

The Way to Egypt via Dothan

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Well let's turn to Genesis 37, we're going to look at verses 12 through to the end of the chapter, verse 36. Last time we looked at Jacob and his family and Joseph's family in which he was brought up and we saw the kind of family they were.

We saw the problematic upbringing that Joseph had in this family where there were so many tensions and historically so many things that really you wouldn't expect perhaps in a believing family.

But there you are, that's very often how it is. No family is perfect and even the families of the best believers sometimes have trials and difficulties to contend with.

But that's the kind of background he had and in particular he had to face the hostility of his brothers and that really was what made the upbringing so difficult for Joseph.

We read here that the history of Joseph's life really begins here because earlier there's nothing much more than just a reference to his birth. So 17 years have gone by and then you find in chapter 37 this is really the rest of the book of Genesis taken up with the whole story of Joseph.

[1 : 16] So at 17 years of age that's what we're told about him and the background that belongs to him. Now here we find verses 12 to the end of the chapter the way that Joseph ended up in Egypt and that of course is one of the great things that God has in mind which as we read the book of Genesis we know that that's the case.

You're not coming to the story blind but just put yourself back in Joseph's time. Yes God was revealing himself to him. He didn't know everything clearly as yet and his brothers although they detected as we saw last time something unusual about this person about this younger brother something indeed to do with God in him.

Something in the way that God was going to make him important. And that especially in the recognition of that however small it was in the reckoning and how little I understood of it that's what they really resented.

That's what his dreams as we saw it were about that he would be actually ruling over them. That he would be one that they would bow down to including even his father.

And that is what they especially found unacceptable. And here is now the way that God in his providence brought even through the brother's hostility he brought Joseph to Egypt.

[2 : 35] Because God's great plan is as we saw to show himself as the redeemer of his people. And in order to show himself as the redeemer of his people his people need to be in Egypt.

From which he is going to redeem them. And therefore give us one of the great pictures in the Old Testament of what redemption is about. And for that redemption to be shown. Think of what we were saying this morning to the children.

There is a photograph of redemption in the exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. But by the hand of God. And all of that was provided for or what led to it was Joseph going to Egypt. And then the people of Israel of Jacob following him. So there is God's plan. And this is how he executes it. By making Joseph the central figure.

Now you notice the father's concern here first of all. Israel that Jacob said to Joseph. Are not your brothers pastoring the flock at Shechem? Come I will send you to them.

[3 : 37] And he said to him here I am. Now the father obviously had some concerns about these older brothers of Joseph. They were not just all that reliable. I mentioned that last time.

They were involved in a number of scrapes already in their lives. They weren't averse to falling out. They weren't averse to taking actions that their father wouldn't have approved of.

And you notice how Jacob specifies. I will send you to them. Go now and see if it is well with your brothers. And with the flock. And bring me word.

In other words their father was a bit anxious. He probably hadn't heard anything from them since they left. And some time had elapsed. And for all he knew they might just as well. They might even have gone and involved themselves in some activity or other. And just neglected the flock. And he was obviously concerned for the flock. That was part of his livelihood.

[4 : 32] They depended on that as a family. So he was sent. Joseph was being sent on a message. Where he would report to his father. It wasn't sent in a way as we saw last time.

Where his reporting back would be a kind of telling tales. This was a father genuinely interested in the well-being of his family. And concerned for the flock.

Concerned for their livelihood. Concerned for the well-being of these brothers. Of Joseph and these other sons. And so he sent them. So that because he knew Joseph was reliable.

And trustworthy. And would tell the truth. This is why he sent him. Bring me word back again. Tell me how it really is. And then you notice the instant response of Joseph.

And he said to him. Here I am. Now that immediately catches your attention. Doesn't it? Because elsewhere in the Old Testament especially. You have episodes where these very same words are used.

[5 : 32] Sometimes where it's God that's speaking. Think of for example of Isaiah chapter 6. Where Isaiah has been commissioned by God for his great ministry. Of bringing his word to his people of his day.

And there is Isaiah with that great vision in chapter 6. Of God high and lifted up. And his train. That's his robes filling.

The temple accompanied by all those beings around him. That spell out the glory and the holiness of his name. And there is a question comes to Isaiah.

Out of that glory and out of that wondrous majesty comes this question. Who? Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?

There is God asking a question. Coming to address it. Especially to this man who is seeing this great vision of God. And there is God's question. Who am I going to send?

[6 : 31] Who will go for us? And instantly Isaiah says. Here I am. Send me. In other words. When you find the words here I am. In this sort of context.

It's always an indication of a person who is willing and ready to be sent. A person who is willing to actually do the will of the person who is asking the question.

Or sending him on the message. In other words Joseph is instantly in compliance. It wasn't a short journey. From Hebron northwards.

To where he thought the flock were at Shechem. It wasn't an easy journey. And Shechem was a place where these older brothers of his had already committed a violent act.

And where the people of that district would not actually receive them very well. And yet here was Joseph. And instantly he says to his father.

[7 : 29] Here I am. Here I am. I'm ready. I'm just willing to go. I'm here at your command. And that reminds you of something.

Because as we'll see. Bit by bit. The story of Joseph shows many parallels with the Lord Jesus Christ's own life. We're not told in the Bible that Joseph is a type of Christ.

A specific representation of Christ. Like for example Aaron is as the high priest. Or the sacrifices are as indicating or being a type or an image of the sacrifice of Christ.

We're not told anywhere that Joseph specifically is a type of Christ. He's not referred to in the New Testament as a type. The way David for example is in his kingship. But nevertheless as you look at his story.

As you go through it. It's impossible not to be struck by the parallels. By the things in Joseph's life that are powerfully found in the life of Christ as well.

[8 : 32] In the same sort of principles. And this is one of them. The principle of instant obedience. Think of the psalm we were singing. Psalm 40. In the middle of the psalm.

Verses 6 to 8. Where the psalmist was saying prophetically. And these words are used in the New Testament. And applied to Christ.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire. That doesn't mean that God had stopped being satisfied with sacrifices as in the Old Testament.

He had instituted them. He had given them as the means by which the people approached him. And they were emblems. They were types of the sacrifice of Christ. But the time came.

When the type, when the emblem, when the image. Had to give way to the reality. To the one who was going to fulfill all aspects of these types of images. And when that moment came.

[9 : 32] The Son of God in heaven is represented as saying. This is the time for these sacrifices to end. And for me to come to fulfill them. Then I said.

In the scroll it is written of me. Lo. I am coming to do your will. Oh my God. You see what that is saying.

Heaven as it were looking down on earth at that moment. The plan of salvation of course has already been completed. Christ has agreed the Son of God. In this wonderful, mysterious but glorious agreement with God the Father.

That the Father will send him. And that the Son will be willing to be sent. Into this world. To become human. To give his life. To be raised from the dead.

To ascend back to glory. And when that moment. And as far as the history of the world is concerned. When that moment in time as we know it comes. Then there is a conversation in heaven.

[10 : 37] And the Son says it is time. It is time on earth for me to go. I come. It is written of me in the scroll. It has been in the scripture since history began.

Since God at least gave revelation of it to human beings. Lo I come. To do your will. My God. And that is why.

So often in John's gospel especially. You find Jesus. Spoken about as one who delighted to do the will of God. You remember. There he is at the well.

At Sychar talking to the woman. Revealing himself to the woman of Samaria. And who he was. And there she is. Led through this wonderful conversation. Until you come to the moment.

When he says to her. As far as your reference to the Messiah is concerned. I who am speaking to you. I am actually he. I am the very one. And then his disciples came.

[11 : 39] And marveled that he spoke to this woman. And they asked him. Have you had anything to eat? That is why they had left. To get something to eat. What did he say?

My meat. My fruit. Is to do the will of him who sent me. And to finish his work. That is what he was feeding on spiritually. His obedience to the will of God.

Was always instant. Always perfect. And there is Joseph. Now then. We have to put that to ourselves of course. When God says to us.

You go on to do this for me. Are you and I in the position where we say. Here I am. Is God saying to you today. Give your life to me.

Open up your heart to me. Don't keep your heart closed against me any longer. Are you going to say. Here I am. I will do it now. Or are you going to say to him.

[12 : 40] Not now Lord. You see how important it is. Instantly to be like Joseph. Ask the Lord. Every day. As I must ask the Lord. Every day. For grace.

For help. For power. To be obedient to him. To be obedient to his will. To be obedient. Whatever it is he asks of us. And requires of us. It is his command.

It is his instruction. Through his word. We are sinning against him. When we don't. Just imagine what. It would have been like. If his father said. Come. I will send you to them. Pasturing the flock.

Go and see if it is well. With your version. With the flock. And bring me word. Imagine if. He had said. No I won't. It is too far. It is too difficult. I can't do it.

I don't want to go to Shechem just now. I am quite happy where I am. I have too many things on my mind. It is too dangerous. We all make excuses.

[13 : 36] Don't we? And we make excuses to God. Let's be honest about it. Instead of here I am. It is very often.

Or sometimes. Well. It is the opposite. Isn't it? I will just stay where I am. Joseph's obedience. Although it reminds us of the obedience of Christ.

Remember it is also the obedience of a young believer. The obedience of a young man who is being instructed by his father to go on a message for the good of the family.

And he says yes I am here. I will do it. And so he comes to Shechem. And in Shechem a man found him wandering in the fields.

Now this is something really quite remarkable in itself. Through this chapter as we saw last time.

There is no reference to God as such. And there is nothing here to say well God sent this man to meet with Joseph.

[14 : 33] But in your mind as you read it and as you know the teaching of scripture. You know what is going on. You know that God is actually guiding Joseph's steps. And here he comes to Shechem. There is no sign of his brothers.

There is no sign of the flock. He does not know where they are gone. He is wandering in the fields. And it is not a safe place to be in Shechem. Given what has happened there some time before. In regard to his brothers as we mentioned.

In the previous chapter you find that. The man asked him. What are you seeking? What are you looking for? And he said I am seeking my brothers. Tell me please. Where are they pasturing the flock?

They have gone away for I heard them say let's go to Dothan. So Joseph went after his brothers. And found them at Dothan. Now isn't it remarkable. At such an important point in the life of Joseph. Such an important point in the plan of God for his people. That Joseph would actually need to be in Egypt. That such an important thing in his plan. Is here depending on an unnamed stranger giving him guidance.

[15 : 36] What is that telling us about God? What is that telling us about ourselves? Well it is telling us that for guidance from God. You don't often have a theophany.

You don't often have a great dramatic thing through which God reveals himself. God reveals himself to you and to me. Like he did there with Joseph. Through everyday ordinary events.

And everyday ordinary people. We don't even know the name of this man. It's deliberately kept from us. So that we'll come to that passage and say. This is how God is steering our lives.

Every single day as I live by faith. God is taking me from one place to another. From one experience to another. And it's God who's in charge of my life.

The people you meet with on a daily basis are not met with accidentally. The experiences you have in life. They may seem and are in one sense very ordinary.

[16 : 33] But if you look for God in them you'll find him. And that's how our life goes on from day to day. The junctures of our lives that we dismiss sometimes as unimportant.

They're unimportant because we haven't really looked for meaning in them. And because we haven't stopped over them and said. What's God doing with this? Where is God taking me through this?

So remember everything in your life in that sense is important. And for Joseph there was no such thing as a dramatic event.

Where there was an earthquake. Where like Elijah or people like that. Things happened that really caught his attention. And the creation itself was in turmoil or something like that.

It's just an unnamed stranger. And he meets Joseph here at this point. And it's through that that he's directed to where his brothers are. God providing for him.

[17 : 32] God going before him. And it's something that we should actually pray. And I'm sure you do pray for it. But I put it to myself as much as anyone else. That I begin every day as I should.

Seeking God to go before me into every event. And that's so important. Because if we don't do that. Then we're not really in a position then to learn from the events the way we should.

You remember the way that the psalmist puts it. Where he speaks about. I have set the Lord always before me. Since he is at my right hand.

Therefore I cannot be moved. Or I shall not be moved. Wonderful psalm. Psalm 16. Speaking about the inheritance God has given to his people.

The lions having fallen to him in pleasant places. I have set the Lord always before me. That's the constant action of his life. Setting the Lord deliberately before him in his way.

[18 : 34] And therefore the Lord accompanies him. He's at his right hand. Therefore he says. I can't be moved. Not even by death. Which the psalm goes on to speak of.

You will not leave my soul to rest in hell or in the grave. At your right hand there are pleasures. Forevermore.

Hope. Expressed by someone. Who knows the companionship of God. That's how it was with Joseph. God was guiding him on the way.

That's the way to Dothan. Then from that point onwards. It's the way to Egypt. Of course that's God's great plan for him anyway. But you notice what it says here again about the brothers.

When they saw him coming from afar. And before he came near to them. They conspired against him to kill them. Now that's significant.

[19 : 32] Before he was actually in hearing. Within their hearing range. They conspired against him to kill him. They said one to another. Here comes this dreamer.

Come now. Let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We'll say that a future animal has devoured him. Then we will see what will become of his dreams. You see. That is really. The moment they see Joseph.

They think of his dreams. That's what the text is throwing at us. That's what this passage really wants to emphasize for us. What they really object to is his dreams. What they really object to is Joseph's presentation.

Of how he would actually come to be superior over them. In other words. They actually object to what is specifically God's choice. God's choice is the choice of Joseph.

He's chosen Joseph. To be his representative. So that he will ultimately be the ruler of Egypt. The redeemer of Israel's people. Reflecting God himself.

[20 : 34] And. As God was. Chosen. Had chosen Joseph. So that's what really rankled with his brothers. Because.

This young man had as far as they were concerned. The audacity to say. That he was more important than they were. Well he was.

He was because of. God in his life. Because of God's choice of him. And that too. Follows through into the life of Jesus.

Jesus. You know. It's a really solemn thing. That those who put Jesus to death. Thought that they were saving God. And of course they were in the ultimate sense.

God used them. In order to bring about the crucifixion. And I know there's. A difficulty for us. And a mystery between. The responsibility. Laid at the door of those who crucified him.

[21 : 32] They were responsible. They were guilty in doing that. And on the other hand. God's overruling plan. Where that was the means. God chose. The crucifixion of Christ. The death of the cross.

To bring redemption to us. As sinners. But nevertheless. It's still the case. As the Bible says. Again. In the psalm. The stone.

The stone which the builders rejected. The same must become the head of the corner. In other words. It wasn't because they didn't know Jesus. It wasn't because they didn't know his claims. It wasn't because they didn't know what his life was about.

It wasn't because they didn't know why he had come into the world. He had told them that. And the miracles that he did. Actually demonstrated that. They had inspected him. That's what that phrase says in the psalm.

That's what it means. The stone which the builders rejected. A builder before he rejects a stone. That he's going to place in the wall. Examines it. He looks at all sides of it.

[22 : 28] He looks at its shape. He looks at its size. He looks at its suitability. For where he wants to place it in the wall. And if it doesn't meet with the specifications. He puts it aside.

That's what they did with Jesus. It wasn't because they didn't examine him. It wasn't because they didn't know anything about him. It was because their examination. Was actually guided by. And governed by.

Their own prejudice. And you know for you. And for me that's important. Because. Even as believers.

It's all too easy. To actually be in resistance to. And opposition to God. Sometimes without hardly realizing it.

Isn't that how it was with Peter. That's a warning. To all of us. Never to think. That we ourselves. Know. The best way forward always. This shall not happen to you.

[23 : 27] He said to Jesus. Having been told by Jesus. About the cross. And the death. He was to die. No this shall not happen to you. Get behind me Satan. Is what Jesus said to him.

And when Peter was challenged. By the young girl. As to being one of the disciples. He said. Three times. I do not know him.

I don't know the man. He was in denial. But he was actively resisting.

What in fact. He knew best. In his own heart. He was his disciple. He did know him. He did serve him. But at that critical moment.

Peter relying upon his own strength. Failed. And so will you. And so will I. And so will Joseph. If he hadn't been relying upon God.

[24 : 29] And that's where these sons. Were there at fault as well. Instead of looking at what Joseph had said. With prayer to God. Instead of examining it.

And seeking God's mind in it. Instead of looking at what he said. And really analyzing it. And asking themselves. Now. What is God saying about us in this. What is God doing in this.

Why is this young brother of ours. So remarkable. And why does he have these dreams. Instead of that. They resent the very fact. That there's a suggestion there. That he's more important than they are.

Then we will see. If we kill him. We'll see what will become of his dreams. In other words. They're saying. We know what his dreams were saying. We know what he actually. He's going to be presented to us. Through his dreams.

And there's something in that. That tells us. About God. And about what God's intentions are. But we want to do away with that. We don't want these dreams to be fulfilled.

[25 : 26] So we'll do away with them. That will be the end of it. That's what they said. About Christ as well. They thought that crucifying him.

Was the answer. To his claims. Let's do away with them. That will be an end of it. Sometimes maybe that's how we. React to God as well.

We just put it away. We put his claims. At a distance. And we say. That's it. I'll keep them there. And they'll go away. And I won't really need to think about that anymore.

About committing my life to God. About opening my heart to him. About confessing my sins. And the fact that. My life is going nowhere fast. Spiritually or properly.

Well that's. Impossible. You cannot. Put God aside. And expect that he won't come back.

[26 : 28] He'll come back in some form or other. He'll come back. At some point or other. In our lives. You just cannot get rid of. God from our lives.

Just like they could not get rid of. The fulfillment of these dreams of Joseph. So it is with ourselves. So there's the plotting. Of it brothers.

And it does. If we had time you could go into. How this is real sheer jealousy. Jealousy. And how jealousy is such a dangerous. And terrible weapon. That you can use.

And you and I can use against each other. Jealousy. Is not just. A kind of envy. At somebody having something. And you're wanting either something. The same or something better.

It doesn't. There is that to it. But there's actually even more than that to it. Jealousy. Or envy. Is not just looking at someone. And saying. I wish I was. I wish I had that. Or I'll have to have something better than that.

[27 : 28] What you actually want along with that. Is to take from them. The very thing that's making you jealous. You cannot satisfy jealousy. Without robbing the person of whom you're jealous. Of what they have.

That's what envy is like. It's destructive. It kills. It removes. It robs. It covets. And covetousness. As we'll see.

Tonight's study. In Luke. Is what Jesus. Talked about. There. Take heed. And beware. Of covetousness. And it's covetousness.

It's envy. It's greed. That lives. In these brothers of Joseph. That's why they're treating him. The way they did. And so. You find the providence of God then.

Coming to take over. And their plan. Is overturned. I'm just going to run through this very quickly. Just leave yourselves with the notes to go through it. It begins with. Reuben's. Fairly pathetic.

[28 : 23] Attempt to actually. Intervene. In the situation. He. Rescued him out of their hands. Saying. Let's not take their life. His life.

Shed no blood. Throw him into. This pit in the wilderness. But don't lay a hand on him. Well he's trying to actually. Solve it without. Actually the death of Joseph. But it's a pretty weak.

Attempt. Isn't it. What he ought to have said was. Throwing his hands up. And said. Brothers. This is wrong. This is completely wrong. Let's forget about this plan.

Of killing him. Or doing harm to him. Or selling him off. Or whatever. He's our brother. So let's just do an end with this nonsense. And he didn't do that. And. Because of that.

They threw him into a pit. But it's interesting. That. The language there. Verse 23. When Joseph came. They stripped him of his robe. The robe of many colors that he wore. That was of course. An indication of the favoritism of his father.

[29 : 19] The fact that he was the chosen one. And. There's an element of. God's own choice in that as well. Of course. They stripped him of that. And then they threw him into a pit.

And. The pit would have been. One of these big recesses in those days. That filled up with water. When it was raining. It was kind of bottle shaped. Narrow at the top. And then widening out. There's no way you could get out of it.

By yourself. And that's why it was quite a secure place. To keep someone. If they were a prisoner. Or whatever. But the language there is one. Where it makes it very obvious.

That they treated Joseph violently. They didn't take him gently. They just tore his robe off. Then they laid hands on him. And just threw him into this pit.

What did they then do? They sat down to eat. They were called. They were called. They were called. they were called. They were called. calling out to them from this pit he couldn't get out of it himself, he had to be lifted out were they going to leave them?

[30 : 20] just imagine this young man's situation and how he would feel he wouldn't sit there silently and yet they sit down and eat as if nothing has happened how callous can you get how cruel can you get?

here are his brothers having treated him violently intending to kill him they just sit down in a blasé fashion and they just get on with their meal they have their lunch isn't it amazing how resistance to God can harden your heart how going against what God's plan is can actually let you into this situation where you do something that's so obviously wrong and yet you treat it so casually you just go about your business as if nothing has happened that's what they were like and then the providence of God continues because these traders come along and Joseph is lifted out of the pit and he's sold on to the Ishmaelites for 20 shekels of silver there's another link there if you like a parallel to the life of Jesus he's sold for the price of a slave and of course that's what he becomes for a while in Egypt he's given away for these for the price of a slave 20 shekels of silver would have been equivalent to the price paid for a slave in those days and he's sold on to the Ishmaelites they took

Joseph to Egypt and Reubin comes back to the pit and he sees that there's no sign of Joseph and he panics what am I going to do you see what am I going to do it's all self the boy is gone where shall I go he's already been in an indiscretion as far as his father is concerned maybe he thinks if I go back to my father and something else has happened where I haven't been responsible for my younger brother what's he going to do what will happen to me but it's all about himself so they devised this cruel scheme they killed a goat dipped the rope of Joseph in his blood took it to their father and then just callously as well matter of fact said to him is this your son's robe or not we found this and Joseph of course recognized it not knowing what happened he tore his garments and he said

Joseph undoubtedly has been torn to pieces his beloved Joseph and he's convinced now that he's dead what a cruel trick to play on their father and yet just remember what his father what Joseph's father had done himself how did he actually take over the birthright from Esau by killing a goat by putting its skin on his hands and on his neck by going in before blind Isaac his father pretending to be Esau and receiving his blessing what goes around comes around God is not asleep and difficult though this is you say to yourself when you read it well Jacob you weren't actually very slow yourself at using cunning and deception in your life and now it's used against you that's how it will often be with us sometimes we will think we've gone away with it and if God has noticed well that's it he's not really going to deal with it he's not going to come back against us to haunt us this wrong that we've done and then sometimes very often very often very soon after the wheel of providence comes around and God shows you

I took note of that and that's why you now have to face the same situation well that's a note just by the way how ironic that is but the passage ends by bringing us back to Joseph in Egypt he had been sold to Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh the captain of the guard in other words it's like sometimes reading a book or watching a film there's Joseph in Egypt there's Jacob's house there's the scheme that the brothers have concocted and all the time that that's going on and they're telling their father this wrong tale about his brother at the same time this is what's happening in Egypt Joseph is being sold as a slave to Potiphar and that's where the story of Joseph picks up in chapter 39 now in all of that there's one thing that's important for us we mentioned the providence of God and you think of the question in the catechism catechism number 11 what are

[35 : 28] God's works of providence and you can see that worked out in so far even in the life of Joseph God's works of providence are his most holy wise and powerful preserving his creatures and governing his creatures and all their actions God's works of providence are his most holy wise and powerful preserving and governing of all his creatures and all their actions that's what you see in the journey to Egypt via Dothan God's works of providence no accidents no chances all God's plan within which human beings are responsible for their behavior but where God is in complete control let's pray gracious

Lord help us we pray to realize your providence in our lives day by day we give thanks that you are the God who rules infallibly from your throne above because all that we see happening in our own lives and in the history of the world we belong to is the working out of your own plan devised from all eternity and involving us as creatures of time and yet bringing things to that conclusion which you have always had in mind and especially for your believing people here is now an acceptor thanks for Jesus sake