

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE PIT OF SIN

Genesis 37:12-36

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There are three points to today's message:

1. Trouble lurks where least expected.
2. Actions start with an attitude.
3. Sin has a tendency to grow.

Last week, we began the story of Joseph's life as a young adult, beginning when he was 17 years old. We do not know how much time transpired between when verse 11 ended and when verse 12 begins, but his younger brother Benjamin has been born, and his mother, Rachel, has died. However, not much time has passed because Joseph's dreams were still fresh on his brothers' minds.

TROUBLE LURKS WHERE LEAST EXPECTED

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 37:12-17

Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied. ¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" ¹⁶ He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" ¹⁷ "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"

EXPLANATION: As I mentioned last week, Jacob, also called Israel, showed favoritism to Joseph. The favoritism is demonstrated several places in scripture.

- In an earlier passage, when Jacob met his brother Esau after years of separation, Rachel and Joseph were placed in the most prominent and protected positions within the caravan.
- Last week's scriptures clearly state that Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons and mentioned the special coat that Jacob gave him.
- In this passage, Joseph is exempt from the typical shepherding duties and has instead been placed in some sort of role as an overseer.

It was typical for shepherds to move their herds around in order to find the best grazing areas. Since Shechem was about 50 miles from Hebron, Jacob would not have known how his sons and flocks were doing. So, he sent Joseph to check on them. It was probably a two-day journey to reach Hebron, and then Dothan was another 15 miles or so from there.

ILLUSTRATION: Did you ever play hide and seek as a child? I know one father whose boys begged him to play hide and seek when he got home from work. He would say, "OK. You hide, and I will count to ten and come look for you." The dad lay down on the bed and counted while the boys scurried away. When the dad reached 10, he shouted, "I'm coming! Where are you?" but then he fell asleep before he ever got off the bed, leaving the kids in hiding until their mom called them all for dinner.

Of course, the best hide and seekers hide in the least expected places. One little boy climbed into a clothes hamper and covered himself with dirty laundry. His babysitter begged for him to come out from hiding because she thought she'd really lost him.

APPLICATION: The Bible tells us that there will be trouble in this world. Trouble is a natural result of man's fall into sin. Unfortunately, trouble is a lot like hide and seek. It hides in the least likely places. I'm sure that Joseph had no idea the danger he was in as he searched for his brothers. His heart was to obey his father. Trouble was just ahead, and Joseph did not even know it.

ACTIONS START WITH AN ATTITUDE

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 37:17-28

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹ “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. ²⁰ “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.” ²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. ²² “Do not shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. ²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷ Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. ²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

EXPLANATION: This passage of scripture aptly describes the differences between the heart of Joseph and the heart of his brothers. Joseph could have easily turned around and gone home when he did not first find his brothers. He could have reported to his father that he tried, but that they had moved, and he did not know where. Instead, he persisted until he found out where they were and then followed them. Joseph was intent on doing what his father asked. He did not look for excuses to get out of the work or seek the easy way out.

Joseph’s brothers, on the other hand, saw him from a distance and automatically began talking about him, making fun of him, and thinking of ways to harm him. While Joseph’s heart was set on obedience, their hearts were set on evil. Reuben, who was the oldest, seemed to have thought better of their plan. It’s not obvious whether this was because he was more righteous or whether he was trying to gain favor with their father. Either way, his words did little to dissuade his brothers. At some point, when Reuben stepped away for a short time, they hatched a new plan.

Killing Joseph would not really benefit them. Selling him, however, might be profitable.

ILLUSTRATION: Christian author C.S. Lewis, when writing about his childhood, mentioned how he seemed to have a perpetual “look” on his face. He said he was constantly being reminded to “take that look off his face.” Years later, when he received Christ into his heart and life, he revealed how God permanently removed it. Of course, we recognize that “look” was not a look at all. Typically, when we say something like that we are referring to an attitude. A person’s attitude reveals his state of mind.

APPLICATION: Joseph had an attitude of respect for his father that resulted in obedience and even going the extra mile to do what he was asked. Joseph’s brothers, however, had an attitude of sin. They had no control over their father’s favoritism, and they were rightfully hurt. However, they harbored those hurt feelings, mulled over them, and talked about them until they developed into nasty looks and snide remarks. Because of their bad attitudes, they were just itching for a way to take action.

Let’s review:

- Trouble lurks where least expected.
- Actions start with an attitude.

SIN HAS A TENDENCY TO GROW

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 37:29-36

When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. ³⁰ He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy is not there! Where can I turn now?” ³¹ Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.” ³³ He recognized it and said, “It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.” ³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.” So his father wept for him. ³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianites

sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

EXPLANATION: It's not obvious whether the brothers immediately told Reuben what happened to Joseph, but I doubt it took long for him to get it out of them. They quickly compounded their sin by covering it up with deceit. Notice that the brothers did not technically tell their father a lie. Like Jacob many years earlier had deceived his own father, and like Jacob's father-in-law deceived him, the brothers tricked their dad.

ILLUSTRATION: Years ago, there was a scandal at a little country church. A man in the congregation cheated on his wife with the adult daughter of another couple in the church. The situation was a sad one, but the man and woman refused to admit their sin and repent. The man left his wife and small daughter for the other woman. I'm sure he would have said something to the effect that he could not help himself. He had fallen out of love with one woman and in love with another. A year or two later, the new relationship broke up, and the man—left alone in the consequences of his sin—committed suicide.

ILLUSTRATION: Here's another story, but not as terrible: Many college students live on the edge financially. I knew one guy who figured out how to float a check for days until he was paid. He would write a check for cash and as I recall he used another checking account to write a bad check and make a deposit for the check that was about to hit the first bank. He would do this back and forth until he got paid. Just hearing him explain it was mind-boggling. But then, of course, such dealings eventually catch up with a person.

ILLUSTRATION: Many of you remember East Tennessee's City and County Bank scandal with Jake and C. H. Butcher. For a long time, bank regulators felt they were running fraudulent schemes, and one day 180 of them raided the bank offices and uncovered so much fraud it was unbelievable. The bank had made loans to dead people and just kept moving the money around, just like the college guy, but on a grander level. When I was in college, one of the high rises that Jake built was empty, all 27 floors. Rumor had it he had paid the mortgage for years in advance. I read an article about the Butchers. Their financial schemes were so complicated, I couldn't understand them.

ILLUSTRATION: You may remember when I told you about living in Kentucky and making an unflattering comment about a famous politician which resulted in no one ever giving us anything else from their gardens. Until that time, church members shared lots of vegetables with us at harvest time. Well, I learned that lesson, so today I am not going to mention any politician's name but there are so many scandals and even questionable deaths surrounding this person, that even a person with a limited imagination could quickly deduce that something is not right. And in time, I believe we'll live to learn many cover-ups, and even deaths connected to situations related to this person's career. There are just too many incidents for them all to be coincidences. It'll all come out in the wash.

ILLUSTRATION: A few years ago, a famous actress illegally paid a lot of money to get her daughters admitted into a certain school and to be fake-recruited onto the school's rowing team. She and her husband did jail time after being convicted of conspiracy to commit fraud in a college bribery scandal.

APPLICATION: There, I just told you five illustrations where one sin led to another sin, or in the case of the actress – a deceptive scheme that spiraled quickly and landed her in jail. Listen to this: Joseph's brothers' sin of jealousy turned into hate, the end result of the sin of hate ended up in two ways: Joseph was sold into slavery and the lie about his death brought untold grief to their dad.

Listen to this fun story and the punch at the end: Does everyone remember slime? A family I know made homemade slime one night. They tried different recipes and their slime concoctions turned out about how they expected. They were unable to recreate the product you buy at the store. So the mom tried a recipe she found. It called for the addition of shaving cream and lotion to be added with some other ingredients. What she got was not slime, but a blob. As she kneaded it, a blob grew out of that batch and expanded out of her bowl and ran onto the table. It stuck to her hands and grew into a giant mass until she finally lobbed much of it into the trash.

APPLICATION: "Why did you tell us such a trivial story about silly putty?" I'll tell you why: Sin is a lot like that recipe. It's a dangerous business in part because of how quickly it grows.

- A man’s admiration for a friend can grow into an unhealthy attraction that can then become an illicit affair.
- A student’s laziness can turn into a desire to cheat the system which can lead to his removal from school.
- David’s brothers’ jealousy led to hatred which eventually ended in their brother’s slavery.
- Trouble lurks where least expected.
- Action starts with an attitude.
- Sin has a tendency to grow.

The Bible tells us in Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death.” The New King James Version says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

IN ADDITION: You have probably heard the old saying that there are two different types of sins: sins of commission and sins of omission – in other words, sinning because you do something you should not and sinning because you don’t do something you should. But there is another type of sin – the sin of disposition. It’s the sin of bad attitude. Joseph’s brothers committed all three sins:

- (1) They committed the sin of commission by throwing their brother in the cistern.
- (2) They committed the sin of omission by not doing what they should have and that was going back and getting him.
- (3) But before and after the event, they committed the sin of disposition because their attitude was that of hate before and that of deceit after.

CONCLUSION: Of course, not every sin leads to a physical death. Not every sinner commits suicide or murder. Adam and Eve, after they first ate the forbidden fruit, did not drop dead physically, but they immediately died spiritually. Their relationship with God the Father was broken, and they began the slow process of physical death. We are born into a world of sin, and just like the homemade shaving cream slime, our sin will grow with us. In fact, the more we dabble in it, the bigger it will get. Thank God, there is a remedy, and that is repentance and trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

While there are lots of sins that people can harbor, I've been making the appeal for you to let go of jealousy and hate. These will do nothing but tear you up from the inside out. Jealousy and hate will take over your mind and consume all your thoughts. It will take over your speech and every conversation will include your jealousy and hate. Eventually, jealousy and hate will consume you to the point that people don't want to be around you, and you won't even know why because you don't even realize it's consumed you. Jealousy and hate, like that of Joseph's brothers, will only lead you down a path of destruction.

INVITATION: God sent his son Jesus to pay the price for our sins, to redeem us and help stop the spiral of sin. Will you come forward today? The altar is open. Let me talk to you about the saving grace of Jesus Christ and how he can redeem you from your sins. If you are a believer, maybe you recognize in yourself a little bit of the bad attitude that you see in Joseph's brothers. Do not let that attitude grow into sinful actions. Ask Jesus to forgive you and to help you change your course.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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