

The King's Heart Revealed

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[0:00] If anyone here, as part of your work now, or maybe in the past, has ever had to write tests! or exams or set a test for others to take. Maybe you're a teacher, and that's something you've got to do for your class. Maybe it's in your place of work. You've had new staff come in, they've trained for a while, and you need to give them something, a small test, to see if they've learned all that you've tried to teach them. Maybe as parents, we've done it for our children. We've written out some words or maths or whatever it is and said, do you know this? Can you read it? Tests are kind of a part of life, aren't they? And I hope that it's at least sort of generally true that tests aren't there to trip us up, but to genuinely see what a person knows or maybe doesn't. Who is this person in relation to what they should be, or what does this person know in relation to what they should know? They've come into this class, they've been taught. Who are they now? Has there been a change from what they knew then to what they know now? Well, as we come this evening to Genesis 44, we pick up the story with

Joseph testing his brothers for a second time. And kind of the question before Joseph in his mind is, well, have they changed? Have they changed? Are these the same men who sent me into slavery, or are they different? Are they changed men? Just a little reminder of where we are in the narrative, that there's famine in the land, in Egypt and Canaan, kind of all across the known world, that the supermarket shelves are empty, the Egyptian and Canaan and Sainsbury's, Morrison's, as does Tesco's, wherever else it is you go for your shopping, or they went for their shopping, right? The shelves are empty, that there's nothing for the farmers to plow in the fields, and they've all been shut for two years. And Joseph's brothers have come from Egypt to Canaan looking for food. Joseph recognizes them, he tests them. In fact, Judah gives us a bit of that summary in speaking back to Joseph, doesn't he, in chapter 44. But in that first test, as we saw a few weeks ago, Joseph sort of accuses them of being spies and sends them back to Canaan, saying, bring Benjamin to me. He also puts some of their money back with them into their satchels, and there we have test number one. Will they keep the money? But actually, much more important and bigger than that, will they bring

Benjamin back? Will they be loyal to Simeon, who's been left behind? Will they return? And they have returned, they have come back. And now in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 44, they're about to be sent back to Canaan again. They've been loaded up with food, they're ready to go, but as they go, Joseph is going to test them again. Have these men changed? And that brings us to our first point this evening. The test reveals transformation. The test reveals transformation. The narrative here is quite straightforward, but what these events, this test is going to reveal about the brothers' hearts is profound. It's really, really beautiful. It's why I really wanted to read all of it. I think what we come to here is beautiful.

So what happens in this test, first of all? Well, verse 2, Joseph has the silver cup placed in the bag as their way to be sent out. Verse 4, Joseph then sends his steward after his brothers, and he accuses them of stealing the cup. Verse 8, do you see the brothers? They defend themselves, saying, well, look, last time we brought the money back, didn't we? We've been shown to be honest men before. Verse 9, they actually get a little overexcited. They say, whoever has the cup should die. It's a little bit like Nathan with David.

Do you remember Nathan with David, with all that happened with Bathsheba? Nathan said, someone took the poor man's sheep, and David says the man should die, and Nathan says, it's, well, it's you. Well, these brothers get a little bit overexcited. Yes, this man should die, thinking they're innocent. It's kind of easy to pass judgment, isn't it, when we think we're off the hook, and they think they're off the hook, but verse 12, their belongings are searched, and the silver cup is found in Benjamin's sack.

[4:34] So where's the test? Well, they're brought back to Joseph, and in verse 17, Joseph says, well, look, I'm not going to kill the one who took it, but I'll keep him as a servant, and you all go back to your father in peace. In other words, in other words, why don't you sell, keep a younger brother into slavery, and all you brothers go free? That's the proposal that Joseph puts there in 44 verse 17.

I'll keep the one who had the cup. All you other brothers go free. If we have any kind of Bible knowledge, we've been here the last few weeks, or we're familiar with the story, does that ring any bells? Is anyone getting a sense of déjà vu? A younger brother into slavery, and everyone else goes free. If we've been tracking the story, it should be setting bells off in our mind, because it's sort of a replay of what happened with Joseph right back in Genesis 37. Joseph is in the pit, and Judah decides they should sell him to the slave traders heading to Egypt, and then the brothers can profit. And so here we are all these years later. Here we are again. Leave this brother as a slave in Egypt, and we brothers can head home. Will history repeat itself for a second time?

Is this going to be Joseph kind of 2.0, but with Benjamin now as a slave? Verse 1 of chapter 44, their sacks are full of money and food. It's payday for them. It's almost like getting a couple of years' salary at once. Head home, take the cash. Feast like kings as the world is in famine.

And so the question is this. What Joseph wants to know is this. How far have these brothers come in these 20 or so, 22 years? Have they learned? Have they changed? There's brotherly conflict all through Genesis. Right back to Genesis chapter 4. Will it keep going on here?

Friends, can people change? What do you think? Can the Spirit of God and the gospel of the Lord Jesus does so work in people's lives to bring about godly change, to bring about Christlikeness?

[7:06] What do you think? Can others change? Can we? Well, the question is hanging there in verse 15 of chapter 44. They come to Joseph and he says, what deed is this you have done? What deed is this you have done? One commentator I read pointed out that this is the eighth time that this has been asked in Genesis.

What is this deed you have done or what is this you have done? The exact Hebrew phrase there repeated eight times. And each time before, the answer is that of a child who's been asked kind of why is there a pen on the wall? It wasn't me. Blame, deflection, nothing to see here. I have nothing to do with it.

And so as we arrive here to that question being asked by Joseph, we're meant to think, what is going to happen now? Let's think briefly those eight times God asks Eve in Genesis 3.13, what is this you've done after she eats the fruit? Adam blames Eve. Eve blames Satan. The blame game starts. The second time, God asks Cain the same question in Genesis 4.10, after Cain kills Abel, he blames God. The third time, Pharaoh asks Abraham in Genesis 12, when Abraham pretends Sarah is his sister and not his wife, what is this you've done? Abraham doesn't own it. He just walks away. Abimelech asks Abraham in Genesis 20, when for a second time he presents that Sarah is his sister and not his wife, Abraham tries to justify it rather than apologize. Abimelech asks Isaac, different Abimelech, in Genesis 26, when he pretends his wife is his sister. There's kind of something going on there, right? But again, Isaac just goes about his life. No apology, no owning his sin. The sixth time, Jacob asks Laban in Genesis 29, after he's deceived over Rachel. More excuses from Laban. Laban also asks the question to Jacob,

Genesis 31, 26. Jacob has prospered, he's left Laban, takes great abundance with him, and Jacob just makes a kind of counterclaim back. We've seen seven times God's people have been asked, what is this you have done? And seven times they blame, they excuse, they ignore the sin in their lives. Well, here's the eighth time. What is this you have done? And verse 16, God has found out the guilt of your servants.

God has found out the guilt of your servants, says Judah. In other words, he owns his sin. He owns it. We are guilty men. Now, hit pause. We know the cup was planted there by Joseph, don't we?

[10:00] It's a test. But Judah doesn't know that. And now he stands in the place of his brothers and owns it corporately for them. Yes, we are guilty. For the first time after seven attempts, a member of this family asked about their sin owns it. And I think in some ways, Judah could be saying more. He's kind of saying more than he knows, speaking not only about the guilt with the cup. I think he knows that they're guilty about what they did with Joseph all those years ago. I think, in other words, Judah is kind of saying, look, I think justice has caught up with us. From selling our brother, lying about our brother all those years ago, we need mercy. We are guilty men. Friends, in our relationships with one another, our friendships, or with our walk with the Lord, what are we prone to do if or when kind of God finds us out? If I can put it that way. When our sin is exposed, what are we prone to do? Blame shift?

He made me do it. She made me do it. Ignore it. I can't hear you. It wasn't me. Or say yes. Guilty.

Being famous, being in the public eye can't be easy. I don't know what it's like and probably never will know what it's like, okay? But I don't think it can be easy being an A-lister in Hollywood.

But if you watch public apologies often, or at least as they are reported through the press, usually if you listen carefully, it's more of an apology really that I was caught rather than for the thing itself. I'm not really sorry for what I did, but I'm kind of sorry that it came out.

But owning our sin before God isn't that. God knows our hearts. He sees all. We are called to confess our sin, to own it, knowing that there's always, always grace and mercy and forgiveness at the foot of the cross. So can people change? Yes, by God's grace they can. Judah now shows us that. The brothers and Judah have changed. Think about what Donald took us through those few chapters, those few weeks ago, back there in Genesis 38. Judah has history that we almost don't want to repeat or rehearse again.

[12:29] That sordid affair with Tamar, it's almost unspeakable. And now he comes and confesses his sin. We are guilty men. We're sorry. He's changed. And so, dear friends, this evening, remember that the gospel, the power of God at work within us can change us. That sin which I've fallen back into this week in Christ does not have the power to keep hold of us. That pattern of folly I keep going back to, anger, lust, pride, gossip, greed, whatever it is, it does not define us. The gospel is at work among us for our transformation and being made like Jesus. So, dear friends, pray for that, long for that, trust God for that, that we would continue to be sanctified, holified, made like Jesus until one day we see him face to face and that work is completed. And dear friends, know that there is always, always grace with God. There was for Judah here before his brother Joseph, and boy, did he need it. And there is always abundant oceans of grace found in Christ for you and for me. And I think we see the depths of change here in Judah even more as his speech and his coming to Joseph goes on. He doesn't just ask for mercy for him and his brothers. He offers his life in place of Benjamin's, as he'd already said to Jacob before they came down. He pleads with Joseph for the sake of his father. Do you see that? Verse 26.

Verse 29, verse 31, we can't read them all or go to all of it, but there they are. Jacob would die. He would go to Sheol. He would be lost if I go back without Benjamin.

And in verse 33, Judah, he asked for his life to be taken for Benjamin's. My life, a surety, I'll be a servant. He can go free. We don't have time to reread all of this, but it's stunning. It's beautiful. Please let him go, and I'll stand in his place.

As far as I can tell, and please correct me if I've got this wrong, but as far as I can tell, this is the first time in the Bible that someone kind of offers their life in place of another who says, I'll stand where he should stand, that they might not be a slave and go free.

A substitute, a surety, my life for his. Dear friends, if someone with a past like Judah's can offer his life for his brother Benjamin's, how much more, how much infinitely more can we have confidence in Christ who stood in our place, who took our place, who offered his life that we might no longer be slaves to sin and death. Jesus, who was spotless, perfect, with no sin of his own, gave his life that we might no longer be slaves. The test reveals a transformation. Secondly, transformation leads to reconciliation. Well, Judah's open heart and confession, that's enough to kind of, for Joseph to kind of melt down completely. That the king's heart tests have drawn the brothers out of themselves, and they have shown to be changed men. Chapter 45, verse 1, Joseph can no longer conceal himself or kind of control himself almost. He sends everyone out, and in verse 3 of chapter 45, he reveals himself to his brothers. I mean, friends, what a moment that must have been.

[16:08] What a moment. This man, this man, this man, Joseph. We're told they're dismayed. No wonder.

Literally, that word could be translated disturbed, terrified, alarmed, nervous. That this brother who they sold into slavery likely thought dead is now the kind of second most powerful man in Egypt, just behind Pharaoh. He can do anything with them that he wants. Anything. Their lives now sit in his hand. I mean, friends, think about it. People feel nervous enough, don't they, if they enter into a room, and perhaps there's an old boyfriend, an old girlfriend there, maybe a bad breakup. Oh, this is slightly awkward. We've been invited to the same party. Or even just an old friendship or family member.

That went south, and here we are in the room again. Wow, this feels a bit awkward. I didn't think we'd bump into them again. Well, how much more here? Joseph, think of the power he has and all the wrong that they did to them. What will he do with them now? Punish them? Send them away? Sell them into slavery?

Banish them? Take everything from them? Kill them? What does he do? Verse 4, come near. Come. We're going to come to the speech just in a minute that Joseph gives, but it's amazing.

It's beautiful. The softness of his heart. Come to me, verse 4. Verse 12, I'm real. See my eyes, my mouth. He mustn't have looked anything like, anything like the brother that they left in the pit and then sold to slavery. And just see the emotion. Verse 14, verse 15, the weeping, the crying, the kissing of his brothers. The king's heart tests have revealed the king's heart for mercy and love and forgiveness.

[18:09] They are reconciled. Owning sin leading to reconciliation. Now, dear friends, we know that for ourselves in this life with other people, it doesn't always work out like this, does it?

Some of us here this evening may have said sorry to people before, to others before, and received a very frosty, a very different response. But the Bible tells us, doesn't it, as far as it depends on us, be at peace with everyone around us.

But if that's been your experience before, then what this passage would have us do, I think, is keep trying. Apologize when we need to own our sin and trust that the Lord can work a reconciliation together.

I trust for most of us, sort of nine out of ten times when we're met with sorry, we've been met with, okay, we're reconciled. Things may take time. It may take time, but the course is set. Do you know even these brothers have things to work out?

Yes, there's tears. Yes, there's kisses. All that's going on, Joseph's going to provide for them, and he's going to send them home. But there's work to do, isn't it? Do you see there in verses 24 of chapter 45, he's a way to send them home, and look what Joseph says. What does he say to them?

[19:35] Don't quarrel on the way. It's a striking thing, isn't it? They've done lots of talking, we see. There will be lots for them to catch up on. But true reconciliation means a point comes where we no longer point the finger. I think that's what he's saying to them. Don't quarrel on the way.

What has happened has happened. We now look forward with grace and mercy together. No longer point the finger, but receive the mercy that I've shown you. No longer blame shift. We've said sorry. Let's move forward. Friends, maybe some of us need to do that in our households, our families, our workplaces, our neighbors, wherever it may be. Maybe it's a lesson for us to put away for church family life as well. The gospel is called a ministry of reconciliation, vertically to God above all, but also to one another. And so when people come to us and say sorry, we must be open to it. And when we owe others an apology, we need to make it. And then looking to the cross, knowing Christ has paid for our wrong and dealt with our guilt, we don't quarrel about what has passed, but we trust ourselves to the Lord.

A test reveals transformation. Transformation leads to reconciliation. Reconciliation rests upon providence. So what moves Joseph's heart to forgive? He has been so wrong, so hurt, but what is the goggles, the vision, his way of seeing the world that has so softened his heart? Verse 4, Joseph said to his brothers, come near to me, please. And they came near and he said, I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh and Lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. So what lenses is Joseph wearing, if you like, to see and enable to keep his heart soft to forgive? It's God's sovereignty, God's providence, his hand over all of this.

One of our tools for Bible reading, as we've seen and studied together over these months and years, has been looking for repetition, what things are repeated in the text. And did you notice it there three times? Verse 5, verse 7, verse 8, God sent, God sent, God sent. Now on a human level, of course, they did sell him into slavery in Egypt. And there is human responsibility here, and the brothers have seen that, and Judah's admitted his guilt, and Joseph knows that too. But I think what allows Joseph to be so tender and to show mercy and to hold out life and forgiveness and provision and blessing is that he knows God is in control, that God is providentially superintending these events to preserve life, that something bigger than his hurt and this wrong is going on. And so, dear friends, I want that to be a real source of comfort for you this evening, a real source of comfort for you this week. I'm sure in your life, at some stage, you have been wronged at work, in your family, maybe even in a church. And those things were wrong and sinful and not pleasing to God. And yet we see again and again in the Bible, we see here in Genesis, that God is providentially working over all those things and indeed everything, whatever we've received in life, sovereignly for his glory and our good, that his purposes are much bigger, that in our one story, God is weaving 10,000 times 10,000 stories, all for glory and blessing. Now, we've seen that, haven't we, already in Genesis, and we're going to see it again. God sent, God did, God did, even when this happened. It is a drumbeat for this part of Genesis. God is in control over all parts of our lives, even the hard parts, even when we've been wronged. God is still in control and ruling and reigning and using it all for his glory and our good. Let me read to you this question from the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Heidelberg Catechism, a question and answer. We're doing a question and answer book in the morning. This is another question and answer. Lord's Day 10 has two questions on providence, on really what we've just read here, that these brothers did all of this wrong, but yet God is at work. The second of those two questions, the first one explains providence, but the second one is what benefit it is to us. So, let me read it. Heidelberg Catechism, question 28. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by his providence, that we can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future, we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love, for all creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will, they cannot so much as move. So, dear friends, if you're in adversity this evening, and some of us are in real adversity, knowing that God rules and reigns over all can help us to be patient, for God is so moving all the pieces of our lives and all the pieces of history together for his glory and our good. And if you're in prosperity this evening, and some of us are, our lives just feel like we're kind of singing from the hilltops, maybe like a day at Cabaret Land or World, if that's your thing, or you just feel like you're on top of a mountain, whatever it is, some of our lives are like that. What does providence allow us to do? To be thankful to God, to be thankful to God, for he has brought us there, and he has been with us. And in all things, in all parts of our lives, knowing God's rule and superintending care should allow us to have confidence that our faithful God will mean that nothing can separate us from his hand.

[26:35] That brings us to our final point then. The test reveals transformation. Transformation leads to reconciliation. Reconciliation rests upon or viewed through providence. And finally, providence works.

Blessing. We don't have time to look at all these verses, but what does Joseph do now? They've wept together. He's told them that God is working in a much bigger way than they can see through all the events of their family's life. So what happens now? Well, he provides for his family. We see in chapter 45, verse 6, the famine still has five years to go. So they're not all that much through it. There's still a considerable amount of time. And so what they say is, well, we need to bring everyone down here to live. We need to go back and get Joseph and bring all the family and the household down here.

And as we read it, did you see that kind of word or phrase being repeated? Verse 11, I'll provide. Verse 18, Pharaoh says, I'll provide. I'll give you the best of the land, the choicest fat. Everything is yours. Verse 20, Pharaoh says, have no concern for your goods.

The best of Egypt is yours. Remember, these are days where the supermarket shelves are empty. The fields that the combines aren't on, right? Things that are being, forgive me, Alistair, whatever is used to plow, isn't plowing the fields, right? Everything is, everything is, there's no food.

And he says, you can have the best of it all. He provides for them. Verse 23, we also get the word provision. It's blessing, blessing, blessing, provision, provision. It is, if you like, salvation, life in days of death. It's even better than Mr. B saying, live 30 days in this circle, and I'll give you a million dollars if you don't cross the red line or whatever it is that Mr. Beast does, right? In days of famine, they are promised feasting. In days of death, they are promised life.

[28:37] This providence has worked blessing. And so friends, it's not just that God is in control, like a king who reigns from his throne, but doesn't really know if the outcome is going to be for the good of his citizens. No, this is a king who is working all things for blessing.

Now, we've seen that already, haven't we? We've seen it in Joseph. He has gone from pit to power. We've seen it here with the brothers in days of famine. They're promised feasting. And of course, ultimately, we see providence working blessing and salvation, for the good of God's people, ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If God can use the cross, the crucifixion of the Son of God, and work it for the salvation of his people, is he not then able to make all things work for our good? Yes, yes.

So, dear friend, in your tears, when falling asleep at night to waking up in the morning is a pillow soaked with tears, in days of grief and loss, what is the providence of God worked in our life?

Well, for those of us who know the Lord Jesus, it is just that, that he's brought us to him, that he's given us a saviour, that he's brought us to that saviour, and that we can know and be safe and rest with him forever.

[30 : 09] I was listening to a talk just earlier this weekend about Alexander Solzhenitsa. He was the famous Russian dissident who was in the gulags in the Soviet Union.

He famously wrote the Gulag Archipelago. And it was remarkable listening to the person, can reflect on his life, and also some of what Solzhenitsa said about these prisons, these gulags in the Soviet Union, about how some of the Christians there just remarked on the providence of God, that even in the worst of the conditions that they knew, they knew that God was with them, that God would not leave them, and that ultimately one day their saviour, who they knew, they would see him face to face and be with him forever.

It was remarkable. Even amongst those trials, they knew that God was working for their good. It's remarkable. Even as I listened to it, I was sort of struggling to wrap my head around it.

Indeed, so, of course, we know that this life has trials and pain and sorrows. But for those of us in Christ, we are to remember that Jesus will sovereignly work all things for our good, that he is ours, that we are his, and that one day we will see him in the new heavens and the new earth, face to face, world without end.

And so, yes, our blessings, our blessings here is not the kind of material prosperity that these brothers get, but it is the spiritual blessings of knowing that we belong to the Lord Jesus, that one day in the new heavens and the new earth, yes, all the world will be ours in Christ, and the fullness of the inheritance will come and be ours.

[31 : 48] So, dear friends, whatever life circumstances you're facing this evening, remember that God has worked providence for our blessings. He's brought you to Christ. He's brought Christ to you.

You are safe with him, and he will be yours forever. And perhaps you're here this evening, and you don't know the Lord Jesus. Life is hard. What blessing are you talking about?

Well, dear friends, all that this chapter holds out to you, the gospel holds out to you, is the person of Christ. Trust him, and see how all the pieces of your life have brought you to this moment, that you could trust Jesus, be forgiven, and know new life safe with him forever.

So, God's people, Israel and his family, right at the end of the chapter, now prepare to make their way to Egypt for provision and blessing in days of famine.

But you'll remember that Israel, that is Jacob, and his father Isaac, and his father Abraham, have been promised the land of Canaan, not of Egypt.

[32 : 57] And so the test of the brothers might be over, but the test for God's people, for life in Egypt, is now about to begin. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you so much for the great hope of the gospel that it holds out to us.

We do pray that we would be people who run quickly to you for grace and mercy, and are quick to show grace and mercy and forgiveness to those around us. And Lord, for all of us here this evening, whose life circumstances do feel so hard, how do the pieces all fit together?

We're not quite sure. Help us to know that your ways, although mysterious to us, are ultimately for our good. Lord, and for your glory, we rejoice that you have brought us to Christ, which one of us would have thought a cross, an instrument of death, could bring life, but it did.

Lord Jesus, your death has brought us life. And so may we rest in the confidence, and the assurance, that with you there is life and blessing. With you there is hope of heavens and earth, of world all made new.

[34:13] And so may we look to you in all our days, in days of sorrow, in days of joy, in days of empty hands, in days of full hands, to praise you, to trust you, and to keep walking with you, knowing that you will never leave us until we see you face to face.

And we ask it, Lord Jesus, in your powerful name. Amen.