

Cornered By Grace

Genesis 42-44

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever known you needed to deal with something, address an issue, make a change — and just... didn't? You stared at it. You avoided it. You built your whole life around never having to deal with it. Genesis 42-44 is all about when we get cornered by Grace, and we must face the facts.

These three chapters could have been the longest single chapter in our Bible because they tell one continuous story — Joseph's dealings with his brothers.

Normally, you might preach seven different Sundays on these three chapters, but we are going to take it in one sweep to see a very important biblical precept. Namely, that life change doesn't often happen all at once, but rather, it is progressive. The Theological term is ***Progressive Sanctification***.

You see, the Bible speaks of salvation in three tenses:

1. Past Tense, Justification

Justification is what Paul was talking about in 2 Timothy 1:8-9 (NASB95)

⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹**who has saved us** and called us with a holy calling...

- Justification is the Judicial declaration that you are righteous because of Christ.
- Justification is all of God and none of man.

Martin Luther was right when he said – *the only contribution we make to our justification is the sin God so graciously forgives.*

Justification happens instantly and completely.

- When you are saved, you are as justified as any Christian in all of History. Paul, Billy Graham.
- When you are saved, you are as justified as you will ever be. (In heaven, you will be no more Justified than you are right now.

2. Then there is the Future Tense of salvation...Glorification

Romans 5:9 (NASB95)

⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we **shall be saved** from the wrath of God through Him.

Glorification speaks of a time when the wrath of God will ultimately be poured out on sinners... but not for you if you are saved - you will be glorified.

Glorification is what Paul is talking about when he writes in 1 Corinthians

15:51-53 ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

- Again, glorification is completely and totally a work of God whereby He changes your physical body into a spiritual, eternal body.

But the Bible also uses the word “saved” in the present tense...

3. Present Tense Sanctification

2 Corinthians 2:15 (NASB95) ¹⁵ For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those **who are being saved** and among those who are perishing;

Justification and Glorification happen instantly and completely; they are totally God’s doing. But sanctification is gradual and progressive, and it does involve human effort.

Sanctification is our cooperation with the Holy Spirit for the purposes of life change.

CONTEXT: The text before us today is Sanctification on full display in the lives of the Tribal Patriarchs.

Throughout these chapters, we will see these brothers broken and brought to a place where they must look their sin squarely in the eye; they must own it before they can forsake it. The same is true for you and me this morning.

We can view the process in 4 distinct precepts. And you will find that these precepts are very familiar to those of us who know the Savior. In fact, some of you will find yourself in Precept 1, 2, 3, or 4.

1. Precept 1 - God Confronts What We Avoid

TEXT: Genesis 42:1–5 (ESV)

¹ When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” ² And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.”

NOW, these competent men — men who know all about famines and food and livestock — why are they just staring at one another? Because they know that there is something in Egypt they do not wish to confront.

Twenty years earlier, they took the favored son of their father and sent him to Egypt as a slave. Then they lied to their father for two decades.

It is hard to lie. If you lie once, you have to remember what you lied about so you

can cover it again. And then you have to lie again, and the more you lie, the better your memory has to get. It's a real art to lying. Imagine ten guys lying for twenty years and keeping the story straight? They've built an entire lifestyle around the evasion of their sin.

We tend to do that, don't we? We sin, then we walk away and act as if it never happened. That's what happens here...

But now God does something that forces them to face what they did. The famine is His sovereign instrument. **They have to own up to their sin.**

You see, God often forces us to DEFINE our sin before we can DEFEAT our sin.

ILLUSTRATION: I am in an extended study of the individuals and histories that surrounded the time of the Civil War in our country. One of the most remarkable stories is that of Wibur Mclean. The First Battle of Bull Run happened on his property in Manassas, Virginia, in 1861. Traumatized by the experience, he moved to Appomattox, Virginia, to escape the conflict. His parlor was commandeered by the Union Army in 1865 and used as the office where Gen. Robert E. Lee would officially surrender to General Ulysses S. Grant. ***McClain famously noted that the war "began in my front yard and ended in my front parlor".***

Listen, there are some conflicts you just can't get away from - the Lord will move Heaven and Earth to see to it that you face the consequences.

Genesis 42:3 ³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. ⁵ Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 42:6–11 (ESV)

⁶ Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." ⁸ And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. ⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land." ¹⁰ They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all sons of one man. ***We are honest men.*** Your servants have never been spies."

Honest men? Really? I don't believe they are insincere - they have done one of the most dangerous things a man can do - ***they have believed their own lie.*** They had convinced themselves. But then, Joseph pushes them into a corner where they must face reality.

Genesis 42:12–13 (ESV)

¹² He said to them, “No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.” ¹³ And they said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.”

Ah, for the first time in 20 years, **they are forced to speak again of Joseph**. They presume he is no more, but now, at least, they can speak his name.

Notice that Joseph is forcing the brothers to feel exactly what he felt. He was falsely accused, he feared for his life, and now they are experiencing the same. They are reaping exactly what they have sown.

BIBLE PREACHING DOES THAT - That is why it is a very wise thing to sit under the unadulterated preaching of the Word of God. It corners us, it will not allow us to escape. We must decide either to face our sin or to sin all the more.

God Confronts What We Avoid - ***What is that one area of your life you want God to stay out of?***

2. Precept #2 - God Attacks Our Illusions

We mentioned last week, Steve Jobs and his reality distortion field. We all have such a field, and it's never more evident than where there is sin in our lives...

Genesis 42:14–17 (ESV)

¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you. You are spies. ¹⁵ By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” ¹⁷ And he put them all together in custody for three days.

Joseph puts them in prison for three days. God strips them of all the people who would have told them what good men they were, what successful businessmen they were. You see, **some people reinforce our delusions**. They are not helping us.

These brothers are all alone with the exposed wound of sin. Joseph eavesdrops on their conversation to see if perhaps they had matured.

Genesis 42:21–22 (ESV)

²¹ Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. **That is why this distress has come upon us.**” ²² And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.”

As they reflect, they see the weight of their own sin.

Statistically, the most profound changes in a person's life happen when they experience solitude. **When they are alone**, when they cannot hear the reinforcing voices of people who tell them how great and innocent they are:

- When a person goes to **college**, away from high school peers for the first time.
- When a person is newly **married**, they are separated from their old social reinforcement.
- When a person enters the **military**, stripped of familiar surroundings.

With older people who come to Christ, it is often because God has cracked their foundation — perhaps a tragedy, lying in a hospital bed, hearing the heart machine go *blip, blip, blip*. You don't argue with that heart machine. These guys got alone. And when they did, the truth broke through.

Genesis 42:23–24 (ESV)

²³ They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. ²⁴ Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

So **Joseph keeps Simeon as a surety** in case the brothers decide to remain in Canaan.

Genesis 42:25–28 (ESV)

²⁵ And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them. ²⁶ Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. ²⁷ And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!" At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "**What is this that God has done to us?**"

Note: this is the first mention of the name God in the brothers' lives. They've spoken of their sin, they've spoken of their supposed dead brother, but this is the first time their thoughts are turned toward God. What is God doing?

Note that as they gaze Heavenward, they tremble. Why? Because if there is a God who sees, then there is a God who saw.

Some of you are in a season right now where God has taken away every distraction. And you hate it. But what if that's not punishment — what if that's pursuit? What if that's part of the process of your life change?

God confronts what we avoid, God attacks our illusions...

3. God Breaks Our Control

There comes a time in a man's life and a woman's life where God steps in and reminds them they have absolutely no control over the situation.

Likely, the brothers thought: once the famine lifts, we'll barter with this man and get Simeon back. But the famine doesn't lift. Nature won't cooperate. The situation won't bend. Circumstances won't break their way. People, nature, and circumstances — all dominate these dominant men. Again, they feel as Joseph did, totally at the mercy of circumstances beyond their control.

Genesis 43:1–2 (ESV)

¹ Now the famine was severe in the land. ² And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food."

They are forced back to Egypt, forced to bring Benjamin, forced to confront the man who holds their fate. God is systematically dismantling their control.

ILLUSTRATION: Chuck Colson was the most celebrated young man in Boston. Marine captain. Brown University scholar. Presidential appointee — one of six men in the world who could walk unannounced into the Oval Office. But God broke him at Watergate.

A friend read him C.S. Lewis's chapter on pride from **Mere Christianity**: *"There is one vice of which no man in the world is free... I am talking about pride or self-conceit. Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of life."*

Colson said, *"Lewis's torpedo had hit me amidships. That one chapter ripped through the protective armor in which I had unknowingly encased myself for years."*

He drove away from his friend's house sobbing, pulled to the side of the road, and prayed his first real prayer: *"God, I don't know how to find you, but I'm going to try. I'm not much the way I am now, but somehow I want to give myself to you. Take me."*

I wonder if there is anyone here today or watching online who is in a situation they cannot control. Helplessness often precedes humility, and God is near the humble.

God confronts what we avoid, God attacks our illusions...God breaks our control...

4. God Offers Mercy and Opportunity

They return to Joseph. And instead of condemnation, Joseph releases Simeon. He has their feet washed. He inquires about their father. He throws a banquet and seats them from oldest to youngest — in exact birth order.

Genesis 43:33

³³ And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. ³⁴ Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.

The one man in all creation who should hold them most guilty now pours upon them mercy. Sound familiar?

Romans 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

What happens next is a stroke of genius.

Joseph had a cup called the cup of divination — a golden cup Egyptian leaders used to discern God's will. He plants this cup in the saddlebag of Benjamin, the only brother who wasn't alive when Joseph was sold into slavery. The brothers ride away. Joseph's men overtake them and accuse them of theft.

The method is deliberate. They begin searching sacks from the oldest down. And with each empty sack, the brothers grow prouder. Nine sacks opened — all clean. **Nine sacks say you're innocent.** Then they open Benjamin's. And they are dead to rights guilty.

Why Benjamin? Because Benjamin is the son of Rachel, the mother of Joseph. Remember what the brothers did to Joseph? They tried to kill him. Now the question hangs in the air: **will they do to Benjamin what they did to Joseph twenty years ago?** Will they throw him under the bus to save themselves? Or have they changed?

Genesis 44:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶ And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found."

They had repented. That is the final step. It is when God puts the finger on a guilty sinner, and that sinner is willing to say: **I am guilty. I have nothing to say.**

God confronts what we avoid, God attacks our illusions...God breaks our control...then, when we have changed, when we have owned our sin, God offers mercy and grace. Where are you in the trajectory?

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Maybe, like these brothers, you have moved far away so that you will not have to face your past. Maybe you have surrounded yourself with people who reinforce just how good you really are. Maybe you have erected a great

edifice of success to try to drown out the voice of your conscience. **But God knows. Will you recognize it? Will you repent?**

ILLUSTRATION: Jay Strack tells the story of his daughter... I love you just the way you are, but I love you too much to leave you that way.

Listen, God loved Joseph's brothers even in the midst of the delusion they found themselves in, but he loved them too much to leave them that way.

God loves you whether you change or not, but he loves you too much to leave you that way.