

Second Chances and Changed Hearts

Good morning! I'm Allen Snapp, pastor of Grace Community Church. Thanks for joining us this morning.

Before we open God's word, I know that there are many voices and perspectives speaking about the great challenges our nation is facing today. I don't want to add to those voices right now except to say that this is a time when Christians need to unite in prayer for our nation. Ultimately the solution to what's tearing this country apart isn't political, it's spiritual. We need Jesus Christ, we need God's powerful hand to move across this land and bring revival. Will you pray with me?

Father, You are the Great and Awesome God, nothing is too difficult for you. We come humbly before You and ask you to heal our nation. We know that Jesus is the only true and lasting answer to our deepest problems and our deepest needs. Pour out a spirit of revival on us that many might come to faith in Jesus Christ. Open our mouths and our hearts as believers so that we are ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us. Lord, help our nation. Bring healing where there are now deep wounds and bitter division. Bring justice where there is injustice, love where there is hatred, kindness where there is brutality. Provide for those who have lost their livelihoods or are unemployed. Recover those who are sick and remove the coronavirus from our midst. God, help and heal our nation. We ask it in Jesus name, amen.

If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Gen. 42 as we continue our series Spiraling Upward.

I used to enjoy playing Spider Solitaire on the computer to relax. If you've never played Spider Solitaire, it's a game you play it until you either win, or there are no more moves to make. But if you get to the end of the game and there are no more moves to make, there's actually one more move to make. It's called "undo". There is an "undo" button that reverses the last move you made. You can hit "undo" several times and undo a whole series of moves. Sometimes by making different choices, it's possible to turn the hand of time back and win a game you had just lost.

Don't you wish life had an "undo" button? When you mess up, or do something you regret, just hit undo and try again. Said something dumb? Hit "undo". Posted something online that got you fired? Undo. Said and done things that have hurt your marriage? Undo. Regret the way you've led your family? Undo!

Well, you've probably figured out that there is no "undo" button in life. God isn't the God of undo, but He is the God of second chances! Jonah got a second chance to preach to Ninevah. Samson got a second chance to use his strength to fight the Philistines. Peter got a second chance to confess Jesus as his Lord after denying him three times.

Lamentations 3:23 declares the mercies of the Lord are new every morning, which I take to mean that every morning is a second chance from God. God is the God of second chances!

This morning we come to a perplexing part of Joseph's story, and one that I think one is all about second chances. Background: the famine we read about last week finally reaches Joseph's family in Canaan. Let's pick up the story in Gen. 42:1

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?"² He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

³ Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. Gen. 42:1-4

The same ten brothers who sold Joseph into slavery go to Egypt and stand before Joseph. They don't recognize him but Joseph recognizes them and he begins to put his brothers through what seems to be some crazy head games. The first thing he does is accuse them of being spies, and holds one of the brothers, Simeon, saying if they don't return with their younger brother to prove their story, they will never see him again.

But then he fills their bags with grain and puts their money back in the bags. He accuses them, and then he blesses them.

Over time they run out of food and have to return to Egypt and this time they know they have to bring Benjamin with them to prove they're not spies. There Joseph treats them well...until he doesn't. He puts a silver cup in Benjamin's bag and then as they're returning home he has his men catch up with them, search their bags, find the silver cup in Benjamin's bag and drag them back to stand before him.

Why does Joseph play all these hot and cold head games with his brothers? Some think this showed that Joseph was still bitter about what his brothers had done to him. I don't think so, I think something far more interesting and redemptive is going on here. It's all about second chances. And it speaks a powerful word to us today.

1. God doesn't give us an "undo" button, but He often gives us a chance to "redo"

Joseph is giving his brothers the chance to redo what they had done and make a different choice.

a. Joseph gives his brothers a chance to redo their envy and make a different choice

²⁹ As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." ³⁰ Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

³¹ After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, "Serve the food."

³² They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. ³³ The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. ³⁴ **When portions were served to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's.** So they feasted and drank freely with him. Gen. 43:29-34

Way back in Gen. 37 we read that the ten brothers hated Joseph and were jealous of him. Joseph was the first of two sons born of Rachel, the wife Jacob loved the most, so Jacob loved her children the most, and the brothers watched their father openly favor Joseph and give him extravagantly special treatment.

The word that probably best describes what Joseph's brothers felt against Joseph is the word *envy*. Jealousy and envy are often thought to mean the same thing but they're different: jealousy is the fear of losing something we have to someone else (a jealous boyfriend is afraid that some other guy is going to steal his girlfriend). Envy is the desire to have something that someone else has and hates the fact that they have it.

Cornelius Plantinga Jr. compares coveting with envy:

To envy is to resent somebody else's good so much that one is tempted to destroy it. The coveter has empty hands and wants to fill them with somebody else's good. The envier has empty hands, and therefore wants to empty the hands of the envied. ~ Cornelius Platinga, Jr

We see envy eating up the brothers 17 years earlier. They didn't want the expensive coat Jacob gave Joseph, they just didn't want Joseph to have it. They didn't want the dreams God gave Joseph, they just wanted to kill the dreamer.

Now Joseph gives them a chance to redo their envy and make a different choice. Do they envy Benjamin the way they once envied Joseph? Remember, Jacob didn't send Benjamin with them the first time because he was afraid harm might come to him. What about harm coming to his other ten sons? Favoritism, special love. And even here in Egypt Rachel's son is being treated with special favor. His plate is heaped up with 5x more food than the other brothers. They must be thinking, "you've got to be kidding me? Even here in Egypt he gets special treatment?" Will it stir envy in their hearts towards Benjamin? Or will they make a different choice this time?

b. Joseph also gives them a chance to redo their betrayal and make a different choice

¹Now 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. 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.

³As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. 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? ⁵ Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.'"

Verse 14:

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

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."

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." Gen. 44:1-5, 14-17

Seventeen years earlier they had sold and abandoned Joseph into slavery for 20 shekels of silver. Now, over a silver cup, Joseph tells them, Benjamin alone needs to be my slave, you can go back to your father in peace. Abandon your brother and your life can be great! The question now is will they betray and abandon Jacob's other favored son over a silver cup? Or make a different choice?

God doesn't give us an undo button, but He does give us chances to redo. But second chances aren't enough, redo's aren't enough for us to get it right.

2. We need more than a second chance. We need a changed heart.

Have you ever tried to get out of a situation that you didn't like – only to find yourself in the same situation again before long? You left your last job cause your boss drove you crazy, only to find your new boss *is just the same!* You consolidate your debt to get out from under high interest rates, only to add new debt to the consolidated debt and before long you're in a worse place than you were before.

Maybe you're thinking a move to another town or state will be a fresh start: you'll slow things down, spend more time with the family, make God a higher priority, get life back on track. But before long, your life looks the same way it did before you moved. Or you left a church because you weren't making friends easily – only to find the same problem in the next church.

A lot of times we think we need a fresh start when what we really need is a fresh heart! We think we're leaving the problem behind us but the problem follows us because the problem *is* us! God brings us full circle because He's not interested in changing the circumstances, He wants to change our heart. So that we can face the same situation as a different man or woman.

Joseph wants to test his brothers to see if they're the same men they were 17 years ago. They aren't. They have changed. Verse 18.

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' 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.'

Jump to verse 20:

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, 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. 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!'"

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. 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 on my father."

Years ago the brothers were jealous of their father's special love for Joseph. Now Judah highlights without bitterness his father's special love for Benjamin and Judah wants to guard it. Years ago the brothers were indifferent to the pain Joseph's death would bring to Jacob, now they will do anything to avoid bringing that pain down on their father again. Judah is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of his brother's.

Joseph gave them a second chance, but God gave them a changed heart.

We need more than a second chance, we need a changed heart. We need more than new mercies, we need a new heart. **And that's just what the gospel provides!** God is the God of second chances, and God is the God of changed hearts. He gives new mercy every day, and His Spirit is working every day to make us new. On the inside, in the heart!

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of

reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Cor. 5:17-19

Through Jesus' blood we are forgiven of our sins (which are not undone but are removed from us as far as the east is from the west). And by His Spirit we are new creations!

The gospel isn't limited to receiving forgiveness of sin, it includes freedom from sin. We could have a million second chances and nothing would change if our hearts are the same. Age doesn't make us more like Christ. Experience doesn't make us more like Christ. The Spirit working deeply in our hearts makes us more like Christ.

If we pray for second chances, but harden our hearts to the Spirit's work, we will circle the same mountain over and over again. The Bible stresses that we must not harden our hearts. Heb. 3:15 says, **"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."**

¹⁶ Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?

Their situation changed, they moved out of Egypt, but their hearts didn't change because they hardened them. God warns us: don't do that. Let's hear that warning today and take it to heart.

- If our heart is full of bitterness, envy, hatred – getting away from the people we blame isn't going to fix the problem. We'll just carry the problem with us to the next place. We need to soften our heart before God and let Him remove the poison of bitterness and hatred.
- If we exploit, cheat, lie, abuse, or otherwise destroy people, our heart is hard.
- If we act like we're spiritual and close to God when we're in public but treat our family badly in private, our hard heart is deceiving us. We're not close to God, we're far from Him. We need God to soften our heart!
- If our hearts are complacent, comfortable, unmoved by the brokenness and sin in our lives and the world around us, our hearts are hard. I have been convicted of this, so this is for me.
- If our hearts aren't moved by the hatred, racism, violence and division going on around us, but we immediately go to our political posture, whatever that might be, we need a softened heart.

The Times once put out a question, *what's wrong with the world?* British pastor and author GK Chesterton wrote back, *Dear sirs, I am.*

The problem with the world is me. It's my heart. And yours. And the gospel answers that problem with forgiveness in Christ, and transformation by the power of Christ.

David, when confronted with his horrendous sin against God and man, sin that included adultery and murder, prayed a prayer that God heard, honored and answered. It's a prayer we need to pray today.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Prayer for new mercy, a second chance. But he goes on...

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Ps. 51:1-2, 10

God, give me a new heart. We need both. New mercy and a new heart. A second chance, and a changed heart. Christ offers us both. Let's pray.