

WHAT IS THIS THAT GOD HAS DONE

Genesis 42: 25-38 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

When Joseph dreamed his two dreams when he was seventeen years old, how many of us think he would have said, “It won’t be easy. You brothers are going to seek to kill me. But you’ll compromise, and sell me into slavery in Egypt. I will be falsely accused, end up in prison, be forgotten, and one day, as the Prime Minister of Egypt, you each will bow to me, and I will keep each of you and our family alive during seven years of famine.” What do you think? Did Joseph have any inkling of what was coming? No more than you and I have any inkling of what will happen tomorrow. Do you think Reuben, his oldest brother would have said after hearing Joseph’s dream, “One thing’s certain! Joseph is a young man of God, and if God told him his dreams, they will come true. I don’t know how it will happen, because I don’t intend to ever bow to Joseph, yet I know God never lies, so God will be changing my mind somewhere along the way.” What do you think? Hardly! Some people think the ten brothers took Joseph’s dream lightly. Really, did they? If they took his dream lightly, why did they sell him into Egypt, and why did they declare, “We will see what will become of his dreams.” They did everything they could do to stop God’s dreams to Joseph from coming true.

Reuben and his brothers had no inkling of the future. Why? The reason is—mark it down. **“Life is totally unpredictable.”** The only things we can predict for sure relate to believing that God never lies. How He will make His dreams, His will, and His promptings come true, He will do. How it will all happen is a mystery now, but God will fulfill His Word. Have you, your spouse, your children or one of your friends ever heard or seen or sensed that God gave an unlikely message to you or to them? Have you rejected that message, that dream, or that prompting of the Lord? Have you stood in its face saying, “That will happen over my dead body!” That’s dangerous to say. God can fulfill his Word without our participation. A precise example of this came in the days of Elisha when Samaria was under siege by Ben-hadad, king of Syria. Women were boiling their children to eat, the famine was so severe. Elisha told the king of Samaria, “God is going to turn things around tomorrow, and a seah (7 quarts) of fine flour will sell in Samaria, for only a shekel. The captain standing beside the king of Samaria said, “If the Lord Himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?” Elisha answered, “You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it.” Most of us remember how God defeated the Syrians that night as they heard the sound of chariots and horses, and the sound of a great army, so they fled in the twilight. Four lepers outside the gate of Samaria were dying of hunger, so they said, “Let’s go to the camp of the Syrians—if they spare our lives, we’ll live, and if they kill us, we’ll die. What they found was incredible—they found all the food we have at Smiths and Albertsons

and Walmart and all the grocery stores across Sweetwater County—and more and they started to get some and hoard it. But they said to each other, “This is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait till morning light, God will punish us.” So, they came and told the gatekeepers of famished Samaria, “The Syrians have fled and there’s enough food left behind for us all and more. The king of Samaria sent the captain whom he leaned upon, to open the gates of Samaria for the people to go get food in the abandoned Syrian camp. Do you know what happened? God saved the city of Samaria, but the captain who refused to believe the word of the Lord was trampled by the people at the gate and he died without eating a bite of that rich food. Don’t ever say—“I’ll show you, Lord,” or tell someone, “Never will God’s word to you come true, at least not through me. It will happen over my dead body.”

The ten brothers had gone for 22 years denying the Word of the Lord through Joseph. That’s a long time to say, “No way, to God.” What was God up to? It can often appear God isn’t doing a thing. **Life is totally unpredictable!** Yet, God’s Word never fails. What can happen in 22 years? As many of you know, a man and a woman can grow from childhood to adulthood, marry and start a family of their own. But what can’t happen in 22 years? God will not forget what He has spoken. The ten brothers knew, in 22 years, they could not erase their guilty consciences. Life rarely works out the way we think it will. Yet, in life’s unpredictability, God keeps on teaching those who will listen to Him and He helps those grow and mature in Him who seek to have a relationship with Jesus. I ask each of us today, “In this Joseph series, is God bringing to remembrance things you have done, or failed to do, things you have said, or failed to say? Is God reminding you of something it’s time to settle-up with Him on? Years come and go, and like the captain in Samaria, we may live and die, denying God’s word, but we can never change His Word. His Word is eternally settled in heaven. As I have studied these awesome last 14 verses of Genesis 42, I have clearly seen five lessons God wants to teach us about Himself. These are all crucial lessons we need to learn today, and not, like the Samaritan captain, wait around to prove God wrong. What are they?

GOD WANTS FAMILIES TO BE PUT BACK TOGETHER AGAIN. (I.) Go back to Genesis 42: 20. Joseph said, “Bring your youngest brother to me. So, your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” This return trip back to their father, Jacob, leaving Simeon in prison, was about bringing Joseph’s family together. The brothers told Jacob in v. 34. “The man said, “Bring your youngest brother to me.” Now you may wonder why Joseph didn’t immediately identify himself to his brothers? Why didn’t he give them the food they came to get, and be on their way? Why didn’t he say to them, “Great to see all of you, my brothers! Tell Dad hello for me. Tell him I’m not a slave anymore. I’m the prime minister of Egypt.” Beloved, believe me when I tell you, Joseph was following God’s promptings. He

was no mere Egyptian. He was a Hebrew man, the 11th of 12 brothers. His least concern was his brother's biggest concern—get the needed food and get home to Jacob. God placed in Joseph a deep desire for real reconciliation. In that desire, he is a type of Christ. During those years in prison, Joseph never once forgot his Dad or his brothers. He never disowned his Dad or his brothers. Deep in his heart, he was still a Hebrew, the son of Jacob, a part of a family he wanted to see reconciled. To send them home with food, and call it good, would be to miss the heart of God for his family. God's heart for every family is to be put back together again. Reconciliation isn't cheap. There must be a change of heart God orchestrates. Joseph sought to know if his brothers still hated him, if they would own up to their sinful treachery, if they would accept God's grace to repent, and find out if the brothers ever wanted him back in their family again. God wanted all the brothers to be put back together, and so did Joseph. Embracing them now and saying "Hello!" when they were un-repentant in their lives, would never do. Ecclesiastes 3: 5 is true, "A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing." This was such a time! What God wants in families, extended families, and in the family of God, is for us all to be put back together, fully reconciled, all sins confessed, repented of, and forgiveness granted. "Bring your youngest brother" was God's call for the family of Jacob to end their 22 years of treachery, lies, deceit, and guilty consciences. Secondly,

GOD WANTS HIS KINDNESS TO LEAD US TO REPENTANCE OF ALL THE LIES WE HAVE SPOKEN. (II.) Notice Genesis 42: 25-27. What a kind act

of Joseph. Listen! "And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them. Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed. And as one of them opened his sack, to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack." Romans 2: 4 is a promise to memorize and sing about. "Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" The consciences of the 10 brothers had to be reawakened. When the brothers told Joseph they weren't spies, in Genesis 42: 11, they were straight up liars as normal. They said, "We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies." Then in Genesis 42: 13, they added, "We, your servants, are 12 brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more." Did you know that when we mix the truth with lies, we make ourselves all liars. God through Joseph orchestrated tests to prick their consciences. Joseph wasn't dead—far from it. They weren't honest men—far from it. When our consciences are pricked, the chickens come home to roost, and the skeletons come out of the closet. We come face to face with our past. Mark Twain once rightly said, "A clear

conscience is a sure sign of a bad memory.” Often, that is right. When our moral barometer in our heart starts beeping, we had best get right with God and our brothers and parents and others in the family of God. The trouble in Egypt stripped the 10 brothers of their self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and self-deception. The harsh treatment by Joseph with 3 days in prison, was a mirror of their treatment of Joseph. Keeping Simeon in Egypt reminded them of how treachery had divided their family before. The demand for Benjamin to come tested their honesty, and reminded them they were dishonest with their father saying Joseph was dead. Now the returned money—what a kindness! It was about to force them to admit that God was up to something in their lives. After three days, they did confess their sins to each other, not knowing Joseph could understand them. God was paving the way to repentance. As Simeon was bound in their presence, they afresh must have seen and heard again what happened 22 years before as Joseph cried in vain for mercy.

God finds a way to connect our past sins with our present suffering. Mark this down. If any of us are under conviction and wish to get better, we must stop justifying ourselves and our sins, blaming others and start saying, “I have sinned.” Think about it and remember, “Without repentance, God can’t help a liar.” Once we tell the truth, God can help us. David confessed in Psalm 51: 6 that God desires “truth in the inward being, in the inward parts.” For God to change us, it has to be from the inside out.” The lies weren’t over yet. Those lies were still plaguing the heart of Jacob in Genesis 42: 36 as he told his sons, “You have bereaved me of my children; Joseph is no more (meaning, “he is dead,” Simeon is no more, (“as good as dead in an Egyptian prison”) and now you would take Benjamin.” John Ruskin once said, “A person can lie even by saying nothing, because the essence of a lie is in deception, not in words. A lie may be told in silence. A lie may be told by equivocation and double meanings. A lie may be told even by an accent or a syllable or a lie may be told by the glance of the eye, attaching a peculiar significance to a sentence. These kinds of lies are worse by many degrees than a lie plainly worded.” God desires truth in the inward parts. Jacob thought Joseph was dead, and the brothers believed their own lie. They had no clue nor idea that the prime minister of Egypt was Joseph. Will we repent of lying and all lies? Thirdly,

GOD WANTS US TO STOP BLAMING HIM AND ACCUSING HIM RATHER THAN REPENTING. (III.)

Notice Genesis 42: 28. “He said to his brothers, “My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!” At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another saying, “What is this that God has done to us?” Up to this point, these 10 brothers, guilty for 22 years, had not mentioned God. This is the first mention, and guilty consciences seldom speak well of God. These brothers knew they were skating on thin ice with their lies and Joseph set them up. Were they in trouble? No. Joseph

was being kind to them. They were getting free grain from Egypt, with all their money back. Notice it wasn't just in one brother's sack. Notice what happened when they all opened their sacks back home with their father. Verse 35 reads, "As they emptied their sacks, behold every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid." They were home free. They had the grain they needed, no charge. Yet did the brothers or their dad, Jacob, thank God for His goodness? No, they accused and blamed God. Notice the words in verse 28. What is this that God has done TO us? They had a faulty view of God. Because of their sin, they didn't trust Him. They saw God as waiting to pounce on them, waiting to punish them, and aiming at them, to gun them down from a distance.

Look at guilty Christians. Look inside yourself today. We face difficult times. How many of us conclude God has deserted us, we face sickness and pain and say God has forgotten and forsaken us. Our plans go bad and we blame God. We miss the grace of God, just like a rebellious or guilty son or daughter sees discipline meant to guide them as coming from a mean parent. They see rules in the home to protect them as encroachments on their freedom, denied requests because of dangers seen, as from mean-minded dads and moms and they think "No!" is the mark of no love for them. Beloved, when will you and I start to say in every situation, "What is God doing here to help me, because I know He loves me?" When will we remind each other, "God is in control; He loves me, He never ever makes a mistake.?" When will we recognize God's hand as an open hand of love giving and giving again to us? When will start seeing His hand of discipline as the proof of His love? When will we quit blaming and accusing God? When will we realize God, the Holy Spirit, has opened our eyes to the point where we can see clearly what happened 22 years ago is somehow connected to what is happening to us today, and say "Thanks, Lord, this is good for me." You've opened my eyes. Fourthly,

GOD WANTS US TO GIVE UP OUR FEARS SO HE CAN HEAL THE WOUNDEDNESS THAT KEEPS ANTICIPATING TRAGEDIES FROM HIM.

(IV.) Notice Genesis 42: 29-35. "When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, "The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we have never been spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.' Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, "By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land." As they emptied their sacks,

behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid." How many of us know the most common command in the Bible? "Fear not!" "Be not afraid!" Fear is what keeps us from moving forward, from dreaming and risking and daring for God, from trusting God in bold, daring ways. When we are afraid, we limit the work of God and His grace. What happened because of Jacob's fear along with his son's fear? His family was back in need, as they in fear delayed returning to Egypt for more supplies. They prolonged the imprisonment of Simeon back in Egypt. They delayed what God was planning—a coming reunion with Joseph. In our fears, we can't see the forest for the trees. We miss God's marvelous all-sufficiency in our times of sorrow and heartache. This week I read of a family whose house caught on fire. The parents ran out the door, only to realize their little girl was stuck in her room. The daughter opened the 2nd story window, screaming, "Daddy, help me.!" Her father said, "Jump to me. I will catch you." She screamed, "Daddy, I can't see you." Her daddy yelled back, "It's okay, sweetheart. You can't see me, but I can see you clearly. Jump into my arms. My arms are strong." She jumped. He caught her. Are you afraid today, like Jacob was? God's arms are open. He calls us to faith, not fear. He calls, "Jump into life with me. Trust me. I won't drop you. 5thly,

GOD WANTS US TO QUIT SAYING EVERYTHING IS AGAINST US. (V.)

Notice Genesis 42: 36-38. And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. **All this has come against me.**" Then Reuben said to his father, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol." In our fears, we develop this mentality that all is against us. We dig in our heels. We conclude like Jacob that God has struck us with yet one more tragedy rather than believe He has placed us on the verge and threshold of the most moving reunion in our life. Why is everything against us? Like Jacob, we have our reasons, our wounds and our scars. We've lost our beloved Rachel in the birth of our 12th son. Devastated, a man rapes our only daughter, Dinah. We believe our treasured, beloved son Joseph is dead. So, we build walls of protection. We isolate ourselves and hide. We will not be hurt again. Inside our walls, we shut out God's healing grace. Oh, how wrong Jacob was! How wrong we are when we conclude all is against us. We have God's promise in Hebrews 13: 5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." We have God's promise in Romans 8: 31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" When we say what Jacob said, we don't know the end from the beginning. All these things were really for him. Joseph was not dead. He was not slain. He was prime minister in Egypt. God teach us these 5 lessons. Amen.