

Introduction

In 1973 a movie came out that starred Paul Neuman and Robert Redford. It was called, "The Sting," and it was about two con men taking revenge on a ruthless crime boss. Everything was set up to resemble an off-track horse betting parlor. They made everything look real, so real that a conman was conned at his own game.

In our text today, Joseph tells his steward to plant his silver cup in Benjamin's bag and to return everyone's money in their sacks. He was to wait until they had left and then chase them down. He was to accuse them of stealing the silver cup belonging to his master, and then bring them back to Joseph's house. Once they got back, they were accused again, and the youngest is judged to be guilty and to remain as a slave, while the rest were free to go back. Just like in the movie, everything was set up and acted out perfectly. The brothers had no idea that they were set up, and are fully expecting to suffer the consequences for taking the silver cup belonging to Joseph, something that they had not done.

But, the brothers had done something seventeen years earlier. They put Joseph in a pit, and then decided to sell him to the Midianites. They slaughtered an animal and put the blood on his multi-colored tunic and brought it to Jacob. They deceived their father, and all this time he was under the impression that his son had been eaten by wild animals. This time, they are the ones being deceived. They believe they are going to be imprisoned, or have to leave their brother behind as a slave. In our story today, Judah pleads to stay as the slave so that Benjamin can return home to their father. He does not want his father to go down to Sheol in sorrow. Joseph's brothers deceived their father because they hated their brother and wanted to get rid of him. Joseph's actions are not based on hate or vengeance; he was testing his brothers to find out what is in their hearts.

Judah's Plea (Gen 44:1-34)

1. Joseph Gives Instructions To His Steward (Gen 44:1-5)
2. Joseph's Steward Brings The Brothers Back (Gen 44:6-13)
3. Joseph's Verdict (Gen 44:14-17)
4. Judah's Plea (Gen 44:18-34)

1. Joseph Gives Instructions To His Steward (Gen 44:1-5)

(Gen 44:1-5) "Then he commanded his house steward, saying, "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} "Put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph had told *him*. {3} As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. {4} They had *just* gone out of the city, *and* were not far off, when Joseph said to his house steward, "Up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? {5} 'Is not this the one from which my lord drinks and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'"

Joseph's instructions clearly indicate that he is going to bring them back and charge the youngest with stealing the silver cup. He knows how special Benjamin is to his father, and that this will test his brothers to the fullest. He is going to test them to see if they will treat his youngest brother like they did him, or whether they will stick up for them. We saw that Joseph tested them in Genesis 42 on their first trip. This is just another test to find out what is in their heart.

The silver cup was used by some pagan nations for divination. Some scholars associate the silver cup with a practice of doing a thorough inquiry. In Adam Clark's commentary he had this to say about the silver cup:

"Now there has been in the east a tradition, the commencement of which is lost in immemorial time, that there was a CUP, which had passed successively into the hands of different potentates, which possessed the strange property of representing in it the whole world, and all the things which were then doing in it. The cup is called jami Jemsheed, the cup of Jemsheed, a very ancient king of Persia, whom late historians and poets have confounded with Bacchus, Solomon, Alexander the Great, etc. This CUP, filled with the elixir of immortality, they say was discovered when digging to lay the foundations of Persepolis. The Persian poets are full of allusions to this cup, which, from its property of representing the whole world and its transactions, is styled by them jam jehan nima, "the cup showing the universe;" and to the intelligence received by means of it they attribute the great prosperity of their ancient monarchs, as by it they understood all events, past, present, and to come."

Scholars are in agreement that Joseph did not practice divination, as the cup would suggest. But, the cup could very well have signified that he possessed great wisdom and intelligence about all matters. We know that Joseph said that the interpretations of dreams belong to God. We know that God's favor and hand was upon Joseph. He was not into witchcraft, divination, or false religion. He was a man of integrity, who served god with a whole heart.

2. Joseph's Steward Brings The Brothers Back (Gen 44:6-13)

(Gen 44:6-13) "So he overtook them and spoke these words to them. {7} They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. {8} "Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? {9} "With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." {10} So he said, "Now let it also be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and *the rest of you shall be innocent.*" {11} Then they hurried, each man lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. {12} He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. {13} Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city."

Joseph's steward did exactly what Joseph instructed him to do. He had planted the silver cup in Benjamin's sack, and now he had overtaken them. He spoke as he had been instructed and accused them of stealing his master's silver cup. The brothers defend themselves, stating that they had returned the money that they had found in their sacks. Then, they said, "How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house." They also said that if any of them were found to have the cup, he should be put to death, and the rest to be made slaves. You would not make that statement unless you were pretty confident about your innocence.

The steward responded by saying the guilty one will become a slave and the rest would be innocent. They hurried and lowered their sacks to the ground and opened them up. When the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, they tore their clothes and returned to the city. The tearing or

rending of garments was a sign of remorse, repentance, and mourning. In Genesis 37:34, Jacob tore his clothes and mourned for Joseph when he thought he had been killed by wild animals. In Numbers 14:5-6 "Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes." The tearing of clothes showed disapproval of what was being done. They were protesting the decision. Joshua then encouraged the people not to listen to the evil report and tried to stir up faith to do what was right – to obey and trust God and to go conquer the Promised Land.

In 2 Samuel 1:11, David hears that this Amalekite had put Saul to death as his own request. David tore his clothes, and the men with him tore their clothes. They mourned, wept, and fasted for Saul. Joseph's brothers are extremely sorrowful about the silver cup being found. They are saddened and are demonstrating true repentance and sorrow.

3. **Joseph's Verdict** (Gen 44:14-17)

(Gen 44:14-17) "When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him. {15} Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?" {16} So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found." {17} But he said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

When they arrived back at Joseph's house, he was still there. Of course he was still there. He was waiting for his steward to bring them back. He had orchestrated the whole thing. His brothers fell to the ground before him. They humbled themselves again in front of him. There is a principle in Scripture that is repeated a number of times. When we humble ourselves before the Lord, He will lift us up. He will give us grace. Joseph's brothers are humbling themselves before him and want grace. (See Psalm 138:6, Proverbs 3:34, Matthew 23:12, James 4:6, and 1 Peter 5:5.)

Joseph questioned them, saying, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you now know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?" Joseph is acting the part to a Tee. He did not practice divination. He worshiped the one and only God, and went to Jehovah for interpretations and divine wisdom. He and his steward get an emmy award for their part in this story.

Judah responds to the charge made by Joseph and said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. We are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found." He does not argue or make excuses. He accepts responsibility for the wrongdoing and is ready to suffer the consequences.

Joseph then said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father." Again, Joseph knows that Benjamin is the key to the pressure on his brothers. This will be the ultimate test on whether they bail on him or stand up for him. He has given his brothers the easy way out. They can all return in peace to their father.

4. **Judah's Plea** (Gen 44:18-34)

(Gen 44:18-34) "Then Judah approached him, and said, "Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh. {19} "My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' {20} "We said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a little child of *his* old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, 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} "But we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' {23} "You said to your servants, however, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' {24} "Thus it came about when we went up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. {25} "Our father said, 'Go back, buy us a little food.' {26} "But we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' {27} "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; {28} and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn in pieces," and I have not seen him since. {29} 'If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.' {30} "Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, {31} when he sees that the lad is not *with us*, he will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow. {32} "For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him *back* to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.' {33} "Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. {34} "For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me—for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?"

Judah responds again to Joseph. He replies respectfully, calling him lord, and telling him he is equal of Pharaoh. He refers to himself as Joseph's servant and asks permission to speak to him. He pleads for Joseph not to be angry. Then, Judah tells him about his father and his two children. He tells him that the one brother is dead, which is Joseph, and that Benjamin is the only one left of his mother, and how much his father loves him. He tells him that if something should happen to the youngest one, his father will die. He tells him of their conversation with his father and how they could not come to Egypt to stand in front of Joseph without bringing Benjamin. He tells Joseph of his father's words, that if something happens to Benjamin he will bring his gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow. He told Joseph that he had become surety for his younger brother, and that he would bear the blame for not bringing him back. Judah is a man of his word. He gave his word to his father, and now he is accepting the responsibility and consequences for his brother. He pleads with Joseph not to keep Benjamin and cause sorrow to his father. Finally, he offers to stay in place of Benjamin and to be a slave to Joseph.

Judah has made a great case to Joseph. He has come humbly with contriteness of heart. He has accepted responsibility and the consequences. Even though he was personally not guilty, he did not try to save his own neck. He was willing to suffer wrong for the sake of his father's wellbeing.

There are times in our life where we might need to make a plea. In Daniel, the four youth did not want to defile themselves with the king's food, so Daniel made a plea. He asked that they be fed vegetables for ten days and then be examined. If they were healthy, then he asked that they could continue getting the vegetable only. They were not vegan; they just did not want to eat unclean

meat, like pork or something else. They were trying to follow God's laws and principles, and were living under the Old Covenant. Their plea was successful and they were allowed to eat only vegetable.

(Dan 1:8-16) "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. {9} Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, {10} and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king." {11} But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, {12} "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. {13} "Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see." {14} So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. {15} At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. {16} So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables."

Here are some principles about making an appeal. First, Daniel's heart was right. He wanted to obey God and not defile himself. Second, he submitted to his authority. He was fully submitted to God, and he was submitted to the commander of the officials. Daniel did not take matters in his own hand and refuse the food. Third, he did not act defiantly or arrogantly. He humbly requested that they be tested for ten days. Then, the commander could observe their appearance and act accordingly. Fourth, Daniel made a reasonable request. He did not ask for a year; he asked for ten days.

In Esther 4:8, Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree against the Jews, and told him to give it to Esther so that she could make a plea to save the Jewish people. Esther and the Jews in Susa fasted for three days about the plea. Esther sought the Lord's guidance, favor, and help. She made a plan, which included throwing a couple of banquets. She came before the King and he extended to her the scepter, allowing her to come in. She asked only that the King and Haman would attend a banquet. At that banquet, the King asked her what her request was, and she asked that they might attend a second banquet. Finally, she made her plea known to the king. She said she would not have bothered the king if it was only to become slaves, but the intent was to kill her and all her people. We see that Esther's heart was right. She fasted and prepared her heart. She humbled herself by fasting. Like Judah, she was willing to risk her life to save the life of her people. She went in to the King's presence, uninvited, which meant risking her life. She honored the King and made a reasonable request for her life and the life of her people.

In Judah's appeal, he had his heart in the right place. He wanted to honor and protect his father. There was no selfishness in him. He had a wife and sons at home. He was going to give up a lot to protect his father and to be a man of his word. Second, he showed great respect for his authority, saying he was equal to Pharaoh. Third, he made a humble appeal to Joseph, calling him Lord, and himself a servant. He begged him to listen to him. Fourth, his request was reasonable. He was willing to become a slave to Joseph in place of his brother. The sentence for the crime would be paid, but by him instead of his younger brother, Benjamin.

When you are not in agreement with something that your authorities have asked you to do, let me encourage you to make an appeal. Pray about it and ask God for wisdom. Make sure your heart is right in the matter. Judah was on the spot and did not have time to fast. Esther took time, three days in fact, to fast and seek God's favor and guidance. She humbled herself and prepared her heart. Make sure that you are submitted to your authorities and that you are not in rebellion to them. Make a humble appeal, not an arrogant demand. Make your appeal a reasonable one.

Conclusion and Applications (Mark 14:36, Rom 3:23, 2 Cor 5:21)

This morning, Judah was persuasive in getting his father to send Benjamin with them to Egypt so that they could buy more food. He was willing to become surety for Benjamin so that the lives of all of their families would have food. When Joseph planted his cup in Benjamin's sack and had them brought back, it was Judah that responded and plead for Benjamin to be allowed to go home. Even though he had a wife and children at home, he was willing to become a slave for life so that Benjamin could go home to his father. He thought more about the father's will than his own will. That sounds like someone else in the Scriptures.

When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane praying, He prayed, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." (Mark 14:36) It was not Joseph's silver cup that Jesus referred to; it was the cup of death. Jesus was willing to lay His life down so that we could be restored to the Father. Each of us had a cup in our sacks. We have all sinned and been found guilty. (Romans 3:23) But, Jesus was willing to take the consequences and penalty for our cup, and die for us so that we could be restored to the Father.

This morning, if you have never asked Christ into your heart, I want to give you an opportunity. All of us have sinned and had a cup found in our sacks. All of us are guilty, but Jesus was innocent. Paul wrote that He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21) He took our punishment so that we could have a relationship with God. The only way that you and I can go to our Father is to have our sins paid for. If you have never asked Jesus to come into your heart, and have never made Him Lord, you can do that this morning. Just pray with me,

"Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for our sins, and were raised from the dead. I ask You to forgive me of my sins and come into my life as my Lord and Master. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."

Stay tuned for next week as we study Genesis 45 and see the results of Judah's plea to Joseph.

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