

Genesis (2011) 37C

The children arrived for Sunday school excited to attend the annual church Christmas party. The Children's director had placed a selection of wonderful treats on a long table and lined up the children single file to fill their plates from the table. On one end of the table there was a plate of cookies. There weren't very many of the cookies, so one of the teachers made a note, and placed it in front of the cookie tray. It read:

'Take only ONE. God is watching.'

As the children moved down the table filling their plates, they eventually came to another plate at the other end of the table filled with various Christmas chocolates and candies. Next to this plate, a child had written his own note. It read:

'Take all you want. God is watching the cookies.'

- Sometimes, we think like this child's note
 - We think we can escape the watchful eye of God
 - When we assume God or our boss or our parents aren't watching, we begin to act differently
 - We begin to relax and allow our flesh to rule our hearts
 - Small children demonstrate this principle to us
 - When they want to do something they know they shouldn't do, they will sneak away to a place where no one is watching
 - This is the sin nature at work
- Last week in our study, Joseph had left his father and traveled to Shechem to find his brothers, who were shepherding the flock away from their father
 - These brothers hate Joseph because of jealousy, envy and other sinful passions
 - So long as they were living and working around their father's house, they couldn't act on their hatred for Joseph
 - But now that they have moved so far away, to a remote place outside their father's view and authority, they have their chance

- Like the child's note says, Jacob and God aren't watching, or so they think
 - And this gives opportunity for the sons to act against Joseph
- But we also studied last week that these circumstances are according to God's plan
 - The Lord is working to bring about Joseph's eventual slavery in Egypt
 - And He is using the sin of his brothers' heart to affect that outcome
 - The Lord has two primary purposes for this plan
 - First, the Lord is in the process of bringing Israel into Egypt as He promised to Abraham
 - The nation will spend their time in Egypt growing into a great nation
 - One that is large enough to return to Canaan one day and defeat the Canaanites
 - Secondly, the Lord is protecting Israel from a great sin, one that we learn about in Chapter 38
 - And as God does this work, He is also using the nation's experience in Egypt to create a picture of His Son, the coming Seed
 - Joseph is a picture of Christ, as you know
 - His brothers and father form a picture of Israel in the future
 - And many details of the story line up with future details of Christ's first or second coming
- As Joseph enters Shechem, he doesn't find his brothers
 - He's told they have gone another 15 miles further north to Dothan

Gen. 37:15 A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?"

Gen. 37:16 He said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock."

Gen. 37:17 Then the man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

- Dothan is an important detail in Chapter 37
 - The meaning of the town's name is obscure, but it's been said to mean either "two cisterns" or "law" or maybe "custom"
 - It was located was on the normal caravan route from Gilead to Egypt
 - The road passes through the Harod Valley to Jezreel, then crosses through Dothan to the coast
 - At the coast, it meets up with the Via Mar, or the Way of the Sea
 - The Via Mar was an interstate highway of ancient times, linking Egypt with the Near East
 - This is the place God wants to draw Joseph and his brothers, because it serve His purposes for Israel
 - The brothers' hatred of Joseph is their own...God didn't inspire their hatred
 - But the Lord is working with it, using it, taking advantage of it for good purposes

[Gen. 37:18](#) When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

[Gen. 37:19](#) They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer!

[Gen. 37:20](#) Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!"

[Gen. 37:21](#) But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life."

[Gen. 37:22](#) Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him" – that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

[Gen. 37:23](#) So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him;

[Gen. 37:24](#) and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

- Joseph approaches from a distance and his brothers notice his arrival
 - It was probably his unique tunic that identified Joseph from a distance, and even before they speak with him, they are plotting against him
 - The word for plotting is *nakal* in Hebrew

- It means to be crafty, deceitful
- They are conspiring to kill their own brother, and purely because Joseph's righteousness convicts them and leaves them jealous
- Here's another picture of Christ, since we remember how Jesus' Jewish brothers conspired against Him and plotted to kill Him
 - The Sanhedrin council plotted to kill Jesus even as Jesus was some distance from Jerusalem
 - And as He approached the city, they sent Pharisees to Him warning Jesus not to enter Jerusalem

[Luke 13:31](#) Just at that time some Pharisees approached, saying to Him, "Go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You."

[Luke 13:32](#) And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal.'

[Luke 13:33](#) "Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem.

- In this way, John writes in his first chapter that Jesus came to His own, but His own did not receive him
- The brothers call Joseph the "dreamer"
 - By their use of this term, we discover the motive in their actions
 - They are set against Joseph's prophetic dreams
 - The idea that he might rule over them, compels them to act against him
 - Notice in v.19 they ask what will become of his dreams if we kill him?
 - To put it simply, their motive is to stop the dream from coming true
 - And to that end, some in the group suggest killing Joseph and disposing his body in one of the pits in the area, and lying to Jacob
 - The pits they mention are empty cisterns
 - A cistern was a cavity dug out of the ground that held water
 - They were deep and the sides were smooth

- If you fell in a cistern pit, you would die eventually unless someone rescued you
- So they made an excellent jail cell
 - This may be the origin of the word Dothan, two cisterns
- Reuben, the first born, secretly objects to the plan, and with a few minutes to spare before Joseph arrives, he argues for a better solution
 - Reuben suggests that none of them want to be guilty of the actual murder
 - Instead, they could simply put him in a cistern and let him die of exposure
 - Then, no one brother would be guilty of his murder
 - But Moses tells us that Reuben's true motive was to save Joseph when the brothers weren't watching
 - He would release Joseph and send him home, thus saving him
 - Why does Reuben want to save Joseph, and why does he feel the need to deceive his brothers in this way?
 - Reuben was the oldest son, and therefore he would be held accountable for the welfare of his brothers
 - Reuben knew that if Joseph died on his watch, his father would be crushed and might take his anger and sorrow out on Reuben
 - But it's telling that Reuben couldn't face his brothers and demand they abandon their plotting
 - He was a man who showed moments of strength, like here, but in general he was a man who couldn't bring himself to do the right thing
 - He was tempted by his flesh to take Bilhah
 - And now he's struggling to take a firm stand for his brother
 - In fact, his tribe will share this ignominious future

- Reuben's tribe never produces any military leaders, judges, kings, or prophets
- As Joseph arrives, they pounce, and the first step they take is to strip him of his symbol of authority
 - They leave him nearly naked, throw him in the pit and leave him
 - Their actions mirror Jesus' treatment, of course
 - Jesus was stripped before enduring the cross
 - And in nakedness, Jesus endured the shame of the cross
 - Fulfilling this picture, Paul tells us that Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth after he was crucified

[Eph. 4:8](#) Therefore it says,
 "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
 HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
 AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

[Eph. 4:9](#) (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

[Eph. 4:10](#) He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

- Joseph's brothers threw him in the pit to kill him, and Joseph's time in the pit pictures Jesus' time in the grave after his death
- Like Joseph, Jesus descended below the earth

[Matt. 12:40](#) for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- And from his brothers' point of view, Joseph was dead
- Now they could relax and consider their next steps

[Gen. 37:25](#) Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt.

[Gen. 37:26](#) Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood?"

[Gen. 37:27](#) "Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him.

[Gen. 37:28](#) Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

- The brothers sit down to eat, while their brother languishes in a pit nearby
 - Later in Genesis 42 we'll learn that during this meal, Joseph is pleading for their mercy
 - Nevertheless, they ignore his pleas
 - In fact, Amos 6:6 tells us that they showed no remorse or grief over what they have done
 - The next time they sit to eat a meal in Joseph's presence, Joseph will be seated at the head of the table
 - About this time, they watch a caravan of traders approaching Gilead in the east and headed down south toward Egypt
 - The traders are descendants of Abraham
 - They are called both Ishmaelites and Midianites
 - Ishmaelites descended from Ishmael, who was born of Hagar
 - Midianites descended from Abraham's third wife, Keturah
 - But the Midianites were eventually absorbed by the Ishmaelites, so the names are used interchangeably here
 - Judah speaks up and suggests a better way to dispose of Joseph
 - Rather than be guilty for Joseph's death, Judah suggests they sell him
 - First, this plan would relieve them from the guilt of murder
 - Secondly, they would profit from selling him

- The Midianites bought Joseph as a slave for twenty pieces of silver and took him into Egypt
 - This moment gives us another parallel to Christ
 - Jesus was also betrayed by His brothers (the Jewish people) for 30 pieces of silver
 - Since Joseph is merely a picture of Christ, he was sold for a lesser amount than Jesus
- We know Joseph's brothers were intent on blocking Joseph's dreams from ever coming to pass
 - So they turn on their brother and devise this plan to sell him to traders
 - By their actions, they send their brother into Egypt, certain that their plan had put an end to the possibility of Joseph ruling over them
 - Each brother was doing as he saw fit, as he thought best and as his sinful heart directed him to do
 - Each man must have felt he was completely in control of his own actions and decisions
 - Yet we know God promised Abraham that his family would go to Egypt
 - Moreover, in Chapter 38 we will learn that God had good reasons to send Israel to Egypt
 - In other words, God intended for Joseph and his family to spend hundreds of years in Egypt
 - As we consider these events, we inevitably reach what seems a circular conclusion
 - God gave Joseph a dream that told the brothers Joseph would rule over them
 - The dream increased their hatred, leading them to send Joseph to Egypt
 - But because Joseph ends up in Egypt, he is able to rise to a position of power that forces his brothers to accept Joseph's rule over them

- So the action the brothers took to prevent the dream from coming true is the very thing that caused it to come true
- What was God's role in this chain of events?
 - Did God merely know these things were going to happen, and so He gave Joseph the prediction?
 - If so, was it just lucky for God that the sons were willing to sell Joseph instead of killing him?
 - What if they had never done anything against Joseph, how would the dream have come true?
 - Where does God's sovereignty end and man's will begin?
 - The God of the Bible has no limit to His power, and yet we often choose to limit Him by how we distort the teaching of Scripture
 - Probably the most common limit we place upon the Lord's power and reach in our life is that of our own will
 - Many of us have been taught that God either can't or won't interfere in our thoughts and actions
 - You may have heard people tell you that God "loves us too much to deny us our free will"
 - This statement is trotted out as an obvious truth, and many of us accept it without questioning
 - But is this what the Bible teaches, and is this what the story of Joseph is teaching us today?
 - In truth, such a view is unbiblical and nonsensical
 - In fact, the only thing the Bible says God can't or won't do is sin
 - It never declares that man has free will in anything
 - Nor does it declare that God is a "hands off" God in the affairs of men...on the contrary, He's a "hands on" God
 - The Bible teaches the opposite
 - God is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe
 - He is the potter and we are the clay

- His power is greater than any man's will, and there is nothing in God's creation that stops His will from being done
- Furthermore, the Lord is at work in using everything and everyone to accomplish His will
 - The Bible teaches that even the sin and wrath of men will work into God's plan

Psa. 76:10 For the wrath of man shall praise You;
With a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself.

- Every thought and action of every man is a part of God's purpose and plan and under His control
- In the Psalms, we hear that God's plans span generations of men

Psa. 33:11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
The **plans** of His heart from generation to generation.

- The Lord then delivers His plans to men so that their hearts are inclined to His ways

Prov. 19:21 Many **plans** are in a man's heart,
But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

- And then He enacts His plan by guiding and directing the will and actions of men to accomplish His purposes

Prov. 16:9 The mind of man **plans** his way,
But the LORD directs his steps.

- And should a man determine to do something other than what God has purposed, God intervenes

Psa. 33:10 The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations;
He frustrates the **plans** of the peoples.

- In a future day when the Antichrist rules the world in the Tribulation that is to come, we're told in Revelation 17 that the world leaders of that day will all give their power to the Antichrist
 - No world leader would normally give up their power to another, except that God will cause them to do so

[Rev. 17:17](#) “For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

- But notice God’s method
 - He will put it in their hearts to execute His purpose
 - And together, these men and the Lord will have a common purpose
- The Bible never says any such thing about God loving us too much to interfere with our “will”
 - The Bible’s definition of love says exactly the opposite
 - The Bible defines love as that while we were yet sinners, Christ laid down His life for us
 - And that the Father so loved the world that He gave His son for this reason
 - But the Father’s love went even further
 - He loved us so much that He determined to override our will
 - Paul says that it was our will and nature to reject the Gospel and to hate God and to be His enemy
 - It was our will to oppose the things of God and to see the Gospel as foolishness and to never seek for God nor to do His will
 - So the Bible teaches that the Lord loved us enough to intervene in our lives and change our will and bring us into a relationship with Him by faith
 - Just as the Lord is working to bring Joseph and his family to Egypt as He promised Abraham He would do