

Text: Genesis 37:1-11

Title: "God's Providence Calls for Faithful Submission"

Time: 5/28/09 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Have you ever had a day that just did not go according to plan? You may say, Pastor, I have never had a day that did go according to plan. Last Monday the Parishes invited us to go hiking on Mount Monadnock with them, and only Maureen and Kara could go. At one point Maureen and Amy became separated from Vic, Miranda, and Kara. The plan was to take separate paths down the hill, but one party wound up going back up hill. Things did not go according to plan.

Have you ever stopped to think how this never happens to God? Things always go according to plan for Him. We call God's working His plan the work of God's providence. *Pro* means *before*, and *video* means *to see*. God executes His plan as one who can see the future before it gets here. It is impossible for us to fathom how that must work, but we do know that God's work of providence, His ability to work His plan as one who can see the future before it happens, makes for a plan that cannot fail. God's plan will be accomplished; it marches relentlessly on.

The remainder of the book of Genesis has been described as the most significant portion of Scripture related to the doctrine of the providence of God. Leupold put it this way: "This portion of the book of Genesis is, without doubt, the most interesting and dramatic of the entire book. . . . The drama involved is practically nothing other than the unusual display of divine providence, which shines forth more brilliantly here than perhaps anywhere else in sacred history. Step for step God's providence watched over the chosen race as it was about to go into the depths of national enslavement" (949).

So we are going to hear a lot about the doctrine of God's providence in the weeks ahead as we complete our study of Genesis together. We are going to learn how the virtues of submission, perseverance, patience, purity, diligence, service, suffering, forgiveness, and the hope of future reward all relate to God's plan for all His people.

Yet God's plan for Joseph was unique in an important way. The experiences of his life parallel and illustrate in a remarkably detailed way some of the experiences of the life of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Part of the rich blessing of studying these chapters together will be the opportunity they provide to see a picture of Christ in what we read. The plan of God's providence for His own dear Son brought us redemption.

We begin this morning with the first 11 verses of chapter 37. Here we find an emphasis on the importance of our response to the providential plan of God. The success of His plan is an unstoppable given; but whether that plan is a blessing or a curse to us depends a great deal on our response to it, the success of which is in no way guaranteed.

I want us to notice this morning that "God's Providence Calls for Faithful Submission." Joseph is an example of how to do that here, while his brothers and even his father are examples of how not to. Let's notice four things about Joseph's submission to God's plan.

I. Submit to the providence of God even though you are young (vv. 1-2a).

Illustration: People tell me that I sound a lot like my Dad. When we visit my parents home, I will at times be called on to answer the phone, and it is not uncommon when I do that people say to me, "Hello Jack, how are you?" This last visit I actually had a long drawn out conversation with someone before I had the opportunity to explain to them that I am not my

Dad. That was fine with my Dad, because when I tried to hand him the phone, he decided that he did not want to talk to them anyway.

Application: We are told that beginning in chapter 37, Moses tells the story or history of Jacob (vv. 1-2a.). And then we immediately read about Joseph. We think that we are going to be focused on the father, but instead most of the material is about his sons.

Have you ever thought that the story of your life is the lives of your children in an important sense? Jacob's story lived out in the lives of his kids included some things that he would have been proud of, but also some terrible things that undoubtedly broke his heart. As parents, we need to think about what our lives and examples are teaching our kids about God's plan. Do we live in such a way that our kids sense that God's plan is an important plan? Do we show them specifically what it takes to submit to God's plan? What does your life teach your kids about your God and His plan? Their lives will ultimately be your story.

Now as much as the Bible indicates that parents need to care for the spiritual wellbeing of their kids, it also commands kids to take care to appropriately honor their parents in their response to God's plan for their lives. We are told specifically that Joseph was 17 years old when he had to come to terms with the plan of God for his life in a serious and life-altering way. We are also told that up to that time, Joseph had learned how to work hard in spite of his young age. He could handle the responsibility of the flock, though he was only a young lad. Young people, the time to embrace the responsibilities of God's plan is now while you are still young.

II. Submit to the providence of God when pressured to do wrong (v. 2b).

Illustration: The plastic bottle company I work for has a very detailed 25-page “Code of Business Conduct” manual. One of the sections in that manual is called “Disclosure Policy,” and that policy says in part the following: “[We] will not discipline or in any way retaliate against any employee for reporting in good faith any suspected violations of laws, regulations or Company policies to the appropriate authorities, to the Senior Leadership Team or to the Ethics Hotline. If you believe you have been discriminated or retaliated against, please notify a supervisor or manager at the worksite, a Regional EOE Manager, Director of EOE, Vice President of Human Resources or the Ethics Website . . . or the toll-free . . . Ethics Hotline.” This is a typical whistle-blowing protection policy that businesses have in place.

Application: Joseph blows the whistle in this passage. He gives an evil report, but what makes the report evil is that the brothers were doing something wrong, not that Joseph was willing to report them to his father. The brothers view Joseph, not themselves, as the problem when it comes to this evil report, and we need to avoid the temptation to feel the same way. We get a picture of what life is like where there are no whistle-blowers when we jump ahead a little in the narrative (vv. 29-35).

God’s work of providence involves a plan that moves upstream against the current of a world flowing downhill with wickedness and sin. Peer pressure was strong enough to keep Joseph’s brothers from disclosing to their father the truth of what had happened to Joseph. They were even unanimous in their hypocrisy as they endeavored to comfort their father. No one was willing to blow the whistle and say, “This is wrong.”

Joseph was willing to do so, and we need to be like Joseph, not like the brothers. This world will pressure us into silence on the issues of right and wrong, but we still need to faithfully speak up. When we do so, we need to be prepared for the fact

that there is no whistle-blower protection policy for the person who stands for truth in a world of lies. But being willing to stand for what is right is part of being on the side of the plan of God and blessed by that plan.

III. Submit to the providence of God when people hate you (vv. 3-4).

Illustration: One of the great archeological discoveries related to the period of the Old Testament patriarchs is the palace of Zimri-Lim, a king who ruled from the city of Mari during the 18th century B.C. The palace was a building that covered 8 acres and contained three hundred rooms and courtyards. A mural fresco from this palace depicts a garment made of small rectangular panels of multicolored cloth sewn together into a wide strip and wound around the body like a sari. Evidently, this kind of garment was known to Jacob, and he decided at one point to craft one for his son Joseph as a token of his love for Joseph.

Application: Now we might be tempted to conclude that what we have here is a bad case of parenting on Jacob's part. Clearly, Jacob loves Joseph more than his other sons, although later on his love for Benjamin was evidently in the same category as his love for Joseph (Gen. 44:20).

For the Jacob's sons, God's providence included Jacob's preference for Joseph and Benjamin. They could not help the fact that there were four mothers in their family, or that the favored mother had only two of the twelve sons, or that she had them last in Jacob's old age. These were all providences of God that created real inequities among the brothers.

The brothers responded to these inequities with hatred, but that need not be our response. Paul provides an alternative response in Phil. 3:7-8: "But whatever things were gain to me, those I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than

that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." The blessing of knowing Christ can make everything else look like rubbish by comparison, which certainly helps us bear the inequities of the providences of God.

But Joseph had to submit to all of this too. In some ways, it was perhaps harder to wear the coat of many colors than it was to be deprived of such a coat. Yet Joseph wore it out of respect for his father's love. Because of this his brothers could not even speak to him. God's plan often asks us to endure unpopularity, even the hatred of others. Paul warns us, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Let's not be ashamed to wear the coat of righteousness that our Heavenly Father has given us to wear. Do not take it off to please the crowd who lacks one.

IV. Submit to the providence of God when challenged with a difficult task (vv. 5-11).

Illustration: John Wilkes Booth was the infamous assassin of Abraham Lincoln. After shooting the president, Booth jumped from the balcony and broke his leg. As he was making his escape, Booth received medical attention from Dr. Samuel Mudd, who was evidently unaware of Booth's crime at the time. Mudd was later convicted of being a coconspirator with Booth, although historians are not sure that he was truly guilty of that crime. The phrase, "His name is mud" actually predates all that, but it became popularized with the events of the life of this doctor, whose name truly was "Mudd," only in a new sense after he had helped the assassin of the president make his escape.

Application: Joseph's name is related to the Hebrew word meaning *to add*. You may remember that Rachel had named Joseph this with the prayer that the Lord would add to her

another son. Joseph's brothers, however, put a different twist on the meaning of his name in two verses of the passage we just read. In both v. 5 and v. 8 the text literally says, "they added to their hatred for him still more."

Why the hatred? Because Joseph had been faithful in a difficult task – communicating the truth that God had given him to communicate, even though it was a truth that people did not want to hear. It is God's plan that we be faithful messengers of truths that people do not always want to hear. Still, we must communicate the truth and leave the results up to God.

God's plan requires us to walk by faith and not by sight. Imagine how the brothers might have reacted if this were not a dream but an actual miracle that happened out in the field. Why the dream, and why give the dream to Joseph of all people? Well, God expects man to believe what he cannot see. This is faith, and without faith it is impossible to please Him.

Some commentators suggest that Joseph should have kept his dreams to himself, and yet, if he had we likely would not know about them today, nor would Joseph's family have seen the power of God's providence in their coming true. In addition, we would have missed a wonderful parallel between the experiences of Joseph and the life of Christ.

Jacob pondered in his heart the sayings regarding Joseph (v. 11). That sounds familiar. Mary does the same thing about some wonderful things said about the plan of God regarding her Son (Luke 2:19). God's plan for Christ involved the submission of his mother and father before Him just as Jacob's mom and dad would bow before Joseph (Luke 2:46-51).

Conclusion: Mary pondered these things. Jacob pondered the providences of God. What about you and I? What have we pondered about God's plan for our lives and our need to submit to that plan? Have you considered whether you have re-

sponded to God's plan for you as though it is a blessing and not a curse? Have you pondered the fact that God's providences call you to faithful submission today?

God's plan is for the young, not just the old. It may require resisting the pressure to do wrong and the hatred of people when we do right. It may ask us to do a difficult task. But like Joseph and more importantly like our Lord Jesus Christ, may we walk by faith and not by sight, trusting that God's plans for us are truly best.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*