

Transformation

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Preacher: Jonathan Gemmell

[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, please turn with me to Genesis chapter 43. That would be great. We're in the, I think it's the sixth installment in our Joseph series.

It's been great to take somebody we've known about since youth. We've heard, we've seen on the stage. We learn at Sunday school and to dig in and find out a bit more and see some new lessons. There's Joseph and the gospel of many colors. And this evening, we're in Genesis 43 and 44. Just a small 62 verses for us to get through.

Anna Levinson writes in a New York newspaper these words. By the time I was six and my brother was five, we were used to waiting.

Waiting for our father to show up. On one particular afternoon, we sat in a pool of sunlight that poured through our living room bay window.

[1 : 07] We were baking in our jackets ready to go while we waited. Would he be late? Would he come at all? What state would he be in?

What would he smell like? My parents had separated a year before. And when my father came to pick us up for occasional visits, his gait was often wobbly and his words were usually slurred.

My mother worked full time in an insurance company. Our nanny, therefore, would be left to handle these messy transfers. Sometimes she wouldn't let us go when she saw his condition.

Whilst waiting and worrying, on this occasion I made a decision. We're so stupid, I said. He's never going to come. Most days I would have been right.

But late, slurring but apologetic, he appeared. We piled into the taxi and drove to Tenderloin, a rough neighborhood across town from where we lived.

[2 : 08] On arrival, he gave us a quick tour of the cluttered apartment. There was a withered pot plant and an overflowing ashtray on a long, dirty coffee table.

A woman with long, stringy blonde hair entered the room and introduced herself as my father's girlfriend. Immediately, her bulging eyes and grubby fingers scared me.

I was used to meeting weird people when visiting my father, but she was by far the most manic. After a brief introduction, she and my father abruptly headed to the bedroom, leaving me and my brother on the couch all alone.

A few quiet moments passed before we heard yelling and objects smashing and then silence.

Consumed with fear but driven by curiosity, I crept to the door and knocked softly.

When no answer came, I peered through the crack under the door to see my father and girlfriend passed out on the bed with needles all over the floor.

[3 : 09] I ran to the door. I ran to the door. I ran to the phone to call my mother and begged her between sobs to come and pick us up. Although at that age of six, I couldn't then verbalize exactly what was happening, but I knew one thing.

I never wanted to see my father again. After that moment, my father disappeared from my life for 18 years.

Alana then writes about the ensuing years struggling with OCD, anxiety, depression, hypochondria and withdrawnness. The article then moves to when she is in her mid-twenties.

Her father reappears, clean of drugs and eager to make up for lost time. Yet Alana couldn't engage with him. She was absolutely unable to trust him or respond to any of his attempts to build bridges. She writes, my shattered trust couldn't be glued back together. The article ends after a long and painful process with the barrier slowly coming down after her dad passed literally hundreds and hundreds of trust tests.

[4 : 25] Alana writes, it was too risky to let him straight back into my life. We started with monthly phone calls that he had to make when we had agreed. Then letters that he had to write and they

must be delivered to me every Monday.

After this, we'd meet for coffee miles from his house. Then we'd move to lunches. I would always tell him when and where and if he was late or missed, it was over.

Trust is slowly built and quickly destroyed. I couldn't let him back into my life if he was going to ruin everything all over again.

Testing him, she writes, was the only way I could ever move to trusting him. Horrible story, isn't it, about a six-year-old?

Crushed and severely affected by her father's drug abuse. And to find out if he was clean, to find out whether he was worth investing in, she tests him in a number of ways.

[5 : 34] And Genesis 42, where we've come from, functions a bit like Alana's story. Joseph hasn't seen his brothers for 22 years. The last time they met, it didn't go very well.

He turned up to see how their shepherding was going on and they stripped him and they beat him and they threw him in a well before selling him to the Ishmaelites who carried him to Egypt. That's his last memory of his brothers.

Before they turn up in chapter 42. And as we saw with Paul Fred last week, Joseph sets about testing them. Testing them to see whether he's better off without them.

Testing them to see whether they've changed. Testing them to see whether he could ever trust them again after being so treated by them. And in chapter 42, he sets four tests.

The first one is this. Is Benjamin still alive? In verse 12. He asked them. And they say he is, but there's no evidence.

[6 : 36] So they fail the test. Then he asked for a volunteer to go and get them and no one volunteers. So they fail that test. And then he says for a volunteer to stay while the other nine go to get their brother.

And no one volunteers to stay. So he has Simeon bound before their eyes. Will someone come back for Simeon? Well, no.

Because he's still in Egypt. By the time we open chapter 43. Then he sets the money trap that they're on their way.

And they open their sacks. And all the money they paid to Joseph was still there. Would they go back? Or would they carry on on their journey? Well, they carry on on their journey. There's no about turn.

And we should go and sort this out. And then they tell him that we need to take Benjamin. Have they earned Jacob's trust? Well, no. Verse 36. He seems to blame them for absolutely everything.

[7 : 41] You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more. And Simeon is no more. And now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me. They don't trust him. And I guess implicit in the same episode is, does Benjamin trust them?

Well, we don't exactly see him jumping up and down saying, I'll go. So they fail that test as well. In fact, you have to say, in chapter 42, Joseph brothers are an epic fail.

And you kind of think Joseph is better off without them. They're still just a ragtag bag of swindlers and murderers and liars and deceivers who are all out for themselves.

They don't seem to have changed at all. Yet what we're going to see in our two chapters is how God is going to providentially work. How God is going to set tests and how things are going to be transformed so that there'll be restoration, reconciliation and a glorious reunion in chapter 45.

So why don't I pray? Father God, thank you that you always have your glory at the forefront of your agenda. Father, following closely after that is the blessing of your people and the ultimate transformation of them to look more and more like your son.

[9 : 02] So as we open this, your word, this evening, speak to us, we pray. Glorify our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Transform us and orientate our lives once again around your gospel.

Father, do this all by your grace through the power of your spirit. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So here's the first test we're going to see in this little passage.

God tests his people to free them from idolatry. God tests his people to free them from idolatry. As we enter chapter 43, the famine is still severe.

It's gone on a long time and they've run out of food. They've gone to the cupboard and it's been like old Mother Hubbard. There was nothing there. Simeon is still in Egypt.

He's been there since chapter 42, verse 24. And Egypt remains their only hope. The only place in all the world that has grain surplus enough that they can give out is Egypt.

[10:12] And so Jacob says, verse 2, go back and buy us a little more food. Go back and buy us a little more food.

Seems like a really obvious suggestion. Egypt has food. You need to go and get it because we've run out. And yet there's a problem. There's a real problem that Judah points out in verses 3 to 5. That if Egypt is their only hope, then Benjamin is the key to unlocking that hope. Benjamin, Jacob's prize son, the one that he spent at the end of chapter 42 saying, no one's getting hold of Benjamin. He's staying with me. And so Judah's reminder to his father of the fact that Benjamin is necessary to get food from Egypt, stabs Jacob in the heart.

Jacob is very protective of Benjamin. I don't think it's a stretch to say that in Jacob's life, Benjamin has become an idol.

[11:23] Benjamin has become the center of his life. Chapter 42, verse 28. Which is the wrong verse.

38. My son will not go down there with you. His brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.

Jacob loves Benjamin that much that he says, if he dies, I'll die. If he dies, I'll die. 43, verse 6.

Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother? Just want to keep him for myself. Without him, I'll die.

Judah's going to say in verse 44 that my father's life is bound up with this boy. Jacob's affections are completely tied up with Benjamin and he will not let him go.

[12:34] Tim Keller writes, when anything in life is an absolute requirement for your happiness, life, and self-worth, it is essentially an idol. Something you are actually worshipping.

When threatened, your anger is absolute. To diagnose what the idols in our lives are, we must ask, what am I defending?

What is so important that I cannot live without? Seems to be where Jacob finds himself. Growing up, we had a dachshund called Jaffa and Jaffa was the most placid dog you will ever find.

You'd let him out in the morning like you should do all dogs and if it was raining, Jaffa would go, well, don't really fancy it today. One time, every month, our dog would turn into a ferocious animal after a lamb Sunday lunch.

He'd throw the bone, Jaffa would sit on the lawn like gnawing at it like crazy and literally, if you got in within five meters of this dog, it would go for you in the most savage way.

[13:47] Jaffa became the most stupid looking guard dog anyone could ever imagine. That seems to be how Jacob is functioning.

If you come close to Benjamin, there's going to be problems. And so God is really testing Jacob to free him of his idolizing of his son.

Something profound happens in this text. Jacob starts by saying, no way. It's not going to happen. And then in verse 8 to 10, after Judah reasons with him and says, it's not just our lives that are at stake. It is your life and the lives of your children. You've got to let Benjamin go.

I'm even going to offer myself a surety for him. Jacob agrees with Judah's proposal. It is a remarkable transformation between chapter 42 and chapter 43.

[14:51] But Jacob says, yes, you can take him. In fact, there is a remarkable transformation going on in chapter 42. Jacob is repeatedly referred to by his name, Jacob.

When we get to chapter 43, the name that Jacob is referred by is Israel. Jacob's name means the twister, the self-reliant, the one who's always in it for himself.

Chapter 42 and chapter 43, the covenant name of God, the one who is struggling with what God's will is, struggling to trust him. And in chapter, in verse 14, he makes three profound professions of faith.

the beginning of the verse, and may God almighty grant you mercy. How is Jacob dealing with his idols?

Well, he's subscribing all power to God. Almighty God, the one who's in charge. Suddenly, when we see that God is almighty, our idols are minimized in size and they become futile and worthless.

[16:03] Where he's blaming God in chapter 42, why has God let this happen to me? Everything's against me. Here he's saying, almighty God, I place myself, I place everything into your hands.

He places his children into God's hands so that your brother will let your other brother Simeon and Benjamin come back to you.

And then he places himself in the hands of the sovereign God. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.

Suddenly, he's relinquished his idol. Suddenly, he's trusted himself to the sovereign God. And he said, my life is now bound up with God's will and what he wants.

Sounds remarkably, doesn't it? That last phrase, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved. Like Esther, when she goes before King Xerxes, when she says, I will go and see the king even though it is against the law and if I perish, I perish.

[17:10] Trusting a sovereign God with life and everything. If you want to catch a monkey in the jungle, all you need to do is put a banana in a cage. And the monkey reaches in, grabs the banana, but can't get its hand out.

It can't be free because it won't let go and the hand plus the banana won't fit through the bars in the cage. That seems to be where Jacob has been.

He's holding on to this idol and he can't be free. But God so tests him that he lets go in order that he would be free to enjoy all that God has for him.

Even more than he thought he had. It's not about preserving Benjamin, but God has something much greater in store. And so I guess we see that God tests us so that we let go of our idols so we'd be free to worship him.

So we'd be free to submit to his ways to fulfill his purposes and enjoy him forever. And I guess tonight we're all conscious that we're riddled with idols.

[18:20] Spurgeon will write that the human heart is the idol factory. Riddled with idolizing children and work and power and money and reputation and stuff and image and countless other things.

Jacob didn't think he could let Benjamin go but God tested him to release him from his idolatry. Centuries later Jesus will stand and say whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.

Oh that God would test us in such a way that we would stop worshipping futile created things that we might be free to worship him alone.

God tests his people to free them from idols. We see that in the life of Jacob. So what idols are we cleaved to? What in our life is so essential that we think we cannot do without it?

And if it's threatened our anger is disproportionate. Many great saints have testified to the truth it is only when Jesus is all that they have they realise that Jesus is all that they need and that God would loosen our grip so we could cling to his son alone.

[19:40] So they get to Egypt and here's what I think we learn from this God tests his people to free us from fear and reveal his grace. They finally arrive the eleven of their well the ten of them when Simeon is already there they make it down to Egypt and I think the whole thing revolves around verse 16 when Joseph saw Benjamin with them he said to the steward of the house take these men to my house slaughter an animal and prepare a meal they are to eat with me at noon I think I'm sure that Joseph says to the steward of the house in Egyptian that he knows what's going on but the brothers don't have a clue and that's why they're so afraid that is why they're terrified because they're being ushered into Joseph's private quarters and don't know what is going to happen to them but it's stupid because Joseph is the second most powerful man in all of Egypt and therefore the world Joseph doesn't need to attack his brothers in secret he can do it out in the open because he is untouchable the brothers are frightened the steward comes in and verses 19 to 22 is them pleading frantically their innocence you can imagine the scene they're all talking over one another oh we just found the silver we tried to pay you somehow it got back into our sacks please don't kill us all making a real kerfuffle then verse 23 the pagan servant testifies to

God's grace he says we did get your silver your God the father your God the God of your father has given us has given you treasure in your sacks then he brought Simeon out they thought they were going to get knocked off and the servant says no your God is gracious he's rewarded you don't be afraid your God is sovereign and actually here's your brother unbound fear always makes us suspicious and cynical and doubting our fears always make us think that the absolute worst case scenario is going to happen and our fears get in the way of trusting a sovereign God that actually the way that we cope with fear is doctrine that when we see that God is gracious and he's good when we see that he's sovereign we realise we have no need to be afraid because our

God is unstoppable and we can trust him in every area of our lives so when you have a freak out get your Bible out verse 26 and 28 Joseph is reminded of God's sovereignty here are the brothers bowing down again before him just like the dream of the wheat and the stars and then he sees

Benjamin and suddenly his fears are subsided they were telling the truth Benjamin is alive and his full brother the only other son born of Rachel Jacob's favourite wife is born in and it's too much for Joseph deeply moved he has to go out of the room to have a good cry I wonder what in your life makes you afraid and I wonder is the way you can conquer that fear knowing more about God trusting the God that is revealed in this book don't we read in 1 Corinthians 15 that even God is sovereign and gracious and that grace is bigger than death he writes death has been swallowed up in victory where oh death is your victory where oh death is your sting sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but thanks be to God he gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ surely if God's grace is bigger even than death then fear becomes futile if you were here on Thursday you'd have heard Alexander read Psalm 23 and what a beautiful reminder even though I walk through the shadow of death you're with me it gets even better than that you lay a banquet before all my enemies in the midst of my enemies well the brothers go down to Egypt they think they're going to be treated as enemies God is gracious to them and to top it all off Joseph lays on a banquet before them I wonder will we trust a sovereign gracious God in every area of our life so we will not be fearful and we remember what he's like will we trust him in our everyday lives will we trust him with tomorrow will we trust him in every area will we trust him as a church will we trust him in our evangelism is grace going to be sufficient to quell our fears and so God tests these brothers that they might be transformed that fear might be replaced by trust and they see that God is sovereign over it all and is treating them far better than they deserve okay third point here we go God tests his people to free them from individualism and bind them together do you see it's a sting operation that it's not just the silver that's replaced again but there's this cup that has special significance in

[25 : 42] Joseph's life and Joseph knows that Benjamin is still alive but he doesn't know that his brothers love Benjamin they're worried that they kind of treat him like they used to treat Joseph and when they're away when Benjamin's finally been prized away from their father will they take this opportunity to kill him again he's already partially tested them in chapter 43 verse 34 when Benjamin gets five times the helping will there be jealousy and rivalry then well it doesn't seem to be everyone's feasting and drinking together and there doesn't seem to be a hint but then dogs don't turn on each other when there's enough food to go around crisis will reveal what's really going on are they in it together are they a family unit united or will they go it alone well the brothers wake up in the morning they've had a cracking night in the prime minister's house I'm sure they've got sore heads and they've still got full bellies they've partied like

Egyptians they ride along chatting together and then you know like when you see the blue flashing lights in your mirror they see the dust of a chariot coming up behind not some random stop and search this is a sting operation the servant repeats Joseph's words to them why have you repaid good with evil isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination this is a wicked thing you've done and again they plead their innocence in verses seven to nine if any of your servants they say is found to have it he will die and the rest of it will become my lord's slaves that sounds pretty together but verse 10 he offers them a get out clause 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 they've got an opportunity they can go it alone they can cut and run and so they're lined up in age order go to Reuben first clean keep going keep going and I bet with every clear sack that doesn't have the cup Benjamin gets more and more sure that he's going to be fine they get to Benjamin sack and he's got the cup and everyone tears their clothes the absolute worst case scenario has happened that perhaps Benjamin won't get back to Jacob after all but isn't it incredible that they stick together as a family at this they tore their clothes then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city there seems to have been a radical transformation they left Simeon in the city no problem Benjamin's caught their roar going back you see how God is testing them and through these tests he's freeing them of it's all about me and they become this family unit bound together this testing strengthens the ropes of fellowship between the brothers and don't we know that in our own lives that when tough times come doesn't it bind us together some of my proudest moments of being pastor of

Brunfield evangelical church has been when all our backs are against the wall because we see just how tightly knitted we are together as a family that no testing is very good when you go through it and yet doesn't it strengthen those ropes doesn't it bind us together as a family all together doesn't it make us into a true spiritual family and not just people who rub shoulders Christ 1

Corinthians 12 but God so composed the body that there may be no division but that all the members have the same care for one another if one member suffers all suffer together if one member is honoured all rejoice together crisis comes and it binds people together and yet don't we know sometimes when crisis hits we're secretly quite pleased when others are brought low I'm quite disappointed when someone is lifted up it cannot be so

God tests us to knit us together God is for us he tests us to free us from individualism and to bind us together as his family lastly God tests his people to free them from lostness and reveal his true leader I think we've seen throughout the Joseph story so far that the brothers are a bit of a rabble they seem a bit rudderless they don't really have anyone who's telling them what to do when Joseph says would somebody volunteer to go no one volunteers when somebody says will someone stay behind no one stays behind they're a bit leaderless they don't really have a captain telling them what to do but in chapter 43 a leader emerges they're like sheep without a shepherd and in chapter 43

Judah comes forward he's the fourth born son and yet we see him emerge as the one that Jacob listens to Joseph listens to we saw in chapter 42 Reuben says give Benjamin to me and if he's dead you can kill my two sons Judah says in chapter 43 if Benjamin doesn't come back to you then it's my life that will be ashamed before you all the days of my life Judah's been growing in repentance and transformation ever since that really grisly episode in chapter 38 where he gets Tamar pregnant and he makes this confession she is more righteous than I a confession of sin and since that confession since that repentance Judah's life has been changing over the last two decades and here we see him emerge as the leader he takes the blame he says our guilt has been revealed and then he steps forward towards

[32 : 44] Joseph verse 18 then Judah went up to him and said if you approach Joseph who's the prime minister uninvited that's your life on the line and yet he stands before him he takes the blame he recaps the entire history verse 33 is the most significant verse so far 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 this is the first case in any part of scripture in the whole unfolding of Genesis so far where somebody offers their life for somebody else you see Judah emerge as a leader and then we see that he offers himself as a substitute you have to say that Judah is behaving more and more like the lion of

Judah who would come a long way down the line brothers were rudeless he appears as the shepherd for the sheep of his brothers and we see him offer his life for Benjamin Judah becomes the substitute shepherd shepherd John 10 verse 14 I am the good shepherd I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep seems that there's a shadow and a type of a greater one to come emerging in the life of Judah it's been a bit of a whistle stop tour I hope that God takes what is for us and keep it and sear it on our hearts God tests his people to free them from idols see that in the interplay between Jacob and Benjamin God tests his people to free them from fear and reveal his grace

God tests his people to free them from individualism and bind them together God tests his people to free them from lostness and reveal his true leader let me pray father god we've romped through your word of breakneck speed father we've left a lot out but lord i pray these four lessons might encourage us that as we face the test that you put in our way father they might relinquish the grip the idols have on us father that we might trust you when we're afraid of what's coming against us knowing that you're sovereign and you're good all the time father that we wouldn't go in alone but it would strengthen us as a family as problems come as storms erupt that it might strengthen the ropes of fellowship between us and lord that it might make all the more us trust your son the good shepherd father thank you that we see it in a type as judah emerges as a leader amongst his brothers lord thank you that jesus is our leader who offers himself for us who takes our place that we might go free that we might know forgiveness that we might not be slaves anymore father father thank you that the one who knew no sin became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of

God father bless these things to us we pray in jesus name amen