

"God Meant It Unto Good"

Genesis 50:15-26, Trinity Sunday V

July 16, 2006

A guilty conscience can be both a good and bad thing. For example, when we have done something wrong by sinning against God, it is the guilty conscience, that law of God written in our hearts, that makes us feel bad or evil. Scripture says, "by the law is the knowledge of sin." Rom 3:20 God's law is not only written in the Ten Commandments, it is also written in our heart. We call it the conscience. So when we sin, our guilty conscience condemns us. If we did not have guilty consciences when we did evil, imagine how much worse this world would be! On the other hand, a guilty conscience can sometimes be a bad thing. When a believer has sinned and asked forgiveness for Jesus' sake, but then his conscience continually accuses him of this sin, that is bad. For example, the apostle Paul knew that he was a condemned sinner, yet he knew that Jesus Christ had redeemed him from all sin. Yet Paul struggled, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul grew tired of the struggle between his spirit and his flesh. At times his guilty conscience would tempt him to doubt forgiveness.

As Christians we should remember that the only way to a clean conscience is through the blood of Jesus Christ our Savior. When our conscience accuses and condemns us, and we feel the sting of God's law in our heart, we should remember who Christ is, and how He has already delivered us from all sin. A clean conscience therefore is nothing less than the knowledge that Christ Jesus has forgiven us all our sins on the cross. Therefore our conscience is clean indeed through Jesus Christ our Lord! As we look now at the behavior of Joseph's brethren after the passing of their father, let us recognize their guilty conscience and see how God put their worries at ease, giving them a peaceful conscience.

I. Confession and repentance "And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." Even though Joseph had long ago forgiven his brothers for selling him into slavery, after the passing of their father they feared Joseph. Their minds were plagued with doubts. "Perhaps Joseph only forgave us out of respect for our father? Maybe it was all a front, and all this while Joseph has been plotting his revenge. Maybe as soon as we return to Egypt he will kill us all as punishment". Such thoughts plagued them. Similar thoughts plague us! Our sinful flesh will always seek

to rob us of the comfort of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. It is in our nature to doubt that God's forgiveness is true and everlasting.

"And they sent a messenger unto Joseph saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now we pray thee forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father." The brothers were truly repentant. Whereas for years they had hid the truth from their father, shortly before Jacob's death they finally confessed their sins to him. Jacob not only forgave them, but he commanded Joseph to forgive them as well, though it is likely Jacob already knew Joseph had done this.

Confession is good for the soul. If we keep our sin to ourselves, especially when we have wronged others, then this sin will weigh upon our guilty conscience like the weight of the world. Worse than this if we do not repent and stubbornly deny our sins, then we will suffer damnation. The Bible says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us!" Confession of sins is important in the life of faith. Numbers 5:7 "Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass". Likewise David confessed saying, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD." Ps 32:5 In James 5:16 the Bible says "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." I John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Confessing our sin, we will find forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ who arrays us in His own righteousness. We receive His forgiveness by faith.

Though it is easier to hide our sins rather than confess our sins, nothing can be hidden from the Lord. Without confession, sin becomes a miserable burden too heavy to bear. Though Joseph's brothers had long ago repented, many years later they now find themselves questioning Joseph's forgiveness. That's the way it is with doubt. Though the forgiveness of God through Christ is like a constant and drenching downpour of rain giving spiritual life to this earth, we often feel less than forgiven. We all have times of doubt where we question, "Can God indeed forgive me? Has He? How do we truly know we've been forgiven? What can we do?" But when we struggle with such weaknesses, we should remember the phrase, "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief." God is our strength even though we are weak. He does not break our reed of faith, nor quench our little spark of faith.

Indeed over and over again He comforts us with the Gospel saying, "Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee."

II. God can bring good from evil After the brethren told Joseph the command of their father, to forgive the brothers, "Joseph wept when they spake unto him." Joseph could not hold back the tears! How sad that they doubted his forgiveness! How tragic that they were still haunted with these sins of long ago! Joseph could have no doubt as to their penitent hearts which were heartily sorry for their sin! Joseph of course, had forgiven them long ago just as he publicly forgave them now. He said, "Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." Joseph's actions were the fruit of his forgiveness. His words "Fear ye not" was truly a sign of forgiveness. He would take care of their children. He would nurture the whole family during this time of famine! He loved them and they should have no doubt as to his forgiveness.

Joseph likewise said, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Here we find one of the glorious teachings of Scripture! God can bring good from evil! God's wisdom so far surpasses our understanding that He can fully change an evil situation so that in the end it bears good fruit! Its not that God ever wants evil to happen, nor is He the Author of confusion. Likewise its not that He ever wishes we commit evil so that He can turn it all around. But it is simply this: God is so wise and omnipotent, that even though the wicked work their evil, God can confound them so it brings forth good! Though Joseph's brothers committed the unthinkable crime of selling him into slavery, God let this happen in order to bring Joseph second to only Pharaoh's power! He preserved people's lives through the famine! God made a savior from a slave!

And what about our Savior on the cross! What better example could there be of God bringing good from evil? God permitted the Jews to spit upon Christ, beat Him, mock Him, and revile Him! They pierced His hands and His feet! Soldiers thrust a spear through His side and He was decked with a crown of thorns. He was crucified for our sakes, your sins and mine being upon Him! What greater picture of evil could there be? What greater tragedy of inhumane injustice! But there was a great benefit to that evil picture wasn't there? Yes indeed! Through this evil God brought about salvation, life everlasting, heaven, immortality, perfect sanctification, bliss beyond all bliss! "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission

of sins." Acts 10:43

We should not be like Joseph's brothers who doubted the forgiveness of sins. Though our guilty conscience will condemn us, Christ by far is the greater. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Not only does He know the sorrow of our heart over sin, but He knows how to comfort our sorrowing heart. He comforts us with His rich and perfect forgiveness, which completely restores us into perfect fellowship with Him. Our gracious Lord in His mercy proclaims to us His forgiveness over and over again so we need not doubt it! Over and over again He gives us His own body and blood, sealing us in His grace. God is good to us. Psalm 86:15 says "But thou, O Lord, *art* a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth."

III. Death and burial of Joseph After Joseph had comforted his brothers speaking kindly unto them, in actions, words, and deeds, he was blessed with many gracious years by the Lord. Not only did he live to see his grandchildren, but even his great grandchildren were able to sit upon his knees. Before he died, he spoke prophetic words about the times to come. The words said to his brothers are also said to us, his spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. Joseph said, "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which He sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob". This young nation of Israel would not always remain in Egypt. God promised them that they would indeed enter into the promised land of Canaan in God's own good time. Over four hundred years later this prophesy was fulfilled when the children of Israel crossed the river Jordan.

What about the spiritual meaning? God's promised land of heaven awaits all who trust in Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. God will surely visit us in death, and take us away from this veil of tears to Himself in heaven. This is the same heavenly land where all saints end their pilgrimage. Heaven is the home of all God's children who trust and believe in Him. Therefore let us have no doubts, fears, or anxieties, because Jesus Christ is truly our Savior. Our beloved Savior quietly removes all doubt, by His own sacrifice on the cross and His glorious resurrection from the dead. He comforts us and speaks kindly to us in His Gospel. His actions, words, and deeds tell us what we need to know. Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace. Amen.