

Joke: An elderly woman is arrested for stealing a can of peaches. When the case gets to court and she is found guilty, the judge decides to make an example of her.

'How many peaches were in that can that you stole?' He asked.

'Six' she said, with tears of remorse in her eyes.

'Then you are hereby sentenced to six months in prison. One month for each peach'.

As the poor lady is lead away, her husband - sitting at the back of the public gallery - leaps to his feet, shouting

'She also stole a can of peas!!'

Path to Penitence

So far in our study of Joseph we have looked at the Promise, the Process, Perfection, and the Procession.

Today, we are going to talk about another "P," which is penitence.

Penitence and repentance are virtual the same but since we are looking at P words and repentance doesn't start with p I had to use the more difficult one to say.

We are going to look into three chapters in Genesis don't worry we aren't going to read everyone. I will just give you some highlights of each. So, let's dig in. . .

In Genesis 42 -- The famine has affected Jacob and his family, so he sends his sons to buy grain from Egypt. He sends all except Benjamin, the youngest, he doesn't let Benjamin go because well after what he believed true about Joseph being attacked by wild animals, because after all that's the story he was told, so now Benjamin has become Jacob's new favorite.

And when they arrive in Egypt, they encounter Joseph, who is overseeing the buying and selling of grain. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they don't recognize him.

Joseph doesn't reveal himself to them in their first encounter but rather he wants to see if they have learned anything from their mistreatment of him. Are they repentant for what they did.

As a matter of fact he calls them spies.

They plead their case and the accusation of being spies and begin to blurt out their life story, sharing their family dynamics even revealing that they still have another brother at home.

What does Joseph do?

He detains them for three days and then tells them that they must send one brother to go and get their other brother to corroborate their story.

And then on the third day, Joseph tells them that instead, they can leave one brother behind while the rest go and retrieve Benjamin.

So, they decided to leave Simeon behind and they say this to one another. . .

Genesis 42:21 (NIV): They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.”

They have been carrying their guilt for over a decade, and they believe that this is God’s reckoning for selling Joseph off in the first place.

Joseph fills their bags with grain, but he does something else as well. He secretly puts their money back inside of the bags. And on the way home, one brother discovers the money, and says. . .

Genesis 42:28 (NIV): My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. “Here it is in my sack.” Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?”

In their guilt all they see is what they believe is God's wrath and so they became fearful.

They get home and tell Jacob what happened. They tell him that this leader told them that to prove they are honest men and not spies to bring the younger brother back.

And because Jacob has already lost Joseph he is a little comprehensive to send Benjamin.

Reuben then swears on his son's lives that he will bring Benjamin back alive.

And it's in this story we see a family whose trust is completely broken. Jacob doesn't know if he can trust the others to bring Benjamin back safe, and Joseph isn't sure if he can trust that his brothers have changed.

Now listen church God does always stop bad things to happening to us. He is however able to work all those things out for good. Which is ultimately what we will see happen here.

Jesus even told us that in this world you will have trouble. But then he continued but take heart I have overcome the world.

But there is a principle in Scripture that tells us that we sow what we reap and not always, but often times much of what is going on in our lives is a consequence of choices that we have made. It's not that God is out to get us, it's more that we have forgotten God.

And because of the deception that these brothers have concealed for years they feel as through this is an angry God just getting them back.

And in scripture there are two types of repentance described.

They are found in 2 Corinthians chapter 7. . .

2 Corinthians 7:10 (NIV): Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

So, there is godly sorry, and worldly sorrow. What is the difference between the two?

Godly sorrow is transformative and leads us to repentance. It's understanding our need for a Savior and it brings with it no guilt or condemnation but rather a genuine change of heart that ultimately brings freedom and the life abundant that Jesus promised.

On the other hand, worldly sorrow brings regret but no transformation. The best way I can describe worldly sorrow is that it's not so much we are sorry, we are just sorry we got caught.

And in our text it seems at this point in the story it's more about worldly sorrow and they are more sorry they got caught over being sorry for what they did because they say, "What is this that God has done to us?"

They believe because of what they did, God was repaying them.

I mean think about it, Joseph's brothers have had over ten years to take responsibility and confess the truth to their father.

But instead, they have kept their secret, hoping that the truth will not be revealed.

Hebrews 4:13 (NIV): Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Now let me pause here to and give a little clarity of this Scripture. Because if you were to rush past it, it would almost appear that we are going to give an account of every sin that God sees. But is that what it's talking about, because remember, and I will share another scripture in a few minutes, but it's important to remember that Jesus paid the price for all our sins once and for all.

And let me digress once more to say this, just because we have been forgiven, and God's grace is sufficient doesn't give us the right to live like the devil. Grace was never meant to be a license. It's actually his grace that helps us live righteously. The law could never accomplish that.

Back to Hebrews 4:13. . .the idea of giving account is not about fear of judgment for us as believers but instead is telling us since God sees everything we need to live in alignment with our new identity in Christ. You are a new creation after all.

Let me add this as well, Scripture says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That doesn't mean to fear him because he will strike us down if we mess up. It means to be in awe of who here is. To live a life that dips pleasing to Him.

Back to our story. . .

As the saying goes you can run but you can't hide.

And these brothers are racked by guilt, but it doesn't seem, at this time at least, to be a Godly guilt that has led them to take responsibility, that leads them to repentance and then ultimately towards change.

This is more like a festering, unproductive guilt that fills them with fear of what they believe to be a retribution from God.

So, why does Joseph begin by calling his brothers spies, instead of revealing himself?

It's because they avoided confronting their sin and the wound has festered for all these years and Joseph wants his brothers to be healed, and also wants the relationship with him to be healed as well.

Paul tells us this in the book of Romans. . .

Romans 2:4 (NIV): Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

And It's the goodness of Joseph that is leading them to repentance, just like it's the goodness of God that leads you and I to repentance as well.

Church I know you've heard the phrase, hurt people, hurt people. And this whole thing started because Joseph's brothers were hurt that he was the favorite.

And truth is when we sin, we hurt the heart of God because He knows that we are better than that. And although He still loves us because nothing can separate us from His love. He also loves us too much to leave us where we are and wants to help us to reach the destiny that He has called us to.

So, in His goodness God and the Holy Spirit will convict us into changing which draws us to repentance. He's not condemning us but loving us to it.

Romans 8:1 (ESV): There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Joseph wants reconciliation with his brothers, and he knows this can only happen if they confront the reality of what they've done, and given an opportunity change.

And so in Genesis 43 -- the famine forces Jacob to reconsider.

Judah promises to take personal responsibility to bring Benjamin back safely, and so they go to Egypt with Benjamin, some gifts, and double the money to pay for more grain.

And if you remember it was Judah who had the idea to sell Joseph into slavery instead of killing him.

And now he has sworn to protect Benjamin, and will be tested to see if he will do just that. It's what he failed to do with Joseph so has he really changed?

They return to Joseph and he receives them, he releases Simeon back to them, and then invites them to come to his house to dine with him.

But the brothers still aren't at ease, they still don't know this is Joseph so they are fearful, thinking he's setting them up for some sort of ambush.

But what does Joseph do, he has his servants bring them into his home, gave them water to wash their feet and took care of them until Joseph arrived.

And remember his dream he had that started this whole thing in the first place? That his brothers would bow down to him.

Well watch what happens. . .

Genesis 43:24–26 (NIV): The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. 25 They prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there. 26 When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground.

After they bow to him Joseph asks questions about the welfare of Jacob. And when Joseph sees Benjamin, he gets emotional and has to leave the room to weep.

How strange it must have been for the brothers to see how Joseph is acting, sometimes he's accusatory, saying they are spies, and yet sometimes he's kind.

But through all his joy and pain, Joseph sticks to his plan to reveal their hearts and invite them into a posture of Penitence.

Ultimately they all sit down to dine, Joseph with the Egyptians, and the brothers set apart, since it was an abomination for Egyptians to eat with Hebrews.

Joseph makes sure that Benjamin's meal portion is five times the size of his brothers.

God is the architect of this process. He has a plan and can use all things for good. I want you to know church that wasn't true just for our story we are looking at today, but for your story as well. God has a plan for you and everything that has happened to you He sees and cares about. We just need to trust him in the process.

And so, He uses a famine to bring together an entire family that would like to avoid Egypt all together, but their own survival requires them to make the trip with Benjamin in tow.

This is the irresistible goodness of God, forcing the deeds done in darkness to be brought to the light.

Luke 12:2 (NIV): There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

And let's be honest one of the first things we need to do to become a Christian is confess our darkness to the one that gives us light.

It's so evident in this chapter that Joseph's heart is to be restored to his family, but it's not as simple as letting bygones be bygones, as much as he might want it to be that way. There are some tests of the heart yet to be had in order for true reconciliation to take place.

And it's the goodness of God that draws us to repentance.

The problem is we often want to sweep things under the rug and avoid the discomfort of confronting our wrongdoing or even the wrongdoing of others.

But God is so good, He will orchestrate circumstances to compel us to confront those things. In our story it was a global famine.

God wants these brothers to be healed from their sins -- not just forgiven. And this requires Penitence: which includes taking responsibility and change.

God also wants the relationship with Joseph to be healed. And even Joseph, who was the victim, must be willing to sit inside this painful situation that he would probably prefer to avoid.

Perpetrator or victim, we cannot heal sin unless we confront it.

Let's be honest we can't change what we won't acknowledge.

Maybe that's one reason why we read. . .

Matthew 7:3–5 (TPT): Why would you focus on the flaw in someone else's life and yet fail to notice the glaring flaws of your own? 4 How could you say to your friend, 'Let me show you where you're wrong,' when you're guilty of even more? 5 You're being hypercritical and a hypocrite! First acknowledge your own 'blind spots' and deal with them, and then you'll be capable of dealing with the 'blind spot' of your friend.

Then in Genesis 44 we get to the climax in this part of our story.

Joseph forces the true colors of his brothers to be revealed; whether or not they are truly willing to take responsibility and make a change.

He forces them into a situation where they will have a chance to abandon Benjamin, the way they abandoned him, or protect him and keep their word to their father.

So, here's what he does Joseph sends them home with all the grain they can carry, and also puts all their money back. But he has a servant plant Joseph's silver cup inside of Benjamin's sack.

He then tells his servants to go after them and says this, . .

Genesis 44:3–9 (NLT): The brothers were up at dawn and were sent on their journey with their loaded donkeys. 4 But when they had gone only a short distance and were barely out of the city, Joseph said to his palace manager, "Chase after them and stop them. When you catch up with them, ask them, 'Why have you repaid my kindness with such evil? 5 Why have you stolen my master's silver cup, which he uses to predict the future? What a wicked thing you have done!' " 6 When the palace manager caught up with the men, he spoke to them as he had been instructed. 7 "What are you talking about?" the brothers responded. "We are your servants and would never do such a thing! 8 Didn't we return the money we found in our sacks? We brought it back all the way from the land of Canaan. Why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house? 9 If you find his cup with any one of us, let that man die. And all the rest of us, my lord, will be your slaves."

Joseph's men ride after the brothers, and ask them why they have repaid evil for good and stolen from him. The brothers, unaware of the cup in Benjamin's sack, insist that they have not stolen anything, and even go so far as to say that if the cup is found with any of them, then that person will die and the rest will be servants.

And trying once again to pled their case, we would never steal anything, remember we returned the extra in our sacks last time.

But will the brothers betray Benjamin, like they betrayed Joseph all those years ago? That was really the question.

Genesis 44:13 (NLT): When the brothers saw this, they tore their clothing in despair. Then they loaded their donkeys again and returned to the city.

And this is where something miraculous happens.

Genesis 44:16 (NLT): Judah answered, “Oh, my lord, what can we say to you? How can we explain this? How can we prove our innocence? God is punishing us for our sins. My lord, we have all returned to be your slaves—all of us, not just our brother who had your cup in his sack.”

Rather than advocate for his own innocence, Judah takes responsibility for something that he didn’t do. “God has found out the guilt of your servants.”

In other words, God has uncovered the kind of people that we are.

At this moment, Judah stops running away from the sins of the past, and takes responsibility, refusing to let any brother be separated from the others.

But Joseph isn't done testing the heart he will not allow all the brothers to suffer for what one brother did. He says Benjamin stays the rest can go home.

Judah talks to Joseph privately, and pleads for Benjamin, tells him about what his father said, how reluctant he was to even let Benjamin go along in the first place.

And then he says the words that blow this whole situation wide open:

Genesis 44:33–34 (ESV): 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. 34 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.”

In other words, Judah says, “take me instead.”

Exactly the level of change that Joseph was hoping to see, this is a sign of the Penitence that God's process was intended to yield.

Judah, the same person who traded his own brother for money, is now willing to trade his own life for his brother's life.

The process has done its work and created the opportunity for a changed heart.

With all that Joseph's brothers had done to him there's nothing punitive in Joseph's dealing with them, this wasn't vindictive. This

is not punishment. Joseph is God's vessel to draw his brothers into repentance.

It may look like punishment or retribution, but it's love. All three of these chapters have been God's invitation, through Joseph, for the brothers to have a transformation. The purpose, so that they and the relationship can be restored.

The climax of this story is when Judah offers himself in Benjamin's place.

The scary and uncomfortable process has produced a Godly sorrow that is bringing change. Judah is being healed of the heavy burden of guilt and shame he has been carrying all these years.

He says, "God has found out the guilt of your servants."

Sorrow has become responsibility, and responsibility has led to the fruit of a changed response.

Judah no longer acts out of envy and hatred. He acts out of protection and sacrifice. Instead of saying, "Let's sell Joseph into slavery" or "Let's leave Benjamin behind," he says, "Take me instead."

Praise God, who is able to pull us out of our shame and avoidance and into an abundant life because of His grace and forgiveness.

The truth sets us free, even if it sometimes it feels like a train-wreck.

I'm trying to wrap this thing up but I need to say one more thing that is extremely important.

James 5:16 (NLT): Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

This confession is not about seeking more forgiveness from God, as believers we are already completely forgiven through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:14 (NLT): For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

So this Scripture in James is about us sharing struggles and being transparent with trusted friends and the community of believers so that they can pray for you and support you in your journey. That's why we need community.

And through that sharing and prayer it can lead to healing and encouragement, helping believers to grow together in their faith.

It's about building honest and open relationships within the body of Christ, not about obtaining more forgiveness from God.

And let's be honest sometimes God's dealings with us don't look like or feel like love, especially the ways he allows us to

experience the consequences of our own sin in order to bring us to repentance.

It is love. And it's the goodness of God that draws us to repentance.

Remember there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

But there is also that principle of sowing and reaping.

If we want real peace in our hearts, real intimacy in our relationships, we must be willing to walk in the light. Embrace repentance. Which by the way simply means to make a 180 degree turn away from that thing or sin that caused us to feel regret or shame in the first place.

And as I said repentance doesn't mean we need to run to God with every misstep we make it means to turn the other way and walk, and do differently today than you did yesterday.

It is the goodness of God, it is the righteousness of God, and it is the love of God that leads us to repentance.

Some of you in this room, or watching online have a secret. Some of you have a broken relationship. Some of us have been wronged by someone who refuses to take responsibility. All of us are experiencing, or have experienced in some way, the results of sin and broken relationships.

This world is full of broken relationships and broken people because of sin. Sin has damaged each and every one of us both as perpetrators and as victims of wrongdoing.

The only way to deal with the divine price of sin is through the perfect, healing blood of Jesus Christ. This is the forgiveness that we enter into through faith in Jesus Christ, who paid the ultimate penalty of death to restore us into right relationship with God.

The only way to deal with the personal and relational consequences of sin is by bringing our sin into the light, and by entering the path of Penitence.

God is primarily concerned with His glory through his vessels -- us, the church.

God is never cruel, and never wastes our suffering. He is calling us through our brokenness, and the brokenness of others, into a place of transformation and strength. He's fashioning out hearts into hearts that are actually filled with the very characteristics of Christ.

Look, unflinching, at your life. Look at those who have harmed you. Look at those you blame and resent. Now imagine that God is giving you the power to be free of your resentment, whether or not they ever change or repent. Joseph is evidence of God's power in this area.

Now, look, unflinching, at your sin. Look at those you have harmed through your words and actions. Now, imagine that you

could stop making excuses, and stop running from your responsibility. Judah is an example of that.

And church, God has made us all ministers of reconciliation.

But the better news is that God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus.

You don't have to live another day with shame, or regret you can cast all your cares upon Him for He cares for you. Make right what you can, but then allow God to bring about a transformation in your heart