

Joseph Sold

HN 13/06/04pm

Reading: Genesis 37, Romans 8:12f

Study: Genesis 37:18-36

Psalms: 34:1-9, 33:8-11, 105:15-19, 33:18-22

Many are the plans of a mans heart

But it is the Lords purpose that prevails. (Proverbs 19:21)

Or as someone has said – man proposes but God disposes.

Joseph's brothers hated him. They hated him because they were jealous. He was his fathers pet and liked to get about in the fancy coat his father gave him. Moreover he had dreams which showed his brothers bowing down to him- they were not impressed.

They had gone up country looking after the flocks. One day they saw in the distance Joseph coming towards them – I guess he stood out in his coloured coat. Their anger had not abated. They still hated him intensely – their own little brother. Would they take him and beat him to teach him a lesson? No – they conspired to kill him. *Here comes the dreamer* they said. Let's kill him. They were not going to wait to hear what he had to say. They determined to kill him even before he got there.

However, not all the brothers were in on this conspiracy. When Reuben heard about the wicked plan he tried to save Joseph. Reuben was the eldest so maybe felt responsible. He was not so ready to shed blood as some of them. Remember Simeon and Levi had massacred all the males in Shechem. They may well have been the ringleaders of the conspiracy. Thankfully they listened to Reuben's idea to just leave Joseph to perish in an old well out in this wilderness. Reuben secretly planned to rescue Joseph afterwards.

Joseph does not speak in this story but clearly he would have pleaded for mercy when they tore his coat off him and then threw him in the dry well. They would remember years later *the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us and we would not hear (42:21)*. Their hearts were so hardened by sin that they did not hear his pleas. But when they were in trouble they remembered their sin and guilt came upon them.

Unforgiven sin continued to afflict their souls – as it does all men. There can be no closure as people say today, if sin is not dealt with. There can be no peace in the heart while ever guilt remains. And guilt remains if sin is not confessed. Humble and sincere confession before the One who is offended, namely God, will bring forgiveness from God. *Repent that your sins may be blotted out and times of refreshing may come (Acts 3:19)*. Do you enjoy times of refreshing? If not it may be time to examine your heart before the Lord?

After throwing Joseph into the pit they sat down to eat a meal – possibly food that Joseph had brought them. How hard their hearts had become. They sat their eating while their little brother cried out for mercy. While eating they looked up and saw a camel train coming towards them. It was Ishmaelite and/or Midianite traders going from Gilead on their way down to Egypt with a load of

spices and perfumes.

The fourth brother Judah came up with a bright idea – well the Lord put it in his mind. Why not sell Joseph to these traders as a slave he suggested. What profit do we get if we kill him? And he is our brother after all. We don't want our hands stained with his blood. Money in our pockets and no blood on our hands – they were convinced. They went and pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him as a slave to these traders for 20 shekels of silver – a very handsome sum for a handsome lad. *And they took Joseph to Egypt.*

Reuben must have been off with his flock or doing something else for he was not with the rest at this time. He returned to find the pit empty. He was alarmed – what had happened to Joseph. *The lad is not more and I – where shall I go?* Reuben was thinking about how he would face his father and explain what had happened. They had cleverly gotten rid of Joseph, but how were they going to tell their father – this was the problem they now faced.

They killed a goat and smeared its blood on Joseph's special coat. They planned to deceive their father and let him think that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. There is a note of irony here for you will remember how Jacob himself had deceived his father by killing a goat and wearing its skin on his arms. His father Isaac trembled violently when he realized he had been deceived and his brother Esau wept uncontrollably (ch.27).

Jacob was deceived. He concluded that Joseph was dead. He went into deep mourning for his favourite son. He refused to be comforted by any in his family. *Thus his father wept for him.* How could his sons keep silent as they watched their father grieve like this? They knew Joseph was still alive. Their hearts had become so hard that they could maintain this deception even as they tried to comfort their distraught father.

Jealousy and hatred had led to this – to this human tragedy. Sin led to more sin and to cover up. Sin led to sorrow and grief – to this tragic family situation.

But there is another side to this story. There is always another side to a story. We have seen the human side. We have seen the human tragedy. But there is a divine side. God was watching and he was over-ruling in all these events. He was over-ruling for the good of his chosen ones. He was overruling for his eternal purposes and ultimately for his glory.

It was in the providence of God that Joseph found his way to where his brothers were in the first place. It was in the providence of God that the Midianite traders came by at that particular time. The sovereign God overruled in these **events**.

The sovereign God also overruled in the **hearts of men**. Reuben showed some leadership for a change. Judah had the idea to sell their brother as a slave. God kept Joseph from harm and sent him down to Egypt for his greater purposes. In Egypt he was sold to Potiphar and officer of Pharaoh. God indeed was with Joseph.

This story then must be read in the light of the sovereignty of God. Joseph himself acknowledged this to his brother years later. When forced to humble themselves before Joseph, in fulfillment of his dreams, and they feared revenge. But Joseph said – *you meant evil against me but God meant it*

for good (50:20).

How could Joseph say this? Why did he not take revenge on them for selling him into slavery? Everyone would have understood such a reaction. He could have killed them all on the spot with impunity. Human law would allow this. Is this not what is going on in the world today. In the Middle East revenge killing prevails. And in our own justice system it is rapidly becoming the same. If you have a good reason for killing someone chances are you will be set free. That is the law of man.

Joseph did not live by the laws of man but by the laws of God. God's ways are higher than our ways. God's wonderful grace was in his heart. He was given insight into the ways of God. He was given discernment regarding the will of God. In Philippians 1:9 Paul wrote – *this is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and discernment so that you may be approve the things that are excellent and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.* God meant it for good. What an amazing declaration.

God always works for the good of his chosen people. Do you believe that? Not always easy is it – but it is true. It is what the word of God says. We know all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). The Lord is good declared David (Psalm 34:8). The Lord works good for his people. That is what Joseph was able to see by the grace of God. That is what David could say. That is what Paul could declare. What about you? Can you say with confidence the Lord is good and he works good for me?

Let us not confuse good with what is comfortable or what is easy. For years Joseph did not see many comforts but still he knew that God was with him. He trusted God and who was faithful always. He could look back and see the hand of the Lord upon him even as he was sold into slavery by his brothers and separated from his family all those years.

Finally let us remember our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered so much at the hands of men. He was sold for 30 pieces of silver by his disciple. He suffered silently. He did not revile those who reviled him. He committed himself to his heavenly Father – to the righteous judge. He knew it was the sovereign will of God for him to suffer and to die on the cross. *Him being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and out to death (Acts 2:23).*

No accidents, no coincidence but the sovereign purpose of Almighty God. Is that not what we have learnt? God works all things together for good – for the eternal good of his people and for his great glory.

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