

“The Shadow of El Shaddai”

Genesis 43:1-34

Turn with me in your Bible this morning to Genesis 43. We left off last time with Joseph's brothers having made the trip to Egypt to buy grain due to the effects of the famine which were being felt in Canaan. While they were there, they had an encounter with Joseph, though they did not recognize him. Yet he is well aware of who they are.

(Suppose you were in Joseph's position, how do you think you would have reacted upon seeing the ones who had been responsible for the misery of the last 20 years of your life, over which you had had no control? Would you have thought about getting even? Given the fact that Joseph is now in a position of authority, would you have wielded your power against them?)

Joseph accuses them of being spies, which of course they deny while claiming to be 'honest' men. Joseph has them confined for three days, and then calls them to stand before him and gives them an ultimatum. He would keep one of them as a prisoner, but supply the rest of them with grain if they return home and then bring their youngest brother back to Egypt. They agree to the terms, but not before having an honest conversation among themselves in Hebrew. They admit to their guilt of having sold their brother all those years ago and see it as being the reason for the predicament in which they now find themselves. Of course, they didn't realize that Joseph could understand every word of what they were saying.

In verse 25, we read that Joseph gives orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man's silver back in his bag, and to give them provisions for their journey. In other words, he didn't simply give them what they requested, but he gave them

more than that, as well as giving them their money back. And it was a gesture of kindness, a kind expression of his goodness. And it certainly was not what they deserved. As he reflected upon all that they had done to him, all the offenses that they had caused him, the fact that they had hated him and were accountable for what they did, surely the last thing that they deserved was any help at all. It would have been just had he taken all their money and filled their sack up with dust and sent them on their way. They would have deserved it. But instead, he manifests unbelievable generosity and grace. So they leave Simeon behind in Egypt, load their donkeys with grain, and head back home to Canaan where they tell their father Jacob all that has happened. And that is where we'll pick their story back up now in chapter 43. (Read)

One of the most precious names of God in Scripture is the one used here in verse 14 where Jacob says to his sons, "May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man." The Hebrew name he uses here is 'El Shaddai.' You know that there are multiple names of God which are revealed in the pages of His Word, each one revealing something unique about His character. In the Old Testament, a name was much more than a way to refer to someone or something. Instead, it revealed very important information about a person. We even read of how God changed the name of a person to reflect some new reality about that person. For instance, the name 'Abram' meant exalted father. And God changed his name to 'Abraham' which means father of many nations. Jacob means 'deceiver.' God changes his name to 'Israel' which means to wrestle or strive. Even in the New Testament, we see where this often happens. Jesus changes the name of Simon to 'Peter' which means rock. In Scripture, a name speaks of identity, purpose, and character. A person's name sort of encapsulates all that he is. Well, the names of God that are mentioned in the Bible reveal His nature, character, and

divine being. The name 'El Shaddai' emphasizes the watchful care and limitless power of God both to guard and to bless. The psalmist uses this name for God in:

Psalm 91:1 — “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”

To abide in the shadow of 'El Shaddai' speaks of the:

- Satisfaction of His presence

To rest in someone's shadow means you must be close to them. This implies a life lived in deep fellowship with God. It's not about a passing acquaintance but about abiding in God's presence. And then it also implies the:

- Safety of His protection

The 'shadow of the Almighty' is a picture of divine covering and shelter, like a bird covering its young (Psalm 91:4) or a warrior being shielded with armor. The Hebrew word for Almighty (El Shaddai) emphasizes God's power to protect and keep those who trust in Him. Then it speaks of the:

- Sufficiency of His provision

To 'rest' or 'abide' means to settle down and be at ease, even when the world is chaotic. It reflects a confident trust in God's sufficiency. Dwelling in the shadow of El Shaddai speaks of a consistent walk with God. This is not a one-time visit to God in crisis, but a continual life of trust and surrender. That's what the name means.

The patriarchs knew God as 'El Shaddai,' or the One who has the power to accomplish His purposes, especially in situations that seem impossible. That is

the name of God that Jacob uses in verse 14. When confronted with the impossibility of what seemed to be a threatening situation, he looks to El Shaddai. And so from this chapter, I want us to consider a few of the ways ‘God Almighty’ overshadows us with His providential care.

1 – In His WISDOM, God uses difficulty to move us toward obedience

(43:1-10)

“Now the famine was severe in the land. And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, ‘Go again, buy us a little food.’ But Judah said to him, ‘The man solemnly warned us, saying, You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you. If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.’ Israel said, ‘Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?’ They replied, ‘The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?’ What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’ And Judah said to Israel his father, ‘Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.”

The situation

Verse 1 says that the famine was severe in the land, which means that things had gone from bad to worse. The grain that they had brought back with them

from Egypt had been eaten, and they once again find themselves in need. And so Jacob says to his sons, “Go again, buy us a little food.” But they remind him of the terms that had been given, and how they could not return without their brother Benjamin. Of course, Jacob had been unwilling to let Benjamin go with his brothers out of fear of what might happen to him. His fear is seen in verse 36 of the previous chapter, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.”

Those are the words of a deeply grieving man who has felt the pain of loss. I mean let’s just reflect on all that he has faced. First it was Rachel, then it was Joseph, next it was Simeon, and now his sons are wanting to take Benjamin to Egypt upon the word of its governor. All of this has come about in his life despite having been given the promise of God. Remember how as a young man, God had appeared to Jacob at Bethel and said:

Genesis 28:13-15—“I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

But now, Jacob looks around on all of his hardships and says, “All this has come against me!” Gone is the vertical perspective, and all he can see is the horizontal. You’d be apprehensive to send your youngest son with them, too. It is often the same reaction that we have to circumstances that are not what we

want and beyond our control. We can protest them all we want, but it accomplishes nothing. God often uses difficulty to change us and bring us to the place where we confront our problems honestly. Jacob may think that everything is against him, and we might say the same, but a better statement is this one:

Romans 8:31 — “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

That is the question Paul raises in response to the great truth of Romans 8:28 and following. All things are working together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His redemptive purpose. So that a Christian can never look at life and say, “All this has come against me!” No, in fact the opposite is the case.

The suggestion

Notice in verse 8 that Judah steps forward and assumes the responsibility for Benjamin, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be a pledge of his safety.” The word ‘pledge’ there is interesting. Judah is offering up himself in the place of Benjamin, pledging to bear the blame forever should something happen to him. I’ll say more about this next time, but it is evidence of a profound change in Judah’s life. With that being said, the fact is that sometimes it takes hardship and difficulty to break down the pride of the human heart. God uses it to get our attention.

C.S. Lewis — *“God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; [pain] is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”*

All too often, it takes a ‘famine’ to open up our eyes!

It may be that God's megaphone will bring a real threat to earthly life in order to alert us to our need for eternal life. That is how God got John Newton's attention. Newton had been a slave trader and a wicked man by his own admission. But it was a storm at sea that threatened his life that led him to call on God. And God saved him not simply from the storm but from his sin by what Newton would later describe as, 'Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see!'

2—By His POWER, God works in our situation even when we can't see it (43:11-15)

"Then their father Israel said to them, 'If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take double the money with you. Carry back with the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.' So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph."

Now, I want you to pay attention to the fact that in this text Jacob is referred to as Israel. Remember, it was the name that God gave to him after an all night wrestling match with the Lord in Genesis 32. I understand this as a preincarnate appearance of Christ, and Jacob refuses to let Him go until He blesses him. The Bible says:

Genesis 32:28—“Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

“Israel” —*he that wrestles with God*

So that now in chapter 43, once more we see him wrestling with God in the midst of his circumstances, don't we? That is why the name 'Israel' is being used three time—verse 6, verse 8, and verse 11. He is faced with the choice of either refusing to budge, or of submitting to the circumstances by allowing Benjamin to go with the group. We would say that he is between a rock and a hard place. Have you ever felt like you've been there? And so watch what he will do, and then pay attention to what he will say.

A present

In verse 11, he arranges for a present to be prepared that he can send with his sons, something that would express goodwill with hopes of gaining favor with the Egyptian lord. He tells them to take double the money with them, to carry back the money that had been mysteriously returned in their sacks of grain as well as additional money with which they could purchase more food. Then he says in verse 13, “Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man.” It wasn't what he wanted, but there was no other option.

A prayer

He sends them on their way, but not before speaking words of faith and blessing over them, in which he calls upon God Almighty (El Shaddai) to grant them mercy before the man. Though he doesn't realize it, God was already answering Jacob's prayer. His providential, guiding hand was working in the midst of their situation. When Jacob was looking at the situation from strictly a horizontal

perspective, there is no way that he could have ever surrendered Benjamin. But as he lifts his eyes above the horizontal and fixes his gaze on the vertical, he's walking by faith. He's trusting in El Shaddai, the God who overshadows and protects His own, keeping His promise and acting according to His Word.

3—Through His GRACE, God softens our hearts with unmerited kindness (43:16-30)

“When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, ‘Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.’ The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph’s house. And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph’s house, and they said, ‘It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys.’ So they went up to the steward of Joseph’s house and spoke with him at the door of the house, and said, ‘Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man’s money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.’ He replied, ‘Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money.’ Then he brought Simeon out to them. And when the man had brought the men into Joseph’s house and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, they prepared the present for Joseph’s coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there. When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground.

And he inquired about their welfare and said, 'Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' They said, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.' And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!' Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there."

We've already considered how God will often awaken the conscience through an awareness of our need, conviction of our sin and its guilt. His law which we have broken is a witness against us, which ought to terrify us if we are not saved. However, Christ is there with His outstretched arms ready to forgive and receive all who come to Him. So that grace and unmerited kindness is what melts our hardened hearts and brings us to real repentance. And that is what is illustrated for us now in the text.

The fear they possess

Upon being brought to Joseph's house, notice the reaction they have in verse 18 —“And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, 'It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys." Remember, a guilty conscience constantly looks back over its shoulder. That's because fear of being found out is in the driver's seat. Fear always assumes the worst. Fear is suspicious of grace. That's what had happened in the previous chapter with the silver that they found in their sacks of grain. Upon discovering it, verse 28 says their hearts failed them and they turned trembling to one another and say, “What is this that God has done to us?” They say the same thing in verse 35 when they learn that everyone

of their bags contain their bundle of money. They were all 'afraid.' It is the same word used in Genesis 3:10 where Adam says to the Lord, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." Fear produced by guilt leads us to run from God. But that problem will never be solved as long as we are running away from God. Forgiveness and freedom from guilt is found in His grace.

The gift they present

While they are waiting for Joseph to arrive, notice the Bible says in verse 25, "They prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there. When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground." The spices, the honey, the pistachios and almonds. It really was a meager gift, especially when you compare it to the wealth that Joseph already possessed. How can you court favor with a man by giving him things that he doesn't really need?

Now, I don't want to press this detail too much. But I can't help but see how people try to do the same thing with God. What are those things that we are tempted to bring with us before God, things with which we try to earn His favor and approval? I can think of a few:

- Good works

People will try to present their morality, kindness, church attendance, generosity, or volunteer service as spiritual currency. And yet Isaiah 64:6 reminds us that even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags apart from Christ. The gospel says Christ's righteousness, not ours, justifies us.

- Religious rituals

We may lean on baptism, communion, prayer routines, Bible reading, or even our denominational background, as if those things earn us spiritual credit. These are good practices, but they're not bargaining chips with God.

- Personal sacrifice

Sometimes we feel that our trials or hardships have earned us special standing—"I'd done this, so God must owe me now." But our suffering is not a means of salvation—it's a context in which God reveals grace, but not a payment to receive it.

- Comparisons to others

We may justify ourselves by saying, "At least I'm not like them." Like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12, we hope that being 'better than most' will count for something. But God doesn't grade on a curve. He demands perfect, spotless righteousness—that which only Jesus provides.

- Past achievements

We may point to a moment of intense faith, a past season of ministry, or an emotional spiritual experience. Yet God isn't impressed with our resumé. He looks for ongoing trust in Christ, not trusting in something that we ourselves did.

- Right theology

While sound doctrine is essential, we can wrongly treat it as our righteousness—thinking right answers to theological questions equate to right standing. But even demons have sound theology (James 2:19)! Friend, saving faith is more than intellect—it's surrender to Christ.

- Family heritage

Some trust in their Christian upbringing, family values, or last name as a sign of God's favor. But it has been said that God has no grandchildren—only children who come to Him by faith.

Ultimately, the only thing we can truly bring to God is our need—our sin, our weakness, our emptiness. And in exchange, He gives us Christ—His righteousness, His merit, His grace. The hymn writer said it this way, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.”

In the story of Joseph and his brothers, what I want you to see is that here we have a wonderful picture in the Old Testament of the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ treats us—as those who have sinned against Him, those who have disregarded Him, paid little interest to His life and all that He has done for us. What we deserve is judgment, but what we receive is grace. His unmerited and undeserved kindness. Paul says it this way in:

Romans 2:4—“Do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

The kindness and goodness of God is intended to bring us to repentance. That's what is happening with these men. Their experience is undeserved, unmerited kindness, the kind that leaves us scratching our heads. Yet conventional wisdom says there are no free lunches. You only get what you pay for. All of the things we gain in this life come only through blood, sweat, and tears and the fruit of our hard work. And then we often import that same mentality into our understanding of Christianity. That's why a religion of works is very appealing to people, because it says there are things you can do in order to gain standing with God.

But the standing that Joseph's brothers have with him is not because of anything they bring—it is because of him and the undeserved kindness he shows.

4—For His GLORY, God seats us at the table of fellowship in His presence (43:31-34)

“Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself he said, ‘Serve the food.’ They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph’s table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.”

In His wisdom, God uses difficult circumstances to move us to obedience. By His power, God works in our situation even when we can't see it. In His grace, God softens our hearts through undeserved kindness. So that for His glory, God seats us at the table of fellowship in His presence. In the text, it is apparent that Joseph's brothers thought they were going to be made slaves. In fear they assume the worst. They fear Joseph, they face Joseph, and much to their shock, they feast with Joseph. They're received as friends and given a place at his table.

Glance back through the chapter and pay attention to all of the overtures of grace:

- They are reassured about their money by Joseph's steward
- They are reunited with Simeon

- They are given water with which to wash their feet and food for their animals
- They are seated at the table upon which a feast is now spread before them

Only a day before, they were on the verge of starvation, the reason they came to Egypt in the first place. But it never would have crossed their minds that they would find themselves seated at royalty's table. They're being treated as friends rather than enemies. And think of all the irony as Joseph hosts this meal for his brothers who years earlier had sat down to a meal while he pleaded with them for his life. Friend, that's mercy and grace. The first time, Joseph was the victim. Now, he is the victor. And they will share in his goodness. That's the gospel!

Their position

Verse 33 says that as they sat before him, they notice how they were seated according to birthright from the firstborn to the youngest. So that the men looked at one another in amazement. How could that have happened? The only explanation is that they're in the presence of someone who has knowledge of them.

Their portion

Why does he give Benjamin five times as much as the rest of them? Maybe this was another small test by Joseph to see if his brothers would react with the same resentment they had shown toward him earlier in his life. Remember how they had mistreated him out of envy because he had been given a coat of many colors. And once again, their youngest brother is receiving special treatment. But there is no sign of resentment on their part. All of this is just one more way in which Joseph is a picture that foreshadows the coming of Jesus. In Christ, I

have been given a place at the table of fellowship, and He has lavished upon me a rich portion of grace. The psalmist wrote:

Psalm 16:11—“You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Ephesians 2:4-7—“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

To be seated with Christ in heavenly places means that as a believer:

- You are united with Him in His resurrection and reign

Being seated with Christ is a result of our spiritual union with Him. Just as Christ was raised and exalted, believers share in His resurrection and exaltation—not physically yet, but spiritually and positionally. You are united to Christ in His death (your old self died), in His resurrection (you are given new life), and in His ascension and reign.

- You share in His authority, victory, and blessings

Being seated implies a finished work—He has completed the work of redemption and now reigns. To be seated with Him suggests that believers also share in His victory over sin, death, and the devil. We’ve received His inheritance and status as sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:17). We are no longer spiritual outsiders, but are now citizens of heaven, already belonging to God’s kingdom.

- You have a new identity, future, and standing with God

Though we live on earth, this ‘seating’ is not just future but is a present spiritual reality. We already have access to God (Hebrews 4:16), heavenly resources to live godly lives (2 Peter 1:3), and a new identity and status before God. So that while we are waiting for Jesus to return, we are already participating in kingdom life, even while living on earth. It’s both a present reality and a future promise. And one day, we will fully experience what we now possess—we will reign with Christ in His kingdom!

Now, you didn’t know that all of that was right there in this story of Joseph and his brothers, did you? Jacob’s prayer is that ‘El Shaddai’ grant them mercy before the man, and that prayer will be answered ultimately in Jesus Christ. For to be in Christ is to dwell under the shelter of the Most High and in the shadow of the Almighty. That’s a safe, secure, and satisfying place to be! William Cowper said it best:

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*