

08. God meant it for good

Genesis 37-46, Joseph

1. INTRODUCTION

- a. Joseph's story directly relates to how we react and respond to the unpredictable, uncontrollable events of life
- b. The adage, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade" is cute, but it only applies to minor frustrations
 - i. What do we do with and how do we respond to real problems?
 - ii. How do we respond to things that are way beyond our control?

2. WHAT DOES THE STORY SAY?

- a. Israel's sons hated Joseph because he was dad's favorite, he was a tattletale and because of his dreams (37:5-8)
- b. Joseph goes to check on his brothers in the field
 - i. His brothers conspire to kill him, they sell him instead (37:12-36)
- c. Joseph goes to Potiphar's house, the captain of the guard (39)
 - i. God blesses everything Joseph puts his hand to
 - ii. Potiphar's wife hits on Joseph repeatedly
 - iii. Joseph denies her saying he couldn't do this great wickedness and sin against God (a man of integrity!)
 - iv. One day she tried to sleep with him, but he ran away.
 - v. Embarrassed and angry, she accuses him of sexual assault
- d. Joseph is thrown into prison, but again the blessing of God is with him (39:19-23)
 - i. Joseph interprets two dreams for the cupbearer and the chief baker
 - ii. "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."
 1. God did not forget him...
- e. Two years later, Pharaoh has a dream and the cupbearer remembers Joseph
 - i. Joseph interprets → 7 years of plenty, 7 years of want
 - ii. Joseph instructs → Save and store
 - iii. Pharaoh is impressed (*Gen 41:37-40*)
- f. All comes to pass. The famine is severe not just in Egypt, but everywhere
 - i. Jacob learns of food in Egypt (*Gen 42:1-5*)
 - ii. They come to buy from Joseph, not recognizing him
 - iii. Joseph tests them the first time
 1. Tells them to return with Benjamin, his brother
 2. Holds Simeon in prison until they come back
 3. Places their money back in their bags to frame them
 - iv. They return to Canaan, realize what has happened and are distraught
 1. They know they need to go back once they run out of food
 2. Reuben volunteers that Jacob can kill his sons if they don't bring Benjamin back

3. Judah offers to sacrifice himself
 - v. They return w/ Benjamin and gifts to make up for the money bags
 1. Joseph dines w/ them and tests them again
 2. He sends them back and this time replaces the money and puts the choice silver cup in Benjamin's sack framing him
 3. Joseph's men overtakes them, finds the cup and brings them back
 4. Judah tries to sacrifice himself for Benjamin (44:33)
 - vi. Finally, Joseph could no longer control himself and comes clean
 1. *Read Genesis 45:1-8*
 2. Joseph forgives them, seeing the big picture
 - vii. So Jacob and all of the family come to Egypt under the protection and provision of Joseph and Pharaoh.
3. WHAT DOES THIS STORY TEACH ABOUT GOD?
- a. **God is sovereign.** (What does that mean?)
 - i. All powerful, all knowing, outside of time, responsible for all of creation
 1. I.E. Nothing in the universe occurs without God's permission.
 2. He can prevent anything, so anything that does happen must, at the very least, be "allowed" by God.
 - ii. At the same time, the Bible describes God as offering humanity choices
 1. They are held personally responsible for their sins, and God is unhappy with some of their actions
 2. God chooses to allow things that He does not directly cause.
 - iii. God has the wisdom and authority to do anything He chooses
 1. Whether or not He actually exerts that level of control is actually a completely different question.
 2. Often, the concept of divine sovereignty is oversimplified to being a puppet master.
 3. People think of sovereignty as God determining everything that happens - and he could do that, but he doesn't have to do that
 4. This cartoon version of sovereignty depicts a God who must do anything that He can do, or else He loses his sovereignty.
 - iv. An illustration:
 1. *"If a man were to put an ant in a bowl, the "sovereignty" of the man over the ant is not in doubt. The ant may try to crawl out, and the man may not want this to happen. But the man is not forced to crush the ant, drown it, or pick it up. The man, for reasons of his own, may choose to let the ant crawl away, but the man is still in control. There is a difference between allowing the ant to leave the bowl and helplessly watching as it escapes. The cartoon version of God's sovereignty implies that, if the man is not actively holding the ant inside the bowl, then he must be unable to keep it in there at all. The illustration of the man and the ant is at least a vague [limited, imperfect] parallel to God's sovereignty over mankind.*

God has the ability to do anything, to take action and intervene in any situation, but He often chooses to act indirectly or to allow certain things for reasons of His own. His will is furthered in any case.” - JI Packer

b. God’s sovereignty is not aimless (he’s not some bored God playing w/ us)

- i. *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)*
- ii. *Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. (Psalm 115:3)*
- iii. Whenever God acts, he acts in a way that pleases him. In his sovereignty, *“God is never constrained to do a thing that he despises. He is never backed into a corner where his only recourse is to do something he hates to do... God never becomes the victim of circumstance. He is never forced into a situation where he must do something in which he cannot rejoice. He is not mocked. He is not trapped or cornered or coerced.*

Even at the one point in history where he did what in one sense was the hardest thing for God to do, “not spare his own Son” (Romans 8:32), God was free and doing what pleased him. Paul says that the self-sacrifice of Jesus in death was “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). The greatest sin and the greatest death and the hardest act of God was pleasing to the Father.

And on his way to Calvary, Jesus himself had legions at his disposal. “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:18) — of his own good pleasure, for the joy that is set before him (Hebrews 12:2). At the one point in the history of the universe where Jesus looked trapped, he was totally in charge doing precisely what he pleased — dying to justify the ungodly like you and me.

So let us stand in awe and wonder. And let us tremble that not only our praises of God’s sovereignty but also our salvation through the death of Christ for us, hang on this: “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases.” - John Piper, Solid Joys 9/1/2016

- iv. God’s sovereignty is not aimless, it is shot like a precise arrow to accomplish his purposes and your good.

4. WHAT DOES THIS STORY TEACH ABOUT MAN/YOU?

a. You are not sovereign.

- i. Things are beyond your control.
 - 1. Seems obvious, but you deceive yourself very well.
- ii. You can tell how much you struggle with this by how frustrated, depressed, resentful, bitter you get when things don’t go your way
 - 1. From Road Rage to Anxiety (not talking about medical condition)
- iii. So what do you (we) need to realize?

- b. **You cannot control what happens in life, but you can control how you respond to what happens in life.**
 - i. Based upon this story, I think we have two options for how we respond
 - ii. Will you respond w/ bitterness or trust and faith?
 - 1. Believe the lie of the garden - God doesn't love you, he isn't good
 - 2. Trust that God does love you and is for you, not against you
- c. Joseph: Had a lot of opportunities for bitterness. (Joseph could have gotten bitter towards God or people when...)
 - i. Being sold into slavery... Falsely accused... Forgotten in prison... When his brothers showed up...
- d. Joseph chose to trust that God was for him and not against him.
- e. Only in trusting in God's sovereignty does Joseph have the ability to forgive his brothers' evil deed:
 - i. *His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:18-21 ESV)*

5. WHY TEACH ON THIS STORY?

- a. The parallels between Joseph and Jesus are spectacular
- b. Like Joseph, Jesus would have to leave his beloved Father
- c. Like Joseph, Jesus would be sold for silver
- d. Like Joseph, Jesus would be charged with crimes he didn't commit
- e. Like Joseph, even though his family had hurt him, hated him, and even wanted him dead - in spite of everything - Joseph couldn't stop loving them
 - i. This is exactly what Jesus did too
- f. As God used the tragedy of Joseph's life for great good and forgiveness, God uses the greatest tragedy - the crucifixion of God - for the greatest good and the offer of forgiveness
- g. In his sovereignty, God allows great harm to befall Joseph, but that harm culminated in great grace → forgiveness for his brothers, survival for the ANE
- h. In his sovereignty, God orchestrated the death of his only Son, but that great crime culminated in great grace → forgiveness for God's people

6. IF THIS IS TRUE, WHAT DO I DO?

- a. You cannot control what happens in your life...
- b. You can control how you react to the events of life...
- c. **Will you trust God that God is for you or will you believe the lie of the garden?**
 - i. If you are angry "at your circumstances" you are angry at God
- d. The only reason that Joseph can forgive his brothers is because he trusts in
 - i. Good God; A Sovereign God; An Intentional God (Rom 8:28)

- e. Trusting in those truths, Joseph can forgive because he knows that God is for him in the midst of the chaos of life
- f. You might never know the plan this side of heaven like Joseph did → Job didn't
- g. But you must trust that God is for you not against you
- h. Then and only then will you be able to get past your bitterness... past your inexplicable anger... past your rage... past your unforgiveness towards others... past your disdain of God
- i. God has proven himself through his promises culminating in the cross.
- j. God is for you. Trust in him.

7. Cue Piper Sermon Jam