

Genesis 42 Hard Grace 11/4/18

When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” ² And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” ³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. ⁵ Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

⁶ Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” ⁸ And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. ⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.” ¹⁰ They said to him, “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.”

¹² He said to them, “No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.” ¹³ And they said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.” ¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you. You are spies. ¹⁵ By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” ¹⁷ And he put them all together in custody for three days.

¹⁸ On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so. ²¹ Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” ²² And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” ²³ They did not know that Joseph

understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. ²⁴ Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵ And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

²⁶ Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. ²⁷ And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!" At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

²⁹ When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, ³⁰ "The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. ³¹ But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we have never been spies. ³² We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.' ³³ Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. ³⁴ Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.'"

³⁵ As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. ³⁶ And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me."³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you."³⁸ But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

(Pastor prays)

More than likely, you are familiar with the concept of "tough love," when a parent does something seemingly painful in the life of a child in an effort to bring about an ultimate good. Well that's not exactly what we have in this passage, but it is close. Chapter 42 turns aside from having Joseph as the main character and casts our eyes back on his

father and brothers for a bit. The long-awaited and dreamt-about famine is finally here. The end of chapter 41, verse 57, tells us the famine has spread over the whole earth and now the known world, including Joseph's family, are scrambling for food. And to get food, they're gonna have to go down to Egypt.

But what good Hebrew wants to go down to Egypt? Egypt is almost 300 miles away from Canaan plus they would be foreigners. On top of this, for the 10 brothers (Benjamin is innocent) Egypt held a secret that they've kept buried for 20 years. For years they've lived their lives without actually having to think about God.

Some of you know this all too well. Even after many years, guilt doesn't sleep - it grows. And now they can't find food, and the only one place that has it is Egypt. It's a crisis. And God uses this crisis to get their attention.

This is a hard bunch and it's going to take hard grace to crack their hard hearts. You see, God will stop at nothing to turn people's hearts to Him. Think about who we are dealing with. Ruben, he is the oldest, has proven to have weak character by having an affair with his father's mistress. Judah is no better. In chapter 38 he had an affair with his daughter-in-law and produced two children, twins. Before that, Judah had sons who were so evil God just struck them dead. The other brothers, Simeon and Levi, were ruthless and, in a violent rage, they deceived and slaughtered a whole village of men. And all the brothers, except Benjamin, had a hand in selling Joseph into slavery. These were bad people, hard men. And my question is: Why did God go after them? The answer is *grace*, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Grace, but just like for some of you, it has been a hard grace.

Hard Grace Brings Real Hope

Because there is a lot of text, let's go through it and I'll point out a few things and then come back and make application. I want you to see God's grace.

See God's Grace in His Powerful Word

In the first section of the story, I want you to see how every bit of this is going to fulfill God's word. Do you remember the dreams God gave Joseph back in chapter 37? The dream that all the brothers would one day bow down to Joseph? Now let's read verse 6.

⁶Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of

the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.

It's been a long time with multiple obstacles and doubts but everything that God said would come to pass has come to pass. The brothers who had tried so hard to kill the dream had unwittingly fulfilled the dream. This reminds us once again that the grass withers, the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

These brothers bowing down before Joseph are not sensitive people. Verse 9 says that Joseph knew that this was a fulfillment of God's word and certainly, in due time, the brothers will realize it too. This tells us a couple of things. You can trust God's word even when evidence points to the contrary. God is faithful to His people. We are as simple as God's word says we are. God's hates sin as much as God's word says He does. What Christ did namely, is finished work on the cross, and that is the only thing that can save sinners from judgment. At the cross we find out that God's grace is greater than all our sin. It's a hard grace, but hard grace brings about real hope. See God's grace in His powerful word.

See God's Grace in His Hard Mercies

Hard mercies. It's an unfamiliar concept to many people. It's the concept of God going to great lengths, often painful and humbling lengths, to stab our conscience and break our hard hearts so that we might see Him for who He is, our Sovereign Savior.

And I think that's what the Lord is doing with these brothers. Let's pick up the story and run to the first turning point in verse 6. They've gone down to Egypt and bowed down before Joseph. In verse 7 – 8, Joseph recognizes them, but they don't recognize him and God starts breaking them with hard mercy. In verse 12, Joseph accuses them of being spies and does it four times. This feels like vengeance at first, but nothing could be further from the truth. Behind the harsh threats there is affection and mercy. Let me show you some of it.

In verse 17 - 18, Joseph puts them in prison for three days, which sounds bad, but don't forget Joseph had been in prison for 13 years. This was just a taste. He had authority to do whatever he wanted, even to kill them. In the same way, those afflictions they endured are nothing compared to Christ taking on our sins and enduring the cross. In verses 18 - 20, he lets them go because he fears God and knows their families are starving at home. This is a reminder that God knows our frame, that we are but dust and

He has mercy. Now in verse 18 - 19, instead of keeping them all in prison, he will keep one and send everyone else home, because he fears God. This shows that revenge is not the motive, but redemption is. It reminds us that God does hurt us but not for revenge, for redemption, so that we might look to the cross of Jesus in true repentance.

And in the story, the first crack in their hard heart starts to show itself in verse 21. The dawn is starting to break, 20 years of *status quo* and ignoring the guilt, 20 years of all the stuff they have done and they just start confessing it. This is a hard mercy here, coming to grips with such terrible sin. God is using tough treatment from Joseph and more specifically, the famine, to bring them to repentance. Jesus tells a story similar to this in Luke chapter 15. It's the parable of the prodigal son.

Let's turn there and look at Luke 15:11 -17. It's when the famine hit and he was with the pigs. His conscience broke and God awakened his heart to turn back. When you pray for your prodigal, pray God brings a famine. Pray misery and pray hard mercy. Or maybe you are the prodigal and you are in misery. Listen, it's a hard grace but hard grace brings about real hope. See God's grace in His powerful word. See God's grace in His hard mercies.

See God's Grace in His Strong Providence

The brothers are under conviction, and in verse 24, Joseph heard their conversation and he gets emotional. He locks Simeon up and look at the grace in verse 25. *And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.* Now watch their reaction in verses 26 - 28. *Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. ²⁷ And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!" At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"*

There are a couple of things to consider here. What Joseph did in verse 25 is pure grace. What God has done for us in Christ is pure grace. Pure grace is always perplexing at first. In verse 28, their hearts failed them because grace feels strange, to be given something so good when we have been so bad. That's why the cross is so perplexing, taking our pride away.

By grace you have been saved through faith and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God so that no one may boast. And for the very first time, since we have been following this story, the brothers recognize the hand of God's providence working in this hard mercy. See it at the end of verse 28. It's a great question, What is this that God has done to us?

Maybe you would ask something like this too. What is God doing? Because He's doing something. Maybe your life is like the brothers and you are hard to get to, but God is breaking in to save you. Maybe you are like the prodigal. God is bringing you to the end of yourself so that you might turn to Christ. Hard grace brings about real hope and that hope is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

(Pastor prays)