

Benjamin's Cup

“Ordinary Object, Extraordinary Meanings”



“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” 1
John 4:20

This wasn't just any cup. It was a silver cup and it was precious. Years earlier, the brothers of Joseph had sold him into slavery but told the father, Jacob, that he had been killed. Actually Joseph became the second most powerful man in Egypt next to Pharaoh. This cup was his personal silver chalice. When famine struck the land of Canaan, the brothers of Joseph were forced to beg and eventually go to Egypt to beg for food. They went with money to pay but when they returned with the food they found the money was still in the sacks. Now they were concerned because they had to go for more food and were afraid they would be thought of as being dishonest because they had not paid for the first food. When they went back to Egypt they took the money back with them. But Joseph had required more from them. He told them he would not give them anything more unless they brought their youngest brother with them. Joseph knew that the youngest of his eleven brothers, Benjamin, was his only true brother. The others were half-brothers. They pleaded that they could not bring Benjamin with them, but Joseph insisted. They had no choice. The story is found in Genesis 44:1-34

When they returned to Egypt for food, they took the money they had found in their sacks when they went the first time, and they took Benjamin with them. Joseph welcomed them and fed them and again gave them food. This time it was double what he had given them the first time. He instructed his men to put his silver cup into the bag of the youngest brother, Benjamin. After they had a chance to begin their journey home, Joseph had a servant go after them and claim that his silver cup had been taken. They were taken back to Egypt. The search began with the oldest brother. They were sure they were not guilty of stealing the cup and they were prepared to go on their way. But the cup was found in the bag of Benjamin who was the youngest and a favorite of his father, Jacob, because he had been born of Rachel. They were taken back to Egypt to face Joseph. It isn't hard to imagine the outrage and exasperation they must have felt. They had been accused of being spies and now this. They had even taken the money back they had found in their bags after the first time.

They must have expected the worst. Joseph had said that the one who possessed the cup would become his slave. Judah, one of the brothers, pleaded that Benjamin be allowed to return to his father, and he would gladly be the slave in place of Benjamin. The brothers had promised the father, Jacob, that nothing would happen to Benjamin because he was the favorite.

Joseph could do nothing more. He had tested his brothers and found them to be honest. He told them he was the brother they had sold into slavery years earlier. They were speechless. I can imagine the fear and thoughts of revenge that must have been racing through the minds of the brothers. Joseph could make them all be his slaves. He could have them killed. He would make sure that they didn't ever take Benjamin back to his father. But Joseph didn't react that way.

Joseph wanted to know if his father was still alive. They told him that he was but that he was a very old man. He told them not to fear. He told them that God had a hand in all of this. If he had not gone to Egypt earlier and succeeded, they would not have been able to have the support he was giving them. He felt God had sent him ahead to pave the way and make him ruler of Egypt.

Then he told them to go back and get their father and get all the relatives and he would give them a place to live because there were going to be more years of famine and they would not be able to survive in Canaan.

We are told that then Joseph fell on his brother Benjamin and wept. Then all the brothers rejoiced. But not so fast. Hadn't all the other brothers been guilty of selling Joseph into slavery? Hadn't they lied to their father that they were robbed and he was beaten and taken as a slave? Were all these sins forgiven also? According to what we are told, Joseph forgave them and even said it was a part of a master plan by God to save all of the people.

The silver cup was just a way to a promise that we have all sinned in some way, but we can all be forgiven. The brothers were all willing to have their bags searched for the silver cup because they were sure they had not stolen it, and especially Benjamin, but all of us have sinned and when we are searched, we will be found with sin, but the most amazing thing is that through God that sin will be forgiven if we ask. I wonder if God feels like Joseph many times. He has to be upset with our actions but He loves us so much and is so forgiving that we are always welcome. He will always give us His love. All we need to do is ask.

Prayer: Lord God, it is sometimes very difficult for us to understand Your plan. Our minds are so small that we cannot even comprehend the beauty of this earth let alone what is in Your mind and heart. Help us to be forgiving because we love. We know that Your love is forgiving us all the time and that we constantly sin even when we don't take time to acknowledge that we sin. Guide us to seek to Your will every day. Amen

1. Who is your brother?
2. Why was it important that the cup was found in the sack of Benjamin?
3. What does the cup represent – sin or love?
4. How can you compare the love of Joseph to the love of God? Or can you compare the love of Joseph to the love of one human for another?
5. Is there any significance that the brothers needed to be forgiven since they are the twelve tribes of Israel?

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