

"...God...hath given you treasure..."

Even though we are Christians, sons and daughters of God, things do not always go the way we want them to go. Being human we make plans – some we make to cover the rest of our life. Through many adversities and rapid changes, when everything we think is fixed quickly turns to dust or disappears, I have been put in a position where I have to think from day to day. My plans are nothing when God wants me to do something else! This is why I sometimes tell people I have 'no ambitions' (humanly devised).

As I continually remind our small church, we suffer spiritual privation by the style of our lives. As soon as we have enough money for living and even a tiny bit extra, our lives consist of earthly schemes and plans. We centre on our possessions, families, cars, jobs, often planning far ahead... and this reduces our sense of God, His active, vibrant presence, and what He requires. For this reason our best-laid plans often conflict with what God wants of us. (But, because we are so intent on 'doing well' and building our 'quality of life', we do not even recognise this). Also from experience I can tell you that poverty removes all this and, as a Christian, you have to rely solely on God and what He provides. I do not wish poverty on anyone, because there is no virtue in it. The virtue is in how we respond to our circumstances, not in the circumstances themselves.

In this chapter we come to what is probably the end of the second year of the famine, and Jacob is again brought face to face with reality. His family have eaten over the past year, but the food has now run out and they need more. The only place they can get grain is Egypt. Jacob's son, Simeon, is still in prison awaiting the return of his brothers with Benjamin, but because of Jacob's fear, he remains languishing in bonds. No doubt he was treated well under Joseph, but that is not the issue: Jacob refused to free him by sending Benjamin to Egypt.

Christians often do this – we hold on to human fears. Why we do this I cannot tell, for faith in God's judgements are paramount if we want peace with God. Satan manages to divert our energies and ways, so that we fail to allow God free passage in our lives. Jacob feared losing Benjamin, yet he, along with his father and grandfather, knew God's active presence in their lives. This does not mean things always go the way we want them to go, but God executes His plan whether or not we are faithful! Why, then, do we burden ourselves with human fears?

Whatever was going to happen to Benjamin was going to happen. Deep down Jacob knew this, but he let his human frailty pervade his soul and one son stayed in prison as a result. However,

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that is the way it went. We cannot really tell why Joseph acted as he did, but he was not being nasty or wicked. We know that Joseph was sold into slavery not to suffer, but to eventually become pontiff of all Egypt, saving the lives of countless thousands if not millions. Above all this, though, was God's overall plan for the coming Hebrew nation. It was, then, good.

Verses 1-5

1.

“And the famine was sore in the land.

2.

And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food.

3.

And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you.

4.

If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food:

5.

But if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you.”

The famine continued unabated throughout Egypt and the Middle East. Those who had no money resorted to begging, but many starved to death, just as they do today. Those with money were able to buy grain. The food bought by Jacob's sons now ran out, so Jacob asked them once again to travel to Egypt to buy more.

‘Solemnly protest’ is one word in scripture, and it means a serious warning given before

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witnesses. Judah reminded his father of the great Egyptian ruler's command, to bring Benjamin to him to prove their innocence. We know, of course, that this was only an excuse used by Joseph to see his younger brother – but Judah did not know that.

He reminded Jacob that he could not go back to Egypt without Benjamin, for fear of his life. Therefore, he told his father, they would go to buy grain if Benjamin accompanied them. Otherwise, they would stay at home. They feared Joseph more than they feared starvation!

Verses 6-10

1.

“And Israel said, Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?

2.

And they said, The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down?

3.

And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones.

4.

I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever:

5.

For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time.”

Desperate, Jacob (called Israel in this text) complained to Judah: why have you done me such

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injury? Why did you have to tell the ruler you had another brother? The brothers protested: 'The man asked us a direct question! He asked about our lives, and if our father was alive, and if we had any other brothers. We just answered honestly – how were we to know he would demand to see Benjamin!' And their protest was right; there was no way they could have foretold Joseph's demand.

Judah said, 'Let Benjamin come with me and we will go immediately, so that we do not die of starvation; you, us, and our children. I stand as a guarantee we will bring Benjamin back safely, and if I do not fulfil my promise, I will forever wear both the shame and the blame. If we did not wait to argue about all this, we could be back by now, a second time.'

Verses 11-15

1.

"And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds:

2.

And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight:

3.

Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man:

4.

And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.

5.

And the men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph."

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Now under pressure, Jacob relented and gave in. 'If I must do it, let it be this way... take the man gifts. Take him the best this land can offer, like a small amount of balsam and honey combs; spices (this possibly referred to tragacanth gum); myrrh (aromatic gum from the rock rose); pistachio nuts and almonds.

Not only that said Jacob, but also take double the money needed. Add this to the money you brought back from Egypt, just in case it was put back in your sacks by mistake. Obviously, Jacob wanted to ensure Joseph was flattered and pleased with gifts, to soften any possible wish to do harm. And, take Benjamin – go to Egypt and get grain.

Jacob invoked God's protection: may God Almighty (the words *'el Shadday* are used – Jehovah Most Powerful) show you mercy when you see the man, so that you will return with Simeon and Benjamin. He added, 'If I am robbed of my children I will be childless'.

So the brothers took the gifts, money and Benjamin, and went on their way, no doubt with much trepidation. The threat of starvation and loss of another brother weighed on their hearts as they got nearer Egypt to face Joseph.

Verses 16-23

1.

"And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house, Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon.

2.

And the man did as Joseph bade; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house.

3.

And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses.

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4.

And they came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they communed with him at the door of the house,

5.

And said, O sir, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food:

6.

And it came to pass, when we came to the inn, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight: and we have brought it again in our hand.

7.

And other money have we brought down in our hands to buy food: we cannot tell who put our money in our sacks.

8.

And he said, Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them."

Verse 16 implies that Joseph saw his brothers arrive, but they did not see him. He ordered his chief servant, the overseer or steward, to take the brothers to his own house, where he would dine with them at noon. The overseer was to order the butchering of an animal for the occasion.

When the brothers saw they were being taken to Joseph's house, they were cast into utter fear. They conjectured this was now the time when Joseph would place them into slavery for taking their money back home. As they reached the house, in panic they spoke to the steward (either he understood their language, or they had an interpreter – the latter is more probable, as Joseph used one on their earlier visit).

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'O Sir' ('Please excuse me, superintendent'), they pleaded, and gave him their version of events. 'We have brought the money back, plus more; we don't know who put the money back into our sacks!' The steward was most amiable: 'Do not be afraid, for your God gave you the money in your sacks by my order!' This left the brothers with even more confused thoughts at this revelation, as the steward then brought Simeon to them. For the brothers all this was most bizarre and perplexing. They now had to wait and see if 'the man', the ruler of all Egypt, would be merciful.

There have been times in my life when I expected horrendous misfortunes to befall me. Yet (not always!), when the time came, the much feared fate simply did not occur, but disappeared in a puff of smoke! It is evident to me that when God delivers us from a fate we fear, He only does so when we can see there could have been no other cause for the deliverance but God. This is possibly why we must descend into fear and experience all the heart-stopping moments that leads up to it, so that God's might shines through, and we give all the glory to Him, and not to 'circumstances' or to other men.

Verses 24-26

1.

"And the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender.

2.

And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon: for they heard that they should eat bread there.

3.

And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth."

Inside the house, the steward gave them water to wash their feet, and ordered servants to feed the asses. After that, the brothers set out their gifts ready for when Joseph returned at noon to

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eat with them. This must have added to their perplexed state of mind: why should the supreme ruler eat with those he wished to do harm to? They hoped the gifts would sway the ruler, but God had already moved in their favour, though they were unaware.

At noon, Joseph returned to the cool interior of his home and the brothers immediately regaled him with their gifts. It is likely, as was custom, that Joseph did not speak to them first – he was the ruler. As they offered the gifts they again fulfilled prophecy by bowing low before Joseph, probably by prostration on the ground, as befitted his high office.

Verses 27-31

1.

“And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?”

2.

And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance.

3.

And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son.

4.

And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.

5.

And he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread.”

Again throwing them into confusion, Joseph asked them how they were. Last time he spoke to

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them harshly, as if he was their enemy. Now he spoke softly! Is your father alive and well? With respect they answered, 'Yes, our father is alive and well.' Again, they bowed their heads and showed obedience to Joseph by prostration.

Knowing who Benjamin was, but feigning ignorance, he asked if the younger man was the brother he had demanded to see. They must have affirmed this, for Joseph then blessed Benjamin: 'God be gracious unto thee, my son.'

Very often, God is indeed gracious to us all, even when we fall and sin badly. This ought to show us we cannot be judgmental towards our brethren (as the New Testament teaches), but must acknowledge we are all sinners requiring grace and mercy. At times when we have no option but to reprove brethren, we may not keep an attitude of anger or judgementalism. That is, our reproof or rebuke must not be personal, but an act needed for his or her betterment as a believer. We must still speak out against wrongdoing, but we may not assume the place of God by becoming judges ourselves. Only God is the Judge. We can only pass-on what He says.

Quickly, Joseph went to his private room, and wept, such was the emotion that overcame him when he spoke with Benjamin. He could not let others see an expression of emotion, nor did he wish to betray who he was at that time. When he had cried and calmed down, he washed his face to freshen up. Possibly, he had to also put on more eye make-up. He walked briskly back to the hall and ordered the servants to set the table with food.

Verses 32-34

1.

"And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, which did eat with him, by themselves: because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians.

2.

And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth: and the men marvelled one at another.

3.

And he took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times

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so much as any of theirs. And they drank, and were merry with him.”

The servants set a table for Joseph, who ate alone. Separate tables were then set for the brothers, for the Egyptians considered them an inferior race whose nearness would have made them unclean. Other tables were set for the Egyptian courtiers there with Joseph.

The brothers were seated in order of their birth, the eldest at the head. As they ate, they wondered what on earth was going on! The fine food and welcome atmosphere did not tie-in with what they were expecting. Joseph even sent ‘messes’ or portions of the very best foods from his own table, for their enjoyment. But, to Benjamin he sent five times more portions. They began to relax, drank wine, and were ‘merry’ – became drunk.

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