

**Genesis 44: 1-34; “The Silver Cup – A Test”, Sermon # 107 in the series –  
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 15<sup>th</sup>,  
2019, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In these sermons on the life of Joseph, I have been using Joseph’s life as a type of Christ. I have been drawing lessons from the way that he deals with his brothers, in relation to their being taught what they needed to learn about their own sinfulness and their own salvation. I am applying these same lessons to all who would come to know God through Jesus Christ. The question that we are asking this morning is this – What does Joseph’s putting the silver cup in the sack of Benjamin teach us about the love of Jesus Christ for those whom He intends to save from their sins? Well I want to show you, that Joseph’s putting the silver cup in the sack, teaches those who are looking for saving grace from Jesus Christ, 3 things.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Our Lord and His Spirit will examine your conscience to see if it is working in the right way or not.** (verses 1-10)

Now, I want you to remember that these brothers did not know or recognize Joseph, but he knew and remembered them; the way that they had treated him twenty years before. The brothers had come down to Egypt this second time seeking grain, but they did not know that this man whom they are dealing with is Joseph. Joseph loves them, even so, and he has sold them grain both these times that they have come down. Unbeknownst to them Joseph’s steward placed the money back in their sacks. He did this to show them his good-will and his love to them. He would most surely provide them with the grain that they needed to live. But because he had a special love for them, he would also test them to find out whether they had really changed or not.

This is the same thing that the Lord Jesus Christ does for each person who seeking grace from him. I have spoken of this before, but the grain that Joseph was selling was a good picture of the grace that Jesus Christ freely gives to sinners who are seeking Him. Sometimes sinners do not realize that Jesus Christ knows all about their lives. He remembers the things that we have done to shun Him, to oppose Him, to refuse to have Him to rule over us. And yet, He is very willing to give saving grace to those who come to Him looking to be forgiven. We have come to the verge of the revelation of that special grace of salvation in the story of Joseph. Joseph put the silver cup in the sack of Benjamin in order to test the repentance of his brothers in relation to their former sins against himself, and also to test their love for Benjamin and their father.

In a similar fashion the Lord Jesus Christ tests all those whom he has chosen to eternal life, by bringing them into situations in which they are forced to reveal whether they are seeking a complete change of heart. He would show them the kind of love that it will take to bring about the restoration of their broken relationship with him. And He will test their willingness to exercise that same kind of love toward another member of the family; his brother Benjamin, who is in a very similar position to what Joseph was 20 years before. He is special, and he is favored by his father; especially since Jacob has believed for some years now, that Joseph was dead.

How do the brothers view his being seen in this special way by their father at this time in their lives? Do they envy him? Do they despise him? Do they love him? Joseph is going to find out, by means of the placement of his special silver cup in the mouth of Benjamin’s sack. You remember that the brothers were all invited to Joseph’s house in the last chapter. They were afraid because on the return trip from their first journey down, they had found that someone had returned their money to them in their sacks, along with the grain. I said to you that this is a picture of how Jesus Christ does not want any seeking sinner, to think that they have to pay for salvation. Salvation is all of grace. We do not pay for it with our good works, our best efforts, our best intentions, or with anything else that we can bring to God.

When they were invited into Joseph's house, I said to you that this is a picture of the sinner who comes to an Bible-believing church for the first time, and for the first time they are beginning to understand the riches of the grace of Christ. They sat at their own table and He took servings to them "from before him", but Benjamin's serving was five times as much as any of theirs. It says that they drank and were merry with him. Persons who are worldly, like the Egyptians, sit at their own table and they will not eat food with the Hebrews. Even so, worldly people who come to church to be satisfied with worldly things will not partake of spiritual food with God's people. They will be satisfied with their own ways, rather than those that Christ would teach them.

Now they had finished the meal, and Joseph sent them away home, with this rich time of feasting and merriment in their minds. They were very happy men at this point, but they still did not know Joseph, who he was, or what he was seeking to find out about them. He has helped them, but they are still not saved from their sins. It is just as true that many come to church seeking to be religious, seeking to be helped, and they may feast with God's people and enjoy many of the same influences of the Holy Spirit and rejoice in the good word of God, and yet they go away from church, not really knowing Christ yet. He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother. But they do not understand this as of yet.

So what our Lord does, is that He will further order the circumstances in the lives of those who are like this, to test them in regard to whether their consciences are working rightly or not. Our consciences are a witness within ourselves, telling us whether what we are doing, or what we are saying is right or wrong; whether we are honest men or not. And sometimes our conscience is performing its function faithfully and commending us where we are right and convicting us when we are wrong. And sometimes our conscience does not perform faithfully like it should. It is silent or it justifies us when there is actually still much sin lurking in our heart. In the life of the person who is being drawn by Christ, or who already knows Christ, their conscience has the work of the Holy Spirit attending its working to help to instruct them whether they should feel guilty or not about what they have done in the past.

This work is faithfully performed by the Spirit until we see ourselves rightly; as sinners in the sight of a perfectly holy God. Our conscience is working rightly when we come to believe that we are only saints because we have received grace. I have said to you that this steward of Joseph's is a type of the Holy Spirit in this story. He and Joseph worked hand in hand together to arrange the circumstances so that the brother's testing would take place, and also the, that hopefully the lessons of repentance would be learned. So too, when Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit work together in the salvation of souls, they begin in the conscience.

In Romans 8: 27, it says – "Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Let's say that Jesus Christ would see you as a sinner saved. He knows what it is going to take. He works in conjunction with the Holy Spirit as He has access to your mind and your conscience. He knows whether you are fully telling the truth or not. He knows and will prove to you where you are innocent and where you are guilty. What Joseph did was to tell his steward to place the silver cup in Benjamin's sack and to pretend then, that he suspected that some one of the brothers had taken it; had stolen it. And then "as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys." And "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?' 'Is not this the cup from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination?' 'You have done evil in so doing.'"

Joseph and the steward arranged all these circumstances as a test, but it was a test born out of love to his brothers and especially to his younger brother Benjamin. The Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit also arrange all the circumstances related to your salvation if you are one of God's elect people. And so, I want you to understand that there is never any sin that takes place

in God's testing of your heart. You might say to me that you do not think that it was right for Joseph to have done the things that he did in this test; to conceal his identity from them, to plant the silver cup as though they had stolen it, and to pursue after them in the person of his steward; and then accuse them of something that they had never done.

But Joseph had the authority from Pharaoh that, "without his consent no man could lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. He had the earthly authority to do this, and I believe that he also had been directed by God Himself in this most important matter of how he was to test them, and how he was going to reveal himself to them. For Jesus Christ not only has the authority upon the earth to test men's sincerity. He has all power in heaven and earth also to bring the truth of the state of our hearts to light. And He will do so in due time and in accordance with the fulfillment of all of His purposes; to make those who are seeking Him, into holy men and women.

The first thing that He tests is to see whether your conscience is working rightly or not. Joseph's steward was wise. He began the test by bringing to them to a false accusation which he knew that they were not guilty of. He will test their outward sincerity and integrity by this. "Why have you repaid evil for good?", he says. "Why have you taken the silver cup?" "You have done evil in so doing." Immediately their conscience vindicates them. They defend themselves with good logic. "Why does my lord say these words?" "Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing." "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 you're your lord's house?"

So they knew that the way that they had conducted themselves before Joseph was blameless in this matter. Their consciences were working in the right way. It gave them great confidence in their speech. This principle of truth is found in 1<sup>st</sup> John 3: 21 – "If our heart does not condemn us we have confidence before God." They had confidence, but in fact one of them went too far in his spirit. He, representing all of them, was so confident that he hadn't done anything wrong that he said – "With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." This was a very rash statement, but it indicates how self-justifying these men were in their hearts. They were concerned for the way that they were seen by men, more than the way that they were seen by God.

When the Holy Spirit perceives this in those whom He is working with, in order to bring them to a better knowledge of themselves, He will do what Joseph's steward did here. Verse 10 says – "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. The steward tempers the strong words of the brothers with loving righteous judgment. He knew that this was not a matter deserving of death, but rather a lesser punishment. He says, however, that they shall be judged according to their own words. This reminds me very much of what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 12: 36 and 37 – "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment." "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Their consciences were working rightly in this particular matter, but not so well in regard to their past sins, which they would rather forget, than deal with. And this leads me to say -

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Christ will so order our circumstances as to show us where our true innocence and guilt lie.** (verses 11-16)

Verse 11 says – "Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack." In spiritual terms we could say that they are saying – "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." "So he searched," verse 12 says. And – "He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack." "Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city." "Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city." They are innocent in the matter of stealing the cup. They do

not believe that Benjamin could have done this; but they cannot clear themselves. Why is this? It is because there were more serious sins, sins in their past, in relation to Joseph, which they were guilty of, and which they had not owned up to.

In matters related to truth, the truth of what we have done wrong in the past, it is always the right thing to do to confess your sins frankly and freely to God, and to own the guilt of them. You will want to let that guilt sink down into your soul, so that you are pleading with God for mercy. “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them will have mercy,” it says in Proverbs 28: 13. These men were indeed innocent in the matter of stealing Joseph’s cup, but they were still very guilty in relation to Joseph’s attempted murder, and the sale of him to the Midianite traders.

This should show us something which is very important in relation to our own hearts. Remember Jeremiah 17: 9? “The heart is deceitful above all things and is desperately wicked; who can know it?” “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” We may all too easily want to forget the sins of our past, and our sinful weaknesses in the present, and want to declare our innocence, when God the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ see our hearts very clearly; and they most certainly know if there is any issue which relates to sin, that remains in our hearts. We may indeed be innocent and trying to do the right thing now, in the present, but because we have not sufficiently come to terms with our past sins, we may. And we may find if we have not confessed them, that God is still dealing with us over them.

The brothers have now come to this terrible realization. Verse 14 says – “So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, and he was still there; and they fell before him on the ground.” “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?” “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.” This truly, is the beginning of their conversion to Christ. Their eyes have been opened to fear God. They know that they are innocent in this matter of the cup, but now they are beginning know that God knew that they were guilty of those great sins against Joseph of many years before.

Let me ask – Have you come to realize the truth that the Lord through His Word is bringing to you at this point? It is very important to your coming to know God, and having the assurance that you are a true Christian, that you understand that there may be sins which you have committed in the past, which may be brought to your attention at the very time when you consider yourself most innocent? Why is this? The brothers did not understand. The reason for it is, that Joseph knew exactly what they were concealing in terms of their past sin. Their confident attitude before, where they declared that they were innocent, was inconsistent with the seriousness of their unconfessed sins of the past. The silver cup in the sack proved to them that God knew, and He had found out their sin.

Judah calls himself and his brothers, “my lord’s slaves”. And certainly this was best possible thing that he could have said. It showed Joseph that they were willing to bear the reproach of being guilty of the false charge, in order to show the Lord God that they were guilty of the true charge of their sins of long ago. This was the right approach to take, for more than selfish reasons. It showed their love and support of Benjamin in this trial as well.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – The Lord Jesus will so order circumstances as to draw out the truth of whether you will lovingly lay down your life for the brethren.** (verses 17-34)

The brothers, when they found out that the silver cup was in Benjamin’s sack, could have distanced themselves from his predicament. They could have left him with Joseph’s steward and said – Let him bear the consequences of this. Either he has sinned and is guilty of stealing it, or he is not. But we cannot help him. We will leave him to face it himself. We will go back to

Canaan; our consciences are clear. But they did not. They returned to Joseph's house. And when they returned to Joseph's house, they were making a statement of their love for Benjamin by returning with him. They were identifying with his predicament. They believed that he was innocent. But whether he was innocent or whether he was guilty, they thought it right to stand with him. They could have allowed Benjamin to fend for himself, and to become this man's slave, but they did not. And the reason that these things did not happen, is because time and grace had changed these men. There was now a brotherly love in their hearts for Benjamin. Here we are, they say – my lord's slaves, both we and he also with whom the cup was found. They will all stick together.

But Joseph will test them even more. In verse 17 Joseph says – “Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave.” “As for you, go up in peace to your father.” Joseph would seek to know how far their love will go. Will they leave Benjamin when they are told that they are off the hook? And so, now, up steps Judah, the spokesman for the group, to explain that their concern is for more than just themselves. It is one of the finest examples of righteous pleading that we find in all the Word of God. As he approaches Joseph he does so with great respect and honor for his office. He not only has not become upset about what he suspects is a false charge, but he shows great respect for Joseph's authority.

He says – “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.” Then he gently reminds Joseph that he had asked whether they had a father or a brother and that they had told him that Benjamin alone was left of his mother's children, and that his father loved him. He reminds him that he had insisted that Benjamin come down on the next visit, and that he would not see them at all to give them grain unless Benjamin came with them. He explains to Joseph the reaction of his father when he was told that Benjamin must go down with them to purchase the grain. “You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, ‘surely he is torn to pieces’; and I have not seen him since.” “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.”

This is where the reality of Judah's faith in God and his repentance over his past sins shines forth. He was the one who concocted the plan to sell Joseph into slavery. But now, he doesn't think cruel thoughts, and he does not even think of himself most; but rather he thinks of his father and his father's sorrows, and how Benjamin's slavery would affect him. “Now therefore,” he says, “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, 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.”

Christian love is always that which thinks deeply about how our actions will affect others, or what the actions of others will do to those whom we love. Our life is bound up with the lives of other brethren. If we are walking in the Spirit we want to prevent the sorrow and grief of mind that will come to them when that which is most precious to them, is taken from them. So Judah reveals what Joseph had not known before. (verse 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 forever.’” And he follows it up with this great demonstration of his love for both Benjamin and his father. “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 brother.” “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?”

I want to close this sermon by asking you to think about the nature of Christian love. Showing the love of Christ to others is something that you learn over time when you are placed in various situations by the Lord; situations which will require you to either think about yourself first, or to consciously put others before yourself. Christian love will lead you to the place where

you will consciously put yourself into the place where you will stand surety, and even suffer in the place of the ones that you love, rather than see them suffer or make them suffer. This is something that is only learned when you have the love of Jesus Christ at work in your heart. Do you have this love at work in your heart? If you do not have it, you will eventually come to have it for Christ will lead you into it. It is learned by grace, when you look at what the Jesus Christ did on the cross for us, as sinners. Jesus did not simply lay down his life for the better people among us. He laid down His life for guilty sinners; those who are unworthy and undeserving of being shown mercy and grace.

You, as a Christian, will come to understand more of what it will mean for you to exercise this kind of love, as you are placed in circumstances where you will be forced to make a choice. Will you lay down your life for the brethren? Will you be willing to bear the reproach of a false charge against you in order that our repentance over your past sins will be fully established? Will you so love the brethren that you will demonstrate the surety-love of Christ in relation to them? This is what will honor and glorify God. I pray that the Lord will give you the grace to learn this love. This is what we should plead for, in prayer, to our Lord, our greater Joseph.