

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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THE FINAL TEST

Genesis 44

May 1, 2022

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There are three points to today's sermon:

1. Joseph tested his brothers' hearts.
2. The brothers had a choice.
3. Judah offered his life to protect his brother.

In our series on the life of Joseph, we've covered:

- Some of his family lineage.
- The sins that passed from one generation to the next, such as deception, jealousy, and extreme favoritism.
- Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him into slavery.
- Joseph went to Egypt and was a trusted servant of Potiphar.
- Joseph avoided temptation and was thrown into jail.
- In jail, he met a baker and a cupbearer and interpreted their dreams.
- The baker was put to death by the king, but the cupbearer was let out of jail.
- Joseph hoped the cupbearer would remember him and help him get out of jail, but he did not.
- Through the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph predicted a seven-year famine.
- As a result of his interpretation, Joseph was freed from prison and became second-in-command of Egypt.
- Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to secure grain during the famine.
- Joseph did not reveal himself to his brothers but devised an elaborate scheme to determine if their hearts had softened since their last encounter.
- When Joseph's brothers returned a second time with the youngest brother, Benjamin, Joseph honored them with a dinner but still did not reveal himself.

## 1-JOSEPH TESTS HIS BROTHERS' HEARTS

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 44:1-10

*Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. <sup>2</sup> Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said. <sup>3</sup> As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. <sup>4</sup> They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, “Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil? <sup>5</sup> Is not this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.’” <sup>6</sup> When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. <sup>7</sup> But they said to him, “Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! <sup>8</sup> We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master’s house? <sup>9</sup> If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves.” <sup>10</sup> “Very well, then,” he said, “let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame.”*

**EXPLANATION:** So far, every decision that Joseph asked his brothers to make was still in their favor. They needed the grain; therefore, they persuaded their father to allow Benjamin to come along. Joseph wanted to know how they would respond to their younger brother when there was no direct incentive to come to Benjamin’s aid. He wanted to determine if the brothers felt about Benjamin the same way they had about him. This was the last and greatest test Joseph conducted to examine his brothers’ hearts.

**ILLUSTRATION:** It’s wise not to make strong assertions like the brothers did: this idea that if something was found in their sacks, they would agree to become slaves. The reason I say this is because the unexpected happens. Before every election, there are people who say if a certain candidate gets elected, they are moving to Canada. In the case of the brothers in our story, there was a setup. Let us be on guard for setups that would garner such a reaction.

- Joseph created one more test.

## 2-THE BROTHERS HAD A CHOICE

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 44:11-17

*Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. <sup>12</sup> Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. <sup>13</sup> At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city. <sup>14</sup> Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. <sup>15</sup> Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Do not you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?" <sup>16</sup> "What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup." <sup>17</sup> But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."*

**EXPLANATION:** When the brothers sold Joseph into slavery, they may have thought that his absence would somehow increase their standing in their father's eyes. Instead, Jacob chose a new favorite—Benjamin, the other son of his beloved Rachel. Joseph's test offered them the perfect opportunity to rid the family of Rachel's legacy. No longer would they have to live in the shadow of her sons.

Benjamin was the one who had been caught with the cup. They had no obligation to pay for his crime. Joseph made it clear that he did not hold them all responsible. They could tuck their tails between their legs and go home with the grain and the silver which had again been returned to them. They could have told their father the truth. They had done nothing wrong, or they could have made up another story to soften the blow. Either way, they could have gotten off "Scot-free", as we like to say.

**APPLICATION:** 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*" The brothers had a choice in how to respond. They could throw Benjamin under the bus and let him fend for himself, or they could do what was right.

Like the brothers, we too have choices. No matter what the circumstance, God has promised that there is a way out.

- Joseph tested his brothers' hearts.
- The brothers had a choice.

## **JUDAH OFFERED HIS LIFE TO PROTECT HIS BROTHER**

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 44:18-34

*Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. <sup>19</sup> My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' <sup>20</sup> And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.' <sup>21</sup> "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.' <sup>22</sup> And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.' <sup>23</sup> But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' <sup>24</sup> When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said. <sup>25</sup> "Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.' <sup>26</sup> But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' <sup>27</sup> "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. <sup>28</sup> One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since. <sup>29</sup> If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.' <sup>30</sup> "So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, <sup>31</sup> sees that the boy is not there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. <sup>32</sup> Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!' <sup>33</sup> "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. <sup>34</sup> How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father."*

**EXPLANATION:** The brothers did not abandon Benjamin. Judah, who had personally guaranteed Benjamin's safety, instead offered himself in exchange for Benjamin's life.

It's interesting to me that when Joseph refers to Benjamin in verse 17, he called Benjamin a man, but when Judah refers to him, over and over again he called Benjamin a boy. Although Benjamin was probably an older teen or maybe even a young adult, it seems that Judah looked at him with the affection of an older brother.

- While Judah had not always been a man of his word, in this instance, he stepped up to the plate.
- He had not always been concerned about other people's feelings, but in this case, he demonstrated a deep concern for his father's.
- He had not always been honest, but in this case, he was determined to do what was right.
- He had not always been self-sacrificing, but in this case, he was willing to lay his life on the line for the protection of his younger brother.

After two trips to Egypt and a lot of accompanying stress, the brothers finally demonstrated to Joseph that they had changed. Time, experience, and the working of the Lord had changed their hearts. They were no longer the foolish young men who had sold their brother and lied to their father. While they were far from perfect, they had grown at least in this one way. They had no desire to harm their youngest brother or see their father in pain. This time, they did not react out of jealousy or anger.

- Joseph tested his brothers' hearts.
- The brothers had a choice.
- Judah stepped up to the plate.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Near the start of Jesus's ministry, he went to the desert to fast and pray for 40 days. At the end of that time, Satan tempted Jesus in three different ways. First, Satan tempted Jesus to turn the stones into bread. Next, he tempted him to throw himself off the roof of the temple so that angels would come and rescue him. Third, Satan tried to get Jesus to bow down to him.

**APPLICATION:** Just as Satan tempted Jesus, he tempts us as well. Jesus was hungry; so, the temptation to turn the stones to bread was a physical temptation. The need for food was real, which made the temptation all the stronger. Often, in our lives, Satan will use a legitimate need to coerce us into doing something we know is wrong. Remember, our God can supply all our needs according to the riches in glory. Needing something is not an excuse for sin.

When Satan asked Jesus to jump off the temple, he was trying to get Jesus to question God's love. It's as if he said, "If your Father really loves you, then you can jump off this building, and we'll see if he sends angels to protect you." Satan also attacks our faith in God's love, power, and protection. We think, "If God loves me, then nothing bad will happen," and then, when things go wrong, we sin by doubting God's goodness. God's love and goodness are not dependent on what we think but who he is.

Satan's final temptation of Christ was an effort to appeal to the human desire for power. Satan also tries to convince us that we need to do whatever it takes to gain power and control. Meanwhile, Christ calls us to complete submission to him.

For believers, God promises that with every temptation, there is a way of escape. Additionally, we have the Holy Spirit and God's word to help us discern the difference between right and wrong and make the right decision. Therefore, we are thoroughly equipped to handle any temptation that comes our way.

**INVITATION:** How are you holding up under the temptations of day-to-day living? Are you struggling? If so, maybe you need to repent of your sins and ask God for a renewed desire to listen to the Holy Spirit's direction. Maybe you need to commit yourself to study and know God's Word so that you can fight off the attacks of Satan. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23 that *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*. We are all sinners, and we will all mess up, but through the power of the resurrection, Christ-followers can live in victory. However, if you have not given your heart and life to him, then you do not have that power, and you cannot know that victory. The altar is open if you want to learn more about the saving and empowering mercy and grace of Jesus. Come forward today.

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