

Reading: Genesis 43:24-34

Theme: “Fringe Benefits” of Salvation!

Last time we saw Joseph forgiving and accepting his brothers; they were not accepted or forgiven because they came with double the money, or with a gift to bribe Joseph, or that they had dressed themselves up in their finery. They were accepted by Joseph because they came on his terms - they brought Benjamin to him when they returned to Egypt. We saw how this points us to forgiveness and acceptance by God. We do not need to bring anything to impress, bribe, or turn God to favour us. King David committed adultery, murder, lied and deceived, but when he came to confess this, he didn't start with those around, but comes before God, aware of the enormity of the offence it was before this holy and pure God. David said *"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight"* (Psalm 51:4). Yes, there was a hurt and grief against others, but if that could be dealt with, forgotten, the guilt before God would still stand.

It is the same with each of us, there is in heaven a record of all our wrongs and as much as we would want them removed and forgiven, we cannot earn or deserve it. We can only be forgiven by one-way - by the penalty we deserve being paid out to another. This is what happened on Calvary when Jesus died; He bore the punishment of all who will ever trust in Him as their Saviour. This forgiveness in Christ is not an automatic universal forgiveness, but only for whosoever believes in Him. This is the only way God can forgive us our sin. No person can forgive another their sin against God; but in receiving God's forgiveness, we show it in forgiving others their offences against us.

Joseph's brothers took time to realise and delight in his forgiveness. They were unsure of Joseph's reaction and in these verses, yet we see Joseph's care and love being shown to them. We

see here that Joseph is as a picture, a type of the Lord Jesus and His care and love for us. Let's see some of the things we can learn from this portion of God's word and we'll see there firstly was:

1. A Bowing (v 26 & 28)

The 11 brothers bow down before Joseph and here we see a part fulfilment of the dreams he had so many years previously. They gave him their presents as there in his house they honoured him as their master and lord. Do we realise there has to be a bowing down before the Lord Jesus? We may admire Him, His example, His teaching and His miracles. Yet, until we bow down and truly submit our lives to Him it is of no value. We are not to do it in a hypocritical way - merely externals, but not meaning it in our hearts and lives. This bowing down before Him involves a humbling ourselves in our own estimation and it will mean we will own we have been wrong and done wrong before Him and cannot in any way make ourselves acceptable to Him. We may have to own that we have been doing wrong for years, stubbornly refusing to repent and surrender to Christ on His terms alone.

Joseph in his dreams, some 22 years previously, was shown by God that his brothers would bow down before him. **God always keeps His word** - even if it was at that time through dreams to His people. It is a solemn thing to realise God has promised, threatened the day of judgement; has said all must die and after death the judgement. Yet it is also encouraging knowing that when we bow the knee to God – by having the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, that all His promises for His people are certain and true also. We have heaven promised to us, it is secure and awaits us, yet God promises us so much more. We heard of the “*fringe benefits*” of this or that offer or job etc, but God's care and provision for our eternal souls also includes glorious “*fringe benefits*” here on earth! What we will see from the rest of the passage are some of

the “*fringe benefits*” set apart from the central wonder of eternal life and a secure heaven. The first such “*fringe benefit*” is:

2. His Care.

In v27 Joseph asks about Jacob. He was concerned about their father, also about their well-being and he wanted to know how things were. In modern society, so often we are just a number in a computer; a code word or number. Society seems to depersonalise us, but God never does. He saves us and cares for us as an individual; He treats us and regards us as individuals, with our own characters, quirks, humour and backgrounds. He cares about us in the entirety of being. He knows and cares about our hopes and fears; joys and sorrows; sicknesses and health; finances, marriages, relationships, work situations, emotions - in all the situations in our life, even in this Covid crisis. God cares about us, even more than we do so for ourselves!

God is interested in us and our loved ones - our families and friends. Joseph cared about his brothers, so does God about us! God cares for us so much - He is interested in and cares for us now and for the future, so He works in our life to prepare us for the future - various experiences, providences of life, which sometimes seem good to us, other times grievous to us, but all for our best. Sadly, we can fail to see and realise God's care for us. If we saw things aright, it would cause us to stop worrying, to truly cast our burden on the Lord, cast all our care on Him, because He really and truly does care for us.

Think about the more sensitive feelings we have, the little hurts no one else knows about, the minutest details of life no one cares about and realise **God knows and cares about them and us**. We do not need to tell Him about them as He is God and He knows already, but He invites us and wants us to do so! Amazingly, the

God of heaven encourages us to do so; it is a great privilege and we are to recognise His care for us and we say, even sing "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*" (Psalm 23:6)

We are to recognise and acknowledge the care God has for us in our life's details? Many people take for granted God's care, but not own it; others realise it, but do not realise the goodness of God should bring them to repentance and to trust Him for their salvation. If we are Christian then we are to recognise and acknowledge God's care of us. See 2nd '*fringe benefit*':

3. His Love.

We can imagine Joseph, his heart bursting with love for his father away in Canaan, full of love for his brothers, but v29 tells us he saw Benjamin. This was his full brother, the other 10 were half-brothers, but Benjamin was his complete brother - of the same father and mother. He is deeply moved on seeing him and has to leave the room as tears are shed.

When we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we are told that we are made joint heirs with Christ - we are true family of God; we are little brothers and sisters to Jesus and He is our full and complete big Brother and we share an inheritance with Him in our relationship with God. This is an incredible thing. We seldom realise it or are aware of this truth and it is to affect our lives much more than it does. I wonder how much we consider this as believers; but as we do so it should thrill us because of the great honour given us. It should amaze us that we are made joint heirs with Christ, actually and legally made and adopted as God's children – an incredible honour and privilege.

Joseph's heart was bursting with love, yet Joseph acted as if it did not exist and Joseph had to hide his face and his emotions from his brothers. Sometimes the Lord acts in a similar way and does not reveal His love fully to us! He knows it is for our best when His smiling face is hidden by a dark cloud! If we are the Lord's then He loves us, yet often we wish we could be more aware of it, as we can feel isolated, feel as if things aren't going right for us. Even at such times He knows what is right and best for us. He knows that at that particular time it is right for us. All His actions toward us are pure love, but we are to realise this is not an easy going, soft love, for we are told *"For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."* (Hebrews 12:6 NKJV). There are things that would not be for our best and He in His wisdom and love does not indulge or spoil us. That said we see that Joseph does mark out Benjamin, his full brother by:

4. His Gifts.

Joseph gave things to Benjamin the others did not have - he gave him **his word**. In verse 29 he says *"God be gracious to you, my son"*. This was a token of his love. Surely, he wanted to say *"my brother Benjamin"*, but says *"my son"*.

When we think of the great benefits God gives us on earth, one of the greatest of them is that He gives us His word - the Bible. Here He reveals His heart and all that is necessary for living our lives aright, for salvation, for our comfort, peace, encouragement and instruction - even to face our death. Here He tells us of our adoption, our future, of our glorious Saviour who is our Lord, our elder Brother. If we want to please the Lord who saved us, then there is a need to read, to trust and to obey His word. People would add to God's word - this, that or the other, or even to take away from it, but as the hymn writer says: *"How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!"*

What more can He say than to you He has said - you, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?"

What more can we need? If God has said enough, if God has said all we need, why do we need more or dare we take away from it? God has given us His word, what a privilege - to take it, enjoy it, learn of it and apply it to our lives. God's Word tells us we have One who is touched by the feelings of our weaknesses, infirmities. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet He did not sin. He knew the sorrow bereavement - Joseph (*Mary's husband, His stepfather*) dying; of friends dying; of pain; of rejection; and of death itself.

The Lord Jesus sympathises with us, feels for and understands our situation more than we do ourselves. Yet in His wisdom and love He may appear to delay e.g. when Lazarus was sick his sisters sent for Jesus and He delayed until after Lazarus had died and when Jesus gets there, Lazarus had been dead for 4 days! The sisters were confused and said "*Lord, if you had been here our brother wouldn't have died.*" Yet Jesus acted in such a way as to show God's glory in a far greater way because He raised Lazarus from the dead.

Often in our lives, events, circumstances occur that make us say "*Lord I need You now to work in such and such a way and do so now!*" But nothing seems to happen. Even then He still loves us and His Word tells us that He is working all things together for good to those who love Him - even when it seems He's hiding His face, His love and His care.

We read that Joseph and all his brothers sat down to feast. Before the meal started, the brothers are amazed by the fact that they are sat in order of birth - from oldest to youngest and in right sequence

(v33). Remember our Lord knows all our details, all of our circumstances, all our cares. We are foolish to doubt His care and are told even the hairs on our head are numbered.

Yet notice that is a feast, a banquet and they all join in, but sadly there is a necessary distance between Joseph and the brothers, they have to, for the moment, keep apart, away from each other. This reminds me of an invitation given to a church and individuals in Laodicea in Revelation 3:20 *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."* This speaks of the benefits of the eternal life Jesus gives and it is pictured as feasting at a great banquet - the joy, the pleasure that will be known one day in heaven. But it includes now; as we are still able to feast with Him, even if it seems we are separated from Him at a distance. There are joys and wonders in the Christian life which are to be delighted in and known now as we go through life and they can be precious and real, but one day we will be with Him, know Him as He is and we will enjoy a feast in His near presence and company. Psalm 16:11 (AV) says *"in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."* There is an amazing banquet and time reserved for heaven and will be far more wonderful than we could ever understand, experience or describe now!

So, what do we make of Benjamin getting 5 times as much? Don't forget Benjamin was truly Joseph's brother. Realise that God is Creator and Sustainer of all. He sends His sun and rain on the righteous and the unrighteous; He gives men and women all good things richly to enjoy; He gives health and strength; sight and hearing; breath in our bodies. Yet so often many abuse God's good gifts and use them for self gratification alone, or abuse God's goodness to them. God knows who are His - those who have

trusted the Lord Jesus, and although they may not have, humanly speaking and to human eyes, 5 times as much, yet they have God's blessing upon them for time and eternity. Would we rather gain all the world has to offer in terms of health, wealth, fame and enjoyment for 70 or 80 years and then perish eternally? We place much emphasis on the physical and forget that we are destined for eternity and our health, wealth, standing in this world has no bearing there because we are all in need of God's grace and forgiveness before we go into eternity. If we have known God's forgiveness, we have the greatest thing this universe could ever give - we have the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and we have eternal life. Many in suffering, in death, in torture, in persecution, in need, as well as in ease and plenty, have valued Him much more than anything else.

It should be our prayer and desire that we all would enjoy His fullest blessing in receiving the Saviour and to know God given joys and blessings for evermore in our life and most certainly eternity.