

Place Lurgan Baptist: 2:5:2010

GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

Readings: Genesis 43:1-14, v26-34 44:14-16, 30-34

8. BETTER NOT BITTER

The common tendency when we are mistreated is to seek revenge. I heard of a despondent woman who was walking along the beach when she saw a bottle on the sand. She picked it up and pulled out the cork, Whoosh! A big puff of smoke appeared. “*You have released me from my prison,*” the genie told her. “*To show my thanks I grant you three wishes. But take care for each wish, your spouse will receive double of whatever you request.*” “*Why,* the woman said, “*that husband of mine left me for another woman. He lied to me and deceived me.*” “*Well, this is how it is written,*” replied the genie. The woman shrugged then asked for a million dollars. There was a flash of light and a million dollars appeared at her feet. At the same instant, in a far off place, her wayward husband looked down to see twice that amount at his feet. “*And your second wish ?*” “*Genie, I want the world’s most expensive diamond necklace.*” Another flash of light and the woman was holding that precious treasure. And in that distant place her husband was looking for a gem broker to buy his latest bonanza. “*Genie, is it really true that my husband has two million dollars and more jewels than I do, and that he gets double of whatever I wish for ?*” The Genie said that it was true. “*Okay, Genie, I’m ready for my last wish,*” the woman said. “**Scare me half**

to death.” If anyone was ever mistreated it was Joseph. If ever there was a man who had the right to become bitter it was Joseph. Joseph’s mum died when he was just a young boy. His father put him in a place of leadership, when he was immature. His own brothers were so jealous of him that when he was seventeen years of age, they sold him into slavery to get rid of him. It looked like everywhere Joseph turned, things went wrong in his life. He tried to do a good job. He tried to be successful and things didn’t seem to turn out right. He decided to keep himself sexually pure, and he was accused to rape and put in prison. Then he was forgotten by a butler after he had done a great favour for him. My if ever anyone had the right to be bitter, it was Joseph. I wonder this are you bitter ? Many people have lives that are filled with bitterness. When they open their mouths their words are like gall. Their tongues strike like a cobra. Life has dealt them some unkind blows and they are bitter. Ted Rendall defined bitterness as

The atmosphere produced in us internally when we meditate over life’s circumstances and decide that we have not been given a fair deal.

To put it more simply, you might say that bitterness is harboured hurt seething in the soul. People get bitter for a lot of things. You may be bitter because a boss has sacked you and you think unfairly. Perhaps a business man has stolen some money from you, and that has been seething in your heart. Is it because a spouse has walked on you ? Has a father mistreated you ? A mother neglected you ? You may be bitter because a pastor has disappointed you,

an elder has betrayed you. My do you realise that bitterness is a thief that will rob you of God's plan for your life ? I tell you, if Joseph has any hidden bitterness in his heart we are going to see it as these chapters unfold. For Joseph has his brothers just exactly where he wants them. He has become the Prime Minister of Egypt. There has been a famine that has gone all over the world. Because of that the brothers of Joseph had come down to Egypt. They didn't recognize him. Now he has them right where he wants them. If he's going to be bitter, it is now. Do you recall what he did ? He said to them, "*You can't come back for more food unless you bring your baby brother Benjamin with you.*" When he sent them away, he put their money back in their sacks. Things are working now. Let's see the story unfold. Did Joseph's circumstances make him better or bitter ? Think with me here about first of all about,

(1) THE ADVERSITY OF JACOB

Jacob is an old man. He had been the round the block a few times. Do you see what he says in the last few verses of (Ch 42) ? He talks about bringing his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. He has lost his son Joseph, as far he knows. His other son Simeon, is now held hostage in Egypt. He is faced with the situation of having to let his youngest son, who is dear to his heart, to be taken down there as well. As the whole family stood around, perplexed, dismayed old Jacob said, "*All these things are against me.*" (42:36) It was as if he said, "*Why did God let this happen to me ?*" He doesn't like the circumstances he is in, yet there seems to be nothing that Jacob, the

schemer, the deceiver can do. Sometimes life is that way isn't it ? Perhaps you have a difficult situation at home, and you don't have a solution. Maybe you are trapped in a job and there is no way to turn. *Let me encourage you by saying that God has said in His Word that His grace is sufficient.* Regardless of what the situation may be in your life, God can give you grace, the Lord can take that difficulty, bring glory and good out of that situation. Anyhow old Jacob was wrong. As it turned out these events were the best thing that could have happened to him. Jacob didn't know even as we sometimes fail to recognize it that all these things were working together for his good and the good of his family. Here he thinks that these things are against him. Is it not the same with us ? Through our ignorance, misunderstanding, weakness of faith we often consider things to be against us, that in reality are really for us. You see, in Jacob we have a number of reasons why people get bitter. Here was an old man who failed to,

(a) RECOGNISE THE PROMISES OF GOD:

Do you hear what he says ? "*Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away, all these things are against me.*" (42:36) He sounds paranoid and self-pitying. Was Jacob not supposed to be the spiritual leader ? Yet, with a quick glance behind the scenes, as we sneak a peek through the back door of the tent, we see Jacob as he really is. He's a negative, horizontal-thinking man who's pulling his hair out in fear. "*Where is God in all this ?*" he whined. "*Everything is against me.*" Do you recall that when his sons held up before him a cost

dipped in the blood of a kid, and asked him if it was not the coat he had given to Joseph he answered, “ *It is my son’s coat, an evil beast hath devoured him, Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.* ” (37:33) He had no doubt about it, yet it was not true, and we have many people who will believe anything that is very terrible, even though it may not be true. You see, Jacob failed to consider God in his calculations. ***I mean had God not given promises to his son Joseph ?*** Do you recall that Joseph had two dreams ? One involved the harvest, the other involved the heavens. In one there is sheaves, and in the other there is stars. The dream that involved the harvest had all the sheaves of the field being obeisant to Joseph’s sheaf. *This dream indicated that all the resources of the land would be under Joseph’s control.* The dream that involved the heavens, had all the stars, sun and moon being obeisant to Joseph. *This dream indicated that all the rulers of the land would be under Joseph’s control.* Did old Jacob not know about these dreams ? These promises from God that Joseph would one day rule and reign.

My will you learn from Jacob this ? Things are not always what they appear. Jacob had drawn wrong conclusions. It may seem that God has abandoned you, or ignored you, but He hasn’t. Listen again to His promise, “ *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.* ” (Is 49:15) (a)

(b) RECOGNISE THE PURPOSE OF GOD:

Look if you will at (43:14) Did you notice something here ? What Jacob didn’t know was that the man he was calling “ *the man,* ” was his beloved son Joseph. What he didn’t know was that Joseph had been sent by God ahead of them into Egypt land to preserve their lives, and make it possible for them to live through the famine. My if we understood all the facts we would understand that God is working all things together for our good. I heard about a man who was on a train one day and he leaned out the window of the train. When he did, the wind blew his hat away. So he got off the train, and went to retrieve his hat. But while he was doing that, the train took off and left him. He was livid with rage. *Scarcely a mile down the track the train was involved in a terrible accident, and all on the train lost their lives.* He was the only who survived. What he thought was against him, was actually for him. Like old Jacob, are you bitter because you feel everything is against you ? Listen, when you know that God has all of the facts in His control, that God is working behind the scenes, then you can know that all things are working together for your good. (a) (b)

(c) RECOGNISE THE PERSON OF GOD:

You see, we get bitter because we don’t know the kind of God we have. Do you see what he says in (43:14) ? We’ve just read the groanings of a sad Dad. He said too much. If only he had ended his farewell speech with “ *And Benjamin.* ” No self-pity. No whining. No “ *woe is me,* ” sniffing. Then those sons of his could have left with “ *El Shaddi,* ” ringing in their ears and thinking that God will grant compassion, God Almighty will provide just as

our father reminded us. But no, Jacob again took the low road. He thought that everything in life was going against him, but they weren't. God was working in the background but old Jacob failed to see the kind of God he had. What is your concept of God ? What do you believe about God ? I think of the words that were said of the Lord Jesus. When Christ walked on this earth He was God in human flesh. If you want to know what God is like, look at the Lord Jesus. If you want to know what God would say, look at what Christ had to say. If you want to know how God would react to a situation, look at the way Christ reacted. Do you know one day what they said of Christ ? “ *He hath done all things well.* ” (Mk 7:37) One day in glory, when God lays out the whole panorama of our earthly lives, and we look back over all these difficulties and circumstances we will be able to say of our God and His dealings with us, “ *He hath done all things well.* ” We see that in (1) But, the story continues to unfold as we notice,

(2) THE ACTIVITY OF JOSEPH

The brothers have now returned to the land of Egypt with Benjamin, and Joseph is active in this whole situation, bringing them to the point where they know who he is. How did we know that Joseph is active ? Well, look at,

(a) HIS TESTIMONY:

Joseph is going to have a special luncheon for his brothers. So the steward of Joseph says to them, “ *You are going to eat with the Prime Minister today.* ” That just

about scared them to death. You see, the old guilt is still eating them up. They remember what they did to their brother all those years ago. They think, “ *This man has got it in for us.* ” So they tell the steward about the money that they found in their sacks, you talk about men eating humble pie. But did you notice the response of this Egyptian steward ? Look if you will at (43:23) The Hebrew Bible simply says, “ *Shalom.* ” This steward in effect said, “ *Hey, Shalom, men be at peace. Settle down, Don't be afraid. God is in this thing.* ” Where do you think this man learned to talk about God like that ? He heard it from his boss, Joseph. That's where he heard it. Here was Joseph so full of the Lord that everyone who worked around him was impressed by the reality of God in his life. I wonder did Joseph lead him to the Lord ? Some of you businessmen here, you've got a lot of others who work around you. *Do you realise that God has put them in the sphere of your influence ? Is one of your goals to lead them to Christ ?*

Some of you are teachers. You are getting ready to go to school tomorrow and meet those young people as they come. You see, the Lord has put within your sphere of influence young lives that can be touched for Christ. My what is our testimony like ? Is it positive ? You see, what Joseph was full of, his servant became full of. His language spilled over into the vocabulary of that servant. So he says to these brothers “ *Yes, your God has taken care of you. Don't worry about this, God is in this matter.* ” Amazing is it not ? And then Joseph comes in and he sees his brothers and his baby brother Benjamin. Is Joseph bitter ? Is he getting ready to hammer this boys

into the ground now ? Is this what it is all about ? Did you notice,

(b) HIS TEARS:

Look if you will at (43:30) Can't you picture the scene ? All of a sudden, the handsome, bronzed leader of millions has rushed to his bedroom and collapsed in sobs. All those years passed in review. All the loneliness. All the loss. All the seasons and birthdays and significant occasions without the family. It was too much to contain, like a rushing river, pouring into a lake, his tears ran and he heaved with great sobs. A Christian lady was told by her Christian friends after the death of her husband, “ *You let the Lord down by crying so much.* ” With friends like that who needs enemies ? My God has created us with a capacity to weep. Look at the Lord Jesus as He stands by the grave of a friend and weeps. See Him as He stands over the city of Jerusalem and weeps. Watch Him, as He goes to the garden and with strong crying and tears battles through in prayer. Does He not tell us that we are to “ *Rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep.* ” (Rom 12:15) Joseph was active for we see (a) (b) and now we see,

(c) HIS TEST:

You see, just as God tested Joseph and prepared him to serve, now the Lord uses Joseph as His instrument in testing Joseph's family. These boys are about to face a test for the purpose of bringing them face to face with their sin. Notice for example,

1. The Arrangement at the Table:

Now keep in mind these brothers don't know who in the world he is. They thought he was just the Prime Minister of Egypt, they didn't know he was their brother. So he begins to arrange the way people are going to sit. He puts Reuben, the first born in this seat, then in the exact order of their ages he puts everyone of them, starting with the firstborn going round to Benjamin. Do you see what the text says ? “ *And the men marvelled one at another.* ” Can you imagine the puzzled look on their faces ? They must have thought they were really in trouble now ? Then came

2. The Abundance of the Food:

For Benjamin got five times more than anyone else. You mothers know how to spoil the youngest don't you ? Do you recall when Joseph was the apple of his father's eye ? And Jacob gave a little extra to Joseph, Do you recall how jealous they got because of that ? Joseph wants to know is that old jealousy still there. Are they still going to be that way ? Are they still going to be resentful ? So he just piles it on. Extra steaks, more potatoes, and extra deserts. This things fixing to get good now, for notice,

3. The Appearance of the Cup:

Its time for them to go back to Egypt now and Joseph gets hold of his steward and tells him “ *I want you to take my silver cup and put in Benjamin's sack of food.* ” They weren't far out of the city when Joseph sent his steward to overtake them and arrest the one with the cup. You see, the whole exercise was to test these men. *How would they react to this situation ? Would they be willing to take up the cause of an accused brother ? Would they be willing*

to throw him away like they did to Joseph, or would they stand by him ? Their reaction to this test revealed that they had really changed, for as soon as Benjamin gets into trouble, they start back to the city to accompany Benjamin to his trial. My if you have set out on some work for God, it will not be long before you are tested by God. God's fire of testing will reveal any hypocrisy. Do you recall that in the New Testament the Lord of the churches sends seven letters to seven local churches ? Moving, revealing, sifting, warning, challenging, frightening, tough but tender, these letters to the churches sort out the hypocrites like no other letters have. They all face the test of the Lord's scrutiny. " *Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead,*" He says to the church at Sardis. Is that you ? Have you got reputation but no reality ? The church at Ephesus was patient, persevering and unwearied in its work for God but it had a fatal flaw, " *I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love.*" (Rev 2:4)

My do you remember when it was springtime in your soul ? When you really loved the Lord ? To the church at Laodicea Christ says, " *Because thou art lukewarm I will spue thee out of my mouth.*" (Rev 3:16) Could this be you ? Is the glow gone ? Is the passion missing ? Does your fellowship with Christ need to be restored ? God's gold or the world's is a question millions face. Thank God, the second time around Joseph's brothers chose wisely, for notice,

(3) THE ADVOCACY OF JUDAH

An advocate is a person who speaks on behalf of another.

Is this not exactly what Judah did ? There is one word that appears twice in these chapters. Do you know what it is ? ***Surety.*** (43:9 44:32) It means to exchange with someone else, to pledge oneself for the life of another. Here is Judah pledging to give his life for the life of Benjamin. (44:32-33) The first time in the Bible we read of anyone offering to give their life for the life of another. Judah's name means " *praise.*" He hardly lived a life of praise. Do you recall that he was so immoral that his daughter-in-law tricked him into thinking she was a prostitute and so had twins by him ? (38:27) Judah's history was most unsavory but don't write anyone off. For grace turns monsters into men, social climbing women into social blessings and spiteful teenagers into inspiring leaders. You see, Judah now has his finest moment for do you see,

(a) THE REMORSE IN JUDAH: HE IS CHANGED

He is a thoroughly repentant man. Do you see what he says in (44:16) ? Now word of God had ever crossed Judah's lips to date but now he is confessing that twenty odd years ago he and his brothers had committed a grievous sin. He is saying, " *God has found us out. We are guilty.*" Sure, they were innocent of stealing the cup, but guilty of stealing their brother's life. They discovered that you cannot run from God, that you cannot hide from God for the Lord says, wherever you go I'll be there. (Ps 139:1) Some of you have been running from God for years and years. I have news for you, the next corner you turn you will run right into the Lord. (a)

(b) THE REQUEST OF JUDAH: HE IS CARING

For after coming reverently before Joseph and carefully explaining the situation, Judah gets to the heart of the matter. In effect he says, “*Let him go, and let me stay.*” Do you see the selflessness in this ? What a change. Remember this is the one who so many years before had been callously eating supper after tossing Joseph into a pit. As he ate Judah had seen the traders coming and suggested, “*Hey, lets sell Joseph and make a few shekels.*” (37:27) But this was not Judah trying to save his bacon. This was a broken son saying, “*I can’t bear to bring my father any more pain. I can’t bear to see him die in anguish. Please don’t send me back without Benjamin.*” “*For how shall I go up to my father and the lad be not with me ?*” (44:34) He says to Joseph “*Let him go, let me stay.*” Do you recall the request of Paul ? “*Brethren my hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.*” “*For I could wish myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*” (Rom 10:1 9:3) Paul says, “*I’m willing to go to hell, if that means they will get to heaven.*”

What about your concern for the lost, for the family ? Does it express itself in prayer ? Is your daily cry, “*How shall I go up to my father and the lad be not with me ?*”

(c) THE RESPONSE TO JUDAH: HE IS COMFORTED

Judah’s plea broke Joseph’s heart. “*And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph.*” (45:3) “*Joseph now is your time. You have them right where you want them. All these*

years of heartache, all the ways they have mistreated you, let them have it.” But not one drop of bitterness is found in Joseph. Do you know why ? Because he recognized the providence of God. He says “*And God sent me*” (45:7-8) My one of the reasons we get bitter is because we fail to see the hand of God in our circumstances. Bitterness is wrong thinking about God. Joseph wasn’t bitter. He was better. In spite of all that he came through, instead of coming out a bitter man, he comes up a better man.

Are you struggling with the problem of bitterness ? Are you harbouring hurt on the inside and its seething in your soul ? The Bible says, “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.*” (Eph 4:31-32) Charles Flood wrote a book entitled “*Lee, His Last Years.*” In the book, Flood, tells the story of General Lee visiting a lady of the Confederacy during U.S.A. civil war. She took him out into the garden and showed him a tree that was kind of a family heirloom. It was a special tree. Its limbs had been destroyed by Federal forces. Its trunk defaced by Union armies. She was filled with bitterness. It was so obvious. She cried to General Lee, “*What should I do about this ?*” Lee said, “*Cut it down dear Madam and forget it.*” Is that what you need to do ?

