

Examination

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[0 : 00] Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to come back. It's been a while, I think, since I was at Brunfield, but it's great to be back here. I'm in college with Graham, so I see Graham quite a bit. That's okay on some days. I don't know what kind of mood Graham's in, you know, depending on how much coffee he's had on the way in in the morning.

The story of Joseph is, I think, in terms of the Old Testament ones, probably the one that had the biggest impact on me as a young Christian. I remember when I became a Christian when I was 17, and I was probably quite a confused Christian. I remember my stepmom giving me a copy of R.T. Kendall's book, *God Meant It For Good*, and she said to me, go away and read that. And she says, I think that that might solve some of your difficulties. And it certainly did, because I had lots of doubts about how God could deal with difficult situations and turn them around. I think sometimes the story of Joseph is helpful, just as you actually try to live as a human being on the planet. And to be honest with you, there's so much within it. And it's a helpful story. And also, you see Jesus almost on every page. It really points forward to Jesus as a Savior, a Messiah story coming out of the Joseph story, which is tremendous. But I thought that this evening, really, by way of introduction, rather than telling you about how much impact it had on me, I want to introduce you to a guy called Jim. My years prior to working and coming to work as a pastor were spent working for Bethany Christian Trust. I worked for 14 and a half years for Bethany Christian Trust, particularly working with addicts, those recovering from drug, alcohol, gambling problems. And as you can imagine, with that kind of lifestyle comes convictions. So probably about 85 to 90% of the guys I worked with were convicts or were ex-convicts or were waiting on a conviction case.

Jim's case, though, was something slightly different. One night, he and I were chatting, and it was late at night, and he confessed to me that he had committed a crime. And it was one that he'd never been caught for. It was one that he felt extremely guilty about. It would cause him sleepless nights. And often when the police would arrive at the hostel door, which happened quite a bit when you're working with 17 guys who have charges waiting, he would wonder if this was his time up.

Is this when I'm going to be found out? In fact, it wasn't uncommon to see guys jumping out their bedroom windows and diving out the back door, even if they hadn't done anything wrong. The feeling of guilt, often, I don't think it's just the criminal fraternity, to be honest. I don't know about you, but even when I'm driving down the road and I see a police car and I know I'm doing the right speed, there's that instant look down and going, am I guilty? But for Jim, that feeling was real, he had committed a crime and one that would have put him in prison, or should have put him in prison. And often he and I would discuss, you know, what would it be like if he was to be found out?

[3 : 16] Maybe it would be better for him to go and confess. Maybe that would at least remove the constant feeling of having to look over his shoulder every time he stepped out the front door.

Would it be better if he felt like he could pay for this crime that he committed? I'm not going to tell you the ending of the story. Jim's no longer with us.

But it had a big impact on me watching somebody in the middle of that kind of guilt, wondering if the next knock on the door was going to be the one that would bring his whole world tumbling around about him. The passage that Alistair read so well to us, thank you Alistair for reading that, it was a long passage, you did well with that. I'm glad I didn't have to do it.

Joseph's brothers have lived in a similar position to my friend Jim. It's probably about 22 years, at best estimates, it's probably about 22 years since they've sold Joseph, since he's gone to Egypt. So that's 22 years since they've committed a crime that they've never been caught for. A crime that only they know about.

[4 : 30] A crime that I think they feel guilty about. And as Alistair read that passage, you'll have seen this whole web of lies starts to fall down.

The title you gave me for the sermon was An Examination. And boy, oh boy, are the brothers about to get a tough examination about their life. They're about to be exposed, or the beginning of their exposure for their wrongdoing is starting in Genesis chapter 42.

So I thought that we might look through this passage and look at the five family meetings that go on. I don't know if you come from a family where you have family meetings. Our family, they were always really short. Whatever my dad said went.

So that was the way it was. But the first family meeting is one of crisis, isn't it? And I think it's probably hard for us to, today in this country, that some I'm sure maybe experience hunger, but it's not a countrywide famine that we're living in.

In this situation, they are facing a huge famine. A huge famine. In fact, the final verse of chapter 41, what we read, it says that the famine is severe in all the world.

[5 : 55] In all the world. So this family meeting is convened. They are in crisis point. And if you're in crisis point and there's a severe famine, it's not a surprise, I suppose, that word reaches Jacob that in Egypt there is an answer.

There is an answer to his problems. There's an answer to the famine. But, but, although he is unaware, there is also an answer to Jacob's grief.

That will come in a few chapters' time. But there's lots of answers in Egypt that are about to be unfolded over the course of the next few chapters that you'll look at. It says that Jacob had decided, in chapter 37 of Genesis, to take his mourning to the grave.

And actually, if you look at the impact in Jacob's life of his relationship with God, it is severely impacted. If you look at Jacob as a young man, getting these visions, wrestling, amazing things happening to him.

And then you look at Jacob now, and we'll look at him a little bit towards the end of the chapter this evening. Because he has made a decision to not leave his grieving behind, to not get on with his life, to live in the middle of the problem, his relationship with God has been drastically, drastically affected.

[7 : 27] And he isn't aware that over the next few chapters, there is going to be an amazing reunion, of course, that's going to happen.

The brothers, though, they're not so in the dark, are they? They have this history. They're aware that they've sold Joseph.

They've sold him to the Ishmaelite traders, who are on the way to trade there, when they decided to palm Joseph off. That is going to cause some apprehension about going to Egypt.

If you know that what you have done is betrayed your own flesh and blood. And so I would think that if you picture the horror on the brothers' faces, as Jacob calls this family meeting together, and he informs them that, listen guys, we are in crisis point.

The famine is severe in all the world. We're in big trouble here. We aren't going to last out. We don't have enough provision of ourselves that we can kind of sit tight and make it through.

[8 : 43] The answer to our problems lies in Egypt, boys. There's grain there. And I think that Jacob's question in the very first verse that we read is really one that we can highlight this evening.

It's a really insightful thing. Because I actually think that Jacob's suspicions are aroused. I wonder if he's always had some suspicion about the brothers. And he says this, why do you keep looking at each other?

Here we are in the middle of a famine. We've not got enough food. We've not got enough food. We've not got enough seed to grow things with. We're just not going to make it. I've told you what we need to do.

And then in the middle of this family meeting, there's just silence as the brothers kind of cast, shifting glances at one another. You know, that knowing look when you hold a secret in a group of friends that somebody doesn't know about.

Were Jacob's suspicions aroused? Why do you keep looking at each other? I mean, after all, we know, we know that in previous chapters, we're told about the suspect character of these boys.

[10 : 07] Chapter 38 goes through the suspect character of one of them in particular. These guys are no good guys. I'm sure Jacob as a father must have looked at them and thought, I wonder, I just wonder what really went on between them and Joseph.

He knew they didn't like him. But we know the story from the beginning to the end. Jacob's in the middle of it here.

We know what's really going on. We know why they're looking at each other. The past has now got a potential to catch up with these boys. They know that they've sold Joseph as a slave.

They know that it's most likely that he is in Egypt, that he's ended up there. And therefore, they now risk exposure. As they travel into Egypt, and as they stare into the face of every Egyptian slave, they'll be wondering and asking the question, is that Joseph?

Is that Joseph's face staring back at us? And that's why, that's why, they're looking at each other. unspoken words between them.

[11 : 24] Perhaps a terror, as they realize now the severity of their situation, leaves them with little choice but to head down to Egypt and to face their fears.

And I actually think also that they're hoping as they look from one another that one of them might just be able to come up with a plan that means they don't have to go there. each knowing the weight of guilt that the other one bears.

Only they understand each other's plight. They don't know though, do they, that this is all God ordained. This family meeting here, this point we get to in the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis, is God ordained.

God has ordained the famine for a purpose. He's going to use this famine not just to save the lives of many as Joseph will say in a later chapter, but he's also ordained this family to reunite the broken relationships, to give the offer of forgiveness and true repentance that these brothers really need. That is going to come later. But for now, they must endure the ordeal of a 250 to 300 mile journey to Egypt to have any possible chance of experiencing salvation.

[12 : 45] because God has left them with no choice but to go. God has left them with no choice but to go.

And I do think that that is one of the first challenges for us this evening. those moments where you wonder why calamity has happened, why tragedy has happened, why you're going through tough time, why you're suffering.

And we all ask these questions and we accuse God and we say, how could you let this happen? Why are you doing this to me? Perhaps you might say something like, I've served you and I've done this and I'm following you here and yet you let this happen.

Of course, we know the brothers can't say that because they're of suspect character. But who in this room tonight doesn't have suspect character about them? Doesn't have little things that you wouldn't want other people to find out about?

What choice do you have in those moments of suffering that are, whether we like it or not, God-ordained?

[14 : 03] I'm not saying I understand why that is the case. I'm not saying I understand why the people of Nepal are suffering the way they are. I don't think we'll ever understand that.

But to say that God has been caught by surprise by those things that have happened is to doubt His sovereignty. To doubt His sovereignty is to say that God isn't big enough. To say that God isn't big enough opens a whole lot more problems for you.

Is His salvation enough? Is that complete enough? God is sovereign. God ordains that suffering will come. Do we understand why? No. But when we read stories like this, we begin to see that we can trust God to be in control no matter how tough the situation brings.

It's tough. The Christian life is tough. I was preaching from Philippians 3 this morning where Paul basically just says that.

I expect that the suffering of a Christian life is just a given. It's going to happen. In fact, Paul says, I invite it because that way I get to experience and empathize with Christ in some way.

[15 : 26] God has ordained this famine for a purpose. This famine isn't about punishment of the brothers because it's worldwide, remember.

It's not just their sin that he's been talking about. It's not just their sin that he's been talking about here. This famine will bring about an amazing reconciliation between Joseph and his family.

And so it can often be in our lives that those things that we go through, I think we should often ask the question, how can I be reconciled to Jesus through this circumstance, the author, the perfecter of my faith, when I'm going through a tough time?

What are the things I think about Jesus? What are the things I say about him in these moments? I believe these times are often sent to reconcile us to God.

So that's the first bit. The family meeting part one is done. The family meeting part one is done and we're going to come to our next part in there.

[16:34] Family meeting part two. The reunion. The reunion. The brothers, they embark on this arduous journey unsure of what's going to meet them at the end.

Not only do they fear who they might meet, but they've also got the fear of being foreigners in a strange land where they might not be wanted. And it's not long into this scene as Alistair read through this chapter with us that we look in on the scene of their sternest test where the real examination begins.

Of course for them it's a family meeting that they're actually unaware of. And the first thing that happens in this is that Joseph's dream is fulfilled.

The dream that had caused all the problems in the first place. And as the brothers arrive at Joseph though they don't know who it is, they bow down and they worship him.

Just as Joseph predicted would happen. But it is a tough meeting. If the brothers have aroused suspicion of Jacob back home, they've now aroused the suspicions of the man they needed the most in this whole process.

[18:00] And I think there's two things that we have to actually consider as we look through this next section. Firstly, we have to look at the motivation of Joseph's words. And then we have to think about how the brothers respond as they experience what Joseph has experienced for parts of his 22 years in Egypt.

So let's first look at Joseph's motives. Joseph isn't willing to reveal himself yet to his brothers. And so he speaks harshly to them it says from verses 7 through to 21 we see this fascinating encounter within this family meeting.

And the question you first ask is well is Joseph out for revenge here? Is he out for revenge on his brothers with a false accusation and an imprisonment?

Is this finally the moment that he has waited 22 years for? I don't think this theory is plausible though when you consider later chapters in Genesis like Genesis 45 and Genesis 50 where Joseph when he is reunited reassures his brothers that he's witnessed God's hand in all that's happened despite the consequence of their sin despite the circumstances that he had to live through because of it.

And in actual fact in the same way that the brothers are being examined here in this chapter so too is Joseph. Joseph he is under huge examination here.

[19:39] Who could blame him if he used the power that he now has to bring about revenge? I mean you've all had it haven't you? Where somebody has noised you up and you're thinking how am I going to get back at that person?

Okay well I'll admit I have okay maybe you haven't but I have I have I have often felt revengeful thoughts in my heart over people who I perceive have wronged me.

And if given an opportunity where I may have had power in this situation I cannot tell you what I would have done would have been godly. Abraham Lincoln says this he says nearly all men can stand adversity but if you want to test a man's character give him power.

And I think that's really true. That is so true. If you have opportunities to have power over somebody very often the human will that comes out is one to dominate somebody.

And you know what I think about when I was reading this story here as Joseph does something different is that of Jesus when he has power over Judah on the night of the last supper he knows who's going to betray him and it says that Jesus has power over everything it says that God has given him power over everything and in humility Jesus kneels down and washes his betrayer's feet.

[21:10] If you want to test a man's character give him power and Jesus' example in this situation is one that we must look to to be humble in that moment and say Lord I need you to help me here I need your wisdom in this situation because humanly speaking I want to do that person in I want to do them harm these Old Testament stories are great but Jesus' example is the best there that's real humility it's guaranteed that there was nothing of humanity in Jesus' response in that way Joseph there might have been he's human he's got feelings but in Jesus we have our perfect example of a situation where you may have power over somebody Joseph has power but Joseph has experienced God's blessing in his adversity he's come from the arrogant young dreamer to a man with integrity a man of wisdom of God and so he passes his examination because he recognizes that what God is doing through him is for his brothers it's for this reunion that's going to come because Joseph could have revealed himself to his brothers straight away couldn't he

Matthew Henry suggests in his commentary that given Joseph's status now in Egypt he must have had plenty of money he must have had access to horses and chariots we know that the brothers have made a 250 to 300 mile journey themselves that would have been nothing for a man in Joseph's position he could have trotted off to Canaan at any point and revealed himself to his brothers it's speculation I know to say that we know that he saw God's hand in it but God ordains this meeting to happen and not for Joseph to run off and make himself known and again it's interesting when you look through the life of Joseph you remember when he interprets one of the dreams he says remember me today when you come into Pharaoh's household it's that thing that Joseph constantly wanted to run on ahead and yet here you see something different Joseph is older and wiser and has recognised that it's God's timing and not his own that's important Joseph hasn't revealed himself because he has to see them come to true repentance and in some ways they have to experience perhaps a little bit of what Joseph experienced this is what Keith Krell the associate pastor of biblical exposition and Moody Institute says about what they experienced over verses 7 to 21 and Joseph's treatment of them this is what he says I would also suggest that Joseph repeats with his brothers the exact scene that has happened to him 22 years earlier in chapter 37 verse 2 Joseph brought his father a bad report about his brothers in 37 14 to 17 Jacob sent Joseph on a mission to find out where his brothers were and what they were doing when Joseph finds his brothers they're upset because no doubt they think he's spying on them for a second time reading between the lines it's likely that Joseph's brothers accused him of being both a spy and an ark now in an unusual turn of events Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies no doubt

Joseph would have protested that he wasn't spying just as they now protest they would have answered him roughly and without any basis for their accusation just as Joseph now answers them they threw him into a pit just as Joseph now throws them into a dungeon the parallels between their treatment of Joseph and the treatment they're now receiving is a powerful stimulant to their sleeping consciences Joseph is doing all of this in the hope that his brothers will wake up to the nature of the actions he is hoping this treatment will make them come clean so the brothers at the end of this first family meeting with Joseph they're banged up for want of a better word and their examination will continue further in the confinements of a prison cell left to reflect that perhaps their actions of the past have finally caught up with them of course

Joseph has also revealed an ulterior motive here in his request that the only way they can prove their innocence is to bring back the younger brother by the treatment of both Benjamin and ultimately of Jacob Joseph will be able to discern here if there has been a spiritual change in the brothers since they last met and so they're in prison for three days and at the end of these three days we've got the next part of our family meeting family meeting part three the solution Joseph opens this meeting with an extraordinary declaration he has explained what they must do now he wants to give them something more specific but before he does that he informs them that he fears God he fears God it's the first explicit mention of

[26 : 58] God in this chapter and I think that we can surmise that Joseph given his wisdom is probably aware that God is now working out his bigger plan and Joseph wants his brothers to be aware I think firstly that his actions aren't just of his own thinking it's not just some random Egyptian ruler here that's decided this is what's going to happen to these boys listen guys he says I fear God I fear your God and it's that that brings about a realization in the brothers their actions have caused or have led to the situation they now find themselves in they are now facing the crisis in life because of what they've done to Joseph and the full open and honest confession begins you remember this guy some of you as well some of you as look old enough to remember

Columbo I didn't have a TV growing up and we would get crammed in the family car on a Friday night to go to my uncle and aunties and watch a bit of Columbo so Columbo was a favourite in our house Columbo had this incredible way about him of just asking one more question to the point of real frustration with the criminal before all of a sudden those who you thought had got away with it would open up with a full on confession of how they did it where they did it what they did it with and yes just bang me up and take me away to jail now in my dealings my 14 years of dealing with the criminal fraternity I never once really had anybody in the prison cell confessing in that way but Columbo could do it and there's the answer maybe they needed to watch more more cop shows with Columbo in it the brothers though are met with this full on force of God Joseph I fear God and that's why I've made these decisions and that's why I'm asking you to use this as your solution to

the problem to confirm that you are not spies sent to see where our land is vulnerable but within that fear of

God brings hope it's a chance of hope for the brothers Joseph's confession that he fears God will allow them to see that perhaps there will be an opportunity of compassion here there will be an opportunity for grace if God's character is one that they believe Joseph is the Egyptian if one that the Egyptian Joseph is aware of yes their past has caught up with them finally but the mention of God is what they need to hear that though they've tried to hide their actions from human perception God God has been aware of it all along and they have lived for 22 years trying to hide it which sin do you fear being found out for because we are not unlike the brothers here simply living as I've already said brings about guilt it will friendships betrayed perhaps that gossiping word you uttered that you pray the person will never hear about maybe that fiddling of the expenses account that you hope will remain unnoticed but what the story of Joseph shows us is and the story of his brothers in a sense because this is really the story of Joseph's brothers here it's their examination here it shows us that God sees and knows everything and that from human perspectives we may think that we've got away with it and we might well get away with the sin for many years maybe until the day we face God on judgment that is the reality that might happen but as the brothers remind us here we will have to make an account on judgment day for the way that we've lived in front of a God who has seen it all who has known it all are there dark places in your life that you're holding unconfessed sin in and what is that doing to you on a daily basis as you try to live for Jesus Christ confession of sin doesn't just happen at conversion or shouldn't just happen at conversion and yet for a lot of Christians that is the way it works are you wondering why you're not connecting with Christ are you wondering why there's this constant weight on your shoulders what is that sin that you really worry about the person sitting next to you tonight finding out about the one that you know is damaging the relationship you have with your work with your church family with your work colleagues with your wife with your husband with your kids

[32 : 36] I can imagine if you're anything like me sometimes there's dark thoughts that go through our mind and you wonder how on earth can that be sin doesn't make sense in the life of believers it doesn't apostle Paul says you're dead to sin so why do you end up doing the things that we don't want to do I would say it's better to keep short accounts finding that someone you can trust in your church family that you know you can go to and talk about this sin with and you know the reality of the situation is unconfessed sin if it remains that way if you're not a believer tonight and you have unconfessed sin when you stand before God in judgment that unconfessed sin well it will take you to hell as a

Christian you'll stand before God with unconfessed sin and you'll have nothing to make an account of yourself for in that way there is hope there is hope that if we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness what a great verse that is it's a promise that we have an offer and perhaps it's something that we'd be better taking up now sooner rather than later family meeting part four I've not got long to go Joseph sends them on the way but he initiates the next part of God's plan he sends them for what they came for but he sends them back with a full refund of the cost and I think it's in this discovery that we finally have the brothers acknowledgement that God is at work that he is explicitly at work verse 28 it says that their hearts sank what is this that God has done to us yes there's been a jailhouse confession there's recognition that they've finally been found out the realisation fully that they are now answerable to God for this maybe Joseph's motivation was to see if his brothers could still be bought off with money as they had been with him but I suggest more appropriate it was an act of love he knew that they were going to have to return that they were going to have to buy more and I think he knew that given their dealings he would also have known that they would have felt and been fearful of accusation of theft whatever his motivation in this instance God uses elements of grace and fear to bring about a realisation of their guilt and what I was just saying a few moments ago that is a sign of the Lord's discipline in our lives that he often uses this combination of grace and fear remember reading a book by Jackie Chan not Jackie Chan I hope it wasn't Jackie Chan maybe does he write commentaries I don't know Francis Chan where he talks about you shouldn't be frightened about preaching about hell because it appears in scripture the reality is there that if you never come to know Christ hell is there elements of grace and fear well I think that's okay but there is grace in this situation and that's how God brings them to this situation it's a real picture here

Isaiah 55 come and buy without money without cost and Joseph sent them on the way saying listen you've got what you needed without money without cost because I know that you're going to come back to something even greater fear and grace should bring us to a place of repentance in our lives a place of dependence and accountability on God on the work of Jesus because that is the only way folks it's the only way that life can work the last family meeting back to the beginning the return to Jacob probably brought back men very different from the ones who had left perhaps more conscious of God than they'd ever been before Jacob on the other hand not so the story of the journey the discovery of the silver the confession that Simeon was left behind that Benjamin's release from

Jacob's apron strings is the only possibility of Simeon's freedom brought about a response from Jacob that was not godly and yet in my dealings with Christians and my conversations and perhaps my own experiences it's a response toward God that is not uncommon Jacob's first thing is to be faithless he blames you have deprived me his next response is one to be pessimistic everything is against me his next response is to be fearful fearful that his son will be harmed and that question again is do you recognize any of these things that when you're met with a solution and response to what's going on in your life and God says do it my way and you say you've done all this to me how on earth can I trust you now how can I have faith in you now

[38 : 49] God when I'm going through this difficulty maybe you're tempted this evening to respond in the way that Jacob did under the sternest of tests when your examination begins and as I said near the start perhaps God is ordained in fact not perhaps God ordains everything and this difficult time that you're going through do you need to come back to a place of repentance you'll see that in the upcoming weeks that unlike Jacob Joseph has come to know and trust that in adversity God will work out his purposes he's learned the beauty of being carried by God to allow God's plans to be outworked Jacob must and will come to learn this but at present he's so far from doing so and finally this evening I think we should consider more about Jesus in this situation

Peter Granger in his book Foundations for Faith has a really helpful suggestion for finishing the thoughts on this chapter he says we could look at the actions of Joseph in this chapter and ask the question is he judge or is he saviour is he judging the brothers or is he saving them and I think perhaps it's an element of both he must lead them to a place of considering their sin before he can grant them freedom from it and so it is with Jesus Jesus like Joseph suffered an injustice a crime against him but Jesus unlike Joseph the crime against him was the perfect crime a friend of mine at college recently described the murder of Jesus as the perfect murder and I remember sort of taking a step back going what do you mean by that but it was the perfect murder father forgive them they don't know what they're doing they don't know that in putting Christ on the cross salvation for the world is possible that's why it was the perfect murder and so judge or save you when we think about Jesus and Joseph

Joseph does judge his brothers to bring about true repentance to bring about God's plan for the eventual salvation of many it says Romans 2 16 tells us that God will judge us all one day through Jesus Jesus is the judge but then Hebrews 9 says just as people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many and he will appear a second time not to bear sin but to bring salvation for those who are waiting for him you see forgiveness is possible salvation is made possible for the people of Israel and the world as they come to Egypt through God's ordained life and Joseph's circumstances however God ordains the death of Christ to lead to the salvation of the world and then as we examine ourselves in light of this and ask ourselves that question do I need forgiveness of my sin like Joseph's brothers did the only conclusion we can come to is that we do because there is not one of you is perfect out here tonight not one of you is and you know that you would admit to that in private conversations and because you're not perfect you do not meet God's standard because God's standard is perfection that's why Jesus met his standard perfection perfection him who knew no sin died in our place and so as you answer yes to that question of needing forgiveness

I'll leave you again with that verse for some reason it's repeated twice but maybe that's not a bad thing if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness as you will see in the chapters coming this reunion between Joseph and his brothers is a glorious one but there's still got things that they need to work through but confession is the place where they begin let's pray father we do thank you for your word we thank you for all that it can teach us father we thank you that your word points to Jesus the author the perfecter of our

faith lord we praise you for Jesus this evening lord we praise you that because of Jesus we can be forgiven from our sin that we can be made righteous before you lord I pray for the rest of this evening whatever we've got planned this evening that we'll continue to think of you to think about your precious gift of salvation for us lord we thank you for being here with us this evening and I pray that lord anything that I have said that isn't of you lord you will deafen ears to that now but lord we thank you that your word will not return void in your precious name amen or for