

Joseph and his brothers

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 October 2017

Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] As we continue in our progress through this section in Genesis, we come now to the occasion in which Joseph is betrayed by his brothers and sold into Egypt.

And we find this sort of gathering storm, as it were, beginning at verse 12. His brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. Now, Shechem was apparently well-renowned for being a particularly exceptionally good pasture area, very well watered.

And so a lot of people who are from outside that area would go there to pasture their flocks and herds, and then they would move on. And clearly for Jacob's family, this place of pasturage was well worth their while to cover such a distance in order to graze their flocks and herds for a wee while before they returned again to the Baal of Hebron, which we're told, verse 14, is where they were.

Now, Hebron is about 50 miles south of Shechem as the crow flies. So as you would actually have to travel around mountains and through gullies and defiles and so on and what have you, it would probably be quite a bit more than that.

So it's a good 50 miles plus that Jacob has sent his other 10 sons northwards to this good pasture land. And it would be a journey and a situation not without some danger.

[1 : 29] The atrocity committed by Jacob's sons, Levi and Simeon, which we read of in chapter 34, against the inhabitants of Shechem, only a few years previously would still be remembered in that area.

And whilst it might still be true by then, what we read of in chapter 35, in verse 5, they journeyed and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.

Jacob is the key figure there.

Jacob, we know, for all his williness and his guile and the fact that he was a twister and a chancer and all these kind of character flaws, let's say a colourful character, shall we say, that Jacob was. For all that, he was a man of God. A man who trusted and believed in the God of Abraham and Isaac, his fathers. A man who put his whole heart into God's hands and who worshipped him in spirit and truth.

[2 : 52] He was a worshipper of the true God, Jehovah. You couldn't say from this chapter that most of his sons were that. There's no fear of God before their eyes in this chapter, clearly by what they are envisaging doing.

So his sons are running something of a risk in going back to the area where their reputation stinks, to put it mildly, and where they could still be in danger from the inhabitants round about.

But, so far, they are protected, as we read, and the Lord still prevents anything from happening to them. But, it may be that the hostility of the inhabitants round about is one reason why they didn't stay in Shechem.

If the pasturage is so good in Shechem, you'd expect them to stay, but they haven't. They've moved a further 14 miles north to Dothan, the name which means two wells.

So, yes, there's good pasturage there still, but it's not as good as in Shechem. But, could it be that without Jacob in their midst, they're not so conscious of the Lord's protection?

[4 : 03] Perhaps they're sensing the hostility of the inhabitants round about. That's all speculation, of course. But, the fact is, it's only a few years previously that they have murdered the entire male population of a city with whom they had entered into a covenant bond.

And so, yes, they don't have a good reputation there. And, you can understand why the inhabitants might have felt hostile towards them in the area round about. So, it might be indicative of a perceived lack of safety in the vale of Shechem.

Jacob feared the Lord. And, no doubt, for his sake, the Lord had protected his family before that. But, clearly, as we say, there is no fear of the Lord in the hearts of most of his sons. Because, Joseph might be an exception here, but for the rest, there's not much concern for the Lord or his honour, obviously. Joseph, in these verses 12 to 14, these opening verses, is seen to you here to be something of a type, a prefiguring of Christ.

We see a lot of parallels here between the two. Though they are each the beloved son of their father and hated by the wicked of the world, yet the father sent them.

[5 : 24] Now, using the word him, it could be applied to Joseph, it could be applied to Christ. The father sent him and he willingly went. Notice that Joseph doesn't say, oh, come on, dad, you know, they hate me.

I wouldn't be safe in their hands. And besides, going back to Shechem, where they hate all of us, you know, that's not very wise. I wouldn't feel safe going up and send about ten armed servants with me and then I'll be safe for my brothers.

No, he just goes. His father asked him to go and he goes. He goes willingly and he goes readily despite the risks. He is sent by his father out of the safety and comfort of the father's own presence to an environment of danger and of isolation and vulnerability.

And what is true of Joseph, going from the father's immediate presence into a place of danger and a place where he will be rejected and hated, is exactly what Jesus is doing. He who is God the son from all eternity is sent by his father on a mission to which he willingly submits to come to such a world as this and to enter into danger and vulnerability and limitation.

And I say that with all reverence. Inevitably, if you are confined within your human body, you are more limited than if you are simply God the son who fills the heavens and the earth.

[6 : 44] So he is more limited down here. He is vulnerable. He can be attacked. He can be brutally treated. He can suffer. He can be killed. And what is true for Jesus is true for Joseph.

The one is a prefiguring of the other. God, in his knowledge and his mercy, is intending his inspired record and narrative to point the way forwards, to keep showing us shadows beforehand of the reality.

It is by looking at the shadows, we can tell something of the reality. Not unlike, as some commentators have said, an x-ray machine. The doctor looks at you through an x-ray machine and he holds it up to the light.

All that is on these black bits of plastic or whatever it is, is shadows. Shadows of your bones.

Shadows of your skeleton. They hold it up to the light and they see where the problems are.

They see the things that they're looking for. And because they look at the shadows, then they know how to deal with the reality. And so it is with the shadows that we see in the Old Testament pointing us forward to Christ.

[7 : 48] The reality casts the shadow backwards into the Old Testament where the reality is illuminated. And Joseph is pointing us to Christ as a prefiguring, a type of Christ.

So he leaves the safety and comfort of the father's own presence when he comes to an environment of isolation, of vulnerability, of danger.

He is sent to visit his brethren in great humility and in love to them. He's going to see how they are. He's looking to, he's probably bringing with him, you know, provisions and food and drink as well for them.

He's going to check and see how they are and bring his father away again. And it's out of humility and love to them and obedience to his father. Although they would both know, both Jacob and Joseph would both know that his brethren hated him.

Now Christ came down to us to save us. As the word tells us, he came to his own and his own received him not, but conspired against him to slay him.

[8 : 59] And we might think, yeah, but come on, it wasn't the believers that killed Christ. You know, it was the unbelievers. It was the Romans and the Jews, yes, and the Sanhedrin. Yes, but amongst all the nations of the world, whom should the Lord God Almighty expect to love and to receive his own anointed, whom he had been preparing them for for centuries, if not his people Israel, if not in Jerusalem, if not amongst his own priests and his own Pharisees and his own people who studied the scriptures and who were seeking and supposedly waiting for the Messiah, if not them, who is going to receive his son when he comes?

So he came to his own. He came to his own people Israel. He came to his own people of the Jews. And they received him not. For the most part, they received him not.

Let us never forget that the first believers, the first Christians were all Jews. The first evangelists were all Jews. The apostles were all Jews. Some believed. But the most part, he came to his own and his own received him not, but conspired against him to put him to death.

As he says himself in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, it's, Come, let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours. Get this Jesus out of the way and we can carry on reaping the benefits of the temple business.

Reaping the monetary benefits of the sacrifices and the sacrificial system and the temple and the shekels that keep coming into it. Get them out of the way and we won't upset the apple cart with the Roman authorities.

[10:44] We can carry on with our lives. We are free now to buy and sell and get gain and to ignore the inconveniences of the laws of God. So the inheritance they reckon will be ours.

In verses 15 to 17, we find that when he gets to Shechem, his brethren are not there. He might have gone home with a clear conscience.

He might have gone back to his father and said, Well, I went to Shechem and they weren't there. So, you know, I did what you asked of me and have him back home safe and sound. He went the extra miles. As we said, Dothan's about 14 miles or so extra.

As the crow flies, he keeps on seeking for them. In the short term, of course, humanly speaking, it would have been better for him if he had never found them. But he finds them because he comes seeking for them.

And we know how they react. Jesus always goes the extra mile for us. He is always seeking out sinners to save.

[11:45] He is always seeking out lost souls. He does not content himself with the company of the righteous or the good or those who believe they have no need of a savior.

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, Jesus says. He goes out seeking the dangerous. He goes out seeking those who are his enemies.

He goes out seeking those who are lost. He doesn't content himself with simply a fulfilling of the letter of the law. I went to Shechem. They weren't there. I came home.

He doesn't content himself with simply saying to his disciples, Well, you know, the law says thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill. So that's what you do, boys, and that will be fine. No. He says if you even look on someone with adultery in your heart, you've already committed it in your heart.

If you look on someone angrily and you desire in your heart to kill him, you've committed murder in your heart. And that's what Joseph's brothers are doing here. They are committing murder in their heart even though they don't actually get the length of fulfilling it.

[12:48] Jesus does not content himself with the letter of the law. He goes the second mile to the spirit of it. And what his father has designed and intended. He goes out seeking those who are in enmity with him that in the fullness of time they might be saved and delivered.

So he goes and he finds them. The man said they are in Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren and found them in Dothan. And then we have these cold-blooded verses 18 to 20.

When they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. They said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.

Come now therefore, let us slay him and cast him into some pit. And we will see some evil beast have devoured him. And we shall see what will become of his dreams. Now where they say this dreamer said, Behold, this dreamer cometh.

Some translate it as this master of dreams is how the words might be translated. And it implies one who has sort of mastery or control of the visions which are revealed to him.

[13:58] Dreams were reckoned, as you know, last Lord's Day when we're looking at this. They were reckoned as a connective, a connection with the heavens, with the spiritual realm.

And that this was one way in which the Lord made known his will or his thoughts to people here. He revealed them in dreams. So if you had a connection with the eternal, a connection with the heavens through these dreams, then that was a very special gift.

But it also meant that if you were falsely claiming such a gift which you didn't have, to claim such a revelation when you didn't actually have it, you were just making it up, was taken as being akin to

blasphemy.

So their title for him is a scornful and sarcastic one. This master of dreams. This dreamer cometh. In other words, they're refusing to believe that he should have such visions from heaven while they are bypassed.

If you think of Jesus in Nazareth, you know, when they all wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, you know, who is this? And how has he got all this? How has he got all this spirit-filled words?

[15:10] You know, we know who he is. We know his mother's Mary. We know that Joseph is supposedly his father. His daughters and sisters, they don't hear us. You know, who does he think he is? And they were offended at him because he was filled with this power and this spirit that they wondered, how can this local boy have all these blessings, all these things?

They were offended at him. They did not believe in what he had because of who they thought that he was. But even more so, Joseph's brothers here, they refused to believe that any genuine vision from above would exalt him, the youngest, over them.

So they concluded he must be making it up. He must be claiming a position for himself as authorized by heaven because simply he's puffed up.

He's a reverend. He's vain. They did not believe the validity of his dreams. And yet, rather than laugh it off and say, ah, stupid boy, who's a big yes?

I could just ignore it. Rather than laugh it off, they hated him for it. Now, if you think about it, friends, this is a very real hostility and it is a spiritual warfare that is involved here.

[16:30] It is the hatred of evil against good which is built into the DNA of the evil one and all who are plugged in to his kind of spirit.

And we're all tainted by that spirit to an extent. The hatred of evil for good simply because it is good. And this can be summed up, as has been said about modern day atheism.

You know, there is no God and I hate him. If there is no God, then why are you bothered? It should be a matter of indifference. It should just be shrugging your shoulders and laughing off.

But no, there is a hatred for the Lord and for his Christ and for his followers in the disciples of modern day atheism, which is not mere indifference and unbelief.

It is enmity. It is hatred. They hate the God in whom they do not believe. And yet, if, as they say, he doesn't exist, what's to hate?

[17:36] Now, this really goes to the heart of the issue. They hated him not simply for his dreams, but as some commentators have suggested, this implies, you know, the viciousness, the murderous intent that they have here.

Envy about dreams that are colored cold, that doesn't buy it. That doesn't sort of explain this depth of hatred. But what would explain it is that they hated him not merely for his dreams, but rather because he was virtuous.

He was diligent. He was faithful. He was hardworking. And they were the opposite. You know, when Joseph is with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, he brought unto his father their evil reports.

What they were doing, how they were treating the flocks and the herds, he tells the truth, and they don't like it. He is diligent and faithful. For he goes readily into a place of danger at the behest of his father.

He will do everything that's asked of him. Yes, we could say perhaps he's a wee bit of a spoiled brat. Maybe he's a wee bit puffed up with his dreams. Maybe. But he is doing his father's will. He is obeying.

[18:48] He is living a life that is virtuous. And if that is the case, it would also explain then why these, his brothers, before whose eyes clearly there is no fear of God, hate him so much.

This goes, as we say, to the heart of the issue. The hatred of the evil one for the followers of the true God. Because he was virtuous.

And they were the opposite. Evil hates good with a passion. And with a vengeance. Because it makes the less good look bad.

And it has ever been thus. If we go back to 1 John 3, verses 10-15 and read together. In this, the children of God are manifest. And the children of the devil.

Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God. Neither he that loveth not his brother. Now, they're talking about Christian brethren. But, of course, it's true as well for physical, biological brothers.

[19 : 51] Joseph's brothers do not love them. For this is the message that he heard from the beginning. That we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.

And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous. Abel offered his sacrifice in faith. Cain offered his without faith.

That's what Hebrews tells us. And so he envied his brother. He hated his brother. Because his works were righteous and Cain's were evil. And he killed him. It was murder in his heart. His own works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Marvel not, my brother, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Now, if you're abiding in death, it's no problem for you to consider actually bringing it to pass. And actually enacting murder. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.

[20 : 50] And you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. 1 John chapter 3.

Likewise, again, if we look into the realm of the spiritual warfare in Revelation 17.

We find the harlot of Babylon. When we read chapter 17 verse 6. I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints. It's not just with mankind in general.

It's with the blood of the saints. The harlot Babylon hates the righteous saints of God. Because evil hates good. And with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

And when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. Turn a couple of pages back. Can you find in chapter 11 of Revelation at verse 10. The two witnesses that are witnessing.

They are then killed. They that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them and make merry. And shall send gifts one to another. Because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

[21 : 48] How did they torment them? Because they testified to them. They testified clothed in sackcloth. They prophesied. They shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days clothed in sackcloth.

And if any man will hurt them, fire proceeded out of their mouth and devoured their enemies. They have power to shut heaven and so on against the rain. Declaim the truth of God brings wrath from the enemies of God.

That is what we read in Revelation. It's what we read in 1 John. It's what we read throughout Scripture. And we see in Proverbs again, chapter 29 and verse 10. Like it was, the bloodthirsty hate the upright.

But the just seek his soul. So we have it, even at a lesser level. You know, nobody likes to be made to look bad. But let's say if I was doing some football with some kids or something.

I was doing keepy-uppy. And then I used to be like 25, keepy-uppy. I'm really pleased with myself. And then along comes somebody to do 55. And I don't look so good suddenly.

[22 : 51] I don't look so good now. Or let's say I'm trying to scrape away my violin. And I'm doing my best to you. And I'm playing a wee tuner. People who don't know the violin at all, they think, oh, that's really good.

That sounds much better than we could do. And then somebody turns up who's a really good player. And they just bring beauty out of it. They bring music to make you weep out of it.

No, no, no. It doesn't make me look too good. No, no, no. That's not so great. Saul hath slain his thousands. And David his tens of thousands. Now, what is the effect upon Saul?

When we are made to look inferior, made to look bad, it affects the pride and vanity of our hearts. And that is so even if we are in a relationship with Christ.

Human nature is what it is. None of us like to be made to look bad. But if you take the restraining grace of Christ out of such a heart, and then you provoke its vanity and its pride by showing it up with somebody else doing better, then all hell, if we can say that reverently, breaks loose in that heart.

[24 : 02] Friends, hard as it may be to believe, I can remember many years ago when I was still a young minister, hearing a minister in the presbytery criticizing a fellow minister because that fellow minister in his interim moderatorship was visiting the homes of the sick.

And because he was doing that, it was making other interim moderators look bad. So a brother minister was criticizing another one for doing what he ought to be doing because it made others look not so good.

Now, it wasn't a murderous intent and he wasn't about to kill him or anything like that because of his grace and because of the love of Christ, no doubt, is amongst these brethren in that presbytery. But it was quite a shocking thing to hear for one so young in the job at that time.

But it is part of our human nature. We do not like to be made to look bad. And that is with the grace of Christ there. When you take the grace of Christ out, there is nothing to restrain.

Murder becomes palatable as we have here. They abide in death. The plot to destroy Joseph is not conceived in the heat of the moment or under some sudden or rash provocation.

[25 : 25] When they saw him afar off, verse 18, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. It is cold-blooded in every sense of the word.

It is plotted and thought through. And they have plenty of time to work it out as they see him approaching from a distance. And we've got Reuben here who tries to intercede away with it.

It says, Now Reuben seeks to be a friend to his little brother here.

And it's worth pointing out that the Lord often places friends in the midst of his enemies. If you think, you know, of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council that condemned Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed.

We read about a council within that number. In Luke chapter 23, verse 50. Behold, there was a man named Joseph, a councillor, and he was a good man and a just.

[26 : 33] The same had not consented to the council and deed of them. He was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.

This man went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. He was of their number, but he didn't consent to what they did. The Lord had a friend in the midst of his enemies.

He wasn't able to help them in that sense. He wasn't able to deliver them any more than Reuben proves able to deliver his little brother here. But Reuben wants to do it. But Reuben is weak.

As we will come to in due course, we will see that Reuben, as the eldest, ought to have been able to say, Oh, come on, guys. This is your brother you're talking about.

I'm the eldest. I'm the head of the family while we're here. And I say, we're not going to do this. But Reuben didn't have moral authority anymore. And we'll come to that, as we say, shortly in due course.

[27 : 31] But what we do have here is, if you can stop to imagine, the terror and fear in this strange land that Joseph must have encountered.

Here he is coming to Dothan. We don't know if he's been there before. He finally finds his own family. Finds his own brothers at last. And it is they who turn on him to do him harm.

Nor was he passively indifferent. But he suffered through it all. And they knew it. Because we read a little further on in chapter 42.

At verse 21, they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother. In that we saw the anguish of his soul. And remember that scripture often tends to understate things.

When it comes to the crucifixion of our Lord, they simply say, And we crucified him. We saw the anguish of his soul. You can only imagine what those words actually contain and conceal.

[28 : 35] When he besought us, and we would not hear. Therefore is this distress come upon us. Reuben answered him, saying, Speak I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child.

And you would not hear. Therefore, behold, also his blood is required. They still think he is dead. Or else has died as a slave in Egypt. They don't realise that he is standing before them.

It doesn't alter their guilt in any way. Imagine the terror, the fear, the anguish of this young boy. 17. And it is his own brothers who turn on him.

He was stripped of his coat of many colours, as Christ was stripped of his own seamless robe, his own seamless coat. And he was stripped of his dignity, and of his majesty, and eventually of his life. The types and the parallels just keep going on and on. And they sat down to eat bread. You know, that takes some cold-heartedness.

[29 : 37] Here's your brother. It might even be the food that he had brought to them. And he's down a pit, languishing, crying, weeping, or asking them, please, please, to let him out. But they wouldn't.

They wouldn't listen. There they are, chomping away, sat down to eat bread, cold as you like.

Conscience for now, all but anaesthetized. Not dead, but anaesthetized.

Why do we say anaesthetized? Because anaesthetic wears off. Death doesn't. If it is anaesthetized for now, we know, we've just made reference to chapter 42.

Years later, it's still coming back to them. They have lived with the knowledge of what they have done all these years. They have remembered it. It has burned in their hearts. They have concealed it from their father. They have engaged in this collective conspiracy of silence. And remember that they lived in a close-knit, extended family.

[30 : 34] If they mention this to any of their wives, or any of their children, or any of the servants, if they let something slip, it's going to get out. Because it always does. But no, they have kept it.

They have kept it secret all these years. You can imagine how that must have been eating away at them. Conscience has been anaesthetized for now.

It's out for the count. But it wakens up. And it begins to feel the pain in all its fullness. But for now, they sit down to eat bread.

An aesthetic always wears off in the end. And as they sat down to eat bread, they looked it up their eyes and looked. And behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels, bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going down to carry it to Egypt.

Now Egypt, of course, the Egyptians, the wealthy in Egypt, always embalmed their dead. That required treatment with certain oils and spices and so on, and what have you.

[31 : 36] So there was always a desire, always a market, for the spicery and for the balm and all the things that these merchants were bringing. Traffic was constant through the Holy Land, backwards and forwards.

Some critics of Scripture make a big deal of the fact that in verse 25, it describes them as Ishmaelites. And then a couple of verses further on, it calls them Midianites.

And then again, they're called Ishmaelites again a little bit further. And then Midianites at the end of the chapter. In fact, they're called Midianites and Ishmaelites twice in the same verse, verse 28.

Now this, some people make much of. It's not a big problem. If you go back to chapter 25 in Genesis, you'll see in verse 2 that Midian and the Midianites were children of Keturah.

That is Abraham's second wife after Sarah died. He took another wife after Sarah died. And amongst the children that he had with Keturah was Midian. So the Midianites are descendants of Keturah, Abraham's second wife.

[32 : 35] The Ishmaelites are descendants, naturally, of Ishmael, Abraham's son with Hagar. And you read of that in chapter 25, verse 13. Either way, they're all descendants of Abraham.

That doesn't make them buddies with the brothers here. But it does mean that they have a common ancestor. They are probably a mixed group here. Ishmaelites and Midianites together.

They're traders. They're a caravan of traders. And they're in business to do business. So how would they like a nice little teenage slave here, take him down into Egypt, buy him for a small price, 20 pieces of silver.

Not much. It's less than the price that's suggested later on in Scripture. 30 pieces of silver. It's not even that. They're not bothered because they didn't expect to make anything off it. So they make 20 pieces of silver.

Share it out amongst the 10 of them. A couple of pieces each. Thanks very much. It's fine. But at the end of the day, as far as they know, that's him dead with a wee prophet to themselves.

[33 : 38] He's as good as dead. Down into Egypt. He'll never rule over them now. And so they think. There is the selling which is cheap. But then there is the lie to their father.

They sent the coat of many colors. And they brought it to their father. Said, this will be fun. Know now whether it be thy son's coat. Jacob rent his clothes, put sack off upon him and mourned for his son.

All his sons and his daughters rose up to comfort him. What liars. They could easily have comforted him and said, look, father, I'm sorry. We shouldn't have done this. Joseph is alive.

He's in Egypt. He's a slave. But he's alive. We sold him. We shouldn't have done. We're very sorry. But he's not dead. So please don't mourn like he was. They could have done that. Reuben could have done that.

He could have cracked. He could have told him. He could have said, look, we did this. We shouldn't have done it. But they don't. They compound their sin of betrayal with now a sin of betraying their father too.

[34 : 37] When the devil teaches man to commit one sin, he soon teaches him to commit another to try and cover it. When Adam sins in the garden and then covers himself, then he hides from the Lord.

And he says, oh, well, I knew I was wicked, so I hid myself. And then he blames somebody else. And one sin leads to another to another. You know, it's like those adverts they say where for such and such a price you can have this.

And then you actually sign up to it or try to sign up for it. And then there's always another hidden cost. And then another little cost. And then another cost that you have. You know, the flight is never just as cheap as that because there's always these extra wee costs.

The special offer is never just that special price. There's always these wee hidden extras. And it's like that with Sun. There are always the hidden extras. David looks at Bathsheba and he wants to have her.

So he has her. And then she gets pregnant. And then he has to try and cover it. So he brings Uriah the Hittite. But he won't cooperate. So he has him killed. So, front of the adultery. Then the murder. [35 : 39] Then the covering up of the murder. Then the child dies because of it. And then all David's moral authority crumbles away. And you get the Absalom Rebellion. And you get all the other things that go wrong in David's household.

And David is powerless to stop it. Because his moral authority has collapsed. Because one sin is never just one. It always leads to another, to another, to another.

And it always, always, always comes out in the end. We cannot emphasize that enough.

Jesus says in the New Testament, Whatsoever you hear whisper in secret will be shouted from the rooftops. There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. Now that is true whether it is for the goodness of men's hearts or for the evil of it.

When the last judgment comes, everything will be set out in broad daylight. That's a scary prospect, yes. But it should at least cause us to recognize that there is no concealing of sin forever.

[36 : 44] It will always, always, always come out. No matter how many you add to cover over layer upon layer. It will always come out.

Now Reuben, we see here, is anguished. The child is not an eye. Where shall I go? Where shall I go? Why can't he just say, Come on boys, we're not doing this.

This is your brother. You're not selling him into slavery. You're not going to kill him. Send him back to our father. And let's be done with it. Yes, he's annoying. Yes, he may be vain.

Yes, he may be puffed up. He may be a spoiled brat. But he's still our brother. But Reuben doesn't do that. Reuben can't do that. Because Reuben, like King David in the latter part of his life, his moral authority has likewise collapsed and been compromised.

Why? Because we read in chapter 35, we read about Reuben took his own father's concubine. Bilhah. Verse 22, When Israel dwelt in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah's father's concubine.

[37 : 54] And Israel heard it. His relationship with his own father has been destroyed. Maybe that's one reason he wanted to send Joseph back to try and regain something of his father's favor.

Maybe. But it also explains why his brothers will not listen to him anymore. He's a sinner just like them. He's not a murderer like Simeon and Levi, maybe.

But all the brothers colluded in that. And all the brothers colluded in this. And all the brothers lie to their father. And all the brothers are guilty.

One way or another. Reuben has no authority now. Because he chose to give in to his particular sin.

Simeon and Levi and the others have no restraint because they chose to give in to their particular sin. You see what sin does? We think we are entering into it freely.

[38 : 49] We think we are becoming masters and mistress of our lives because we choose what we will do. But in fact all we are doing is we are snapping the handcuffs and foot shackles and ball and chain tight around our own wings.

And we are making prisoners of ourselves from which we do not have the power ever to free ourselves. It is why we need a savior.

Because sin is a cruel master. And it destroys any authority that we might have. Reuben's anguish is not great enough to make him go back to his father and say Father this is what we have done.

I am really sorry. We should not have done it. I should have stopped him. But he does not. They carry it for years. They keep the secret for years. And let us face it.

In God's providence. If Reuben had succeeded in his plan and the implication is that he left the company and the brothers and went round by a circuitous route in order to come back to the pit

hoping to get Joseph out of it while they were away doing something else and to free him.
[40 : 04] If Reuben had succeeded in his plan however well intentioned they would all have died in the long run. They would all have died of famine. Egypt would have died in famine.

It would have perished. The poor would have died first then the rich would have died after that. The Israelites would all have been starved to death. And the nation would have perished. If Reuben's well intentioned plan had been allowed to succeed.

God's providences may often seem to contradict his promises. I will say that again. God's providences may often seem to contradict his promises.

But even then they are in fact serving those promises and working at a distance towards the accomplishment of them all.

You are yet alive in your own situation. God has a plan, a purpose for us. Just as he had for Joseph.

[41 : 12] If the merciful plan of Reuben had worked they would all have died long term. If Jesus had been freed by Pilate we would all be lost now. A key word for us to understand and to recognise is the word yet.

By failing to employ the word yet we often accuse God wrongly. Saying Lord you promised this and you didn't do it. You said you would do this and you didn't do it.

You caused me to believe that you would help me with this and you didn't do it. He hasn't done it yet. Maybe. Think of this at the end of Exodus chapter 5. Where the Lord has sent Moses back into Egypt.

He tells the Israelites about their plan. He goes to Pharaoh. And instead the bricks are redoubled and the straw is taken away. And Moses returned unto the Lord and said Lord wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people?

Why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name he had done evil to this people neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.

[42 : 16] Well we know what happened of course after that. Because God just hadn't done it yet. Because his time was not yet. If you're a sporting event and it's 89 minutes and the 90 minutes isn't gone then it's not over yet.

God has time and eternity in the palm of his hand. You for all I know may be languishing at the bottom of some spiritual pit tonight. Wondering why on earth the Lord has left you there.

Why those whom you loved most nearest and dearest have cast you into this pit. How could God let this happen? How could it be the case that now you are sold into bondage? How could you be betrayed in this way?

God has a plan. God has a purpose. And God's providences and God's promises are not at odds with each other.

Although they may often seem to be. They are working and serving together to bring out his accomplishment and his purpose. Which we may not see the fulfillment of yet.

[43 : 22] but which he will do infallibly at the last. You are yet alive. You have not perished in the pit. God has a purpose, a plan and a design and he has not let go of you yet.

Have faith in God and wait upon him because he will pull you out and he will set your feet upon a rock and he will lead you in the paths that he designs if you wait and trust upon him.

God's providences and God's providences are not against each other. The Lord is in supreme control of the life of Jesus, of the life of Joseph, of the life of you and me.

Let us pray.