

Genesis 37:12-36 A Trustworthy God 9/9/18

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem.¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am."¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.¹⁵ And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock."¹⁷ And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him.¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer.²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits.^[a] Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life."²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him.²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels^[b] of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes³⁰ and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?"³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.³² And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not."³³ And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces."³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his

loins and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. 36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

(Pastor prays)

The longer I live and the more life experience I have and the more I study the Bible, the more I am convinced that God is there, He is good and you can trust Him. These 3 truths are on vivid display in the passage before us today. Let's play catch up. In the story, God has given the final patriarch, Joseph, a dream. That dream has him in a position of authority and his brothers and father are all bowing down to him. It happened twice and he told it to his family. His brothers resented him for it but his father kept it in mind. Joseph is going to be some kind of ruler.

But in chapter 37 things take a dark and tragic turn. In an effort to forestall the dream and just get rid of the braggart, the brothers almost kill Joseph but instead end up selling him to slave traders. And when we leave chapter 37, Joseph is sold to an Egyptian army officer. His father is duped into believing he is dead and the brothers got away with their plan.

This story feels like what some of your lives feel like. If the truth is told, sometimes it feels like God really isn't there. That He doesn't really care and He's not actually good. Providentially, these are 3 things that came up in a conversation I had this week with Matt Johnson. And I think this passage speaks to all 3. I think this passage shows that God is really there even though it doesn't look or feel like it. And He's not only there, He's providentially working in the events of your life. And for Christians, he's discipling and refining and making you more like Jesus. Not only that, His love is real and penetrates the pain with peace, the loneliness with comfort, and your sin with grace. A saturating grace found at the cross. This passage reminds us through it all that God is supremely good. Sovereignly good. Unthinkably good. In fact, it is this single event in chapter 37 that Joseph will look back on 20 years in the future and say God meant that for good. And I want you, today, just to see a ray of sunlight. Regardless of what it feels like, God is here, He really does care and in Christ, He is genuinely good.

A Hard Life is Useful in the Hands of a Good God

God is Here, He is Aware and He is Acting

From the very beginning of this odyssey Joseph goes on, you feel like there there's more happening than meets the eye. What feels random and sometimes aimless is our good

God secretly and sovereignly and perfectly working. This passage in verses 12 - 14, Joseph's father sends Joseph to go check on his older brothers that are tending the flock. Notice where they are. The writer mentions the place 3 times. Let's read it in verses 12 - 14. *Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem.¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am."¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.* Shechem. That's not a good place for those brothers to be going. Remember in chapter 34, 2 years earlier, their sister Dinah had been so abused in Shechem that she never married. This enraged the brothers so much that they went committed a massacre in Shechem. Jacob had good reason to send Joseph down to Shechem to check on them. Shechem is a place of sin, a place of sorrow. Shechem is a place of broken sexuality. Shechem is a place of evil passions, and bloodletting. I don't know why anyone would go down to Shechem.

Joseph, the good son, was sent by his father to go to a sinful place. Underneath this Old Testament story there is a New Testament tune. It reminds us that the true and better Joseph, who was Jesus, was sent by the Father to the place of sin so that he might become sin and die on the cross and thereby give his righteousness to all who will believe. Jesus, the true Joseph, comes into our sin and strife to save and to redeem us to the glory of God the Father.

Let's get back to the text and see the plan unfolding. Let's read verses 15 - 17 and see an odd thing happens. *And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock."¹⁷ And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.* A man found him wandering. A random, anonymous man found Joseph as he was wondering. It feels aimless and it looks random. God is not mentioned in chapter 37 but he's always there. What feels aimless and looks random is actually God working out the details to bring about his perfect plan through what the Puritans called "second causes". What others mean for evil, God turns it to good. If you and I are going to grow in our understanding of our lives, we must grow in the doctrine of God's providence. When something terrible happens, we need to quit asking why and start asking Who. The question, Why?, is the wrong question. The question "Why?" will send you down a rabbit hole that you will never get out of. The right question to ask is, "Who?" And we can know who.

In this story, starting in verse 12, there are a series of coincidences that look random on the surface but it's God orchestrating the events to fulfill the plan that He revealed in the

2 dreams to Joseph. See if you can follow in the Bible as I walk through the providence of God at each turn. In verse 12, Jacob sends Joseph to see his brothers in Shechem. In verse 13 - 16, he gets to Shechem and his brothers just happen to not be in Shechem. In verse 15, Joseph just happens to be in the exact right place where his brothers had been. And in verse 15 – 16, he just happens to bump into a stranger who just happened to have passed by the brothers. And in verse 17, at the exact right time as the brothers were saying they were going to Dothan, the stranger happened to hear. It gets better! In verse 18, the brothers just happened to see him coming. (Although in that Zuit Suit – the coat of many colors - he would be hard to miss.) The brothers decide to kill him in verse 21 - 22 but Ruben just happened to keep him from being killed. Then, Ruben just happened to be gone in verses 26 - 27 when the brothers sold him into slavery. The Ishmaelite slave traders just happened to be coming by.

Let me pause here. If everything doesn't happen exactly like it's told at the exact right moment, If Joseph didn't just happen to run into the stranger or 1000 other things, if it doesn't happen just like it's written, then thousands of people will die. You see there is a famine coming that none of them know about and Joseph has to be in Egypt and has to have power so that he can save 1000's of people. Every single little tiny detail - if any one of them doesn't happen, then the plan falls apart and thousands die. Our God, our good God, He not only makes the plan, He brings it about. What does Psalm 46:1 say? *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* God is here. He says I will never leave you or forsake you. God is aware. I know the plans I have for you says the Lord. God is acting. In Ephesians 2:8-10, the Bible says, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* He's here, He's aware, and He's acting.

He's Here and He Genuinely Loves His People

I want to take you back to the middle of the story when Joseph's brothers attack him. Verse 23 says, *So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.* Stripped him. The word that is used, stripped, is the same word you would use for skinning an animal. It was very violent. They ripped off his clothes. Verse 24 tells us, *And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.*

They threw him into the pit in a way you would have thrown a dead body. In verses 24 - 25, there is something tragically profound happening. Let's look at verse 24. it was a cistern, a dry well. In verse 25, the brothers sat down and ate lunch. Now nothing is said about Joseph crying out right here but 20 years later when Joseph is in power and the brothers are confessing what they did, Genesis 42:21 tells us *Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us."* It's not written here but between verses 24 and 25, while his brothers at lunch, Joseph was in complete anguish. Joseph couldn't know it, but he was experiencing in part what Jesus would experience in full. The Godly son, being despised and rejected only to rescue those who abused him.

Isaiah 53: 3-6 says,

He was despised and rejected by men,

a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

and as one from whom men hide their faces

he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs

and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken,

smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;

he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have turned—every one—to his own way;

and the LORD has laid on him

the iniquity of us all.

The story of Joseph points us to the person of Jesus who is the ultimate display of God's love. And it is at the cross of Jesus where the love of God meets the justice of God. And through the blood of Jesus, the mercy of God flows to cover and forgive our sins. He is here and in Christ, He genuinely loves His people.

(Pastor prays)