



The Sermon

Dr. Steven J. Lawson

Genesis 43:16-34

"Unexpected Mercy"

November 6, 2022

TRANSCRIPT

So I want you to take your Bible and turn with me to Genesis chapter 43. And today we're going to be looking at verses 16 through 34. The title of this message is "Unexpected Mercy." Genesis 43 beginning in verse 66, I want to just dive right into this because we have so much to be looking at today. As always, I want to read the passage first, then I'll pray, and then we'll look very carefully at what it says.

Beginning in verse 16, " When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, 'Bring the men into the house, and slay an animal and make ready; for the men are to dine with me at noon.' So the man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, 'It is because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in, that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys.'

"So they came near to Joseph's house steward, and spoke to him at the entrance of the house, and said, 'Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food, and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand. We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks.' He said, 'Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in

5622 Dyer Street, Suite 200 | Dallas, Texas | 75206 | 214.972.9679 | TrinityBiblechurchofdallas.com

your sacks; I had your money.' Then he brought Simeon out to them. Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys fodder. So they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there.

"When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him. Then he asked them about their welfare, and said, 'Is your old father well, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' They said, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.' They bowed down in homage. As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me?' And he said, 'May God be gracious to you, my son.'

"Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and he controlled himself and said, 'Serve the meal.' So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians. Now they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment. He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they feasted and drank freely with him."

This is the reading of God's Word. He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, as we approach Your Word we are mindful that in a very unique way we are stepping onto holy ground. Your Word is inspired and inerrant and infallible, so unlike the world in which we live, as we are bombarded with lies and falsehoods. Every time we turn on television, every time we surf the Internet, every time we pick up magazines, we are surrounded by that which is untrue. And for us to gather together now as the body of Christ and to hear the Word read and to hear the Word opened up to us is so unlike the world in which we live. You are the God of all truth.

Your Son is the way, the truth, and the life. Your Spirit is the Spirit of truth. And we as the church are to be the pillar in support of the truth. So assist us now as we look into the Word of truth; and may You use it to shape us, mold us, conform us yet further into the image of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is in His name that we pray. Amen. [End]

I have entitled this message "Unexpected Mercy" because that's exactly what we see Joseph's brothers receiving. They feared the worst, and yet received the best. They dreaded being sent to prison, but instead were seated in a palace. They were terrified that they would be enslaved as thieves, but instead they were entertained as dignitaries. Rarely has any group experienced such an unexpected reversal of fortunes and fortune so undeserved. Rather than receiving Joseph's revenge, they actually receive his restraint. And rather than receiving what they deserve, they received what they did not deserve. They received mercy. They received good for evil.

They did evil to Joseph, they are now receiving good from Joseph. And what we learn here is basically two things. Number one, how we are to treat one another, and how we are to interact with one another in the body of Christ, as well as in our own families. And those who have hurt us, we are to show unexpected mercy to them. Those who have betrayed us, those who have done us wrong, we are actually to return their evil with our good.

Second thing we learn here is that really this is but a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because we have received in Christ that which we do not deserve, and we have received really mercy, and we would say undeserved mercy and unexpected mercy. And this narrative really serves as a beautiful portrait in many ways of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So I want you to join with me as we walk through this passage. It's a beautiful passage. It's a wonderful passage.

And the first thing I want you to note is "the arrival." That begins in verse 16. This scene starts with Joseph's brothers appearing before him at his house in Egypt. They have made the long journey south, southwest, from Canaan, 250 miles, three long weeks, descending down into Egypt, in order to buy grain, because they have run out of food in Canaan because of the famine, and there were there were no storehouses of food. And down in

Egypt there has been much food stored under Joseph's leadership, and so they have made this journey down.

And as they come, verse 16 says, "When Joseph saw Benjamin with them." We can only imagine the excitement within Joseph to see his brother whom he has not seen in over 20 years, probably about 22 years, how he has replayed in his mind again and again and again his family, and specifically Benjamin, because they were born from the same mother. All the brothers are not born from the same mother, but Joseph and Benjamin have been. I mean, they are blood brothers, and they, in many ways, are just welded together as only brothers can be from the same womb. And so Joseph sees Benjamin. Benjamin has grown up. In many ways, he doesn't look like how Joseph remembered him, yet that's unmistakably Benjamin.

"And so he saw Benjamin with them, and said to his house steward." Now his house steward was like Chief of Staff, the man who oversaw the palace in which Joseph lived and oversaw the staff and had really control over who has access to Joseph - a very important position. "And he sent to his house steward, 'Bring the men into the house, and slay an animal.'" We might have thought he said, "Slay the brothers." But he says, "Slay an animal, and make ready for the men to dine with me at noon." And so Joseph rises above any sense of harboring hatred, harboring ill-feelings towards his brothers who have done him wrong. He now desires to turn the other cheek. He now desires to go the second mile. He now desires to wipe the slate clean and to forgive them, and says, "Prepare a meal for my brothers." It's a very dramatic moment.

And so, verse 17, "So the man" - that refers to the house steward - "did as Joseph said, and brought them in" - the ten brothers - "to Joseph's house," so that Joseph can show loving kindness to them, though the brothers do not yet know what is about to happen. Before I go any further I just want to encourage all of us, we have family, and we have Thanksgiving coming, we have Christmas coming, we have family gathering together, and no doubt, there can be strained relationships. There can be things brought forward from the past that make it awkward as you sit down. I want to remind you that you're one of the Lord's disciples, and we are commanded to love one another. We're even commanded to love our enemies. And so as you have opportunities to be with your brothers and your sisters and your in-laws, et cetera, you need to bury the past, and you need to take the high

road and show kindness, even to those who have, perhaps, hurt you the most. Even as Jesus was dying upon the cross, by the power of the Holy Spirit in His humanity, He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The arrival leads, second, to "the apprehension," in verse 18, the apprehension, because Joseph's brothers, as they entered the house, they are afraid. They are afraid of what reprisals will come to them from the Prime Minister, who they do not know to be Joseph. And so we read in verse 18, "Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house." In their mind, this is like a trip to the principal's office. This is like a trip to the warden's office. They're afraid. This word "afraid" in the Hebrew means to be filled with dread, to be filled with terror.

I mean, no doubt, their heart is beating and feels like it's about to leap out of their chest. They're so afraid because of what Joseph may do to them, and the reason is what follows here. "As they talk to one another, they said, 'It is because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in.'" They assumed that they are being brought into the Prime Minister's house for a time of accountability to him, because they will be charged with stealing the money that they found in their sacks.

And just to remind you, when they came down the first time to Egypt, they brought money with them, and they brought money to buy corn and grain to take back to Canaan because of the famine. And Joseph told the house steward to return the money into their sack, unknown to them. And so as they journey back, they stop the first night to feed their animals, they opened their sacks, and laying right there on the top, it says, "in the mouth of the sack," is the very money that they had given to buy the grain. And they were terrified, because people are going to think, "Either we stole the grain and kept the money, or we bought the grain and then stole the money. But either way, it looks bad for us." And when they returned to Canaan, even their father said, "You need to go back and buy some more grain. But take the money back, lest you be falsely accused for stealing the money."

And so they have very little way of proving their innocence on this. And so they're already called out as soon as they return: "You need to come into the Prime Minister's house and you need to sit down with him." Well, their

heart is thumping now, as they come in to face charges, they perceive for stealing this money. This may take their life. There may be a death sentence assigned with this. They may be thrown into prison and the key thrown away. They may never leave Egypt. They may spend the rest of their life in a dungeon in Egypt.

And so we continue to read in verse 18 that, "He" - Joseph - "may seek occasion against us, to bring charges against us, and fall upon us." And the imagery there is of Joseph coming down hard on them. That's what's in their mind: "He's going to come down hard upon us and fall upon us, and shatter us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys. We're going to be in chains. We're going to be in prison. We're going to be serving the Prime Minister for the rest of our lives, and will never escape." I would have been terrified. I think you would have been horrified.

And so, verse 19, "So they came near to Joseph's house steward, and spoke to him, 'We need to appeal to his chief of staff and try to present ourselves as innocent before we even get in to stand before Joseph. Maybe he'll put a good word in for us. Maybe he will see how innocent we are. So let's bring our case to him,' at the entrance of the house."

So they've not yet gone into the house, and Joseph has not yet returned at high noon, so they're making their plea. And in verse 19 it says, "Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food." When they say "my lord," it's not a reference to deity, it's a title of respect. It would be like us saying sir, "Oh, my sir." "We indeed came down the first time to buy food, and it came about when we came to the lodging place," - that means were they stopped on their return journey to feed their donkeys - "that we opened our sacks," - in order to get food out to feed their donkeys and feed themselves - "and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full."

And so the money that this steward to whom they're speaking, he's the one who put the money into the sack. He didn't even bury it at the bottom of the sack, he put it in the mouth of the sack, which is the opening. It's just laying there right on top for anyone and everyone to see whenever the sack is opened. And to the full degree, the entire amount of money that they had spent, there it is. "So" - into verse 21 - "we have brought it back in our

hand." And the reason they have brought it back in their hand is to prove they're innocent. They realize that they must supply some evidence of their honesty. So verse 22, "We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; and we do not know who put our money in our sacks."

A lesson for us to learn here is they actually did tell the truth. Sometimes people will create a lie, a falsehood, to try to cover up a misperception; but as soon as you start going down this path, it's going to lead to more falsehood. And so we'll give it to them. Truth is its own best defense. They spoke the truth. And that should be the case with each one of us as well.

So this leads to verse 23, "the assurance." Joseph's house steward now responds with words of comforting assurance for the brothers. Please note, verse 23, "He" - referring to the house steward - "said, 'Be at ease.'" In the original Hebrew it's a word that you're probably familiar with. It's the word "shalom." Be at ease. Literally, be at peace. "Peace be unto you. Shalom. Do not be afraid. Do not be filled with dread, your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks."

That's amazing. This house steward doesn't speak of the gods of Egypt, he speaks of the God of the Hebrews. Obviously Joseph has witnessed to his house steward. He's brought God into the marketplace, and he's brought God into the political arena in Egypt - Joseph has - and has spoken to the house steward of the one true living God. And he says, "Your God." Now that's interesting. He doesn't say, "Our God." So the house steward, I would assume, is not a believer, but he knows about the one true God. "Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks." It's an interesting statement. "God put the money into your sacks." Now we know how this has worked. Joseph told the house steward to put the money in the sack, and the house steward did it; yet the house steward says God did it. So which was it? We'll find out.

Notice the house steward goes on to say, "I had your money." Wait a minute, I thought you said God put it there. "Well, I had it." God worked through the house steward. And literally in the Hebrew, the original language, where it reads, "I had your money," it literally reads, "Your money had come to me." So in other words, the house steward received the money from someone else that he put into their sacks, and the only person

who would have given it to him was Joseph, or to whomever Joseph told to give it to the house steward.

"Then he brought Simeon out to them." Joseph was a man of his word, and he said, "If you'll bring your younger brother down from Canaan down here to Egypt, then I will release Simeon whom I have taken into my custody as a hostage, if you will, and put him in prison until you bring your younger brother down." And so Joseph has seen his brother. He hasn't met with them yet. He's probably like looking across a courtyard or something like that, and he sees that Benjamin is now here, and so he gives the word to release Simeon from his prison; and so Simeon is now brought to him.

Now before we move on from verse 23, there's a lot of good theology right here in verse 23, and I want us to see this. There are four truths here about God that I want us to see in verse 23, and the first is this, that "the God of the Hebrews is the only true God." This house steward who speaks these words, he is an Egyptian who lives in Egypt. And Egypt is a land that is plagued with polytheism – many, many gods. I wish I had time to walk you through just some of these gods in Egypt. If you have a Study Bible, you can later look in Exodus. When Moses performs the plagues, ten plagues, each one of those ten plagues is against one of the Egyptian gods (small g); and if you have a Study Bible, you'll find a chart that lists the names of these gods. And this is only the tip of the iceberg. There are countless other gods in Egypt.

And so they worshiped many gods. It was a pluralistic society, right? But here this house steward speaks of God as the only true God. He says, "The God," and the name that he uses for God is a Hebrew word: Elohim. It's the name that is first used for God in the first verse of the entire Bible in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth." It's the name for God, that He is omnipotent and all-powerful, He is the Creator of all that there is. God but speaks and it comes to pass.

And in the name Elohim, (El) it means the powerful One. There is a plural ending (him), Elohim, which does not speak of multiple gods, it's what we call a majestic, an intensive majestic, meaning it intensifies the statement that God is all-powerful. He is unbelievably powerful. He is extraordinarily powerful. He is incomprehensively powerful. And that is the name that the

house steward uses for God, that He is the one and true God who has created all that there is. And He is omnipotent. He is the Almighty.

The second truth that we learn here about God is that "the God of the Hebrews provides for His people," that He's not just high and lifted up in the heavens, disconnected from the needs of His people, isolated in the heights of heaven as though far removed from the occurrences here upon the earth and the needs of His people. No, this God is the God who sees the needs of His people, this God intervenes into their lives, and God provides for them. That's what this house steward says in verse 23, that "God has given you treasure," that God is active in human history, that God intervenes in the lives of His people, and that God is concerned, and that God cares, and that God provides for His people. "And my God shall supply your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus," Philippians 4:19. His name is Jehovah Jireh, Psalm 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." This is our God. That's the second truth that comes screaming out of verse 23. He provides treasure for His people to meet their needs, that where God guides, God provides.

And then, third, we learn that "the God of the Hebrews works through secondary means." There are times when God just acts directly and there is no secondary means. When God sent manna from heaven to feed the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings, there was no grocery store involved. I mean, there was no drop off of bread from a wagon. God just spoke it, and there was bread that came down. But by and large, God usually works through secondary means. And when we say secondary means, we mean that God works through people, and God works through circumstances, and God works through our hard work, and God works through prayer, and God works through circumstances (good circumstances, bad circumstances), sometimes God even works through the devil himself. But God works through secondary means to accomplish His greater good.

And that's what has happened here, according to verse 23, that no doubt, God is leading Joseph and prompting Joseph's decisions. And Joseph says to the house steward to put the money back into their sack. And so then the house steward takes the money out of the depository and hides it into each of their sacks at the top of, at the mouth. But it's like a domino effect. And that's how God works in your life, that's how God works in my life; He

works through secondary means. But It ultimately comes from the same source: it comes from the throne of grace, it comes from the hand of God.

James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from God above, the Father of unshifting shadows, with whom there is no variation." We trace this back upstream to the source, and every good thing in your life has been flowing out of the throne of grace and out of the heart of God. There's rich theology here in verse 23. Look at it again: "God gives you treasure; I had your money." That's not a contradiction, that is cooperation, man working in cooperation with what God is doing.

And then the fourth truth that we learn here is that "the God of the Hebrews often works discreetly, mysteriously, secretly." We do not see His invisible hand at work, we just see the results of it. And here there is the secret working of the invisible hand of God. This is what we call God-centered theology. This is a God-centered worldview. And you and I must have a God-centered understanding of reality and truth if we are to make sense of the world in which we live. Now this steward has been well-taught by Joseph. Whether or not he's come to faith in the one true living God we cannot tell. Probably not; but he's had an earful of truth, just like you just heard an earful of truth.

This leads us now to verse 24, "the audience." And Joseph's brothers are now led into the house to have a royal audience with the Prime Minister of Egypt. They're being led into, in essence, Buckingham Palace. They're being led into the White House. They are being led into the nerve center of the Egyptian Dynasty. This is not a small audience that they're about to have, they are being brought before the Prime Minister who has all authority entrusted to him from Pharaoh.

So we read in verse 24, "Then the man" - that refers to the house steward - "brought the men" - that refers to the eleven brothers - "into Joseph's house" - and no doubt, it was a palace - "and gave them water," - it's a sign of common courtesy and hospitality; and the water will be used for what follows - "and they washed their feet," - because as you would enter into such a beautiful house as this, you need to wash your feet because of the dirt that you would accumulate and pick up, and you need to prepare yourself to

have an audience with the Prime Minister – "and he" – referring to the house steward – "gave their donkeys fodder."

Verse 25, "So they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon." Now the reason they have brought a present, number one, is their father told them – their father was older than they are, their father who has lived through many life experiences knows. And when you have an important meeting like this you need to bring a present as an expression of respect and honor, and to improve your standing before him, to put him in good stead. A first impression's a lasting impression to show that you've come as an ally and not as an enemy.

"So they brought a present for Joseph who is yet to come at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there." And at this point their assumption is, "This may be the last supper. This may be the last meal. OK, we're getting close to the nerve center of the empire. We may be eaten for breakfast, who knows."

So, verse 26, "When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him." They gave him the present as an expression of good will, and they bowed to the ground before him, expressing, "Our life is in your hands. We are at your mercy. You may do to us whatever you so please. You may give thumbs up, you may give thumbs down. We submit ourselves, we do not resist you. We give you homage, and we give you respect and honor."

Verse 27, "Then he" – referring to Joseph – "asked about their welfare." I'll just stop right here for a moment. Here's a little life lesson. As you interface with people, you have one of two choices. One is to talk about yourself, or the other is to sincerely and genuinely ask about them.

I've had the privilege – I've been in ministry for 50 years. I've had the privilege of meeting thousands of people, countless thousands of people. I always have people come up and say, "Do you remember me? In 2004 I was at a 7-Eleven." "Oh, thanks for reminding me." But of the people that I have met, those who really distinguish themselves are those who have the spirituality and the social graces to inquire and ask other people, "How are

you doing? What is going on in your life?" rather than rushing to give your update on yourself.

Joseph is both a spiritual man, and he also has social graces, and so he inquires about their welfare. It's also interesting to note that though they have given him the present, it is as though he doesn't even notice the present, he notices them. He's not noticing the gift, he's noticing the giver, and, "He inquires about their welfare," - it's been a long journey, it's been a three-week trip coming down - "and said, 'Is your old father well,' - same word, shalom - 'of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?'"

I mean, he shows unusual interest in their father, which should have been maybe a little bit of a hand-tipper that he has this interest in our old man, our old father. "And they said, 'Your servant our father is well.'" Again, it's the word "shalom" which means he is healthy, he is safe, he is sound, he is content, he is at peace. Literally, he is complete. His life is in good order. He is still alive. And he expresses "him" (Jacob) as "your servant": "Though he is not here, he is joining us in bowing low and humbling himself and putting himself at your discretion."

And we read at the end of verse 28, "They bowed down in homage." They prostrated themselves and went to the ground as they were submitting themselves to the one in authority over them. As I think of this and its relevance for you and me today, I think of 1 Peter 2:17 which says, "Fear God, honor the king." When Peter wrote that, the king was Nero, the madman, the man who was taking Christians, or would soon be taking Christians, and using them to become torches, their bodies, to light up his gardens for his garden parties. He was such a persecutor of the Christians; and yet even Peter writes here, "Honor the king."

You say, "How can you do that?" Well, four verses earlier in 1 Peter 2:13, Peter writes, "Submit yourselves, *hupotassó*, submit yourself under. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake, not for Nero's sake. I mean, he's a reprobate. But for the Lord's sake, humble yourselves. Why? We don't want a revolution, we want a reformation. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as one in authority, or to governors. We have an election in two days on Tuesday. I've already voted just to influence the whole process. And you and I need much grace, much

grace, to honor the king and whoever is put in control over various decisions of our lives.

In verse 29 we see "the affection." Joseph is deeply moved by this sight. Verse 29, "And he" - Joseph - "lifted his eyes" - he had to lift his eyes because they have been bowed down on the ground; so he's been looking down - "he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin." That means Benjamin is now standing up, having prostrated himself to the ground. "He lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son." And when he sees Benjamin, it just melts his heart like soft butter on a hot sidewalk. I mean, his heart just liquidates.

"And he said, 'Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?'" Well of course, he knows this is his youngest brother. But he's having to play along with this so as not to turn his cards over and reveal himself too quickly. "And he said," - Joseph said, and he says this to Benjamin his youngest brother - 'May God be gracious to you my son.'" The word "gracious" here means to show favor to, to have mercy upon, to bestow goodness to.

This is the greatest thing you could desire for any person is for God to be gracious to that person. This is the greatest thing a husband could pray for his wife, for a wife could pray for her husband. This is the greatest thing a parent could desire for their children is that God would open the windows of heaven and pour out His blessing upon this person, and that God would be gracious to this one and cause His face to shine upon them and to be merciful to that one. There could be no greater benediction bestowed upon someone's life than this.

And Joseph again uses Elohim, God: "May God be gracious to you." Not the gods of the Egyptians. He's in Egypt, but Egypt is not in him. He still is loyal with allegiance to the one true God in heaven. He's in the world, but not of the world.

Verse 30, "Joseph hurried out" - meaning he departed from the room - "for he was deeply stirred over his brother." I mean, 20-plus years of emotion has been pent up, and it's now like a volcano that's erupting, and he

has to slip out of the room, lest they see him weeping and crying and give himself away to them. So he's deeply stirred. The word "deeply" means compassion, and "stirred" means to grow warm, to be kindled at the sight of Benjamin. It was as though the match was struck and the fuse was lit, and there was a burst of emotion that came flooding like a tsunami out of his soul.

Verse 30, "And he sought a place to weep," a hidden place, a private place where no one could see him. The word "weep" here means to shed tears, to weep bitterly. I mean, I think we see here that real men cry. I mean, Jesus wept, did He not, the perfect Son of Man, John 11:35. And David wept, and Jeremiah wept, and Paul wept, and Peter wept. And when John went to heaven in the vision when he was on the island of Patmos and he was caught up in Revelation 4 and 5, he's in heaven, and he weeps in heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:4 says, "There is a time to weep."

There's no stiff upper lip here, but a flood of emotions, because he's made in the image of God. "And he entered his chamber," - verse 30 - "and wept." He cried like a baby. He had an emotional meltdown, and rightly so. It's his brother.

Verse 31, "Then he washed his face" - to wash away the tears and to wash away the red countenance on his face and try to cause his eyes to open back again - "and came out; and he controlled himself" - he gathered himself, he girded himself - "and said, 'Serve the meal, proceed.'"

You know, we are to have affections for our family, for our loved ones, and we are to have affections for fellow believers. And it's not always expressed like this, but there are times it is expressed like this. I've had times like this. And just to give you one cross-reference, Romans 16:16, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." In the early church there was much affection and much, much emotional love that they had for one another. So must we.

Finally, verse 32, I want you to see "the astonishment." Hang with me. I want you to hear this, because this scene builds to this crescendo, to this high point. And so in verse 32, "They" - meaning Joseph's servants - "served him by himself," - he's the Prime Minister; he is set apart, he's set

apart from his staff, he's set apart from the guests - "and them" - referring to his brothers - "by themselves, and the Egyptians who are with him by themselves."

So here's three different seatings in this one area. We're not certain exactly what this looks like; but here's Joseph by himself, here are the brothers by themselves, and here are the Egyptians by themselves. And the Egyptians here must refer to those in the inner council of Joseph and his staff and his chief of staff. And the reason he says that the Egyptians eat separate from these Hebrews who have come, at the end of verse 32, "because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians," meaning really blasphemous, because eating a meal with someone is a fairly intimate thing.

Now notice this in verse 33, "Now they" - referring to the brothers - "were seated before him," - Joseph. So the idea is Joseph is at probably at least the head of the table and the head of the room - "the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth," - so they line up at the table in the order of their birth order chronologically - "and the men" - referring to the brothers, now watch this - "looked at one another in astonishment."

The word "astonishment" means they were stunned, they were dumbfounded, they were astounded. Why? Because they are seated in places of prominence before the Prime Minister. This blew their minds that they, whom they assumed would be charged with stealing and thievery, and be consigned to prison, and perhaps even sentenced to death, are now seated at a banquet feast in the palace of the Prime Minister, and they are treated like royalty. They don't even have a category for this. "We thought we were walking the gangplank, and now we are seated with the captain of the ship, and he is treating us like dignitaries."

And to take it even further, the next verse, verse 34, "He" - Joseph - "took portions" - meaning of food - "to them" - referring to the brothers - "from his own table." Did you get that? So the Prime Minister stands to his feet, and they would assume the good times are over, the other shoe is about to fall, the elephant in the room is now ready to swing its weight. He arises from his table, but as he does, he gathers his own food and walks it over to

his brothers and serves them and sets it in front of them, and would have said something like, "Enjoy. Eat." No wonder they were astonished. No wonder they're pinching themselves. "Is this a dream? Is this reality?"

"He took portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs," because of his deep, deep love for this one brother. There is just a connection with chemistry. There is just a bonding, a welding of their souls together that transcends these two decades. And from his own plate and his own portions he just piles it on to the plate of Benjamin to the point that his cup overflows and his plate cannot contain it. "So they feasted and drank freely with him." You talk about unexpected mercy. You talk about a reversal of fortunes that we never saw coming. You talk about being so unworthy and so undeserving to receive this from him.

I think you and I today who are believers in Jesus Christ should have this same astonishment that you and I feel every day, and that every time we come to the Lord's Table be astonished that I have a seat at the table with the King of kings and the Lord of lords. But I who have lived as such a law-breaker to His Commandments, that I who have chosen to go my own way and to do my own thing, I who have at times shaken a fist in the face of God, I who have been so determined to do my own thing my own way, call my own shots, I who have been under the wrath of God, I who have offended Holy God, that I would be brought into the inner sanctum of His palace in glory, that I would be invited to sit with Him, that He would arise from His throne of grace and, as it were, serve me of the fullness of His pardon and forgiveness, and clothe me with His righteousness, and live inside of me, and go before me and prepare the way, and cause all things to work together for good, to make His royal throne inside my humble little heart, and to wash away all my sins and to bury it in the sea of His forgetfulness, and to give me a new start in life and set me on a new path, and to be preparing a place for me in heaven and one day to receive me to Himself, and for me to be made completely into His likeness in heaven, what astonishment, what amazement should flood our heart this day.

The children of the devil could become children of God, that rebels against the reign of God should find themselves now bowing low before Him; we who are so undeserving, we who have no merit, we who have nothing to contribute to our salvation except the sin that was laid upon the Lord Jesus

Christ. Only God the Holy Spirit could cause this to well up inside of you. But I pray that this day, even this very moment, that there would be welling up inside of you amazement and bewilderment that the King of glory which shows such unexpected mercy upon you. If you have never entrusted your life to Jesus Christ, how could you possibly have heard the last five minutes of what I said and remain where you are in a far away country, separated, when He would receive you to Himself, when He would embrace you, when He would take you in and wash away all of your sins, when He would seat you and serve you for the rest of your life? How could you remain in unbelief? I would urge you, if you yet need to commit your life to Christ to do so this very moment. And may you leave this service today with unexpected mercy lavished upon you in Christ. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for such goodness that has been showered upon us in Christ. Thank You that You have withheld nothing that is good, and that You have given us all things richly to enjoy in Christ that are good. We are the most blessed of all people who have ever lived. You have not given us what we deserve, You have given to us what we have so desperately needed. Thank You for full, free, eternal forgiveness of sins, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you stand for the closing benediction? And then you'll be dismissed. May you take this message with you, may you take these truths with you, and may you feast upon them. From Numbers 6: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you peace." God bless you.