

Conscience-42 1-8.docx
Genesis 42:1-8

Some 21 years have passed since Joseph was sold by his own brothers into slavery.

Much has happened in Joseph's life since that time.

There have been many valleys and trials.

There have been many mountain tops and victories as well.

The boy has become a man.

The slave has become Prime Minister.

The passage we have before us today allows us to see many of the events of this man's life come full circle.

Joseph sees his brothers again after 21 years.

The last time they met, Joseph was the one at a disadvantage.

His brother treated him roughly and cast him into a pit.

This time, the shoe is on the other foot!

This time, they are treated roughly and they are thrown into prison.

When Joseph's brothers see him after all that time, they do not recognize him.

Joseph, however, recognizes them.

God uses this encounter to work in the lives of these ten brothers of Joseph.

God uses these events to resurrect the conscience they silenced many years ago.

Today, I want to take this passage and preach a message I am calling **Conscience**.

I want us to learn what the conscience is, what it does, and how it can be protected.

I want to show you, from these verses, **How The Conscience Is Seared; How The Conscience Is Stirred** and finally, **How The Conscience Is Saved**.

But, before we consider these three **thoughts**, I want to first talk about just what the conscience is and what it does.

Let's first talk about what the conscience is.

The dictionary defines conscience as **“the inner sense of what is right or wrong in one's conduct or motives, impelling one toward right action.”**

The Greek word means **“to know together”**.

The conscience is a gift from God to all men, **Pro. 20:27**.

It gives mankind the power of moral judgment.

It appears some 31 times in the New Testament.

In his book **The Vanishing Conscience**, Dr. John MacArthur says,

“The conscience entreats us to do what we believe is right and restrains us from doing what we believe is wrong. The conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God. It is a human faculty that judges our actions and thoughts by the light of the highest standard we perceive. When we violate our conscience, it condemns us, triggering feelings of shame, anguish, regret, consternation, anxiety, disgrace and even fear. When we follow our conscience, it commends us, bringing, joy, serenity, self-respect, well-being and gladness.”

So, the conscience acts as a rudder for the soul.

It is not a guide, but it is an early warning system, which tells us that danger is ahead.

When we go against the warnings of our conscience, it punishes us with feelings of guilt, shame and regret.

When we honor the conscience, it rewards us with feelings of peace, happiness and joy.

One writer said that a violated conscience is a **“flash of Hell”**.

Another writer said that an honored conscience rewards us with **“a pat on the back”** from God.

Regardless of how it may seem at times, everyone has a conscience.

If that is true, then why can some people do the things they do and have no shame guilt or remorse for their actions?

For instance, how can some Muslims destroy innocent life in the name of their god?

How can some women abort a baby with no remorse?

Questions of that nature could go on forever!

The answer lies in this statement from John MacArthur:

“The conscience, however, is not infallible. Nor is it the source of revelation about right and wrong. Its role is not to teach us moral and ethical ideals, but to hold us accountable to the highest standards of right and wrong we know.”

Thus, the conscience can only react to what it knows and what it has been taught.

If the conscience is taught that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is the supreme standard for right and wrong, the conscience will react when there is any deviation from the teachings of the Word of God.

If the conscience is taught that Islam, Mormonism, Hinduism, etc., is the truth, it will react when those standards are about to be violated.

If the conscience is taught that cursing, drinking and wicked living are right, the conscience will have no problem with those things.

Do you get the idea?

J. Oswald Sanders said this concerning the conscience:

“Every conscience needs instruction. Its delicate mechanism has been thrown off balance by the fall. Just as a bullet will reach the bull’s-eye only if the two sights are in correct alignment, so correct moral judgments are delivered only when the conscience is correctly aligned with the Scriptures.”

That is why it can be very dangerous to let your conscience to be your guide.

That might be a good practice if the conscience has been trained in the right way.

If, however the conscience has been given a false standard of truth, it will guide you in that direction and you will be led even deeper into your error.

That having been said, the conscience is still a great gift from God.

Most people are born with some sense of what is right and what is wrong.

This is because God has written His Law into the heart of man, **Rom. 2:15**.

Thus, if you filled this room with atheists today, most of them would agree with us that murder, stealing and such like, are wrong.

Those things violate our conscience and most people believe they are wrong.

I want to continue to consider the conscience as we move through this passage today.

This passage has something to say to us today about the conscience.

Joseph's brothers had long ago silenced their consciences, but God is about to bring to life what which they longed to kill.

Let's learn a little more about our own conscience as we consider the thoughts in this passage.

I want to preach for a while on the thought **Conscience**.

To Know Him and Make Him Known

1) HOW THE CONSCIENCE IS SEARED

- a) If you remember the story of the early years of Joseph's life, you will remember that his brothers sold him as a slave, killed an animal, put the animal's blood on their brother's coat, brought the coat their father and told him that they had found the coat.
- b) Jacob assumed the worst; he bought into the lie and declared that Joseph must have been killed by a wild animal, **Gen. 37:31-33**.
- c) Then, old Jacob entered a time of mourning that lasted over 20 years.
- d) As they sold their brother and watched his captors haul him away, it must have tugged at their hearts.
- e) When they lied to their father and saw the grief and anguish on his face, and as they lived with that grief year after year, it must have touched them on some level.
- f) But, as time passed, the feelings of remorse and guilt were silenced.
- g) After a while, they probably thought of Joseph less and less.
- h) They may have even come to the place where they believed their own lies.
- i) These brothers seared their consciences!
- j) They came to the place where their hearts stopped speaking to them about their guilt!
- k) The Bible tells us that it is possible for a person to do just that. **1 Tim. 4:2** says, **"Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."**
- l) This verse refers to people who have ignored their conscience to the point that it no longer speaks to them.
- m) They have silenced the warning system until it can no longer be heard.
- n) **ILL--In 1984 an Avianca Airlines jet, flying over Spain, crashed into a mountain. Everyone on board the jet died instantly. When investigators found the "black box" they were amazed as they listened to the cockpit recording in the minutes just prior to the crash. The plane's collision avoidance system began to speak to the pilot, warning him of an object that was in the flight path of the plane. The computerized voice of a female speaking English was heard to say, "Pull up. Pull up. Pull up", over and over again. After a few moments of this, the pilot was heard to say, "Shut up Gringo!" And with that, the pilot turned off the system. He just ignored the warning, flipped the switch and few moments later, everyone was dead.**
- o) That is what happens when the conscience is ignored!

- p) When we start to do something we know is wrong, the conscience tells us to “**Pull up. Pull up.**”
- q) If we heed that voice and pull up, all is well.
- r) If we ignore that voice and do as we please, we have begun the process of “**searing the conscience**”.
- s) The next time, the voice of the conscience will not be heard as loudly or as clearly.
- t) If we continue to ignore our internal warning system, the conscience will eventually stop warning us at all.
- u) Every time we ignore the voice of the conscience, we are retraining the conscience.
- v) We are teaching it that things which it believed were harmful are now all right.
- w) When we retrain the conscience, we are headed toward a crash!
- x) Of course, our culture tells us that we need to “**silence the voice of guilt**”.
- y) They say that only weak people have problems with right and wrong, because there really is no right or wrong.
- z) Everything is relative!
- aa) Our culture tries to silence conscience.
- bb) We need to be very careful about how we treat the conscience!
- cc) If the conscience tells us something is harmful, we need to heed the voice of the conscience.
- dd) It is dangerous to go against the conscience when it sends out a warning signal.
- ee) If we ignore the signals it sends us, we will eventually silence the voice of the conscience.
- ff) When the conscience says “**Pull up!**”
- gg) We must never say “**Shut up, Gringo!**”
- hh) As I said, the conscience must be trained.
- ii) The conscience is not infallible.
- jj) It only knows what it has been taught.
- kk) As a result, some people have an overactive conscience.
- ll) They are referred to in **Romans 14-15**.
- mm) People who have been raised in an atmosphere of legalism, and who have been taught that everything is wrong tend to have a very sensitive conscience.
- nn) They may believe that some things are wrong, when those things are, in fact, not wrong at all.
- oo) The conscience can be trained by tradition.
- pp) That person needs to retrain the conscience by teaching it the truth of the Word of God.
- qq) By the same token, some believers have a strong conscience and know that they have liberty in the Lord.
- rr) However, they must always take into account their weaker brothers.
- ss) They must not do things that would cause a brother with a weaker conscience to violate his conscience.
- tt) That is the clear teaching of **1 Cor. 8:1-13**.
- uu) Be careful that you do not “**sear**” your conscience!
- vv) The word “**sear**” gives our word “**cauterize**”.
- ww) When a wound is cauterized, heat is used to seal off blood vessels to stop bleeding.
- xx) The word originally meant “**to brand; to mark by branding**”.

- yy) Branding causes a scar and a scar had no nerve endings; it cannot feel!
- zz) A conscience that becomes seared is a conscience that ceases to feel! Don't let that happen to you!

2) **HOW THE CONSCIENCE IS STIRRED**

- a) The brothers of Joseph have allowed their hearts to become hard.
- b) They have “**seared**” their consciences and have ceased to feel.
- c) In these verses, the Lord uses several events to bring their consciences back to life.
- d) By the way, God knows how to rip the callous right off a hard heart!
- e) Let's watch Him do just that in these verses.
- f) **God Used Problems To Stir Them** –
 - i) The problem God orchestrated to awaken the dead consciences of these men was a worldwide famine, **Gen. 41:56-57**.
 - ii) These men would have had no reason to go to Egypt otherwise!
 - iii) In fact, I believe they knew where Joseph was taken when they sold him as a slave, **Gen. 37:28**.
 - iv) And, I believe that fact is exactly what they are thinking about in **verse 1** when Jacob said, “**Why do ye look one upon another?**”
 - v) These men had also heard that there was grain in down Egypt.
 - vi) They were probably thinking, “**Egypt! That's where Joseph is! If we go down there we might run into him.**”
 - vii) The famine has begun to awaken in them some feelings they had buried long ago.
- g) **God Used People To Stir Them** –
 - i) So, these boys head out to Egypt.
 - ii) Their father refuses to allow them to take Benjamin with them.
 - iii) Jacob's words in **verse 4** seem to indicate that Jacob still had some doubts about their involvement in Joseph's disappearance.
 - iv) The whole story just didn't make sense to the old man.
 - v) When the brothers arrive in Egypt, Joseph recognizes them right away, **v. 6-8**.
 - vi) Joseph had probably been waiting and watching for them to show up.
 - vii) They don't recognize him because he has adopted Egyptian dress and appearance.
 - viii) The Hebrews dressed in long robes.
 - ix) The Egyptians wore short ones.
 - x) The Hebrews wore beards.
 - xi) Egyptian men shaved both their faces and their heads.
 - xii) Joseph uses this opportunity to turn the screws on these men.
 - xiii) He speaks roughly to them, **v. 7**.
 - xiv) He accuses them of being spies, **v. 9**.
- h) **God Used Pain To Stir Them** –
 - i) When they are accused of being spies they try to defend themselves, **v. 10-14**.
 - ii) Then, Joseph concocts a plan to really make them sweat.
 - iii) First, He demands that they send one of their number back home to get Benjamin and bring him back as proof of their story, **v. 15-16**.
 - iv) They protest and Joseph throws them in prison for three days, **v. 17**.
 - v) Then, Joseph allows nine of the brothers to return home to get Benjamin while one of them remains behind in prison, **v. 20**.
 - vi) Having no choice, that is what they do!

- i) **Note:** I went through all of that to remind you that God will do what it takes to awaken your conscience when you allow it to become seared.
- j) These men would have never thought of Joseph again had it not been for the famine.
- k) The famine drove them to Egypt.
- l) The trip to Egypt brought them face to face with their brother.
- m) Their treatment in Egypt awakened thoughts in their hearts that had lain dormant for two decades.
- n) God used some harsh measures to get their attention, but He has them where He wants them.
- o) He has them on the road to repentance and renewal.
- p) **Note:** If you belong to the Lord and you allow your conscience to become hardened, you need to know that you are going to wander off into sin.
- q) Your conscience will cease to warn you of evil and you will fall away.
- r) But, if you are His, He will not allow you to remain in that condition forever.
- s) He will come and get you and He will use whatever it takes to awaken your conscience.
- t) For Joseph's brothers God used problems, people and pain.
- u) For David, God used a man of God who was willing to confront a king. God also used the death of a child.
- v) For Samson, God used a Philistine prison, the loss of his eyes and the loss of his strength.
- w) For Peter, God used a little girl at a Roman fire.
- x) Who knows what He will have to use in your life and mine.
- y) But, one thing is sure, He will use whatever it takes to get our attention and to resurrect the conscience we have tried to kill, **Gal. 6:7-8**

3) **HOW THE CONSCIENCE IS SAVED**

- a) As this story continues, the brothers have reached a place where their consciences have come back to life.
- b) They are certain that their troubles all stem from their treatment of Joseph.
- c) They confess their sin, **v. 21-23**, not knowing that Joseph could understand their language.
- d) A secret that has remained buried for 20 years bubbles to the surface.
- e) He sends the nine brothers home and keeps Simeon in prison.
- f) He sends his brothers home with the grain they need to live.
- g) He also puts their money back in their sacks, **v. 24-28**.
- h) When they find this, they are filled with fear and with the conviction that God is actively working in their lives, **v. 28**.
- i) They think that God is out to get them for what they have done.
- j) They think that God is intent on their destruction.
- k) In reality, God is intent on bringing them back to Himself.
- l) As I said, God knows how to get our attention!
- m) If we can take anything away from this chapter today, it is the truth that the conscience can be cleansed.
- n) If we have allowed our conscience to become dirty and damaged, it can be restored.
- o) Let me take a moment to tell you how to restore your conscience to a place of purity.
- p) **Confess and forsake all known sin** – Consider your life in the light of the Word of God. Deal with your sins God's way and get them out into the open through confession, **Pro.**

28:13; 1 John 1:9; Psa. 32:5. That is what Joseph's brothers did and it is what we need to do as well.

- q) **Seek forgiveness and reconciliation for all those you may have wronged** – Before we can be right with God, we must be right with our fellow man, **Matt. 5:23-24; 6:14-15.**
- r) **Make restitution to those you have wronged if possible** – The Old Testament commanded this, **Num. 5:6-7** and the New Testament reaffirms this as well, **Philemon 19; Luke 19:8.**
- s) **Don't wait to cleanse a wounded conscience** – When you have violated your conscience by ignoring its voice, deal with your guilt immediately, **Ill. Acts 24:16.** If you allow the guilt to remain, it will fester and your spiritual life will only deteriorate. You will experience depression, anxiety, and other emotional problems. The guilt will remain long after the offense has been forgotten. Get things right fast!
- t) **Educate your conscience** – If you have a conscience that is easily violated, train it in the things of the Lord. Feed it the pure Word of God and not the teachings and traditions of men, **Ill. Psa. 119:11.** We must not train the conscience based on what our parents say; based on what old traditions have taught us, or based on what some preacher said. To have a pure conscience, we must train it on the Word of God alone. Let the Bible be your only guide for living and your conscience will become a trustworthy friend!

Conc: People may silence the conscience in this life, but one day, it will speak up loud and clear! When you stand at the judgment, your conscience will agree with every judgment handed down by Holy God.

Every person in this room needs to look within and examine the condition of his or her conscience.

- Is your conscience pure? Is it helping you live for the Lord as it sounds the alarm when you approach thin ice in your life?
- Has your conscience been telling you to “**Pull up?**” What has your response been? Have you been pulling up? Or, have you been saying, “**Shut up, Gringo**”, as you flip the switch and kill the system?
- Maybe your conscience hasn't spoken to you in a long time. Today would be a good time for you to come before the Lord and start the process of purifying your soiled and seared conscience.

Has the Lord spoken to you today? If He has, please come to Him and do what He is calling you to do.