

I. Introduction: Genesis 43

- A. A lot of football fans remember a crazy game in Chicago called the Fog Bowl. Fog poured into Soldier Field like soup poured into a bowl. I was at that game and it was amazing.
- B. We sat behind the south end zone and we could see, maybe, to the 20 yard line. Otherwise, it was all fog. When the game moved to our end of the field, players emerged from the fog and we could see them for awhile.
- C. When the game went the opposite direction, players vanished into the fog and we couldn't see what was going on. The cameras could hardly see anything. They called play by play in the stadium because we couldn't see anything either.
- D. On this 2008 Superbowl weekend, you know I had to work the Bears in somehow.
- E. Every Christian I know, sooner or later, finds themselves in a spiritual fog. You lose the big picture. You can't tell what's ahead. You don't understand what's going on. Worst of all, God seems far away.
- F. That is what happened to Jacob, his sons and their families. They were confused. They were living in a fog and they couldn't find their way out.
- G. If you resonate with this, listen to this story.

II. Jacob and Joseph

- A. Almost two millennia before Jesus, a man named Jacob had eleven sons. He loved his youngest son, Joseph, most of all. Jacob's other sons hated Joseph and conspired to get rid of him. They sold him to slave traders and Joseph became a slave in Egypt.
- B. The sons told their dad a wild animal had torn Joseph apart. Jacob was heartbroken. He never recovered from the loss of Joseph.
- C. Twenty years went by and the brothers kept their conspiracy of silence. For all they knew, their brother was either dead or slaving away in Egypt.
- D. What they didn't know was Joseph had risen to become the second ruler in the mighty empire of Ancient Egypt. Because of his wisdom and because he planned ahead, when a devastating famine hit the known world, only Egypt had massive stockpiles of food. Joseph suffered greatly as a slave and as a prisoner. Now, as ruler of all of Egypt, he discovered his suffering had been worth it. He saved, literally, hundreds of thousands of lives from starvation.
- E. One day, who should go to Egypt shopping for food but Joseph's big brothers. These were the men who hated him, who knocked him on the head and sold him into slavery. These were the men who had torn his life apart. Now, they bowed before this mighty Egyptian ruler. They did not recognize Joseph, but he recognized them.
- F. They were 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.
- G. Their memories haunted them. Their consciences gnawed at their contentment. Their joy was dampened. Their lives were okay, but nothing brought them great satisfaction. They were not content.
- H. We talked about this last time and I want to continue today. If you live in a fog about your past life, if you can't see where you're heading, maybe it is because unresolved conflict from your past dominates your life today. You'll never be content if this is you.
 - I. But God was leading these men on a journey, just like He's leading you. Joseph gave the men some food, surreptitiously returned their money, took one of the brothers (Simeon) as a hostage and sent them back home. He told them to come back with their new, youngest brother or else they'd never see Simeon alive again.
 - J. That's where we pick up the story in Genesis 43:1.
- K. As we read, look how the story develops on a simple theme: Unhappy, discontented people, are people who are fighting God.

III. Quit Fighting God

A. Too bitter to accept God's sovereignty: verses 1-15.

1. *"But there was no relief from the terrible famine throughout the land. When the grain they had brought from Egypt was almost gone, Jacob said to his sons, 'Go again and buy us a little food.' But Judah said, 'The man wasn't joking when he warned that we couldn't see him again unless Benjamin came along. If you let him come with us, we will go down and buy some food. But if you don't let Benjamin go, we may as well stay at home. Remember that the man said, 'You won't be allowed to come and see me unless your brother is with you.' 'Why did you ever tell him you had another brother?'" Jacob moaned. 'Why did you have to treat me with such cruelty?' 'But the man specifically asked us about our family,' they replied. 'He wanted to know whether our father was still living and he asked us if we had another brother so we told him. How could we have known he would say, 'Bring me your brother?'" Judah said to his father, 'Send the boy with me and we will be on our way. Otherwise we will all die of starvation, and not only we, but you and our little ones. I personally guarantee his safety. If I don't bring him back to you, then let me bear the blame forever. For we could have gone and returned twice by this time if you had let him come without delay.' So their father, Jacob, finally said to them, 'If it can't be avoided, then at least do this. Fill your bags with the best products of the land. Take them to the man as gifts, balm, honey, spices, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. Take double the money that you found in your sacks, as it was probably someone's mistake. Then take your brother and go back to the man. May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, that he might release Simeon and return Benjamin. And if I must bear the anguish of their deaths, then so be it." Genesis 43:1-14, NLT*
2. Key verse: verse 14: *"May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, that he might release Simeon and return Benjamin. And if I must bear the anguish of their deaths, then so be it." Genesis 43:14, NLT*
3. Maybe you know, God goes by several different names in the Bible. Here Jacob calls him El Shaddai, God Almighty. This is the powerful, mighty, warrior name of God. This is the name He uses when He goes into the ring for a fight. El Shaddai is used in situations in which God rules history in order to bring about His purposes. It is the sovereign name of God.
4. When we say God is sovereign, we mean He is the caring and powerful ruler over my life and my world.
5. To say God is King is one thing. But to say God is MY King is something else, isn't it?
6. That's why a lot of us are stuck. We know God is our King, but we don't like the things He's done or the things He's allowed.
7. Case in point, Jacob. He says, "Fine. I'm backed into a corner. If I'm bereaved, I'm bereaved. If I'm ruined, I'm ruined.

Fine, God. Are you happy now?"

8. He has enough knowledge to call God by His sovereign name, El Shaddai. He has enough bitterness to resign himself to God's rule as if he's swallowing bitter medicine.
9. Jacob is too bitter to accept God's sovereignty. He is fighting God. Jacob is a classic case of a man who gives in to God without giving up. I'll follow you, God, but I'm going to hate it every step of the way.
10. God is a great King. His sovereignty is powerful and caring. He loves you. He is Lord over the events that break your heart. Even the ones that seem to hurt us, are really for our good, His glory and to save many people.
11. If you reject the rule of God, if you fight His sovereign authority, your life will be a fog. You will not be content. Your life will be confusing.
12. You will never be content until you can say, "Even if He slays me, yet will I trust Him." Job 13:15. This is the first step out of the fog, toward contentment. This is the first step toward closing the books on the unfinished business of your past. Accept the sovereign rule of God in your life and your world.

B. Too afraid to enjoy God's grace. verses. 16-25

1. *"When Joseph saw that Benjamin was with them, he said to the manager of his household, 'These men will eat with me this noon. Take them inside and prepare a big feast.' So the man did as he was told and took them to Joseph's palace. They were badly frightened when they saw where they were being taken. 'It's because of the money returned to us in our sacks,' they said. 'He plans to pretend that we stole it. Then he will seize us as slaves and take our donkeys.' As the brothers arrived at the entrance to the palace, they went over to the man in charge of Joseph's household. They said to him, 'Sir, after our first trip to Egypt to buy food, as we were returning home, we stopped for the night and opened our sacks. The money we had used to pay for the grain was there in our sacks. Here it is; we have brought it back again. We also have additional money to buy more grain. We have no idea how the money got into our sacks.' 'Relax. Don't worry about it,' the household manager told them. 'Your God, the God of your ancestors, must have put it there. We collected your money all right.' Then he released Simeon and brought him out to them. The brothers were then led into the palace and given water to wash their feet and food for their donkeys. They were told they would be eating there, so they prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon." Genesis 43:16-25, NLT*
2. Key verse 23. *"Relax. Don't worry about it," the household manager told them. "Your God, the God of your ancestors, must have put it there. We collected your money all right." Then he released Simeon and brought him out to them." Genesis 43:23, NLT*
3. On their first trip, the guys bought grain and paid for it. When they got home, they found all their money had been returned.
4. On most days, you would be happy about that, right? Not these guys. They freaked out. The Lord of Egypt (and all the earth) is showing them grace and they're too afraid to enjoy it. Why? Because they live in a spiritual fog. They have not brought closure to their past guilt over Joseph.
5. Now, they returned to buy more grain with double the money and Joseph's servant told them not to worry about it. The records say they paid, so they paid, and they can keep their money. Oh, and the Lord of Egypt wants to have you guys over tonight for a party, a lavish feast. Give me your Hummers, I'll get them all gassed up and the oil changed.
6. What was really happening? A set up for a party.
7. What was their perception? A set up for a slam.
8. Do you know what God has in mind for you is a cosmic party? The worst attitude you can carry around is being a party pooper. For some of you, that's your spiritual gift!
9. These men carried the secret burden of guilt. Even though grace was raining down on them, they couldn't enjoy it. They were too afraid.
10. What is God's grace? Grace is the character of God which causes Him to do good to those who don't deserve it or haven't earned it. More technically, grace is "the unmerited goodness or love of God to those who have forfeited it, and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation" (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 71).
11. Most of all, grace is God giving up His only son, His beloved son, to give us life. Grace is Jesus dying on the cross that He might pay for your sins and rescue you forever. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you are forever under the grace of God.
12. Maybe you're one of those Christians who can't handle it when things go well. You see the goodness of God like a big hunk of cheese on a celestial mousetrap. As soon as you take it, God springs the trap.
13. What will it take for God to get it through our thick skulls that the price of love has already been paid in full by Jesus and the treasures and provisions God gives us are exactly what they seem to be, gifts for you to enjoy.
14. Joseph's brothers couldn't believe God had given them the treasure in their sack. Even the pagan Egyptian said it was their God. But they didn't believe it. There just had to be a catch.
15. You know what, with God there are no catches. God wants you at His party. He invites you, pays your cab fare and brings all the food. You say, "Hey God, can I bring something?" He replies, "No, no. I've got it covered. You don't bring a thing. Just show up."
16. As long as you fear grace, you call into question the unselfishness of God and your life will be a spiritual fog.
17. Like Jacob, you'll look back at the hardships of your life and, even though God was filling you up with treasures, you'll feel like He ignored you. You will not be at ease. You'll always look for the strings attached.
18. Maybe God brought you here today so you could quit letting your baseless fears spoil the party God has graciously designed for you.

C. Too confused to recognize God's love, verses 26-34.

1. *"When Joseph came, they gave him their gifts and bowed low before him. He asked them how they had been getting along, and then he said, 'How is your father, the old man you spoke about? Is he still alive?' 'Yes,' they replied. 'He is alive and well.' Then they bowed again before*

him. Looking at his brother Benjamin, Joseph asked, 'Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about? May God be gracious to you, my son.' Then Joseph made a hasty exit because he was overcome with emotion for his brother and wanted to cry. Going into his private room, he wept there. Then he washed his face and came out, keeping himself under control. 'Bring on the food!' he ordered. Joseph ate by himself and his brothers were served at a separate table. The Egyptians sat at their own table because Egyptians despise Hebrews and refuse to eat with them. Joseph told each of his brothers where to sit and, to their amazement, he seated them in the order of their ages, from oldest to youngest. Their food was served to them from Joseph's own table. He gave the largest serving to Benjamin, five times as much as to any of the others. So they all feasted and drank freely with him." Genesis 43:26-34, NLT

2. "Looking at his brother Benjamin, Joseph asked, 'Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about? May God be gracious to you, my son.' Then Joseph made a hasty exit because he was overcome with emotion for his brother and wanted to cry. Going into his private room, he wept there." Genesis 43:29, 30, NLT
3. The brothers came and bowed to Joseph, flat down on the ground. They were bowing on the outside, but they were not bowing on the inside.
4. God does not want you to bow to Him in the way the brothers bowed to Joseph. Oh, don't get confused, He wants your allegiance, homage and worship.
5. But in true biblical allegiance, there is always an element of love. Notice how the story highlights the love.
6. First, in verse 29, "May God be gracious to you, my son." The word for gracious refers once again to the grace of God. This time it emphasizes the passionate love of God. God feels His love for you in His gut. In the depths of His being.
7. Second, Joseph showed us a small portrait of God's love. It says he was overcome with emotion. Actually, the Hebrew says, "his bowels did yearn upon his brother." In other words, from the depths of his being, from the pit of his stomach, his love reached a boiling point for his little brother, Benjamin.
8. Moses, who wrote this, invites a comparison. If that's how Joseph loved Benjamin, how much more does God love you?
9. What is God's love? Here's a technical definition: "God's love may be thought of as the eternal giving or sharing of Himself," (Erickson, p 292). It is God going outside of Himself and His character to you. God could have sat in heaven for all eternity, perfectly content within the three persons of the Trinity. But, for His own hidden reasons, He created a universe and filled it with wonders that science is only beginning to discover. He filled it with moral free agents like you and me. Having made us, He goes outside of Himself to love us, even to the point of entering the world as a man who died for our sins. This is the reality of God's love.
10. Yet, these brothers cannot appreciate it. They are surrounded by signs of love, but do they get it? Can they see it?
11. Notice verse 32. "When they were seated by his direction the oldest in order of his seniority and the youngest in order of his youth, the men turned in fearful amazement to one another." Joseph dropped lots of clues about his identity and his love, but they can't tell.
12. There they were, surrounded by the love of a great master and all they could do was look at each other in fearful amazement. They were fearfully blind to God's love, so their whole life was a fog bowl.
13. You say, "Well, I know God loves me."
14. Oh really?
 - a) Do you ever view God's love as *conditional*? God, I know that if I do this, then you'll do that.
 - b) Or do you ever view God's love as *temporary*? I know God loved me more back when I was still going to church and tithing.
 - c) Or do you ever view God's love as *self-seeking*? God only loves me for what He can get out of me.
 - d) Or do you ever view God's love as mere *tolerance*? God just barely puts up with me.
15. Wrong, wrong, wrong and wrong. His love is not conditional, not temporary, not self-seeking and not mere tolerance. He loves you with an everlasting love, not because of who and what you are, but because of who and what HE is and on the grounds of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
16. You cannot fight God—even His love—and be content, clear the fog and find closure. Quit fighting God. Quit fighting His love.
17. Don't be too afraid to enjoy His love.

D. Too proud to acknowledge God's righteousness, 44:1-10.

1. "When his brothers were ready to leave, Joseph gave these instructions to the man in charge of his household, 'Fill each of their sacks with as much grain as they can carry, and put each man's money back into his sack. Then put my personal silver cup at the top of the youngest brother's sack, along with his grain money.' So the household manager did as he was told. The brothers were up at dawn and set out on their journey with their loaded donkeys. But when they were barely out of the city, Joseph said to his household manager, 'Chase after them and stop them. Ask them, Why have you repaid an act of kindness with such evil? What do you mean by stealing my master's personal silver drinking cup, which he uses to predict the future? What a wicked thing you have done!' So the man caught up with them and spoke to them in the way he had been instructed. 'What are you talking about?' the brothers responded. 'What kind of people do you think we are, that you accuse us of such a terrible thing? Didn't we bring back the money we found in our sacks? Why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house? If you find his cup with any one of us, let that one die. And all the rest of us will be your master's slaves forever.' 'Fair enough,' the man replied, 'except that only the one who stole it will be a slave. The rest of you may go free.'" Genesis 44:1-10, NLT
2. Key verse, 4. "But when they were barely out of the city, Joseph said to his household manager, 'Chase after them and stop them. Ask them, Why have you repaid an act of kindness with such evil?'" Genesis 44:4, NLT
 - a) "Didn't we bring back the money we found in our sacks? Why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?" Genesis 44:8, NLT.
3. In every paragraph, the brothers ran up against an attribute or quality of God. Here it is, the quality of righteousness.

How do these men measure up against righteousness.

4. This makes us ask, "What are God's standards of right and wrong and where do they come from?" The answer is God is the standard of right and wrong and His standards come from His own character. *God's righteousness is that quality of God by which He is infinitely right in Himself, and by which He approves all that measures up to His character and rejects all that fails to measure up.*
5. Actually, this is really good for us. None of us wants to live in a universe with an unrighteous God. That would mean evil triumphs in the end. Not a good thought.
6. Now, look at the brother's argument in verse 44. "How then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold?"
7. In other words, Hey, we're good guys. We would never do anything as bad as stealing.
8. Uh huh.
9. Even worse, they base their claim to righteousness on *their past actions*.
10. Do they really want to be judged by their past actions? Do you? We know, from their past actions, they're not only capable of theft, but kidnapping, murder, betrayal and conspiracy.
11. This is so typical. None of us, in our own eyes, is all that bad. As long as we have a little goodness going for us we latch onto it. That's like a guy, in a previous church, who bragged that he wasn't addicted to pornography, just to having sex with different women every chance he had.
12. "But, Bill, I wouldn't think of using pornography."
13. What do you say to a self-justifying spirit like that?
14. All our righteousness (goodness) is as filthy rags, the Bible says. There is no one righteous (good enough for God), not even one.
15. That is the bad news. The good news is on the day you were saved, God gave you all the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You are clothed in a righteousness that is not your own.
 - a) "[That I may be...] found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." Philippians 3:9, NKJV.
16. It is a "gift of righteousness" (Romans 5:17) and you receive *it* when you receive Him, Jesus. Your righteousness is an alien righteousness, says theology, which means it comes from a source other than yourself. It comes from Christ.
17. That means there are two mistakes we make with regard to righteousness:
 - a) You get proud in your own righteousness (I don't do pornography. I never murdered anybody).
 - b) You doubt your righteous standing in Christ (I'm a worm. God can't love me).
18. Both mistakes have one issue in common. They question the righteousness of God.
19. The moment you begin to point to your own life as a ground of righteousness, from that moment on, your life will be in a fog. You will have wrong goals, selfish standards, a twisted self-concept, reversed values and broken relationships. It all stems from a low view of the righteousness of God.
20. With God, there is no room for deviation. Thank God He does not judge you according to your YOUR righteousness but, instead, according to the righteousness of Jesus given to you.

IV. Conclusion

- A. So here we have a group of men
 1. Too bitter to accept God's sovereignty;
 2. Too fearful to enjoy God's grace;
 3. Too confused to recognize God's love;
 4. Too proud to acknowledge God's righteousness.
- B. You can't fight God and be content. All of this stems from that awful day in the past when they sold their brother into slavery and lied to cover it up. God is graciously bringing closure to that guilt. They don't know it yet.
- C. What is the secret of closure?
- D. The rest of the chapter shows us, but we're out of time and you have to come back next week.
- E. Let me leave you with this: *If you want to be content, sooner or later you have to quit fighting God.* If you could only see that God is waiting for you, God is allowing you to burn out on yourself, He's waiting for you to come home to Him. Because all He has in mind is a party. Sooner or later, you'll join in the fun. That is my prayer.