

February 6-Genesis 37

In Genesis 37, we see an example of someone (Reuben) who wanted to do the right thing but couldn't find the strength to take a stand publicly. Reuben made the decision to do something every one of us will be tempted to do, namely, to try to do the right thing in secret while trying to fit in publicly. We see this scenario play out in Genesis 37:18-30. Joseph had just finished telling all of his brothers about the dream he had in which all of them would one day bow down to him. Now, I think we can all understand why the brothers were upset. No one wants to be told that they will be subject to their sibling, especially not their LITTLE brother! So shortly after Joseph told his brothers about his dream, the brothers were out working together and they saw Joseph approaching. As they saw Joseph coming, the Bible says that they "conspired against him to kill him" (v. 18). Now, in the middle of this conversation stood Reuben who was apparently the only one who disagreed. This is a situation that will more than likely feel familiar to the Christian. Reuben was burdened by a different conviction than his brothers. The question for Reuben is not what is the right thing to do? The question is how do I stand for what I know to be true?

It is important to state that this is not an easy situation for Reuben. Everyone else, according to the text is on board. We don't know what Reuben was thinking, but certainly the possibility that his brothers might just kill him too if he spoke a dissenting opinion must have crossed his mind. Regardless, he is faced with a decision, and he chooses unwisely. Notice what he decides to do, "Reuben said to them, 'Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him'- that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father." Did you catch that? Reuben decided to not speak up for what is right but to propose a "compromise", representing to his brothers that he was in agreement with what they were going to do. His plan was to act like he was in agreement with his brother's sinful activity and then later do the right thing. This is a huge temptation for all of us. We often fall into the trap of believing we can reason with those who are lost and intent on sin. This is what happened to Reuben. His brothers agreed to his new plan, but they made a little change because their intent was still to harm Joseph. They were not aware that Reuben was planning on taking Joseph back to Jacob; in fact they thought he was in agreement with them. This became a huge problem because an opportunity presented itself for Joseph to be sold into slavery and the rest of Joseph's brothers took it without Reuben even knowing. Reuben came back to get Joseph and realized he wasn't there anymore! The Bible says he "tore his clothes" (v. 29) which is a sign of intense grief and then something strange happens in verse 31, "then they (all the brothers including Reuben) took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood". The brothers did this to cover up what they had really done and to make it appear as if Joseph had been killed by wild animals and Reuben became a part of the cover up! You see, it didn't matter that Reuben had better intentions than his brothers, by not speaking up and urging his brothers to do the right thing, he was just as guilty as the rest of them.

Certainly all of us know how uncomfortable it can be to take a stand. We live in a fallen world, but as we finish up today, I want to remind you of what Christ prayed for us regarding our lives in this sinful place. In John 17:15-17 Jesus is speaking to God about us! His request to God on our behalf is as follows, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." You see, the solution to this problem of living in the world is not to leave or abandon it altogether! Instead, it is to live different lives. We are to continue to dwell among "Joseph's brothers" who are bent towards evil and inclined to commit unrighteous deeds but we are to seek to avoid evil. Christ prays for us that God would keep us from the "evil one" who is Satan but He also shares with us that the way we are sanctified and therefore set apart from the world is through the truth of the Word of God. Therefore, what you are doing this morning, as you sit underneath the teaching and truth of the Bible is the very source of your strength to separate yourself from the world when difficult situations arise. I pray you continue to find your comfort in God's Word and I know that you will see that His truth empowers you to live a righteous and bold life!