

Judah Loves His Father
Genesis 44:14-34

Turn to Genesis 42 please. This story is about a son who loved a father that did not really love him. Jacob the father was not very good to Judah, but Judah was very good to his father Jacob. This is part of the Joseph story in Genesis.

One of the things that happens in the Joseph story is that Judah becomes the natural leader of the 12 sons of Jacob. Reuben was the oldest, but he was not the leader. Judah was the fourth son, and he was the one who led and the rest followed.

We're mostly interested in what Judah says to Joseph in Genesis 44, but we have to tell some of the story leading up to that. So Joseph is in Egypt, he's now prime minister of Egypt. There have been seven years of incredibly good harvests, and Joseph stored up food, and now they are in the second year of the famine, and the whole world already comes to Egypt to buy grain.

Why do you just keep looking at each other? 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?" 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." Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.

If Jacob knows there's food in Egypt, his sons probably know too. They're the ones out and around. I wonder if they're looking at each other because there is food in Egypt, but they sold Joseph into Egypt, and they have a bad feeling about that place. They are not called Jacob's sons, they are called Joseph's brothers. So they go to where Joseph is.

But Jacob won't send Benjamin along, because harm might come to him. If harm should come to one of the other ten? For Jacob that would not be so bad, so long as harm did not come to Benjamin. Since Joseph is gone, Benjamin is all Jacob has left of Rachel. Benjamin has taken Joseph's place as Jacob's favorite.

The Story – Genesis 42 – 44

So the ten brothers go to Egypt to buy food. Joseph recognized them right away, but they do not recognize him at all. Joseph is pretty hard on them, pretends he suspects they are spies and that he does not trust them. He asks if they have a father and any more brothers, so they tell him they have an old father and one younger brother.

It is important to understand why Joseph was so hard on them. At first it seems that he's just angry at them, and getting some revenge. But as the story goes on, we learn that Joseph was after something else, not revenge.

Joseph wanted to find out if the ten brothers would still abandon their father's favorite. Had they changed? Or were they still the same? Joseph suspected from the start that Benjamin had taken his place as Jacob's favorite. He was right. Would the brothers leave Benjamin in Egypt the way they sent Joseph to Egypt twenty-two years earlier? Joseph wants to find out.

So Joseph kept Simeon in Egypt, in prison, and sent the rest back with their grain. And their money. And he said, "Do not come back unless you bring your youngest brother. I will not deal with you unless you bring him."

They went back, and used up the food they'd gotten. Now we are in Genesis 43. They need to go back for more food, but old Jacob will not let Benjamin out of his sight. But they need food, and eventually Judah persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin come with them to Egypt to buy more grain.

Rueben was the oldest son, Judah was the fourth son, but in the Joseph story, Judah turned out to be the real leader of the sons. It was Judah who had the idea to sell Joseph to the traders going to Egypt, and it was Judah who persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin come with them to Egypt.

So they went the second time to Egypt, with Benjamin, and I'm leaving out lots of juicy stuff here. When they left with the sacks of grain they had just bought, Genesis 44, Joseph told his servants to sneak his special mug into Benjamin's grain sack. Joseph gave them a few hours to start their trip home, then sent his steward after them to arrest them for stealing his special cup.

The brothers tell the steward there's not a chance they'd have stolen this cup, why would they do that? But the steward searches all their grain sacks, and there it is in Benjamin's grain sack. The brothers were all shocked, and were horribly distressed. The steward said, "the one whose sack has the cup will be a slave, and the rest of you can go free." But they all went back to Egypt.

Joseph's Test – Genesis 44:14-17

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

So far, the brothers are passing the test. Joseph pushes them harder.

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."

Judah's Speech – Genesis 44:18-34

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. My lord asked his servants, ‘Do you have a father or a brother?’ 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.’

“Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.’ And we said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.’ But you told your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.’ When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

“Then our father said, ‘Go back and buy a little more food.’ But we said, ‘We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’

“Your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, “He has surely been torn to pieces.” And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.’

“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, 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. 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!’

“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. 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.”

Judah never pretends his father Jacob is any better than he really is. Even if Joseph knew nothing of this family, he could tell from this speech that the father did not care nearly as much about the other ten brothers. And in spite of being one of these ten, Judah has great compassion for his father.

Let’s look again at the paragraph where Judah tells the Egyptian prime minister exactly what Jacob said: *Your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, “He has surely been torn to pieces.” And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.’*

“*You know that my wife bore me two sons.*” Jacob had four wives and twelve sons. But he talks to the other ten as if he had one wife and two sons. And Jacob tells the other ten that if they take away his last favorite, he will die, and they will have killed him. “*You will bring my grey head to the grave in misery.*”

And old Jacob has no idea there’s anything wrong with this. It is a blind spot. The Egyptian prime minister, Joseph, has had their brother Simeon in prison in Egypt all this time, but Jacob seems remarkably okay with that. Judah just quotes him, gives Jacob’s own words to Joseph, but Judah has so much compassion for old lopsided Jacob, and hates to bring him harm.

And so at the end, Judah begs Joseph, “take me as your slave instead, and send the boy home to his father, so my father will be at peace. Let me take the boy’s place. My father will be okay if I never come home, so take me instead and send the boy home to my father.”

Joseph wanted to know if the brothers will still abandon the spoiled favorite in Egypt. He got his answer, no they would not leave Benjamin in Egypt, and they were led in this by Judah.

One of the brothers must have told Jacob about this conversation, because at the end of Genesis, when Jacob was dying, and Jacob blessed each of his twelve sons, he gave Judah a wonderful blessing. The reason king David came from Judah, and ultimately our Lord himself, was Jacob’s blessing on Judah, and that blessing came mostly because of the speech we just read.

Right through Genesis there have been family troubles. Spouses not getting along, parents and children divided, sisters divided and brothers divided. But at the end of Genesis it turns around.

And it turned around because two of the brothers treated family members much better than they deserved. Judah treated his father Jacob better than his father treated him. He was not fooled about his father, but he had compassion on him, and was willing to be a slave for life!

And at the end of Genesis, Joseph told the rest of the brothers that when they sold him, they truly intended to harm him, but God meant it for good, and Joseph would take good care of them all. Good relationships in the family came when family members treated others better than they deserved, better than they had been treated themselves. Judah and Joseph did that.

And why did that happen? Were those two better? No, they were not. We read enough about both to be unimpressed. (We did not read the whole Judah story.) Both began poorly.

It happened because this was the family God blessed. When God decided to bless Abraham and his descendants, this was included. Judah was good to his father, and Joseph to his brothers, because God was blessing that family. And in Christ this blessing has come to us, and when we do this for one another, we do it because the blessing of that family has come on us.

We are brothers and sisters of each other. In the NT, we are called brothers and sisters about 250 times. It is by far the most common way the writers spoke to the churches. Let's thank God for this blessing, and let's live it out with one another. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, we are relieved that after all the trouble in this family in Genesis, you brought healing and restoration. Thank you for your blessing, the blessing that led Judah to do what he did for his father. Thank you for this amazing story. And Father, build into us what you put into Judah. Build into us what you put into Joseph. We know that's your way. Lead us farther and farther down that path. We are selfish and have blind spots. But so were they, and you helped them. Thank you that you work in us this way. Amen.

BENEDICTION: Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us all with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.