

Reading: Genesis 37:12-36

Theme: Man's Plans v God's Plan

This passage is full of drama and intrigue. It is a simple narrative, it shows us something of the extent of man's inhumanity to man, as hatred and jealousy get a grip and man's sinful nature is inflamed and overcomes reason, natural ties and conscience. If Jacob had known what he was sending Joseph to, he would, as his dad, never have allowed him to leave his side that day; neither would Joseph want to go either! Such things are hidden from view and although Joseph suffers much he can eventually say "*God meant it for good*".

Often in our lives we look back on an incident or a time that would have been filled with such things as confusions, traumas, difficulties, bad news and difficult events which we would never have wanted, cannot understand why these and other such things in our life happened. We, like Joseph, need to learn, be prepared for service through such events and be brought to a point in our lives where we can acknowledge that God used all such things for good in our lives and/or in the lives of others. Let's look briefly at 4 things:

1. Joseph's Obedience. (v12-17)

Jacob sent his sons to work, but he wanted to know how they were. He couldn't text them or use their mobiles, have a Zoom meeting or a WhatsApp chat, not even a landline! He sends Joseph. Why Joseph was at home we don't know; I feel that perhaps Jacob knew the hatred his brothers felt about the dreams and a part of Jacob keeping the dreams in mind was to protect Joseph from their animosity, snide remarks, even cruel silence and isolation. Yet even knowing their feelings towards him, he sends Joseph, perhaps hoping they would receive him for their father's sake, so to start rebuilding the relationships between them.

When Joseph is told what his father wants, he does not argue, or gripe, but says "*Very well*" (NIV) or "*Here am I*" (AV) He was willing to go, not because he thought his brothers were great, but because he loved and honoured his father, was glad to serve and obey him and to go and seek their welfare. He went to Shechem where they should have been (*50 miles*), but they were not there. He asks and is told that they'd gone to Dothan (*12 miles to the north*). So, he goes and seeks them out even though it involved more travelling for him. It would have been so easy to turn around, go home and told his father they've moved on, but he did not just fulfil the letter of the instruction given to him, but its spirit - he aimed to please and obey his father.

It is easy to think of Joseph and just say "*He was a good lad*". There is a principle here for us to learn from. Jonah was sent to the enemies of his people to preach against them and he knew God was sending him to them in order to spare them - as happened. We know that Jonah didn't want to go and tried to run away. God can often use us to speak to those we may not like; or we want nothing to do with. If there is someone who hates us in work, school etc because we are Christians, then we have to learn to love those who hate us; not because we want to, but because it pleases our Father in heaven and be prepared to bring God's word to them by our attitude, actions and words.

The Lord Jesus didn't please Himself, but His aim was to do God's will and please Him. It meant being sent from the glory and splendour of heaven, laying aside and veiling all His glory and coming into a world full of sin and misery, to a cold, even hostile reception, yet He loved the Father so much that He would go and seek, search and rescue those the Father loved.

2. The Brothers' Proposals. (v18-22)

Joseph was wearing his special coat/robe and his brothers instantly recognised him while he was a long way off because he had on this hated symbol of favouritism. Now their hatred is given the opportunity to be released. In 9 of them was a murderous heart, only Reuben seeks to prevent the other brothers killing Joseph, but such was their hatred, he has to make an excuse to prevent the murder. Their hearts hated Joseph, wanted him out of the way, wanted his dreams to be shown to be hollow and useless (v20b.).

Their hatred was based on two things: his father's love and his dreams - neither of which he was directly responsible for! If they had paused to ask what he was doing there in Dothan, they would have realised it was an errand of love and mercy, it was out of concern for them that their father had sent him and Joseph had come to take news of them home to their father.

Before he came up to them, the brothers proposed to murder him. It wasn't a rush of blood or emotion, but they coldly and coolly calculated to kill one of their own family. Hatred and envy are such powerful things which will cause unexplainable horrors and events to be carried out with no regard to the hurt caused by the words or deeds. Joseph would be killed because he, a teenager, told what his brothers regarded as silly dreams. His dreams seem to have really upset his brothers (v19 & 20b)

They proposed to kill him, cast him in a pit and make out some animal had killed him. One sin always involves another sin if we try to cover it up, as we make out it never occurred, as we try to delude ourselves, those around us, even God that we are not guilty of it! Consider David and Bathsheba - wandering eye, lust, adultery, lying, deception, getting someone drunk, and eventually murder. How many marriages or friendships have been destroyed

because of sin - sin puts up barriers, separates hearts, as lies, cheating, anger, bitterness, jealousy build-up? How many lives have been ruined as people try to cover up their guilt and failures by lies, by theft, by hatred to others?

I feel the brothers already felt there was something in Joseph's dreams! Jacob had seemingly transferred the birthright to him and they were jealous - for both Jacob and God had showed him favour. Ultimately the brothers were fighting against God and His revealed will, so they sought to deal with Joseph and also God. Yet even as they made their murderous plan, God was already using the wrath of man to praise Him and further His plans.

Remarkably Reuben talks them out of murder - making out it was better if they didn't kill him themselves, but let him die in the wilderness in the pit. His plan being to rescue him later. Reuben was guilty of lust and committing immorality with Jacob's concubine (35:22), but here he is seen as a man not given to great anger and he seeks to deliver Joseph.

We are to beware of envy, jealousy, resentment and anger in our lives. In God's sight it is as murder - the Lord Jesus puts it as bluntly as that in the Sermon on the Mount. I wonder how we would feel if we saw our angry, bitter thoughts like this, and then realise how many we would have murdered, how many would be missing loved ones, sisters, brothers and parents? We bottle it up and keep up the facade, but inside, if we had opportunity, they would be dead! Do we see our hatred and resentment like that?

Yet all of us are not given to such hatred or resentment, maybe we, like Reuben, we may be prone to lust, to a wandering eye, heart and mind that dwells on immorality; perhaps it is covetousness - wanting this position, or power or money or a car, or possessions

or lifestyle; it may be pride; perhaps it's dishonouring our parents; or lying, stealing, or a drink, drug or gambling problem. All of us have our own particular weaknesses to sin; that we turn to so readily if left to ourselves and our own hearts. Pray not to be lead into temptation, but kept from our sinful desires and so delivered from evil.

The Lord Jesus came to His own people on an errand of mercy, love and salvation, but they too hated Him, rejected Him and sought His death. They would not have Him rule over them. What about you? As the Lord Jesus is presented to you in the gospel, will you reject Him and His so great salvation? Will you have hatred and animosity in your heart because you will not have Him rule over your life because you feel He would spoil it?

3. Joseph's Humiliation. (v23 & 24)

Joseph is pounced on and his special coat is removed. This is emphasised twice in verse 23 - *"his robe - the richly ornamented robe he was wearing"*. They had to remove the token of Jacob's love. It screamed at them of "Jacob's love", yet it is taken off with contempt for that love. They may as well have cast Jacob into the pit by this action. If Joseph died, a large part of their father would die, but it didn't bother them at that moment...

Joseph evidently pleaded for his life. The brothers told him of their plan, of going to leave him to die, even taunting him of his birthright now and his dreams. They remembered his pitiful pleading years later **42:21** *'They 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."*' Joseph was left in this dry pit. No water to drink and only a slow agonising death to anticipate. If his brothers had any last pity or love, they

would have killed him with a sword, rather than leave him to die slowly in a waterless pit in the wilderness. They were so heartless that they sat and ate their lunch nearby, perhaps coldly laughing and mocking at his pitiful cries that would have come out of the pit, perhaps even taunting him about how nice their food and drink was!

How would we like to be in such a pit? What a horrible prospect. The Bible says we are in a pit, a pit of our own making and dug into sin and trapped by sin. As we move about in this pit it becomes a miry, clay bog and we are unable to scramble up its sides; unable and even not wanting to leave it. If we die in such a pit, even a pit of respectable sin, we will go to **the Pit** - the pit of hell, where no water is, a dry and thirsty place and an awful place in which to spend an agonising eternity. There is only one way out of such the pit we are in now and that is by someone to help us out. Not religion, not man's philosophy, not our good works, but God in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus came down from heaven to earth, from riches to rags, from unbelievable honour and glory to dishonour and shame. He did it, came to this pit of humanity, to save us, enable us to be drawn out by God's grace, to have our feet placed on a solid rock, for us to be given a new song of rejoicing in our hearts and mouths, even praise to God for saving us (Psalm 40:2 & 3). Have you experienced God's love, mercy and forgiveness in your life? It is freely available to whosoever believes, but it involved the humiliation of God's Son to save us. To be saved means you have to be humbled too - to admit your sin, your inability to save yourself and call to Him to accept His free gift of eternal life. Will you call on Him while he is near?

4. God's Providence. (v25-36)

The 9 brothers had planned Joseph's death, while Reuben had planned his rescue, but God had planned Joseph's exile, slavery, imprisonment and exaltation. Joseph needed preparation. To have success, wealth, honour before he was ready could have destroyed Joseph. Men had their plans, but God had His and He was working all things together for good. Even while Reuben was away for a short time, the Ishmaelite camel train passes by and Judah suggests that they don't kill him in this way, as it would be better to sell him. He acknowledges their failure to do Joseph good would be the same as murder, so why not sell him.

Can we see what's going on here? The Lord is turning their hearts and counsel upside down from only a short time previously. Now they own him as a brother and their own flesh and blood (v27). Their anger, wrath and hatred were used of God to fulfil God's purposes. It was not an easy experience for Joseph. His dreams must have been shattered, his self-glorification and pride smashed, his heart and mind in a confused state, yet all the while God was silently and yet purposely working out His plans and purposes. Our plans and ideas may be turned upside down and inside out by the present pandemic. Why and what is happening? We do not know, but God does – He can be trusted even when we have no clue as to what is going on – He is at work! God is greater than our hearts, our hopes, our fears and anxieties. He knows what He's doing in our lives and on the world scene. Not a sparrow falls to the ground but He knows it and we are worth more than many sparrows. He knows the number of the hairs on our head, such is His care for us His children. We are not to doubt his love - yet we can find ourselves easily doing so!

On Calvary, nearly 2,000 years ago, the One God loved the most was mocked, crucified, beaten, spat at, suffered more than we could imagine and cried out "*My God, My God why have you*

forsaken Me?" He was betrayed by one of His disciples, handed over by the Jews to the Roman authorities, was crucified. Yet all this was in the predetermined will and counsel of God. Why? It pleased God to do so! (Isaiah 53:10 AV) By this means He would save you and me from hell and from what our sins deserve. Has the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus been applied to your life? In the terminology of the Bible *"Are you saved?"*

Jacob mourned for Joseph, was deceived into thinking his son was dead and the brothers callously comforted him! Jacob was totally comforted one day when he saw Joseph again! How will we meet the Lord Jesus? Many here will be comforted in their death because they know they will meet Him as their Lord and Saviour. If He isn't your Lord and Saviour, then you will have to meet Him as your Judge and that is not a comforting thought! Honestly would we really want that?

May we all recognise and learn of God's love and working from this history of Joseph and apply it to our own lives, for we can see how Joseph can point us onto the Lord Jesus and all that He offers in the so great salvation He has accomplished.