

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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FIVE LESSONS FROM THE RETURN OF JOSEPH'S BROTHERS

Genesis 43

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Today's sermon has five points:

- Respect Authority.
- Give What You Can.
- Be Honest.
- Don't Be Afraid to Cry.
- Enjoy the Blessings.

1-RESPECT AUTHORITY

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 43:1-5 & 8-10

Now the famine was still severe in the land. ² So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food." ³ But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.' ⁴ If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. ⁵ But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'" ... ⁸ Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. ⁹ I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. ¹⁰ As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice."

EXPLANATION: We don't know how much time elapsed between the brothers' first and second trips to Egypt, but it was long enough for them to have eaten all the grain Joseph gave them to take home. During this time, Simeon was in the Egyptian prison. Jacob was not willing to lose his youngest son, Benjamin, in an attempt to

save his second-oldest, Simeon, until the grain ran out. Despite his frustration, Jacob realized that his family needed grain, and he knew that Egypt was the only place to retrieve it. His sons, however, refused to go back unless Benjamin was with them. If they showed up without Benjamin, they would not receive the grain, would not be able to negotiate Simeon's release, and might actually lose their lives.

ILLUSTRATION: Family members, friends, and even God-followers don't always agree. In Acts, we read about Paul and Barnabas, two Godly men who disagreed about whether they should take John Mark with them on a mission trip. Because they could not agree, they departed ways. Each took a different mission partner and went a different direction, but both still proclaimed Christ.

APPLICATION: Even though Paul and Barnabas disagreed, they did not treat each other disrespectfully, and therefore, they did not harm the cause of the kingdom. In the same way, Judah disagreed with his father. He and the other brothers understood better than their father how adamant the Egyptian ruler had been. They knew that to go back to Egypt without Joseph would prove disastrous. They could not blindly obey their father, but in the same way, they did not want to disrespect him. So, Judah respectfully disagreed and personally assured Benjamin's safety.

God has created us all uniquely. We have different opinions, tastes, and personalities. As a result, we will not always think the same. We will want to do things differently. As Christians, however, we should always be respectful of one another. The Bible says in John 13:35. *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* Love begins with respect. 1 Peter 2:18 tells us to submit to those in authority over us with respect. Judah showed respect towards his father even when he disagreed.

- Respect Authority.

2-GIVE WHAT YOU CAN

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 43:11-14

Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift—a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and

almonds. ¹² Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake. ¹³ Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. ¹⁴ And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”

EXPLANATION: When it was agreed that the brothers would make a second trip, Jacob was willing to give away some of his prized items in order to help secure the purchase of grain and, more importantly, the safe return of his sons. While we are familiar with spices, honey, pistachio nuts, and almonds, two of the other items may seem a bit foreign. Balm and myrrh were gums or oily substances that came from certain trees or plants. Both were used medicinally, and myrrh was also used as an incense or perfume. In addition to the gifts, the brothers took twice as much silver to recompense for what had been returned to them.

ILLUSTRATION: In the New Testament, we read about how Jesus sat down one day and watched various people deposit their gifts into the temple treasury. Many rich people came and threw in large amounts, but it was a poor widow who caught his eye. *“Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.’”* Mark 12:43

APPLICATION: Like the widow, Jacob did not have a lot. He and his family were suffering from a famine just like the people in Egypt. Had they not needed the grain, it is unlikely he would have risked sending his sons to Egypt. Had he not been desperate, he would never have risked Benjamin’s life. Since Jacob understood the importance of this mission, he gave a gift from what he had.

In this life, we often have the opportunity to give. We can give to help meet a need or give as a way of honoring or blessing someone. It is not the size of the gift that is important. The motive behind the gift and the heart of the giver are what matter.

- Respect Authority.
- Give What You Can.

3-BE HONEST

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 43:15-23

So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. ¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal; they are to eat with me at noon.” ¹⁷ The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph’s house. ¹⁸ Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, “We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys.” ¹⁹ So they went up to Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. ²⁰ “We beg your pardon, our lord,” they said, “we came down here the first time to buy food. ²¹ But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. ²² We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don’t know who put our silver in our sacks.” ²³ “It’s all right,” he said. “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.

EXPLANATION: Joseph had probably long anticipated his brothers’ arrival and often looked for them among the crowds wanting to buy food. When he spotted the group, he immediately noticed Benjamin. Benjamin was most likely an infant or small child when Joseph was sold into slavery. So Joseph would not necessarily have recognized the young man unless he saw a resemblance to himself or his mother. Still, a quick headcount affirmed that there was one more brother present. Before the brothers made it to the front of the line, Joseph arranged for his steward to take them to his house. The unusual treatment frightened the brothers. They were terrified that the Egyptian ruler might think they were thieves and wanted to explain the situation as soon as possible.

ILLUSTRATION: A college professor asked his students to watch a particular intersection for a certain length of time and record how many cars failed to stop. A young woman in the class never completed the assignment. She hoped the professor would not find a way to grade it. Unfortunately, however, at the beginning of the next class, he asked the students to write down the number of cars they observed and how many did not stop. He asked them to write their names on the papers and turn them in for a grade. The woman contemplated what to do. It would have been

easy to write down anything. The teacher would not have known the difference. Finally, she wrote, “I’m sorry. I didn’t do this assignment. I could have lied about it, but I’m a Christian, and that wouldn’t have been right.”

APPLICATION: Sometimes a lie is much easier than the truth. The brothers didn’t have to tell the truth. The steward had not asked about the silver. Even if he did, they could have easily denied ever seeing it. There had been no investigation, no accusations. Yet, they wanted the Egyptian ruler to know that they were honest, God-fearing men. In Ephesians, the Bible commands us to speak the truth to our neighbor. In Proverbs, we are told that lying is an abomination to the Lord. How carefully do we guard ourselves from lies and deceit?

- Respect Authority.
- Give What You Can.
- Be Honest.

4-DON’T BE AFRAID TO CRY

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 43:24-30

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. ²⁷ He asked them how they were, and then he said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?” ²⁸ They replied, “Your servant our father is still alive and well.” And they bowed down, prostrating themselves before him. ²⁹ As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother’s son, he asked, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.” ³⁰ Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

EXPLANATION: Upon hearing news of his father’s well-being and seeing his younger brother in person, Joseph could not contain his emotions. We get the sense that he was really homesick. Yes, he was living as an Egyptian ruler, but Joseph had not forgotten his family, his heritage, or his home. He rushed out of the room to

have a good cry. In some cultures and in some families, men are encouraged not to cry. We have to wonder if Egypt was one of those places.

APPLICATION: Tears, of course, are not only for sad times. They are also a result of happiness, and, often, they are a product of even more complicated emotions such as guilt, fear, and regret. There are three times in the New Testament that Jesus cried.

- Jesus cried over the city of Jerusalem.
- Jesus cried right before he resurrected his friend Lazarus from the dead.
- And Jesus cried the night before his crucifixion in the Garden of Gethsemane.

If Jesus cried, then we can be certain there is nothing wrong with men crying. In fact, according to some experts, crying can actually be good for your health.

- Respect Authority.
- Give What You Can.
- Be Honest.
- Don't be Afraid to Cry.

5-ENJOY THE BLESSINGS

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 43:31-34

After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, "Serve the food." ³² They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. ³³ The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. ³⁴ When portions were served to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

EXPLANATION: Although he lived as an Egyptian, Joseph was still not accepted as one. Though he was a respected ruler, Joseph was still a Hebrew and hated by many if not most. Therefore, Joseph was served and ate his food first. Then the Egyptians, and then the Hebrews. The brothers, of course, were amazed at the seating arrangements and equally astonished because Benjamin was given such honor. Still, they enjoyed the meal—a feast during a time of famine.

APPLICATION: 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*” Notice that the verse says to be thankful in the circumstance not for the circumstance. In every circumstance, there is cause for gratitude and a blessing to be found and enjoyed.

Joseph’s brothers were in the middle of a famine. They were far from home in a precarious situation. They still did not know what the Egyptian ruler planned to do with them. They did not know if they would get the grain they needed, if they would be allowed to take Simeon and Benjamin back home, and what they would find when they returned home from their trip. Despite the unknowns, they were able to enjoy the blessing and bounty of this meal.

From the brothers’ second trip to Egypt, we can glean five lessons to apply to our lives—even when times are tough.

- Respect Authority.
- Give What You Can.
- Be Honest.
- Don’t be Afraid to Cry.
- Enjoy the blessings.

INVITATION: Do any of these strike a chord with you?

- How are you measuring up when it comes to the authority figures in your life? Do you show respect—not because they necessarily deserve it but because God requires it?
- What about giving? Are you sensitive to the needs around you? Do you offer help where you can?
- To what level of honesty and integrity do you hold yourself? Do you try to live above reproach, or do you fudge a little here and there?
- How are you handling your emotions? Do you laugh freely and cry when appropriate, or do you bottle up your feelings in some kind of attempt to appear self-reliant and strong?
- Finally, are you enjoying the blessings God has given you and thanking him for them? Do you search for and express gratitude for the good even when times are tough?

As Christians, these are areas of our lives where we can follow Christ's example. The altar is open if you want to pray. If you don't know Christ, your first concern should be to know the God who loved you enough to send his son to die for your salvation. Come forward and let me tell you more.

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