

The Marks of Conversion
Genesis 42 – 44 (Excerpts)
Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church
September 11, 2016

Review:

The book of Genesis tells the stories of the biblical patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The patriarch Jacob has twelve sons. They will become the founding fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. A key question the book of Genesis seeks to answer is this: "Which of the twelve sons of Jacob will assume leadership of the clans of Israel?" There are several possibilities. One possible answer to that question is that Joseph and his clan should lead.

Joseph,

⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them.

Joseph is the favored son of his father Jacob. Jacob's twelve sons are the product of his relations with his two wives and his two concubines. Among the women in his life, Jacob's favorite wife is Rachel. Rachel had trouble conceiving. Finally, she gives birth to Joseph. And Joseph, the first born son of the favorite wife is Jacob's favorite. If Jacob could determine things, Joseph and his descendants would lead the clan.

However, perhaps as a consequence of being the favored son, Joseph is haughty and spoiled. He earns the enmity of his brothers. When opportunity presents itself, they sell him into slavery and deceive their father into believing that Joseph has been killed by a wild animal.

We looked at the story of Joseph and how, by God's providence, he rises to become the second most important person in the land of Egypt; a nation which, at this time in human history, was the strongest, most significant realm on earth. Circumstances conspire to bring Joseph's brothers to Egypt in search of food, in search of grain. Joseph recognizes his brothers. His brothers do not recognize Joseph. Why do Joseph's brothers fail to recognize him? Recall that, when Joseph is summoned from prison by the Pharaoh in order to interpret the pharaoh's dream, we are told (Genesis 41:14) that Joseph shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. In the ancient world at this time, the Egyptians were unique in the practice of shaving. The men of all other nations wore beards. Joseph looked like an Egyptian, dressed like an Egyptian, and carried himself like an Egyptian.

In the intervening years, Joseph had matured. We are told that, upon recognizing his brothers (Genesis 42:9), Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. Joseph's dreams had suggested that he would be the leader of the clan, that his brothers would bow before him. And, that is precisely what happened when they came to Egypt in search of grain. Nonetheless, though Joseph plays an important role among the sons of Israel, he will not be the leader of the clan.

The most natural expectation regarding who would lead the clan would be the oldest, Reuben.

Reuben

³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.”

The ancient world followed the custom of primogeniture; the right of the firstborn son to inherit the estate of his father. Reuben is the oldest son. It is to be expected that he would inherit the leadership role among the tribes of Israel. Reuben is good hearted and noble. When the brothers were conspiring against Joseph, Reuben did his best to prevent the betrayal. But he failed to do so. Reuben means well, but he is inept.

We can see this clearly when the brothers are discussing with their father Jacob the requirement that Joseph has placed upon them that, when they return to Egypt, they must be accompanied by their youngest brother, Benjamin. Joseph, of course, is testing them. He knows that he was betrayed by his brothers in part because of the clear favoritism shown by their father Jacob towards him. Joseph has never met his younger brother, Benjamin. He wonders whether the brothers' jealousy would lead them to betray him as well. When they return to Egypt, they must bring Benjamin with them. Benjamin also is favored by Jacob. Jacob resists sending him with his brothers to Egypt. As the discussion unfolds, Reuben offers his own sons as a guarantee for Benjamin's safe return from Egypt. Reuben says, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you.” This is a pointless offer. Jacob does not desire Reuben's sacrifice. He wants protection for what he believes is the only surviving son of his favorite wife Rachel. Reuben means well, but he is not a leader.

The leadership of the clan will not fall to Reuben, the oldest. Nor will it be given to Joseph, the favorite. The leadership of the tribes of Israel will fall to Judah.

The New and Improved Judah

Last week we looked at the shocking story of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 38). This is an “R” rated story. It is not a story we teach in Vacation Bible School. Indeed, on the surface, it is appropriate to wonder why this story is told at all in the book of Genesis. The telling of the story of Judah and Tamar interrupts the telling of the story of Joseph. Why? Last week we asked the questions, “Why is this story recorded in Genesis?” and “Why is it told to us here?”

What we discovered was this: the story of Joseph is important in the unfolding narrative of Genesis. It is natural to see Joseph as a major character in Genesis. His is the longest story in Genesis. But, while Joseph's story is important, there is more going on in the telling of his tale than may appear on the surface. The twelve sons of Jacob, those who will in turn become the founding fathers of the clans of Israel, each have a role to play in the unfolding story. And, while the story of Joseph is a key in that

unfolding story, Joseph's lineage will not be the leaders of the clans of Israel. The leaders of the clans of Israel will be the descendants of the Judah, not Joseph. And while the story of Judah and Tamar is shocking and sordid, the power of its message is that it is a story of conversion: the conversion of Judah. He is not the same man that he was at the beginning of the story. When Judah declares of Tamar that "'She is more righteous than I'" Judah is declaring his change of heart, of understanding. By the grace of God, he is a new man, a changed man.

It is appropriate to ask "How does Judah's conversion change him?" "How is Judah a different man after his encounter with God's grace?" The reason behind the very long scripture reading for this sermon is in order to see the various ways Judah is changed as a consequence of his conversion. Judah is a different man as a consequence of his encounter with God's grace in the story of Tamar.

First, we see him take responsibility.

He takes responsibility – 43:9

⁸ And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, ⁹ 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.

Reuben foolishly offers to sacrifice his own two sons should he fail to return from Egypt with his younger brother Benjamin. His sons have no part in this discussion. Why offer to sacrifice the innocent? In contrast, Judah's offer is more appropriate and reasonable. Judah simply takes the responsibility. He knows that he cannot promise what the future holds, but he can promise the integrity of his own efforts. He acknowledges that should he fail to do what he has promised, to return Benjamin safely, he will bear the blame forever.

Jesus taught, in the Sermon on the Mount, (Matthew 5:37) Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. The biblical principle is that we are to be men and women of integrity. If you make a commitment, see it through, do what you have said you will do. Prior to his conversion, Judah dealt deceitfully towards his daughter-in-law Tamar. Now we see that he is a man willing to take responsibility for his actions.

Judah takes responsibility. Secondly, he takes the lead.

He takes the lead – 44:14

¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground.

When we met Judah at the beginning of Genesis 38, he had separated himself from the family. He had walked away from the covenant community. He was living among the Canaanites and had married a Canaanite woman. At this point in his life, Judah was not simply in the background of the story; he was out of the picture entirely.

A significant consequence of his conversion was his reconnection with his family, with the covenant community.

This too is a mark of conversion: to be connected, reconnected, with the covenant community. The Christian faith is not a solo enterprise. We cannot be Christian on our own. The Christian faith is not about “me and Jesus.” Faith in Christ means that we are adopted into the covenant community. We become part of Christ’s church.

Earlier in this service of worship we ordained and/or installed officers here at Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church: elders, deacons, trustees, and our small group coordinator, Cheryl. Being part of the covenant community means that God may set us apart for a leadership role in that community. All of God’s people have a place in the community of the covenant. Some are set apart for leadership. The key thing to note from this verse is that Judah is being set apart for leadership. Referring to Jacob’s sons, the verse tells us: When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house. Judah is named. The others are simply referred to as his brothers. What this phrasing tells us is that Judah is taking the place of leadership among the sons of Jacob. Now, reconnected with his brothers, Judah’s leadership role among them begins to develop.

So far, as a consequence of his conversion, we see Judah take responsibility. He is reconnected to the covenant community and begins to take leadership within it. Next, we see him admit guilt.

He admits guilt – 44:16

¹⁶ And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.”

At the moment of Judah’s conversion experience, he admits his moral and spiritual failure, declaring of his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 38:26), “She is more righteous than I.” He had seen himself as morally superior to Tamar. But God, in his graciousness, revealed to Judah that he was not the man he believed himself to be. As we noted last week, God held a mirror before Judah. Judah saw himself as he truly was. That realization brought him to his conversion of faith. Judah no longer deceives himself.

It is not surprising, therefore, when confronted with the stolen cup, that it is Judah who acknowledges that he and his brothers are guilty. Judah does not understand all that is happening in this story, but he also knows that there is no point in denying the truth. He asks rhetorically, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves?” Willingness to acknowledge guilt, to admit fault, is a mark of the people of the covenant. God’s people understand that we cannot earn his approval. We do not deserve God’s grace. We do not need to pretend to be more righteous than we are. We know that we are not the men and women we ought to be. When we gather to

worship God, we begin with a confession of sin. We come into God's presence admitting our need for his grace.

As a consequence of his conversion, we see Judah take responsibility. We see him reconnect to the covenant community and to take a leadership within it. Confronted with the stolen cup, he admits he and his brothers' guilt. Next, we see him submit to authority and give appropriate deference to that authority.

He submits to proper authority and gives proper deference – 44:18

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said, "Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant

One of the marks of God's people is to understand the place of authority and proper deference in life. Regrettably, both of these concepts, authority and deference, are rapidly eroding in the modern world. A doctor tells the story of examining a six-year girl with a fever and sore throat. The doctor looked in her ears and said, "Now I am going to take a look at your throat." Before he could do so, the mother said, "Do you mind if the doctor looks in your throat for a second? Afterward we will go and get some ice cream." The mother thought she was doing something right, being sensitive and caring. The little girl burst into tears, declaring "I don't want to." What should have been a two second exam became an ordeal lasting several minutes. The modern world is uneasy with the notion of authority. By asking the question, the mother undermined the authority of the doctor. The first job of a parent is to teach their children, not consult them. Children need the guidance of their parents.

At this point in the story, Judah's leadership is revealed as he rightly and wisely submits to the authority of Joseph. Judah approaches Joseph. He refers to himself as Joseph's servant. He also seeks to propitiate Joseph's emotions, saying let not your anger burn against your servant. Judah is acknowledging he and his brothers' place under Joseph's authority. He submits to Joseph. He gives to Joseph the deference that is due to him as the second in command in Egypt.

We are looking at the impact of Judah's conversion upon his life. We see Judah take responsibility. We see him reconnect to the covenant community and to take a leadership within it. Confronted with the stolen cup, he admits he and his brothers' guilt. We see him submit to authority and give appropriate deference to that authority. Lastly, Judah's spiritual growth and maturity is underlined when he offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin.

He offers himself as a substitute – 44:33

³³ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.

When Judah offers to substitute himself for Benjamin as a servant, what he means is that he is offering himself to Joseph as a slave. When the brothers first laid hands on Joseph, it had been Judah who suggested that they sell him into slavery:

(Genesis 37:26 – 27). Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. Now, rather than see his brother Benjamin taken as a slave in Joseph’s household, Judah offers himself as a substitute. He offers to take his brother’s punishment. He offers to give up his life and freedom for the sake of his younger brother.

This offer underscores the completeness of Judah’s conversion. At one time, Judah had separated himself from his father and his family. He wanted nothing to do with them. Now, out of sympathy for his father and compassion for his brother, Judah offers to give up his own freedom for their sake. By the experience of God’s grace in his life, Judah is truly a man made new.

This leads to our last observation: Judah is a type of Christ.

Judah: a type of Christ

Judah has come a long way in his spiritual walk. In this last act, offering to take Benjamin’s punishment, Judah becomes a type of Christ. Judah offers to take Benjamin’s punishment. He offers to be Benjamin’s substitute. He chooses to become a slave so that his brother may be freed. In this, Judah models what Jesus will one day do on our behalf.

On the cross, Jesus is our substitute. He takes the punishment that you and I deserve. Christ’s work on the cross is substitutionary atonement. In the second verse of the hymn ***In Christ Alone*** we sing,

*Till on that cross, as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied;
For every sin on Him was laid.
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

You and I have transgressed God’s law. We deserve punishment. The good news of the gospel is that the punishment we deserve was willingly taken by Christ on our behalf. He is our substitute.

I invite you to turn to Jesus Christ and place your faith in him. Believe in him and be saved.

Say “Amen” Somebody!

Genesis 42 – 44 (excerpts)

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” ² And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” ³ So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him.

⁶ Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them.

⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.” ¹⁰ They said to him, “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.”

And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵ And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

²⁹ When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying,

³³ Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. ³⁴ Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.’ ”

³⁵ As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. ³⁶ And Jacob their father said to them, “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.”

Joseph’s Brothers Return to Egypt

43 Now the famine was severe in the land. ² 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.” ³ But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’”

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

²⁶ 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.

He said, "Serve the food." ³² 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ 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.

44 Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, ² and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him.

³ As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. ⁴ They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? ⁵ Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this.' "

¹¹ Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. ¹² And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?" ¹⁶ And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found." ¹⁷ But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father."

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said, "Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' ²⁰ And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' ²¹ Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' ²² We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' ²³ Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.'

²⁴ "When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. ²⁵ And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' ²⁶ we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' ²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. ²⁸ One left me, and I said, "Surely he has been torn to pieces," and I have never

seen him since. ²⁹ If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.'

³⁰ "Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, ³¹ as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. ³² For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.' ³³ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. ³⁴ For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father."