

25 February 2024 Sunday 9.00 am and 10.30 am

# YOU SOLD ME BUT GOD SENT ME – THE MYSTERY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Sermon preached by The Revd Dr Tony Martin delivered at Cromwell Presbyterian Church



**READINGS:**

## **Genesis 45:3-11**

**3 Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.**

**4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.**

**8 “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. 9 Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. 10 You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. 11 I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’**

## **Luke 6:27-38**

### Love for Enemies

**27 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If**

**someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

**32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

Judging Others

**37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.  
38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”**

## **SENTENCE FOR THE DAY**

**“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.. Luke 6:27-28**

## **INTRODUCTION**

I wonder if you can recall the last sermon that you heard preached, either here or elsewhere? What passage of Scripture was it based on? Was it an expositional sermon or topical? Short or long?

Did it have spiritual power to convict, convince and comfort. Or was it muddled, lightweight, and forgettable? What was its main point, or perhaps did it have 3 main points?

Or can you recall a particular sermon that was preached in your lifetime, that made a real impact on you?

What can you recall from that message ... the Scripture ... the main point ... who preached it ... and on what occasion?

You know, a lot of hard work, including prayer and spiritual discernment, goes into preparing a sermon ... so one hopes sermons are helpful and memorable.

Well, I was greatly heartened one Sunday morning when I returned to a garrison church in England where I had previously been chaplain ... and a member of the congregation ... came up to me after the service ... and pointed at me ... and

said “Everything will be alright mate, Romans 8:28” ... which was the title and main point of a sermon that I had preached 13 years previously.

It referred to that amazing passage in the book of Romans where Paul declares,

**“28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

What an extraordinary passage from the Bible, which ... properly understood ... will bring great comfort to those who are going through dramatic ... perhaps even traumatic ... experiences ... which defy meaning, cause huge heart ache, and simply do not make any sense.

I am talking about moments in our life where we feel abandoned by others ... and perhaps even by God ... and we ponder whether God either does not love me, is powerless, or disinterested in

helping me, or ... whisper it quietly, Tony ... that God does not in fact ... exist.

“Everything will be alright mate, Romans 8:28”,

**“28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

So, this morning we hear of the account of Joseph ... being reunited with his family after their evil, dreadful, arrogant, and merciless rejection of him ... many years previously.

You see, Joseph was a living witness to the spiritual truth of Romans 8:28.

And his reaction to seeing his family again ... and acceptance of them ... also beautifully demonstrates the Gospel reading this morning ... on loving our enemies and forgiving them.





Route of Joseph and kindred to Egypt

I believe it was amazing that Joseph was able to withhold his true identity from his brothers for a period of two years. On more than one occasion ... he had excused himself from their presence ... when his emotions threatened to get out of control ... but finally ... he could contain himself no longer.

“He cried out, ‘Make everyone leave!’

**So, no one stood with Joseph while he made himself known to his brothers” (Gen. 45:1).**

You see, the moment had arrived ... for which he had waited so long ... and for which he had worked so hard.

He needed to reveal himself to his brothers.

There was much unfinished business ... which could not be completed ... until a full disclosure was made.

OK, we can identify three deep needs of Joseph here:

1. The Need to Relate (45:1–2)
2. The Need to Reconcile (45:3–15)
3. The Need to Restore (45:16–28)

**FIRSTLY, THE NEED TO RELATE (45:1–2)**

Joseph's brothers were suffering under the delusion that he was dead.

And they had probably been carrying a load of guilt ... about his demise ... for more than two decades ... and they needed to know the truth of the matter.

To say they were surprised at his announcement would be to put it mildly! Genesis 45 says,

**They “could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence” (v. 3).**

No doubt they wondered ... how this could possibly be true ... but the fact that Joseph **“wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it” (v. 2)** ... showed them ... that this was not an idle tale.

So, when the truth finally dawned upon them, they were able to understand ... his unusual behaviour ... and the strange happenings with the sacks, the money, and the divining cup.

It was true!

The brother they thought they had killed ... had escaped ... and in some inexplicable manner ... had risen to the heights in the land of Egypt.

He was not as they thought. He was very much alive, and they had thought him dead.

They themselves ... were not as they thought either.

For years they had assumed ... that they had escaped all accountability for their behaviour ... but now they stood exposed ... and their fate lay in the very hands of the one they had aggrieved.

Painfully, it was for their own good ... that they had to face the facts ... and deal with their sin ...

but at that moment the revelation of the truth ... seemed to be the worst possible thing ... that they could have imagined.

And little did they realise ... that it was about to lead to the greatest possible blessing they could desire.

You see, ever since the days of Adam ... humanity has preferred to cover up sin ... rather than confront it ... confess it ... and be forgiven.

And in so doing ... we have robbed ourselves ... of the special freedom that forgiveness brings ... and damned ourselves ... to the bondage of unpardoned guilt.

So, firstly, we notice the need to relate.

## SECONDLY, WE NOTICE THE NEED TO RECONCILE

You see, Joseph held all the cards ... and could play them exactly as he wished.

His brothers were completely at his mercy ... and fortunately for them ... mercy was what he extended.

He ***“said to his brothers, ‘Please come near to me.’ So, they came near. Then he said: ‘... But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life’ ”*** (vv. 4–5).

Don't you think Joseph attitude was remarkable ... in that he refused to impose any blame on them ... but wanted only to impress upon them ... that the hand of the Lord had been clearly evident in his life.

He wanted them to see that God ... had sent him to Egypt ... and that God had done so ... in order that a great blessing ... to many people might result.

Everything will be alright mate, Romans 8:28.

If the brothers had difficulty comprehending these dramatic disclosures it would be understandable.

Not only had their ... long-lost brother ... suddenly reappeared ... and their long-hidden secret ... been exposed ...

but Joseph promptly offered forgiveness to them ... and going to great lengths ... to encourage them ... not to grieve ... or be angry with themselves!

This might sound too good to be true but ... remember that Joseph was coming from a solid

conviction ... that the sovereign Lord had been in control of his life.

On the one hand, he told them **“you sold me”** but at the same time he reminded them, **“God sent me”**

In no way ... was their responsibility diminished ... but equally ... in no way had the Lord ... ever lost control of the situation.

Can you see the profound mystery ... illustrated here?

Does it have echoes in your life?

Are there times in your life ... where pain and meaninglessness ... were taken by God ... to work wonder and blessing?

Please forgive me, but let's have a little theological reflection for a moment.



The debate over Calvinism (namely, divine predestination in a believer's life) and Arminianism (namely, human will alone determining a believer's life) ... has waxed and waned ... over the years ... in the halls of ecclesiastical academia ... and out in the marketplace of life ... of human prosperity ... and suffering.

And, I hope we have come to learn ... from experience ... that to ignore divine sovereignty ... is arrogance of the first degree ... but also to ignore human accountability ... is irresponsibility on a grand scale.

Theologians will probably never finally figure out the mysteries of how divine will and human decisions interact.

In the meantime, perhaps ... we should be inspired by people like Joseph ... and others ... whose practical approach to the problem ...

allowed them to continue ... in deep reverence  
and dependence on the Lord ...

while at the same time accomplishing ... through  
hard work and human activity.

Now, **General William Booth**, the founder of the  
Salvation Army, is a great example here.

And it is interesting to know that ... he did not  
allow himself to be sidetracked in theological  
debate ... when he became aware of London's  
desperate ... and destitute masses.

Theologically, he put it ... all together ... when he  
insisted, memorably, **“Work as if everything  
depended on your work ... and pray as if  
everything depended upon your prayer.”**

And, Joseph, the Old Testament patriarch said,  
**“God sent me before you ... to preserve a**

**posterity for you in the earth ... and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (v. 7).**

He was referring, of course, to the devastating famine ... from which they were being delivered ... but, in fact, he may have been saying more than he knew ...

because in the plan of God ... there would be an even greater deliverance ... of the children of Israel from Egypt ...

which could not take place ... without God first sending Joseph ...

to the land of the Pharaohs.

And I am referring to the Exodus led by Moses.

The brothers were ... of course ... being invited to explore the wonderful workings of God and ... moreover ... to see how an understanding of the

Lord ... can deal with bitterness ... and put sweetness in its place.

It was demonstrating the need to relate and the need to be reconciled.

Joseph summarised this by saying, “***So now it was not you who sent me here, but God” (v. 8).***

And it is doubtful ... if guilty people ever heard more pleasant words than those.

The victim of their unspeakable wickedness ... who held their lives in his hands ... was offering them full and free forgiveness.

If they had any doubt at all ... it was dispelled when Joseph “***kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him*” (v. 15).**

Now, we are spared the details of their conversation ... but little imagination is needed to guess ... that at first ... they were overwhelmed by their guilt ... as they grasped the forgiving spirit of their brother.

And so ... they poured out their gratitude for his mercy and grace.

## **AND FINALLY, WE NOTICE THE NEED TO RESTORE**

Now, a great start had been made ... in restoring the family of Jacob ... to its proper condition ... but there was still much to be done.

You see, Pharaoh was delighted ... when he heard about Joseph's family ... and royal instructions ... were given to the brothers ... to return home and bring their families down to Egypt.

Pharaoh even provided all the necessary transport and assured them, **“do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours”** (v. 20).

And it is interesting to notice that Joseph ... knowing his brothers as he did ... did not make the mistake ... of expecting too much ... from them ... too quickly.

He told them, **“See that you do not become troubled along the way”** (v. 24).

What he was really saying, was “Don’t mess up ... by getting yourselves into a fight ...

while you’re on the way back home ...

There are more important things to concern you ...

than distracting and petty squabbles”

Meanwhile, his father, Jacob had been waiting in his tent.

One day he saw the Egyptian carts and the laden donkeys.

Overjoyed to see his family return he was totally unprepared for what lay ahead.

**“They told him, saying, ‘Joseph is still alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt.’**

And we are told **Jacob’s heart stood still, because he did not believe them”** (v. 26).

And eventually they were able to convince him and, **“the spirit of Jacob their father revived”** (v. 27).

Immediately he promised to go to Egypt ... as Joseph had arranged ... and ... once again ... the plan of God ... moved a step closer to completion.

You know, I find the story of Joseph and his brothers ... very moving ... that it seems almost unreal.

But when applied ... it etches ... two unforgettable principles ... on our hearts.

**First**, that ... God truly is in control of a believers life ... even though there may be suffering and apparent meaningless ... and that ... God's overriding good purpose ... will ultimately prevail.

**Second**, when a person comes into contact with the ... mystery and majesty of God ... the result is ... a heart that beats with love ... to such an extent that ... extraordinary depths of love and forgiveness ... flow from a grateful heart.

**AMEN**



