

O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?**Genesis 43**

Intro: A very memorable movie for me is the 2000 film *O BROTHER WHERE ARE THOU*, which is a very loose adaptation of Homer's *ODYSSEY*. It is set in the American South during the depression and if you try to make much sense of it, you'll fail – just like the original *Odyssey*. Fortunately the humor in it is pretty good and not too ridiculous and the music is great.

The saga of Jacob and his sons is also an *Odyssey*, of sorts, and Joseph and his brothers were made for TV. They were fit for reality TV millennia before it came along – but unlike that modern phenomenon, it was truly real life instead of the contrived excuse for reality we have today. That's what I love about the Bible – it's not only our guide for faith and for living, but the people in it are real people, just like you and me, and we can learn from them.

In the last installment in our Lessons from Joseph series which was Genesis 42, we left all but one of the sons of Jacob in Egypt. Benjamin, Jacob's youngest son remained with him in Canaan because Jacob refused to let him go. The ten remaining sons traveled to Egypt to buy grain, from, unbeknownst to them, their brother Joseph who had now become the regent of Egypt. This was the same brother they had despised so much that they had sold him into slavery, and now he was second only to Pharaoh in power and authority. Some 20 – 25 years later, their odyssey had brought them into a situation where the tables had completely turned. They weren't thinking about where their brother was – they thought he was dead, but they certainly were saying *O BROTHER!!!* with great exasperation.

I want to stay in Chapter 42 for a little bit more and cover an issue that needs to be addressed. And it's this...

When the going gets rough, don't blame God.

- Let me read several verses and explain. Listen, *Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left. At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. "My silver has been returned," he said to his brothers. "Here it is in my sack." Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?"* Genesis 42:25-28 (NIV).
- Actually this is a pet peeve of mine. I marvel when people who rarely think of God, or at least, care very little what he thinks, instantly blame him when the going gets difficult. I'm judging these men harshly, I know. They probably had mellowed as they had gotten older. They also, no doubt, regretted very often their treachery toward their little brother. The magnitude of their action was very clear when they saw the despondency of their father. They had been very nearly murderers in their impulsive act and they probably wished they could have a do-over. But when they make the discovery of the silver in their bags of grain when they stop for the night, they wasted no time assigning blame to God.
- The truth is, God *was* orchestrating it, but not in the way they thought. The guilt we talked about last week is showing up again and they knew whatever consequences came along, they certainly deserved it. So, really, instead of asking, "*What is this that God has done to us?*", they more accurately should have asked, "*What is it we have we done, that God and this Egyptian have brought again the reminder of our despicable actions?*"
- Truthfully though, why is it always God's fault? Why is it God's fault when tragedy occurs? Why do we say ask, "Why God?" when we face the consequences of our own stupidity or carelessness? Could he prevent it? Of course he could, but he chooses not to because he has given us free will and also how would we ever learn from that? This is a fallen world and humanity is sleeping in the bed we have made. God is not a fiend who wickedly lowers his helpless victims into the flames, nor is he powerless to do nothing. He is a God of justice and mercy, and we will experience both and we get to choose which one. Let's not be so quick to blame God.
- Rant over – let's move into Chapter 43 to finish out this talk with some learnings that I've picked up in this chapter. Once again, since this is a rather long chapter, I'll reference just the verses I'm covering. And while I'm thinking about it. . . read Genesis 44 for next week.
- First, and in keeping with the idea of "When the going gets rough..."

When the going gets rough, manipulation and insensitivity are not helpful

- The subtitle for this series LESSONS FROM JOSEPH, is Dreams, Deceptions, Disasters, Detours, & Deliverance. And as I did all the way back in the first message, I added another “D-word” which fits this family perfectly – DYSFUNCTIONAL! Jacob, his wives, his sons and his daughters were the poster family for it and it is, once again, on full display here.
 - The first one is favoritism. From the time Jacob is introduced to us in Genesis 25 favoritism shows its ugly head and so it stands to reason that he would struggle with it too. Jacob participated in a practice that was as prevalent in the Old Testament as it was inadvisable – polygamy. He had two wives and numerous concubines. Does this mean it was okay? NOPE! Did it work out? Not at all. Jacob had one wife who was clearly his favorite and there was not end to his troubles because of it. Also the sons from that wife were also his favorite sons. Just because it is in the Bible is it okay to play favorites? NOPE! A huge contributor to this family’s issue was Jacob’s clear preference for his youngest two sons. In fact he lost a son over it. Did that excuse his sons’ despicable behavior? Of course not – but it didn’t help. His preference for Benjamin is obvious here in Chapter 43. Even with one son still in captivity in Egypt he is unwilling to risk his remaining favorite to win Simeon’s release and put food on the table. This is crazy and destructive. Even though none of us have two spouses and 12+ children, any semblance of this kind of family dynamic is terrible, Don’t play favorites.
 - Another dysfunction that is obvious in this family is the incredible lack of sensitivity the 10 older sons had toward Jacob. It’s an understatement to say they were cold when they ignored his cries as his Midianite owners dragged their despised younger brother away toward Egypt. But then their heartless cover story, accompanied with a torn and bloody coat was the icing on the cake. Now, they are similarly heartless to the protests of their elderly father when they suggest that Benjamin must go to Egypt with them. It shows, that mellowed with age or not, they were still pretty heartless. They needed a remedial course in brotherly love for sure.
- But Jacob had taught them well. These men were a product of the home they grew up in. And it shows in Jacob’s staunch refusal to allow his beloved son accompany them to Egypt. In fact he whines accusingly *“Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?”* Genesis 43:6. His thought is only for himself. And later when he relents allows them to take Benjamin he is extremely fatalistic when he says *Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.*” Genesis 43:13-14 – or as it says in another translation, *But if I must lose my children, so be it.* Genesis 43:14b (NLT). Jacob attempts to play their heart strings even as he legitimately grieves. Manipulation is not helpful.
- And finally

The story begins to unfold – A brother is found – kinda

- The men head to Egypt with the proper payment and the required brother Benjamin. Of course their paranoia is in full bloom but they are not connecting any dots that this is their ill-treated sibling Joseph who is the powerful Egyptian official. And they are further confused by the much kinder treatment they receive – including a wonderful meal.
- And they are schooled by Joseph’s Egyptian steward about their own God. God Almighty, to whom Jacob had prayed for mercy, was orchestrating redemption for them and they still didn’t know it.
- Meanwhile Joseph is going through a myriad emotions. As I pointed out last week, he was, no doubt, tempted to throw the book at his brothers, but in the end he took compassion. He was overjoyed to see his younger brother who has grown to adulthood in his absence, and his heart was bursting as he kept from revealing who he actually was. Made for TV? You bet. It was still O Brother, where art thou, well, actually, it was, O brother, you just wait and see what’s next.

Conclusion: Good things take time. And God’s things take time. He wants us to learn, and like Joseph’s brothers, sometimes we’re a little dense, so he is deliberate and careful. A lifetime of dysfunction is difficult to unlearn. Next week we will have a big reveal. A silver cup will be found in a bag of grain and the sons of

Jacob will find their hearts in their throat. And God's plan of deliverance will further unfold. TO BE CONTINUED. Amen.