Study of Joseph - Part 5

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[0:00] The Lord's Blessing Seeking the Lord's blessing, we'll turn again to the scripture we read, the book of Genesis, and chapter 43, and verse 14.

And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin.

If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. Now we saw the great turning point in the life of Joseph when he was suddenly exalted into a position of preeminence and power in Egypt.

And that took place in a real messianic fashion. Because at one moment he was in the depths of degradation in the king's dungeon. And the next moment he was suddenly exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh.

That took place at the messianic age, you could say, of 30 years. And he was given a new name which spoke of his power and his glory. And all things were put under him in the land of Egypt.

And these things, I say, are messianic. They are typical of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah who would suffer and rise to give repentance to his brethren. And chapter 41 closes with a picture of Joseph as chief administrator or grand vizier in the household of Pharaoh.

He has charged over the storehouses. For seven years he has supervised the accumulation of corn in Egypt. And now in the seven years of famine he is overseeing them.

And is there a doctor again required? Midway in the center. Thank you. So Joseph is supervising over the storehouses.

And as the famine begins to bite, not only in Egypt, but in the other neighboring countries, men begin to appear seeking corn from the storehouses in Egypt.

Now this famine spread so much that it goes into the land of promise itself, into the land of Canaan. And it begins to affect the chosen family itself, Jacob and the remaining sons.

[3:28] Now we read that at verse 1 in chapter 42. Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, Why do you look one upon another?

And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt. Get you down there and buy for us from thence, that we may live and not die.

Now it's an interesting expression to say, why are you staring one upon another? As much as to say that Jacob is conscious that their sons are not certain what to do.

They are normally the ones who take the lead or who take the initiative in everything to do with the family. But at this point they don't know what is happening and they're staring at each other. Now I wonder sometimes if that tells us this, that perhaps the sons had also heard that there was famine, that there was corn in Egypt, but for some reason they could not face that land and they could not face that country.

That country held memories for them, memories of 20 years ago when they had sold their own brother down into that land. I'm sure they heard it. If Jacob knew it after all, they knew it.

[4:43] They were the ones who were out and about looking after the flock. But for some reason they were reluctant to go down to Egypt. And this is the sins of the past beginning to catch up with them.

And this is really, as Spurgeon says, the hound of heaven beginning to catch up with them. Because God will bring their sins firmly back into their consciousness. And he will bring them to a place where they will mourn and where they will repent for these sins.

Now I have no doubt as well that Jacob is suspicious and perhaps he has grown suspicious over these 20 years that there was some foul deed or that there was something not quite right in the story that his own sons had told him about Joseph.

Look after all at verse 4 itself or verses 3 and 4. And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.

But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren. For he said, lest peradventure mischief befallen. Now what is Jacob saying with these words?

[5:49] It is as though he is insinuating to his own sons that there was some kind of mischief which perhaps they had something to do with in connection with Joseph before. And he is saying, I am not sending Benjamin.

Benjamin is not going down to Egypt. He will remain with me in the land of promise. And there is an interesting expression as well in verse 36 of this chapter.

And it tells us the same thing. Now listen to this. Verse 36 of chapter 42. And Jacob their father said to them, Me have ye bereaved of my children.

Joseph is not. And Simeon is not. And you will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me. Now look at what he says. Me have ye bereaved of my children.

Joseph is not. Ah, my friends, Jacob is more than suspicious that there was some foul play in connection with the death of Joseph himself.

[6:52] Now in any case, the ten sons leave for Egypt. Now in Egypt again we find Joseph supervising the affairs of the land.

And one after another, strangers are coming from different countries asking this great man for corn in the land. And all of a sudden, who does Joseph see appearing before him but these faces, which he has not seen for over 20 years.

There they are, ten of them in a row. And they fall down and they bow before him and they ask him for corn. He recognizes them, but they do not recognize him.

Now some people balk at this and say, how is it possible for them not to recognize their brother? Well, there are several reasons for that. In the first place, he was 17 when they sold him into the country.

He is now over 37 years of age. He was exalted at 30. There were seven years of plenty. And now the famine. So he is perhaps around 40 years of age.

People change a lot between 17 and 40. Then again, he speaks like an Egyptian. He speaks the Egyptian tongue. He is careful not to speak in Hebrew. And every time he speaks to them, he uses an interpreter.

Although he understands every single word they speak. But he uses the Egyptian tongue. And he has a different accent. And there was this distinctive headgear that the Egyptians wore.

All these things were hiding the identity of their own brother from their eyes. And in any case, you know yourself, when you are well used to seeing a person, and you see him suddenly in a completely different context, perhaps many, many years after you saw him, you forget.

And you just cannot place it. And you cannot, as it were, reconcile the two things together. Well, all these things combined to hide the identity of Joseph from his own brothers.

And they ask, of course, for the corn. And this is where the strangeness begins to appear. Because Joseph doesn't reveal himself straight away to his brothers.

[9:08] In fact, he assumes a strange posture to them. He becomes aggressive. And he adopts this tone. He says to them immediately, You are spies, he says, and you have come here to see the nakedness of the land of Egypt.

You've come to see its weaknesses and how to assault or how to attack it. And they say, no, we are true men. We are all the sons of one man. And we have come here to buy food.

And then to their amazement, Joseph holds up all proceedings. And he comes back at them with the same thing. No, he says, you have just come here to see the nakedness of the land.

And he says, I will test you with respect to what you are, he says. And he puts them in prison three days. And this is his plan. He says, I will keep you here.

And one of you will return to the land of Canaan. And you will bring back your brother. If you have a brother, and if you are true men, then bring him back here. And if you bring them back here, he says, then I know that you are telling me the truth.

[10:15] And he keeps them in prison for three days. And after three days, Joseph comes to them and says that there is a change in what he wants.

He doesn't want one to go home. No, what he says is, I will keep one of you here. I'll keep one in prison. The rest of you go home, take corn to your home, and bring back your brother.

You don't bring back your brother, he says. Then don't even attempt to appear before my face again. And he takes Simeon. And he binds Simeon.

Now, I'm sure many people wonder why he chose Simeon to bind. Well, he didn't choose Reuben. Simply because he overheard the brother speaking.

Well, this may be the reason anyway. In verse 22, Reuben spoke. Reuben answered them saying, did I not speak unto you saying, do not sin against the child.

[11:16] He's going back 20 years when they were at the cistern, at the pit. Did I not say to you, don't sin against the child, and you would not hear. Therefore, his blood is required.

Now, they didn't know that Joseph understood what they were saying. That was the first inkling Joseph had that Reuben had fought to save his own life. And so he chooses not the firstborn, but Simeon to be bound.

And he sends the rest home. But before he sends them home, he fills their sack with corn and with the money. The money that they brought to buy the corn, he puts that into the sack as well.

Now, a question rises here, and that's this. Why the mask? Why feign to be a stranger? Why pretend he doesn't know them?

Why does all this happen? You could say, well, it's vengeance. Joseph is extracting his own pound of flesh, you could say, after what his brothers did for him. But that's not true.

[12:18] You'll find that Joseph, at certain points, has to go out of the room and weep in private, because of his own love for his brethren. And only when he is again composed, does he come back into the room and speak to the brothers.

It's not vengeance. If he was wanting vengeance, he would do much worse than that. Notice. Notice. He only begins to act like this when he remembers the dreams.

Verse 9. Verse 8. Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said to them, you are spies.

To see the nakedness of the land, you are come. He remembers the dreams and he says, you are spies. Now, what does that tell you?

Well, it tells you this. It tells you that God is in what Joseph is doing. It's not Joseph's own scheme to hide himself from his brothers, and to take on this kind of character.

[13:26] It comes from God. And it has to do with the dreams. Joseph remembers the dreams. He had dreamt as a young man, that the sun and the moon and the stars would bow down before himself.

Now, here, there are ten brothers bowing down, and it's as though God is saying, the dream is coming to pass, but not yet, he says. The vision is coming. It is tarrying a little bit, but it is not here yet.

Wait for it. Your father is still not here, and your younger brother is still not here. This is not the fulfillment of the dream. This is me saying to you, Joseph, you have waited for years, and now my word is about to come to pass.

You have held on in faith to my promises, and to my character, and you have not doubted it. Well, here is a token. The vision is coming. It is tarrying. Wait for it.

And it is this that moves Joseph to act in the way in which he acts, and he says, you are spies. Now, the reason precisely for hiding himself is this.

[14:32] It is all designed to work repentance into the souls of his own brothers. God is doing a work, and it is through Joseph that they are being saved.

But just as the great Joseph had to descend to the depths in order to ascend to the heights, so must those who follow Joseph, or those who are saved through Joseph, they must also descend down into the depths before they ascend into the heights.

And the truth is this, that God hides his glory from you until you see your shame. God will not speak peace to the souls of the people he is converting, until they are brought into that place where they are face to face with their sin, they recognize it, and they don't accuse others, and excuse themselves, but they take it home, and they'll say, it is us, it is our sins, and we are doomed, and we are damned, unless God himself opens the way for us, and unless the Lord has mercy.

And that is what is happening here. God veils himself until we seek him diligently. Now, my friends, that is a pattern.

In the life of every single person who comes to God, you can never come to God without repentance. Notice the gospel that is preached. Jesus himself began to preach the gospel, and to say, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[16:06] That is the gospel that Jesus preached. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. God has a way with us. And whenever he is bringing a soul to himself, he strips that soul.

He cuts the props. He takes away the arms of flesh. He causes you to see the emptiness of the world. He causes you to see the corruption inside here, not just out there.

You see that all right, but for a change, you see it in here. There is a look inward, and there's blackness. There's filth. There's dirt. All these things are there.

And only when you are face to face with that, will you cry to see a sight of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. And so Joseph is assuming this posture to bring his brothers down to where they want, or where they'll come to repentance.

Does Joseph enjoy it? No, he does not. He doesn't willingly afflict the children of men either. Just as the greater than Joseph does not enjoy the afflictions of his own people.

[17:11] He does not. But it is for their good that he afflicts them. In fact, Joseph goes out and weeps and comes back to do more of this work.

To show that it is not pleasant to him to do. Not pleasant. To hit his own brethren with a rod. But this is the means of their salvation. And he will hit them with the rod until they come to himself.

And that's why sometimes when you hear of a person out there, and let's say everything's going well with yourself and everything's going smoothly and you've got no problems with your health or with your money or with your family or your home.

Well, in some respects that's a cause for concern if you are not the Lord's. Perhaps you're going to be at ease forevermore in that way. But when I hear God ruffling and something going on here, may the Lord speak to them in this.

And may the Lord show them their sin in this. And may he bring home to them that here they have no continuing city that they might seek one to come. And this easy providence is not so good.

[18:16] Very often sins come home to us when we are in some kind of furnace. Wasn't that what happened to Manasseh? He was a very wicked man but he never really saw himself as a sinner at all.

until he went to Babylon and he was put into captivity. And there he sought the Lord. And when he sought the Lord, he found him. And of course this is true of Christian people too.

Very often God hides himself when he's bringing them to repentance. For example, I think I spoke recently of Hosea chapter 6, the close of chapter 5 and the opening of chapter 6.

God says that he will devour his people like a lion. He says, And when I devour them, I will go away and hide myself until they seek my face. And then sure enough, chapter 6 opens with this cry from his people, Come and let us seek the Lord.

Come and let us find him. Remember the two on the way to Emmaus. Christ went up and he talked with them and he hid himself from them. He hid himself.

[19:24] Their eyes, we're told, were withholden so that they could not see him or recognize him. Why did he do that? Well, he did it to bring them to that point.

Well, put it this way, he said to them, we're told in the scriptures that he made as though he would go on, as though he would carry on walking. But they constrained him and they said, Come in, he says, abide with us for it is evening and the day is far spent.

Christ sometimes hides himself so that we'll truly desire him and long after him. The Syrophoenician woman, she went to Christ and she said, Have mercy on me, Lord, for my daughter is sick.

And we're told that he answered her, Not a word. He hid himself, as it were. And then she besought him again and she said, Help me. And he said, It is not right, he says, to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs.

How about that for what people would call evangelistic technique? That's what he said to her. It's not right, he says, for me to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs.

[20:37] Will that put her off? No, it will not. She comes to him, she says, Yeah, Lord, but even the dog seat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table. He veils himself so that she'll desire him and that she'll, her faith will be refined.

Look, that woman started off wanting help for her daughter, but by the time Christ had finished, she was wanting help for herself. How often you find that in the scriptures? You remember the man who had the epileptic son?

He came to Christ wanting help for his son, but before Christ had finished dealing with him, he was wanting help for himself. And that is the way the Lord sometimes works.

He hides himself to bring people to search themselves and to look in and to call upon the name of the Lord. Now, you may be seeking the Lord tonight, my friend, and maybe you've been seeking him for some time, but you still feel you haven't found him.

Well, what more can I say to you except to keep on seeking him? Because if you do, you shall find him. Come face to face with what you are and be ready to cut off the arm that stands between yourself and heaven or the right eye that offends you.

[21:47] Pluck it out if it's in the way. Deal with the matter. Get down deep like Joseph's brother said to do and come face to face with reality. Don't excuse sin. Don't cover it up.

Don't give yourself a license to carry on this thing that you know is not right in your life. You know it's out of place. You know it's unbecoming. You know it's against the law of God. Give yourself no more license in the matter.

Say what have I to do anymore with idols and cut the thing off and you will then find that he will reveal his face and he will show you his glory.

And does he not say in Isaiah well, Israel said this Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself. Ah, how often we feel like that.

Thou art a God that hidest thyself. You hide yourself from me. But then God says in a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy upon you.

[22:51] Ah, my friend you seek him and that will be true of you in a little wrath to bring you to repentance he'll hide your face for a moment but with everlasting kindness he will have mercy upon you.

a little wrath a moment everlasting kindness that is the contrast. Now the remarkable thing is this that's why he speaks to them the way he does and notice carefully in the chapter how you see it bearing fruit and how you see it worthy.

For example look at verse 21 verse 21 and they said one to another we are verily now listen this is the hard-hearted group of brothers who you would thought could never have such a thing as guilt in their conscience at all and they said one to another verse 21 we are verily guilty concerning our brother in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear therefore is this distress come upon us and look again at verse 28 and this is when they find the money in their sack and he said to his brethren my money is restored and it is even in my sack and their heart failed them and they were afraid saying one to another what is this that God hath done unto us are you hearing that what is this they are saying that God hath done unto us that is a sign of something working in a man's life or a woman's life or a boy or a girl when these kind of questions begin to appear these questions were a million miles away from these people not too long ago but now all of a sudden they are tracing their providences back to their own sins the hardships in their life it's not an accident it's not misfortune it is this distress is come upon us because of what we did 20 years ago because of the way we have conducted ourselves in the presence of God and when they find the money in the sack they say what is this that God has done to us at one point in their lives

God was nowhere now suddenly God is everywhere God is everywhere and that as I say is what happens when the Lord is working in people's lives one minute God is not in your vocabulary the next minute suddenly everything in your life has some association with the Lord and he comes into your thoughts in your work or at your play and everywhere he comes into your thoughts his word comes before you and your sins come before you and your sufferings and your providence you connect to your sins and what begins to come home to you gradually is this that you are a sinner and that you are under God's wrath and curse and except you somehow deal with it you are bound to be lost for it you're bound to be lost for it and all these things come into the minds of the brothers he will by no means clear the guilty what kind of vocabulary do you have yourself does God appear in it does suffering appear in it does sin appear or does guilt appear or do you just leave these words out of your vocabulary ah when the spirit comes in they come you can tell a man by the words he uses by the thoughts which he has are these things in your own mind tell me are you as comfortable tonight as you were a year ago are you as comfortable with your life you say yes

I'm pretty comfortable well my friend that's no good news for me and it's no good news for you we need to feel uncomfortable before we feel comfortable we need to have our sins brought home to us and this is what's happening in their consciences what is God doing to us and this is happening because we are sinners and so they make their way home to the land of Canaan and they tell Jacob everything that has happened and until the brothers go back to Egypt the spotlight falls on this great patriarch this old man of the faith Jacob and we see again how he responds to another great crisis in his life because his sons come home they have corn but mysteriously they have the money for it and all they can say is that this stranger supervising affairs in Egypt will not give us one ounce more of corn unless our younger brother comes along with us now Jacob responds to that in two ways first of all in chapter 42 and in verse 36 he responds like this chapter 42 and verse 36 and Jacob their father said to them me have ye bereaved of my children

Joseph is not and Simeon is not and you will take Benjamin away all these things are against me now that's Jacob you'll notice it's Jacob their father who says that all these things are against me now if you cast your mind back some time ago I brought this before you that from the moment Jacob wrestles with the angel you'll find a certain literary device in the Bible that when the name Jacob is used you find Jacob the weak old man the man who is weak in faith but when the name Israel appears you find the strong Jacob the man who is strong in God the prince with God who had power with the angel and prevailed Jacob and Israel now notice it's Jacob who responds first the unbelief or the weakness you will not take Benjamin all these things are against me but then in chapter 43 when some time has passed

Jacob thinks differently and in verse 13 he says this chapter 43 verse 13 take also your brother and arise go again unto the man and God almighty give you mercy before the man that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin if I be bereaved of my children I am bereaved now if we're not mistaken there is a great contrast between these two things the Jacob of chapter 42 and the Israel of chapter 43 and the contrast is this Jacob oh how does Jacob respond he cannot see the work of God at all when he looks at his providence when he casts his mind back when he thinks of Joseph when he thinks of the brothers and he now finds them come home saying we can't go back unless Benjamin is with us all he can do is say no on no account he says all these things are against me and it rings out of his soul bitterly it is wrung out by the depth of his experience

Jacob can hardly believe what has happened to him he can hardly believe it he says am I to lose my family one by one and must I lose the most precious of all I have already lost Joseph and now are you to take Benjamin away from me everything is against me that's Jacob Jacob ah what Jacob there is in our own hearts when God comes and he works a providence and how bitter it is how hard the cup that he has given me is to drink and I must look at the cup myself and I must drink it in the same way as the Lord himself did it is not as black a cup it is not as bitter but as Christ said to James and to John he says you must be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized and you must drink of the cup the cup of which I drink we must all do it and sometimes when things come to us in that cup we say it's not all for me it's all against me and faith is trying to reach hold of this that all things work together for good but sense is only looking at this everything is against me it is as though at some points absolutely everything in your providence was designed to make you believe that

God was not for you but that he was against you that is how Jacob felt and I know child of God that you will pass through similar things yourself you could read what is going on and say I cannot accept that the Lord has good in store for me but that he only has evil now faith and sense are two different languages and we're not asked to speak the language of sense we're asked to speak the language of faith we're asked to cling on and to remember the goodness of God not to doubt it not to cast aspersions upon his character but to remember that he is good and that he doeth good and whatever the thing looks like he is working it out he is working it out and he will work it out for the good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose don't say all things are against you if you are gods nothing can be against you nothing can separate you from the love of God

Christ Jesus our Lord but time passes for Jacob and the famine cuts deeper and he begins to assert himself and he commands his children you'll notice in verse 11 of chapter 43 their father Israel said if it must be so he says then do this he's thought about it and he asserts himself take the fruit bring the man a present balm honey spices myrrh nuts and almonds obviously these things were there although there was a great famine of basic corn and stuff of that kind take double money he says in your hand and go take your brother take my Benjamin arise and I go again to the man and he says may God give you mercy and may Benjamin return to me because he says if I am bereaved then I am bereaved no you can look at that in two ways one I think wrong and the other right if I am bereaved he says then I am bereaved you can look at that as the language of a man who has no option a man who says well if he's got to go then he's got to go and what can I do about the thing just take him take him with you

I'm boxed in a corner and I'm hemmed in and I can do nothing else my after all it is the name Israel that he wears here he is thinking and he is exercising in faith he's doing a hard thing but he's doing it believing I would rather look at it in this way that this was a great act of faith on the part of Jacob a great act of faith where he believes no longer that all things are against him but he believes that all things are really for him and if he's got to let Benjamin go then he let Benjamin go and that is the highest pinnacle to which Jacob's faith could ascend after all it's one thing to lose Joseph in circumstances out with his own control it is another thing to give up Benjamin when he has the authority to hold on to him I'm sure he could have sent his sons perhaps somewhere else or they could have just hung on further with the supplies that they had but no he says to himself in spite of it all

God is in this I don't know what happened to Joseph I know that he had dreams and these dreams not only spoke to him but they spoke to me they spoke to me many years ago and my sons mocked them but I laid them in my heart and I believed that one day we would all bow down before him as God's chosen vessel in this family and is it not right that perhaps Jacob still can't let that go after all does he not remember his own grandfather ascending up Mount Moriah and about to put the knife into his father's heart still believing when he had the knife in his hand that God was able to raise him from the dead is Jacob not perhaps saying well these dreams are still true I can't understand how they can come to pass maybe they will only come to pass in the resurrection maybe only when there is a new heaven and a new earth will

I and my brethren fall down before Joseph but one thing sure God gave the dreams and I am sending my son down to Egypt and if I am bereaved then I am bereaved so be it God first and myself second this is the purging process my friend of the Christian life God has ways to make us cut off the flesh and to rely on himself if I have got an idol God will cut it out that is if I am a Christian man and I have allowed an idol in God will cut it out and as I said last week he'll grind it into powder and he'll put it on the water and he'll make me drink the thing in all its bitterness if I am idolizing Joseph I might lose him if I am idolizing Benjamin I might lose him also and he loses him he cuts him off and when he sees the ten brothers and Benjamin going past that hill can we not say in some respects that that is Jacob's finest hour he fought once with an angel and he prevailed and he has here fought with an angel again

God has said can you do this Jacob and after much wrestling Jacob has said here I am and here is my son I am sending him into Egypt and so the brothers returned back with Benjamin and that leaves Jacob at home on his own ah my friend I believe the Lord drew near to him I believe the Lord drew near to him whenever the Lord comes like that and whenever the Lord tests us like that it is always to give us something good I said that already today with respect to Nathaniel Nathaniel was in agony of soul I believe when he was underneath the fig tree but when he came out of the fig tree Christ spoke in a precious way to his soul whenever we pass through a furnace and yield ourselves in that furnace to God God brings us out and God meets us in a particular way you will never express your faith in God without God meeting you and saying well done thou good and faithful servant he has wrestled with the angel and he has prevailed

I remember saying when I began with Joseph that Jacob thought perhaps that his trials were over when he entered back into the land of Canaan how wrong he was they're never really over they're never really over at all the Christian life is really passing from one kind of trial into another each trial strengthens us for the next one and we move along in that way different things and in each trial we think we'll never make it God gives us grace to make it and he turns us in the midst of every trial from a Jacob into an Israel and that process happens in every trial Jacob becomes Israel until finally we enter into the promised land ah my friend can I put that to yourself now in two ways first of all you who are without God can you say that God is hiding himself from you or is God suddenly breaking into your life in a way in which he was not before may God break into it may he bring your sins home to you may he convict you of sin as with the term that's the term we use conviction of sin may he show you your sins and may you feel that you need salvation from them and

Christian friend who are being put to the test as to whether you love something more than God don't allow anything to stand between yourself and your savior whatever he's asking you to do whatever he's calling you to go lay yourself on the altar as Isaac did and say here I am Lord send me here I am I am yours may he bless this word let us pray oh Lord we pray that thou would teach us our need of a savior and that thou would show us thine own glory show us that thou art the God who judges all things and who will bring past sins to our remembrance so that one day we shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ and things which we have done and forgotten long ago shall all be brought to pass before our mind and we shall then recognize that the judgment of

God is according to truth and no man will say there is an injustice when he is cast into hell may our sins come before us in this life before they come before us in the life to come bring them back to our remembrance and when we come face to face with them may we take them to thyself and cast them at thyself recognizing that they were born by the Lord himself upon the cross or take away our sins for his sake amen the long sync music that they they have to ah maybe

I like having