

**Genesis 37: 12-36; “God’s Leading of Joseph”, Sermon # 98 in the series –
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 4th, 2019,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

We see in this passage what happens to brotherly love when the heart is unchecked and unguarded. Joseph’s brothers were envious of him, and their envy developed into hatred, and their hatred developed into a conspiracy to murder the one that they should have loved. They forgot that God was watching, and that He would judge. They could conceal their sins from other men, and they could even lie about it to their father. But they could not conceal it from God.

So the question that I would like to set before you this morning is this – How does God show His sovereign power over the acts of Joseph’s sinful brothers? How did He lead Joseph in these dangerous and difficult situations. God was not impotent in this whole affair. Perhaps we might think that God was simply standing by as a watcher while these things were happening. But this was not the case.

I want to assert to you that God was exercising His great sovereign power to lead Joseph even when Joseph’s brothers were at their worst, and doing their worst. So, at this hour, we want to think about this truth: That God will be your keeper, when and if evil men conspire against you. God shows his sovereign power over all the acts of Joseph’s sinful brothers in the following ways.

1st of all – He led Joseph, in the path of his obedience, to the place where he would fall into his brother’s hands. (verses 12-18)

Let’s think about the brother’s conspiracy against Joseph. Conspiracy is when a number of people secretly plan together to do something to hurt or harm a person, or a group of people, or a whole nation. Sinful conspiracy is when people combine their thoughts to seek to do evil to another whom they hate. And often the one that they conspire against, if he is a believer, has done nothing wrong in God’s sight. That person has done nothing to deserve what they are plotting against him, to do. This was the case with Joseph.

You will find, if you read the Bible, that this subject of conspiracy shows up in many places in the Word of God. In the book of Esther we read of the conspiracy of Haman and the king of Persia to exterminate the Jews. In the book of 2nd Samuel we read of Absalom conspiring with some of David’s closest counselors and men; men that he had appointed to high positions in his kingdom, and here they are conspiring against him and seeking to take his life. We read of the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts in Chapter 23, verse 23, being plotted against by more than 40 men who had bound themselves with an oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him.

I want you to see that in all of these conspiracies, God’s man was delivered. In fact, Paul says in 2nd Timothy chapter 4 and verse 18 – “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.” This is what God also did for Joseph in our text, although he must have wondered at many points whether he would live to see his dreams fulfilled. John Calvin says this about this conspiracy against Joseph – “In profane history no such thing is found, as that nine brethren should conspire together for the destruction of an innocent youth, and like wild beasts should pounce upon him with bloody hands.”

I think that this statement is true. I can think of nothing else like it in all of history except one other conspiracy. And in that conspiracy the Lord’s chosen Man did die. This was none other than our dear Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. God has purposed that He must die so that others would not eternally perish. Just like Joseph, it was His own brethren, the Jews, that conspired against Him. But in His case, He was not only “wounded and in the house of His friends”, but He laid down His life for us while we were yet sinners, and enemies to God. Many

people do not understand that when they conspire against God's chosen people, whether it is in Old Testament times or New, that they are conspiring against God Himself. God takes it that way. God is the great watcher over men; both good and evil men. The conspiracy that Joseph's brothers formed against him, and the sinful acts that followed, were actually a display of their opposition to God Himself, and His plans and purposes for their lives.

But God, who is the ruler over all men, intervened to modified those sinful plans to suit His own holy purposes in regard to the things that He would permit to have happen to Joseph. Each of us as Christians must learn this lesson that God is watching over His people in very particular ways. And we must remember the truth of Romans 14: 7 and 8 – "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself." "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord." "Therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." Paul goes on to say there – "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living." "But why do you judge your brother?" "Or why do you show contempt for your brother?"

In this text we find 9 brothers judging one brother and showing their utter contempt for him, all because they did not like his words and his dreams. You perhaps are thinking – This does not sound like God's loving care over His chosen man Joseph. If God were as great and loving as you say, then He would have delivered him immediately from the schemes of his brothers. And I would say to you – No, this is not often God's way with those whom He loves; to keep them from every trial and difficulty. He will sometimes lead them right into the situation of opposition and difficulty, and even danger, in order to fulfill His purpose, and perfect their faith. I am speaking of those whose obedient hearts He is pleased with.

You will perhaps remember Psalm 23, a most beloved Psalm to every Christian. You will probably also recall what it says there. "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me." "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Now have you ever meditated upon that? What kind of a table does the Lord prepare before us in the presence of our enemies? I believe that it is a table of fellowship with Him, where we feed upon His faithfulness, His grace, His love, His mercy, and every remembrance of His goodness to us.

We feed upon these things and we look expectantly to Him for more. We have food that the world knows nothing about. That food strengthens us to do His will in every situation. I am sure that God was well-pleased with Joseph's obedience to his earthly father. It was because he wanted to obey his father's directive, that he went on this mission to see his brothers. It was because he loved and respected his father, and he wanted to obey him in everything. That is how Joseph came into this most distressing situation. Jacob did not want Joseph to be idle. He wanted him to go check on his brothers who had gone to feed their father's flock in Shechem.

"Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem?" "Come, I will send you to them." "So he said, 'Here I am.'" This is the response of instant obedience, on Joseph's part, even though he knew that his brothers did not care for him, even though he knew that they could not speak peaceably to him. Jacob knew that Joseph had brought back an evil report concerning the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah when he had placed Joseph among them to learn to feed and care for the sheep. Jacob had also seen the reaction of his other sons to the dreams of Joseph. But he did not want to promote a life in Joseph that was isolated to himself and separate from the rest of his brothers.

I think that he thought that this mission would show the brothers of Joseph's real love and concern for them, even though they were so hateful toward him. He hoped that a good report could be brought back this time. By way of application, this is the kind of mission that you and I as Christians are sent on as well. It is a mission of loving concern, a mission of genuinely seeking the welfare of people around us. Our mission is not to isolate ourselves or to see

ourselves as better than others. Our mission is to be as our Master, the Lord Jesus; to seek the lost, not to shun them. It is to show them by our good words and good behavior, the better way of doing what is right, in accordance with God's Word. "Here I am, Father, send me", we say. It is in the path of obedience to our heavenly Father's commands that we will be led directly into situations in which we will be fulfilling the purposes of God.

It is a beautiful scene that is conveyed to our eyes in verse 14. "Then Jacob said to him, 'Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me.'" Both Jacob and Joseph are recorded often in this passage, as using this word "please" in their speech with others. They are both shown to us in their words as kind and thoughtful men, not wanting to impose their will on others. "Please listen to my dream," Joseph says in verse 6. "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and the flocks", says Jacob. So, in these things you can see their sincere and true concern for the welfare of the evil and ungrateful men who lived in their own house.

You also see Joseph's true and sincere concern for his brothers in his search for them. He goes to Shechem where he believes his brothers are; and he does not find them. He is wandering around, looking for them in the field. He comes across "a certain man" who asks him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers." Again the word, "Please", is used. "Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks." Joseph wants to find his brothers. He doesn't give up easily. He is seeking to find his brothers for a good purpose. In doing so he is obeying both his earthly and his heavenly Father's will.

The language of Joseph's words to this man seems very similar to what we read of, in Song of Solomon 1: 7. "Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon?" "For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?" This is the picture of a believer seeking to find the place of greater association with Christ in terms of learning to do His will. The words of verse 6 seem to apply as well. "Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept." The Shulamite did not keep her own vineyard, but Joseph had kept his.

His brothers did not think so. God is showing His sovereign power in this matter of finding them. This "certain man" coming across Joseph is no accident. The man tells him, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" Let me ask you this morning if you have this holy desire in your heart, even as Joseph did, that day? Is it your desire to want to make progress in doing your heavenly Father's will? Sometimes when you obey God and do the right thing, in obedience to an earthly authority such as a parent, you may not be sure of what the outcome will be in relation to your brothers and sisters. Can you trust God with the outcome?

God was leading Joseph to the place where he would suffer for righteousness sake, where he would suffer for their sakes. He did not know it, but he was walking into great trouble. God was just about ready to bless Joseph's faithful obedience, but he could not now see it at that point. It will be some time until he does. "Blessed are you when men revile and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake." "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven."

Verse 18 says, "Now when his brothers saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him." "Look this dreamer is coming!" "Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.'" "We shall see what will become of his dreams!" But God will protect Joseph's life and fulfill the dreams that He had given.

Now 2nd – God puts the idea into Reuben's heart to attempt to keep Joseph from being killed. (verses 19-24)

“But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, ‘Let us not kill him.’” “And Reuben said to them, ‘Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him.’” He did this, it says, “that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.” Now, I say that this is the working of God, working all things together for Joseph’s good. There was only one person here in this group of conspirators who dissented from the commonly held conviction that Joseph should die. It was Reuben.

But why does Reuben not think that Joseph should die? I think that it is because God had been working in Reuben’s heart and in his conscience in several ways. Reuben, if you will remember, was the one who had sinned against his father by taking his father's concubine wife Bilhah to bed. “He defiled his father’s bed”, and as a result he had lost the right of the first-born; he had lost his birthright. It had been given by Jacob to Joseph instead.

If anyone would have had a reason to kill Joseph, it would have been Reuben. Perhaps Reuben thought that others would think this way; if Joseph was killed, he was trying to prevent it, to save his own skin. But I do not think so. I think that God had moved in Reuben’s heart to see that he had deserved to have his birthright taken away from him, because of his past sin. And he was trying now to think of how he might please his father and in some way to make up for the pain that he had caused him before, when Jacob heard about his shameful sin.

I think that Reuben knew in his heart that Joseph did not deserve this kind of treatment that he was about to receive, and so, he then did try to turn his other brothers away from their sinning against Joseph. He tried to do this, however, in a compromising fashion. The brothers had said, “Let us now kill him and cast him into some pit.” Reuben says, “Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit.” Turn with me to Genesis 42 and I will show you some things that are not revealed to us at this point, here in Genesis 37, about this incident. It is many years later in Egypt. And Joseph’s brothers have come down to Egypt looking for grain because they have heard that there is grain in Egypt.

The great ruler there, unknown to them, is their brother Joseph, and he acts as a stranger to them, and he speaks roughly to them. He wants to test his brothers as to their attitude now, about how they treated him then. And so, he tells them that he believes that they are spies sent out to spy out the land. He put them all together in prison for 3 days, it says in verse 17. In order to vindicate themselves he tells them that they must bring their youngest brother Benjamin to him, so that their words would be verified to him. Verses 21 and 22 reveal to us more about what happened that day when they thought to kill Joseph.

“Then they said to one another, ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’” “And Reuben answered them, saying, ‘Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen?’” “Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us.” This is very revealing indeed. We now know something more of what Joseph’s reaction was when he came up to them to inquire after their welfare and they stripped him of his coat of many colors and threw him into this pit.

The brothers saw the anguish of Joseph’s soul when he pleaded with them. “Please, please, do not do this.” But they would not listen. And we also see here that Reuben thought that what they had done to Joseph was a sin, at that time when they committed it. He says, “Do not sin against the boy”. But they would not listen. Let me apply this to you in this way. Young people, when you know that one of your brothers or sisters is being mistreated, or thought of in a bad light, or cruelly being taken advantage of in some way, what do you do? How do you think of it? Do you join in with them, or do you confront those who are doing these things with the fact that it is sin?

We can apply this to those of us who are older as well. When you see someone who is trying to do the right thing, the thing that is unpopular, what do you think? When you see a person who is being made fun of, and looked down upon, what do you do? Do you try to find ways to

stop these sins, or do you join in, wanting to be accepted by those who perpetrate such things. I think Reuben was moving in the right direction. I believe that the Lord was using him to fulfill His purpose that Joseph should not die, but live, and make it safely down to Egypt. Joseph was emotionally wounded and traumatized, and he did not know what lay before him. He knew now the rejection of his brothers, but God was still going to help him in tremendous ways.

So Reuben is different from his brothers. He was not cruel; he wanted them to be kind. He wanted to see Joseph safely back to his father. So he pretended to leave the brothers on some errand. He was going to return later and bring Joseph out of the pit. God ordained and superintended that Reuben be used to prevent Joseph from being killed, but not that he would be prevented from going down to Egypt.

Then 3rd – God permitted Judah’s sinful idea of selling Joseph to prevail, but also shows them later, the grief that they had caused. (verses 25-35)

“And they took Joseph and cast him into a pit.” “And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.” “And they sat down to eat a meal.” “Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt.” Here is another providential ordering of God. It is the timing of these Ishmaelite traders coming by. Joseph is in the pit. The brothers have hard enough hearts that even though they have heard him crying to them to let him up out of this pit, they will not only not heed his cries. But they will actually sit down to eat a meal.

But Judah, when he sees these traders coming, thinks of a brilliant idea. It’s an idea that will get rid of Joseph for good without killing him, and it will even make them a little money. “What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?” “Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him,” he says. He even tries to sound like he is being compassionate in this idea. “Let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” Well, Judah, if he is your brother and your flesh, why don’t you pull him out of the pit and bring him over to the other brothers and tell them that you think that what has happened so far has been a terrible mistake.

You were wrong to treat your flesh and blood this way, and now you will ask his forgiveness and comfort him and give him some food and water. No, this is all sinful reasoning to cover up a guilty conscience. But his brothers listened to him; they were content with this answer. I would declare to you that it was God who permitted Judah to prevail in his this regard, without ever once approving of his sin. Because God is never the author of sin, but He may permit sinful men to prevail in their sinful reasonings. Did he not do so with His own dear Son?

It was God’s purpose in sending the Lord Jesus into the world, that He would die at the hands of sinful men, but He did not approve of their wickedness in doing what they did to Him. He overruled it, He superintended it, and He accomplished His Higher and Most Holy Purpose by delivering Jesus up to their wicked hands. Acts 2: 23 says that the Lord Jesus, “being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, they crucified, and put to death...” And it says in Romans 8: 32 – “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not with Him also freely give us all things?” God permitted this for the deliverance of all those sinners who believe in Jesus.

This shows us that no matter what sins you have committed, they shall be forgiven if you see your own sinfulness, and will confess your sins, and will trust in what Christ has done in fulfilling God’s law and suffering on our behalf. God also permitted the brothers to see the grief that they caused Reuben, and their father, and the rest of the family. I don’t think that the brothers let Reuben in on their little secret when he came back and found out that the pit was empty. We are not told.

But in chapter 42, verse 22 he says to his brothers, “Behold his blood is now required of us”. But if the brothers had told him after they had sold Joseph, he would then have had to assume that the Ishmaelites or someone else had killed Joseph. Reuben, in chapter 37, verse 29, after he

saw that Joseph was not in the pit, it says that he tore his clothes. And so, when he returned to his brothers and said, “The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?” It says that they took Joseph’s tunic, and they killed a kid of the goats, and they dipped the tunic in the blood. Reuben was grieved, but he went along with this cover up. “Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, ‘We have found this.’ “Do you know whether it is your son’s tunic or not?” Immediately Jacob recognized Joseph’s tunic and drew the conclusion which his sinful sons wanted him to. He said – “A wild beast has devoured him.” “Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.”

Do you see how one sin which is covered up will lead to another, and then to another, to prevent it from being known? In order to cover up the guilt of their sins, they will cause great grief to Jacob: a grief that will last for many years. God permits them to see it. Verse 34 says – “Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.” “And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, ‘For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.’ “Thus his father wept for him.”

Even the comfort that his sons tried to give to him at that time, was sheer hypocrisy. How great was their sin. But God would make them see it more and more. He would bother their consciences with it all the way until Joseph revealed himself to them. What is it that will take away the guilt of such sinful things? It may be that you are carrying around with you the guilt of sins that you have committed long years ago. Hear the words of Psalm 32, verses 1 and 2. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” When you come to the Lord Jesus Christ confessing all your sins, this is the blessedness that you come to experience.

Let us pray to apply these truths to our lives, that we have learned this morning. If you are a Christian, you are on a mission of concern and compassion toward unbelievers. In the way of obedience God may lead you straight into a situation in which you will suffer at the hands of others. Please remember, dear Christian, that this will be for your good and their good. Learn to look above to God. Pray for the strength and the grace to be faithful. And then by faith remember that God is with you. In Acts 7: 9 and 10, Stephen, facing his accusers, uses Joseph as an example to them. He says, “And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.” “But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles.” May it be so with each of us.