



Episode 105: Gen. 37:12-36

Hi Friends! Welcome to Moments to Ponder – a podcast designed to help you journey through God’s Word, gain fresh perspectives, and find meaningful takeaways to ponder throughout the week. I’m Betsy Marvin, and this is episode 105.

(music fades as narration begins)

As we continue with Joseph’s story, let’s review a bit from the last episode. Joseph has a doting, aging father, he’s a bit prideful, and he’s a teenager with 10 older brothers who don’t like him at all. Oh, and he’s had a couple dreams that imply he will rule over his family someday. He and his family live in the area of Hebron where they are shepherders and farmers.

We’re starting at vs. 12 in chap. 37.

*Soon after this, Joseph’s brothers went to pasture their father’s flocks at Shechem. <sup>13</sup> When they had been gone for some time, Jacob said to Joseph, “Your brothers are pasturing the sheep at Shechem. Get ready, and I will send you to them.”*

*“I’m ready to go,” Joseph replied.*

*<sup>14</sup> “Go and see how your brothers and the flocks are getting along,” Jacob said. “Then come back and bring me a report.” So Jacob sent him on his way, and Joseph traveled to Shechem from their home in the valley of Hebron.*

*<sup>15</sup> When he arrived there, a man from the area noticed him wandering around the countryside. “What are you looking for?” he asked.*

*<sup>16</sup> “I’m looking for my brothers,” Joseph replied. “Do you know where they are pasturing their sheep?”*

*<sup>17</sup> “Yes,” the man told him. “They have moved on from here, but I heard them say, ‘Let’s go on to Dothan.’” So Joseph followed his brothers to Dothan and found them there.*

This sets the stage for what will become a sharp turn in Joseph’s story. Jacob’s sons are off herding the sheep, and Jacob hears that they are near Shechem. In an earlier chapter of Genesis, we learn of an incident between the brothers and the people of this town that involves deceit and murder which would lead Jacob to believe his sons could be in danger and he’s worried about them. So, he sends Joseph to check on them.

Young Joseph, wearing his amazing coat, travels at least 4 days walk, or almost 50 miles, to do an overseers job and check on the workers. Yet, he discovers from a man that happens to see him looking around and just happens to know where they went - that his brothers have moved on to a place called Dothan, another 10-15 miles north of Shechem – another days walk. So, after 5-6 days of walking, Joseph finally comes upon his brothers.

*<sup>8</sup> When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. <sup>19</sup> "Here comes the dreamer!" they said. <sup>20</sup> "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, 'A wild animal has eaten him.' Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"*

*<sup>21</sup> But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said. <sup>22</sup> "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.*

From what we learned in the first episode of this series, Joseph's brothers have jealousy issues and as he arrives on the scene in Dothan, there are years that have built into this moment and talk of murder. To understand this more, lets dive into the difference between envy and jealousy.

Envy is that feeling of – *Oh, I want that.* It's a two-person thing usually triggered by comparison. Someone else has something you want, a job, a possession, a relationship and you wish you had it too.

But Jealousy is more that feeling of – *Give it back! It's mine.* It's described at a three-person thing which is where I think we get a deeper understanding of the brothers. Jealousy is stoked when you feel the threat of losing someone or something you have to another person. It's a mix of anxiety and betrayal with a good dose of sadness and anger. It brings a feeling of being 'less than' and it appears when there is the presence of a rival or threat. And, although jealousy can be mild, when it builds into something deeper it brings with it hostility and bitterness.

As we think of the brothers and their deep feelings of jealousy, we can see that it's a three person thing - this isn't just about Joseph - it's really about their father. Before Joseph was born, they were the focus of Jacob's love and pride. To have sons in that culture was to have legacy and wealth and to have 10 would have been amazing. Yet, when Joseph is born, it all changes. Their father has shifted his affection, which would have been more strongly felt in the oldest sons, especially as he placed their young brother over them with a coat that spoke of privilege and honor. Joseph was their target, but it's their father that is the source of anger and betrayal.

When Joseph arrives wearing his colorful coat, his presence reminds them of the threat they feel and their deep bitterness moves them to take action. This doesn't excuse them in any way, but it does make this whole thing a bit more – well- understandable or at least make sense in

some way. Their quick jump to 'let's kill him' wasn't actually so quick but was born of years of feeling 'less than', betrayal, and loss.

Rueben does speak up, but not in the way an oldest brother should. He could have said, stop, this is wrong...we get the impression that he wanted to be merciful but also not go against the brothers completely, so he plots to deceive them by coming back to save Joseph. It's so twisted.

*<sup>23</sup> So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. <sup>24</sup> Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. <sup>25</sup> Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of gum, balm, and aromatic resin from Gilead down to Egypt.*

*<sup>26</sup> Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother? We'd have to cover up the crime. <sup>27</sup> Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed. <sup>28</sup> So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.*

They could hear Joseph calling out to them, I'm sure he was pleading with them – but – they just get ready for dinner and as they sit down – they see a caravan. Thank goodness for Judah, who speaks some sense into the rest. They sell him to descendants of Ishmael (their father's great uncle) – for 20 pieces of silver which was the going rate at that time.

*<sup>29</sup> Sometime later, Reuben returned to get Joseph out of the cistern. Ok, where did he go? Why would he leave at a time like that? Anyway...*

*When he discovered that Joseph was missing, he tore his clothes in grief. <sup>30</sup> Then he went back to his brothers and lamented, "The boy is gone! What will I do now?"*

Notice, it's not about Joseph, it's about himself...Joseph may have been headed for slavery but Rueben is more concerned with how this will affect him.

*<sup>31</sup> Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. <sup>32</sup> They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: "Look at what we found. Doesn't this robe belong to your son?"*

"We found this", really? This confirms the real target of their hurt and hatred, their father. They knew how much their father loved Joseph and how much this would hurt him, so they send a message using the thing that represented all their hurt and jealousy - the coat. They knew it would devastate him, they wanted it to, jealousy seeks revenge and this is theirs.

The sons trick their father much like Jacob had tricked his own – Jacob had used goat hair to deceive his father, Isaac, and now his sons are using goat's blood to deceive him. Jacob was tricked out of getting his favorite wife and now the sons are tricking him out of Joseph – his favorite son. In many ways, Jacob is reaping what he sowed many years ago.

*<sup>33</sup> Their father recognized it immediately. "Yes," he said, "it is my son's robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!" <sup>34</sup> Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. <sup>35</sup> His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "I will go to my grave mourning for my son," he would say, and then he would weep.*

*<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.*

Joseph's story is one that helps us see the Bible as one big story. The Old Testament pointing toward Jesus, the Gospels focused on Jesus, and then the rest of the New Testament pointing back to Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit. There is so much in this story that points to Jesus.

First, deceit. It was deceit that put this all into motion for Joseph and deceit, all the way back to the Garden of Eden put things in motion for Jesus. And just as Joseph left Hebron - which means fellowship - Jesus left the fellowship of his home with his father to go to where his father sent him.

Both go to Egypt, Jesus for a short time as a young child and Joseph will be there for the rest of his life.

Joseph was stripped and cursed, Jesus would be stripped of everything by those that were filled with jealousy and cursed with hatred before he was crucified.

Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver, Jesus would be sold for 30 both sold by a brother with the understanding of what may come.

What can we take away from these verses today?

First, do you struggle with jealousy? That feeling of - that's mine, give it back! Jealousy is a deceiving feeling that goes back all the way to Eve. Satan's jealousy led to the deceiving of Eve, and this kind of sin has been an issue ever since. It stems from feeling 'less than', from insecurity and fear. Yet, in Jesus we know that none of us are less than, we are all his priceless children fully gifted and loved. When those feelings of jealousy come, face them for what they are – remember who you are – and, have the conversations that may be needed in order to clear the air or speak truth into the situation.

What if the boys had talked with Jacob about how they felt? I wonder if that would that have changed anything?

The other take away is this - When we look at Joseph's life at this moment, we see a young teenager, dirty, thirsty, in torn clothes, tied up or chained, being led far from a home where he was safe and loved. He is going to a place where he won't know the language and will be seen as a slave to be bought and sold. It looks pretty bleak and hopeless for him, and it will get worse.

Yet, God is at work. So often, especially when life seems to gang up on us, we can get to feeling hopeless and wonder where God is. Have you ever found yourself asking, where is God? Doesn't he know what's happening to me?

God has not forgotten Joseph, He is with him in it all working out his purposes. This is such a mystery to those of us that like reasons for all things, we want to make sense of why things happen, but we do not have God's eternal perspective. Jesus told us in John 16 that in this world we would have trouble, it's no surprise that we do – but he also says, I am with you, even to the end of the age.

Yes, Joseph's on his way to Egypt, he would have walked all the way there in ropes or chains making his hands and feet raw, but, God was with him. Egypt at that time was thriving, the pyramids would have already looked old and the Sphinx was already carved. It was a wealthy place with massive natural resources filled with educated people living in a long season of peace. Joseph would learn so much in the years to come.

Even though it looks hopeless for Joseph as he enters Egypt, God is not done.

He's not done for you either.

He is with you in every circumstance, in every season, loving you with all he is.

Amen.