

STUDY NUMBER SEVEN - Genesis 44:1-34

INTRODUCTION:

Job 23:1-5

Then Job replied, "Even today my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say.

Psalm 38:1-12

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows
have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon
me. Because of your wrath there is no health in
my body; my bones have no soundness because of
my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden
too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are
loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed
down and brought very low; all day long I go about
mourning. My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart.
All my longings lie open before you,
O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.
My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes.
My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds;
my neighbors stay far away.
Those who seek my life set their traps,
those who would harm me talk of my ruin;
all day long they plot deception.

Genesis 39:19, 20

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

James 1:2-5

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

How difficult are the circumstances that the men find themselves facing in this 44th chapter.

In our last study together, Jacob was willing to let Benjamin go down to the land of Egypt, as Joseph had stipulated so that they might get grain to sustain their starving families.

Upon arrival, Joseph made arrangements for them to have a meal with him at noon. At the meal, he gave each of them a portion, and then for Benjamin he gave five times as much as he had given the others.

If anyone had opened his mouth to say that this is just like home, Joseph would have known that their same feelings of resentment which they had for Joseph have now been transplanted to Benjamin.

They all were very quiet and subdued, and we left them at the table enjoying their feast.

v. 1 Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: "Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his sack.

After they have finished eating, Joseph gave some instructions to the steward.

These are probably the same instructions that he gave on their first journey as far as the grain and the silver in their sacks.

v. 2 Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain." And he did as Joseph said.

The steward organized getting eleven sacks of grain. He then took the men's silver that had been given and put that back in each of their sacks. He then took the silver cup of Joseph's and buried it in the grain in Benjamin's allotment.

Benjamin ended up with quite a bit of extra things in his sack because he not only had his silver returned but he also had a silver cup.

(Joseph: From Pit to Pinnacle by Charles R. Swindoll)

The cup was in the sack to test the men and see if they had begun to read God into daily life, even into misfortune or death. Joseph wanted to see if their vertical scope was clear. From Judah's mouth he heard the words he had wanted to hear. When Judah referred to their "iniquity," he was alluding to the days they had taken advantage of Joseph twenty years earlier.

v. 3 As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys.

All of the men must have been guests at the White House Condominiums for the night.

Wanting to get on the road early before it got hot, the men had made preparations to leave as the day dawned.

v. 4 They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil?'"

Joseph didn't let them get too far from the city when he turned to his steward and said, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, give them this message: "Why have you repaid good with evil?"

v. 5 Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done."

When the steward catches up with them, he is to accuse them of returning evil for good and also the fact that the cup of his master is missing, charging them with the fact that "this is a wicked thing you have done."

I do not believe that Joseph actually used the cup for divination but it is to cause these brothers not to suspect anything about Joseph not being a full-blooded Egyptian.

v. 6 When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them.

You can imagine how the brothers felt, leaving the city loaded with provision, all eleven of them together. It just seemed too good to be true. They must have had joyful, buoyant spirits over a night of good rest and some tender, loving care. And now they're on their way back northeast 250 miles to Hebron and to their starving families.

Their joy is short-lived, and their fear and anxiety returns when they see red flashing gumball machines in their rear-view mirrors. When the steward gets all eleven of them pulled over, he speaks the words that Joseph had commanded him to speak about the returning of evil for good and the taking of the cup.

v. 7 But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that!

First of all, they've got a question: "Why does my lord say such things? And then they've got a very strong affirming statement: "Far be it from your servants to do anything like that!" That is the farthest thing from our minds.

v. 8 We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?

They remind the steward of what had happened yesterday morning at the home of the ruler:

43:20-22

"Please, sir," they said, "we came down here the first time to buy food. But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver--the exact weight--in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks.

Because we did this honest thing in bringing the money down to you, the obvious question is, "Why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?"

v. 9 If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

It is probably Reuben who is talking here because he is famous for making the dramatic statements:

Genesis 42:37

Then Reuben said to his father, "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care and I will bring him back."

v. 10 "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."

Here the steward makes an alternate statement. He is aware of the test that Joseph has in mind. "Whoever is found to have it will become my slave." If they have hatred toward Benjamin and resentment toward their father because of his privileged place in the family, they will leave Benjamin and let him become a slave,

and the rest of them will selfishly go on back to Hebron to care for the needs of their families just like they did 22 years ago when they sold Joseph into Egypt and then went back to their old father with the story of the bloody coat.

v. 11 Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it.

I am sure that each of them was shocked again to see the two pouches of silver that were in the top of each of their sacks.

v. 12 Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

I am sure the steward was told how to search.

Just like they were sitting at the table according to age, so now the search proceeds according to age. The steward starts with Reuben's sack and finds nothing. He then turns to Simeon's sack, and there's nothing there. Since Simeon has been away from home for quite a long time, I am sure he breathes a sigh of relief that he is not guilty.

The steward then searches the sack of Levi and then turns to Judah and finds nothing in his sack either.

The steward is going through the grain like you'd go through a box of Cracker Jacks looking for the prize. Next it's time to take a look at the sacks of Dan and Naphtali, and there is nothing in their sacks. Next, it's the sacks of Gad and Asher, and they too are clean.

Now that there are only three sacks left, I am sure the rest of the fellows are already loading up to resume their journey. The steward looks into the sacks of Issachar and Zebulun and finds nothing there as well.

Now everybody breathes a sigh of relief because Benjamin has had such royal treatment, he certainly would not be guilty of taking the cup.

Our text tells us, "And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack."

I am sure there is shock written all over the face of Benjamin and also a horrible fear because now he is in the position of a criminal and the possibility of execution is very real, even though the steward had said, "Whoever is found to have it will become my slave."

Benjamin is totally mystified by these happenings because he knows deep in his heart he had nothing to do with it.

It would be so normal for the brothers to whisper to Benjamin, "Why did you do it? Why did you think you could get away with it? Why? Why? Why? When the ruler has been so good to you?" And you can just hear Benjamin's painful response, "But I didn't! I didn't! I didn't take it, I promise you! I am totally innocent. I don't know how this cup has gotten into my sack."

Isaiah 53:7

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

Matt. 27:12-14

When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked Him, "Don't you hear how many things they are accusing you of? But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor.

James 1:19

This you know, my beloved brethren, but let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Benjamin could have put on a real scene here and gotten very angry and upset. But there is no record of this in the text whatsoever.

Beth Jameson in her book *Hold Me Tight*, speaking of her response to her young daughter's leukemia, said,

Fact and truth overtake my refusal to believe. Grief and helpless fear become uninvited residents in my soul. They are to be tenants coming and going at will. But no matter how long their absence, I know they will return. The lease is long-term and binding.

(*Rx for Addiction* by W. Robert Gehring, M.D.)

Sitting in that cell, I had plenty of time for reflection. I still couldn't believe the terrible things that were happening to me. Now I was a junkie doctor incarcerated on a morals charge. I felt like the principle character in somebody else's bad dream. Where was the strong farm boy who ran through plowed fields to condition himself for football? Where was that determined student who studied hard to get his doctorate in medicine? Where was that sensitive intern who cried over his patients? That same man couldn't be sitting in a jail in Atlanta, Georgia?

(*When the Ceiling is Zero* by Robert D. Foster)

"The righteous shall move onward and forward; those with pure hearts shall become stronger and stronger." (Job 17:9 Living Bible)

Welcome trials and troubles as friends. Do not resist them as enemies to your cozy and snug way of life.

The reason for this uncommon philosophy is found in the Holy Scriptures: "We also exult in our tribulations; knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance" (Romans 5:3, NASB).

Another word for perseverance is fortitude--the end result of pressure. The pressure of finances, difficult circumstances, sorrow and heartache, unpopularity and loneliness tend to press you out of shape. These pressures can produce a spirit that does not just passively endure, but actively overcomes and conquers.

Fortitude--the God-given ability to face the storms of life head-on and come out not somehow, but triumphantly. "I do not like crises," said Lord Reith, "but I do like the opportunities they provide."

Fortitude--out of the battle you emerge stronger, purer and nearer to the heart of God.

When Sir Walter Scott was involved in ruin because (cont.)

of the bankruptcy of his publishers, he said, "No man will say 'poor fellow' to me; my own right hand will pay the debt." That is fortitude.

Someone once said to a gallant soul who was undergoing a great sorrow: "Sorrow fairly colors life, doesn't it?" Back came the reply: "Yes, it does, but I propose to choose the color!" That is fortitude.

One of my most beloved friends was shot through the throat during World War II. Doctors told him he could never talk again. Today Bob is preaching, teaching and witnessing to Japanese people in their own homeland.

This is Christian fortitude!

"I pray that out of the glorious richness of his resources he will enable you to know the strength of the Spirit's inner reinforcement" (Ephesians 3:16, Phillips).

v. 13 At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

At this discovery of the silver cup in Benjamin's sack, after all of this search and the stash is found in the last man's sack, they tore their clothes in an act of horror and repentance. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

It wasn't a long trip back to town because they had just gotten started anyway. And now they just cannot believe what is happening. The day started out so beautiful and they were looking forward to getting home to their families, and now it has become a horrible nightmare. They are returning to the city and to a future destiny they know not of.

v. 14 Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him.

Joseph had not left for work yet; and when Judah and his other brothers came in, they threw themselves to the ground before him.

Here again we have another experience of fulfillment of the dreams that were given to Joseph 22 years ago.

I am sure their faces are as white as a sheet. They are frozen in fear and because of Joseph's prior stern treatment on their first visit when he accused them of being spies, they are probably believing the worst at this time.

v. 15 Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"

Joseph's first question is: "What is this you have done?" Then his second question-- "Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"

He does not want them to think that he has any relationship with them whatsoever, and I think the steward uses the term "divination" and so does Joseph to give the brothers the impression that this ruler before whom they stand is a full-blooded Egyptian.

v. 16 "What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves--we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.

Judah now becomes the spokesman before Joseph. It is Judah who convinces Joseph that they have learned their lessons, and that they are all in this together.

(*Joseph* by F. B. Meyer)

But who was to be their spokesman? Reuben had always had something to say in self-justification, and had been so sure that all would be right that he had pledged the lives of his children to his father for the safety of Benjamin; but *he* is dumb. Simeon was probably the cruel one, the instigator of the crime against Joseph; but *he* dares not utter a word. Benjamin, the blameless one, the prototype of the young man whom Jesus loved, is convicted of sin, and has nought to say. Who then is to speak? There is only one, Judah, who at the pit's mouth had diverted the brothers from their first thought of murder. And notice how he speaks. He does not attempt to hold up any extenuating circumstances, or to explain the past, or to excuse Benjamin or themselves. He throws himself helplessly on Joseph's mercy: "What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves?"

Judah's opening remarks include three questions, two of which are the same:

"What can we say to my Lord? What can we say?"

and then the third question:

"How can we prove our innocence?"

Judah then brings God into the picture: "God has uncovered your servant's guilt. We are now my lord's slaves--we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."

Sir, we are eleven men who are all in this together. We are committed to this as brothers, and we are going to be your slaves--all eleven of us.

v. 17 But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

Now Joseph makes the way easy for them to depart and to go back to their father and families.

The only person who is guilty in the eyes of Joseph is Benjamin, and it is he who is going to remain. Joseph says, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave."

"The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

As far as I am concerned, all I want is Benjamin. The rest of you can go back to your father in peace.

v.18 Then Judah went up to him and said: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself.

Judah very cautiously approaches Joseph. With all the proper protocol, he makes a plea by saying, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word. Do not be angry, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself."

v. 19 My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?'

Judah is now going to focus on the father and the brother in this situation.

v. 20 And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.'

Joseph cannot believe the words he is hearing, I am sure.

Judah gives the family history and once again makes reference to the fact that Benjamin's brother is dead. Oh, if Judah only knew that that brother is standing before him!

Now Joseph understands the special relationship that Benjamin has to his father because Judah says, "He is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him."

v. 21 Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.'

Judah reminds Joseph of the request he had made on their first trip down. "Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself."

v. 22 And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.'

The reason there was so much time between the first visit and the second visit was over Benjamin.

Evidently, they had told Joseph on that first visit when he asked them to bring Benjamin that it would be very difficult. "The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die."

v. 23 But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.'

You held firm on the business of Benjamin and gave us no alternative but to bring him down or die.

v. 24 When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

v. 25 Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.'

v. 26 But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'

Judah is recounting accurately all of the things that transpired between the first and second visit.

v. 27 Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons.'

v. 28 One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since.

v. 29 If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.'

What a dramatic, emotional address Judah gives here before Joseph. I feel confident that Joseph is deeply moved by what he is hearing.

v. 30 So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life,

v. 31 sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow.

Sir, this is a very serious matter. Because my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, when he sees that he's not there, he will die. You see, sir, if we leave Benjamin here and go back, my dad will die.

We will be the ones who will bring our father down to the grave in sorrow.

(The Rebirth of America by the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation)

We have all seen the statistics that reveal the breakdown of the family unit in our society...more than one out of every two couples who walk down the aisle to get married will eventually change their minds and end up in a divorce court; last year over 600,000 children were born to unmarried women; each month the lives of 125,000 children are cruelly ended before they even have a chance to leave their mother's womb; an estimated 10 million Americans are engaged in perverse, homosexual relationships.

The tragedy is that these statistics represent human lives...real people who are experiencing the consequences of refusal to follow God's plan for the family.

(Retreads by Prudence Mackintosh)

In these years, three sons have taught me to tolerate frustration, to develop patience, and to be incredibly flexible, all skills I hope they're learning too. The full-length jeans we bought for them two weeks ago reveal their ankles today, and I lie awake wishing the growth of my sons' grateful hearts could keep pace with their feet.

There will never be another time when I can observe so closely the mysterious and unpredictable changes that occur as little boys grow up. Quantity time, in that case, has its own inherent "quality." For example, my long-running performance as

the tooth fairy only closed last week.

Jacob's life is closely bound up with the boy's life, with that of Benjamin.

(Rx for Addiction by W. Robert Gehring, M.D.)

Courtney Robin Gehring was born at 2:54 p.m. on March 7, 1979. I looked at her pretty little face; I saw the dimple in her chin(just like mine); I held her warm little body in my arms.

Parents had told me that seeing your baby for the first time gave you a feeling that was beyond description. Pediatricians called this feeling part of the bonding process, but they couldn't describe it either. When I held Courtney in my arms for the first time, I felt a warmth, a closeness, a protectiveness that I had never experienced before. It was a euphoria far superior to that generated by any drug. I escorted Carolyn to the recovery room and waited until she fell asleep. Next I called our friends and relatives to tell them of the birth. Then I persuaded the nursery personnel to push Courtney's warmer to a remote corner of the nursery--away from the other babies. "We need to talk in private," I joked.

I sat silently on a stool and watched this new person for over an hour. Courtney was flailing her arms and legs--trying them out, as babies do. I studied her little fingers and toes, her protuberant tummy, her healthy pink cheeks. A thousand thoughts bombarded my consciousness. Future thoughts, past thoughts, baby thoughts, father thoughts.

I started talking to her in a soft whisper. "Happy birthday, little honey. Welcome to our world. We've got problems, to be sure, but it's not a bad world. There's still war and crime and starvation, but that's none of your concern, because your daddy will protect you from all that.

"I'll try to guide your life so that you'll see the beauty of our world. There are fuzzy little animals and sunsets and flowers. There's music and poetry and...well, I could just go on and on. You'll have all that, Courtney. I promise. I'll protect you."

Tears were streaming down my cheeks as I lifted her from the warmer and pressed her tiny body against mine. "Your daddy has a problem right now, little honey. He's gotten into something that he can't get out of. He's in way over his head. There's a beast inside of him that's consuming him. But that's not your concern. Your daddy's strong. Because of you, your daddy will kill that beast, and that beast will never threaten us again.

I promise. I'll protect you."

(cont.)

At that moment, I wanted my own mom and dad to kill the beast for me. I wanted them to protect me; I wanted them to tell me that everything would be okay.

"Mom, Dad, God, somebody! Help me. You didn't tell me life would be so hard. You

told me about teddy bears, love, marriage, children, and happiness. You didn't tell me about the rat race or the goddess of success who demands continual sacrifice or the alcohol or the drugs. You said I would live happily ever after.

"Now I have a child of my own to protect. But who will protect me? How can I give this child a happy life when mine is so miserable?"

"Make me a little child again, and hold me close. Hold me like I'm holding this child. Kill the beast for me--make everything okay. Help me, Mom. Help me, Dad,...God,...somebody! life is too hard--I can't do it alone anymore."

"So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow."

Leaving Benjamin here and going back ourselves--when dad sees that absent face as he counts all of us, it will be a means of bringing him to the grave in sorrow.

v. 32 Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!'

Sir, I entered into an agreement with my dad. I guaranteed the boy's safety. I told him if I didn't bring him back, I would bear the blame before him all my life.

v. 33 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.

After this dramatic, emotional address, familiarizing Joseph with all of the things that had happened, Judah turns to make his request.

His first request was in verse 18:

"Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord."

And now in verse 33 the second request:

"Please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers."

Judah's first statement before Joseph was that "We are now my lord's slaves--we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup. But now since Joseph wants only one and the rest to go free, Judah wants to become that one. He wants to become the slave of Joseph in the place of Benjamin.

Isaiah 53:4-6

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

It is the desire of Judah to become the substitutionary slave for Benjamin, that he might be set free.

Is it any wonder that the line of promise to the Messiah is going to come through the tribe of Judah.

v. 34 How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father."

Judah ends with a question: "How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me?" You see, there is no alternative for me. I either stay here as a slave and he goes free back to his father, or I cannot go. "No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father."

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular chapter?

LESSON #1: Many times trials and difficulties come into our lives without an explanation from our father.

LESSON #2: Silence sometimes is the better part of valor.

LESSON #3: The brothers have learned to accept responsibility for each other.

LESSON #4: There is not a trace of selfishness because they are all in this together.

LESSON #5: As a parent, is your life bound up in the lives of your children?

LESSON #6: Judah's love is so great for his father that he is willing to lay down his life for his brother.

Matthew 5:11, 12

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.