

His Face and His Grace
Genesis 42

There's an old joke – maybe you've heard it – about a little boy who was sent to the bakery by his mother to buy a 65 cent loaf of bread. And while the baker was putting the bread into a bag, the little boy noticed that the loaf looked small. So he said, *“Isn't that a small loaf of bread for 65 cents?”* The baker kind of shrugged and replied, *“That's right – you'll have less to carry,”*

Well the boy thought for a moment, and he didn't like that. So he reached in his pocket, pulled out 50 cents, and placed it on the counter. The baker said, *“Aren't you 15 cents short.”* And the little boy replied, *“That's right – you'll have less to count.”*

Or maybe you've heard the one about the rancher who went to his veterinarian for some advice. He said, *“I have a horse that walks normally sometimes and limps sometimes. What should I do.”* The veterinarian replied, *“Well, the next time he walks normally, sell him.”*

Honesty. It goes without saying that we should be honest with each other. Of course no one can claim to have always been totally honest. Sometimes we aren't forthcoming with information when we should be. We've all told half-truths and we've told flat-out lies. So we're all liars, even though we look with disdain on people who are dishonest with us.

And just as we aren't always honest with each other, we aren't always honest with ourselves. We can lie to ourselves. That's why in Psalm 139, King David writes, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there is any harmful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way!”* It's scary how much we can deceive ourselves. We often don't see things as they truly are. We see a version of reality that's colored by what we love and what we fear.

And yet God is merciful toward liars like us. He's gracious and kind, and He's able to open our eyes and help us recognize and submit to the truth.

But it's not always relief from troubles that God aims to give His people. Many times, God will test us and He will press us to reveal what's in us and show us our sin. God gives freedom from the lies. He gives us truthfulness with Himself, with others, and with ourselves.

This interaction between Joseph and his guilty brothers emphasizes God's love of the truth and how He brings His people to a knowledge of what is true. Genesis 42 taught this lesson to the original audience (the ancient Israelites) and it teaches this lesson to us today. And two questions emerge from this passage that need to wrestle with: Do you recognize the Savior's face and His grace?

When this ch. begins, Joseph is in charge, second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. They've stored up grain for 7 years, and the famine has begun, but Egypt has grain to spare. People are coming from everywhere to buy grain in Egypt.

How important was grain in the ancient world? Well, National Geographic states that today, *“Humans get an average of 48 percent of their calories, or food energy, from grains.”* Grains are the most important food staple around the world today. Grains were probably even more essential in the ancient world. So, in a very real sense, people were coming to Egypt so that they could live.

The action in Genesis shifts to Joseph’s father and his brothers. They need food. So Jacob (Joseph’s father) sends all of his sons to Egypt except the youngest, Benjamin. Like Joseph, Benjamin was born to the wife Jacob loved dearly: Rachel. Jacob believes that Joseph is dead, and so he’s especially protective of young Benjamin.

But when the brothers arrive in Egypt and come before Joseph, they don’t recognize him. Joseph recognizes them, but they don’t recognize him. Now look again verse 9 again, *“And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.”* Many years prior, Joseph had dreamed that he would rule over his brothers and his family. His brothers hated him for his dreams, and they hated their father’s favoritism toward him. So they plotted to kill him before finally selling him into slavery and faking his death.

You may wonder, *“How could they not recognize him?”* Well, you have to take into account that when Joseph was sold into slavery he was about 17 years old. At this point – in Genesis 42 – he’s almost 40. Also, he’s dressed like an Egyptian, and he now speaks the Egyptian language. Even if they thought that perhaps this Egyptian governor favored their lost brother, they wouldn’t expect him to be alive and in this position! So don’t know that it’s him.

They don’t realize that the dreams of Joseph have come to fruition.

They don’t see that God has used their wickedness to bring about their salvation.

Now imagine all the thoughts running through Joseph’s mind, and what emotions he felt. He remembered what they did to him and how he suffered for those 20 years. He could judge them right there and have them imprisoned or put to death. But instead, Joseph is gracious. He decides to test them. Why? To see if they will repent.

All we’ve learned in Genesis about Joseph’s life has been leading to these events. Since we began to look at him, we’ve explored the parallels between Joseph and Jesus Christ.

These are not coincidental. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection. Luke 24 says, *“Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”* This includes the foreshadowing of Jesus’ work in the experiences of Joseph. Joseph was chosen by God to save his brothers, and yet they hated him and wanted to kill him. The brothers would be saved through the suffering of Joseph. So Joseph was made a slave, and he glorified God in that role and was honored. When faced with great temptation, Joseph remained faithful, and as a reward, he was thrown into

prison! Though he committed no crime, he was treated like a convict. Later, Joseph has the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Though Pharaoh is powerful and exalted, he had to rely on a servant for God's warning and guidance for how to be saved.

Do you see the parallels to Jesus?

For all these reasons, Joseph is what bible scholars call a "type" of Christ. According to God's redemptive plan, various aspects of his life point to Jesus Christ and teach us about Jesus so that we may know Him better, and so that knowing Him, we may look to continually to Jesus and follow Him. All of Scripture, OT and NT, is about Jesus.

And we see more parallels vividly here in chapter 42. It's not a coincidence what we see in verse 13. Look at that again. When Joseph accuses them of being spies, to test them, they reply, "*We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan.*"

You have to realize that the first audience of the book of Genesis was the ancient Israelites, who were led out of Egypt by Moses. Their experiences are recorded in the book of Exodus. The ancient nation of Israel consisted of 12 tribes – 12 groups under God who were to rely on God for, among other things, food to eat. In fact, God repeatedly tested them to reveal their sin and show them the way to repentance and life, and sometimes, this testing was through trusting Him for their food. They continually rebelled in their hearts against God and didn't recognize who God really was to them.

Now Joseph makes a proposal to his brothers. He puts them in jail for three days, and tells them to choose one from among them who will go back to Canaan and bring their youngest brother to Egypt. Benjamin was Joseph's only full brother; all these others are half brothers.

However, on the third day, Joseph changes the plan. He says they can all go to Canaan except one, and they take the food they need, and then bring their youngest brother back to Egypt. Joseph wants to see if they will forsake another brother. He wants to see remorse.

Keep in mind that all Joseph does is gracious towards his brothers. He could've revealed himself right away and had them locked up or put to death. But all these years, Joseph had been sustained and carried by the living God. Look at their response, verse [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."* [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.* Joseph is moved by their regret. And this brings up a good principle from Scripture.

Sometimes, the best thing that can happen to us is for our sins to find us out and come back on us. Why? To move us to repentance. To set us free from our secrets. To show us our need for

grace and humble us before God so that we may come to Him and live. That's why we confess our sins to God in worship each Sunday. This is your reminder and your opportunity to come clean before the God of grace.

So the brothers are leaving, but look at what Joseph does next, verse 25, he *"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"* – by their brother – their savior – whom they didn't even recognize!

The apostle John wrote that when Jesus Christ came into the world, *"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him."* The world did not recognize God when He came to earth. Sinful mankind did not recognize the Savior's face. Do you recognize His face? You must see Him with the eyes of your heart.

Is your heart so enamored by things of this world that you can't see the Savior right in front of you? I know what it's like, to be so consumed with your circumstances that you can't see anything else. And God does, in a sense, hide Himself from us sometimes.

In Psalm 44, the psalmist cries out to God, *"Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?"* But God never forgot His people!

Job said something similar. In Job 13, he says, to God, *"Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy?"* But Job was never God's enemy!

As I said earlier, God tests us and presses us to reveal what's in us and show us our sin, so that we may repent and live. Those whom God loves, He disciplines, like a father disciplines the child that he loves. God has done and is doing a wonderful, everlasting work in His people through Christ.

We must keep the eyes of hearts fixed on Him and see His humility and His obedience in our place. We must see His love and His grace. We must see how He remained faithful to God as He suffered – faithful in the place of those who are naturally unfaithful. Joseph's brothers didn't recognize his face, but his face was right there.

Now what happens next is fascinating. Look at verse [27] *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.* Joseph commanded that his brothers be given their grain for free.

You know, they say you can't have your cake and eat it too. But, apparently, sometimes, you can spend your money and have it too! This is a gospel picture. In Isaiah 55, the prophet describes the compassion of Christ. He writes, *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?"*

But the brothers don't understand. Immediately they fear a mistake has been made. Verse [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?"*

You know, ironically, that should be our view of grace! God's grace makes no earthly sense. Why would God not deal with us according to our sins? We can get our minds so fixed on some good things we think we've done, and we can start to believe that we're entitled to something from God. But the heart captured by grace will cry, "*What is this that God has done to us?*"

So the brothers don't understand. They don't know who the Egyptian governor really is. He's their God-ordained savior, who they rejected and wished dead. So they return to Canaan, and to their father Jacob, and they tell him the whole story.

And something curious happens, maybe you caught this as we read it earlier. Verse 35, *"As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid."* They had already checked their bags and discovered this. What's going on? Some scholars interpret this as a staged event. The brothers are pretending like this is news to them in order to shock their father. Strange, but it wouldn't be the first time they staged something in front of him.

Old habits die hard. And as the chapter winds down, it sounds much like previous chapters involving Jacob and his sons. His favoritism toward the son of Rachel is obvious. Jacob is anxious and comes across as self-centered. Again, old habits die hard. Notice that no one cries out to God. No one stops and says, *"Let's pray."* But all of this has been orchestrated by God so they may learn about His grace. However, they don't recognize that grace.

How is God using your present circumstances to bring you to the end of yourself so that you may face the truth and live in the freedom of His grace? Joseph knew exactly who his brothers were. He knew not only their identities, but also their histories. He knew their secret. Not just what they did – but what they did to him.

This is a picture of our natural position before God. In Psalm 51, David says to God, *"Against You, You only, have I sinned."* We don't just sin before God; we sin against Him. God's grace – His undeserved forgiveness and favor towards us – is amazing. Do you recognize the Savior's grace today?

It will transform how you view yourself and everyone else. None of us can be boastful. And consider this as we compare Joseph to Jesus: these wicked sinners don't recognize who he is – His person – and they don't recognize what He's done – His work. Scripture says that *"God...has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* We see the fullness of God's grace in Jesus.

Will you humble yourself before the Savior today? He's gracious and kind, able to open your eyes and help you recognize and submit to the truth.

What truth are you perhaps seeing today for the first time? Where in your life do you need to submit to the truth?

See the face and the grace of the Savior; admit your sin, believe in Him, and follow Him today.

Let's bow in prayer.