

**Sermon preached by Mr. L. R. Broome, Pastor,
at Bethesda Chapel, Southampton,
on Lord's Day afternoon, 29th January, 1984**

Text: *"And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50. 19, 20).*

Here is the sequel. Here, dear Joseph saw why he had to come the way he had. Here, though his brethren fell down to him according as had been his dream, and everything was fulfilled as far as that was concerned, and yet he takes no credit to himself: there is no great "I" anywhere to be found in the whole of the account. Who does he put first? What question does this nineteenth verse ask? "For am I in the place of God?" You see the weeping Joseph, wounded by the words of his brethren, their mistrust, and the way in which they so unexpectedly revealed their minds, and turned round and revealed their true colours. But the whole matter was completely under control, and that by the grace of God. Joseph does not go into detail; he broadly and briefly says, "Ye thought evil against me." He puts another construction on it, and he says, "God meant it unto good." Here are two great sequels. It is true in both cases: they did think evil against him, though it was not visible, God meant it for good. And now this good can be seen. Father has gone, we have laid him in the tomb, we are now on our own, but God's purpose has ripened. "We have come a long way," Joseph might well say, "from the time you thought it for evil." "Many things have transpired since then, that evil which you thought – and intended, you hated me – you have now been brought to see, you have now bowed down before me as you said you never would. And so did your father and mother. Now you see what God meant, and it has taken, what,

these hundred years to do it. That is done, and being done it is done conclusively. You know it, brothers.”

So that when it comes to this great confession and these tears of sorrow, he says, “Fear not – I can see the picture clearly: I can see salvation. I can see why I had to go on what seemed to be a short little journey down to Dothan; I can see why I had to go into the pit, the prison, the palace; I can see why there was a famine; I can see why father had to come at last after much pressure; I can piece the whole together, and I can see the whole of my life, why it was.” Does he take credit for himself, exalt himself as some human saviour and say, “Well, if it had not been for me you would not have been here”? Never! This is just a brief preview of the seventeenth of John where you see, as we read together, the most sacred prayer of the Lord Jesus as He took everything in absolute order: “I have given them the words, they have kept them, they have known that Thou didst send Me,” talking – as nowhere else in Scripture to the same length. “I have lost none save the son of perdition that the scripture might be fulfilled, the story is complete, the prayer is final: neither pray I for these alone but for all those whom Thou hast given Me,” that vast number yet to come. They have come – it is not a question of they may have; they *have* come. Paul calls them “the long cloud of witnesses.” Those who have gone before. “We are not come,” he says, “unto Mount Sinai, but unto Mount Zion.” They have, and they still are; that is why we are here, and this is what God’s purpose is in this world still. Pray for those yet to come. “I pray not for the world.” What is this petition, “I pray not for the world,” when we hear of universal salvation and everyone having a chance, and opportunity for all if they will but take it? When we hear mention of creature ability and free will and power to save oneself, is this true – “I pray not for the world”? Why, it comes out of the sacred prayer, the victory is complete. There are those who are never the

subjects of the prayers of the Lord Jesus. How quietly this work of grace began in its fulness, when the Holy Ghost descended at Pentecost upon those few creatures, and how quietly it has gone on and on and on under the power of the Holy Ghost and by Him who has the treasure of this in His hands, as Jesus explains to us, “He shall take of Mine, and shall shew it unto you.” The comparison fails – it must not be allowed to be a comparison. He is speaking as an equal with His Father – “Father, I will.” That is equal terms, that is talking together, with “If it is Thy holy will,” omitted. “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.” I say, the two are parallel so far in the completion of a purpose, an era in the kingdom of God’s purposes. Here it is natural Israel, after the flesh, very largely, this was told to Abraham that they should go down into Egypt and they could stay there for four hundred and twenty years.

And here they are in Egypt. We know the way they went down into Egypt. And what was the narrow way that took them down? Did Jacob? Why, he did not want to go. Jacob would never have gone down into Egypt; you can see that. Who went to Egypt? Joseph. How did he go? Well, as I have already said, you know well enough. They stayed there in that land of Goshen until another king arose, which Exodus goes on to tell us, “Which knew not Joseph.” So that the end of that sacred era for the sufferings of Joseph were finished.

But the purpose goes on! The Bible does not stop at Genesis, does it! No, and it does not stop at the seventeenth of John. It stops at that place in the twenty second of Revelation: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come,” “And whosoever will, let him

take the water of life freely." Let him say, "Come." This acquiescence in the eternal purposes of God, yet to come.

But here, to come back to our text, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" "Brethren," he says, "You know what you have been through, you know what you did to me, you know how you would have rejoiced in my death – in fact you came and sympathised with father when you took home that coat of many colours and stained it with the blood of beasts; and you know what father said: he would be brought down to his grave and hoary hairs in sorrow. You know that, brethren, you know what you really intended father to think, and he did think it, and he thought it for those long years, too, and you know that you cast me off, you thought that it was for evil – am I in the place of God? Did I arrange this journey to Dothan? Did I submit to going into the hands of the Ishmaelites or elsewhere? Did I appoint myself as governor in Egypt? I in the place of God?" Happy Joseph! All the glory to his God! Ah, but so with the church of God. Anyone would think our deacon and I had been talking, wouldn't they?

"To Jesus, our victorious Lord,
The praises of our lives belong;
Forever be His name adored;
Sweet theme of every thankful song."

(Gadsby's 1080)

So we bring nothing new, but glad enough to sing the language of our forefathers who trod the same track, learnt the same lessons and gave all the glory to God. And it must be so – and they would not wish it to be anything else. There cannot be any true thanks if you have got a hand in it. "Am I in the place of God?" Did Timothy ever think that Paul was God? Did any of those converts of whom we read ever ascribe to Paul the honour of their

salvation? That grace which came to them through his ministry came through a channel, one which this one-time persecutor had himself been brought through, the blessed opening of his eyes at the Damascus gate and the three days of darkness ere his eyes were opened; and then Ananias with all his hesitation at first, goes to him and says, "Brother Saul." This is triumphant grace – and it ever will be triumphant grace, and if grace is not triumphant, it will not be grace! There is no such thing as triumphant free will! And there never will be! There cannot be! Because by nature man is lost, and yet what a delightful, self-pleasing, creature-exalting thing free will is. How it is loved and rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, and the great "I" appears: "I" have done this. But no: says the Apostle, "That no flesh should glory in His presence." Apply that through all the gospel and you have got a good standard. The standard: what God does, He does for His own glory. "Am I in the place of God?" Did I therefore organise father coming down? It is true he did in his position as the governor; it is true that he sent the wagons to fetch his father; it is true that he rejoiced to see him; it is true that old Jacob said, "My son Joseph is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." It is true, but whose was the hand? And whose were the wagons? Can you see these things in *your* life? Can I see them in mine? I hope to die in the reality of them! Yes, who made these things? Who sent Elijah to that poor widow? And who sent Elisha to that poor woman? And who brought the poor, penitent woman to Christ, how she wept over Him and wiped His feet with the hairs of her head and poured the box of precious ointment over Him against the day of His burial? Who did it? Not Simon, in whose house they were. The glories of divine power, then, will never be exhausted in the speaking of them here. Heaven will be the place for that. It will be our mercy to have a harp tuned and a heart to sing His praises to all eternity.

“Am I in the place of God?” This takes all the work, good and bad, right out of the hands of them all, including Joseph, and he gives the honour to his God. But he was the instrument. If you look at it just for a moment from another angle and see, had he not been under the direct influence of the good Spirit and controlled in all these things, what a lot he could have compiled in his favour. What a good account he could have given in his treatment. Talk about gospel precepts and loving your enemies, and heaping coals of fire upon their head, “I obeyed them all!” He does not mention a thing. No, who did it? He knew! This is, you see, the gospel pathway. If God helps you to walk in His ways, to be obedient to His commands, to love Him, follow Him in spite of all that may oppose, and feel the things that Joseph felt, if God thus helps you, think you that the day will come when you will say, “Well, I did that,” and “I did the other”? No, it is worked out in the walking of it out. This is why God brings His people down to weakness. The great preacher frankly admits that he came to them at Corinth in weakness. That is rather a poor thing, surely, for a high teacher to start off with and tell his hearers. Does it not give them a wrong view? Do they not feel somewhat to lose confidence in him if he says, “I came to you in weakness”? What else? “And in trembling.” “Trembling!” This was the very strength of the apostle, his weakness. You too feel your weakness, and the things that come up against you so unexpectedly, that which almost shakes you off the ground. Why, it is in weakness that you are going to learn, and “God’s strength is made perfect in weakness.” You cannot have sanctified weakness without God’s strength, and you certainly cannot know strength until you know weakness. “So,” says Joseph to his brothers, “I have been through it. I know what it felt like. I read what you were saying. You did not think that I knew when you came down first of all: you were talking, I heard what you said.” “We spoke through an interpreter.” Joseph could say, “You were

very free in your admissions; you said, among other things, ‘We are verily guilty,’ and you also said, ‘Did we not see the look on his face when we put him into the pit?’ – you were very frank, but you would not have been so frank if you knew that I understood, and that I was Joseph, no.” But the interpreter was there not to interpret, really, because Joseph did not need an interpreter, but we do. “If there be an interpreter,” says Job, “one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness.” God has provided interpreters, and these interpreters are those who unfold the sacred mysteries of gospel grace, and the everlasting purposes that lie behind them.

He clearly knew what was going on, did Joseph. “But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good.” This is lovely! This is sanctified trial. You say, “Well what does sanctification mean?” Sanctification means this: God deals with you and shows you why He is doing so; He bids you leave this world’s deceitful shore to return no more; He separates you from this world: and He make you happy in it. That is sanctification – for His sake. You do not begrudge it. You do not say, “Oh, I wish I could go back!” No. Israel did, but that was not sanctified. But the true believer does not look over his shoulder and say, “I wish I could go back to the world.” Never! And I can assure those of you who feel and know this change of heart, you will never want to go back, whatever you encounter. However you may feel and perhaps say, as Jacob did, “All these things are against me,” you have made a mistake like he did. You will never want to go back again. It is this God-cut separation: the two-edged sword, the sword of love. And this is where Joseph stood at this particular time as he said, “God meant it unto good.” What, those trying times, Joseph? When you were in prison, when you were accosted by Potiphar’s wife? Those trying times when you were in such a state that you had to wait two years and

feel that the butler had deceived you? Yes. But, do you mean to say, Joseph, that it was a good thing you waited two years? Yes! Oh, but that seemed all wrong at the time, but it was not so. And you mean to say then, Joseph, that when you saw us come in the first place for that corn, that famine that drove us down, God meant it for good? Of course He did! And then when we brought Simeon back again and father would not let Benjamin go, he said, "No, you are not going to take Benjamin." Ye have bereaved me of Joseph and Simeon, but not Benjamin, I am not going to part with him. Thus the hunger continued until at last the heart of Jacob was brought to submission. It may take a long time for your heart to be brought to submission, but it will be. "If ye must go, then," he said, "Take Benjamin." At last, "You can take him." They stood by and prepared to be sureties for him. "Slay my two sons," said Reuben. What good would that have done? Nothing at all. But no, it must be Benjamin, and down they go. O, when he saw Benjamin, of course, God meant it for good. Two sons of one mother, you see. He saw his beloved brother Benjamin after all those years. God meant it for good – ah, it was good, too! And when God means a thing for good, it *is* good! We repeat oftentimes, that "All things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose," but what do we mean by good? Are you in a present trial that looks black? Do you think the day is ever going to be when that black cloud is going to roll away and there is going to be good? You will be the first one that has not proved so if it should be so. These dark clouds, these difficult times are our lot without exception.

"God meant it unto good." "I can see it now, in my own life," says Joseph. I can, too – that is why I can speak to you like this, I trust humbly. And I have been brought to the waters of Jordan, as you know, and found it good. And brought back again, and

found it good. And *still* good to declare the whole counsel of God and the glories of the victorious Lord.

So, Joseph says, "God meant it for good." And for what purpose? "To bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." And of course that is what it was for. Those granaries were absolutely full. When you read about the constant supply from those granaries of Egypt after the seven years of plenty, you marvel that the supply was eked out, but it was. Lives were preserved, and the men, women and children survived because there was enough to eat from the granaries of Egypt. That is what God intended. Israel was to come out a mighty people. They would not have done, other things being equal, but they did. And they came out rich, because of the payment of the Egyptians for the food. The Egyptians were buying their own food. Now these marvellous works of God, when they are sanctified, and you can see the end – only when you can see the end, are glorious. But by walking in the pathway, you will have to walk in faith, and this is why these things are given us, that we may walk by faith and not by sight. "To bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

Let me quote from the Lord Jesus' prayer just once more: "Of all that Thou hast given Me, I have lost none, save the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. I have glorified Thee on the earth." What, amidst all that reproach? Yes, and He knew it. He knew He had glorified His Father, He knew that in His sufferings and reproach, the prophecies had been fulfilled, the purposes had been fulfilled. "I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do" – He had not yet come to Gethsemane. He had not yet come to Calvary. But He speaks thus: "I have finished the work," that is, the magnifying of the law and making it honourable, which was the righteousness of

the people of God. Finished. "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." And can anyone deny then, that He was the eternal, co-equal Son of God before the world was? And He speaks on the same level as His Father, of the glories He had with Him before the world was. Can anyone say that evolution is something worth thinking about and a scientific fact? Can they say that this deadly thing is true when the Lord Jesus said, "Which I had with Me before the world was"? And immortal souls first in Adam were created. Why, it is beyond our thoughts how they had known that "All things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee." "Am I God," says Joseph, "Or in the place of God?" No. But in the eternal counsels of salvation he looked much higher.

Now there is just one more point: Joseph's body, like his father's, was embalmed, and that embalmed body of Joseph was taken on a long journey to be buried in a particular place named and known. "In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah ... which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace." He was taken there and there he was laid. The important difference with Joseph was this: that his body was put in a coffin, and there it stayed embalmed in the land of Goshen until the time came for them to come out, and they did not forget it. They did not say, "We cannot take this." When those door lintels were sprinkled with blood, the destroying angel passed over, but took the lives of the firstborn wherever there was no blood sprinkled, and they came out of Egypt, they brought with them a sign, and that sign was the firstfruits in the embalmed body of dear Joseph. And when the Lord Jesus led His disciples out "as far as to Bethany," just a short distance, famous little Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha, and as they talked, "He was departed from them." And as He was parted from them, they were not left in a bewilderment; they were left with a word of authority from

the two men clothed in white, the angels: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, whom ye have seen go into heaven, shall one day come again in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." But what a solid foundation for that day when the Lord Jesus will return, yes, the same way as He went. There can be no question about it. Joseph was embalmed as a token. They should come out of Egypt. The Lord Jesus ascended up on high and led captivity captive and received gifts for men, and as you know the sacred cry in the Psalm is, "Open ye the two leaved gates, that the king of glory may come in." All over glorious. And if any one of you should feel the sacredness of this, what reality it will be to you, and the vital nature of it as compared with the flimsy things that are uttered in pretence of the gospel.

Amen.