

Laying Down Your Life Genesis 44:1-45:5

We've been tracking each week with Joseph and how he foreshadowed Jesus Christ. His life and experiences teach us about Christ and the gospel. Jesus explained to his disciples that the OT pointed to Him.

The common aspects of Joseph's life and that of Jesus are so obvious: both were chosen by God to rule, but hated by their brothers and made to suffer unjustly. Both suffered according to God's plan for them in order to save those who were against them. Both honored God and displayed faithfulness, but were unjustly accused and arrested. And yet God was at work, as both ascended to the place of honor and power. As a result, both saved their people.

For these reasons, scholars call Joseph a "type" of Christ. Needless to say, the work of Jesus was infinitely greater. But through Joseph's life, we can understand Christ more. We can know God better and understand His grace and God's ways.

And through the actions of Joseph's brothers, we better understand our sin and the value of what we have to give to our Savior. We even see a parallel between the brothers' inability to recognize the one chosen by God to save them, and our own inability to recognize the One chosen by God to save us. Like Joseph's brothers, our Savior must be unveiled to us.

And that's what happens, finally, at the beginning of Genesis 45. I chose to go on into 45 this morning because 44 brings these events to this dramatic moment when Joseph reveals his identity to the brothers who wished him dead.

Maybe you noticed what happened that showed Joseph what he wanted to see. It was Judah's offer to trade His life for Benjamin's life. Judah put forward himself for servitude in Egypt in the place of his younger brother.

They came to this moment by way of a series of tests engineered by Joseph. Before he disclosed his true identity, Joseph wanted to see if his brothers had changed. Were they remorseful for what they had done to him? Would they repent?

It's a fascinating display of loyalty by Judah. He had given his word to his father, Jacob, that he would protect Benjamin at all costs. And here he has to make good on that word. He has to lay down his life for his brother.

We understand what it means to sacrifice ourselves for someone else: to put someone else first, to put aside what we want, and surrender our desires for someone else's benefit. It's essential to true serving. For example, soldiers do this. Parents should do it.

But did you know that laying down our lives isn't a suggestion from God - it's a requirement? Philippians 2 says, *"In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

That's not easy, is it? We don't naturally count others better than ourselves! Even when we are compelled to lay down ourselves for another, we have our limits and we expect something in return. Or we often have qualifications that the person must meet.

But considering others better than yourself is part of God's moral law. That's why we see Jesus doing it. He was fulfilling the law of God in our place, living life as humans were designed to live. Laying down your life is truly human, truly godly.

And so Jesus laid His life down to bring us to God. In John 15, Jesus says, *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."* Then in 1 John 3, the apostle writes, *"By this we know love, that [Christ] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."* We should lay our lives down for each other.

I doubt it's a big surprise to hear that from a pastor in a sermon! It's probably the hardest thing for us to do. But it's critical in any relationship. And there's a freedom to be found in doing it. But we need God's help.

So how do we begin? This part of Joseph's story helps us answer that. What keeps us from doing it is our sense of entitlement. What goes on here between Joseph and his brothers illustrates some principles that guide us, especially in situations where the other person doesn't seem to deserve our sacrifice.

Notice the points on pages 6-7 in the WG. Laying down your life for another requires that you identify your sin against God, rather than their sin against you, declare God's penalty for your sin, rather than your penalty for their sin, and behold the life laid down so that you both could live.

Joseph's next test for his brothers frames Benjamin for stealing his silver cup. His servant again gives the brothers their grain and their money, but also puts the cup in Benjamin's bag as Joseph commands. Then, when they leave in the morning, Joseph sends the servant to catch them and accuse them.

They plead their innocence. They say they brought back the money from before – none of them would steal this cup! In fact, they're so confident, look at verse [9], they say, *"Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord's servants."* Joseph's steward modifies that offer slightly, verse [10] *He said, "Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent."*

When they open their bags to prove their innocence, Benjamin has the cup, and they tear their clothes in agony. They just agreed to their youngest brother's slavery. So they return to Egypt and throw themselves before Joseph to beg for mercy.

But Joseph continues to play the part. The test isn't done just yet. He says, "*Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?*" Joseph didn't appeal to false gods for guidance, although it was common in Egypt. He trusted the one true God. But he's leading them on to see what they will do.

And Judah speaks up. Notice what he says in verse [16] *What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants.*" What guilt is Judah talking about? He doesn't mean the guilt for stealing the cup. He's talking about their guilt from what they did to their brother Joseph all those years ago. This came up before as Joseph tested them. They know their guilt remains. They pulled one over on their father and everyone else, but they didn't fool God.

You may have some secret that you think no one knows, but God knows. You may have some offense that you were able to sneak by others, but God sees. The lie is the belief that keeping the secret will preserve your freedom. In reality, secret sin robs you of your freedom. It puts you in a kind of prison.

Joseph's brother is recognizing this. But notice what Judah doesn't do. He doesn't say, "*We are being framed! Benjamin said he didn't do it and we believe him. None of us did this; we have no reason to. These accusations are ridiculous; take your cup and let us go!*" Judah knows they aren't getting out of there. Benjamin is guilty of having the cup (even though didn't steal it), but Judah and the other brothers are guilty of getting rid of their lost brother.

Someone has clearly done them wrong. Someone set them up. Judah has a legitimate case. In the matter of the cup, they are innocent. But in greater matters, they are guilty. And this "primes the pump" for Judah to lay down his life.

The first step toward laying down your life for someone else is admitting your guilt rather than defending your innocence: As long as you're stuck on their sin against you, you'll never consider them more significant than you. As long as you're focused on what they don't deserve, you'll never put another person's interests ahead of your own. Laying down your life for someone requires that you identify your sin against God, rather than their sin against you.

Again, it's not easy. Jesus compared this to being able to point out a speck of sawdust in someone else's eye while not seeing a 2x4 stuck in your own eye! *Where has God been calling you to lay down your life for someone but sin is getting in the way?* You're focused on the other person's sin against you, but you're not as concerned about your sin against God.

Now, back to Judah. He says that all of the brothers will stay and be servants in Egypt, but Joseph won't agree to that, verse [17], he says, "*Only the man in whose hand the cup was*

found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.” In other words, *“You can leave, but he stays.”*

Will they abandon their younger brother now like they did 20 years ago? Will they turn over their father’s favorite to slavery now like they did back then?

Judah steps up. He has a checkered past. It was Judah who suggested slavery for Joseph. He also mistreated and unknowingly fathered a child with his widowed daughter-in-law Tamar.

But Judah has a place in the plans of the God of grace. After this whole ordeal is over and the family is reunited, the birthright of the firstborn son will be taken away from their brother Reuben and divided between Joseph and Judah. The benefits of the birthright will be split between these two. Joseph’s descendants will get a double portion of the inheritance (the land), but the leadership of the family will go to Judah. He shows that leadership here.

He actually does what the firstborn son Reuben ought to do. He explains to this Egyptian governor (who is really his brother Joseph) that if they leave Benjamin in Egypt, it will kill their father. Judah gave his word on his own life to protect Benjamin. He told Jacob he would take the blame if something happened to Benjamin. And finally Judah tells Joseph, verse 33 *“Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.”* Judah offers to lay down his life for his brother and his father.

He’s not standing on his own rights anymore. And he sees this as retribution. He knows that slavery in Egypt is what he deserves. And it is what he deserves, isn’t it? Exhibit A: his words to his brothers in Genesis 37 as Joseph waited to die in the pit. Judah said to his brothers, *“What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites.”* Granted, that was better than death, but it was still a heinous betrayal. The one who would save them, traded for some money. Side note: that’s another way that Joseph foreshadowed Jesus Christ.

And remember, Judah and his brothers have been framed for the theft of the silver cup! But Judah isn’t concerned right now with whoever did that getting what they deserve. He’s focused on what he deserves. To lay down your life for someone else, you have to declare God’s penalty for your sin, rather than your penalty for their sin.

If you’re waiting for a perfect person on this earth whom you can serve and sacrifice for, you won’t ever serve or sacrifice for anyone! If you spend your life concerned with what others deserve for what they’ve done or failed to do, you’ll never lay down your life for them. Jesus Christ knew when He called us to lay down our lives for each other that we would be laying down our lives for undeserving people! Isn’t that what Jesus did for us?

Where have you been resisting God's call to lay down your life for someone because that person just doesn't deserve it? Think about what you deserve from God. Stop being the judge for a moment, ready to sentence the guilty. What sentence do you deserve for the things you've done?

Judah understands what he deserves. And when he declares this, Joseph has seen enough. He can't control his tears. I won't promise you that your humility will move the heart of another person, but I guarantee that it moves the heart of your Savior.

Joseph sends out every Egyptian from the room; only his brothers remain. Look at verse [3], *And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.* They're stunned. He explains, *"I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."*

Question for you: as you observed Judah offering his life in place of Benjamin, did you think, at any point, *"Wait - I thought Joseph's life pointed to Jesus Christ? Does Judah point to Jesus also?"*

But here's the thing: Judah doesn't actually have to lay down his life. The brothers don't have to lay down their lives. Why? Because Joseph already did. Laying down his life is what Joseph has been doing for almost 20 years! The brothers did the crime, but he did the time.

Joseph realizes that he did so according to the plans of God to preserve many lives. And now he sees that his brothers have changed. His prophetic dreams have come to fruition; they stand face to face with their savior. And this is the third help that Joseph's story gives you for laying down your life for others: Behold the life laid down so that you both could live.

Laying down your life is not the easy path, but it's the best path. The cross of Jesus – and in fact, the whole work of Jesus – teaches us that. There's nothing more central to knowing God and to the heart of the gospel than this. When you lay down self for someone undeserving, you do what Jesus has already done for you.

We must lay down ourselves for each other. This is true in our homes, between husband and wife, between siblings, between parents and children. It's true in the church, between brothers and sisters in Christ. It's true everywhere you go. This will transform your experience at work, with your neighbors, with family. It's life-changing in difficult relationships. Granted, there must be boundaries in relationships. That's another discussion, really. But no relationship can withstand two people who are determined to stand on their own rights and prioritize their own needs.

I hope you see where you're falling short in this, but understand this also: God's method for changing us is not through shaming us. We have to see and admit our guilt, but God is not

guilting us into being different, he's loving us into it. The reason for God's grace towards us is His great love for us.

The division between us and God has been removed through what Jesus has done, so that we can encounter Him face to face. And listen to what happens as we look to Jesus: 2 Corinthians 3, *"And we all...beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* We behold the Life laid down so that we could live – we behold Jesus Christ – and as we do, God gives us the strength and the heart to lay down our lives for others.

Absolutely, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and we need to hear loudly the moral law of God. But the gospel must be even louder in our ears, because the strength to change is not in us. Just feeling guilty won't bring the change. We must behold the Lord.

And the gospel teaches us one more thing about laying down our lives. As long as we hold on to our lives, we can't take hold of Jesus Christ. We can't take hold of His salvation, or His peace, or His joy, or His hope. What are you clinging to so tightly that is not Christ?

Lay it down, and take hold of Him!

Let's bow together in prayer.