

### I. Introduction

- A. We continue our series called *The Secrets of a Highly Contented Life*. We have studied every chapter from Genesis 37 all the way to today's chapter, Genesis 42. The case study for contentment is a man named Joseph.
- B. Joseph was 17 years old, the favorite son of his father, Jacob. Joseph dreamed two dreams; in one, his family bowed down before him. When he told these dreams to his brothers, they were not pleased. One day they attacked Joseph and sold him to a band of slave-traders going to Egypt. They thought they were rid of their pesky little brother once and for all.
- C. They're about to receive a massive shock to their systems. For over 20 years, these men have stooped under the heavy weight of a secret guilt. They are stuck. They can't get past what they did but they can't admit it either. So, they keep the secret and live with the unfinished business of a tormented conscience.
- D. But God, in His mighty providence, is about to finish their unfinished business for them.
- E. The brothers never knew, when they sold Joseph into slavery, they triggered an incredible chain reaction of God's providence. The chain reaction put young Joseph on the throne of Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh in power, wealth and authority.
- F. Nothing is too hard for God.
- G. Now we reach chapter 42. Twenty years have gone by since his brothers sold Joseph into slavery. They assume he's either dead or a slave. Nothing allows them to shake the guilt of their evil act.

### II. Guilt and Contentment

- A. They are about to discover a great secret of contentment. One of the most indispensable secrets of all: *The Secret of Closure*. You have to finish the unfinished business of your life. You will never be content with a guilty, nagging conscience.
- B. Their memories haunt them. Their consciences gnaw at their contentment. Their joy is dampened. Their lives are okay, but nothing brings great satisfaction.
- C. Many Christians live with a boat load of guilt and shame. Maybe that's you. Maybe you have failed God, let someone down, hurt your children, your spouse, your parents, your partner. Maybe you've crossed boundaries you never thought you would. You may have even hardened your heart. If you carry a load of guilt, you are just like the men in this chapter; just like Joseph's brothers.
- D. If you're anything at all like these people, I am so glad you're here today! Because in this chapter, guilty men begin a journey to wholeness. They take their first faltering steps to close the book on the unfinished business of their past.
- E. This chapter has four natural sections; each section discloses more about how God brings closure to your unfinished business.

### III. How God Brings Closure

#### A. God brings you back to your true identity, verses 1-5

1. A great famine hits the whole known world. The time period is roughly 1,700 b.c. The only place in the world with abundant food supplies is Egypt and that's because a wise and discerning ruler stockpiled vast amounts of grain for seven years.
2. The old father, Jacob, mentions Egypt and all his sons get quiet. Why do you stare at each other? The answer is because the last place they want to think of is that place, the place where 20 years ago slave traders dragged their screaming little brother. This is the dark skeleton rattling in their closet. Their faces turn red, their eyes can only look downward. How long can they hide their guilt?
3. I want you to notice how the brothers are identified in this paragraph.
  - a) verse 1: His sons (Jacob's sons).
  - b) verse 3: Joseph's brothers.
  - c) verse 5: Sons of Israel
4. There's a clear progression. Their father has two names: Jacob (the name given at birth which means cheater) and Israel (the new name God gave him which means Prince with God).
5. We have to ask this question, "How will God transform these men from acting like the sons of a cheater into acting like sons of a prince with God?" The answer has something to do with their relationship to Joseph.
6. God is putting together a royal family and He is using these wicked brothers as His raw material.
7. If God can make a royal family out of these men, He can make a royal family out of all of us, including you. You see, the fact that you have sinned and failed does not disqualify you from God's very best. It does not disqualify you from God's love. It does not disqualify you from salvation or eternal life or from anything that God wants to do for you or through you.
8. Some people think they've gone so far that not even God can bring them back. Maybe you think that you've crossed God's point of no return.
9. This is simply never true. No one is beyond God's power. No one is beyond redemption. Even these evil brothers. There is hope even for the worst offenders.
10. This is because of how God operates with us. He does not name us by our failures; He names us by our potential. Right now these brothers see no potential for a fulfilling, rewarding, contented life. They are weighted down by their unfinished business. Watch as God makes them a royal family.
11. So the brothers set out on a journey for food for their physical needs. Little do they realize that their spiritual needs will be met as well.

#### B. God confronts you with the truth about yourself, verses 6-22

1. This is the longest section of the chapter. It has a very simple structure. When the brothers arrive in Egypt, they go before the ruler of the land to buy grain. He just happens to be their long lost brother, Joseph. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they don't recognize him.
2. Moses describes four cycles in their conversation and it isn't good. Joseph initiates each cycle with an accusation:

- a) verse 7 “He spoke roughly to them.”
  - b) verse 9 “He said to them, You are spies!”
  - c) verse 12 “He said to them, No but you have come to spy out the land!”
  - d) verse 14 “And Joseph said to them, ‘It is as I have told you, you are spies.’”
3. What’s going on here?
  4. God is confronting them with the truth. What truth? The truth about themselves. You see, they feel guilty because they are guilty, but they won’t admit they’re guilty, so they can never find release. As long as they deny the truth about themselves, they can never experience forgiveness. God brings them face to face with the truth.
  5. You will either look squarely at the unfinished chapters of your life and bring about closure or you will never be content.
    - a) Bitterness
    - b) Evil
    - c) Broken relationships
    - d) Personal loss, harm or tragedy
    - e) Abuse, giving or receiving
  6. You can’t pretend that stuff never happened; you can’t hide behind it either. There is no such things as “permanently damaged goods” in God’s kingdom.
  7. In the first conversation (verses 6-7) the brothers do not recognize their true need. They came for grain. They see no need for spiritual restoration.
  8. Joseph sees the need and that’s his plan. Why doesn’t Joseph just reveal himself?
  9. Because he has to test them first. He has to know HOW to reveal himself: either in mercy or vengeance. He doesn’t know what their lives have been like for 20 years. So Joseph comes up with a brilliant plan that will serve two purposes:
    - a) It reveals their true character to Joseph.
    - b) It reveals their true character to themselves and leads them to repentance and forgiveness.
  10. In the second conversation (verses 8-11), Joseph calls them spies.
  11. A spy is someone who is deceptive. “You’re are not what you seem to be,” he says. Hmm. He’s right, isn’t he? They seem to be decent, hard working family men. They don’t seem to be betrayers of their little brother and their own father. They’re not as innocent as they seem. So, when Joseph calls them spies, he’s basically right.
  12. What do they say? Look at verse 11.
  13. “We are honest.”
  14. If there is any word in the language that did not apply to these men it’s this one. They are not honest. Their whole lives are a conspiracy of silence and lies. They are deceitful, yet they claim to be honest.
  15. Sound like anybody you know? How many people fill churches in this and every city, week after week, who God would say, “You are not what you seem to be! You are a deceiver!” And we would shout back, “Not me! I am honest! What you see is what you get!”
  16. Right. That’s why you spend so much time in front of the mirror before you come to church.
  17. In the third conversation, verses 12-13, the brothers come close to a breakthrough. Joseph repeats the charge of being spies. Here, they begin to reveal the truth. Verse 13 is the first time they refer to themselves as brothers of Joseph, the one who “is no more.”
  18. They called him Mr. Dreamer, they hated him, they called him Jacob’s son, but now, finally, for the first time they call him their brother.
  19. The truth begins to surface; the sinful issue that has them stuck begins to come out, though they still haven’t come clean. At this point, they’re just flirting with the truth.
  20. Do you know anybody like that? Anybody close enough to the truth to know that it’s there, but far enough from the truth that there’s no danger of being changed by it?
  21. God will not let you play games forever. He will bother your conscience until one of two outcomes happen:
    - a) Either you turn away from God or
    - b) You turn toward Him with a humbled heart.
  22. That’s what happens in the fourth conversation (verses 14-22). Again, Joseph is seeking the truth; Joseph is confronting them with the truth (verse 20) “that your words may be verified;” seen to be true.
  23. Joseph proposes this test: Go home and get your youngest brother. He still doesn’t trust them yet. Here they are, but they say there’s a younger brother. What happened to him? Why isn’t he with them? There is no good explanation and Joseph suspects maybe little Benjamin suffered the same fate Joseph suffered. Joseph has to know if their hearts have changed. So, he tells them that they can’t all go home until some of them go fetch Benjamin.
  24. To make his point, he gives them three days in prison. Why? Because he wants to redeem them and that means making them face the truth of what they did to him.
  25. God uses this prison time to make them face reality.
    - a) *“Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’ And Rueben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not speak to you, saying, do not sin against the boy;’ and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.”* Genesis 42:21, 22, NKJV
  26. They are loaded with guilt. They’re waiting for the ax to drop. They sold their brother into slavery and conspired to keep it silent. They lied to their father and told him a wild animal killed Joseph. This is too much to bear, especially for the

firstborn, Rueben.

27. They remember back to the day they knocked Joseph over the head and threw him into a pit. They remember the callousness they showed while they ate as Joseph cried out for help. Joseph's pathetic pleas haunt their memories.
28. It is at this point Rueben voices what they all feel; the intense guilt of an evil heart and the great need for retribution. Who will balance the scales of justice for them?
29. The key line comes at the end of verse 22, "Now comes the reckoning for his blood." KJV
30. So they feel terrible, but even that is not enough. They're operating on some kind of karmic principle, "What goes around comes around."
31. But that is NOT Scripture. Because, who is making things come around? Some impersonal force? Blind chance, luck, fate? What makes it come around? As they are confronted with their past, the brothers fear some blind force of retribution. But they do not yet fear God.
32. All of us are created in God's image. We possess an innate sense of justice, a need for justice to prevail. You hate it when you see something unfair. That is good, it is a reflection of God's untarnished image. But it's also bad, because you, I and the human race are essentially unjust.
33. We have broken the laws of God. We have even broken the laws of our own conscience.
34. The inevitable result is an unshakable sense of guilt. Look how we shake it.
  - a) Blame your parents
  - b) Redefine sin as a poor self-image
  - c) Redefine righteousness as doing what feels right to you
  - d) Suppress the guilt
  - e) Get rid of it through therapy or medication
35. Anything but a reality check; anything but a day of reckoning.
36. And that's too bad, because you will never finish your unfinished business until you admit the truth about yourself. I am not what I seem to be. I am far worse; compounding my guilt. I'm nothing like I could be with the power of God in my life.
37. All this because they went out for a few loaves of bread!
38. So, God brings you back to your true identity. To do that, He confronts you with the truth about yourself.

### **C. God shows you grace, verses 23-28**

1. Finally, Joseph can take no more so he turns to cry. This is an important point in the story, because it's the first time we know for sure that his motives are gracious. Even though Joseph gets tough with them, his heart is tender.
2. The brothers are telling the truth now, but they're still not coming clean.
3. So after a break, he comes back and ties up Simeon, the second oldest. Then Joseph does the one thing for them they truly can't bear; the one thing that finally scares them enough to worry about God.
4. Joseph shows them grace.
  - a) He weeps for them
  - b) He gives them grain
  - c) He returns the purchase price of the grain
  - d) He supplies provisions for their journey
  - e) He has servants load their donkeys
  - f) He graces them out and the result is verse 28:
    - (1) *"Then their hearts failed them and they were afraid, saying to one another, 'What is this that God has done to us?'"*  
Genesis 42:28, NKJV
5. Finally, God! They realize they're dealing with God. God has His hand in the messy stew of their lives. It's not just me and them and brothers and sisters and parents and kids and friends and politicians and rulers.
6. It is God who has His hand in your affairs.
7. Finally, they turn their thoughts to God. This is the first time they connect their own evil with the justice of God. They ask what God has done to them. But notice, it is only after God has blessed them.
8. What is this that God has done? He's doing all He can to restore their spiritual lives, make them whole again, resurface the dark skeleton in their closet. Not to punish them, but to get rid of it once and for all. He is providing for them. He is protecting their future as a race, though they don't know it yet. He is reuniting their family. That is what God is doing. He is showering them with grace after grace, but they don't get it, so it scares them.
9. Do you know the grace of God? God gives you all you need and then tells you to keep your money. He sends you on a journey to an authentic, real, happy, full, transparent, guilt-free, shame-free life and He provides ALL you need for the journey. He pays the price. He does all the work for you and is with you every step of the way.
10. Is this something to fear?
11. Absolutely. The proud heart always thinks it has to buy God off, impress God. Maybe you think you have to get your act together before God will accept you. Maybe you think you have to straighten up and fly right. Maybe you think you have to wash away your own sins.
12. You are missing the point.
13. The point is grace. If your heart is chained by guilt, you will never feel free or contented until God balances the books, until God balances the scales of justice. You can never do it. God must pay for your sins. God must pull you back out of your guilt.

14. That is the meaning of Christ's Cross. The place where God forgave all your sins, punished the Great Substitute, the Great Sacrifice, the Great Scapegoat for the sin of the world. At the Cross, God balanced the scales of justice. You added your sin on one side of the scale; God added Christ's death on the other.
15. I would suggest that anybody suffering from guilt must come quickly to the cross and hear the words of God:
  - a) *"Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."* Isaiah 1:18, NKJV
16. The answer to all guilt is the Cross; the highest expression of the grace of God. The catalyst that activates God's grace toward a fallen world. All along, God has been summoning you to grace, putting your world in order to bring you to His grace. He uses your successes and your failures. One way or another, He will bring you to give up on your own efforts that you might simply trust Him. God is showing you His grace.

#### **D. God is calling you to faith (verses 29-38)**

1. This last section shows us what our response must be to God's grace. Actually, it shows how not to respond to grace. Jacob and Rueben show us the opposite of faith. This is the author's way of making his point: God is calling us to faith.
2. The men return home, without Simeon, and tell their father the story. Then they unload their sacks and discover all their money has been returned.
3. The source of your grace does not want you to pay for it.
4. Verse 35 says the brothers and their father were in fear. Grace is always scary to the faithless person.
5. Look at verse 36:
  - a) *"And Jacob their father said to them, You have bereaved me; Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me."* Genesis 42:36, NKJV
6. Jacob has four complaints, four anxieties, four laments:
  - a) Joseph is no more (untrue)
  - b) Simeon is no more (untrue)
  - c) And you would take Benjamin (untrue)
  - d) All these things are against me (untrue)
7. Every one of his complaints is baseless, untrue and backwards. God is about to do something wonderful beyond his wildest dreams; He is going to restore his precious, beloved Joseph and raise him and the whole family to a dignity, honor and royalty. These things aren't against him, they're for him.
8. What is faith?
  - a) Faith is the statement your life makes about your God.
9. Faith trusts God because God is trustworthy. Faith keeps hope because God fulfills hopes. Faith reposes in the will of God because God's will is best. Faith relaxes because God is in control. We can read backwards from your faith to see what you believe about God.
10. What Jacob believed was all bad.
11. Rueben, too.
  - a) *"Then Rueben spoke to his father, saying, 'Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.'" Genesis 42:37, NKJV*
  - b) This is so typical of a person who doesn't understand grace. A guilty conscience tries to buy its way clear. Self-sacrifice, self-effort, grandiose gestures, false heroics. God is not impressed.
12. You can never outweigh your guilt. Your good deeds can never balance the scales. Only God can do it, only the Cross. The only way to receive the benefits of Jesus and His shed blood is by faith. Faith to get started, faith to keep going. God is inviting you to a deeper, muscular, yielded, mature faith today.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

- A. God wants to bring closure to your unfinished business. He wants to shut the books.
- B. If it's your guilt, He wants to redeem you through Christ. He wants you to redeem your broken relationships as best you can by making amends.
- C. If it's other people's guilt that controls you, if it's the evil others have done to you, God wants to bring closure to that unfinished business too. He wants you to release that person into God's hands, living or dead, it doesn't matter. He wants you to get on with your life and not let other people's sin control you any more.
- D. Do you really want to know the secret of closure? How to finished your unfinished business? How to close the books on a needlessly energized past?
- E. Then come back next time because the story climbs to a great conclusion back in Egypt.