

Francis Thompson was a devout Roman Catholic who lived a tortured life in the second half of the 19th century. In 1893 he published a poem titled "The Hound of Heaven."

In the poem, the poet is running from God in order to continue the pleasures of an ungodly life.

All kinds of terrible things happen to him, but he feels that God keeps following him.

He lives in addictions, drugs, all kinds of immorality... he spends his days with people who care little for God.

Unaware of God's love for him, the poet keeps running after worldly pleasures.

God hounds him in his conscience, making him feel guilty and think about his waywardness.

Finally, God breaks through and he sees that the happiness he sought was following him all the time.

This is often the purpose of God if we are living in unrepentance and sin.

Your sin will find you out.

Have you ever wondered why life goes the way it does?

God moves in a mysterious way.

Joseph was 17 years old, he had two dreams given to him by God. **Gen 37:5-11**

Shortly thereafter Joseph is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers... because of his dreams.

His father thinks him dead.

Joseph then finds himself in Egypt in the service of Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard.

But God is with Joseph, so, within a few years he rises to be the chief steward of Potiphar's household.

However, after he refuses the advances of Potiphar's wife, he finds himself unjustly thrown into prison...

The very prison that is under Potiphar's authority... supervised by the chief jailor.

The prison into which the Pharaoh puts his own prisoners.

But God is with Joseph in prison and so he rises to a supervisor's role once again...

From Gen. 39:20-41:13 Joseph is in the dungeon... also translated "the pit."

Gen. 41:46 tells us that Joseph was 30 when he left prison to appear in Pharaoh's court.

Thus far in Joseph's life he has been sure that God is with him and God is carrying out the divine plan for Joseph.

And, as he stands before Pharaoh Joseph is no less sure. **Gen. 41:15-16**

Joseph explains that the dream means there will come 7 years of plenty and then 7 years of famine.

Gen 41:32 ...and one then thinks back to the repetition of the dream Joseph had as a youth.

And then, God moves in Pharaoh's heart. **Gen 41:38-40**

So Pharaoh makes Joseph his prime minister.

Joseph gets married and has two sons. He is thankful that the Lord has blessed him and made him forget his troubles.

There is indeed 7 years of abundance, and then comes the famine and it is over all of the known world...

including the land of Canaan where his father and brothers live.

For Joseph, it has been at least 20 years since he had been home.

For Joseph's brothers, it has been at least 20 years since they had seen Joseph.

I. God moves in a mysterious way.

vss. 1-7

The time has come for God to fulfill His promise to Joseph that was revealed in that dream some 20+ years ago.

All of Joseph's life had been in preparation for this moment... though he had not known it.

The betrayal by his brothers, the years of slavery, the betrayal by Potiphar's wife, the years in prison...

Pharaoh's dreams, then his decision to place Joseph over Egypt, the years of plenty, the years of famine...

All to get Joseph's brothers to this place. No one knew it but God.

And, now his brothers were bowing down to him.

They tried to stop the dreams by contemplating murder, throwing him in the pit, by selling him into slavery.

But, actually, all of their efforts served only further God's plan.

And, this is how it always is... people try to stop what God is doing. They try to thwart His plans.

And, not just people... Satan tries to interfere with the sovereign hand of God... but to no avail.

God always accomplishes His purposes.

It is at this moment that Joseph realizes all of this. He remembers his dream.

II. Repercussions: Joseph does not trust His brothers.

vss. 8-17

Joseph recognizes his brothers, they do not recognize him... it is no great wonder...

They think him dead. He was 17 when they last saw him. Now he is 40.

He is dressed richly in the garb of an Egyptian ruler, no longer a shepherd.

But, Joseph recognizes them. In fact he may have been expecting them.

But, 3 times he accuses them of being spies. Why?

Is he toying with them? Trying to manipulate them?

Does Joseph already have a plan worked out to get his whole family to Egypt?

No, I think what Joseph says here is to be believed. He is being honest. He doesn't trust his brothers.

Joseph thinks that they are spies... probably casing the place so that they can steal some grain.

And for good reason. His brothers have already proved themselves to be dishonest.

This is the direct result of their sin.

Joseph does not trust them because more than 20 years ago they proved themselves to be untrustworthy.

Consider who this account was originally written to... a people in the wilderness rescued from Egypt.

Who in this story would you imagine the people of Israel are supposed to relate to?

Joseph? Yes, he's the hero... but he's not very much like them... or us, for that matter.

The brothers are the fathers of most of them. It is likely that most of God's people would see themselves in the brothers.

These people in the wilderness, God's people, needed to understand the nature of sin... their own sin.

Sin always has very direct results... and if you are honest with yourself you can see the results.

If you are treacherous and deceitful, people will see you as treacherous and deceitful.

If you are greedy, people will see you as greedy... with every kind of sin...

immorality, anger, worry, gossip... eventually, if you do not deal with the sin, it will define you.

If you are not really following the Lord, people will eventually see that too.

And, Joseph wants to see his younger brother... he wonders how he is doing with these brothers of his.

So, he is going to test them... he wants to know if maybe they have changed. Will they betray their brother again?

III. Remorse: The brothers realize their sin.

vss. 18-28

Joseph has had a change of heart. We don't know why.

He was going to keep nine of them locked up and send one back. Now he will keep on and send nine back.

We then get to hear a little of the conversation between them... Joseph does as well.

Though he knows what they are saying, he is using a translator so that they do not know that he knows what they are saying.

Joseph is wise with these brothers. He is shrewd. He does not trust them.

But, now, he learns something that makes him weep. What is it?

Gen. 42:21-22 Their hearts are softening toward their own sin.

They see their sin... and this is the first step in turning away from sin. You have to see it.

Apparently they have been thinking about their sin for some 20 years.

Secondly they connect their sin with their present distress. This is important as well.

God often sends us suffering as a result of sin so that we can see our sin.

Just as Reuben says... there comes a reckoning.

Have you sinned? Did you sin recently? Have you hurt people close to you?

You might have forgotten. You might be able to put it out of your mind and go on with life.

But, God has not forgotten. There will be a reckoning. It will not just go away.

But, do not fail to consider why their sin is coming back to bite them.

It is because God has a purpose in it... a purpose not to destroy them, but to bless them.

They are going to learn repentance. They are going to be changed. God is going to bless them.

This is how God always works with his people, even those people in the wilderness with Moses... and their descendants.

Consider **Jer. 29:11**. What a wonderful promise... right? But, do you know the context?

Look at verse **10**. Because of their sin they will have 70 years of misery.

Consider verse **12-14**. Do you see the "future and hope?"

It involves turning to God, away from sin, and seeking Him with all their heart.

Do you see? God, in order to bless us in the way He plans to, must first show us our sins and cause us to turn away from them.

And, these brothers of Joseph are already beginning to do this... though it has been 20 years.

This is why Joseph turns away and cries. He realizes that God is changing their hearts.

And, Joseph puts their money back in their bags. Why? Remember, he is testing them.

IV. Repentance: Reuben puts himself at risk to do what is right.

vss. 29-38

They arrive home and tell their father everything. Jacob is fearful of losing his youngest son... the only son left from Rachel.

Benjamin is the only full brother to Joseph and we can see from vs. 36 that Jacob blames his sons for his loss of Joseph.

Why? I would guess that over the past 20 years at least some of the truth has leaked out.

Jacob has lost Joseph. Now he has lost Simeon too...

After having left with all the money they might guess that their reputation in Egypt is not good.

Jacob is not willing to risk more sons, especially Benjamin, to find out what the Egyptians think.

But, it is what Reuben does that is truly remarkable.

Remember, Reuben was the one who, though lacking the courage to say something,

was secretly planning to rescue Joseph from that pit 20 years ago. He didn't. He was too late.

But, now, he is willing to put his sons at risk to retrieve Simeon and keep Benjamin safe.

And, so, we see the beginnings of real repentance.

First: The brothers see their sin. They realize that present distress is connected to past sins. You cannot fool God.

Second: The brothers show by their behavior that their hearts are changing.

This is the difference between remorse and repentance. Lots of people feel sad when they are confronted by their sin.

To repent means to turn away from the sin and really change... **2 Cor. 7:10**

In this case from a selfish, cowardly, treacherous person to a person willing to sacrifice for others.

And, it turns out that God is the one who can soften human hearts and lead us to repentance. **2 Tim. 2:25**

Do you need to repent of a sin, present or past? Do so today... and let God begin the process of restoration and blessing.