

are part of a greater story, and even though it may seem that God at times tears our story into shreds, nevertheless we know that those broken and torn shreds can be woven into his infinitely greater story, for as Joseph said, "God did send me to preserve life"

All of this makes me think of that line from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallow and in misery."

Shakespeare of course was thinking of the political tide in the affairs of men. But take the lines and let them remain in your thoughts with these overtones. There is a tide - a divine tide in the affairs of men, the tide of God's great purpose which we may not fully see or fully grasp, but there is a divine tide which leads on to fortune. We can take it or we can leave it, but if we leave it and omit it, we shall as Shakespeare said, "Live the voyage of life in the shallow and in misery"

LET US PRAY:

God, Our Father, open our eyes to the vast sweep of thy plan and thy purpose for us and for the world. Save us from disappoint when our own little plans come to nothing. Help us to yield our purposes to Thine that we may go through life borne on the tide of thy everlasting love. Amen

was saying it lightly.

On the other hand, if you take it literally, it means that the brothers were not responsible for sending Joseph, but that God was. And this is not entirely satisfactory for it makes the brothers irresponsible for this evil crime, and it tends to make God immoral. It puts the responsibility upon God, and this is not right.

What Joseph was attempting to say was something like this. That over and above our own little plots and plans ~~the~~ is a greater plan, and that greater plan can use our own little plans to bring its great purpose to pass. The great plan was the preservation of life, and it could use to advantage even the little plot of the brothers to destroy life.

#### RELATING IT TO OUR LIVES

Now as we come to the close of this story, suppose we attempt to be practical and relate this thought to our own lives. I think that in connection with this thought there are two experiences that all of us have. The first is that of making plans and seeing them fulfilled. For instance, we plan a trip and the trip comes to pass, and our plans are fulfilled. Or for instance, a person plans a particular career, and with the passing of the years, that career gradually unfolds and develops and the plan is fulfilled. That's just one experience we all have. The other experience is that of making plans and seeing them completely overruled. It's the old idea of "the best laid schemes of mice and men go oft awry". A man plans to find a new route to the Orient, and he discovers a new continent. Another man plans to leave the world safe for democracy and he leaves it ripe for another war. A man plans to be a teacher, and he ends up becoming one of America's great preachers. A man plans to become a world emperor, and he ends up hanging upside down on the gallows in a public square. A group of men plan to nail a trouble maker to the cross, and soon they find him alive everywhere. The first experience of course makes you aware of your own efforts, and your own abilities and capacities to attain a certain goal. The second experience makes you aware of the fact that there is a greater plan built into the structure of our universe, of which our smaller plan is but a part. How do you bring the two together.

I suppose the point is to be able to hold both of these experiences together like the reins of a team of horses, never letting one outrun the other. Never try to knit them together in a little proposition. Philosophically, it's the old dilemma of determinism versus free-will, and this dilemma can never be solved in any logical fashion. But what you can do, I think, is to hold both experiences as two sides of one great truth. If you let your own plans go, and think only of the great over all plan of God, you'll soon lose your initiative, and end up with nothing. If on the other hand, you think only of your own little plans and lose the awareness of the universal sweep of God's great plan, your life will become a little ship tossed around on the waves of history. And every time your plan comes to naught, you'll experience frustration and disappointment.

#### CLOSING SECTION

In all of this, of course, we're moving in deep waters. This was not meant to be a sermon on freedom of the will versus determinism, but rather a sermon on the story of Joseph, and so getting back to Joseph, we find that he is happily reunited with his family, and as the story ends, we somehow have the feeling that our own little stories, important as they may seem to us,

Now when a cat catches a mouse, he often plays with it before killing it, taking great delight in letting it think that it's going to escape. I suppose Joseph's action is something like a cat's only in reverse. I think Joseph had every intention of letting his brothers go, but before he did, he wanted them to feel like criminals, and he wanted them to feel uncomfortable. We wonder why he acted this way. Why didn't he just come out and tell his brothers who he was.

I suppose the obvious reason why he did this was the human reason. He wanted to act big, but he just couldn't resist being small. It's an inclination that all of us have. We want to be big. We want to do the generous thing, but sometimes that little streak of twisted meanness that's in the center of all of us just creeps to the surface, and we can't be big until we've made the person feel like a little worm. Not always of course, for as we grow and mature, we sometimes train this element of our nature, and keep it under control. Sometimes you even run across a person who has managed to eliminate it completely from his personality, and mind you when you do, isn't it a great joy. Isn't it refreshing when you find such a person! But most of us, I'm sure would have done what Joseph did. We would have made those brothers scurm. We would have cracked the whip and made them feel uncomfortable.

I suppose another flattering reason to Joseph was that he wanted to see whether or not his brothers had grown up at all. Had they matured in their affection for their father, and for each other? And when they arrived back at his palace, he soon had the answer to his question. His answer came in some words spoken by Judah one of the brothers. The passage is found in the 44th chapter of Genesis, and forms one of the great peaks in the Old Testament. I shall read it to you for it is too long, but in essence this is what Judah said to Joseph:

"You know we told you when we first came here that we had a younger brother, and how much our father thought of him, and how reluctant he was to let him come with us; but because we needed food, and because you said we could not have any unless we brought him, our father let him home. His life is bound up in this lad's life. If anything should happen to him, it will kill our father. Therefore I pray you, let me remain instead of the boy Benjamin, and send him back with his brothers."

This was all Joseph wanted to hear. As soon as he heard this, he dismissed all of his servants, and took his brothers to one side and said, "Come close to me for I am Joseph your brother. I am that brash unbearable young boy you sold into slavery. Come close to me. Tell me how is my father. Is he well." And that Joseph went on to say something very worth while thinking about. Something I've often thought a great deal about and I'm sure something that some of you have thought about. It's something I've often tried to talk to you about, but it's hard to put into words, for it's something that's almost beyond words. But this is what Joseph said: "Be not grieved, and be not angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither. It was God who sent me before you to preserve life." (Repeat) Now what did Joseph mean.

First of all, if you take it lightly, Joseph was just saying it to set his brothers at ease, to relieve their embarrassment. To help them overcome their astonishment. Forget it, fellows. Don't be upset by it. God sent me before you to preserve life. But I don't think Joseph

that there were two, while some of the others insisted that there was only one. Actually there are none. Yes, we often look at things without seeing anything at all. But what I started out to say before I drifted into this tangent was that the brothers failed to recognize Joseph, and it isn't surprising, I suppose, when you consider that he was the last person they expected to see in that position.

I suppose if we were hearing this story for the very first time that we'd be in a state of suspense until we learned how Joseph treated his brothers. Twenty years before he had been at their mercy and they hadn't treated him very well. We know what they did. They threw him into a pit and were going to leave him for dead, and then they decided to sell him into a slavery. But now the tables were turned. It was within Joseph's power to deny their request and to send them back to Canaan with empty bags, and to let them starve. As I was preparing this part of the sermon, I got to wonder how we would have acted, if we had been in Joseph's shoes. What would you have done? To put it into more contemporary terms, suppose that when you were younger, someone had gotten you out of a job, and then with the passing of years, you had risen to a position of authority, and by coincidence, that same person came around to you asking for a job. What would you have done? Or suppose for a moment that someone in a previous occasion embarrassed you or offended you, and that on a later occasion, you had the opportunity to make him appear ridiculous, what would you do? It's something to think about.

But getting back to Joseph, we find that Joseph treated his brothers like brothers, but before he did he made them squirm a little. The brothers were completely honest and frank with Joseph and told him who they were, and how their father Jacob still lived at home in Canaan, and how they had a younger brother who was home with him, and how they had also had a brother Joseph who was no longer living. But Joseph insisted they were spies who had come to Egypt to look over the land and plot its downfall, and he had them throw into prison. But after three days he released them from prison, gave them the grain they asked for and sent them back to Canaan with the ultimatum never to return to Egypt for more grain without bringing their young brother Benjamin along with them.

The famine continued, and things instead of getting better in Canaan stayed just about the same. The food supply began to run low, and Jacob suggested that the brothers return to Egypt for more grain. They pointed out to him that actually there was no point in returning for more grain unless they took their young brother Benjamin along with them. Jacob at first refused. He loved Benjamin dearly, and didn't want to risk any chance of losing him, and besides in those days the trip to ~~Canaan~~ Egypt from Canaan was dangerous. But finally when things really became critical, Jacob gave in and let Benjamin accompany the brothers down to Egypt. Joseph met them again and was glad to see them and gave a great dinner for them. He gave them the grain they requested, and sent them back home. Before he did, however, unknown to the brothers, he placed his own silver cup in the sack of grain belonging to Benjamin. Soon after they departed, Joseph sent one of his own hired servants to go after them. When he caught up with them he told them that his master's cup had disappeared and asked them to open their sacks of grain. Sure enough, there on the top of Benjamin's sack was Joseph's silver cup. It appeared that Benjamin was guilty. He must return to Egypt and become Joseph's slave. There was nothing for them to do but to return, and they returned to Egypt, nervous, and in a desperate and anxious state of mind.

## FINAL COPY: "JOSEPH - HOME, AWAY FROM HOME"

**INTRODUCTION** Last Sunday morning we continued the Story of Joseph which we had begun together on the preceding Sunday, and we saw the extraordinary way in which Joseph rose to power. At the age of seventeen sold as a slave to an Egyptian whose name was Potiphar; at the age of thirty, appointed the Prime Minister of Egypt. Today we come to the close of this old story, and the final chapter is entitled, "Joseph - Home, Away From Home". It is the story of the family reunion.

**THE FAMINE** The story at this point hinges on the fact that there was a severe famine in the land. The famine was not just a local experience, in fact, it was quite widespread. It had virtually paralyzed life in the entire Mediterranean basin. And it did not last just a brief temporary time. It lasted something like seven years. And Egypt, as the major power of the world, was not spared, but she was prepared for it and this because of Joseph's shrewd executive ability. You'dl recall that Pharoah appointed Joseph food administrator of the entire land, and in that capacity he took a percentage of the grain each year there was a surplus before the famine descended, and stored it in barns so that there would be enough food when the famine came. The result was that people everywhere were turning to Egypt for help. And among those who turned to Egypt for help was Joseph's own family living in the land of Canaan, to the north and east of Egypt. Joseph's own father, Jacob, had his sons prepare for a trip to Egypt with the order to purchase grain.

I suppose we might just pasue at this point in the story and reflect briefly upon the fact that diaster and tragedy almost always bring people together. It's one of the mysteries of life. For instance tragedy suddenly hits a family that has been slowly and gradually drifting apart over the years. It may stun them at first, but almost always it brings them together again and makes them a solid family unit. It happens this way with the people of a country too. We saw it happen in this country following Pearl Harbor. We saw it happen in England in the days following the experience of Dunkirk. Tragedy and disaster almost always bring people together, and it was the fact of the famine that eventually brought the family of Jacob together again.

The scene is intensely dramatic. I shall not attempt to be dramatic for no one can match the simple grandeur of the story as it is told in the book of Genesis. The brothers arrive in the presence of Joseph, and make their request for grain. They do not recognize Joseph, for after all it had been twenty years since they had gotten rid of him. And Joseph had changed in physical appearance, as well as chaning in his station of life. From slavery to sovereignty. It's not surprising that they didn't recognize him especially when you consider that he was practically the last person on the face of the earth that they expected to see in that position. This leads me to comment that sometimes you and I fail to see the things that are passing right before our eyes. Sometimes we see only the things that we want to see. All of us have our blind spots. It reminds me of a question that was asked on a quiz program several years ago. Several contestants were asked this question: "How many Arabs, one or two, are standing next to the camel on the wrapper of a package of Camel cigarettes?" The funny thing is that I've known men and women who have smoked camels for years and have looked at that wrapper thousands of times who maintained

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Sometimes you and I fail to see the things that are passing right before our very eyes. Sometimes we see only the things we want to see. All of us have our blind spots. The brothers failed to recognize Joseph. It's not surprising, ~~when you consider that he was the last person they expected to see in this position.~~

I suppose if we were hearing this story for the first time that we'd be in a state of suspense until we learned how Joseph treated his brothers. Twenty

years before he had been at their mercy and they hadn't treated him very well. We know what they did. They threw him into a pit and were going to leave him for dead, and then they decided to sell him into slavery. But now the tables were turned. It was within Joseph's power to deny their request and to send them back to Canaan with empty bags, presumably to let them starve.

I wonder...how would we have acted if we had been in Joseph's shoes? What would you have done? To put it into more contemporary terms, suppose that when you were younger, someone had gotten you out of a job, and then with the passing of the years, you had risen to a position of a uthority, and by coincidence, that same person came around to you asking for a job. What would you have done? Or suppose for a moment that someone on a previous occasion embarrassed you or offended you, and then later on, you had the opportunity to make him appear ridiculous, what would you do? All of us are tempted to seek our revenge.

#### BACK TO JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

But getting back to Joseph, we find that Joseph treated his brothers like brothers, but before he did he made them squirm a little. The brothers were completely honest and frank with Joseph and told him who they were and how their father Jacob still lived at home in Canaan, and how they had a younger brother who was home with him, and how they also had had a brother Joseph who was no longer living. But Joseph insisted they were spies who had come to Egypt to look over the land and plot its downfall, and he had them throw into prison. But after three days, he released them from prison, gave them the grain they asked for and sent them back to Canaan with the ultimatum never to return to Egypt for more grain without bringing their young brother, Benjamin, along with them.

The famine continued, and things instead of getting better in Canaan stayed just about the same. The food supply began to run low, and Jacob suggested that the brothers return to Egypt for more grain. They pointed out to him that actually there was no point in returning for more grain unless they took their young brother, Benjamin, along with them. Jacob at first refused. He loved Benjamin dearly, and didn't want to risk any chance of losing him, and besides in those days the trip to Egypt from Canaan was dangerous.

But finally when things really became critical, Jacob gave in and let Benjamin accompany the brothers. Joseph met them again and was glad to see them and gave a great dinner for them. He gave them grain, the grain they requested and then sent them back home. Before he did, however, unknown to the brothers, he placed his own silver cup in the sack of grain belonging to Benjamin. Soon after they departed, Joseph sent one of his own hired servants to go after them. When he caught up with them, he told them that his master's silver cup had disappeared and asked them to open their sacks of grain. Sure enough - there on the top of Benjamin's sack was the cup belonging to Joseph. It appeared that Benjamin was guilty. He must return to Egypt and become Joseph's slave. There was nothing for them to do but to return and they returned to Egypt - nervous - and in a desparate and anxious state of mind.

Now when a cat catches a mouse, he often plays with it before killing it, taking great delight in letting it think that it's going to escape. I suppose Joseph's action is something like a cat's only in reverse. I think Joseph had every intention of letting his brothers go, but before he did, he wanted them to feel a bit of discomfort, like criminals, and he succeeded. We wonder why he acted this way. Why didn't he just come out and tell his brothers who he was.

I suppose the obvious reason why he did this was the human reason. He wanted to be big, but he just couldn't resist being small. It's an inclination all of us have. We want to be big. We want to do the generous thing, but sometimes that little streak of twisted meanness breaks through to the surface and we can't be big until we've made the person feel like a worm. Not always, of course, for as we grow and mature, we sometimes train this side of our nature and keep it under control. Sometimes you find a person who has managed to eliminate it completely from his personality and when you do, what a joy! Most of us would have probably acted the way Joseph did. Make them squirm a little.

ANOTHER REASON A more flattering reason to Joseph for his behavior might be that he wanted to see whether or not his brothers had grown up at all. Had they matured in their affection for their father, and for each other? And when they arrived back at his palace, he soon had the answer to his question. His answer came in some words spoken by Judah, one of the brothers. The passage is found in Genesis 44 and it forms one of the great peaks in the Old Testament. In essence, this is what Judah said to Joseph:

"You know how we told you when we first came here that we had a younger brother, and how much our father thought of him, and how reluctant he was to let him come with us; but because we needed food, and because you said we could not have any unless we brought him, our father let him come. His life is bound up in this lad's life. If anything should happen to him, it will kill our father. Therefore, I pray you, let me remain instead of the boy, Benjamin, and send him back with his brothers.

I suppose this was all Joseph wanted to hear. As soon as he heard this, he dismissed all of his servants and took his brothers to one side and said, "Come close to me for I am your brother, Joseph. I am that brash, unbearable young boy you sold into slavery many years ago. Come close to me. Tell me how my father is. Is he well?"

And then Joseph went on to say something I've often thought a great deal about and perhaps you have, too. It's something I've often tried to put into words in a sermon, but it's hard to put into words, for it's something that's almost beyond words. But this is what Joseph said,

"Be not grieved, and be not angry with yourselves that ye sold me thither. It was God who sent me before you to preserve life".

WHAT DID JOSEPH MEAN BY THIS What did Joseph mean by this. First of all, if you take it lightly, Joseph was saying it to set his brothers at ease - to relieve their embarrassment. To help them overcome their astonishment. Forget it, brothers. Don't be upset by it. God sent me before you to preserve life. But I don't think he was suggesting it simply to relieve a social and awkward moment. Greater depth.

On the other hand, if you take it literally, it means that the brothers were not responsible for sending Joseph, but that God was. And this is not entirely satisfactory for it makes the brothers irresponsible for this evil crime, and it tends to make God immoral.



What Joseph was attempting to say was something like this. Over and above our own little plots and plans is a greater plan and that greater plan can use our own little plans to bring its great purpose to pass. The great plan was the preservation of life, and it could use to advantage even the little plot of the brothers to destroy life. "It was God who sent me before you to preserve life..."

#### RELATING IT TO OUR LIVES

Now we come to the closing moments of the story of Joseph and as we do, suppose we attempt to be practical and relate this thought to our own lives.

It suggests two experiences that all of us have. The first is that of making plans and seeing them fulfilled. For instance, we plan a trip and the trip comes to pass and our plans are fulfilled. Or a person plans a particular career and with the passing of the years that career gradually unfolds and develops and the plan is fulfilled. That's one side of it. Human effort. Right?

The other experience we have is that of making plans and seeing them completely over-ruled. It's the old idea of "the best laid schemes of mice and men go often awry". A man plans to find a new route to the Orient and he discovers a new continent. Another man plans to leave the world safe for democracy and he leaves it ripe for another war. A man plans to become a world Emperor, and he ends up hanging upside down on the gallows in a public square. A group of men plan to nail a trouble maker to a Cross and soon they find Him alive everywhere.

The first experience makes you aware of your own efforts, and your own abilities, and capacities to achieve a certain goal. The second experience makes you aware of the fact that there is a greater plan built into the structure of the universe, of which our smaller plan is but a part.

#### HOW DO YOU BRING THEM TOGETHER

How do you bring these two experiences together. I suppose it's like trying to hold both experiences together like the reins of a team of horses - never letting one outrun the other. We should avoid trying to knit them together in a little proposition. Philosophically, it's the old dilemma of determinism versus free-will. We need to hold both experiences as two sides of one great truth. If you let your own plans go and think only of the great over-all plan of God, you will soon end up losing your initiative and end up with nothing. On the other hand, if you think only of your own little plan and lose the awareness of the universal sweep of God's great plan, your life will become a little ship tossed around on the waves of history. And every time your plan comes to naught, you'll experience frustration and disappointment.

In all of this we're moving in deep waters. This was not meant to be a talk on determinism versus freewill, but rather a sermon on the story of Joseph and so getting back to Joseph, we find that he is happily reunited with his family and as the story ends, we somehow have the feeling that our own little stories, important as they may seem to us, are a part of a greater story. Even though it may seem that God at times tears our story into shreds, nevertheless we know that those broken and torn shreds can be woven into his greater story, as Joseph put it, "God did send me to preserve life". (and this is a matter of faith)

Remember that line from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallow and in misery"

Shakespeare, of course, was thinking of the political tide in the affairs of men. But, take those lines and let them make their way into your thoughts with these overtones.

There is a tide - a "divine tide" in the affairs of people, the tide of God's great purpose which we may not fully see or fully grasp, but there is a divine tide which leads on to fortune.

We can take it or we can leave it, but if we leave it and omit it, we shall, as Shakespeare put it, "live the voyage of our life in the shallow and misery".

PRAYER God, our Father, open our eyes to the vast sweep of thy plan and thy purpose for us and our world. Save us from disappointment when our own little plans come to nothing. Help us to yield our purposes to Thine that we may go through life borne on the tide of thy everlasting love. Amen

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# Pharaoh's dream revisited

Tel Aviv, Israel

Space-age technology has thrown an interesting light on the Biblical story about Joseph interpreting the Pharaoh's dream and forecasting seven "fat" years for Egypt, followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph Ortman, professor of environmental studies at Tel Aviv University, believes deserts are not dry because no rain falls on them. No rain falls on them because they are dry, he says.

His study of satellite pictures of the Middle East show that in areas where large herds are grazing, the vegetation naturally becomes more sparse.

These areas, which show up whiter on photographs from space, tend to reflect the sun's rays more than covered areas. The air becomes hot, dry, and still — and less rain falls. When the size of the herds of cattle and other animals is reduced, the vegetation grows strongly again, fewer solar rays are reflected, and more rain falls.

So, the seven lean years could have been caused by an increase in the size of the cattle herds during the seven years of prosperity.

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Science  
Monitor

ule picture: higher prices but  
orkers filling them.

ices are likely to rise overall  
this year, reflecting what ex-  
nderlying" inflation rate built  
, due to the cost of labor and

will climb higher than 6 per-  
ough new jobs to absorb the  
U.S. labor force and put back  
ple now jobless.

ent, which peaked at 8.9 per-  
5, and now stands at 7.5 per-  
to hover around 7 percent at  
ar.

product (GNP), or total out-  
services, rose 4.4 percent in  
er of the year, compared to  
first three months. Inflation,  
, climbed at a 5 percent an-

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