

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**

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**JOSEPH: Our God Is Always Faithful (Sovereignty, Sin and the Savior)**

**Genesis 37**

This morning, we are continuing our study on the life of Joseph. He is 17 years old and the favorite son of his father. But he's hated by 10 of his 11 brothers. This portion of Joseph's life is filled with turmoil that comes as a result of his brothers' sins. And, before we dig into our text, let me go ahead and give you our big idea for today.

**Big Idea: In the turmoil of Joseph's life, we see Sovereignty, Sin, and our Savior.**

Our text presents us with a picture of God's powerful sovereignty, man's patterns of sin, and our promised Savior. Now, let's jump in and I'll show you what I mean.

**Genesis 37:5-11**

***Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. 9 Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" 11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.***

One of the many things Joseph is known for is the pivotal role dreams play throughout his life. But we need to be careful not to become fixated on trying to interpret all our dreams. Hebrews 1 tells us we live in an age when God speaks most clearly through His word and the revelation of Christ.

But remember, we are studying the first book of the Bible. That means the Bible hadn't been written yet and Christ had not yet come. So, Joseph and his family lived at a time when God communicated in other ways, like visions and dreams.

And that's clearly what God is doing in Joseph's dreams. He is revealing His plan for Joseph and his family. God is showing them that one day, He will make Joseph a ruler and have his family live under his authority. And that's exactly what happens in the end.

And that brings us to the first thing we see in our text.

In the Turmoil of Joseph's life, we see the Power of God's Sovereignty

Through these dreams, God is revealing His plan. And Joseph's family doesn't need an interpreter. They immediately understand.

Look at verse 8...***His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?"***

Thirteen years before it actually happens, God is making it clear that Joseph will become a ruler, and he will have authority over his brothers. God isn't predicting it. He is promising it. It was His plan, and He was going to make it happen.

So, right at the beginning of Joseph's story, we are given an unmistakable reminder that God is Sovereign. That simply means He rules over all things with power and authority. He is able to do anything that pleases Him and accomplish His purposes, no matter what.

Listen to the word of God from *Daniel 4:25; 34-35...the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will...for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"*

God sets up kings and kingdoms. He works according to His will in heaven and on earth. And Daniel 4 says that no one can stop Him.

As you read the remainder of this chapter and the rest of Scripture, it's clear that God's Sovereignty doesn't negate human responsibility or the moral agency of man. And throughout this story, we will see that God holds people accountable for their sins. Our choices really matter, and we will all be held accountable for the choices that we make.

Yet, in a way I cannot understand or explain, God is so big, wise, and glorious that even when people make sinful choices that are against His moral will, He is still able to use that evil to serve His good and glorious plan. This is such a big theme in the life of Joseph that his story begins with the clear message from God about what He had planned for Joseph. And, his story ends with the declaration that, even though his brothers meant to bring evil against him, God meant it for good and God's sovereign goodness wins over man's sinfulness every time.

And this will be a constant drumbeat in our study of Joseph. We will be reminded over and over again about the Sovereignty and Providence of God, and it couldn't come at a better time.

Perhaps you've heard there's a presidential election coming up. And maybe you've noticed a little bit of drama involved. It's even possible that you've heard something about one of the candidates that would lead you to believe he or she is the very worst person who has ever existed, and if they win, the world as we know it will come to an end. And it might make you anxious or afraid or overwhelmed. Even more, many of you are living with things that cause you to be even more anxious or overwhelmed than the thought of who our next president may be.

Let this truth wash over you this morning: God is Sovereign over it all. As the insanity of this world stirs up anxious or fearful thoughts in you, take a deep breath and whisper to your soul: God is in Control. God has a good plan, and no one will stop it. Rest assured, the world as we know it is coming to an end, and for those who trust Jesus, it will usher in eternal glory and unending joy. That plan doesn't depend on you or our next president. God's plan depends on God.

Let's keep reading our text.

**Genesis 37:12-17**

**12 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.**

So, Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers who are taking care of the family flock around Dothan. But notice that the emphasis is that they are in the direction of or the region near a city called Shechem. You might not know much about Shechem, but it's significant in the story of Joseph's family. I'll spare you the details, but in Genesis 34, we are told that some of Joseph's brothers murdered the men of the city of Shechem and plundered the whole city. It gave their family a wicked reputation in that region. Now, they've returned to the scene of their crime and there is still murder in their hearts.

#### **Genesis 37:18–24**

**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. 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.**

The brothers grab hold of Joseph and throw him into a pit. This area around Shechem and Dothan had lots of wells and cisterns. One well that existed for thousands of years was named after Joseph's father, Jacob. It was called Jacob's Well. So, Joseph is down in this empty well. His oldest brother, Reuben, heard what was going on and convinced the other brothers not to kill him. As the oldest son, Reuben would have been in charge when his father wasn't around...he would have been held responsible for what happened on his watch. And it's likely that Reuben was already on thin ice with his dad. In chapter 35, it says that Reuben had an immoral relationship with one of Jacob's wives. So, even though we don't know Reuben's motives, we know he bears responsibility and has failed miserably in the past. And perhaps he sees this as a chance to get back into his father's good graces by saving his favorite son (who would no doubt tell his dad everything once he got back home).

In chapter 42, we find out that Joseph begged them to let him go. And what do they do while their little brother begs from the pit?

#### **Genesis 37:25-36**

**2 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 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 clothes 30 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.***

From beginning to end, this chapter is a vivid picture of something more than a single, isolated instance of sin. It's the continuation of a growing pattern of sin that spread throughout Jacob's sons, a pattern that spreads throughout our lives, as well. And it's the second thing we see from our text.

### In the Turmoil of Joseph's life, we see the Pattern of Humanity's Sin

The sin of selling Joseph into slavery didn't begin when his brothers saw him coming toward them in the field. It started way before that, where all sin begins.

### SIN BEGINS WITH REBELLION AGAINST GOD

Essentially, sin is rebelling against God as our God. Sin is what happens when we disregard God's design and desires for our lives and pursue our plan rather than God's.

#### *Isaiah 1:2*

*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.”*

Though God is a perfect Father, we have all rebelled against Him in our sin. Sin is rebellion against God. And that takes us all the way back to one of the first things we saw about Joseph's dreams. God was making His plans and desires known through Joseph's dreams. And how did his brothers respond? Look back at verse 8.

#### **Genesis 37:8**

***His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?”***

Can you hear the disdain in their words? “You think you're going to rule over us? There is no way you will ever rule over us.” The clear pattern of their lives demonstrated that they lived like they made their own rules. From Reuban taking one of his father's wives to the murder of the men of Shechem, Joseph's brothers lived like no one ruled over them, not even God.

And do you see the connection between this and the Sovereignty of God? The Sovereignty of God is the truth that God is in authority and control. The root of sin is the heart that says, “No, He isn't. I am.”

A few minutes ago, I told you a little bit about this place called Shechem. It was where some of Joseph's family committed wicked sin. But that wasn't the first time a member of Joseph's family came to Shechem. The first was a man named Abraham, the father of the people of Israel. God told Abraham that He had an amazing plan to bless him and his descendants. But Abraham had to leave his old life behind and start a new journey to the land God promised would be a land of blessing, the land of Canaan. And do you know the first place Abraham stopped in that promised land of blessing? A place called Shechem. And there he built an altar for dedication and sacrifice. Essentially, at Shechem, Abraham made it clear to himself and the generations that followed him that “God is my God. I go where He tells me to go. I do what He tells me to do.” Along with the sacrifice, he put himself on the altar. Shechem was a place of Abraham's submission to God as His God.

And that's a great contrast between two very different hearts: the place that represented rebellion in some was the place of submission in others. It helps us see what repentance actually looks like. If sin begins with rebellion against God, repentance begins with submission to God.

So, let me ask you: Is your heart in submission or rebellion toward God today? Do you live like God has the right to tell you how to live? Do you live like God is in control or do you live like you are?

Sin begins with rebellion against God. But that's not all we see about the pattern of sin.

#### SINFUL ATTITUDES LEAD TO SINFUL ACTIONS

It might seem unthinkable that brothers would plan on killing their brother. But the seeds of murder were in their hearts long before Joseph came to them in the field.

#### **Genesis 37:4**

***[his brothers] hated him and could not speak peacefully to him***

#### **Genesis 37:5**

***Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more.***

#### **Genesis 37:8**

***So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.***

We have no idea how long these brothers held onto their sinful attitudes without ever laying a hand on Joseph but it was only a matter of time. Who knows how many times they committed murder in their hearts before they ever laid a hand on Joseph? Since they never corrected their inner sin, it was destined to come out of them sooner or later. That's because sinful attitudes always lead to sinful actions. Sin always works in our lives from the inside out. That's the pattern.

#### *James 1:13-15*

*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

Sin is always a heart issue before it's a behavioral issue. We sin because we desire to sin. And this is a grave warning for a room full of religious people. What I mean is that it's entirely possible to clean up the exterior of our lives while our hearts remain corrupted by sin.

Just think through some of the sinful attitudes we see in our text.

- Favoritism and hatred. These attitudes are really just two sides of the same coin. They cultivate racism and bigotry. They cause you to see some people in only a favorable light no matter what they do while you hold others in a derogatory light no matter what they do. And, if these sinful attitudes aren't uprooted, they will work their way out in hateful speech or preferential treatment. They cause you to murmur and complain about people. They cause you to flatter and idolize others. Are they in your heart?
- Jealousy and Bitterness. Jealousy is what makes you want what others have. Bitterness is what makes you want to have nothing to do with someone. These attitudes cause you to hold a grudge or work to tear others down. They keep you from being satisfied in your own life. They cause you to withhold forgiveness or to become divisive in your family or your church. Are they in your heart?

We could go on and on with attitudes like envy, discontentment, anger, arrogance, lust, and greed. But here's a sobering thought: If those things are present in our hearts, we are one of Joseph's brothers in the first half of our text, and we are just one step away from joining them in destroying a life.

Don't tolerate the inward attitudes of sin. Don't give them safe harbor in your heart. They are every bit as much sin as the appalling outward actions of Joseph's brothers.

And the final thing we see about the pattern of humanity's sin is...

## SIN ALWAYS BRINGS DEATH

Now, you may not think this chapter ends with death, but it does. Just take a look at Jacob as he holds the blood-soaked robe of his beloved son and tell me something didn't die in him that day. Look at Joseph being bound and sold as a slave and forcibly taken away from everything he knows and loves and tell me something didn't die in him that day. Fast forward to the scene of Joseph's brothers as they come to Egypt during a time of famine and are riddled with guilt about what they did the day of our text and tell me something didn't die in them that day.

Sin always brings death.

*James 1:15*

*Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

Sin always brings death. It kills every good thing God has for our lives. It brings death to our marriages and families. It brings death to our friendships and our workplaces. It brings death to our Christ-honoring dreams and our futures. The pattern is always the same. Sin begins with rebellion against God. It takes root in our hearts with sinful attitudes that lead to sinful actions, and it always ends with death.

That's the pattern of sin. Not just among these brothers but also among all the people of this world. It's a grave warning to stop the pattern of sin before it destroys you and everyone you are supposed to love.

So, what do we do? How do we put a stop to the pattern of sin? Well, that's why we need Jesus. He came to solve the problem of our own sin. We can't fight sin on our own, we need a Savior. And that brings us to the last thing we see in our text.

## In the Turmoil of Joseph's life, we see the Picture of Our Savior

You might ask where we see Jesus in this text. The answer is that He is everywhere in this text.

For instance, what was happening when Joseph was in the pit? It looked like the death of the dream. Slaves don't become rulers over the world or, so it seemed. But God was fulfilling His plan to provide salvation for the people who put him there. He was sending Joseph ahead to Egypt so that he could save his family when famine came to the world. He would raise Joseph from the depth of the pit and place him at the right hand of the ruler of Egypt. What was happening when Jesus was on the cross? It looked like the death of the dream. The Son of God was suffering to the point of death. And a dead king can't set up an eternal kingdom or, so it seemed. But God was fulfilling His plan to provide salvation for the people who put him there. He was raising Jesus from the depth of death itself to place Him at the right hand of the throne in Heaven.

Jesus is all over this text. Similar to Jacob, God the Father sent His beloved Son on a mission. Similar to Joseph, Jesus would come to a family of sinful rebels. He would be despised and rejected and stripped of His robe. He would be betrayed by someone close to him and sold for payment in silver.

Jesus, the better Joseph, came on a mission from God our Father to save us from our sin.

The mission of Jesus led Him to a place called Sychar. Sychar is a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew word. Do you know what that word is? It's Shechem, the place of Abraham's altar, the place of Jacob's well, the place of the brother's sin, the place of Joseph's turmoil, the place where so much died as a result of sin. That's where Jesus came.

Look at this scene from the life of Christ.

*John 4:5-6*

*So [Jesus] came to a town of Samaria called Sychar (that's Shechem), near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there;*

2000 years after Joseph finds himself in the bottom of a waterless well, Jesus came to this same place, this same region. And there he met a woman who had spent her life in the pattern of sin...rebellion against God led to lust. Lust led to 5 husbands that ended in 5 broken and dead marriages. The man she is with now isn't even her husband. No one dreams of being married 6 times and hiding your face in shame, but her dream had died a long time ago.

But on this day, she had a divine appointment at Jacob's well. She came because she was thirsty. In the depths of her soul, she was thirsty. Her entire life had been spent drawing from waterless wells of sin that promised pleasure and life but left her parched and withered within.

Little did she know she was about to meet the fountain of life. Jesus told her the Good News: Ask me and I will give you the kind of water that will heal what is broken in you, the kind of water that will satisfy what is thirsty in you, the kind of water that will raise up what is dead in you. Jesus says anyone who receives Jesus through faith will receive a spring of water that will well up with eternal and abundant life, water that would never leave you thirsty again.

So, what do we do when we find ourselves among Joseph's family, gripped by sin and unable to save ourselves? What do we do? Look to Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Depend on Jesus. He came to do what Joseph never could do. He came to save us from our sin. He came to deliver us from the pit. He came to give us life. He came to give us Himself.