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Genesis 50:15-21:

**“The Heart of Man Plans His Way,  
But the Lord Establishes His Steps”**

- I. The Setting for Joseph.
- II. Points to Jesus.
- III. The Setting for Now.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 N. Oakland Avenue  
Decatur Illinois 62526

Genesis 50:15-21

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our text regarding Joseph and his brothers is the appointed Old Testament lesson for this morning. You'll want to recall that Joseph was Jacob's favorite son and years before our text his eleven brothers wanted to get rid of him. Ten of the brothers wanted to kill him. Jesus was clear when He said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander (Mt. 15:19)." Later, Paul would write, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity (filth), sensuality, idolatry, sorcery (which implies the use of drugs and occultism), enmity (hostility), strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these...(Gal.5:19-21)." It's always been that way!

Have you ever considered that human strife is as prevalent today as it has ever been; actually worse? Have you ever seriously considered the fact that every country or empire that thought it had all the answers to solve all the problems no longer exists, or has become something less, or is in the process of being destroyed or destroying itself?

So, you're asking, "What does all that have to do with Joseph?" Well, in spite of the fact that Joseph had eleven brothers who wanted to get rid of him; in spite of the fact that his brothers sold him into slavery; in spite of the fact that he would spend two years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, and a total of thirteen years in slavery and in prison; behind every movement of Joseph's life was a specific plan, and a certain person moving everything. It's like this . . .

### ***THE HEART OF MAN PLANS HIS WAY, BUT THE LORD ESTABLISHES HIS STEPS***

#### **I. The Setting for Joseph.**

Our text begins with, "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father (Jacob) was dead, they said, 'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him (v.15).'" Their statement takes us back to chapter 37 of Genesis and these words: "Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing (his father's)flock with his brothers... But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers they hated him...(vv.2,4)." God didn't stop it.

Moving into the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter we're told, "So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe...And took him and threw him into a pit (vv.23,24)." And God didn't stop it. "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 (v.18)." And God didn't stop it. And then we're told, "Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard (v.36)." And God didn't stop that.

You'll recall that Potiphar's wife was attracted to and desired Joseph. She made advances to him. When Joseph refused her she accused him of attempted rape. And then we're told, "And Joseph's master took him and put him into prison (Gen.39:20)." And God didn't stop that either.

Thirteen years passed from the day his brothers sold him into slavery. And then, through a number of settings, the day came when Joseph was called upon to interpret two dreams of Pharaoh, both of which were from God and prophesied a great famine. Joseph did so, and God gave Joseph a plan in response to the dreams. And we're told: "Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, '...You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne, will I be greater than you (Gen.41:39,40).'" Look at this: Hated, enslaved, wrongly accused, imprisoned, mistreated, perceived as dead by his father. And then, in a instant, a moment, what looked like 13 years of incredulous horror were turned into a most stunning victory: Joseph is second in power to Pharaoh!

And so, Joseph's brothers were fearful of repercussions. We're told:

So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin..."' Joseph wept when they spoke to him...Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 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...So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them (vv.16-21).

## II. Points to Jesus.

So let's make the obvious jump: from Joseph to Jesus; the fact that God made Joseph a type of Christ, a picture of Christ - a picture of One who was loved by His Father but hated by His people, despised, rejected, sold for 30 pieces of silver, imprisoned, tormented and suffered. But Jesus went a great step further: the Roman Cross; the place where Jesus would spill His blood and suffer hell to pay for the sins of the world.

The worst thing that happened to us is the sin that has brought death into our lives and separates us from God. The best thing is Jesus Who enslaved Himself to us and willingly marched to the Cross to secure our pardon and eternal joy. Paul's words say what needs to be said:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (that's a description of us before Christ entered our lives). For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God (Rm.5:6-9).

Again, Joseph said to his brothers, "So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." What Joseph said to His brothers points to what Jesus said to us: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Lk. 12:32)." And these words: "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (Jn. 6:40)."

## III. The Setting for Now.

And then, of course, there's still that nagging question: How does the account of Joseph fit into our day-to-day living? How does it address all the problems and struggles and chaos we experience in life. The sermon theme is Proverbs 16:9: "The heart of man plans his ways, but the Lord establishes his steps." Joseph had his plans, but the Lord would establish his steps." And with that these ever familiar words of Psalm 139: "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them (v.16)." I plead that you would listen to the following from John Brug's commentary on the Psalms; specifically what he writes concerning Psalm 139:13-18:

This section meditates on one aspect of God's mighty power - his power of creation. Although God does not create us directly from the ground or from a rib as he did Adam and Eve, the Lord is nonetheless our creator just as much as he was theirs. Although he brings us into existence through the natural processes of conception and birth, he nevertheless remains fully in control of our creation. He maintains the processes and watches over us with personal care even before our birth. He shapes us as he shaped Adam, so that it can be said that we were made in "the depths of the earth." Like Adam, we came from dust and will return to it. (*People's Bible Commentary, Psalms II*, p. 256)

Do we understand this? Each one of us was personally designed by God, placed on the earth at a specific time and place, made a certain way so He could use us to reach into the lives of others, just as He did with Joseph. No, we're not Joseph. We are who we are. God made us a certain way and put us in a certain place that we might render the love and comfort of Jesus to those torn apart by life and the fear of death.

We live in a fallen world. The problems and hard struggles of life do not and will not go away until we are called into eternal life. If we think the object of life is to grab for whatever we want no matter what it takes to get it we will be horribly disappointed! The good life here **is not** "better than the alternative" for a child of God! And if you ask, "Why does God allow bad things to happen, listen, God does not stop what this world is, not yet, but we're quickly moving to it.

Here's the point: Though simple it is tragically ignored or viewed as unreal or insignificant...until...until life gets torn to pieces - the point: "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps. 119:105)." We must know the Word! So, go ahead and make your plans, but understand, the Lord establishes our steps through this world. And why shouldn't He? He gave His blood so you and I could have eternal life. He owns us!

Amen

Pastor Bill Abbott