

Pastor Russell Lackey
Reformation L.C.
Genesis 37

Sent From the Father

Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied. ¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" ¹⁶ He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" ¹⁷ "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹ "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. ²⁰ "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." ²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. ²² "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing—²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. ²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?" ²⁷ Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. ²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Joseph: A Picture of Human Sin, God's Providence, and Christ's Provision

Today we are back in the book of Genesis. If you remember, I began preaching on Genesis last September. During that time we have moved through three of the four major sections of Genesis. The banner over the first section was "The Word" (Genesis 1-11) – Word & Creation, Word & Sin, Word & Promise, and Word & Confusion. The banner over the second section was "Abraham the man of Faith" (Genesis 12-25). The banner over the third section was "Jacob the Wrestler" (Genesis 25-36). Jacob wrestled with his brother, his uncle, and with God. Jacob was able to prevail against all three because he held onto the promises of God.

Now we turn to the final section of Genesis (chapters 37-50). The banner over this section is: "Joseph: A Picture of Human Sin, God's Providence, and Christ's Passion." The key verse for this section is Genesis 50:20: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

Before we look at these three pictures (human sin, God's providence, and Christ's passion), I want to give you two reasons why this last section of Genesis is so important. First, we face sin every day. Sin within ourselves, our neighbors, church members, co-workers, and all of life. How we respond to sin is important. We can be crushed by it, we can crush others with it, or we can cling to hope in the midst of it. Second, Joseph is a type of Christ. By seeing Joseph, we are given a picture of Jesus.

A Picture of Human Sin

The first picture we see is human sin. Let me read verses 2-5 to get the context:

² This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more (37:2-5).

In these verses we see that Joseph gives a bad report of his brothers. Joseph's father loves him more than all the other brothers. The brothers hate him for this. And if this was not bad enough, Joseph has two dreams to make them hate him all the more.

Dream #1: Joseph dreamt that he and his brothers were in a grain field. All the sheaves (his brothers) bowed down before him.

Dream #2: Joseph dreamt that he was in the sky and eleven stars (his brothers), the sun (his father) and the moon (his mother) all bowed before him.

Because of this his brother hated him all the more. And with this hatred came jealousy. As verse 11 says, "His brothers were jealous of him."

There might not be a more dangerous combination than hatred and jealousy. Hatred is intense hostility toward someone or something. Jealousy is hostility toward one believed to have an advantage. When hatred and jealousy combine, you have rage. The kind of rage Cain had toward Abel. A rage that caused God to say, "Why are you angry Cain? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:6-7). We know Cain did not master it. Would Joseph's brothers master it?

We know they didn't. We do not have to look at the end of the chapter to see it. We get a clue long before they throw him into the pit. The clue is found in verses 12-14 explains:

"Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied. ¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron (vv. 12-14).

The clue is where Joseph came from and where he was going. Where did he come from? Hebron! And where was he going? Shechem! Hebron was the place of safety and blessing. It is the place of his Father's house. Throughout the Bible, Hebron is a symbol of communion and fellowship. Shechem on the other hand was the place where man betrays man. Listen to some of the terrible events that happened at Shechem:

- The Rape of Dinah (Genesis 36).
- Joshua made the people renew the covenant four times but the people still broke it (Joshua 24).
- In Shechem, Abimelech tried to become king (Judges 9:7-20). Abimelech was killed when a woman threw down a millstone and killed him (9:53).
- After Israel split, Shechem became the Capital of the North

You could say Shechem was the place of broken covenants and brotherly strife. The brother's would not master their hatred and jealousy. Instead they plotted to kill Joseph. When he arrived, they mocked Joseph, stripped Joseph of his robe, and threw Joseph into a dry cistern. They also sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver, and finally covered Joseph's robe with blood to convince their father that Joseph was dead!

And probably the most telling sign of their depravity, after they had done all of this they sat down and ate a meal. Any normal person would lose their appetite. But clearly they had a stomach for this kind of treachery! Sin crouched at their door and these brothers welcomed it and threw a party.

A Picture of God's Providence

It is important to pause here for a moment to ask the question, where was God in this? It is a question we often ask in times of trial and suffering. In chapter 37, we do not hear of God. We should surely blame the brothers. Their sin did cause Joseph's misfortune. It is their fault. They are not let off the hook. But where was God in this?

God was there. God was the one who gave Joseph the dreams. The dreams were a wonderful promise for Joseph to hold onto during his time in captivity. God was the one who provided a messenger to direct Joseph to his brothers. God was the one who spared Joseph's life. At first the brothers wanted to kill Joseph. But Judah had a change of heart. Who do you think changed his heart? God was the one who made sure the Ishmaelites were on that particular road at that particular time to buy Joseph and take him to Egypt. Even though God is not mentioned, He was there! "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Genesis 50:20).

There is a mighty lesson for us in this. As Christians we often find ourselves in hard situations. Sometimes it is because of our sin. Other times it is because of another's sin. And other times still we do not know why we are in a particular situation. The temptation is to forsake God. It certainly hurts and it undoubtedly causes us to wonder if God is in some way upset with us. But we must always remember that if our Lord God lets such experiences come upon His children, we should not murmur when things do not always turn out for us just as we want them to. If God lets His saints, whom He loves dearly, be so afflicted, then let us too, bear it patiently if at some time sad and adverse experiences fall on us. For these are not signs of wrath and of being forsaken but rather proofs of grace for the testing of our faith" (Luther Works vol 6, p. 406).

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

A Picture of Christ's Passion

This brings us to our final and most important picture, namely, Christ's passion. There is something familiar about Genesis 37. A father set his love upon a son and shows him special favor. The other children of this father hate the favored son. The favored son tells them that he is to be exalted by God and they hate him all the more. He leaves the comfort of home and goes to seek them to bring them home to his father. They do not believe his words. Instead, his own brothers wickedly plot to kill him. For that purpose they assault and overpower him. They mock him. They strip him. And cast him into the grave. Afterward they sat down and ate. They sold him for silver. And the blood of his garment appeased their father. You see the story of Joseph is also the story of Jesus!

Reformation when you find yourself in the pit hold on to Christ! Hold onto the one who entered into the pit and overcame it for you!

**In Jesus Name,
Amen!**