

Genesis 41:53 – 45:15
Take My Life Instead

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We have a HUGE chunk of Scripture to cover this morning, but it's all one unit, the story of how Jacob's family, who will eventually become known as Israel gets down into Egypt which Moses will lead them out of 400 years later in the events we know as the Exodus.

This week's study won't be as heavy on the application side as last week's, but it's an important piece of world and religious history that you need to know. And before we close we'll make a very important observation about the value of laying down our lives for others.

We've got a lot of ground to cover so let's launch right in.

Gen 41:53 Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do." 56 The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. 57 So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy *grain*, because the famine was severe in all lands.

A little background for you here - the vast majority of Egyptians live in a narrow strip of land on either side of the Nile, which is the lifeblood of the country. Then, and now, the entire country depended on a cycle of flooding from the river that made agriculture possible. When the anticipated flooding did not come, or did not come with its usual strength, famine is the typical result. Egyptian records even indicate that twice the famines got so bad that people resorted to cannibalism.

Fortunately, that is not happening this time around, because God is using Joseph to do a mighty work: he stored up during a seven-year surplus and now he's rationing it out as needed. His efforts are not only helping the people of Egypt, they're blessing people from the surrounding nations as well, including his brothers up north who had sold him into slavery.

42:1 When Jacob (**Joseph's dad, who thinks Joseph is dead**) saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" 2 And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die." 3 So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "Lest some calamity befall him." 5 And the sons of Israel went to buy *grain* among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

When Jacob sends his sons down, they're not the only ones going – the word is out that Egypt still has food and now everyone is headed down there to see if they can get their hands on some. So dad sends his boys down to fetch something for the family, but he won't let Benjamin, the youngest brother, go. Why is that?

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Well, remember, Jacob worked really hard to be able to marry Rachel. He worked seven years and then got hoodwinked by her dad who gave him her sister Leah instead because she was older. So then Jacob had to work another seven years to get Rachel, but that was OK - the Scripture says it seemed "like only a few days to him" because he loved her so much.

But no matter how much he loved her she didn't seem to be able to get pregnant, which was a real sore spot for her. But then finally she conceived. It was a boy and they named him Joseph. Now, and as the first-born son of his deeply loved wife, and as the child he waited so long for, he was obviously daddy's favorite, a fact which didn't sit well with his older brothers.

So, this is that Joseph who they sold into slavery and who is now the number-two man in Egypt. His dad thinks he is dead though, because the brothers obviously didn't come home and say, "hey dad, we couldn't cope with the favoritism anymore so we sold our brother...but we didn't *kill* him."

They couldn't say that, so instead they fabricated the story that they had found Joseph's blood stained coat and let dad assume a wild animal had killed him.

So, dad thinks he's lost his favorite son, but Rachel had another boy, and his name was Benjamin – so, this is Joseph's full brother, same mom and dad; but Rachel dies giving birth to the boy. Now you can see how important he is to Jacob. Benjamin is all Jacob has left to remind him of his first true love and their first son.

Now all that information about who Benjamin is will be important again in a little bit here.

42:6 Now Joseph *was* governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with *their* faces to the earth. 7 Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."

Can you imagine the flood of emotions that comes over Joseph here? The last time he saw them he was screaming out for mercy, begging them to please stop while they tied him up and sold him off, and that was well over twenty years ago now. These were the people who hurt him, but they're also his family, his own flesh and blood – how do you react, what do you do?

8 So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.

It's been over 20 years and Joseph is dressed and groomed like an Egyptian.

9 Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You *are* spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!"

10 And they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. 11 We *are* all one man's sons; we *are* honest *men*; your servants are not spies."

12 But he said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land."

He's accusing them of coming to see how the famine has affected this great nation – obviously this would be a very strategic time for some other country to send out a reconnaissance team of ten men to see if Egypt had been weakened enough to invade. So to see what they're up to he keeps accusing them of what could be a real scenario under other conditions. He accuses them a total of

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thee times, and with each response they keep spilling more information about themselves to prove their innocence.

[13](#) And they said, “Your servants *are* twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest *is* with our father today, and one *is* no more.”

OK, that’s a valuable little piece of intel – dad is still alive and so is my brother Ben...

[14](#) But Joseph said to them, “It *is* as I spoke to you, saying, ‘You *are* spies!’ [15](#) In this *manner* you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. [16](#) Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether *there is* any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you *are* spies!” [17](#) So he put them all together in prison three days.

So here is Joseph’s chance – he has his older brothers, he can do with them whatever he wants, and he can use them to bring his little brother to him – they can get their just desserts and he can be reunited with the part of his family that loved him. Not a bad deal... so he locks them up.

[18](#) Then Joseph said to them the third day, “Do this and live, *for* I fear God: [19](#) If you *are* honest *men*, let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses. [20](#) And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die.”

Apparently the Lord began to convict Joseph as the days went on – perhaps he got to thinking about the women and children and others who were at home starving waiting for their husbands and uncles to return with food. There was no way one man could take back all the food that the family would need - not when it meant traveling a couple hundred miles alone in the middle of a famine. How could you guarantee he wouldn’t be attacked and have it stolen? No, to make the trip, with food, you would need the safety of numbers...

[20](#) (cont) And they did so. [21](#) Then they said to one another, “We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.”

[22](#) And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”

Here is something absolutely amazing, something that I don’t understand – how human beings can be so cruel to one another, how they could see, “the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with” them and not be moved by it.

When bad things happen, like the earthquake and storm this week, some people want to ask, “where is God? Why did God let this happen?” I understand that question, and we have dealt with it in some of our recent studies, but the far greater question for me is – where is the goodness of man?

You see, if there is no God, and all we’re left with is the lucky result of time + chance + matter, then there is no reason for us to cry out over injustices like the one Joseph experienced. If all there is the result of a complex string of chemical reactions, electrical signals, and physics then there is no

ground whatsoever for morality – there is no way to know what is right and wrong, no way to say what Joseph’s brothers did to him was wrong – they were just following their impulses.

Did you know more people were destroyed by secular political powers last century than by natural disasters? Hitler killed an estimated eight million people. Pol Pot, the leader of Cambodia, slaughtered two million people – that’s a quarter of his nation’s population. Joseph Stalin murdered thirty million Russians. And in his efforts to bring communism to China, Mao Tse Tung put to death an amazing 65 million people. The total efforts of these secular men, led by god-less secular ideas, though they span less than 100 years, also outnumbers the total deaths by religious persecution, by all religions, *in all of Western History!*¹

How can human beings cause one another so much pain?

The question is blunted by the size of the numbers I’ve just mentioned, so let’s bring it down to the level of our own lives. Why are we so critical of others? So impatient with them? Why do we look down on others or give thanks that we have it so much better than they do? Why do we get angry with others when things don’t go our way? The answer is simple – we care too much about ourselves.

When people asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment, he told them – Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love others as yourself. That’s it, that’s the BIG DEAL that God wants you to focus on. But it won’t come naturally. You need His forgiveness and you need His help, because without them you are capable of crushing other people just like Joseph’s brothers. You are capable of making them scream and cry while you carry on with your desires. You’re capable of it and you know it, because you’ve already done it to someone in some way.

Fortunately, the Holy Spirit is at work bringing conviction of our wrongs as we’re about to see.

[23](#) But they did not know that Joseph understood *them*, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. [24](#) And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

[25](#) Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man’s money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them. [26](#) So they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed from there. [27](#) But as one *of them* opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money; and there it was, in the mouth of his sack. [28](#) So he said to his brothers, “My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!” Then their hearts failed *them* and they were afraid, saying to one another, “What *is* this *that* God has done to us?”

They’re afraid the Egyptians are going to think they walked off without paying for it.

[29](#) Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them,

They have to explain to dad how they lost Simeon on the trip, so they go back over the details with him:

¹ Os Guinness, *Unspeakable: Facing Up To The Challenge Of Evil*. (Haper-Collins: New York, NY; 2006), 9.
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saying: [30](#) “The man *who is* lord of the land spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. [31](#) But we said to him, ‘We *are honest men*; we are not spies. [32](#) We *are* twelve brothers, sons of our father; one *is no more*, and the youngest *is* with our father this day in the land of Canaan.’ [33](#) Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, ‘By this I will know that you *are honest men*: Leave one of your brothers *here* with me, take *food* for the famine of your households, and be gone. [34](#) And bring your youngest brother to me; so I shall know that you *are* not spies, but *that you are honest men*. I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.’”

[35](#) Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man’s bundle of money *was* in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid. [36](#) And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me: Joseph is *no more*, Simeon is *no more*, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me.”

Actually, all these things are working together for him, but he doesn’t know it yet...

[37](#) Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him *back* to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.”

Reuben is starting to understand the value of personal sacrifice, but he’s not quite there. He wants to offer something dear to him, his own sons, as collateral, but that’s not the right answer. And can you imagine if you’re the boys? It’s like “hey dad, can we talk for a minute before you go making deals?” Fortunately their grandpa spares them.

[38](#) But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.”

So Jacob takes a stand – Simeon might be rotting in jail, but he’s not going to give up Benjamin. But as time goes on the reality of their circumstances settle in.

43: [1](#) Now the famine *was* severe in the land. [2](#) And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, “Go back, buy us a little food.”

[3](#) But Judah spoke to him, saying, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother *is* with you.’ [4](#) If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. [5](#) But if you will not send *him*, we will not go down; for the man said to us, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother *is* with you.’”

[6](#) And Israel said, “Why did you deal *so* wrongfully with me *as* to tell the man whether you had still *another* brother?”

[7](#) But they said, “The man asked us pointedly about ourselves and our family, saying, ‘*Is* your father still alive? Have you *another* brother?’ And we told him according to these words. Could we possibly have known that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’”

[8](#) Then Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you *and* also our little ones. [9](#) I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. [10](#) For if we had not lingered, surely by now we would have returned this second time.”

Now we're there – Judah has hit the answer – he says, if things go wrong with Benjamin I will be responsible, I will bear the blame. I will put myself on the line for the benefit of everyone else.

[11](#) And their father Israel said to them, “If *it must be* so, then do this: Take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a present for the man—a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. [12](#) Take double money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. [13](#) Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man. [14](#) And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!”

[15](#) So the men took that present and Benjamin, and they took double money in their hand, and arose and went down to Egypt; and they stood before Joseph. [16](#) When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Take *these* men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for *these* men will dine with me at noon.” [17](#) Then the man did as Joseph ordered, and the man brought the men into Joseph’s house.

[18](#) Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph’s house; and they said, “*It is* because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and seize us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys.”

[19](#) When they drew near to the steward of Joseph’s house, they talked with him at the door of the house, [20](#) and said, “O sir, we indeed came down the first time to buy food; [21](#) but it happened, when we came to the encampment, that we opened our sacks, and there, *each* man’s money *was* in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it back in our hand. [22](#) And we have brought down other money in our hands to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.”

[23](#) But he said, “Peace *be* with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.

[24](#) So the man brought the men into Joseph’s house and gave *them* water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys feed. [25](#) Then they made the present ready for Joseph’s coming at noon, for they heard that they would eat bread there.

[26](#) And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which *was* in their hand into the house, and bowed down before him to the earth. [27](#) Then he asked them about *their* well-being, and said, “*Is* your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? *Is* he still alive?”

[28](#) And they answered, “Your servant our father *is* in good health; he *is* still alive.” And they bowed their heads down and prostrated themselves.

[29](#) Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother’s son, and said, “*Is* this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?” And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.” [30](#) Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought *somewhere* to weep. And he went into *his* chamber and wept there. [31](#) Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, “Serve the bread.”

[32](#) So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that *is* an abomination to the Egyptians. [33](#) And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked in astonishment at one another.

[34](#) Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin’s serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

Joseph isn’t only blessing his little brother here – he’s also testing his older brothers. How are they going to respond when the younger brother is favored? Are they going to be bitter toward

Benjamin like they were toward Joseph? It seems the answer is no, but they have one more test to pass.

44: [1](#) And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack. [2](#) Also put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his grain money.” So he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken. [3](#) As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. [4](#) When they had gone out of the city, *and* were not *yet* far off, Joseph said to his steward, “Get up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good? [5](#) *Is* not this *the one* from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing.’”

[6](#) So he overtook them, and he spoke to them these same words. [7](#) And they said to him, “Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing. [8](#) Look, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house? [9](#) With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves.”

[10](#) And he said, “Now also *let it be* according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and you shall be blameless.” [11](#) Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. [12](#) So he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. [13](#) Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city.

[14](#) So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, and he *was* still there; and they fell before him on the ground. [15](#) And Joseph said to them, “What deed *is* this you have done? Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?”

Joseph is keeping up the act here – he didn’t practice divination, but he did have access to the only truly Divine God.

[16](#) Then Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord’s slaves, both we and *he* also with whom the cup was found.”

“We’re in this together,” they say. But Joseph tests them; he gives them a way out – a way to save their own skin at the expense of daddy’s little pet.

[17](#) But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. And as for you, go up in peace to your father.”

[18](#) Then Judah came near to him and said: “O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord’s hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you *are* even like Pharaoh.

[19](#) My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father or a brother?’ [20](#) And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a child of *his* old age, *who is* young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother’s children, and his father loves him.’ [21](#) Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’ [22](#) And we said to my lord, ‘The lad cannot leave his father, for *if* he should leave his father, *his father* would die.’ [23](#) But you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.’

[24](#) “So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord.

[25](#) And our father said, ‘Go back *and* buy us a little food.’ [26](#) But we said, ‘We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man’s face unless our youngest brother *is* with us.’ [27](#) Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife

bore me two sons; [28](#) and the one went out from me, and I said, “Surely he is torn to pieces”; and I have not seen him since. [29](#) But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.’

[30](#) “Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad *is* not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad’s life, [31](#) it will happen, when he sees that the lad *is* not *with us*, that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. [32](#) For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him *back* to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.’ [33](#) Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. [34](#) For how shall I go up to my father if the lad *is* not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?”

When it counts the most, Judah steps up to the plate and lays down his own life. He says “take me” and he means it. He is the first person recorded in Scripture as willing to offer his own life for someone else. Even though it is going to cost him everything, he is willing to let it all go for the sake of his brother and the sake of his dad. It’s evidence that there has been radical change in this man’s life. In three chapters he will be appointed as the head of the family because he finally understands that power and position should be used in the service of others.

And now that he is convinced of Judah’s sincerity, Joseph will reveal himself and use his own power to help the brothers who had so badly hurt him.

45: [1](#) Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. [2](#) And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard *it*. [3](#) Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I *am* Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. [4](#) And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I *am* Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. [5](#) But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. [6](#) For these two years the famine *has been* in the land, and *there are* still five years in which *there will be* neither plowing nor harvesting. [7](#) And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. [8](#) So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. [9](#) “Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph: “God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. [10](#) You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. [11](#) There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for *there are* still five years of famine.”’ [12](#) “And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that *it is* my mouth that speaks to you. [13](#) So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here.” [14](#) Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. [15](#) Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.

Joseph has already grasped the importance of giving up yourself and your ‘rights’ and just trusting God to take care of you. So now he shows unnatural forgiveness and unnatural grace – it’s evidence of the Spirit of God working through him.

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What we seen a hint of in Judah and Joseph we see fully in Christ. Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah – descended from this man who was willing to lay down his life for his brother. And of course Jesus would later teach “greater love has no man than this, that he would lay down his life for a friend,” a statement He would back up by dying on the cross for us. Judah never had to go through with his offer, but Jesus did – He laid down His life so that we, who He calls His brothers, could be reunited with our Heavenly Father.

So what’s the take away from this section of Genesis? It’s a big story with a simple point - life is not meant to be spent on yourself; if you do, you will crush others in the process. Instead it is meant to be poured out in loving, serving, and worshipping God and allowing Him to use us in the lives of others. If you’re willing to do that, who knows where He might place you and how He might use you?