rachel is Benjamin. His dear son Benjamin. He holds him close, doesn't want anything bad to happen to him. He is just too precious. Do you also have something or someone that is getting too precious to you? Is it warping or changing what your priorities are in life? Is God number one? Is something important like making money, your career, or getting your child to get ahead in school becoming your first love? Remember what Jesus teaches about letting go. To love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

Matthew 16:24 NIV teaches us "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Matthew 16:25 NIV "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

This is something we all need to remember and repent, and repent again as the Holy Spirit refines us. This is a lesson that Jacob too will soon learn.

We now snap the story to another scene. Joseph is now governor of Egypt. The brothers have come looking to buy grain. So you can guess who the sons of Jacob who are going to encounter. It is no less than his brother Joseph. They "bowed down to him with their faces to the ground." (NIV 42:6). Remember the prophetic dream in Genesis 37:10 NIV when he had a dream that "the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." And his Jacob his father's rebuke, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" So the prophecy in principal has come true. Joseph's family have become entirely at Joseph's mercy.

Now when Joseph saw his brothers, he “remembered his dreams about them.” (42:9 NIV). I think that the dreams he remembered were the very same ones in chapter 37:10.

Oh how the tables have turned.

Poor little Joseph was begging for his life before but now he was governor of all Egypt. Man of incredible power and stature, and we have his brothers who sold him into slavery, bowing at his feet. What would you do if you were Joseph?

Would you like to get even?

Ooooo. Sweet. Now's my turn! Father's not here to see what happens. His brothers don't even recognize him. You can see the temptation for Joseph to get a little bit of justice. [hand to fist]

What would you do if you been treated like that? Maybe you would send the brothers for flogging.

Maybe torture them for couple of months.

Maybe sell them as slaves so that they can get a taste of their own medicine. That will teach them.

So, what does Joseph do?

He accuses them of being spies.

Joseph tells them to send one of them back to get the youngest brother, Joseph's very own flesh and blood brother as proof that they are telling the truth.

He sends them to prison for 3 days to stew on it.

Friends, think about what Joseph is proposing. Keeping 9 of them in jail and sending only 1 back to Jacob and the family is a bad idea. Sending 1 brother back with a whole bunch of food back to Canaan when there is a famine. I mean that's asking for disaster. That's what I would call a lame duck. That's like putting a

target on his back. That's bad and if Joseph actually did that, that would be a sin. There's a good chance that brother is going to be waylaid by bandits and food will not get back to Jacob and the extended family. Jacob and family will become destitute and at risk of starvation.

Thankfully, Joseph seemed to have calmed down after 3 days and said "Do this and live, for I fear God."

So he keeps one brother Simeon as hostage and allows generously to have 9 of them to go back home with donkeys loaded with grain.

I think there is a teaching moment here for us. That we should not try to get even with our enemies or those who hurt us. There are probably some here who have suffered at the hands of others. Perhaps some of us have suffered abuse, neglect or mistreatment. Perhaps we have been falsely accused or treated like 'slaves.'

Sometimes when we have been kicked and treated so poorly, we feel like we need to get even. Sometimes we can't get even with those who have hurt us, so we transfer these ill feelings on others, and we act out and hurt others. Whatever it is we have endured as children, as adolescents, as adults, we need to let God into the situation. We need to be like Joseph, to fear God. Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

When we fear God; that puts us on the path of wisdom. Knowing Jesus, knowing God makes me see things as it really is. It's like we are in the darkness and there is a flash of lightning, and we see the terrain as it really is. We see life as it really is. The Holy Spirit illuminates in our hearts how we should go, what we should do, how we should behave.

Have you been in a situation where your anger is boiling over? Has your finger sat on the precipice of the 'send' button after writing a retaliatory hurtful email? Have you ever been about to say something that you will regret and can never take it back?

But have you also felt the restraining hand of the Holy Spirit as he impresses a word of Scripture or checks your spirit to stop you from going overboard?

This is the grace and power that comes from a trusting relationship with God. We must fear him. Not a cowering fear but one of reverence, of trust that he knows better and that we can trust him, give ourselves and our situation over to him. He is able to control the situation, no matter how out of control things are. We do well to remember the story of Joseph as he stands in a position of power over his brother but yet is merciful towards them.

The story continues.

The 9 brother have already returned home.

Jacob and his family have eaten the grain that was bought from Egypt. But the famine is still severe and Jacob has no choice but to send Benjamin back to Egypt.

Finally, Joseph sees his beloved brother Benjamin. He eats a feast with them and sends them away. Little to the brothers know that Joseph has set them a little trap. His silver cup has been stashed into Benjamin's pack. So, when the brother left, Joseph's steward goes after them.

The steward repeats Joseph's words to them "Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination?" (NIV44:4-5)

The brothers cry out their innocence. No they haven't taken it. After all, didn't they return the silver from last time? The brothers were so confident that they proclaimed that "if any of your servants is found to have it, he will die and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." (NIV44:9)

Surprise, surprise! Not only was the silver cup found in Benjamin's pack but the silver was also in each man's sack! What a state the brothers were in. They tore their clothes and went back to Joseph. Now, they were entirely at Joseph's mercy.

At this point, Judah really rises to the occasion. You won't have thought from earlier chapters that Judah would be the one to save the day. Judah, the one who slept with the 'shrine prostitute' who ended being his daughter-in-law. The one who self-righteously was going to burn his daughter-in-law to death when he himself acted immorally. The one who sold his brother Joseph into slavery. A man who had fallen so low could yet be used by God. He tells the truth as it is. His dad is old and his life is bound up closely with Benjamin. If Benjamin is gone, it will be

too much for his elderly father and will surely be the death of him. Judah offers himself. He will take the fall. He will be the slave instead of Benjamin.

Friends, do you realize that Judah and his brothers could have walked away. Joseph and the steward said as much. Only Benjamin was to remain but Judah said they were all his slaves and even offered to trade himself for Benjamin. This is Judah's crowning moment. I think God has brought Judah to this moment, through all the hardship and ups and downs. Judah finally offers himself selflessly. And in doing so shows a repentant heart. Before, it was perhaps self-preservation. But now it is as if he has got a second chance. He was the one who suggested putting Joseph into slavery the first time around. But now when he had a chance to get away, he makes amends. He offers to put himself into slavery to save Benjamin.

I think God is a God of second chances. How many times has he forgiven for us for the same sins? He is the one who engineers the circumstances to help bring us to a place of repentance where we can forsake ourselves and choose Jesus. Choose righteousness. But all along, we must remember it is God's grace that makes it happen. A new heart brings a new course of actions and requires the grace of God to make it happen. When we repent, we should change how we behave. It's not just about regretting something but changing what we do. It's not easy to change but true repentance warrants it. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit gives us the power the grace to change. He even shows us what we need to do.

Finally, we come to Joseph. I think what we see from the story that Joseph was quite traumatized. After all these years, he still misses his family, especially his dear brother and father. Joseph in chapter 42 wept when he was reminded of the time he was taken, ripped from his father's household. He wept when he saw his brother Benjamin in ch 43. Joseph wept loudest in ch 45 when Judah made his impassioned speech. Joseph, though governor of Egypt, was still a man with a past. Even though God had blessed Joseph immensely, there were still brokenness in him.

Just think about him for a moment. Joseph was probably 17 years old when he was snatched from his family, when he was sold into slavery. He was later accused of rape. His life was hanging by a thread. He was thrown in prison. To top it off, he missed out on being with Benjamin and his dad, Jacob.

But we see in ch 45, how God has shaped and looked after Joseph. Joseph said to his brothers, "... do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you... it was not you who sent me here, but God."

And, importantly, the purpose of it all, "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

How great is our good. God is multitasking. He is pruning and refining them. He helped Jacob to give up his precious sons but eventually it was restored to him and with greater interest. He helped Judah change his ways, from sleeping with shrine prostitute to a man who selflessly willing to trade his place for his brother. He helped Joseph learn to trust him and to learn humility. It's not about him being superior and others bowing before him but learning through suffering to do God's will. Joseph stayed faithful and was obedient to God's standards even though he had every reason to give up and sin.

God is in control of our lives. Whether we seem to be in a season of suffering when things are not going to plan, when things seem to be falling apart, God is in control. Whether in a season of success, when things are going sweet, God is in control. Romans 8:28 NIV 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.' When we believe in Jesus, when we walk in his ways, there is never a dull moment, as everything we go through, good or bad is used for our good and subject to his wonderful purpose. We may not see it yet. Perhaps not now, perhaps not even in our lifetime. But one day when we see Jesus again, we will know everything does work for the good of those who love him. Amen.