

## **GOD IS NOT ABSENT IN THE CHAOS**

### **Genesis 37:12-36**

**Last week** we finished an eleven-part study through the first three chapters of the last book of the Bible. It was filled with truth about Jesus — as we would expect since the title of the book is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” But it was also filled with the words of Jesus as He told the truth about seven specific churches in Asia minor at the close of the first century. All the words to Jesus to those 1<sup>st</sup> century churches tell us the truth about every church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This morning we are going to turn our attention from the 66<sup>th</sup> book in the Bible to the very 1<sup>st</sup> book in the Bible — **Genesis** — and we are going to see that the very first book in the Bible is filled with truth about Jesus.

**IN CHAPTER 36** we have a list of earthly rulers — and that is ALL that we have — a list of their names. But suddenly, in **Genesis 37** the Holy Spirit locks on to the life of a 17-year-old boy named Joseph and spends the following 13 chapters on him. He is indeed one of the most significant figures in the Bible.

Over 25% of the book of Genesis is about this young man. He gets more print than anyone else in Genesis. **More print than Abraham**, who represents the LIFE of faith; going forth into a land that he had never seen. **More print than Isaac** who represents SONSHIP; A type of Christ — *Take now thine son, thine only son whom you love*. **More print than Jacob** who portrays the conflict between the old nature and the new — the training of faith and the discipline of faith.

Joseph was the youngest of eleven sons — yet he was given the place of pre-eminence by his dad. **That** was a radical counter-culture move in the patriarchal society of that day. On top of that, God gave two dreams to Joseph. Both dreams depicted Joseph ruling over his family. Again — that theme was deeply offensive in a culture that was fiercely patriarchal. The social structure of the day was clear — the child always bowed to the parent — the younger *always* bowed to the older. The parent never bowed to the child — the older never bowed to the younger.

His brothers hated Joseph because of the pre-eminence their father had given to him. But they also hated Joseph because God had planted those dreams in his heart. His brothers hated him for these dreams — his dad was insulted by one of them — but we are told that his dad stored those things in his heart.

Joseph shared those dreams with his brothers because he was a young man with VISION. Vision that burned within his heart; vision that moved him; vision that would sustain him through tremendous adversity.

METRO — I pray that we are all desperate for our young men and women to have vision.

I believe that God is **wanting** young men and women to have vision. I believe that God is **looking** for young men and women who can see above the carnal world that we live in; young men and women who would echo and live the words of Paul the apostle: *we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor.4:18)*

**I want to lead with this thought** — The dreams that God planted into the heart of Joseph were his ticket to Egypt.

**As we read to the end of this chapter**, we will see his 10 older brothers driven — not by a vision for the things of God — but driven by envy. We will see the treachery that flowed from their envious hearts. We will see how, out of murderous envy, they sold him to the Ishmaelites.

**THAT** is what we see from *man's perspective*. But there is **another** perspective — and that is the **divine perspective**. It is the perspective we **MUST** have to endure the brokenness and moral chaos in our fallen world.

**WE JUST CAN'T MISS THIS** — The **injustice** and **chaos** and **suffering** that we will see Joseph endure throughout his life **is not the exception** in a world broken by sin.

When Paul Tripp last spoke at Metro, he told me that he wanted to speak on the subject of suffering! Before the first session he came into my office and said — *“So here’s what I’m going to do: Tonight, I’m going to normalize suffering! I’m going to show that suffering is the norm as we live between the already and the not yet.”* On the second day he showed from the Bible that **groaning** is the language of life between the already and the not yet.

Suffering and injustice is real! Suffering and injustice is everywhere! Because of that — many men and women draw certain conclusions about the existence and the nature of God. All of us have heard this said — in one way or another: Suffering and injustice are the ultimate arguments against the existence of an all-powerful, loving God. They break that into a two-part polemic.

**1.** If there were an all-powerful, loving God, He would stop all injustice and prevent all suffering. There is suffering and injustice. Therefore, there is no God.

**2.** If there were an all-powerful, loving God, He would stop all injustice and prevent all suffering. There is suffering and injustice. Therefore, God isn’t powerful enough to prevent suffering and injustice; or there is an all-powerful God, but He doesn’t love us enough to care if people suffer or are the victims of injustice.

I believe that as we walk through this specific moment in the life of Joseph, we will see exactly the opposite! We will see that God is very real. We will see that God was not only present — He was actually at work in the midst of chaos and suffering — and at work through the chaos and suffering — to accomplish a great salvation! In fact, **unless everything** happened, **exactly** the way it happened, **everybody** would die — because a famine was going to come. If you’ve been with us in our study through the Bible you know that if all of the family of Jacob died — the promise to redeem mankind through the descendants of Abraham died with them. God was going to save the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!

*Psalm 105:16-24 NLT He called for a famine on the land of Canaan, cutting off its food supply. <sup>17</sup> Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them -- Joseph, who was sold as a slave.*

**We must always** factor God into our circumstances. We need to remember that there is another perspective — the **divine perspective** And **that** is the perspective we **MUST** have to endure the chaos and suffering and injustices of life in a broken world.

**In Peter's second epistle** he writes of how it is possible for us to get to that place where we are UNFRUITFUL in our relationship with Jesus. And **in that condition**, we can no longer see far off — the concerns of the here and now obscure our view of the eternal realities that should drive our temporal existence. Joseph was not that person!

**STORY:** A construction supervisor asked a brick layer – *“What are you doing?”* Irritated by the question the bricklayer replied – *“What’s it look like I’m doing? I’m laying bricks. This is my life. I get up — eat breakfast — I get here and I lay bricks — one brick — then another brick — then another brick — until it’s time to go home. I eat dinner — watch TV — go to bed — wake up and start all over again.”* The supervisor asked another masonry worker – *“What are you doing?”* That man replied – *“I’m working for the most famous architect and builder — and I’m building his house.”*

Joseph was a man who lived with his heart set on God — and he yielded his life to the purposes of God. His hope was fixed on the person of God and on the promises of God. That *HOPE* was an *anchor for his soul!*

**The Holy Spirit** is relentlessly at work to transform us into men and women who live above the visionless drudgery of a *“one brick at a time — this is what I do — this is my life”* kind of existence. Maybe that’s how YOU walked in this morning. The Holy Spirit knows that we **NEED** to be a people who see that God is at work in every circumstance of our lives — especially in times of suffering and injustice.

**Genesis 37**

**<sup>12</sup>Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem.**

**<sup>13</sup>And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? (50-60 miles from Hebron) Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am."**

Joseph is ready to do his father's bidding.

**<sup>14</sup>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.**

Remember how we learned in THE RESCUE series that the whole of the Old Testament **points** to, **promises**, and **pictures** the Father sending His only begotten Son to rescue us. Joseph is a wonderful and powerful PICTURE of Jesus.

Here we have a picture of the Father SENDING Jesus into the world to rescue us. But with this amazing difference: I'm sure that Joseph's father had little or no idea of depth of hatred his other sons had in their hearts towards Joseph. If he had known that — he probably would have never sent Joseph to them. But when our heavenly Father sent His only begotten Son into our world, He KNEW that the world would REJECT, HATE and MURDER Jesus!

**<sup>15</sup>And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" <sup>16</sup>"I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." <sup>17</sup>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.**

Again — Joseph is a great picture of Christ. Jesus pursued us! Jesus came looking for us! He came to **seek and save** that which was lost! He is the Good Shepherd who left the 99 to FIND the ONE lost sheep.

If you are a Christian — it's because Jesus went after YOU! That is our Jesus — Hot on the trail

## VERSE 17 — found them at Dothan.

That meant Joseph was about 90 miles from home — That is quite a journey. **Like Jesus** — Joseph’s journey was born out of **devotion** for his father and **love** for his brothers that hated him

## So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

**Dothan** means *two cisterns*

**<sup>18</sup>They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him.**

Murder was nothing new for Simeon and Levi

**<sup>19</sup>They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer.**

**<sup>20</sup>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.”**

Here we get a glimpse at just how deeply they resented his dreams AND his rule over them. This was essentially a plan to prevent the dreams of Joseph from becoming reality.

**But we can’t miss this** — Ultimately this was nothing less than an attempt to circumvent the saving plans of God. Again — Joseph serves as a **type** or **picture** of Jesus: He’s a living illustration of the contempt of man towards the **plans of God** and **the rule of Christ**.

***Psalm 2:1-3** <sup>1</sup>Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, <sup>3</sup> “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”*

**<sup>21</sup>But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” <sup>22</sup>And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; cast**

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.

This is radical!

<sup>23</sup>So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. <sup>24</sup>And they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

They didn't even say "hi"! Earlier in the narrative we're told that his brothers hated him so much they couldn't even "*speak peace*" to him — couldn't bring themselves to even saying "shalom" — which is the way Jews say "hi" and good-bye to each other. They didn't even say a word to him! His brothers simply walked up to him — grabbed him — and **stripped him of his robe** and threw him into a pit. It was a cistern with no water in it. When we get to **Genesis 42**, we're told that his brothers heard Joseph **pleading** with them from out of the pit. So Joseph was **crying out** to his brothers — he was **pleading** with them!

**Check this out!**

<sup>25</sup>Then they sat down to eat.

**WHILE** their brother is **screaming** — **pleading** for them to rescue him — they sat down for a meal!

**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.**

His brothers were thinking — *PERFECT! THIS IS GREAT!*

**REMEMBER** what I started with — THIS was of the Lord. **THIS** would be Joseph's ticket to Egypt — **THIS** was the way that God would send Joseph ahead of them to save many alive.

<sup>26</sup>Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>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.

<sup>29</sup>When Reuben returned to the pit (Reuben wasn’t there when they sold him) and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes <sup>30</sup>and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?”

*I’m the oldest — I’m responsible — What am I going to do?*

<sup>31</sup>Then they took Joseph’s robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. <sup>32</sup>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.” <sup>33</sup>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.”

**GUYS** — An evil beast HAD devoured him! That beast is called ENVY! The Holy Spirit was very intentional when He inspired Paul to include ENVY right alongside of MURDER in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Galatians.

*Galatians 5:19-21a KJV* <sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, <sup>20</sup>Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, <sup>21</sup>Envyings, murders....

<sup>34</sup>Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Everything in this scene is about as broken as it could ever be. Broken people behaving out of their brokenness, leaving hearts and lives broken. THAT is the world we live in — THAT is the world we minister to. We cannot escape it.

**WE need to understand that the point of the Bible** is **not** so much to show you how to have the good life! **Sadly** — THAT is pretty much how most church-goers understand the Bible.

**The Bible's purpose** is to show us how God's grace breaks into our life to rescue us from the sin and brokenness in our life that we would never see — and never be able to overcome on our own. **THAT** is what we see on every page of the Bible! **That** is **not** religion — That's the gospel.

**I HOPE YOU NOTICED THIS** — There's no mention of God anywhere in this chapter. God never speaks. God isn't pointed out as doing anything. God seems to be utterly, absolutely, completely absent. We would be hard-pressed to find any other chapter in the book of Genesis in which God seems to be so completely absent.

**From man's perspective** — God **seems** to be absent in this chaos — absent in the face of suffering and injustice. But in reality, God was not absent! In the tiniest of details — in the moral chaos — in the face of all the things that seemed to make no sense, God was at work — arranging things for the salvation of this family.

I can't emphasize this enough! This **was not** a **one-dimensional** rescue mission! By arranging things to preserve the descendants of Abraham God was ultimately preserving His saving plans and purposes for you and me! In a very real way — by way of Joseph's suffering — you and I are saved!

**HERE'S THE POINT** — Suffering and injustice is not the proof that God doesn't exist. Suffering and injustice is not the proof that God is not an all-wise, perfectly loving redeemer. God's perfect wisdom and power, God's redeeming love, can co-exist with terrible disappointments and the terrible things that happen to you and me.

Let's refer back to verses 23-24

**<sup>23</sup>So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.**

The word **stripped** is a word that means to skin an animal. They violently tore his robe from him. He was probably thrown naked into that cistern.

**<sup>24</sup>And they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.**

**threw** means to dump a dead body into a grave. When this word was used in reference to a living person it meant to abandon that person to death.

This was **violent!** This was **brutal!** They seized him. They stripped him. They threw him naked into a pit and abandon him to die. As we noted the reference in **Genesis 42** – Joseph cried out – he screamed. And **NOTHING** happened.

**Check this out!** Centuries later Elisha the prophet and his servant were in Dothan. The city was surrounded by an enemy army. Elisha and his servant were about to die. In the same way Joseph cried out from that pit in Dothan – Elisha cried out to God. Only in Elisha's case – God answered! God did something extraordinary! We read about it in **2 Kings 6**. God miraculously intervened and everyone was saved.

All of us like it when God makes Himself known in our circumstances, exercises His power to rescue us from adversity. That's when we really believe that God really is powerful and really does love us. We think, *That's how prayer is supposed to work: We cry out to the Lord – He answers – we're rescued!*

**So, what about Joseph?** Joseph is in Dothan. He's the victim of great injustice – he's suffering greatly! But it seems as if God's not there! It seems as if God's not answering. WHY is God letting all of this moral chaos happen? Why isn't God **doing** something – doing **anything?** Why isn't God **saying** something – saying **anything?**

God was caring as much for Joseph in His silence and in His apparent absence as He was caring for Elisha by unveiling His angelic armies and by His immediate, dramatic action.

In all of the insanity and moral chaos of **Genesis 37** God was not absent — and we might also say — He was not silent! God had a vision for Joseph's salvation — and for the salvation of his entire family — **including** his brothers! (God had a vision of OUR salvation!) **BUT** — Until it was all over His rescue plan looked stupid; He looked as if He was distant, uncaring, and indifferent on an existential level!

**BUT HERE'S THE DEAL** — God *was* there — God *was* speaking. He *was* saying that He *did* love Jacob and his 10 hateful, jealous sons. He *was* saying that He *did* love Joseph — God had a dream for the dreamer! We know God was there and that God was speaking because where all of this sin abounded — His grace would super-abound. Joseph would go from that pit — to the palace of Pharaoh. If God had saved Joseph from the thing he wanted to be saved from — Joseph, and everyone else, would've been lost. **And that means** you and I would have been lost.

By way of Joseph's rejection at the hands of his brothers God would physically save that little beginning of the nation of Israel (70 became millions) — **so that** ultimately He might save sinners.

### **SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU AND ME TODAY?**

**FIRST** — God has a vision for your life and mine. And the fact is that in the midst of suffering and injustice and chaos — His vision for you and me can look stupid — as we might perceive it.

**SECOND** — Some people are prone to think — *Wow! God is playing games with humans; He doesn't care about personal suffering — He just wants to get His will done — even if it means people will suffer!!*

I can tell you that there have been times in my life when I have thought, *God — I feel like You're playing games with me!*

**LISTEN** — The Bible is the revelation of God to man. The Bible declares that **God** has suffered. The Bible declares that **God** has gone into that pit. The Bible declares that **God** knows what the pit of suffering and injustice is like. The Bible declares that God has suffered **with** you — God is there in the dark beside you. And amazingly — The Bible declares that God suffered **for** you.

**Even though** Joseph had tremendous faith in God in the midst of suffering — Joseph **didn't volunteer** to be rejected by his brothers, thrown into a pit and sold into slavery to save his family. But God **volunteered** to be the Savior of the ones who rejected Him! He stepped into the fray of this wrecked world. He became man — so He might die in the place of man. He was rejected by **His** brethren, the nation of Israel. He was **sold** — for 30 pieces of silver! He was **unjustly** arrested. He was **unjustly** condemned.

*Hebrews 12:2-3 looking to Jesus...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who **endured from sinners** such hostility against himself*

Jesus was **brutally** beaten — He was scourged. He was violently stripped — and nailed to a roman cross (the pain of that form of capital punishment was so profound that we reference it to describe pain that we can't describe: *Excruciating* - from the cross). His body fastened to the cross by wrought iron spikes, He hung there at **eye level, stripped**, so those who hated Him — and were envious of Him could look Him in the eye and spit in His face and hurl insults at Him.

As Jesus hung there, they essentially said — *Where's His God now? If God really cared — God would rescue you!* How many times have we had those very words whispered into our ears by the enemy of our soul?

Jesus cried out from the moral chaos of the cross — *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?* — but heaven was silent.

To those who followed Jesus, **the cross of Jesus** was utterly hopeless — made absolutely Zero sense. The very first time Jesus made it clear that He was the promised Messiah — the true and forever King He made it clear that He was going to establish the Kingdom by way of the cross, They wondered — *How can THAT be the plan? He's the Messiah!* In fact — one of the twelve — Peter — said; *No matter what, we must NEVER let this happen to you*

**But THAT is the Gospel** — God became man so that **He** would be the victim of **THE greatest** injustice ever perpetrated against a human. **He** would endure **THE most horrific** suffering ever inflicted on a human being — and **by His suffering** He could save sinners such as us! The grace of God broke into the midst of **utter evil** to *“rescue ruined sinners”*

**THIS IS HUGE** — We trust, love and serve a God who doesn't create the pride and the evil and the cruelty that we see in this episode in Joseph's life. We trust, love and serve a God who doesn't create the pride and the evil and the cruelty that we see in the world around us, that we see in our own hearts. But He **arranges** it — He **overwhelms** it — and He **overrules** it so that evil actually destroys itself. The wicked hearts that envied Jesus and turned Him over to Pontius Pilate, the wicked hands that nailed Jesus to the cross (yours and mine), were **all** used by God to **rescue** you and me from the **sin** and **brokenness** of our lives that we could never be able to overcome on our own.

**HERE'S THE DEAL** — When you and I are the midst of moral chaos; when we are suffering unjustly — or just plain suffering, we want some information from God. We want information as to \WHY we are suffering! We want information as to WHAT God is going to do by way of our suffering! We say or think something to this effect: *God — just give me that information and we'll be good!*

THAT kind of INFORMATION is not our greatest need in the midst of chaos. What you **need to know** is **this: JESUS** is the ultimate Joseph. **HE** is with you. *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”* He was sold for silver — stripped naked — crying out in the dark. Jesus is not absent in the

chaos! **Jesus** was **lost** — so **we** could be **saved**. What you **need to know** is that **GOD LOVES YOU!**