

JOSEPH AND THE HIGH KING OF CONVERSION

(Genesis 45)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Opening Illustration: The Conversion of Eustace Scrubb

- As a boy (or rather, a sop), as a dragon, as a boy again: a child of God (S)
- Reading: What it felt like
- What Eustace experienced: The Bible and theology call it CONVERSION

B. The Single Greatest Biblical Text on Conversion: (S: Matthew 18:1-3)

- Conversion involves *turning*
 1. A turning *away* from the world, the flesh, and the devil
 2. A turning *towards* God, His purposes, and His people
 3. Hence, a complete *reorientation* of the whole life, resulting in a whole new walk in a whole new direction (S: Against the Flow)
- Conversion involves *being turned*
 1. God is the Agent
 2. By the Spirit, through interaction with His Word about the Person and Work of Christ, God regenerates the sinner, or causes him to be spiritually reborn
 3. This rebirth is a conscious experience, affecting every faculty of the soul: the understanding, the conscience, the emotions, and the will
 4. This rebirth results in repentance: a complete change of mind and heart; a sorrow for, and hatred of, sin; a desire for, love of, and joy in, fellowship with God.
 5. This rebirth results in faith: rest upon, and profound trust in, the finished work of Jesus Christ in his life and death; but also a yearning for complete obedience to all his commands, the better to please, know, and honor Him.
- Conversion involves *becoming*
 1. That is, being turned into something we weren't before: children!
 2. That is, children of God whose new life consists simply of looking to, trusting in, and depending upon Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all things.

C. The Bible gives us more than the theology of conversion; it gives us flesh and blood examples!

- The Prodigal Son (Luke 15)
- Zacchaeus the Tax Collector (Luke 19)
- Saul, the arch persecutor of the Church (Acts 9)

- Cornelius the former pagan (Acts 10) (family conversion)
- Lydia, the Jewish proselyte (Acts 16)
- Rahab the harlot (Joshua 2)
- Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 1-2)
- Naaman the Syrian Leper (2 Kings 5)

D. Thesis: But today's text—Genesis 45, along with all that leads up to it and all that flows from it—gives us what is arguably the single greatest OT picture of Christian conversion: *The story of the reunion, reconciliation, and restoration of Joseph and his family*. In particular:

- It pictures God at work
- It pictures Christ at work
- It pictures the character of Christ as he works
- It pictures the astonishing fruits of their work in the hearts of their spiritual family: the Church, comprised of all God's people of all time, both Jew and Gentile

E. Outline of today's talk:

I. The King Concealed (42-44)

II. The King Revealed: To Latter Day Israel (45)

III. The King Revealed: To the Church of all Time (45)

IV. Joseph's Bones (46-50)

II. (42-44) THE KING CONCEALED

A. (42-44) Summary

- Joseph, having suffered much pain and humiliation in prison, has now been exalted by Pharaoh to become Prince over all Egypt.
- The seven years of plenty he had predicted have come and gone. The great famine he predicted is now upon the whole world. But because Pharaoh followed Joseph's wise counsel, there is an abundance of food stored up in Egypt
- Hearing about it, Jacob sends all his sons—with the exception of Benjamin—to Pharaoh to buy food. When they arrive Egypt, Joseph recognizes them, but they do not recognize him. Unsure of the condition of their hearts—and concerned about the well-being of his full blood-brother Benjamin—Joseph does not reveal himself. Instead, he “speaks roughly to them,” putting them to the test; indeed, to several tests!

- “You are spies,” he says. “No sir, we are honest men, sons of one man; even now one of our brothers is with his father, but the other is no more.” Joseph’s wise response is two-fold: First he throws them all in jail for three days, commanding them, on pain of death, to choose one brother who will go get Benjamin and bring him back to Egypt, on penalty of death. But second, he then changes his plan. Now he will only keep Simeon, and send all the rest back to Canaan, not only with a good supply of food, but also with the money they previously gave him secretly tucked away in their saddlebags. Before they depart, Joseph overhears them discussing this frightening turn of events: “This is the hand of God. We are guilty concerning our brother, and therefore this distress has come upon us.” Hearing their words and seeing their guilt, Joseph weeps.
- When they arrive in Canaan the nine brothers are shocked to find their money in the saddlebags, and so are afraid of returning to be accused of theft. They tell their father Jacob all that happened. He bitterly accuses the nine of bereaving him of his sons, is overcome with fear, and stubbornly refuses to send Benjamin back to Egypt. But as time passes the famine presses and starvation threatens. Judah pleads with Jacob, offering himself as surety for Benjamin: If he does not bring Benjamin back, he will bear the blame forever. Finally, Jacob relents. He tells them to take twice as much money as before, as well as precious gifts from Canaan. And yes, they are to take Benjamin as well. “If I am bereaved,” cries Jacob, “I am bereaved.”
- The brothers arrive at the court of Egypt and Joseph sees Benjamin with him. Hope rises in his heart: Maybe the brothers really have changed! He commands his steward to prepare a banquet at his house for the whole family. At the door of the house, the brothers tell the steward they fear retribution for the missing money. He reassures them that he was the one who put their money back in the saddlebags. When Joseph returns home, the brothers offer him their gifts. Joseph does not even notice, but simply inquires about Jacob and rejoices to see Benjamin after all these years. Yearning to reveal himself, but not yet free to do so, he retires to a private room and weeps. Then, returning, but seating himself apart from his brothers (for Egyptians have no dealings with shepherds), he eats with them. In yet another test, Joseph commands that Benjamin be given five times as much food as the others. Thinking their trials are over, they do not care a whit, but simply drink and make merry with the kindly Prince of Egypt.
- Hopeful, but still uncertain, Joseph now decides upon one final test. He sends the men on their way, but with his silver chalice hidden in Benjamin’s saddle bag. So the brothers depart, but a short distance from the city Joseph’s steward apprehends them and charges them with theft. Eagerly, they invite him to search their saddlebags, swearing that if it is found, the one who stole it must die. The chalice is found in Benjamin’s bag, the brothers tear their clothes in guilt and

anguish, and they follow the steward back to the city and to their doom. When they arrive, Joseph charges them with this wrong-doing. Judah steps forward as spokesman, confessing that God himself has found out their iniquity. Therefore, he offers the whole brotherhood as slaves to Joseph. “No,” says Joseph, “only Benjamin, in whose sack the chalice was found, shall be a slave.” But knowing that this will bring poor Jacob’s grey hairs down to the grave, Judah tells Joseph as much, pleading with him to let him (Judah) be the slave, and to let the others—especially Benjamin—go home. Through this amazing display of sacrificial love for Jacob and Benjamin, Joseph is now fully persuaded of their change of heart, and completely undone with love for his brethren. The time has come for Joseph to reveal himself to them all.

B. What we learn from these chapters about true conversion

- True conversion is normally preceded by spiritual hunger, famine (Mt. 5:6)
- True conversion is normally preceded by attempts to buy spiritual food with one’s own good works
- True conversion normally involves protracted testing, during which time God “speaks roughly” to us out of His Word about our sin, His judgment, and His only provision for salvation, which is Christ (i.e., interaction with truth) (S: John 16)
- True conversion usually involves an intensified awareness of our sins and sinfulness, along with a healthy fear of death and divine retribution (experiencing personal conviction, both of God’s truth and our guilt. (Acts 17, 24-Felix)
- During this time of (painful) spiritual testing and ripening, Christ remains concealed, but also filled with love, compassion, and an eagerness to reveal himself—at just the right time, the time appointed by the Father
- In true conversion, there is a final spiritual crisis, in which the soul completely despairs of its own goodness or good works, and altogether casts itself upon the mercy of Christ, even if it means abject slavery or death itself
- NOTE: Judah’s willingness to sacrifice himself out of love for his father and his brothers is a powerful picture of the heart of Christ as He went to the Cross for us.

III. (45) THE KING REVEALED: TO LATTER DAY ISRAEL

A. Read Genesis 45:1-16

B. Thesis: This text may be interpreted in **two closely related ways**:

- 1) It pictures the conversion of latter day ethnic Israel
- 2) It pictures the conversion of the Church, comprised of Jew and Gentile, throughout the whole Era of Gospel Proclamation

C. The King Revealed to Israel

- The NT on the latter day conversion of ethnic Israel (S: Romans 11)
- How the story of Joseph pictures this, especially here in Gen. 45
 1. A Dreamer arises among his brothers, affirming that one day he will rule over them and they will bow down to him.
 2. The brothers hate and reject him, first casting him into a pit to kill him, but then taking him out of the pit and sending him to Egypt
 3. There God highly exalts him, making him Prince of Egypt, second in command only to Pharaoh
 4. Meanwhile, his brothers are burdened with great guilt over what they have done, and also with fear of divine judgment whenever a dark Providence arises on the horizon of their lives
 5. At last a season of great famine arises, by which Providence drives them towards Joseph, to an intensified awareness of their guilt, and to an honest confession of their sin
 6. At which point, with a GREAT show of emotion, Joseph makes himself known to his brethren, assuring them of his love, forgiveness, and perpetual care
 7. Pharaoh and his household hear Joseph's loud weeping, learn that his brothers have come, and rejoice!
- This is one of the several great signs of the imminence of the return of Christ. Pray for it, watch for it, rejoice when you see it happen!

D. To the Church comprised of Jew and Gentile

- (1a) At the moment of true conversion, Christ is intensely eager to reveal himself to his people in such a way as to relieve them of their fears and assure them of his love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him.

(No Buddha here!)

- At the moment of true conversion, Christ desires that no man stand with Him.

And he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

- Following true conversion, the word of Christ to his people is, "Please, come near to me"

³ *Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. ⁴ And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near.*

- Following true conversion, the word of Christ to his people is, "I am your brother!"

Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

- Following true conversion, the word of Christ to his brothers and sisters is, "Do not let yourself get mired in guilt or grief over your past sins, for they all were part of God's plan for your eternal well-being

⁵ *But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life . . . and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ So now, it was not you who sent me here, but God.*

NOTE: This text is quite similar to 50:16-21, in which we read that following Jacob's death, the brothers feared retaliation from Joseph, and so reminded him of Jacob's dying wish that he forgive them.

And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. ²¹ Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

- Following true conversion, Christ reveals that He has a place prepared for His brothers and sisters, where they can be near to Him.

⁹ *"Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. ¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have.*

- Following true conversion, Christ reveals that He will provide for His brothers and sisters all the rest of the lives!

¹¹ *There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine."*

- Following true conversion, Christ joyfully embraces his brothers and sisters, and talks with them.

¹⁴ Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. ¹⁵ Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.

IV. (50:22-26) JOSEPH'S BONES

A. The rest of the story (46:1-50:21)

Jacob's 11 sons go up to Canaan and tell their father the good news about Joseph. Hearing it, Jacob's heart stands still with unbelief, but soon revives and rejoices. At the word of the LORD he decides to relocate the whole family to Egypt—70 souls in all. Upon their arrival, Jacob and his family settle in the good land of Goshen, where, with tears, kisses, and hugs, he is reunited with Joseph, and then meets and blesses Pharaoh himself. As the famine continues, Joseph becomes the Savior of the whole world, for all nations come to him for food. In exchange for food he buys up most of Egypt for Pharaoh—the land, the livestock, the people, and 1/5 of their crops. Years later, at the age of 147, Jacob nears his death. He calls for Joseph and blesses his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh, claiming them for his own. He then prophesies over all his sons and gives final orders about his burial in the land of Canaan. Then, drawing his feet up into his bed, he breathes his last and is gathered to his people.

B. Joseph's Bones

- Reading (S: 50:22-26, Heb. 11:22)
- Joseph died in faith, fully convinced that one day up ahead God would bring all Israel out of Egypt and into Promised Land. So, desiring to be with God's people in God's Country, he gave orders concerning his bones, that his remains should be buried in the Promised Land alongside those of his family.
- Much the same is true of truly converted people. They know that one day soon Christ will come again to raise the dead, transform the living, judge the world in righteousness, and welcome His brothers and sisters into the new heavens and the new earth. So, whether in life or death, they take their stand with the Family of God, hoping, trusting, and working towards the day when they will sit at table in the completed Kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph; and there, to all eternity, they will sing praises to the High King of Conversion.

- The Words of Eustace Scrubb: “In the days after our great adventure we have often talked of Narnia. Soon, however, my cousins (Edmund and Lucy) will leave for America. I will miss them with all my heart. All Narnians will, even till the end of time.” (S)