

Reading: Genesis 44:16-34

Subject: Flash, bang, wallop, what a picture!

In this chapter we have seen of Joseph's wisdom and love as he tests his brothers to see if they had changed. Would they abandon Benjamin or stay by him to seek his freedom? We saw how the brothers stayed with Benjamin, even though the cup was found in his sack, as well as silver in each of their sacks. They all own their guilt and said they would be Joseph's slaves. Joseph continues to test them in this passage. He told them to go back and so gave the brothers a chance to get away, preserve their own skins. They had a perfect excuse to tell Jacob. Note 2 main pictures from the passage:

1. A Picture of the Lord Jesus.

In the verses we read we see one of the most moving accounts of pleading in the Bible, as Judah, although not the oldest, speaks up on Benjamin's behalf for his freedom and safe return to Jacob. Judah speaks tenderly, pleadingly and lays his own life on the line in order to secure his brother's life and freedom. Benjamin was in real trouble. Here Judah tries to get Benjamin released from the punishment of the Egyptian governor.

Often Joseph is a picture of the Lord Jesus' person and work, but here in this passage, Judah is a lovely picture of Jesus. The Bible tells us Jesus has risen and ascended to heaven; He ever lives and intercedes for all who trust Him. Intercedes means pleads and prays for us, acts on our behalf. We need to recognise, realise this is true of Jesus for us. Jesus is the elder brother of every Christian and He really cares for us, even more than we care for ourselves! Jesus ever pleads for us in all our situations and experiences of life.

In our salvation the life, work and person of the Lord Jesus are pleaded - He died for such as us, for we deserved punishment from God, but He secured our forgiveness in our place. The Father looks on Him and all His work and grants us forgiveness, not because we deserve it, but because Jesus put forth our case and took our place. That is why we as a church preach Jesus is the only way to heaven. All other world religions do not have such a one to plead on our behalf. The founders of the other world religions are dead. (*Krishna Pal, at a crossroads and asked the way of the living one.*)

Judah knew what it would mean to go back to Jacob without Benjamin and though not trained in eloquent speaking, his love for his father made him speak and he humbly asks, begs to speak a few words to the governor. (v18). He was going to try and persuade Joseph not to be angry with and punish Benjamin, but let him, Judah, take the blame and Benjamin's punishment.

Judah begins by reminding the governor of certain facts, facts he knew of, that he could not dispute (v19-20) - Benjamin only came because he, the governor insisted on it (v23). Judah reminds Joseph of their father, the sorrow he had already sustained even in letting Benjamin go down with them to Egypt. Judah then speaks of the effect such a loss would have on Jacob (v30ff). Judah aims at the governor's heart, he's stating the facts so that the governor would have to agree, but Judah also shows what would occur (v31).

All this time Benjamin was standing by, he could say or do nothing. Judah was pleading on his behalf, and then Judah says he guaranteed the boy's safety - his own word was given and he was in fact saying to his father "*I'll suffer before he does; I'll lay down my life to save him.*" This was not merely words, but Judah offers

his own life in place of Benjamin's (v 33). Judah owns someone must bear this punishment of slavery and captivity, so he offers to be his brother's substitute and take his punishment in his place – Joseph would be just in doing so and yet be able to show mercy to the boy.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus can be summed up quite easily in terms of what we've already looked at. God's word shows us that God's holy nature demands we be punished for our wrong. Yet God in His love and wisdom found the way that He could be both **merciful and just** at the same time. We don't deserve His mercy for we are guilty, but someone took our place voluntarily and willingly. Who would take our punishment and take what we deserved, take on Himself our hell so that we can be set free? Who would take all the punishment of all our sin, satisfy God's inflexible justice, so that His mercy could be extended, we can be accepted by God because the legal requirements of His holiness and justice have been met? None of us could ever be saved unless we had such a Surety, Guarantor pleading before God. Jesus was the One who took our blame before the Father, took our punishment in our place.

Have you seen the wonder of this Saviour? Have you seen your need of this Saviour? This is the One who has done and accomplished what we could never do, the One who can turn away the anger, wrath and punishment of God which we rightly deserve. The moment we believe on Him as our Saviour, God's wrath is taken from us and we have peace with God for ever.

Judah is a lovely picture of the Lord Jesus Christ! Yes, Judah did not have to suffer and die in place of Benjamin and although he's only a pen and ink picture, a sketch portrait of the Lord Jesus, he

still serves to show us more of the Lord Jesus and what He most fully did. Now we also see a further picture:

2. A Picture of Prayer.

Judah is also an example, a picture to us of prayer and praying, for here he is pleading with Joseph for Benjamin and pictures what we would call "*intercessory prayer*" - praying for others. It is praying for someone as if they alone were our responsibility; pleading with the Lord for a helpless person. In this we are to copy and do as Christ does, for He intercedes for us - we are to intercede, pray for others and not just for ourselves. Judah's pleading gives us 8 principles (*at least*) for our praying for others. Let's look at them quickly:

a. We must realise our unworthiness. Judah begins admitting his unworthiness (v16). We begin here. We cannot imagine our praying or pleading will be heard **because of who we are** - no matter how long we have been a Christian or serve in anyway.

b. We acknowledge our submission to God. "*our lord's slaves*" (v16b). If we come with high thoughts of self, we will not be ready to submit totally to Christ. We come as those wanting everything, but willing for nothing. We are not to come with demands, or a 'shopping list', but owning He knows what is best for us and are willing to accept, however hard, whatever He sends as answers to our prayers.

c. We need to persist. Judah's initial pleading ended with v17 - no response, seemingly a worsening of the situation; but **he didn't give up**. He kept on, doing so reverently, but boldly (v18). Jacob continued wrestling all night with the angel of the Lord (Genesis 32:26) - Judah had learned well from his father about persistence!

d. We acknowledge God's sovereignty. Judah owns the governors' supreme authority (v18b), yet continued to plead. We must realise God in His wisdom does not, will not and cannot do wrong; is always right even though we cannot understand it. We come in prayer not **to make our will God's will; but to make God's will ours.** We seek Him to work, realising He knows what He has done, is doing and will do.

e. We remind God of certain facts. Judah did this with Joseph (v19 & 20). God knows everything - all our situations of life, heartaches, fears, problems etc. He knows what things we need before we do and before we ask! Why do we need to tell him our situations? This is one of the mysteries of prayer, but effectual praying always reminds God of these things as though He did not know them! It highlights **to us** our need; it shows **us** how great God is in hearing and answering our prayers for such situations. It should cause **us** to realise **we** are being sustained and kept **even at the present time.** Judah reminded Joseph of all that had happened, of Jacob's love and age, yet Joseph knew it personally. So does our God - He knows and understands all we speak of, even all that we can't express, except in groans - He knows them too.

f. We must have hearts free from any resentment. Judah's pleading teaches us he had no bitterness or jealousy left; had come to terms with his father's favouritism. It was probably the same with all the brothers - now no resentment that their father's affection and life was bound up with Benjamin. Bitterness and resentment cannot mix with effective praying; we are to forgive others their trespasses, we are to hold no hard and bitter thoughts against anyone - especially other believers. Practically this must be shown and not kept secret as the Lord wants our praying to affect our life actions.

g. We must seek to move God's heart. Judah didn't aim for Joseph's intellect, or his dignity, but aimed for his heart. Can we, dare we do this with God? Yes, we can! For we have a High Priest who can be touched by the feelings of our infirmities, we have a God who is warm and loving. He is not cold and austere; distant or uncaring. Our God knows all about us and cares for us. The early church was faced with persecution and prayed *"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings:"* (Acts 4:29 AV). God, in the OT in particular, is shown to be deeply moved by his people's sufferings and trials, even when they were suffering correction, He is seen as deeply moved.

h. There is no selfish concern. Judah was concerned with his father, his father's feelings and desperately wanted Benjamin to go free because of him. Paul wrote of his concern for Israel to be saved *"For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers,"* (Romans 9:3). Moses was willing for his name be blotted out rather than Israel be destroyed. There must be a selfless concern in praying in this way for others. Our concern must be the glory of God in the good of others.

Why does God want us to pray that in such a way? Ultimately so we will recognise that the glory must go to Him in the answer of prayers. Yes, it is true God may not answer when and how we want; but He will answer. Any delay is in His wisdom - He knows when is best, ultimately for our best! It is for our sakes He delays, even in ways differing from our expectations.

God often moves us to such praying to give us a glimpse, a flavour of His love for us as well as others. Such praying for another, for another's situation away from our own and yet our hearts and beings are involved. We cannot be detached in such praying. We

feel something of the hurt and grief, the turmoil, as keenly as if it were our own. We are therefore desperate in prayer and we enter into the experience of feeling as the other feels and we glimpse something of the love the Lord Jesus has as He prays for us with a perfect feeling and understanding of and for us as individuals.

Although we realise, we have no rights before such a God, we ask these great things with boldness and He delights we do so. Judah asked Joseph to keep him and let Benjamin go and he was willing for that.

Do we have such burdens in prayer? It is so easy to be playing at praying and yet we need to put ourselves on the line. To pray in such a way is costly, it hurts, we suffer hurt and pain as we feel keenly for others. We have to be honest before God and that is always a humbling experience. Judah owned all that was at stake - he couldn't face his father and see him die. We often pray in such a manner when it is a matter of life and death and we have to be honest and open with God, **but surely it should be at all times**. In such praying we are to be willing to be expendable - Paul was ready to be accursed, Judah to be enslaved, Moses to be blotted out from God's book. What about us so that our Saviour may be glorified and others helped?

Isn't this both a challenge and encouragement to pray in this way? Imagine we could ask Judah if he felt he was making sense; if his words were really expected to touch this mighty governor's heart. Judah may have felt he made a mess of things, looked foolish; almost ended with a question and he couldn't expect the governor to answer that... Often we can pray, feel useless; feel God seems to hide His face and nothing seems to have occurred. Yet God can answer in ways far exceedingly abundantly above what we ask or think.

See what happened here - something that Judah and his brothers never ever expected - for as Judah finished speaking, suddenly the governor sends out all the servants; then he starts to sob, to breakdown and cries! All the Egyptians outside could hear him too. What Judah and his brothers did not know was that behind his ornate Egyptian clothes was one who cared more for Benjamin than they did; was one who cared for them and Jacob more than they understood. He shows his love, his forgiveness and reveals who he really is to them – but that is for next time...

When we pray, we need to remember that the God to who we pray cares for us and loves us more than we do for ourselves, or our loved one etc! Let us pray He will be pleased to make himself known to us in our lives as we truly seek Him. We really do have such an amazing friend in the Lord Jesus who has His heart and love toward us and all we see on earth is just a faint, but glorious wonders of His great love and care for us – so we are to keep on praying seriously with our hearts involved in such prayers and turn them into praise as He lovingly answers even our garbled prayers.