

Feasting in Fear

HN 5/09/04 pm

Reading: Genesis 43, James 1

Study: Genesis 43

Psalms: 8, 147:1-7, 136:1-8, 121

Jacob and his family were suffering famine in the land of Canaan. He heard there was grain in Egypt so he ordered his rather useless sons to go down there and buy grain. They returned with provisions but without their brother Simeon. He was held hostage by the governor until they came back with their youngest brother Benjamin. Their fear of this man in Egypt increased when they found their money restored to their sacks- they had not actually paid for the grain they got.

Grain needed

The famine continued and the grain supply was getting low. But Jacob refused to let his precious son Benjamin go down to Egypt – he feared he would lose him like he lost Joseph. He still mourned the loss of Joseph after more than 20 years. He did not trust his other sons.

The grain eventually ran out. Jacob told his sons to go and buy more but the stalemate continued. They would not go without Benjamin because of what the man in Egypt had said – you shall not see my face unless you bring your youngest brother. Jacob, however, would not let Benjamin out of his sight.

Eventually Judah spoke to his father seeking to reason with him and overcome the impasse. He used the same words that Jacob had when he sent them on the first trip – go that we may live and not die. Then he offered himself as personal surety for Benjamin. He was putting his own life on the line – let me bear the blame forever if I do not bring him back to you. The situation was desperate. Commitment and sacrifice were called for.

We live in desperate days – not for food for our stomachs but for food for our souls. There is a great famine in our land. People are starving without the truth, the Word of God. Where are those who will make the commitment and make the sacrifices needed to bring that food to the people – that they may live and not die?

Guilt grew

One reason Joseph treated his brothers harshly on the first visit was that they might be brought to repentance. He witnessed them expressing their guilt after three days in prison. Now on their second visit that same guilt came over them again.

This time they were not put in prison but were ushered into the very home of Joseph; but still they feared greatly. They thought they would be kept as slaves with their donkeys (43:18). It is ironic and indeed a lesson to them that they who sold their brother as a slave now faced slavery themselves. That is the way of sin. It is often that we are bitten in the same way we bite others or fall into the pit we dig for others. Remember Haman hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai.

Judah was the brother who actually suggested selling Joseph as a slave- probably to save him from death. Nevertheless, we see Judah here offering himself as surety for Benjamin before going back down to Egypt. And in the next chapter, he had to make good that promise and offer to be kept as a slave in Egypt in place of Benjamin (44:33).

The brothers tried to explain about the money to the steward, for Joseph did not come till noon. The steward told them not to worry. Peace be with you, he said. Do not be afraid. But they still felt guilty and afraid. It was from Joseph they needed to hear these words. Joseph must forgive and grant them peace.

Great faith

Convinced of the desperate need and that there was no way to avoid sending Benjamin, Jacob resolved to send his sons down again – and Benjamin with them. He made plans to appease this man in Egypt by sending him a large gift. He prepared a gift comprising the best fruits of the land, expensive nuts, honey, and spices. He also told them to take double the money to make good what was found returned to their sacks.

We are reminded of a previous time when Jacob was in great fear – of meeting his brother Esau. At that time, he made that elaborate plan of sending gifts of livestock ahead of him to appease Esau. It worked at that time. Maybe it would work again.

But there was something else he did at that time. He spent the night at Peniel wrestling with God. And so here also he turned to the Lord. May God Almighty, may El Shaddai grant you mercy before the man. Jacob prayed to the Almighty God for all his sons to come back safely to him.

It was a prayer of faith. If I am bereaved I am bereaved does not express fate but of surrender to the Almighty God. 'Your will be done O Lord'. Sure he was reluctant to let his son go – very reluctant. But having seen that there was no other way he committed himself to the mercy of Almighty God.

We find Esther in a similar position before King Ahasuerus. Her people, the Jews, were in danger of being destroyed because of an edict of the king. She was in the palace but greatly feared going to the king – for good reason. But she had to make a decision if her people were to be saved. She had to go to the king and this she decided to do even though she might die for doing so. She called all the Jews to fast, and no doubt pray, for three days. *I will go in to the king, which is against the law, and if I perish, I perish*, she said (Esther 4:16). She trusted her very life into the hands of God for the sake of the people of God.

So it was with Jacob. The life of his family was at stake. He did all he humanly could but realized that ultimately he had to trust in God Almighty to save his family.

The apostle Paul was in chains for the Gospel. His earthly future was uncertain. He could do nothing to help himself but entrusted himself into the hands of the Almighty. He prayed and the Philippian church prayed. He said for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. He knew that whatever happened to him God would still be on the throne – God would still be glorified.

These are some testimonies of men and women who found themselves in very difficult situations – in desperate situations. They were unable to control that situation themselves. But they did not despair did they. They did not give up and sink into self-pity and despair.

I am sure you have sometimes felt yourself be in a similar situation. Things are not going well for your family, your friends, or yourself. You want to do something but there is nothing you can do. Have you felt like giving up in despair? Others may depend upon you to make a decision and you feel under great pressure.

Turn to the Lord, to the Almighty God. After all, he rules over all things. He controls all situations and all human hearts. He works all things together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

Grace displayed

The brothers were given water and washed their feet when they arrived this second time. They were treated hospitably. Indeed they were taken off to the palace to dine with the governor.

When Joseph came in at noon they bowed down before him (43:26). After telling him that their father was well

they all bowed again (43:28). Joseph probably remembered his dream once again. This time all his brothers were bowing down to him just like in his dream of the sheaves in the field.

Joseph spoke kindly to his brothers at this time. He asked about their father and then introduced himself to his young brother Benjamin – his very own brother whom he had not seen for over 20 years. His heart yearned for Benjamin and he could not stop himself from breaking down and crying. He hurried to his room to weep for he was overwhelmed by love for him.

Joseph wept on the previous visit when he saw his brothers expressing their guilt. Now he wept again out of love for his own brother Benjamin. He was so glad to see him. His heart was filled with joy and gladness.

Joseph wept on the first visit when he saw sorrow and repentance coming from the hard hearts of his brothers. Now he wept out of deep love for his brother Benjamin. He would later weep again when he revealed himself to his brothers. Love and grace abounded in the heart of Joseph, just as they do in our Lord Jesus.

Jesus wept when he saw the grief of Mary and many Jews over the death of her brother Lazarus. He groaned in the spirit and was troubled (John 11:33). When he wept, the Jews said see how he loved him!

After seating them according to age, Joseph proceeded to serve them a fine meal. Benjamin's portion was up sized 5 times. It was obvious to all that Benjamin was special- he was favoured. Maybe this was another test for the brothers. Would they be jealous like they were when Joseph was favoured?

They all drank and were merry. They seem to have enjoyed the meal after all. Slowly they were comprehending his grace toward them. In that grace Joseph would bring them to complete surrender, not only to himself but also to God – do not be grieved for God sent me here before you to preserve your life (45:5).

Through many acts of his grace, through many tests and trials the Lord is bringing you to complete surrender and trust in him. Lord to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.

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