

Monday - Week Eight

Lesson Twenty-One: The first journey of Joseph's brothers

Read: Genesis 42

Summary: God used Joseph to chastise his brothers so that they would come to realize that what they had done to him was wrong.

Background and Comments

- We have previously seen that the spiritual level of the brothers was quite low. What would have happened to them if they had lived their whole lives in Canaan? No doubt they would have all gone their own ways and the emerging nation of Israel would have disintegrated; this could have put God's promise of the Savior in danger. Instead God worked things out so that the whole family would move to Egypt ... and be forced to stay together (they were outsiders in Egypt).
- Verse one makes us smile. Aging Jacob said to his able bodied (but confused) sons: "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" They didn't know what to do about the lack of food. Dad came to the rescue!
- Joseph must have wondered where Benjamin was; perhaps his brothers had killed him too! Joseph did a good job of getting information from his brothers. Little did they know that Joseph could understand everything they said.

Lessons for Today

- Part of Joseph must have wanted to tell his brothers who he was ... especially when he started crying when the brothers said that what they had done was wrong. Joseph was willing to let them feel bad for a while until they had repented for their sin. We need to be willing to let God's law do its work in people's hearts. While we would never say that a person has to feel bad for a certain amount of time before we forgive them we do know that sorrow over sin is a blessing from God.
- God's law did its work well in the hearts of Joseph's brothers. Are you faithful in using God's law as you work with people?

Read: Psalm 36; Romans 8.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for allowing me to go to church yesterday. Use the Word of God to make an impact on my life this week. In Jesus' name I pray; Amen.

Tuesday - Week Eight

Lesson Twenty-two: the third journey

Read: Genesis 43-44

Summary: Joseph's brothers impress us at every point in this account. God had done good work in their hearts.

Background and Comments

- In the first part of Genesis 43 everyone referred to Joseph as "the man". They pictured him as a cold and heartless man.
- Joseph tested his brothers in the following ways:
 1. He gave Benjamin double honor at the feast. The brothers didn't get jealous at all. Instead they ate and drank freely with Joseph.
 2. He planted his cup in Benjamin's sack. The brothers didn't accuse Benjamin of stealing or Joseph's steward of planting the cup in the sack. Instead it appears that they thought about how to save Benjamin.
 3. He "decreed" that Benjamin would stay with him as a slave. Judah was quick to plead for Benjamin's life.

Lessons for Today

- Judah was the leader for the brothers. We can see this leadership even before they left for Egypt as he promised to protect Benjamin with his life if necessary. Judah's leadership was so good because he led with his heart. His love for his father and brother became his guiding principle. What are your guiding principles?
- Judah's speech to Joseph is touching. Here's why:
 1. He confessed their sin. (Genesis 44:16)
 2. He was open about his love and responsibility toward his father.
 3. He "demanded" to be a prisoner himself instead of Benjamin
- Your words are important and powerful - just as Judah's were. What important "speeches" have you made lately?
- God used Joseph to lead his brothers closer to Him. God wants to use you in the same way. Don't be afraid to act!

Read: Psalm 37; Romans 9.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, use me to lead people closer to You. This is an awesome task. I humbly put myself at Your disposal; use me in whatever way You want. I ask this in Jesus' name; Amen.

Wednesday - Week Eight

Catechism Review

Read Questions 31-33

1. Briefly describe the three uses of God's law (in your own words).

2. Why does the "guide" use of the law only apply to Christians?

3. In real life situations the law fulfills all three of its uses at the same time. Give an example.

4. Do you think that unbelievers are aware of God's law working as a curb in their hearts? Explain your answer.

5. God's law certainly works as a mirror in the lives of unbelievers. That's one of the reasons (certainly not the only one!) that some people need counseling help. What do you think secular counselors do about the law that is written in their clients' hearts that cause them to feel guilty?

Read: Psalm 38; Romans 10.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving me Your law ... even though sometimes I'm not too thrilled about the guilt that I feel or the fear of the consequences I might face because of my sin. Lord, continue to use Your law to show me why I desperately need Your Gospel. Amen.

Thursday - Week Eight

Lesson twenty-three: Joseph revealed to His brothers

Read: Genesis 45:1-16

Summary: This extremely touching account shows us how rich God's forgiveness is. The lives of the brothers changed in those few minutes.

Background and Comments

- Joseph couldn't control himself because his brothers showed that they had grown spiritually. This was Joseph's goal ... and now it had been reached. Joseph cried so hard that his attendants could hear him even though they had been sent out of the room.
- Genesis 45:6 and 41:46 show us that Joseph was 39 years old when he revealed himself to his brothers.
- Joseph told his brothers to tell Jacob about all the honor given to him. Joseph didn't do this to brag but to try to convince his father that he indeed was alive and in virtual control of Egypt.

Lessons for Today

- When is the last time that you were so happy that you cried? How happy do you get when someone repents of their sin? How happy do you get when someone shows signs of spiritual growth. These are truly joyous events!!
- When Joseph told his brothers who he was they didn't know what to do because they were terrified. There were so many questions ... chief among them was whether Joseph would kill them or not. Joseph quickly answered their silent questions by telling them that God had used their evil for good. That is an excellent lesson for us. God still uses the evil of other people for our good. This can give us the strength to forgive and forget, to let go of grudges. God's hand in the situation allows us to know that good has come out of evil.

Read: Psalm 39; Romans 11.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, if there are people in our congregation who are experiencing strained relations with family members please help them to repair those relationships. Give them the sensitivity, the forgiveness, and the love necessary for this difficult task. I ask this in the name of Your Son; Amen.

Friday - Week Eight

Life Questions

Topic/Question: What does God say about married couples using birth control? (Note: unmarried people should never use birth control because they should never have sex before they are married. cf.. The sixth commandment)

Bible References and Considerations

- The Bible does not give us a list of rules regarding birth control. As in other areas of our lives He gives us principles to apply to our lives:
 1. Children are a blessing from the Lord (Genesis 1:28, 9:1, Psalm 127:3,5). Our society often views children as hindrances to careers and vacations. Our society is dead wrong.
 2. Selfishness is a sin. Often people want to have children only on their terms (the time, the number, etc.). This is getting dangerously close to living as if we are the center of the universe.
 3. God wants us to be good stewards of what He has given to us (health, etc.). If another pregnancy would threaten the health of a mother we need to prayerfully take this into account.

Practically Speaking

- In this area of our Christian decision making why we make the decision is as important as what we decide. If a Christian couple humbly and prayerfully decides that having another child would not be good (for whatever God-pleasing reasons they might have) then birth control would be appropriate. This is between them and God. At the same time, the couple needs to remember that children are a blessing from God ... and that when God gives a blessing He gives the means to care for that blessing.
- Many couples find that conceiving children is not as easy as they thought it would be. We need to be careful that we don't turn our backs on God's blessings by saying, "No thanks, God; we don't want this blessing now - but try back in another four years."
- Certainly we would never want to use birth control methods that allow the sperm and the egg to unite; this amounts to a very early abortion.

Read: Psalm 40; Romans 12.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please guide couples with these difficult decisions in their marriage. Use us to bring You glory. In Jesus' name; Amen.