

Place: Lurgan Baptist 14:3:2010

## GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD ( JOSEPH )

Reading: Genesis 42:1-28, 35-38

### 7. SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET

Several years ago a friend of ours was playing with his boys one Saturday morning, when the postman called at the door and delivered the letters. *There was one letter that stood out from the rest.* What was unusual about this letter was that there was no name or address on the front of the envelope, but there was a name and address on the back of the envelope. In fact the letter had been sent from that home, and was now returning to that home, back to the person who had sent it. *Who did send it ?* Well, it was sent by the wife of our friend. She was a corresponding with a friend in London but had forgotten to put the name and address on the front of the envelope, the result was that the letter had returned to her. ***Well, not exactly, for the letter had come back to that family home on the only day her husband would have been there to receive it.*** Of all days it had returned to the home on a Saturday morning. Without any waiting the boys of that father opened that letter, and were devastated by what they read. The father was broken hearted. *For there before him lay the account of his wife's infidelity in black and white.* No doubt she may have thought that she had gotten by with her sin, but the Bible says “ *Be sure your sin will find you out.* ” ( Num 32:23 ) Somewhere, sometime, somehow,

God always deals with the matter of sin. *The wheels of God's judgment grind slowly but they grind surely.* The brothers of Joseph may have thought they had gotten by with their sins. You see, twenty years ago these brothers had sold Joseph into the land of Egypt. They may have thought that they had got away with their sin, but God never overlooks sin. The Bible says “ *be not deceived God is not mocked for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.* ” ( Gal 6:9 ) God has a way of uncovering that which we try to cover. God has a way of exposing that which we try to keep in secret. So God is getting ready to expose the sin of these boys. Now the opening words of this chapter shift the scene from Egypt to Canaan. Twenty long years have passed since we have heard anything from the family of Jacob. *But twenty years is not too long for God to remember, and what is about to unfold is one of the most amazing scenarios of God's dealing with long past sin.* For while Joseph was being dealt with by God in Egypt, the Lord was also setting the stage for the recovery of Joseph's family.

They were His chosen people, and no pain would be spared in bringing the family and Joseph back together again. Even a world wide famine would be employed to bring a small tribe of seventy souls to Egypt where they would grow into a large nation. Of course, more importantly than getting the family back to Joseph was getting the family back to God. The Lord had to melt their hard hearts and bring to full realization the guilt and sin of their evil treatment of Joseph. ***How does he do it ?*** Well as we consider this chapter we have a classic study on the subject of conscience. What is the conscience ? A

Sunday School teacher was trying to teach her children one day what conscience was. She said to them, “ *What is that small voice that is with you all the time ?*” One little fellow raised his hand and said, “ *My transistor radio.*” Charles Wesley said, “ *I want a principle within of godly fear.*” He was talking about conscience. In the New Testament days the word “ *conscience,*” was not a strange word. It was used by the Greek people in their everyday conversation. It meant “ the pain that you feel when you do wrong.” Paul tells us that the conscience is the inner witness of God to your heart, which either accuses or excuses your actions. ( Rom 2:15 ) You see, something within the heart of every person approves when we do right and accuses when we do wrong and that something is conscience. Is this not exactly what happened Joseph’s brothers. Here they were at last facing up to their sin, the skeletons coming out of their closet. *Now did you ever notice the course of the conscience in the lives of Joseph’s ten brothers ?* You see, in these brothers we see,

### **(1) CONCEALMENT of Sin: Conscience Abandoned**

For twenty odd years these brothers had concealed their sin. They had forgotten their sin and failed to make it right. For over 20 years that sin had been buried in their heart. *Their conscience was abandoned.* I like the definition that the old Indian gave to your conscience. He said that conscience is a little three cornered thing down in your heart. When you stand still and do everything is all right. But when you start doing wrong that three cornered thing starts revolving in your heart and the corners hurt your heart. *But if you keep doing wrong, by*

*and by, the corners wear off and it doesn’t hurt anymore.* The sons of Jacob most have had a lot of corners worn off in the decades that followed their wicked action. You see, conscience is like a pencil. It does its best work when it is sharpened by the Word of God. Sometimes you hear people say, “ *Let your conscience be your guide.*” That may or may not be good advice. If your conscience has been trained by the Word of God, if you have brought your conscience under the authority of Scripture, then you might follow your conscience. But Joseph’s brothers gave no evidence that their conscience had been brought under the authority of God’s truth. They excused themselves and they silenced the voice of conscience. I mean they did that which they knew to be wrong. They sold their own brother into Egypt. Jealousy had led to hatred, they were even willing to commit the sin of murder. You see, somewhere along the way they abandoned their conscience, they refused to listen any longer to the voice of conscience. For 20 odd years they had forgotten their sin and failed to make it right.

I wonder is there something in your life that you have never made right ? Like Joseph’s brothers, did you do someone wrong ? In your jealousy and bitterness, did you say things you ought not to have said, did you do things that ought not to have been done ? Are you covering sin ? The Bible says, “ *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*” ( Prov 28:13 ) Psychiatrists will tell us that guilt affects people physically. We are finding out that guilt buried deep within the human personality can be the cause of nervousness, backaches, headaches,

heart trouble and ulcers. David discovered this. He said that when he concealed his sin he became physically old. Instead of David being a channel of spiritual blessing he was dried up. He says, “ *For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.* ” ( Ps 32:4 ) You see, when we conceal our sin,

**(a) IT IS DISPLEASING TO OUR LORD:**

Did you notice what these men said when they discovered money in their sacks as they made their way back to Canaan ? They said, “ *What is this that God hath done unto us ?* ” ( 42:28 ) You see, there was coming a point in their lives when they would realise that what they had done was not only a wrong to Joseph but a sin against God. Here was a matter not only to be made right with Joseph but too made right with God. The truth is, any sin and all sin is ultimately against God. David in beating out his confession in ( Psalm 51 ) says. “ *Against Thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.* ” ( 51:4 ) Now let me ask you a question ? Against whom did David sin ? Well, he sinned against his family, he sinned against another family, and he sinned against the kingdom over which God had given him rule. *But in the final analysis David came to realise that sin is fundamentally an act of rebellion against God.* You see, somewhere along the line these boys refused to listen any longer to the voice of their conscience. They abandoned their conscience. The Bible says you can do a lot of different things with your conscience.

Paul writing to Titus says, “ *Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled.* ” ( 1:15 ) It is possible for you by sin to defile your conscience. Sin is like distortion on a radio. If you get distortion on a radio then you’re not able to hear the sounds as clearly as you should. When we sin, that’s what sin does to our conscience. It distorts the voice of conscience. Somewhere along the line as these boys sinned their conscience became defiled. Paul also talks about a **seared conscience**. ( 1 Tim 4:2 ) The word, sear, could be translated “ *branded with a hot iron.* ” They will take cattle and put a branding iron on that animal. It will burn into the skin of the animal and it develops a hard place where there is no feeling. My .... has your conscience become seared ? Is it no longer sensitive because of sin ? You see, when we conceal our sin (a)

**(b) IT IS DISTURBING TO OUR LIFE:**

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the master writer of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries was known for his feeble sense of humour. On one occasion he pulled a joke on a dozen of his friends. He sent each of them a telegram with the words, “ ***Fly at once, all is discovered.*** ” Within 24 hours not one of the twelve remained in the country. Just one word disturbed Joseph’s brothers. Do you know what it was ? **Egypt**. One day their father heard that there was grain in Egypt and as his family faced starvation he ordered his sons to go to Egypt. Egypt, the very word triggered a floodtide of memories in those sinful minds.

“ *Why did you look one upon another, ?* ” asks Jacob. You and I know why they were looking at one another. If Jacob had said there was corn anywhere else in the world, they would have been off immediately. But Egypt. That was a spur in their conscience, that was a prick in their heart. My .... here were ten strong, rough men, and yet all you to do was to go one of them and whisper “ **Egypt,** ” and it would shake them to the very core of their being. Let me ask you a question. *Is there a word that could be spoken that would awaken your conscience ? Is there some place back in the corridor of your memory, some place where you disobeyed God ? Some place where you committed sin ?* The very mention of that place would awaken your conscience. Is there a name ? Could someone’s name be whispered to you that you have mistreated ? Is there the name of a boy a girl, a man or woman, and if that name were whispered in your ear, it would awaken your conscience because of something you do to them. Would be it the name of some business deal you got involved in 20 years ago, and you covered it over and never faced it before God ? My .... Christian .... what about the sin you are concealing ? (1)

## **(2) CONFRONTATION with Sin: Conscience Awakened**

For there came a day when the skeletons came out of the cupboard. That which had been hidden for 20 odd years was confronted and faced. You see, the Lord has His ways of bringing things out into the open. *What were they ?* Well, for one thing, there was,

## **(a) A TRIAL THAT WAS PAINFUL:**

The Bible says “ *And the famine was over all the face of the earth.* ” ( 41:56 ) This famine served purposes in the plan of God but for one thing it forced a process whereby the sin of these brothers was exposed. If there had never been a famine, there would never have been any reason for these brothers to go to Egypt, If they never had gone to Egypt their sin would have remained concealed. *But God knows how to rock the boat. God knows how to stir the nest.* Often, when we get away from the Lord, He brings difficulty and trial into our lives to get our attention. Isn’t it interesting that what initially moved them towards the Lord was a problem. Has the Lord brought difficulty into your life ? Is God rocking your boat ? Is the Lord stirring your nest ? Is it to get your attention ? Is it to draw you back into fellowship with Himself ? Did you know that nearly every miracle in the New Testament is the result of a problem ? My .... many of the miracles in our lives come as a result of us responding to the problems God sends our way. For the Lord uses problems to get the attention of His wayward children. This is often His first step. (a)

## **(b) A TIMING THAT WAS WONDERFUL:**

Can you see them as they make their journey down to Egypt ? This trip was long ( 250-300 miles ), to get there and back might have taken six weeks. I wondered as they walked along the road and saw the crews of slaves working there, did their mind turn to Joseph whom they sold into slavery ? As they move down to Egypt, is their

conscience beginning to awaken ? Finally, they bow before him. ***Isn't God's timing perfect ?*** Can you not see the providence of God in all of this ? I cannot imagine that Joseph would have had time to be present for every group that came from every land in order to buy corn to feed themselves. But God made it possible for Joseph to be there at the very time his brothers have come into the land of Egypt and are requesting corn. *I wonder in the providence of God, has God brought someone or something across your pathway to challenge you about your walk with Him ? Could it be that you have wondered at God's timing ?* That you have stood back and asked, ***“ Is this another stepping stone to bring me closer to the Lord ? ”*** It's interesting that when they met Joseph *“ they bowed themselves before him. ”* ( 42:6 ) Who are those figures bowing themselves before Egypt's governor ? They are the mockers. Who is that great personage whom they have now been brought to for grain ? He is the dreamer. My .... to the very letter God's promise was fulfilled for Joseph suddenly recognizing his own brothers *“ remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them. ”* ( 42:9 ) It must have been one of the most momentous moments of his life.

But his brothers didn't recognize him. Obviously he had physically changed between 17 and 39 and together with his Egyptian language and dress they simply didn't associate their brother with the great person before them. But one thing is certain when God promises He delivers, for recognize Joseph or not they had just bowed the knee to their brother. My .... when God says something, you can mark it down, it's going to take place. What God

promises He is well able to perform. Are you resting on His promises ? Are you coming into His presence and saying, *“ Lord do as you have said ? ”* Do you see how their conscience was awakened through (a) (b) ?

### ***(c) A TEST THAT WAS NEEDFUL:***

You see, Joseph was going to test his brothers to see what kind of characters they now possessed. *Did they still hate him ? Were they still jealous of him ? Did they have any sorrow for their sin ? Any remorse or guilt over their actions ?* The Bible says that Joseph acted as a stranger to them, and spoke roughly to them. Was he acting out of character ? Was he being vindictive ? No, rather all these actions of Joseph were simply a mirror of the dirty deed of Dothan, in which Joseph the favourite son, was sold into the fetters of slavery. ( 37:17 ) Do you see here that,

#### **1. Joseph Accused them:**

He says, *“ Ye are spies. ”* ( 42:9 ) Was this not a replay of how they had treated him at Dothan ? Do you recall how that 20 odd years before his father had sent him to *“ check up, ”* on his brothers and do you remember what they said ? *“ Behold this dreamer cometh. ”* ( 37:19 ) His brothers accused him of *“ spying, ”* on them for Jacob, so now Joseph accuses them of being spies. 1.

#### **2. Joseph Imprisoned them:**

They had thrown him into a pit, so he throws them into jail. You see, he treated them the same way they treated

him years earlier. He did to them exactly what they did to him. At times, the Lord lets us reap what we have sown. They had mistreated Joseph and now they were reaping the same. Have you never seen this happen ? *Have you not know believers who have vilified others, attacked them, run them down and over time have you not seen them getting a good dose of their own medicine ?* Sometimes when we are victims of the same treatment we have give to others, God allows it to create in us a sensitivity to our own sin. Do you think as they sat in that prison, they began to think a little bit about what they had done, and how they had treated their brother Joseph ? As they talked about it, their sin came back too vividly, their young brother struggling and screaming in a pit, his voice wailing for help as they sat down to a meal, tears streaming down his face as they sell him into slavery. “ *We are guilty,*” they said to themselves “ *and we’re getting what we deserve.*” ( 42:21 ) Do you see that conscience is beginning to awaken ? Sometimes God uses prison, that is, solitude to awaken our conscience. Things, work, business, family, keep us from thinking. ***Solitude is necessary for Christian growth.***

We must step aside from the busyness of life especially if we are clinging to unconfessed sin. At first the Lord deals gently, then He uses harsher treatment, and then He may use solitude. I wonder, has the Lord stopped in your tracks ? Has He stopped you through the loss of your job, through illness, through hospitalization, through the death of a friend ? Is God bringing something to your memory this .... ? Is the Lord awakening your conscience making you aware of some sin that is undealt with in your life ?

In these men we see (1) (2)

### **(3) CONVICTION for Sin: Conscience Alarmed:**

They are on their way home now. It’s about supper time and they decide to stop for a meal. Look if you will at ( 42:27-28 ) You see,

#### ***(a) The Brothers Reacted in a Cowardly Way:***

As an act of kindness Joseph restored to every man’s sack the money he had paid. But those brothers who had sold their brother for twenty shekels ( 37:28 ) loathed the money. You see, they saw it as blood money, and they wanted to get rid of it for it spoke of their sin. The Bible says “ *they were afraid.*” ( 42:28 ) You see, conscience makes cowards of us all. Do you remember Ahab when Elijah confronts him in the vineyard of Naboth ? He says, “ *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?*” ( 1 Kings 21:20 ) His conscience is alarmed. Do you remember Belshazzar the night the handwriting came on the wall ? The Bible says “ *his thoughts troubled him.*” ( Dan 5:6 ) His conscience is alarmed. Do you recall Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded ? When he heard about the Lord Jesus he said, “ *That John the Baptist was risen from the dead.*” ( Mk 6:14 ) His conscience is alarmed. I mean why do people go into police stations to confess murder ? Because their conscience has been awakened and alarmed.

I wonder is God speaking to you this .... ? Is the money in the sack ? Has your conscience been exposed ? What you did away back yonder, God has brought it before you

again ? There's only cure for an accusing conscience. Do you know what it is ? The blood of Christ. ( Heb 9:14 )  
Do you need to claim the cleansing of that blood now ?

***(b) The Father Reacted in a Carnal Way:***

For when Jacob learned what had happened, the old man shriveled in fear. Rather than saying, “ *Thank God, He is at work. He loves us and watches over us. In His care we are all safe,*” he responded carnally, “ *all these things are against us.*” ( 42:26 ) He claimed that everything was against him, why if only he had realized it, everything was for him. Are we not just as blind ? We look at life around us and whine all the time forgetting that, although everything that happens to us is not good, God is making sure that it works together for good. It was Derek Bingham who wrote these words.

**Just as he was having his toughest day  
And Goliath was coming with a lot to say  
And Israel was silent, come what may  
God was working it out for good**

**Just when they thought their case was lost  
They heard a knock and said, ‘ It’s a ghost,’  
But Peter arrived when they needed him most  
God was working it for good**

**Just stop today and bow your knee  
Though you’re ready to scream and ready to flee  
Lift your heart to Him and say with me  
God is working it out for good**

***(c) The Governor Reacted in a Compassionate Way:***

For the Bible says “ *And he turned himself about from them and wept.*” ( 42:24 ) A normal man would have rejoiced but this was no normal man, this was a spiritual giant. The man of the world would have said, “ *You all deserve it,*” but Joseph turned away and cried. God forgave us if we ever gloat when God vindicates us. I tell you Joseph was more moved by God's goodness to him, and his family, than he was in seeking revenge. “ *He wept.*” Do you ever weep over those who have gone astray ? My ...if Joseph's brothers could have seen his tears they would have sang, “ **Joseph loves me this I know.**” You know as we peer into the heart of Joseph we see the heart of Jesus. Do you need to be reminded of His love for you ? Have you been encountering problems, experiencing pressure, expressing doubt ? Perhaps you heard the story of the wee boy who went to bed and for some reason or another he was sharing a bed with his father. When the father got into bed, the little fellow called out in the dark, “ *Daddy can I sing ?*” The father gave consent but after a while he, “ *Son you'd better go to sleep now.*”

Silence fell in the darkness of that room, but after a while in the darkness, the wee boy said, “ *Daddy is your face turned this way ?*” My ... the Saviour's face is turned toward you. He loves you eternally, sacrificially, personally, and continually. Will you rest on that ?

