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November 18, 2007

Meal of Mercy Genesis 43 and 44

When I say the word Thanksgiving, what comes to your mind? For many it brings up pictures of family and food and football. Some of you long to embrace a much-loved family member that you haven't seen perhaps in several years. You can't wait to get together and share memories and laugh. Thanksgiving certainly is relational. When my family comes together most of us play tennis and if the weather is decent we will fill up all the available courts. We will enter those gates with thanksgiving and onto the courts with praise. Thanksgiving reminds me of enjoying and playing with family. For some of you when I mentioned the word thanksgiving, you felt your jaws squirt with anticipation just thinking about that moist succulent turkey and pumpkin pie with a pile of whipped cream on top. Others can't wait to sit all afternoon watching football or going out to the park for the annual Thanksgiving mud bowl. It may seem obvious, but I certainly hope for those of us who are followers of Christ, that Thanksgiving is a time of giving thanks. I certainly hope we spend time affirming that everything we have comes from the hand of God. I hope our thanks is verbal and public and laced with attitudes of humility. I loved last week when we came together as a church family and lifted up our offerings of thanks to God, ways He has blessed us throughout the year. "It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praise to His name, O most high..."

Thanksgiving. For some here this morning it doesn't bring up happy family thoughts. For perhaps many here it brings up the dread of spending time with family that has been less than tension free. For some here having a meal together with some of your relatives is like going to the dentist, pulling teeth. You brace yourself just knowing at some point

during the day they will say words of hurt, rejection. Some of these relatives have damaged you badly in the past and its been ignored and swept under the rug. Its hard to have a meal together and act like everything is OK when you know its not right.

This morning we will be talking about how God can change and transform even the worst of your relatives. God can change even those backstabbing family members who have caused great wounds in your heart, even 20 years ago. If you look around the Thanksgiving dinner table and see certain people and think, “they could never change, they will always be rude and self-centered, arrogant and evil. They have been that way for 25 years”, I want you to know that there is still hope. God is in the transformation business. God can change them and He can also change you and I.

The story we read this morning demonstrates hope for even the most messed up family. There is hope because God can change the worst of sinners. There is hope because God can change you and I. Rebuilding relationships in families is possible. It’s hard work. Rebuilding that trust does not come cheap or easy or instant. But it is possible. Rebuilding trust that has been shattered can really happen. It takes time but it can happen. For our God is in the restoration process. God wants us to join Him in what He is doing in our own life and in the lives of our family members. Lets take a look at Genesis chapter 43,44 to see how we can join God in his transformation, change process and how we can be a part of the process of rebuilding trust.

Our Joseph story has taught us that through pain or privilege Gods hand is there, moving and working strongly behind the scenes. But God’s hand is also at work in faith and forgiveness, and indeed it takes great faith to forgive and to join God in the process of rebuilding trust that has been shattered.

Let me **reset the scene** for us: There has been seven years of plentiful harvest and food, but now for two straight years, famine has

ripped through the land. There will be five more years of famine to come. Joseph has been placed by God as second in command in Egypt. Joseph has wisely prepared and stored up food. All of the nations of the world are coming to Egypt for food. Joseph's brothers and families have gone down to Egypt once already to purchase grain, but now that grain is running out. Their brother Simeon has been held in an Egyptian prison, until they return with the youngest one Benjamin. Jacob, the father, is hesitant to send Benjamin down to Egypt. He has lost Joseph and does not want to risk losing Benjamin. V.1 of 43 (READ) famine severe. Grain ran out again. Father says, "Go back to Egypt and buy more food." Judah speaks up. "The man down there was very clear, don't show your face unless your younger brother is with you. We cannot go down unless we bring Benjamin with us. V.6 Jacob is upset and starts blaming, "Why did you even tell him about your younger brother?" Judah replies, "how could we have possibly known he would respond as he did?" Send me down. I will stand responsible for the boy. We've delayed too long already. We need to leave soon.

Now you would think it would have been a great opportunity for Jacob, the great father of the nation of Israel, to say, "Sons, I'm not sure why this is happening. Things look bleak, but this is the time to trust in the promises God has given us. This is the time to get on our knees and pray for your safety. Pray that God would grant us favor with this strange Egyptian leader. Let's see God work. There is a reason that money got back your sacks. God must be providing! Let's trust God!" Jacob could have said that, but he didn't...he delayed, he dragged his feet instead of trusting God. Jacob missed a great opportunity to point out how great God was and point them to trust in Him. Now, some of us look back at Jacob and think. "I sure wouldn't have reacted that way. If I had been there, if I had been given those promises, I would have trusted God and pointed my family to faith in God." Oh??? So why then didn't you trust Him last week? What kept you from seeing God's hand in that matter you

couldn't handle last month? Think about your most recent crisis. Did you calmly trust in Him or did you react in fear? Perhaps most of us would be glad God hasn't put our faith biography in print for all to read. Perhaps right now you are in the middle of a crisis that gives you an opportunity to trust Him.

Back to Genesis 43. So the brothers head back down to Egypt with the blessing of their father ringing in their ears, v.14 "May God Almighty grant you mercy in the sight of the man that he may release your other brother and Benjamin." V. 16 the brothers arrive in Egypt. Joseph observing from afar notes that Benjamin has come too, has his steward invite them to his personal residence for a meal. Almost like a thanksgiving meal with the whole family eating together at noon. This special invitation to lunch made the brothers very nervous. Have you noticed that when people are guilty they always are a bit suspect of any mercy and blessing. Why are you being so nice to me? Is this really a trick to capture us v.18 he still thinks we stole all of those money sacks.

So v.19 they came to the entrance to Josephs' residence and they start lobbying to the Steward on their own behalf wanting to full disclosure about finding the sacks of money. Assuring them they brought the money back and double that money to be paid back in full. v.23 I love what the steward says in reply, "be at ease. Do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your Fathers has given you treasure in your sacks. I had received your money. Then he brought Simeon their brother to them." The steward knew the state treasury had been reimbursed rightly for the grain and also knew that Joseph paid for the grain out of his own pocket. The brother's guilt caused them to fear the worst. Blessing brought fear because they didn't see the source of the blessing. They didn't see that mercy was behind the blessing. I loved listening to an Egyptian teaching the sons of Israel that everything comes from hand of the God of Abraham. Certainly God may use the hands of others to bless us, but it all really comes from God's hand.

Joseph came home for the noon meal and greets his brothers v.26. He asks about their father. All the brothers bowed down to Joseph again. They still had no clue it was Joseph. He blesses Benjamin, v.29 “may God be gracious to you, my son.” This family reunion is so emotional for Joseph he has to leave the room to gain his composure. He comes back out in v.31 “serve the meal”.

v.32 It kind of reminds me of some of the thanksgiving meals I had with my cousins as a kid. Not everybody got to sit together there either. The adults sat at the big dining table, they got the best selection of food. Then the older cousins sat at their table and then we younger cousins eat were given a plate of food at the little card table. Here Joseph ate by himself because of the Egyptian caste system. The upper class ate at one table, the other Egyptians ate at another table and then due to ceremonial rituals, and because Hebrews sometime ate animals regarded as sacred by the Egyptians, the brothers ate at another table. What astonished the brothers was that they were seated in their exact birth order. You can almost hear them whispering to themselves. This is so weird. It's like that guy knows far more about us then we do about him. V.34 Throughout the meal, Joseph sent portions of food over to the brothers table. He gave all of them quite generous portions, thick juicy turkey breast, mash potatoes and gravy, stuffing and cranberries. But to Benjamin he heaped on five times as much food. Five Turkey legs, Five mountains of potatoes, five heapings of stuffing. 23 year old Benjamin must have just rolled out of that feast. As the brothers feasted, Joseph was testing. He wanted to see what they would do with favoritism stuffed into their face. Would envy resurface? How would they treat Benjamin when He is blessed more than they? Had the brothers changed truly? Or were they mere words? If the conditions were set up just right would they again turn to murder and destruction? Joseph had to know. The brothers had passed the other test, but there was one final exam left for them.

I'm sure the brothers must have went to bed that night very happy. The meal had gone great. Their brother Simeon was back with them. They were taking back plenty of grain for the family. Benjamin was coming back too. This Egyptian leader seem to really like them. God was merciful and blessing them. They went to sleep last night thinking to themselves, it just couldn't get any better than this. Tomorrow they would head home and be reunited with dad and everything will be great. Oh, but what a difference a day makes. Joseph is testing them once again. While the brothers slept off their party, he had their sacks filled with grain, and v.2 "put my silver cup into the sack of the youngest one."

V.3 as soon as the sun crested over the eastern skyline, the brothers eager to get home, headed out of the city. No sooner had they gone through the city gates and Josephs steward chased after them, caught up with them. V.4 "why have you repaid evil for good?" (v5-13) Why would we steal? We are honest. Remember we told you about the money found in our sacks before? We offered to return it. Thieves don't do that. Then to heighten the tension, the Steward began to search their sacks, starting in the oldest ones. Nope not there. Sniff. I told you would find nothing. Next brother. Nothing. (I told you would find nothing) Next brother. Nothing. All the way down to the youngest brother, Benjamin. Ahhhhh! No! This can't be happening! The brothers all tore their clothes in grief and misery. Interesting, that 20 years earlier when the brothers sold Joseph for silver, it was only their father who tore his clothes. Now all eleven brothers are tearing their clothes. Joseph is testing them to see if there has been any change in their hearts and action.

So the final test is set. Put the favorite one in jeopardy. See how the brothers respond. Will they cut and run when given the chance? Will they stand up and sacrifice for their young brother, or run and save their necks?

I love the way Judah stands up here. It give me great hope that God can change and transform even the worst of messed up sinners and

the worst and messed up families. God can change your family too. As I read these next few verses remember that Judah is the one who 20 years earlier was more than ready to kill Joseph, then decided to sell him off to slave traders only to make some extra spending money. Judah the one whose own kids were so evil God removed them. Judah the one who had no qualms visiting the prostitutes shortly after his own wife died, only it turned out the prostitute was his very own daughter in law, Tamar whom he had failed to provide for. Can God get a hold of a messed up man from a messed up family who doesn't care about anybody but himself? Yep. God can do that. For you who are facing a relative in that very situation this next week at Thanksgiving, be encouraged...because there is hope in the God who transforms people.

As I read listen how Judah demonstrates a transformed heart. (READ 16-34) It's a very long, impassioned plea that reveals a changed heart. Judah steps forward and takes responsibility personally. He doesn't rationalize his sin, doesn't excuse it. He admits his guilt and that God's hand is behind uncovering it. V.16 "God has found out the iniquity of your servants." He genuinely repents of his sin. That is far more than a lame confession of "I'm sorry I got caught". "I sure don't like these consequences for my sin", "At least I'm not as bad as that guy." Or even "I feel badly that people got hurt." Or "I made a mistake and if I hurt anyone I'm sorry." No. He doesn't play those word games that refuse to take full responsibility for his actions. He says, "I'm guilty. God has found out my sin." Then after a lengthy recounting of the events leading up to this moment, in v.33 he says. "Now please take me as your servant and let the boy (Benjamin) go home." For if he doesn't come home it will break our fathers heart. Judah is thinking of others. He puts his life on the line sacrificing for the favorite brother. He cares about the feelings of his father. Judah and the brothers had passed the tests. He truly had changed.

Joseph couldn't stand it any longer. 45:1 He sends everyone else out of the room and says in their very own Hebrew dialect, "Annn-nee, Yooou-sefff", "Its me, Joseph". Stunned. Shocked. Amazing. What a thanksgiving day reunion that must have been!? Wow. I'm sure that wracked their craniums pretty good. Next time we will talk about the amazing ability to forgive and how we can too.

But this morning, I want to talk about hope for the worst relative and rebuilding trust. Trust is very precious. It takes years to build trust and yet it can be shattered in an instant. Trust is the currency that relationships build on. Without trust there is no relationship. Some of you this morning have even recently badly blown your trust in a relationship. You wonder if it can ever be salvaged. I want to breathe some hope into you. Trust can be rebuilt. It may take years but it can be rebuilt.

If you have been the one who shattered trust what can you do to rebuild it? We can take a lesson from Judah. The only way is through total honesty and true repentance. Come totally clean. If you are not totally honest up front and fail to disclose even those things that you were not "caught" for. When those things come out it will even further destroy the trust you are trying to rebuild. When a man is caught in adultery, the wife wants to know the truth, "how long has this been going on?", they want to know the extent of the damage, "How many times has this happened?" "How many other women?" Too often men are not fully honest up front and wives discover in the middle of what was to be a restoration times that the "one night stand" actually happened again, and again and again. This is certainly not the way to rebuild trust. Trust is build by a long and slow and hard dedication to truth no matter the pain. Trust can be rebuilt, but it takes vulnerability and openness and time. If you were the original trust breaker working to rebuild, don't blast back at your partner because they are still struggling to trust you six months, six years later. Instead of getting angry at them and turning

yourself into a victim, for not trusting you as you think they should, redouble your efforts to be as trustworthy a man or woman or teen that you can be. Work on developing your own relationship with Jesus Christ.

What if like Joseph, someone close to us has violated our trust? A couple years ago, a close relative of mine terribly destroyed my trust in him. I tell him that I love him very much, I forgive him for what he did, God forgives him, I am glad to see that he is now following God. I am encouraged at the progress he has made. I continue to help him rebuild, keep on the righteous track, but I do not trust him. And I tell him that, "I love you. I forgive you, but I don't trust you, yet." He shattered that trust and will take many years to rebuild. I say, "yet" because I hope some day that I will be able to fully trust him.

If someone has shattered your trust we need to do all we can to help that person rebuild that trust. When we begin to help them rebuild trust it will be a test of whether we have truly forgiven them for what they've done. Joseph was terribly sinned against, but he did all he could to rebuild trust. Joseph wisely tested their honesty and integrity but his tests were done not out of anger or revenge or to make them feel the same pain. The test were done to reveal the true change within. The test were done to help them rebuild and establish trust. So in helping others rebuild trust, its not wrong to test them, but be very sure your motives are not done, hoping they fail, but hoping they will succeed. Galatians 6;1-2 says, "brothers if someone is caught in a sin you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

Gene Getz offered these questions to help apply these principles to our own life. Ask yourself; Am I doing anything in my life right now that might lead to violating trust? Have I violated the trust of someone close to me in a certain area? What efforts have I made to be totally honest and open in working to rebuild that trust? If someone has violated my trust, what am I doing to help that person rebuild trust? What are my motives

in testing whether or not that person is sincere? Are my actions reflecting a proper relationship of my own with God?

There is hope. God still transforms and changes people. I know because He continues to work and change me. He can change that frustrating relative you will be eating Thanksgiving meal with this next week. In fact, God may even use those difficult people to shape our own character. God can change that difficult person that stares at you in the mirror. Perhaps this thanksgiving you may need to thank God for the hard but good lessons He is teaching you from the difficult people in your life. God uses people who bring out the worst in us to *bring out* the worst in us.