

Genesis 37:12-36

Introduction

Getting punished for breaking the light fixture at grandma's when all I did was go checkup on my siblings

1. You've heard the idiom no good deed goes unpunished
2. In some respects, that idiom reflects what we're going to see in our passage today, Genesis 37:12-36
3. Outline:
 - a. We see Joseph's obedience in following his father's instructions to check on the welfare of his brothers and his father's flocks (12-17)
 - b. We then see this good deed rewarded (sarcasm) by his brothers' depravity (18-35)
 - c. Finally, in the end we see God's sovereignty and that He's still in control (36)

A. Joseph's obedience (READ 37:12-17)

1. What stands out in these verses is how willing and diligent Joseph was to obey Jacob:
 - a. He was willing to obey:
 - 1) Verse 12 says that Joseph's brothers were pasturing Jacob's flocks in Shechem which was about 60 miles north of their home in Hebron
 - 2) Jacob was apparently concerned about his sons and the flocks so he decided to send Joseph to Shechem to check on their welfare and report back to him
 - 3) The journey to Shechem would not have been an easy one:
 - a) The first thing we have to remember is that Joseph was only 17 and made the trip all alone
 - b) It would have taken at least four days and it was mostly wilderness with no towns or villages along the way
 - c) Bandits and other dangers were also common along such routes
 - d) To add another challenge, shepherds and flocks had to move around frequently (as we'll see in a moment), so Joseph wouldn't have known exactly where to find his brothers and the flock; he'd have to search for them once he got to Shechem
 - 4) This is what makes his answer to Jacob so endearing:
 - a) He didn't go begrudgingly, but willingly, responding with, **"I will go"**
 - b) I don't know why but his response reminds me of when Isaiah saw his vision of the Lord and the Lord said, **"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"**—and Isaiah responded with an enthusiastic **"Here am I. Send me!"** (Isaiah 6:8)
 - b. Joseph was diligent to obey (37:15-17):

- 1) Joseph didn't approach the task half-heartedly, but was diligent to complete it
 - 2) When Joseph arrived at Shechem his brothers weren't there; apparently, the flocks had exhausted the pastureland, so they needed to find another place for them to graze
 - 3) While he's wandering around looking for them, he learned from a stranger that he overheard them talking about going to Dothan which was another 10 miles north
 - 4) However, instead of just giving up, heading back home, and telling Jacob they weren't in Shechem, he spent at least another day heading up to Dothan and searching for his brothers until he found them
2. Takeaway: Joseph demonstrated two important traits when it comes to obedience: willingness and diligence:
- a. God's desire is that we obey Him willingly, not reluctantly or begrudgingly:
 - 1) He doesn't want our obedience to be the result of compulsion or fear, but an expression of our love for Him
 - 2) This is why after delivering the Law to Israel the LORD reminded them that faithfulness, obedience, and a love for Him go hand in hand (READ Deuteronomy 30:11-20)
 - 3) It's also why Jesus said, **"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word..."** and **"He who does not love Me does not keep My words..."** (John 14:23-24)
 - b. God also desires that we be diligent in our obedience:
 - 1) It's needless to say that in this life we will never be perfect in our obedience, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't be diligent and strive to obey God completely
 - 2) Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 119:57-60 (READ)

<h2>B. The brothers' depravity (37:18-35)</h2>
--

1. We already saw in the beginning chapter 27 that Joseph's brothers hated him, both for his father's favoritism and for what God had revealed to him through dreams
2. We now see this hatred come to a head in what can only be referred to as pure wickedness and depravity:
 - a. Their first act of depravity was their plot to kill Joseph (READ 37:18-24):
 - 1) Even before Joseph came close to them, as he was still far off in the distance, they started making plans to kill him (18)
 - 2) Initially, they planned to murder him with their own hands, toss him in a pit, and then claim a wild beast ate him
 - 3) Had it not been for Reuben, the oldest brother, they might have done so; but he convinced them to simply throw Joseph in a pit so he could rescue him later
 - 4) When Joseph arrived, they stripped him of his tunic and tossed him into a pit, presumably hoping he would die of thirst
 - 5) Their motivation appears to have been to prevent his dreams from coming true (RE-READ 37:19-20)

- b. Their second act of depravity was selling Jacob into slavery (READ 37:25-28):
 - 1) It says a lot about the depths of the brothers' depravity that they sat down to enjoy a meal together immediately after tossing their brother into a pit to die
 - 2) In fact, I wonder if it's coincidental that the brothers initially planned to claim Joseph was eaten by a wild beast and then are recorded here sitting down to eat a meal (like wild beasts themselves??)
 - 3) While they are eating, a caravan of Ishmaelite traders comes through on their way down to Egypt and we see their depravity sink to even lower depths
 - 4) Take a look back at what Judah said (RE-READ 37:26-27):
 - a) Did you catch that: "**What GAIN is it that we kill our brother...**"
 - b) In other words, why kill our brother when we can sell him and make money off it?
 - c) That sounded good to the others so they sold Joseph for "**twenty shekels of silver**" which was the average price of a slave
- c. Their third act of depravity was deceiving their father Jacob (READ 37:29-35):
 - 1) Apparently, Rueben wasn't with the brothers when they sold him to the Midianite traders because he showed up at the pit and was shocked to discover he was missing
 - 2) Initially, he appeared to express grief, but soon joined the rest of his brothers in a plot to cover up what they did and deceive Jacob
 - 3) After slaughtering a goat, they dipped Joseph's robe in it and deceptively presented it to Jacob so he would be led to believe Joseph had been killed by a wild beast
 - 4) Then, as Jacob mourned, they feigned compassion and tried to comfort him
- 3. Takeaway: what we see here is an example of the righteous suffering at the hands of the wicked:
 - a. This is a theme we see throughout the Bible, beginning all the way back in Genesis 4 when wicked Cain murdered righteous Abel, and continuing through the New Testament with the persecution against the Church
 - b. It's a theme that has played out throughout history as God's people suffer at the hands of a wicked world
 - c. It's even a theme tied directly to our salvation because the greatest example of the righteous suffering at the hands of the wicked is Jesus Christ Himself
 - d. This is why we shouldn't be shocked or surprised when we suffer as Christians at the hands of a wicked world
 - e. Jesus warned us about this in John 15:18-20 (READ)
 - f. But, the good news is that in the end, our suffering will be rewarded and the wicked will be judged

C. God's sovereignty (READ 37:36)

1. If we weren't familiar with the rest of Joseph's story, we might see this verse rather matter-of-factly and simply a summary or concluding verse to the story so far
2. However, it reminds us of God's sovereignty:
 - a. God's plan, as He revealed through Joseph's dreams, was that Joseph would one day rise to a position of prominence and rule and reign over his family
 - b. His brothers tried to circumvent that by first plotting to kill him, then tossing him in a pit to die, and finally selling him as a slave
 - c. However, in spite of their wicked plans, God was still in control of Joseph's destiny and His purpose and plan would ultimately come to pass:
 - 1) It wasn't by chance that Joseph's brothers ended up in Dothan to graze their flocks just as the Midianite traders were traveling through
 - 2) It wasn't by chance that the Midianite traders were on their way to Egypt
 - 3) It wasn't by chance that they sold Joseph to one of the highest-ranking officials in Egypt, Potiphar, the captain of the bodyguard
 - d. God was totally and completely in control of these things:
 - 1) Look at what Joseph said later in Genesis 45:4-8 (READ)
 - 2) This is why he was able to say with confidence in Genesis 50:20, **"what you meant for evil, God meant for good"** (Genesis 50:20)
3. Takeaway: we know in our heads that God is sovereign, but it doesn't always feel that way, especially when we are suffering or facing injustice:
 - a. The Bible doesn't tell us what Joseph was thinking when his brothers tossed him into the pit to die or sold him to the Midianites
 - b. However, if God revealed to me through dreams that I was going to be a ruler someday, but then I ended up in a pit and then sold as a slave, I'd have some serious doubts and a TON of questions for God
 - c. But, the Bible assures us that God is sovereign:
 - 1) After all of his suffering, Job declared, **"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted"** (Job 42:2)
 - 2) The LORD told Isaiah, **"For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?"** (Isaiah 14:27)
 - 3) And again in Isaiah 46:10, **"...My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure"**
 - d. This is why our hope as Christians isn't just some kind of wishful thinking; it's a confident expectation that God can and will do exactly what He promised because He is sovereign