

Overcoming Betrayal With Grace

Genesis 37:12-36

It was on March 15, A.D. 44 that Julius Caesar was assassinated by Marcus Brutus. What is so troubling about the assassination is that Marcus Brutus was not only a trusted friend, but Caesar had treated him as a favored son. According to Roman historians, Caesar had resisted the onslaught of assassins, but when he saw Brutus among them with his own dagger drawn, Caesar stopped the struggle. Pulling the top part of his robe over his face, he asked the famous question, “You too, Brutus?”

There is an anonymous saying which says, “the saddest thing about betrayal is that it never comes from your enemies.”

Psalm 41:9 “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”

Jesus would apply that verse in **John 13:18** to Himself when referring to Judas who would betray Him.

French philosopher Albert Camus once wrote “I used to advertise my loyalty and I don't believe there is a single person I loved that I didn't eventually betray.”

The saddest truth is that probably all of us to one degree or another has either been betrayed or been a betrayer. I think the worst feeling of all is to the one betrayed, to be delivered to an enemy by treachery or disloyalty. And truth be told, I have been both.

Something internally and emotionally has changed with the betrayer in attitude toward the one-time friend so that he or she has no qualms about handing them over. We'll see in our passage today that the betrayer has lost all feelings toward the person being betrayed. The betrayed has a wound that strikes deep and heals slowly, because it was inflicted by someone they loved, someone they trusted, someone they thought they knew.

It happens everywhere.

It happens when least expected.

It is something that once unleashed can't be undone.

It happens in government
It happens in neighborhoods
It happens at work
It happens in schools
It happens in families
It happens in churches

Betrayal takes center stage in our text. The focus of the betrayal is the person of Joseph. We learned last week that among the 12 sons of Jacob, he was the favorite. All indications point to him being the recipient of the birthright. He was given a beautiful ornamented and colorful robe, which symbolized that the family blessing would go to him. For different reasons, the other brothers had either forfeited that right by unethical and immoral actions or because of their status in the family. Even at 17 Joseph had integrity that was not evident in his 10 older brothers. As we learned last week, his position and his character led his older brothers to harbor envy and hatred – two lethal attitudes that were left to simmer in the cauldron of discontent.

As we turn to **Genesis 37:12-36**, we see the result of what happens when we let those two emotions continue unchecked. The outcome is the sinister act of betrayal. What is even more devious is that their betrayal lies hidden in the shadows masked by the lie of hypocrisy. The person who is betrayed has no clue because the betrayal has been so well hidden.

But there is something that is evident in the whole story of Joseph that we should not overlook, something that we must see in our own lives. It becomes evident in the end of Genesis. Jacob has died and the brothers fear that Joseph will now exact revenge for their selling him into slavery. **Genesis 50:20 “You intended to harm me, but God intended if for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”**

In a similar vein, Paul describes it this way: **“And we know that all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28**

As we have discovered throughout the book of Genesis, so we see now in our text and in the life of

Joseph is the grace of God. This helps us see that while we may encounter something like betrayal the bigger lesson is that God will see us through because His grace is sufficient for every trial.

Etch in your memory banks and inscribe on your heart the tremendous promise of **II Corinthians 12:9-10** “**My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**”

I don’t know about you, but I’m more inclined to wallow in self-pity and despair instead of looking at persecution and hardships as God’s means of strength so that I experience His all sufficient grace. Yet that is the lesson before us. While we may not understand why He allows us to go through such hardships, we must come to realize that His grace sustains us in them because He is there with us. Grace is something I believe Joseph knew before this chapter. As we look at the life of Joseph, I think that if we were to look back through the thread of our lives we would see God’s grace throughout. Let’s consider three things about God’s grace in this passage.

Notice that there is grace in a son’s submission.

I. THERE IS GRACE IN A SON’S SUBMISSION – vs. 12-17

I posed this question for the group to consider in Adult Impact this morning. Why did the sons return to Shechem? Back in **chapter 34** we learned that Jacob and his family settled for a time in Shechem after leaving Padam-Aram where Jacob had lived for 20 years. It was in Shechem that Simeon and Levi deceitfully encouraged the men who lived there to become circumcised and intermarry so they could murder them all for molesting their sister Dinah. Jacob feared that the people of the land would retaliate and murder them. So here they are, returning to the very place that held such

bad memories. So why?

We can only make suggestions here, and that’s what commentators offer. Shechem was 50 miles away from Hebron. You would think that in Hebron there was plenty of good pasture to tend the flocks. Here are some possibilities for going to Shechem. They still owned land there and so returned to the old homestead. Maybe they were homesick. Being a passive father, the sons were doing their own thing in a somewhat rebellious manner. They were given responsibility for oversight of the flocks so grazed them wherever they thought best. They wanted to get as far away from Joseph as possible because he was the favored son and they hated him. Out of sight out of mind. They moved away so no one could spy on their activity and tell their father. There may have been some business dealings with people of the land that they didn’t want their father to know about.

The simple fact is we don’t know the reason they went to Shechem, but Jacob knew they were there and given the recent history, became concerned for their well-being when he hadn’t heard from them. So he called Joseph to go and check on them. In his obedience there is grace in a dutiful son.

A. There Is Grace In A Dutiful Son – vs. 12-14

Joseph had a simple reply. “**Very well.**”

“Dad, I’m on it.”

“Right away Dad.”

“You can count on me, Dad.”

Jacob knew he could rely on Joseph to give an honest report.

There was no discussion about the distance.

No discussion about the difficulties.

No discussion about the dangers.

Jacob knew what was there, but still sent his son and Joseph didn’t hesitate in obedience to do what pleased his father. It wasn’t because he was a goody two shoes or just trying to earn more points with his father, it’s because it was the right thing to do.

Now while Jacob knew where his sons were grazing

the flocks, how far away it was and even the sordid history of the place, something he was not aware of is something we'll discover in a moment. Otherwise I don't think he would have sent Joseph into the lion's den, if you will. Joseph was a dutiful son. His father gave him a task and he did it without question. He didn't complain about how far it was or that he had other things he'd rather do or even about the reason they had to leave Shechem in the first place.

Depending on who you talk to, or in this case, who you read, it took anywhere from 3-5 days to travel to Shechem. But when he arrived he didn't find them where they were supposed to be. You know the feeling. You plan on meeting someone at a certain time and location. You arrive and they aren't there. You check your email or text or voice mail to make sure you got the right day, the right time and the right place. Yep, everything checks out, but they aren't there. You wait and wonder and wait some more. You try calling and no answer. Now you really start to wonder. What should Joseph do?

Not only is there grace in a dutiful son, there is grace in a diligent son.

B. There Is Grace In A Diligent Son – vs. 15-17

It was a simple quest – go to Shechem, find your brothers, and see how they and the flocks were doing. **What would you do if you went to where they were supposed to be and didn't find them?** Some might be tempted to turn around and head home. After all Dad only said go to Shechem. You went and they weren't there. You did what he wanted by going to Shechem so you've done your duty. But a dutiful son is also a diligent son. He wasn't only supposed to go to Shechem. He was also to find out how his brothers and the flocks were doing. So he started looking for clues.

He was looking for some indication of where they may have gone. If this was a western, he would have been a scout looking for signs. I picture him squatting down looking at the ground rubbing it with his hand to determine how old the tracks were,

maybe grab some dirt to roll in his hand while he scanned the horizon.

Just by chance some guy happened to be riding by. Well, no, it really wasn't chance at all. I believe it was a divinely appointed encounter because nothing happens by chance where God is concerned. A man noticed Joseph wandering around the field obviously looking puzzled about something. When he asked Joseph what he was looking for, Joseph said he needed to find his brothers and asked the man if he knew where they had gone.

Not being a God-fearing man, he told Joseph that this was his lucky day because he just happened to overhear them talk about moving on further north to the town of Dothan. We know it wasn't luck at all but God's purpose for the man to have overheard the conversation that they were moving on and then meeting Joseph days later to give him needed information.

Dothan was another day's journey about 12 miles or so north of Shechem. As we will see, it was on a major trade route that went on down to Egypt. We read about Dothan a bit later in the history of Israel found in **II Kings 6**. Syria was at war with Israel, but every time the king planned a raid, God revealed it to Elisha. He would then tell the King of Israel so that they could prepare and defeat Syria. This happened several times and the king of Syria thought that there was a spy telling the King of Israel all their military secrets. His advisers told him there was no spy, but that it was this prophet named Elisha who knew the king's moves and would inform the king of Israel. So the Syrian king sent an army to capture Elisha. He was living in Dothan.

Presumably, Dothan had some of the best pasture around, so the brothers headed there to graze the flocks. Dothan means two cisterns, which will have significance in a few verses. Apparently, they were quite large cisterns as we will see.

We see Joseph's diligence in **verse 17** where we read that he went after his brothers and found them. Grace is always evident where willful submission is concerned. Without grace, submission is merely out of obligation and nothing more. It's done because

that's what you were told to do, not because you desire to please the one who gave the task. Without grace there is no diligence. You only do what is necessary and nothing else.

There is grace in a son's submission.

We see something else about grace in our text.

There is grace in a son's suffering.

II. THERE IS GRACE IN A SON'S SUFFERING – vs. 18-30

Grace is easy when everything seems perfect, but how about when there is pain. **Do we see God's grace then?** Maybe you have personally experienced the grace of God in suffering. Suffering is God's refining fire that separates the dross from the purity of the precious metal. Suffering is the means by which God removes our own self-sufficiency in order to replace it with His all sufficiency. Suffering reveals our own weakness in order to learn to rely on His strength. When we get to whatever bottom God has taken us that's when we can only look up at His sustaining and empowering grace to strengthen us in the suffering. To make it through the suffering, we must rely on His grace. As Paul said, when I am weak then I am strong. Maybe you're needing God's grace through this pandemic.

For the blade to be tempered it must undergo the hammer, the fire and the cooling process. Joseph isn't aware of the suffering he is about to endure, but in it he will experience the grace of God. As he is nearing the place where his brothers are grazing the sheep, they spot him. His coat is unmistakable. Maybe on the long walks and cold nights around the campfire, the brothers had all voiced their disdain for Joseph. As they talked, festering anger and envy worked their evil into every fiber of their soul so that when they saw him approaching their only thought was murder. It rolled off their tongues so effortlessly, without hesitation. According to **verse 18** it was on all their minds because the word "they" is all inclusive, though Reuben was possibly absent. They all thought it. They all voiced it. They all agreed to it. They put aside whatever sibling squabbles they may have had with each other and were united when it came to what to do with

Joseph. Let's kill him.

They resented his dreams of superiority and his dress of many colors. They planned his death and would blame it on wild animals. In one fell swoop they would be rid of the dreamer and his dreams.

The term "**dreamer**" literally means master of dreams or dream expert. They used it as a term of derision and sarcasm. To rid themselves of the dreams and dreamer they agreed to kill him. But Reuben, who had every right to be most bent on Joseph's demise is the only one who came to his rescue. It's even possible that he was not with the other brothers at the time the brothers were plotting. He may have been looking after some of the sheep and only came in on the conversation after it had already been decided that Joseph should be killed. Instead of killing the boy outright, he suggested they just throw him in one of the dry cisterns. It was deep and there would be no way he could climb out of the well without assistance. Secretly, Reuben hoped to pull Joseph out of the well and get him safely home.

But hatred and envy are powerful forces that cause despicable deeds. The irrational seems rational. Take a quick glimpse through history and you can see their ugly heads striking a fatal venomous blow. Hatred is such an intense dislike for someone else it demands action. It will not remain idle for long. It's been said that hatred hardens the tension of the knees like steel, and grips the feet like talons.

[The author of a story posted in *Our Daily Bread*, considered the following account to be the worst case of hatred he had ever seen. The will of Mr. Donohoe from 1935 says "Unto my two daughters, Frances Marie and Denise Victoria, by reason of their unfilial attitude toward a dotting father, . . . I leave the sum of \\$1.00 to each and a father's curse. May their lives be fraught with misery, unhappiness, and poignant sorrow. May their deaths be soon and of a lingering malignant and torturous nature." The last line of the will is vicious, "May their souls rest in hell and suffer the torments of the condemned for eternity." February 18, 1994](#)

Ann Landers once wrote in her syndicated column that “hate is like acid. It can damage the vessel in which it is stored as well as destroy the object on which it is poured.”

Henry Emerson Fosdick stated that “A man who hates to be slapped on the back packs his coat with TNT and waits for this man who always slaps his back. His idea is when he hits me I will get him, I’ll blow him up. Hate kills both the person who you hate, but also yourself as well. Hating people is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.”

Our text tells us that when Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, that symbol of favoritism and privilege and authority, and then threw him in the empty cistern.

When it says that they stripped him of his coat, it is the same term used for skinning an animal. They viciously attacked him, after all if he was going to die, what did it matter how they treated him?

It is my opinion that neither Jacob nor Joseph knew the deep-seated hatred these brothers had toward Joseph. They had covered it well, but here they held nothing back. Their hatred was ignited and their father was not around to protect him now. He couldn’t hide behind that coat any longer and no one would be the wiser so after forcibly stripping him of his robe, they threw him in the cistern where he would starve to death and they would be innocent of shedding his blood.

You can almost hear his moans and cries and pleas. But such hatred always turns a deaf ear to the cries of the innocent. A calloused heart has no compassion for those they have hurt.

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?”

Think back for a moment to the days before the flood. We read in **Genesis 6:5 “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”**

Go back still further when God confronted Cain. **“Why are you angry? Why is your face**

downcast? If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

The day will come years later when these brothers will remember this day, the day they let the sin that had been crouching at the door of their heart to enter in and master them. One day they will stand before Joseph and say to one another: **“Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen.” (Genesis 42:21)**

Whether we realize it or not at the time it is happening always remember that God’s grace is there helping you through the hardships. Always bear in mind that God has a purpose in the pain. The brothers think they will once and for all be rid of this dreamer, but the Master Weaver is creating a beautiful tapestry that is unclear to the unseeing all. Let’s never forget that His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways.

Romans 11:33 “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.”

As we sang earlier **God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me
He will be my guide
Hold me closely to His side
With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way, He will make a way**

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I can’t imagine what Joseph must have been thinking at that moment – fear, uncertainty. I’m sure he was puzzled by the seeming change in their demeanor toward him. He may have been thinking what he had done to deserve all this. Though not written at the time, in that moment Joseph understood the words of **Psalm 88:18 “You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend.”**

But God's grace is always there to make the weak strong, to overrule sin for His purpose. His plans are perfect and never fail and even when we don't understand them or wonder why He allows the pain. **Proverbs 21:30** "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord."

Their callous disregard for Joseph is evident in what they do next. Two things happen. The first is they sit down to eat. They paid no attention to the pleas for mercy echoing from the nearby cistern. Their hearts were as hollow and empty as the cistern. Their eating shows just how insensitive they were. How unconscionable that they would sit down to eat, perhaps the very provisions Joseph had brought them from home, that he should be left to starve to death. But as they began to eat another possibility arose.

The second thing that happens is that a caravan was passing by. These merchants were on the way to Egypt and what better place to dump their hated brother. They hailed them with greetings of peace and offered a bargain, a trade. They offered to sell them a slave. Selling him was more profitable than slaying him and so they made the exchange. But one more thing remained. How to break the news to their father. In this, we also see that there is grace in a father's sorrow.

III. THERE IS GRACE IN A FATHER'S SORROW – vs. 31-36

As we have learned the past couples of weeks "where sin abounds, grace super abounds" (Romans 5:20). Simply put, Grace overflows. Whatever kind of pain or hardship or sorrow you are going through today, grace covers it all. God's grace is sufficient. God's grace is sustaining.

The wording of **verse 31-32** can also suggest that they didn't deliver the robe in person but sent the robe to their father by courier.

One day, Joseph heard a knock on the tent door so he went to see who it was. Standing there in his snappy uniform was the courier from UCS – United Camel Service. He held a package in one hand and

a parchment in the other and asked Jacob to sign it. Handing him the box, he returned to his camel and rode off. Jacob opened the package to find a note fixed to a blood smeared robe. The note was from Judah. "We found this coat mauled by what appears to be an animal and sent it right away. Examine it to see if it was the one you gave to Joseph."

Recognizing the coat, his overwhelming grief wouldn't allow him to examine it more closely to see that it had not been shredded by any animal. He was deceived into believing the evidence was true. Considering the character of his other sons, Jacob never considered foul play and he responded as they had hoped. How interesting that they did to their father what Jacob had done to his father by killing a kid to cover up their sin. When they did arrive home there was no amount of comfort they could offer to assuage their father's grief. Without the truth, their attempts were just empty platitudes from the lips of hypocrisy.

And our text ends by noting that the merchants took him to Egypt and sold him there. **Psalms 105:17** reminds us that God was the one who sent Joseph down to Egypt. God did not condone their sin, but He used it to bring about His will. He does His work even when people do evil because His sovereign hand moves to accomplish His divine will. In it all there is His grace.

Daniel 4:35, 37 "[God] does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: 'What have You done?' ...Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything He does is right and all His ways are just."

Consider this thought from Kent Hughes: "Joseph's life teaches us that life is full of inequalities and unfairness and tragedies. But it also teaches us that we have a great God who works amidst the rich compost of human life to do His will."

His will is the molded by grace. The path of Joseph's dreams weren't how he hoped it would turn out. He would have to experience God's grace along a path that would include heartache, hardship, and humility. He will see that God meant it for good.