

00-05-21a

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning in our Bibles to Psalm 66. Psalm 66. Remembering that at this point in our study in Genesis, we have reached the climactic section of the Joseph story, and understanding the overall impact and theme of that section of Genesis, this Scripture reading is particularly appropriate, understanding God's ways in weaving together both our successes and our failures, the good that we can produce under the ministry of His Spirit and His Word, as well as our sins and failures.

It is a subject that has been labeled a deep and unsolvable mystery by theologians, and there are certainly aspects of it that are probably beyond our human comprehension, the way that God, without altering or finagling in any way with human volition, can still accomplish His purposes and can actually incorporate. And from a human point of view, it is almost as though He is counting on failures and sins by certain individuals at certain key junctures. You think of the brothers of Joseph.

You think of Judas Iscariot and others, where although it doesn't mitigate the sin or the failure involved, it nevertheless becomes a key ingredient in God's delivering salvation to us. And it is indeed an awesome subject to meditate on and to remember that it doesn't call upon us to decide that it doesn't really matter if we succeed or if we fail because God will work all things together for good. It has everything to do with where we end up in the plan of God and in the scale of blessing.

But it is a great comfort to know that there is no failure, there is no sin that we commit, that if we acknowledge, if we change our minds and have a metanoia, as the Greek says, like in metamorphosis, change, noia meaning mind, that there is nothing that we have done, nothing that we will do, that can ever separate us from the love of God. The only thing that can keep us from enjoying the expression of God's love is failure to recover, failure to claim God's grace. It is sometimes embarrassing.

We actually sometimes delay returning to God because we are just too embarrassed to come and we think, well, I need to sit here in the dark corner for a while in my, whatever we want to think of it as, out of fellowship status or whatever, and we don't feel ready to come before God, but that is wasted time. We are commanded to redeem the time, to claim God's grace. It is actually a form of arrogance to cling to our hair shirt or our sin and decide that we are too bad, too messed up to come to God.

God will do for us and to us the things that are necessary to enable our growth, and sometimes that means the chipping away of things that are a part of our thinking. But when we come to Psalm 66, the theme of this psalm, as indicated by the title given in the New King James, is to remember what God has done. And this is not just a memorial.

We had Armed Forces Day this week. We have Memorial Day. We have days where we remember victories of the past, achievements of the past, birthdays of great Americans.

But the idea is not just to become maudlin or sentimental over the past. It is to remember the ideals and the benefits that have come from these great things and to incorporate them into our thinking so that we can continue to exploit those victories or those achievements or those monuments. We look ahead even as we look back.

It is summed up best perhaps in the Lord's Table, where we not only look back to Jesus' work on the cross, but also forward to our participation with Him in His kingdom and ultimately the kingdom of the Father. So here in Psalm 66, this is dedicated or inscribed to the chief musician, a song and a psalm. And you don't find too many psalms that have multiple inscriptions.

But when they do, it is a reminder that this had a multiple purpose. It could be sung as a hymn. It could be sung in the assembly for worship.

It was also something to think on and meditate on. Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth. Sing out the honor of His name.

Make His praise glorious. Say to God, how awesome are Your works. Through the greatness of Your power, Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.

All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You. They shall sing praises to Your name. Selah Come and see the works of God.

He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men. He turned the sea into dry land. They went through the river on foot.

There we will rejoice in Him. He rules by His power forever. His eyes observe the nations.

Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah O bless our God, you peoples, and make the voice of His praise to be heard, who keeps our soul among the living and does not allow our feet to be moved. For You, O God, have tested us.

You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net. You laid affliction on our backs.

You have caused men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water. But You brought us out to rich fulfillment.

I will go into Your house with burnt offerings. I will pay You my vows, which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken, when I was in trouble. I will offer You burnt sacrifices of fat animals, with the sweet aroma of rams.

I will offer bulls with goats. Selah Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul. I cried to Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. But certainly God has heard me. He has attended to the voice of my prayer.

Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me. There are many themes. We could obviously spend weeks just on this psalm.

But you will notice that it says that we are to sing out the honor of His name and make His praise glorious. Say to God, how awesome are Your works. You hear a lot of this going on today.

People saying, Oh God, You're awesome. Oh God, Your works are wonderful. But the idea here is, how can you truly, from the heart, say how awesome are Your works to God? You have to know what they are.

You have to be looking at them. It's one thing to say, well, I know that prayer is supposed to open with thanksgiving, or worship service is supposed to open with praise, so let's just say how awesome are Your works. But for that to come from the center of our soul, we have to be looking at God's works.

And one of the great things about that, why do you think it is that we are instructed throughout the scriptures to begin our prayer and begin our worship with praise? Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Because in order to do that truly and genuinely, you have to be looking at the works of God. You have to be thinking about that.

And if we're thinking about that, guess what? We are now in objectivity and not subjectivity. If we enter into His courts with problems and enter His gates with self-centeredness, we're not going to be able to thank and praise His name. But when we enter into the throne room of God through prayer, when we enter into worship, which, by the way, isn't just in the assembly, we should be worshipping God every morning, every noon, every evening, every chance that we have to stop for a moment in the forward progress of life and remember who we are and why we're here.

It's an opportunity for worship. And to get our minds into that mode, the first thing to do is praise and thank God. And to do that genuinely, we have to be looking at what God has done.

That's the title of this psalm. Remember what God has done. When we are in distress, when we are unsettled, when we are not at peace, when we are roiling with cares, stop and think about what God has done.

We direct our minds and decide to think about the things that God has done. That enters our minds into objectivity. It calms us.

It gives us something noble and of good report, like it says on our wall here. Whatsoever

things are true and honest and just and pure, lovely, of good report, virtue and praise, think on these things, from Philippians 4. That's a great way to begin. And that begins to cycle the divine power of God's word through our souls.

And that's the key. This is going to be important as we move forward in Joseph's story this morning. Secondly, you will see that in verse 8 he says, Bless our God, you peoples, and make the voice of His praise to be heard.

This is a call to corporate, public worship. These large groups, all the peoples, this is not only the nation of Israel, but the mixed multitude that gathers with them and any of the others who are God-fearers. Make the voice of His praise to be heard.

We talked about this some on Friday night. If we are believers, if we love the Lord Jesus Christ, if we are seeking to walk in the light down the narrow road, then the voice of our praise ought to be heard. When we receive blessing and someone says, Wow, that's really a great thing for you.

The voice of our praise ought to be heard. We've sought over the years to try to make sure that evangelism and Christian witness is taken in a proper perspective. And this is one of the ways that we do that.

We do have the opportunity to let our light shine before men. We do have the opportunity for people to glorify our Father in heaven because of His works in us and for us. And to make the voice of praise to be heard is one of our opportunities and one of our responsibilities not to hide our light under a bushel.

God doesn't hide His light under a basket or under a bed and neither should we. He says He keeps our soul among the living in verse 9 and He does not allow our feet to be moved. Even if you look about and you're in the midst of a severe testing and trial and everything seems dank and gloomy, if you're able to even be thinking these thoughts, guess what? God has kept your soul among the living and He does not allow our feet to be moved.

Why is it our feet? That's the thing upon which we stand. On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

Christ never changes. Christ does not move. And if our feet are planted on the solid rock, our feet will never move.

And those are two things we can praise God for regardless. Sometimes you have trouble thinking, well, what am I going to crank up the voice of praise for? I'm in the midst of a real dark set of circumstances. This, again, is the chance for objectivity.

What are the fundamental truths of the universe? I am alive and if I'm alive, God still has a plan for my life regardless if I've brought this darkness upon myself. If God thought it

was over with, I wouldn't be here. And J. Kess sings a song, It's Not All Over.

Regardless of the news you get or the circumstances you're in, if you're able to still think and breathe, it's not all over. God has a plan and your feet are on the rock. He goes in verse 10 and the occasion for this thought on the psalmist part, he says, You, O God, have tested us.

You have refined us as silver is refined. We were talking just earlier this week about that process of refining where the silversmith or the metalworker will take the precious metal which starts out with impurities and begin to heat it up in the refining pot. And the way to get, even today, even in modern metalworking, when they get the raw ore that contains gold or silver, it has to be separated from the impurities that are a part of it when it's mined out of the earth.

And so they do this still today by a process of heating it up. And as they heat it, the precious metals, especially silver and gold, are heavy. And impurities, by their lighter density, are going to float to the top.

And the hotter you heat the metal, the more you're going to refine because even subtle differences in specific gravity, as the metal becomes molten and more and more liquid, allows more and more impurities to be brought to the top. And the standard of knowing when you have refined the metal sufficiently to be used for noble purposes, for making jewelry or fine vessels, as Paul talks about, is when you have removed enough of the impurities that when you look at the surface of the molten metal, it is so smooth that it's like a mirror and you can see your own reflection. And when God refines us as a refiner, he does put us through testing.

And the purpose of that testing is not to punish, it is to refine, to remove our impurities. And to ultimately, the more of our fallen nature that is brought into submission and brought under control, the more restoration we have of the image of God in which we were created. And this is the thought of the psalmist here.

You brought us into the net. You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads.

Have you ever felt this way? I sure have. There are times when you feel like, I fell off my horse and the rest of the pack just rode right over me. We went through fire and through water.

You've got old James Taylor, I've seen fire and I've seen rain. Well, we sometimes feel like we've really been through it. And we're going to see this morning that this is going to be the opinion of Joseph's brothers.

And yet, God says, or the psalmist says about God, you brought us out to rich fulfillment. And this is a wonderful reminder that the abundance that God gives us, the blessing that

we receive, the expressions of his grace are best appreciated after we have been tested, after we have been refined. It is a well-known happening or circumstance, especially for those of us that have spent some time in the military and have been shipped overseas.

We live in a country of great freedom and great abundance, of a great surplus of wonderful things. And we can look at these things academically, and we know that we live in a great country. We can look at TV and see that we have rich blessings.

But once you have actually walked the soil of a poor country, when you have actually strolled into and out of the little shops that mom and pop will put in the front of their hovel in the Philippines or in Thailand or in any innumerable other countries, when you have walked that soil and you've smelled the air and you've seen the meat hanging on hooks out in the open air and you've seen the people scratching a living from the earth and going home at night after dressing up in nice clothes to work at Pizza Hut to go back to a grass shack with a dirt floor and sleep on a blanket stretched out over the dirt, to come back to this country, there is nothing like having experienced and tasted for yourself the environment of poverty, to appreciate permanently the riches that we have in this country. And it's the same way with God's grace. We recognize and appreciate God's grace, but God uses the barren times in our lives and even that testing and affliction that we have brought on ourselves to increase our capacity to love and our capacity to live in God's grace.

Jesus told the Pharisee who brought Him over for dinner after the lady came and washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, He said, Those who have been forgiven little, love little. Those who have been forgiven much, love much. And it's an amazing thing that even our worst hours and our greatest failures, God can work that together for good and He can use it, if nothing else, to increase our appreciation of His grace and of His mercy and of His blessings.

You have laid affliction on our backs, but you have brought us out to rich fulfillment. This is another great subject for praise. Look at the praise choruses and the praise songs and the praise services that characterize so much of our modern Christian worship and look and see if this is a part of it because this is the ground and the basis of our appreciation for God, is looking at what He has done, not just saying that He has done great things, but looking at the great things He has done.

And there's nothing more personal than what He has done for us individually. I will go into your house with burnt offerings. I will pay you my vows which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble.

There is a component of worship, a large component of our worship, even when we gather together corporately, that is individual and is based on our personal relationship with God. Look at the first person pronouns in these verses. You cannot go and be buoyed up to the heavenly realms on the harmony and the musical talents of others

alone.

That can certainly be a wonderful part of worship, but so much of our worship today, people go and wait to float like a cork on the environment that's going to be created at their church or at their worship and praise meeting. Our worship of God is not passive. It's active.

We look. We remember what we said when we were in trouble. We remember the grace of God and the deliverance of God.

We remember the renewed dedication to the things of God that we formed when we were in adversity, and we do that personally. No one can do it for us. No song can push that into our souls.

We ourselves individually and personally, even in the midst of corporate worship, have to actively worship God on our own. And a lot of the efforts that are made to try to bring people into worship are similar to the efforts made to bring people into Christian service and into Christian faith, where it's trying to be pushed in from the outside. I saw one of these infomercials for the vacuum sealing machines where you can get your food and they say, look, if you put this thing in a plastic bag and hook it to this machine and it extracts all of the air and vacuum seals this thing, then you can freeze it and it will last a whole lot longer.

And one of the uses that they have for this machine is they say, you know, when you marinate meat, you want to get the marinade juice down into the meat, so you let it soak and it gradually seeps in. But if you put some of this marinade, is that what you call it, marinade? The juice that you're trying to marinate it in, into this bag and then put the meat in and put it on the vacuum sealer, the vacuum sealer puts pressure on the juice and forces it into the meat. And you can marinate something in a matter of seconds that would normally have to sit overnight.

And the pressure forces this into the meat. Well, I'm here to tell you, it is not the fellowship of believers and it is not the encouragement to service and to praise and worship that is going to push Christianity down into us from the outside. But if you sit and think about it a little bit, this is the modus operandi of a lot of our modern Christianity.

Well, let's bring people into an environment that's clean and that will make them clean. Let's bring them into an environment of service and they'll learn to serve. Let's bring them into an environment where the Word of God is taught and that will create in them a desire for the Word.

And we try to marinate it in from the outside. And a lot of times we put pressure on them, just like the vacuum thing. We say, well, you know, we'll lean on them a little bit.

Let's go ahead and make them a deacon. Let's let them teach a Sunday school class. That will get them into the Word.

We can't do that. That has to be in the inside. We as believers have to have the attitude, I will go into your house with my burnt offerings.

I will pay you my vows which my lips have uttered. My mouth has spoken when I was in trouble. Our relationship is with God.

And the spirituality, to whatever extent we develop it, the fruitfulness, to whatever extent we develop it, comes from our personal decision, our personal desire to dedicate ourselves to the things of God. I will offer you burnt sacrifices of fat animals with the sweet aroma of rams. I will offer bulls with goats.

This is a wholehearted dedication of things to God. When you not only bring your rams, but your bulls and your goats, you're bringing the finest of everything you have to God because you recognize that without Him you would have nothing. Come and hear all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul.

This is one of the great components of Christian fellowship. When believers of like mind gather together and we share what God has done for our soul. And it isn't always a formal thing.

It can happen in our daily conversation. It isn't something that we program. But it's just like being in love.

When you're in love with someone, your conversation can't go for more than five minutes without that person coming up in it. Oh yes, so-and-so and I were over here. You just can't keep it out because your mind is centered on that person.

And it should be the same with us. I will declare what He has done for my soul. I cried to Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue.

But you will notice, this is what God has done for His soul. God does something on the inside, and it works its way out through the mouth. It isn't something that we absorb from the outside and reflect and repeat because others are saying it.

What is the great stumbling block to this taking place? Iniquity in the heart. If iniquity is resident in our hearts, then this process can't take place. How can the grace of God and the blessings of God and dedication to the things of God be at the center of our heart when there's iniquity still there? If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

This is one of the great truths that's been missed in the study of confession of sin and forgiveness of sin and the things that people attach to 1 John 1.9. They say, well, it's all about verbal confession, and you don't have to feel sorry. Do you have to feel sorry? Is

there godly sorrow? And people go round and round about, well, all it says is, name your sins. Homo logeo.

And then people get all wrapped up on homo logeo. This verse is the heart of 1 John 1.9. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. And you can name your sins all you want.

And if you're still regarding the iniquity, if you haven't had a metanoeo away from that iniquity, if you're casual about it, you say, well, you know, besetting sin, God will forgive it. I'm in fellowship. Oh, I was out of fellowship, but I named my sin.

Now I'm back in fellowship. And you get this superficial, exterior sort of thinking going about sin. If you think, well, I'll just glorify God by claiming His grace after I sin.

I'll sin now and then confess it later. There are people that actually do this, which is an extreme case. But this is the principle.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, what does it mean to regard something? There's a range of meanings, aren't there? You can think about it, you can hold it in esteem, or you can grasp it, you can cling to it. You cannot purge it and remove it away. It's the hand that you're not willing to cut off, the eye that you're not willing to pluck out.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. What is it that He won't hear? He's not going to hear any of the praise. He's not going to hear any of the worship.

He's not going to hear any of the attempts to fulfill vows, any of the sacrifices and the rams and the goats and the bulls. All of the things that we do Godward will not be regarded by God if we're regarding iniquity in our hearts. But the psalmist has certainty here.

He has assurance. Certainly God has heard me. How does He know that? Because He has looked at His own soul and He has purged out and expunged iniquity.

Wash me. Cleanse me. Create in me a clean heart, O God.

We can't do it ourselves, but we can claim God's grace as our first step in worship to cleanse us and purge us. And then we know that God does hear us. He has attended to the voice of my prayer.

Blessed be God who has not turned away my prayer. You can't get any more grace-oriented and objective than this. This is the starting point for our lives as believers.

God has heard us. God does answer when we ask, even before we ask. When we ask and seek and knock, He is there to bestow His grace upon us.

He has not turned away my prayer. He has not turned away His mercy from me. It's a

wonderful psalm.

It's a wonderful foundation for our worship and our lives as believers. Turn with me now to Genesis chapter 42. As we continue now our study of the story of Joseph, we have seen many wonderful... The story of Joseph reminds me of a giant faceted gem that you can hold up to the light.

And just by changing your perspective and looking at it from a different angle, you see a whole fresh set of wonderful things. And I am so tempted to linger here almost indefinitely, but we are going to move forward. You remember that once Joseph is elevated to power and the famine follows the seven years of plenty where Joseph sees to it that the grain is stored, people begin coming to Egypt for their sustenance.

And the famine, obviously, the whole purpose of it and the plan of God is to put the family of Jacob in distress. The world at this point and its well-being revolves around the family of Jacob. There is a man with 11 sons out in the pasture lands of Palestine and world events are being shaped in the sovereign plan of God around the fate of these 12 men up there in Canaan as well as the brother who is down in Egypt.

There is a worldwide famine as well as a worldwide period of plenty that is all about these 13 men and their families. So when the famine is great and Jacob sees that there is grain in Egypt, he sends the brothers down there. And we have already seen where they go.

They are accused five times by Joseph of being spies. He, in the process of accusing them and listening to their responses, finds out some information that his father is indeed still alive. His younger brother Benjamin is still there.

And he hears the brothers talking among themselves in Hebrew, verse 22 of chapter 42. And Reuben answers them saying, Did I not speak to you saying do not sin against the boy? They are thinking about events that happened 21 years earlier in throwing Joseph into the pit. This is on their minds.

They have not forgotten what they have done. And when this calamity strikes and they are in distress, they believe that God has brought this back upon them. Verse 21, We are truly guilty concerning our brother.

Most of us are old enough to think back 20 years. This is the year 2000, 1980. Where were we? What were we doing 20 years ago? We only remember the real highlights from any particular year.

I remember 1980 well. It was the year I left the United States of America and went to spend a year in Okinawa and the surrounding seawater. And you can think back.

But can you remember very many particular days from that year 20 years ago or any

particular happenings that were of note? If they are in your memory, it's because they are really big. Either big high points or great low points to remember something. And if you think about the distance between now and 1980, this is the distance that Joseph's brothers are thinking back.

Now, this is probably the low point in their careers. And 20, 21 years later, when they come before this vizier in Egypt and he starts questioning them and accusing them and threatening them with imprisonment, what do they say? We are guilty concerning our brother. We saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us and we would not hear.

Therefore, this distress has come upon us. Now, my question to you is, is this true? That this distress has come upon them because of what they did to their brother 21 years earlier? Yes, it is. It is absolutely true.

They would not be in this position if they had not thrown Joseph into the pit and sold him into slavery and disregarded his anguished pleas for mercy. However, what is their view of God's purpose in bringing this back on their heads? Do they think that this is for blessing or for punishment? They are sure that this is retribution, that this is punishment. Is that true? Has God brought this back on their heads for retribution? No, it's not.

Should they be remembering? Should they be acknowledging? Should they be experiencing a feeling of guilt over what they did to their brother? Yes. Should they view this as punishment from God? No. Reuben gets into some self-vindication here in verse 22.

Did I not speak to you? Did I not sin against the boy? You would not listen. Therefore, behold, his blood is now required of us. Is Joseph's blood being required of them? No.

But that's the view. They did not know that Joseph understood them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter. Joseph turned himself away from them and wept.

Then he returned to them again and talked with them. He took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. Now, a lot of this is new information to Joseph, isn't it? Joseph had no way of knowing that Reuben had, in fact, pleaded with them to not harm the boy.

Remember, Reuben seems to be absent at the point that he is sold. Reuben had the plan to go back and deliver him out of the pit, and Reuben went back and Joseph wasn't there. He said, where's Joseph? They said, oh, we sold him to the caravan.

So, normally, who's the responsible individual among a group of brothers? It's the eldest. But there is a sense in which Reuben is somewhat vindicated here, and you wonder if this isn't a part of Joseph's reason for selecting Simeon, who's next in line. If Reuben was absent when Joseph was sold, then Simeon would have been the senior brother, so to speak, the senior partner here in crime.

And he didn't speak up. He didn't object. He may have been, in fact, an instigator.

As we pointed out last time, it's also interesting that Reuben is the second son of Leah in the same way that Benjamin, for whom he's going to be held ransom, is the second son of Rachel. So, there is a symmetry in holding Simeon in exchange for Benjamin. So, he bound him before their eyes, which seems a little bit severe.

We're going to discover that Simeon, in fact, has a pretty lush time of it. He ends up having a better time than his brothers because he's down there in Egypt where there's plenty. He's in the roundhouse, which is sort of the deluxe luxury prison where the butler and the baker were held.

He's going to have a year of soft living down there while his brothers have to slog it back up to Canaan and wait for the food to run out, face their father, and so forth. Simeon, although it seems like he's really getting the worst of it, is, in fact, getting the best of it. And this is sort of a metaphor for what's happening with the brothers.

They feel like they're about to get the worst of it here when, in fact, this is the means that God is using to preserve and, indeed, to bless them. They are going to have prosperity beyond their wildest dreams through this process, but it doesn't seem so at the time. I think the application of that to our opportunities in life is obvious.

Are there times when we are tempted to believe that perhaps God is bringing our past sins down on our own heads, that we are having to pay a price for misdeeds and failures? All of us have that experience. And it is important to remember that the grace of God is at work for those of us who do what? Do not regard iniquity in our hearts. And we'll develop that more fully here in a moment.

So Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, and restore every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them. So they loaded their donkeys with grain and departed.

One of them opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment. He saw his money, and there it was in the mouth of his sack. Hebrew is such a great storytelling language, and I wish we were all up enough in Hebrew to be able to look at this in the original, but this is really classic, and you can even catch a hint of it in English, because you're back at this comfortable distance looking at the group scene there, and the servants of Joseph as they put all this stuff in there.

And then it's like a zoom shot, because as they stop at the encampment, they have to break their journey. It's at least a two-day journey to get back up to Canaan. When you study Moses later on, you find that when he goes to Midian, he has to break his journey in the middle because it's so far.

And then you zoom in, and here's one brother. It doesn't say which one. One of them

opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment.

He saw his money, and there it was in the mouth of the sack. And you get the idea that this just goes right up to his face, and he's just there, open mouth, looking at this sack of money in amongst the grain. And what is he thinking at this point? They're going to think that we somehow took this money.

This is not just any sack of money. This is their sack of money. They know the kind of little leather bags they make and the leather thongs that they thread through them.

They can recognize the kind of bags. They make these out of goat skins and things up there in Canaan. And here's their own sack with their own money.

People bring different kinds of gold from different parts of the world. They look in it. It's the very same stuff they took to Egypt.

What is this mode for their standing in Egypt? Poor Simeon down there being held hostage, and these guys are going to appear to have thieved back the money. It doesn't matter how. It doesn't matter why.

The appearance of evil is all over this. How are they going to go back and say, We can't explain it. We don't know how it happened.

It seems inconceivable that the Egyptians put it there. But in fact, they've been given something of their own. They have been given this grain for free.

Their grain is a grace gift. And when they try to pay for it, their payment is returned. They can't pay Joseph for what Joseph wants to give them, and it comes back to them.

And we will have to investigate the thought process of Joseph in doing this here in a moment. So he, this one that found the money, he says, My money's been restored, and there it is in my sack. And they're looking at it like it's a viper in the sack.

It couldn't have been any more startled if it had been a big crocodile head sticking out of there. Then their hearts failed them. The Hebrew here, I told you last time, their hearts stopped.

Their hearts went out. You know, we talk about, Oh, my engine went out. Oh, my brakes went out.

Well, in Hebrew, this is their hearts went out. Their hearts quit at this point. And they were afraid, saying to one another, What is this God has done to us? Do they have a right perspective on this? Is this something God has done? Yes.

Do they think that things are going from bad to worse at this point? Yes. But this is, in fact, a preview of coming grace and coming prosperity. But they just don't know how to

handle it.

They don't know what to do with it. They don't have a frame of reference to even fit this into their world view. So they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying, this is kind of a conundrum here, because it says they told him all that had happened to them, but they didn't tell all that had happened because they didn't include the conversation where Reuben said, didn't I tell you not to harm the boy? So this is their version.

The man who is lord of the land spoke roughly to us and took us for spies in the country. We said to him, we are honest men. We are not spies.

Not completely true. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. Now, you remember the accusation that they are spies.

What sort of a footing, why would this outlandish charge even be able to stick from the lips of Joseph? Well, how often do you have this large a group of men? One of the unique things about the family of Jacob and these brothers is they are all together. They are ultimately going to be the beginnings of the nation of Israel, but they are all brothers. They are united and they are a group and they obviously are very close.

You don't typically have these large clumps of people coming together. And so when Joseph says, I think you are spies, he is referring to the fact that here is this abnormally large group of men who come seemingly with a single purpose and from all the same place and that is not usual. They would usually send a caravan of servants.

These men are sort of princes in their own land. They are budding clan leaders and for them to come in person down to the land is unusual. And Joseph can make this charge stick because of their unity and because of their common purpose.

So they try to explain, we are honest men. We are not spies. Why is it that we have this unified front here? Why are we all together even though we are ranking men? Because we are all sons of the same father.

That is what binds us. Not a common interest in overthrowing your land. We are not a group of men who came down here to go back and take intelligence to the Assyrians or to some other ne'er-do-wells.

We are brothers, sons of our father. That is what unites us. One is no more and the youngest is with our father this day in the land of Canaan.

You notice they don't say he is dead. We say he is no more. He is not around.

About Joseph. Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, By this I will know that you are honest men. Leave one of your brothers here with me.

Take food for the famine of your households and be gone and bring your youngest brother to me so I shall know that you are not spies. If you really are brothers and not just a confederation of men to be spies, you will come back for your brother. Blood is thicker than water.

Blood is thicker than politics. If this is true and you are not spies, you will come back to me for your brother. If you are just trying to be spies, you will sacrifice this guy to escape with your skins, is the idea.

So this rationale sort of makes sense from the unknowing perspective, not knowing what Joseph is really up to. Leave one of your brothers here with me. Take food for the famine of your households and be gone and bring your youngest brother to me so I shall know that you are not spies but that you are honest men.

I will grant your brother to you and you may trade in the land. Did Joseph tell them that they would be able to trade in the land? This is kind of an embellishment. Joseph said, Bring him back and I won't kill you.

But they've kind of softened this up a little bit because the idea of killing any of the brothers is going to reduce the chances that Jacob will let Benjamin come. So they don't want to talk about anybody being killed. He just says you'll have the benefit of trading in the land.

Well, verse 35 is where we're going to have to pause and take our break. When we come back, we're going to move rapidly forward. I hope to get to the end of chapter 43.

We're going to see some amazing things in the thinking of Joseph in putting the brothers through this. But if there's one thing to remember from this lesson, what God does for us, He does for our good. If we have a pure heart, if we do not regard iniquity, no matter what may recall our sins of the past, it is God's grace.

It is a foreshadow of blessing and of good things to come. Let's pause and take our break.