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Here's what hit me 2 – Repentance that heals is an unqualified repentance – 10.17.10

The picture on the bulletin is from [The Blog of Unnecessary Quotation Marks](#), where the owner highlights the funny ways people misuse quotes. You aren't supposed to use quotes to emphasize things on your sign. You should underline for that.

If you say you're serving "Chili" that should actually be taken as a warning that you don't claim to know exactly what's in the pot.

If you're selling "ice cream", it could be frozen yogurt or yak milk on a stick. In fact...

...who would ever buy such a thing?

If you say you have a "security guard"....

Likewise with our apologies. Too often we're "sorry" rather than genuinely sorry. We "apologize" and "repent". We really mean "I'm sorry I got caught" or "I'm sorry you have a problem with me" but there isn't really any true, deep repentance unqualified with quotations or conditions.

That's too bad, because repentance is often the very thing our broken relationships need to begin healing. I've done something or you have said something, or we have spent years doing things and carrying attitudes that are sinful. To top it off, we may even feel genuinely rotten about it. But we cannot genuinely apologize and begin the healing because we cannot genuinely repent.

Here's what hit me as I listened through the latter part of **Genesis** this week and heard once again the great story of Joseph and his brothers: Repentance that heals is an unqualified repentance.

It began with a couple of dreams in **Genesis 37**. Actually it didn't begin there. It began when Jacob married two sisters but only loved one of them, Rachel, and when she finally bore him one son and then another (and then died in childbirth), Jacob loved and favored those two sons more than his other ten.

And we have to get our own notions of family out of the way and grasp that favoritism was serious business. It wasn't about a nicer toy at birthdays or always getting to sit in the front seat of the wagon. It was about money, about livestock (the wealth of the day) it was about inheritance. By the time these events get rolling in **Genesis 37**, the sons of Jacob are grown men, and they are understandably concerned about their inheritance and their growing families, and they fear what kind of crazy scheme their father Jacob, who has a well-earned reputation as a schemer, might come up with to disperse his wealth to his two favorite sons, who after all were only their half-brothers. This was serious.

Then the dreams, which made it more serious. Joseph had a dream in which he and his brothers were binding sheaves of grain out in the field, and their sheaves all bowed down to his. Not a difficult

dream to interpret. He had another one. The sun and moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. Well, let's see...he had a father and a late-mother and eleven brothers....hmmm.

His brothers feared that these weren't just dreams but prophesy, perhaps self-fulfilling prophecy in which their father, once he had time to think about it, might just get the crazy idea to make them come true. So one day when they saw him coming over the fields toward them, they said:
¹⁹ **"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other.** ²⁰ **"Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams" (Genesis 37:19-20).** And that's what they would have done except Reuben, the oldest brother, persuaded them to simply throw Joseph in a cistern and not shed blood. Reuben intended to come back later and rescue Joseph and return the young man to his father. Throughout this story Reuben comes off as a decent guy, and he was, I suppose, but he wasn't a moral exemplar. Two chapters earlier, it is briefly mentioned that Reuben slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine and the mother of Dan and Naphtali...so the mother of his own half-brothers. Years ago I heard LeRoy Lawson say that when he was writing a book on family, he went through **Genesis** and was hard-pressed to find anything close to what we would call a functional, healthy family! Indeed! But here he did a good thing. However, he was thwarted in this plans because while Reuben was absent, his brothers took the opportunity to sell Joseph into slavery, and they dipped his robe in goat's blood and took it to their father and led him to believe that Joseph had been torn to pieces by a wild animal. It's cruel to their father and selfish regarding their own interests, but it's what they did.

If you got the sermon text on Wednesday and read ahead, I didn't have you read **chapter 38**. Not because I'm embarrassed of the content (which I am!) but because it seems like a detour from the main story. But maybe not! It involves Judah, Jacob's number four son, the one out of whose line will come the Messiah – and in **ch. 38**, Judah makes use of a prostitute, who just so happens to be his twice-widowed daughter-in-law in disguise – and he fathers a child by her! And actually it turns out that this may be a detour from the Joseph story but not from the larger story because her child would be an ancestor of the Christ.

Oh, and it so happens that Judah is the ringleader as far as selling Joseph into slavery. When Joseph was in that well in **chapter 37** and Reuben was away, it was Judah who said: **"What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?"** ²⁷ **Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. (v. 26)** That might sound like a bit of compassion or honor on Judah's part, but I tend to put some weight on that opening line, "What will we GAIN if we kill him?"

If you're interested in this sort of thing, here's Judah selling for a few pieces of silver the one who eventually be their savior. Later, a guy named Judas sells for a few pieces of silver the one who will be our Savior, and in both cases, the sale got the salvation rolling.

Well, you probably know the story. Joseph got carried down to Egypt. Got a nice gig because God was with him. Lost it when he refused to sleep with the boss's wife, saying to her: **"With me in charge...my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care."** ⁹ **No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"** ¹⁰ **And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or**

even be with her (from **Genesis 39**). We could get the idea that, with all the loose morals and ethical failures of the men of **Genesis**, maybe God doesn't care. He does, and Joseph reminds us of what kind of person God is seeking to raise up, what kind of person he is seeking to make out of us.

Joseph went to prison for his faithfulness – the woman accused him of attempted rape. But God was with him in prison and he rose up to leadership there too. It wasn't a happy time, and I'm sure he wondered about the reason for all his suffering. But to cut out a great deal, it was because of his time in prison that he one day had the chance to give, in God's mighty wisdom and power, and interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. Through dreams and then through Joseph, God told Pharaoh that seven years of bountiful harvests were coming, and then seven years of the worst famine anyone had ever seen.

When he finished his interpretation, Joseph told Pharaoh: What you need to do here is to find someone wise and shrewd who can store up as much as possible during the good years, and then when the tough times come, you'll not only have enough for your people, but you'll be in the position of a seller rather than a buyer. And Pharaoh said: I agree. And where am I going to find someone with as much insight as the one standing here before me, who has the very words of God on his lips? And Joseph, now 30, a foreigner and accused sex offender, and a humble shepherd, now became master of all Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth, second only to Pharaoh. They got him an Egyptian wife and they gave him a new name - Zaphenath-Paneah – and wherever he rode his chariot, they shouted "Make way!" and even "Bow the knee!" And he had two sons there in Egypt and perhaps he began to think of himself as a different man than the guy named Joseph, the son of a wandering shepherd. That life, for some crazy reason, had slipped into the past.

But then it came back. Joseph was so good at his job that when the famine began, Egypt had grain to eat and to sell. And so Jacob sent his sons – ten of them – down to Egypt to buy food. The one son he kept at home was Benjamin, Joseph's only full-brother, the son of Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel so much and grieved so deeply at the loss of Joseph that he couldn't risk losing Benjamin.

When the ten sons of Jacob arrived in Egypt, they came directly before Joseph to buy grain. He recognized them right way, but they didn't know him.

"Who are you?" he harshly demanded.

"We're from Canaan. Shepherds. Here to buy food."

"You are spies!"

"No, we're not! We're sons of the same father. Ten of us are here. One is back with our father. One is no more."

"You're spies. You've come to seek out our weaknesses." And he threw them in jail for three days.

After that he brought them before him and said: "Tell you what. You go back and bring this youngest brother to me, and I will drop these charges of spying. I'll just keep one of you here till you get back". And Joseph had Simeon taken into custody.

Now Joseph had been speaking to them through an interpreter, so they had no idea he could understand **when ^{42:21}(t)hey said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."**

²² Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." ²³ They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

²⁴ He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. Then he sent the nine home, but he messed with their heads by returning the money they spent on grain.

Jacob couldn't believe this! "Why did you idiots tell him you had a brother?!" "The man asked!" they said. "We didn't know he'd tell us to bring him down with us!" And Jacob decided to let Simeon rot in jail rather than risk Benjamin. He'd lost Joseph. Now if he lost Benjamin, it would kill him. So he waited.

But eventually the food ran out and they had to do something. Now at this time, Judah, the one I called the ringleader in selling Joseph and protecting this whole lie, begins to show a little genuine growth. **Genesis 43:8-10 - ⁸ Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. ⁹ I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. ¹⁰ As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice."**

So they went back with Benjamin, and with double the silver they needed. They feared they would be called thieves since they each had returned home with their silver last time, but when they came before Joseph, he said No, no, I got your money. Your God gave you a gift!

Joseph invited them to eat with him (and they still had no idea who they were dealing with). When he saw his brother Benjamin, he ran off and wept privately. He messed with them again by having them seated in the order of their age, and he had Benjamin served five times more than anyone else!

Now, cutting through a lot of exciting detail: Joseph had his servants hide his own goblet in Benjamin's luggage. He then sent these guys on their way, and THEN he had his guys pursue them and accuse them of stealing his goblet. They were so shocked and so confident of their innocence that they said: "If you find it with any of us, kill him, and the rest of us will be your slaves". And when the goblet was found with Benjamin, they tore their clothes and returned to Joseph. Picking it up at **44:15** –

¹⁵ Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"

¹⁶ "What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."

¹⁷ But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

And now Judah – immoral, unrestrained, jealous, selfish, willing to sell a brother for a few pieces of silver...but also the patriarch of the Messiah's line – Judah speaks up with repentance, unqualified by quotation marks.

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' ²⁰ And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there

is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.'

²¹ "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.' ²² And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.' ²³ But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' ²⁴ When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

²⁵ "Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.' ²⁶ But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'

²⁷ "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. ²⁸ One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since. ²⁹ If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.'

³⁰ "So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, ³¹ sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. ³² Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!'

³³ "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. ³⁴ How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father."

Once, Judah was willing to sacrifice Joseph to protect his own inheritance. Now he's ready to give up his own life to save his brother and to do right by his father. His repentance is complete.

^{45:1} Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.¹

⁸ "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. ¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Later he told his brothers: You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20).

There are so many lessons to be drawn from this account, not the least of which is the way it illustrates our own salvation by our brother, sold, punished for sins he didn't commit, sacrificing himself for the saving of many lives.

But here's what hit me. When I considered the spiritual journey Judah takes, I remembered that a repentance that heals is an unqualified repentance. Maybe through the years you could've gotten Judah and the other sons to admit that they had been wrong for what they did. Perhaps he eventually wished he could go back and change things. Maybe there were nights when he couldn't sleep for the regret over what he had done. But healing repentance came in the form of his unqualified, unreserved willingness to totally surrender his own rights and take the full consequences rather than do the same thing again and continue to be the same man he had been before.

And it is a key point that it was at the very moment of Judah's healing repentance that Joseph took off the mask and said: "It's time to be a family again".

Think of how it is with your marriage, your kids. How it is between you and your employees, or you and your own brothers. If someone out there wronged you, forgive with the forgiveness of Jesus and let it go. But what I'm focusing on today is, if YOU are the one who needs to repent, don't put a stumbling block in someone else's way by holding it back.

Healing repentance – it means total honesty about what you did, what you failed to do. It means accepting the natural consequences. It means no hiding. It means making amends where possible and where appropriate. Admit the infidelity, confess the selfishness, own the lie or the theft, and let go of the false self and be whole again.

One thing we have going for us that Judah did not: We have a Savior, the Lion of Judah, who died to pay for our sins. If the worst happens and you repent and someone doesn't forgive...God can handle that in you. The slate is clean. And don't discount the miracles he can do if you will obey him and repent.