

Text: Genesis 37:12-36

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

Time: June 7, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: On April 9, 1965, after approximately 630,000 deaths and over 1 million casualties, the war between the States came to an end at Appomattox Court House, VA. The meeting between Generals Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant is remembered today as "The Gentlemen's Agreement" because of the mutual cordiality of the parties involved and the generosity of the terms of surrender. The terms were written down by Grant at Lee's request and then presented to Lee. Lee put on his spectacles, and after reading those terms he looked up and remarked to Grant: "This will have a very happy effect on my army."

Confederate soldiers were allowed to keep their horses and mules, and after Lee mentioned that his soldiers had not eaten in days, Grant ordered that 25M rations be given to the confederate soldiers to eat as they made their way home.

That was a surrender that had, in the words of Lee, "a very happy effect" on those who surrendered. This morning I want us to see from our study of God's providence in the life of Joseph, that God's plan for us is one that we need to surrender to. This is not far removed from what we talked about last week about the importance of submission to God's plan for us. In fact, there is an important sense in which surrender must come before submission. Lee had to put down his arms and surrender before submitting to the terms outlined by Grant. So surrendering to the plan of God is foundational to how we need to respond to God's work of providence in our lives.

I. Make the presentation of faithful surrender (vv. 12-14).

Illustration: I can remember growing up as a kid with a Dad who was a traveling business man. Dad worked for a software company as a salesman and systems analyst, and he would often refer to his many business trips as going to a place to “make a presentation.” That is one way of understanding what a presentation is – it is trying to sell something for profit.

I do not mean it that way here when I say that we need to make the presentation of faithful surrender. It is not that we need to talk about it, or teach a class on it, or put together a power point slide show on it. Instead, I want us to think of the word *presentation* in this context simply as the presenting of a present, or the giving of a gift.

Application: So what gift do we give when we talk about “making the presentation of faithful surrender.” I think the answer to that question awaits us in verse 13: “Here am I” (vv. 12-14). God had a plan for Joseph, and Joseph responds by giving himself for the purposes of that plan.

He must have sensed also the possibility of danger and risk as he contemplated what God wanted him to do. Remember that Shechem (v. 12) was the place where his brothers Levi and Simeon had committed those atrocities. Evidently, the weather conditions were so severe at that time (no water in the well is emphasized in v. 24) that the brothers had risked returning to Shechem to allow their flocks to graze.

They did not stay there long, for Joseph finds them in Dothan, some 65 miles away from his home. He would have his many-colored coat on, and he would be alone with brothers who were not speaking to him at the time. None of

this looked very attractive to Joseph, yet he still made the presentation of faithful surrender to the plan that God had for him. He said, "Here am I." Have you ever told the Lord that? God's plan will always be a bane and not a blessing to you and I until we come to the point where we are willing to say, "Here am I." Remember that it was the Lord Jesus who said for us, "Not my will, but Thine be done." Should we do less for Him?

## II. Practice the persistence of faithful surrender (vv. 15-17).

Illustration: Some things require persistence or things are going to go haywire. We have a church van that is burning oil right now. It has been a blessing to use the van to get kids to school and back, but you have to keep an eye on that oil. If we fail to check the oil weekly and put some more in, we could do some serious damage to the engine.

Application: Faithful surrender needs daily maintenance. We keep the spiritual lubrication of the Holy Spirit's blessing and power in our lives by surrendering daily to God's plan for us.

Joseph had some excuses in the verses we just read to quit on God's plan. Jacob had told him to find his brothers in Shechem. They were not there so he could justify turning around and going back, but that was not Joseph's attitude. God's plan happened to bring him to a man at random who knew where they had gone. Once again, Joseph persists with an attitude that says, "Here I am." He does not quit because he has made the persistence of faithful surrender to God's plan a part of his life. We need to surrender daily.

The Lord Jesus is pretty clear about the fact that nothing short of this is what it takes to be His follower (Luke 9:23-26, "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.").

### III. Avoid the alternatives to faithful surrender (vv. 18-35).

Illustration: We are creatures who very easily come up with alternatives to the plans of others, especially when those plans involve us. I had a baseball player a few games ago who, while running to third base at the command of his base coach, suddenly thought of the alternative that perhaps the ball was actually a foul ball. So based on this he came up with his own approach to the play, which was to stop three-fourth's of the way to third base and act as though we had a dead ball.

The coach is urgently coaxing (we won't call it yelling or screaming here) that the player needed to follow his plan and run to third base, but the player decided that he would instead follow the alternative that he had come up with. He was called out as a result.

Application: This is a part of our nature. We are planners who come up with our own alternatives. It is part of God's image in us. But when we use this part of us to come up with our alternatives to God's plan for us, we bring trouble to ourselves and others around us.

A. Alternative #1: Our own plans made with bad intentions – the brothers (vv. 18-20).

Application: The more we fail to surrender to God's plan for us, the more we will hate those who do. As much as the brothers hated Joseph because he had brought a bad report against them, and as much as they hated him because of his father's favoritism for him symbolized by this many-colored coat, what really angered the brothers about Joseph was his dreams and the commitment he demonstrated to God's plan revealed by those dreams. Follow your own plans long enough and you will despise God's plan and those who are trying to follow God's plan.

B. Alternative #2: Our own plans made with good intentions – Rueben (vv. 21-24, 29-30).

Application: This alternative is far more common than the first alternative. Most who reject God's plan for their own idea do so because to them God's plan just does not seem workable, and because they really do feel that they have a better way of achieving a desired end.

Here the desired end is the survival of Joseph (v. 22). God's plan would have been for Rueben to tell his brothers that what they were contemplating was wrong, to warn Joseph and Jacob, and to do what he could to lead his brothers to do right. Instead, Rueben had a plan that includes manipulation, deception, and playing politics. Following God's plan always involves a clear decision between right and wrong no matter the outcome. The alternative to God's plan always tries to cloud the decision by getting us to accept a little wrong so that we can have a good outcome. This is a trick of Satan, of course, because the outcome of this approach is rarely good.

C. Alternative #3: Our own plans made with better intentions than others – Judah (25-28).

Application: I think one of the lessons we learn from Judah's proposal is that he might have concluded that he was ok because his alternative to God's plan was not as bad as the alternative of his other brothers. They wanted Joseph dead; Judah would let him live. They would receive nothing for their trouble; Judah's plan would earn them the price of a slave – 20 pieces of silver. Judah was ok, because relative to his brother he was not so bad.

The apostle Paul describes the peril of this kind of thinking in 2 Cor. 10:12: "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding." God is the standard of right and wrong, not someone that we can find who is worse than we are.

Illustration: Our governor took this approach with the homosexual marriage bill that he signed into law this past week. Our law has a provision that supposedly protects you and I when we teach against homosexuality. I'm glad for that provision and the many emails and lobbying efforts that helped make it so. But Governor Lynch makes a mistake if he thinks that he has done a better thing than the other governors of New England in the passage of this bill. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords and Governor of Governors, the One who designed marriage from the beginning as involving one male and one female under the life-long covenant of holy matrimony, finds homosexuality reprehensible and an abomination. That our governor has chosen to officially sanction the practice has not escaped His notice. Our own plans made with better intentions than others are a poor substitute for God's plan.

Every alternative to the plan of God brings a consequence about which we have no alternative (vv. 31-35). The consequence of the brothers' substitution of their own plan for God's plan was something they had not planned on. Their father would not recover from his sorrow. We can expect a similar outcome when we choose our own way instead of the way of the Lord for us.

IV. Remember the promise of faithful surrender (v. 36).

Application: I am sure there were times during all of this when it just did not seem worth it to Joseph to live surrendered to God's plan. He will encounter more reasons to feel this way soon. Yet we who know the rest of the story understand the significance of what God is doing in verse 36.

Remember the promise of faithful surrender, and that promise is that some day we will be able to look back and understand that God meant all that He planned for good. That day will come. Remember, that day will come. Faithfully surrender to the Lord, and trust that it will be worth it.

Conclusion: We would be remiss to fail to note the parallels between the experiences of Joseph and a parable that the Lord spoke about himself in Matt. 21:33-46. Let's conclude by reading that passage in closing.

The Lord Jesus was the Son of a loving Father who surrendered to His Father's plan. He was rejected by those to whom he was sent, just like Joseph was. In fact, He was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, as Joseph was for 20.

He did all that so that you and I could experience forgiveness of sins and have eternal life. What if Christ had thought of an alternative that he preferred to the plan of God for Him? What if He decided that He had to have His

own way, the way you and I do so often? We would have only the hopelessness of Rueben who said in the end, “as for me, where shall I go?”

Because of the faithful surrender of Christ, we have someone we can go to this morning. We can go to God whose mighty plan is a great work of His providence. Let’s tell him today and every day, “Lord, here am I; I surrender to your plan for me today.”

“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*