

One Final Test




“Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the youngest, with his money for the grain.” And he did as Joseph told him (Genesis 44:2).



DEVOTIONAL

When it comes down to it, there is but one question each person must ask himself: “Will I recognize God’s authority as supreme, or will I try to throw off the Creator’s restraints and lay claim to sovereignty?” In other words, will we bow the knee to the Lord gladly, or will we refuse to submit?

Adam tried to supplant divine authority and plunged the human race into sin, wherein all of us are born as children of wrath (Genesis 3:1–19; Romans 5:12–21). But God was gracious and promised to do the work necessary to make for Himself friends and servants from some of Adam’s children. The Creator said there would one day be a people obedient to His precepts (Genesis 3:15; Jeremiah 31:31–34).

This people includes men like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who by their sin showed that they could never merit the righteousness God requires, but had to lean upon His grace alone (Genesis 9:20–21; 12:10–20; 27). Nevertheless, the inevitable fruit of trusting the Lord for salvation is a life that increasingly conforms to the Almighty’s holy law (Genesis 17:1–2; James 2:14–26). Although they will struggle with sin until death, believers will repent and press forward toward the goal God sets before His people (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Jacob’s son, Joseph, understood these truths well, and he knew that his brothers must repent and obey if they were to be the Lord’s people. Their crime of selling him into slavery because they were jealous of him (Genesis 37:25–28) did not automatically bar them from God’s promises – they would have been forever lost only if they, evidenced in an unchanged life, refused to serve God through an utter lack of faith. Happily, Joseph saw their newness of heart when they did not envy the favored position he gave to Benjamin (Ch. 43).

Yet Joseph could not see the hearts of his brothers, and he further pressed them, looking for proof of their changed hearts. Since they had been disloyal to God’s people when they betrayed him, Joseph thought he might discern the state of his brothers’ souls by testing their loyalty to Benjamin. Today’s passage describes how Joseph initiated this test to see if their repentance was genuine.

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

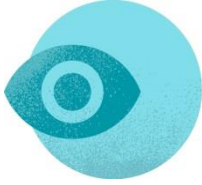
The Lord our God puts us to the test so that we may reveal to others the true commitments of our hearts. Certainly, God knows in advance the outcome of any test that He gives us, but we are not to dwell on this truth. Instead, we should seek His aid that we might show our submission to His will and pass any test He sends our way. Today you will face the choice to trust and follow Christ or sin against Him. Lean on the Holy Spirit and by God’s grace you will pass this test.¹

¹ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/one-final-test/>



OPEN IT

1. As a student, did you do better on tests you knew about or a pop quizzes? Why?



READ IT

Genesis 43–44



EXPLORE IT

2. What causes Jacob to send his sons back to Egypt (43:1–2)?
3. What are all the things that they take back to Egypt with them (43:11–15)?
4. What did Joseph inquire about when he saw his brothers (43:26–34)?
5. What does Joseph do as his brothers leave Egypt (44:1–13)?
6. Who speaks on behalf of the brothers (44:14–23)?
7. What reason does he give when pleading for Joseph's mercy (44:24–34)?



APPLY IT

Can we be honest for a minute? Have you ever in a sinful, unguarded moment engaged in fantasies of revenge? You imagine ways of getting even. You create the perfect scenario. You imagine the steps you would take and then you smile as you picture their face as the plan reaches its conclusion.

Now, if you have ever done this (and of course, I never have), you might have imagined a scenario very similar to what Joseph was facing. Out of jealousy the brothers accused Joseph of being a spy for their father and sold him into slavery. They convinced their father that Joseph had been torn apart by wild animals. As a result, Joseph was paraded around and degraded as a slave, he was accused of a crime he didn't commit, was sent to prison, was forgotten by someone who promised to help him . . . and then was suddenly thrust into the position of being the second most powerful man in Egypt.

During a severe famine, the brothers are forced to come to Egypt for food. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they don't recognize him. But Joseph doesn't reveal who he is . . . at least not right away. Instead, Joseph does several things. First, he accuses them of being spies. Then he throws them in prison for awhile. Next he tells them that they must return with their younger brother, Benjamin. When they do return, Joseph has the

brothers to his house for dinner and then goes out of his way to show favoritism to his blood brother. He loads the brothers up with food and plants his silver cup in Benjamin's sack. No sooner do the boys get out of town than Joseph sends his steward after them to accuse them of stealing the cup. The brothers protest that they are innocent and agree that if anyone has stolen the cup they will be Joseph's slave. When they discover the cup in Benjamin's sack . . . they all return.²

8. At the beginning of Chapter 43, we see that circumstances put Jacob into a difficult place of choosing whether to survive as a family during a famine or run the risk of losing Benjamin. How do we go about making wise decisions in times of difficult choices and circumstances?

9. In Genesis 42:24 we see that Simeon is taken into Egyptian custody and probably put into prison while the others were set free. What are some possible lessons that the brothers and Simeon might have learned through this?

10. Why do you think Joseph went about seeking reconciliation with his brothers in such a long and roundabout way? How might following in his footsteps help us when we are wronged?

Joseph is trying to find out if his brothers have changed. He wants to know if they have repented or not.

Reconciliation without repentance is like painting over the mold on a wall . . . it looks good for awhile on the outside, but underneath things are unchanged. Joseph knew there could be no real reconciliation with his brothers unless they addressed their behavior in the past. Repentance is a prerequisite to genuine conversion and for the believer it is a prerequisite to forgiveness and growth. But the question we must first ask is: what is repentance?

The Greek word for repentance found in the New Testament is *metanoia*: "meta," meaning change, and "noia," meaning mind.

Repentance, as Christ preached it, is a changing of the mind, the intellect, the values, that inevitably produces a profound change of the heart and emotions, a total radical transformation from seeking to please self to seeking to please God. Repentance leads to nothing less than a human revolution. (Colson, *Who Speaks for God*, p. 154)

Charles Spurgeon defines repentance as "a hatred of sin; it is a turning from sin and a determination in the strength of God to forsake it. (Metropolitan Pulpit Vol. 1 p. 586)

Now, that sounds simple enough. The problem (that Joseph seemed well aware of) is that it is possible to look repentant, but not really repent at all.³

11. While they still don't know it yet, the brothers find themselves standing in front of the man whom they had injured greatly. What is it like to face a person you have wronged?

² Sermon by Bruce Goettsche found @ <http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/022700.html>

³ *ibid*

12. There are two choices before each of us when we come face to face with someone whom we have wronged. The first is to cover up our sin. The second is to confess our sin. What are the possible outcomes of each of those choices?

13. Take some time and put yourself in Joseph's shoes. How would you have treated the brothers? What would have been a just punishment for them?

14. Joseph went to great lengths to discern the hearts of his brothers. How does one go about knowing if another person is truly sorry for their wrong/sinful actions?

Note the many signs of Joseph's love for his brothers. First, there is the steward's great reply when the brothers express their concern about the money in their sacks (43:23). Coming from an Egyptian steward, it must have stunned these men. "Be at ease" is literally, "Shalom!" "Peace to you, don't be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." He's saying, "I received your money, but somehow your God returned it to you. Take it as a gift from Him." It shows that Joseph had been talking to his steward about the true God. Returning their money was a sign of Joseph's love for his brothers.

Next, Simeon was returned. They didn't know but what he was long gone, on some chain gang building the pyramids. My guess is that he had put on a little weight during his stay in prison. His healthy return to his brothers was another sign of Joseph's love. Then, the steward brought out water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys (43:24). They weren't being treated roughly, as prisoners, but with the respect given to honored guests. When Joseph arrived home, he asked them (still using an interpreter) about their welfare, and especially about their father.

Then Joseph saw Benjamin. He had seen him from a distance earlier in the day (43:16), but now he could see him better. Joseph was 16 years older than Benjamin, his only full brother. Benjamin had been only a year old the last time Joseph had seen him. As he gazed upon Benjamin, thoughts of his family and his mother, who died giving birth to this child, flooded over him. He managed to say, "May God be gracious to you, my son" before he was overcome with emotion and left the room to weep. Then, he treats them to this great feast. Joseph, being the master, sat at a table by himself. His Egyptian servants sat at another table, not wanting to defile themselves by eating with these Hebrews. They must have wondered why in the world Joseph would invite these hicks from the sticks to eat in his home. Then, even more puzzling, why did he keep giving them portions from his table, a sign of special honor? Benjamin got five times as much, again due to Joseph's special love for his own full brother. Some think he was testing the other brothers, to see if they would be jealous.

The final expression of Joseph's love is seen when he tells his steward to fill each man's sack with as much food as they can carry and to return each man's money again to his sack. He didn't want them to have to pay for their food, but wanted to supply it freely because he loved them. ⁴

⁴ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/99225162257370.pdf>

15. Read Romans 12:14–20. Why is loving and caring for those who have wronged you God's prescription for peace? What can such behavior do to your enemy?

The brothers of Joseph sounded contrite. They seemed to be sorry early on. But Joseph couldn't conclude that they had genuinely repented. Why?

People can feel sorry and not be repentant. The brothers seemed sorry; they felt that they were getting their just rewards. But the question is: **WHY were they sorry?** Were they sorry for their sinful behavior or were they sorry for the trouble their behavior got them into? Were they sorry for their sin or were they sorry for the shame they felt? This is a very common type of sorrow.

- The abusive spouse says they are "sorry" after a violent outburst. Are they really sorry for their behavior? Are they sorry enough to get help? Or are they saying they are sorry because they don't want their spouse to file charges or to divorce them?
- The drunk driver is "sorry" after someone is injured or killed in an accident. But is it for their behavior, or are they sorry that they are facing adverse consequences?
- The thief is "sorry" after he is arrested but may only be sorry for getting caught.
- The promiscuous person is sorry that they "didn't take better precautions" but not for their sin.
- The gossip is sorry that things got "out of control" but they see the problem with others and not themselves.

It is even possible for a person to feel sorrow because they are afraid of hell and yet not feel sorrow for the wrong they have done. They are not sorry for the offense against God . . . they don't want to be punished!

Many people live their lives this way. They are told that they can't be forgiven unless they confess their sin. So, anytime they do something wrong they utter a silent prayer that is little more than "sorry God" and then they get on with their life. They want to make sure they don't "get into trouble" . . . they aren't really concerned about God's honor. There is no real change. People who repent in this way . . . are not saved. Christians who repent of their sin this way . . . are not reconciled to God.... It is possible to find the gospel of Jesus Christ attractive for a number of reasons:

- because of the promise of forgiveness from sin
- because it holds out the hope of life after death
- because it talks about blessings and peace in this life
- because it will help you fit in with the group of people you are attracted to

But the person who "comes to Christ" for any of these reasons is not really a child of God. They have not repented. They have never come to grips with the nature of their sin. They aren't concerned about their sin; they are concerned about their advantage.⁵

16. What are some examples where one feels sorry for the consequences of a sin but not remorseful for the sin itself?

⁵ Sermon by Bruce Goettsche found @ <http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/022700.html>

17. Why is feeling sorry for the consequences of your sin not true repentance? What things cause us to stop short of completing the process?

"Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." — Dietrich Bonhoeffer

18. What happens when a person recognizes his sinful actions against God and others? How will a full understanding of repentance change one's response in seeking to make right?

19. In Genesis 44:30–34, Judah petitions Joseph to not keep Benjamin in Egypt, even going so far as to say He would be imprisoned in Benjamin's place. How does his response illustrate godly repentance?

20. In light of the example we have before us in our text, in what situations in your life might repentance be needed? What steps or actions might be helpful in showing God and others sorrow for your sin?