

## Genesis 43:15-44:34 — Tests

**October 30, 2016**

I don't know anybody that likes tests. Tests keep us up late studying into the night. Tests are stressful. The worst part of it is that tests are important. They determine our future. Tests, like the ACT, decide if we will go to college and how much money we will receive in scholarships when we get there. One of the most humiliating parts of test taking is not passing one when it should be easy.

When I was in school, I needed to obtain a Pennsylvania driver's license, since I no longer lived in New Jersey. To get the new driver's license I had to take the Pennsylvania written drivers test. When I grew up in New Jersey, I remember taking that test as part of a high school class. It was easy when I was 15. I expected it to be even easier now that I was an adult. Besides, I was studying Greek and Hebrew in an intense masters program. An in-depth reading of the Pennsylvania driver's manual was not something that felt was a good use of my time. I was in for a surprise. At the DMV, the driver's test I took was hard. It was filled with questions about alcohol and how many glasses of wine were equivalent to how many glasses of beer. It had questions about intoxication and driving over the limit. Since I don't drink, I ignored those sections of the drivers manual. As a result, I failed my written driver's test. It was embarrassing that day when men who barely spoke English left with their driver's licenses. I was fluent in four languages but I failed the test. That made me eat humble pie.

While none of us like tests, they aren't always bad. They are an essential part of life. I don't think any of us want to be operated on by a doctor that went to

medical school but never took, or passed, a test while there. We wouldn't want to fly in a plane with a pilot that went to flight school but never took a flight test.

Tests have a good purpose. They reveal the truth about a person.

If you are a follower of Jesus, I can guarantee God will test you. God will test us to find out if our faith is the real deal. That will show to ourselves and others that our faith is genuine. God will also test us to help us discover where we need to grow. God will also test us to mature us. This morning we will see the importance of tests in our lives.

As a church, on both of our campuses, we are studying our way through Genesis. The book of Genesis is mostly a flyover of history. When it comes to the story of Joseph, it slows down and gives us a blow-by-blow account of his life.

We learned that when Joseph was 17, out of jealousy his brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt. While in Egypt, because of God's gracious hand of providence, he rose from a lowly slave to be second in command of the nation. He was in charge of storing and distributing all the food of Egypt during a great famine.

In previous weeks, we saw how God used the famine, which extended into the land of Canaan, to force Joseph's brothers to travel to Egypt looking for food. The famine forced them to come face to face with Joseph.

When Joseph saw his brothers bowing before him looking for food, he recognized them but they didn't recognize him. Why didn't Joseph reveal himself and give them a hug? Before he revealed his identity, he wanted to test them to

see if they were the same scoundrels that sold him into Egypt. The test would see if they changed.

The need to test people that hurt us isn't just true of Joseph. It is also true of us. As Christians, we must forgive people quickly so we don't get angry, mean-spirited, bitter or hard-hearted. While we forgive people quickly, when it comes to trusting people again, we should move slowly and take time. Too many people think forgiving someone means instantly trusting someone. If your spouse cheats on you, as a believer you need to forgive him or her like Christ forgave you. That doesn't mean we immediately restore full confidence in their fidelity. Trust was broken. It takes time to earn it back. If you confidentially share with a friend struggles in your life and find your friend gossiped your confidences around town, you must be quick to forgive him or her, but be slow to trust. It will be a while before you share with him or her on a personal level again.

In this story, Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into Egypt 22 years prior, but now that he met them again, he didn't know if he could trust them again. This is why he tested them. He first tested them by accusing them of being spies and locking up their brother Simeon in prison. He told them they couldn't have any more food until they brought their younger brother Benjamin to meet him. Would they leave Simeon behind or would they return? That was a test. He also put their money in the mouth of their sacks. Would they return the money or keep the money? That was a test. The reason Joseph wanted them to bring Benjamin to Egypt was because he was planning the ultimate test. If they had the

opportunity to get rid of Benjamin, like they got rid of Joseph, would they take the opportunity and do it again?

As we pick up the story, father Jacob wouldn't let Benjamin go for two years because Jacob valued him so highly and didn't trust his other sons. Finally, when the family was at the point of starvation, Jacob relinquished and allowed Benjamin to go with them to Egypt.

So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon." The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph's house. And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, "It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys." So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the door of the house, and said, "Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks." He replied, "Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them. And when the man had brought the men into Joseph's house and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there. Genesis 43:15–25 (ESV)

I simply want us to notice the brothers' reactions when they were invited to Joseph's house for dinner. They were negative. They thought they would be captured. It strikes me as funny they thought the second-most powerful man on the world was planning on stealing their donkeys. This is like Donald Trump inviting you to dinner and being concerned it was all a set up for him to steal your

used Honda Civic. I don't think so. Why would one of the richest men in the world care about their flea-bag donkeys?

Here is why they thought this way: They were wrestling with guilty consciences over what they did to Joseph 22 years before. Distrust and suspicion came from their unconfessed sin. If you think everyone is out to get you, it is usually not because everyone is out to get you. It is usually because you are struggling with a guilty conscience and unconfessed sin. That is usually the way it works.

When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground. And he inquired about their welfare and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself he said, "Serve the food." They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him. Genesis 43:26–34 (ESV)

Here are a few interesting tidbits.

First, in that culture, when someone took you into their home for the night and had you over for a meal, that was a way of saying you fell under their protection. It isn't like we do it in our culture when we have someone over the house because we need to do it to be polite but in reality we can't wait for them to go home. Having somebody over to the house was not just a matter of

hospitality, it was treating someone like family. When they enjoyed this wonderful meal it was a way of saying they were now under the protection of the second-most powerful man in the world.

The second thing to notice that probably left them scratching their heads was they were seated according to birth order. Somebody that is more intelligent than me did the math on this and said there is a 1-in-40 million chance of somebody guessing their birth order by luck. What made their ages hard to determine is they came from four different women, many of whom were pregnant at the same time and gave birth close to the same time.

You can see these guys scratching their heads wondering who gave away the birth order to come up with the proper seating arrangement.

The third interesting fact to notice is that the Egyptians refused to eat with them. This was good news. In the land of Canaan, where they were living, the Canaanites had no problems with cultural assimilation and intermarriage. This was extremely bad because the Canaanites were far from God. This is why there was so much emphasis earlier in Genesis about only marrying someone inside the covenant family. Intermarriage with the Canaanites was one of the fastest ways to destroy your family and raise children that walked away from the one true God of the universe.

The Egyptians were different. They were a very proud culture. They did not want to intermarry with the Hebrews because they believed it would destroy the superiority of their race. God, by his grace, was in the process of bringing Jacob and his children to Egypt where he would give them a great piece of land

called Goshen. While there, they would grow and multiply while not intermarrying with the Egyptians. This protected their culture. We can see the beginnings of this when the Egyptians refused to eat at the same table as the Hebrews.

The fourth thing for us to notice is Benjamin's portion. How much larger was it? It was five times larger. Nobody went hungry at this meal but Benjamin had five times more than everybody else. To get an idea of the size of Benjamin's portion, I converted this to pieces of pizza. On Friday, we had Papa Murphy's pizza. I had a family size of the chicken, bacon, and artichoke pizza, which I heartily recommend. I was hungry so I ate half of the pie myself. If half of a family size pizza fills an average adult, that means Benjamin had five times more. He had two and a half chicken, bacon and artichoke pizzas all to himself that evening. That is a lot of pizza! He had serious leftovers!

Why did Joseph go out of the way to overfeed Benjamin? It was another test. Joseph was speaking through an interpreter but he could understand their language. If the brothers thought they were having a private conversation about Benjamin and they expressed their anger over favoritism shown to their father's favorite son, Joseph would know it. He could listen to them. Apparently no favoritism came out at the dinner table. They passed another test. Maybe the brothers had changed. They had come to peace with their father's excessive doting over Benjamin, his favored.

Lastly, as another piece in his plan to test them, he got them drunk. When it says they drank wine and were merry with him, it literally means he helped them get intoxicated. When you are drunk, what you are thinking will come out of

your mouth because you don't have control of your lips. In addition, we will see in a moment why it was an important part of his plan for them to have foggy memories of this evening.

Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph told him. As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this.'" When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord's servants." He said, "Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent." Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city. Genesis 44:1-13 (ESV)

As first light of dawn pierced the night sky, they were sent away. I am sure they were groggy from their hangovers. They were talking about the amazing evening they had the night before. Simeon was probably still talking about getting sick in the potted plant after he drank too much. They didn't realize this was all part of Joseph's advanced test to see if they had changed or if they were the same old brothers at heart. They weren't far out of town when the flashing lights of a chariot caught up with them and they were accused of stealing Joseph's silver cup of divination.

Does this mean Joseph practiced divination? No. He didn't read tea leaves or tarot cards. To keep the ruse up with his brothers, he needed to look

and act the part of a pagan Egyptian. This is why he talked about his divination cup, which would have been something many powerful Egyptians had in their possession.

As you can guess, the brothers were over the top in their responses. “Why would we steal Joseph’s silver cup? We brought back the money that was in our sacks from the first trip. Why would we try to steal Joseph’s cup?” Their memories of the night before were fuzzy but they didn’t think anyone stole anything. They made an over-the-top promise. If one of us has the cup, he will die and the rest will become your servants.

The steward went through everyone’s luggage until he came to the end. The cup was found in Benjamin’s sack.

This is the reason Joseph wanted them to bring Benjamin to Egypt. He planned to set up an opportunity for them to get rid of Benjamin and let Benjamin become a slave in Egypt, just like they had done for Joseph. If they were comfortable leaving Joseph to be a slave in Egypt, would they do the same thing with Benjamin? Would they take the opportunity to go home and say, “Dad, you always played favorites with Benjamin. The kid was a thief. He tried stealing the silver cup of the prime minister of Egypt’s. They caught him red-handed. There wasn’t a thing we could do. He is in jail, like he deserves.” The test was, what will the brothers do with an opportunity to dispose of the favored son?

When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?” And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been

found.” But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.” Genesis 44:14–17 (ESV)

When they came back, Joseph was still at home. He hadn't left for work. Apparently he was still eating breakfast.

Look at Judah's response. “God has found out our guilt. All of us will become your servants, not just Benjamin in whose sack the cup was found.” Here is what I find interesting. Were any of them guilty of stealing the cup? No! Why did Judah say God found out their guilt? In that statement Judah stepped forward and confessed the guilt of selling his brother as a slave into Egypt and living that lie for 22 years. Judah admitted their guilt and embraced his just punishment and said the rest of his brothers would join him.

Then Judah went up to him and said, “Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father, or a brother?’ And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.’ Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’ We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.’ “When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And when our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food,’ we said, ‘We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.’ Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. One left me, and I said, “Surely he has been torn to pieces,” and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.’ “Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.’ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let

the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.” Genesis 44:18–34 (ESV)

Does anybody remember Judah from our earlier study in Genesis? Judah was the brother that came up with the idea of selling Joseph into slavery. Judah was part of the scheme to tear up Joseph’s coat and cover it in animal blood then lie to dad for 22 years. Judah was the son that had such a guilty conscience he left home and moved in with a friend named Hirah who was a Canaan pagan party animal. Judah was the guy that left the faith and married a pagan Canaanite wife. He was the guy who had three sons, and he was such a bad father that two of his three sons were struck dead by God because of their immoral and wicked lives. When God strikes two of your sons dead, that doesn’t qualify you as a great dad. He was the guy who refused to give his third son to his daughter-in-law because he thought she was a black widow. A week after Judah’s wife died, he went partying with his friend Hirah and slept with a woman he thought was a prostitute. It turned out to be his daughter-in-law who was trying to ensure she would have an heir because Judah wouldn’t fulfill his obligations.

Judah was about as messed up as people come. Here is the amazing part. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, people change. Judah changed. He went from the guy who would sell his own brother into slavery to become the guy who would give his life to save his brother even when it looked like his brother was guilty.

Joseph's tests ended up being a good thing. Judah and the rest of the brothers were different men. There would have been no way to know it unless they were tested to reveal the truth.

For the balance of our time, I want to take a few minutes to look at God's tests in our lives. Why does God test us and how does he use them?

**1. If I am a follower of Jesus, God will test me.** We often think that if we are following Jesus, life will be smooth sailing. It won't. God is in the business of conforming us to the image of Christ. Just as Joseph used tests to help his brothers face the sin of their past and to reveal what they had become through God's grace, in the same way, God uses tests in our lives.

*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)*

God will discipline and train us. He always has and always will. It is a sign we are a child of God when God tests us to prove us and mature us.

**2. God's tests are designed to reveal who we are, not break what we have become.** Joseph's tests of his brother were not designed to break them. They were designed to reveal the truth about them. In the same way, when God brings hard times into our lives, those tests are not to break our faith but to prove the genuineness of our faith.

*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6–7 (ESV)*

Peter said that just as gold is tested by fire to prove it is genuine, God tests our faith and it proves to us, and to others, that our faith is genuine. When

we go through trials, how we handle them and how we get on our knees in them reveals the truth of our faith.

**3. God will never put me through a test I can't pass.** No matter how difficult the tests we face in life, God promises to never stretch us beyond our breaking point. He promises to never test us beyond our ability to endure with the Holy Spirit's strength.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

This reminds us that every trial we face is common. Nothing is new. Other people have faced the same tests just like us and made it through. God is faithful to us. He promises to not let us face more of a test than he will give us the ability to bear. Whenever I fail a test by giving into temptation, it is not the fault of the test. It is my own fault. God always provides a way out. Many times the way out is so obvious we don't see it. It is simply to get up and walk away. Walk out of the apartment. Turn off the computer. Hang up the phone. It is straight forward.

**4. God's test are designed to show us where we need to grow.** (See Matthew 26:31-75) Whenever we fail a test God puts in our lives, the right way to respond is not despondence and hopelessness. It is to go to God in brokenness and confess your sin. Then we ask him for more grace and more mercy as we focus on the areas of our lives where we need to grow.

**5. God's tests never make sense until they are over.** Think about this. The brothers had no clue why they were seated in order. They had no clue why they were accused of being spies. They had no clue why it was essential for them to

bring Benjamin back. They didn't understand why Benjamin was fed five times more. They had no idea why the money was planted in their sacks. They didn't understand how Benjamin ended up with the silver cup. It was after the test when things made sense. It is the same with each of us. God's tests in our lives rarely make sense in the windshield. We can only understand them in the rearview mirror.

## Conclusion

Probably the most amazing part of the story of the testing of Joseph's brothers is what happened with Judah. Judah had an incredible life transformed by the grace of God. He went from a complete mess to someone that was willing to give his life to save his brother from slavery and death. Thousands of years later, a descendant of Judah, called the lion of the tribe of Judah, named Jesus, did the same thing. He gave his life so that each of us, his brothers and sisters, would not be enslaved to sin and face eternal death. In Judah's actions we see the gospel message of Jesus. It would never be seen if it was not for tests and their good purpose in his life.



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