

Reading: Genesis 42:1-26.

Theme: Ways in which God can make our sin known.

As a child I heard the story of a little girl who, many years ago, was given a doll full of seeds - a seed dolly. She loved the doll, one day she upset her brother and he took the doll and while he was kicking it, it broke. He decided to get rid of the evidence and buried it in the garden. The little girl was upset as she couldn't find her dolly and their mum questioned him, but he denied all knowledge of it. Eventually all the fuss died down and the seed dolly was forgotten. The little boy thought he had got away with it. He had, until next spring when there sprung up, in the shape of a doll, a whole variety of plants, his naughtiness was made clear to all and he owned up!

The exposing, remembering of wrong happens here in this chapter, as the brothers' wrong against Joseph suddenly came back to mind. After many years of getting away with it, keeping quiet, not saying anything to each other, suddenly it is brought to their memories and they feel their guilt acutely. Such an experience can happen to us - we feel we have got away with something only to find it uncovered or exposed by God in our lives years later.

Many people feel they can live as they please. They've never suffered from doing wrong and humanly speaking they will never be found out, but the Bible is quite clear that one day they will be found out - Numbers 32:23 "*and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.*" It is not a question of **whether** you will be found out, but **when**! For God will one day, sooner or later confront us all with every one of our wrong

deeds, words, desires and thoughts. This will be one of the most awful aspects of God's judgement to come - all our wrong paraded before us and we realise that nothing was missed, but all done was an affront to God and His holiness.

The wonderful thing about God is that He sometimes exposes and makes known our sin before the Judgement Day, before it is too late. Yes, it is a most distressing and humbling thing, but it is far better that it happens in our lives when we can do something about it, than to realise it after death when we will have to remain guilty and condemned forever.

We see such in the uncovering of sin, a bringing back to their memories in the lives of the brothers as Joseph dealt with them. In all I say we have to realise Joseph was not perfect, nor faultless, but his dealings with his brothers illustrates some of the ways in which God can deal with us as He uncovers, exposes and causes us to discover, remember and realise our sin before Him.

Joseph's brothers have for some 20 years appeared to have got away with their crime and lies. Jacob has suspected nothing, he was sure that Joseph had been torn to pieces by a wild animal, no longer alive. Yet things happened to bring their wrong and guilt to the surface in their hearts and minds and they said v21. The Bible says in Proverbs 28:13 *"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."* If we confess our sins and wrongs to God and seek His forgiveness, the Bible says they will be taken away from us as far as the East is from the West and will never be held against us. We will see 7 things from

this passage that can show us, teach us whether God is making known to us our sin and sins:

1. When God seems harsh.

Joseph spoke harshly to his brothers, seemed to treat them in a rough and cruel way. It seemed Joseph was their enemy. We may have felt God was a caring grandfather figure, but as we've heard of Him from the Bible it may appear He is against us, against our pleasures and ease, for He may appear as a judge condemning us and our life. Martin Luther said "*You must know God as your enemy before you can know Him as your friend!*" If we feel that God is our enemy, that He is dealing with us harshly and His law stands to condemn us, then it can be taken that He is at work for He is disturbing our peace.

2. Sonship in God's family is wanted.

Joseph's brothers prized highly their relationship to Jacob as his sons. Do we realise that by nature all of us belong to one family - we are all children of wrath; of our father the devil; no matter how nice respectable we are we are part of this family. We need to be God's children. As God works in us, we realise this is our need and it becomes our desire - to be born again into His family, we want to belong to God, but it seems such an impossibility.

3. We become touchy and edgy.

Joseph's brothers were quite indignant at his questions and accusations (v11 & 13). They tried to present their own case and became touchy and edgy as the governor probes them and their lives. We can be like that - we fume as a preacher

mentions this or that, because it seems he's been prying into our private life, or someone has told him about us. We can become defensive about what we know is wrong in our life as it is touched upon in a message and driven home to us is the truth that things are wrong and we don't like it.

This may be especially so if we have had to refer to or consider that which we have tried to cover up. Joseph's brothers said "*and one is no more.*" (v13) They have to speak of their past sin, make reference to that they had covered up. Yes, they use language to gloss over it, showing that even they believed it was now true.

God has a way of showing us precisely what He's on about. Sooner or later we will remember it, even though we try our hardest to forget it, to repress it in our memories and our subconscious. It may grieve us to think about it, but God can put His finger on it and draw it back into our memories. When He does so we get edgy and touchy not only with God, but with other people too.

4. We hurt and smart.

We may not only be touchy and edgy, but as God puts His finger on our lives, it may positively hurt, smart and be most painful. What would have been most painful for the brothers? Not prison, not lack of food, but having to go back to tell Jacob the governor wanted to see Benjamin! Benjamin was now the dearest one to Jacob, had taken Joseph's place and the brothers knew it. It must have hurt them deeply to hear such a demand from the harsh governor of Egypt (v 15 & 16). Later, as Benjamin is taken captive, the brothers are overcome

with distress - they fear the resulting grief may kill their father. Did they wonder how the governor knew the most painful thing to touch their lives with?

Realise God knows our tender spots, where we don't want to be touched, where our treasured and cherished sins are kept and nobody knows about them, but God can come and put His finger right on them and boy don't we feel it! God knows us completely - everything we have thought, everything we've desired, everything we have said, as well as everything we have done. In fact, He knows about them before we have done, thought or said them. He knows exactly how to put His finger on that which we would conveniently ignore and wish had never occurred.

5. The appearance of unfair punishment.

Joseph put them in prison, saying one brother had to go and get Benjamin. All of them suddenly suffered. It seemed unfair and unjust. Here they were telling the truth, they were not spies, they really did have a brother in Canaan. Yet as unfair as it seemed, it was hardly the punishment they really deserved after the ill-treatment of Joseph those many years before.

Many people, who have little time or thought for God, will nevertheless start complaining about God - that He is not fair and begin to question what they have done to deserve this when an illness or death strikes their loved ones. *[Story of a student complaining to his professor that the professor's marks didn't do his essay justice and the reply was "It's not justice it deserved, but mercy!"]*

We all fail to see what we truly deserve from God. We ignore Him, disobey His commands, take all His good gifts of health, strength, food, families, finances etc for granted and waste them on living lives against Him or without Him. Have we considered what we deserve from God? We certainly don't deserve His mercy. We deserve His justice - which would mean none of us would deserve any good thing in life and only hell after our death. God has to disturb our peace and our tranquillity, to show us the seriousness of sin and the awful punishment our offences against Him deserves. God will never unfairly or unjustly punish anyone; all in hell will admit that they have what they deserve.

6. God shuts us up.

Joseph's brothers were making their arguments - he shuts them up in prison and shuts up their arguments too! They could not do anything. They were shut up, shut in and could only think and reason among themselves. They came to a conclusion v21. God often deals with us in this way - He allows us time alone, to think - not to worm our way out and work out our excuses, but to give us opportunity to come to a realisation of our sin before Him.

The brothers felt this sin was inscribed upon the punishment - all Joseph's cries and pleadings came back to their minds, as he had pleaded for them to spare his life and they had coldly shut their hearts. Now they had been pleading for their lives and also the lives of their families with the governor and they had received the same treatment! Their sin had been exposed to their own hearts and minds by God. When our sin is

exposed, all its details will be stingingly and painfully real and God can shut us up and in to make them all more vivid and real in our hearts and minds.

7. God provides an alternative to our punishment.

Joseph had pronounced it was going to happen to his brothers (v15 & 16). Then he provided an alternative (v18-20) - one had to suffer and the rest could go free. One was bound and the others could go free (v24b).

By nature, all of us deserve to be sent to hell. It is not a pleasant thought, but it would be fair, would be correct and just if God were to do so for it would be in accord with His holiness and justice. Yet God has provided an alternative to our being punished. It means this punishment doesn't ever come near us at all; He allows us to go free, to be welcomed and accepted into heaven, accepted as His children. It involved the Lord Jesus Christ being our substitute, dying and suffering in our place, taking our sin and its punishment, - our hell - there on Calvary on the cross. Have you realised that your sin - your wrong deeds, words, desires and thoughts, all those nailed Jesus to the cross, they held Him there and caused Him to suffer in such agony?

I wonder if God has been speaking to you. Perhaps you have been aware of something of what I have said in your life and thoughts. Joseph still demanded that they bring Benjamin. God still demands a holy and pure life from you, but you cannot provide it. Joseph told his brothers "*Do this and you will live*" (v18)

Amazingly God says to you and me *"Do this and you will live"*. You may ask *"Do what?"* To accept God's verdict on your life - that you are guilty before Him; you then need to accept His substitute for you - that the Lord Jesus died for you, as if for you alone; you need to own your sin and guilt before God and ask Him to forgive you on the basis of what Jesus accomplished in His life, death and resurrection. We are not to blame our circumstances in life, or our education or lack of it, our parents or society. We must see we are **personally guilty** before God and we personally need His forgiveness and this is only possible through the Lord Jesus.

Do this and live! Whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life— as John 3:16 says. The questions are: *"Will you choose life or death; heaven or hell; God or Satan this night?"*

If you choose life, it is because He has found you out, exposed your sin and revealed it to you, showed you your need of Him and so you should not only trust the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, but thank Him for showing you your true state and rescuing you from it.