



#6 In the Joseph series
God Meant it for Good
Forest Park Church

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As we have journeyed through Joseph's story over and over again we see God working in the midst of the chaos. Joseph's life illustrates perhaps better than any other story in the Bible a profound truth:

Romans 8:28

"For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"

In many ways Joseph's whole life is an illustration of a profound New Testament truth, Romans 8:28 must be true.

We generally operate with the expectation that life should work with some fundamental fairness.

- This bedrock belief is so commonly accepted in our country that even those who leave God out of the equation accept it as the norm.
- If life is working as it should, goodness gets rewarded, badness gets punished.
- This conviction is almost axiomatic in America.

These are things we often hear.

- "Be diligent in school, be nice to others, and doors will open for you"?
- "Do right by the law and it will go well for you"?
- "Work hard, keep up your end of the deal, and you'll prosper"?
-

When you think about it, the whole ethical, legal, and economic system we call Western civilization rests on this foundation that people reap what they sow.

Now we call this principle "justice."

- And our national concept of it actually comes from a biblical worldview that has profoundly influenced Western culture.
- The Bible teaches that, at the heart of the universe there is a Creator who is both fair and purposeful, who has established links between actions and consequences.
- This is what is behind the assertion in Psalm 73:1 that "Truly God is good to ... those who are pure in heart."

So what do you do when it doesn't work out that way?

Asaph is the God-inspired writer of Ps. 73 and he is really struggling over this very thing.

PSALM 73:1

*Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.*
 2 *But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.*
 3 *For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*
 4 *For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.*
 5 *They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.*
 6 *Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.*
 7 *Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.*
 8 *They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.*
 9 *They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.*
 10 *Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.[a]*
 11 *And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"*
 12 *Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.*
 13 *All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.*
 14 *For all the day long I have been stricken*

*and rebuked every morning.
15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed the generation of your children.*

**16 *But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
17 until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.***

*18 Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
19 How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!
20 Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.
21 When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,
22 I was brutish and ignorant;
I was like a beast toward you.
23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength[b] of my heart and my portion forever.
27 For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.
28 But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
that I may tell of all your works.*

In **v. 2**, *But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.*

- In other words, "Judging from appearances, God doesn't enforce justice evenly, and frankly, that is causing me to lose my spiritual balance."
- He goes on to describe the seeming injustice of life, how that the wicked get along well while the righteous struggle.

In essence he says, "I've discovered how life really seems to work.

- You try to stay humble and do good and you have a tough, mediocre life.
- You live by lust, power, greed, and deceit and you become a celebrity.”
- Sounds like he lives in our world! In

Asaph’s own words, we have the axiom in

- vs. 1: *Truly God is good to ... those who are pure in heart?*
- vs. 13, he has come to another conclusion: *All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.*

In our study of the OT man of faith, Joseph, we’ve found plenty of reasons that could lead him agree with Asaph.

- He was sold like cattle by his own brothers to passing slave merchants;
- he was falsely accused of rape by a conniving, immoral woman;
- he was imprisoned though innocent;
- he was forgotten after he had helped others out.
- His young adult years were littered with circumstances that seemed to defy the biblical order that God blesses the faithful and judges the wicked.

Oh how easy it would have been

- to let anger become bitterness
- to let temptation lead to immorality
- to let fear foster despair
- to let suffering turn to self-pity

Joseph had ample ammunition and power with which to formulate a spectacular revenge against his ruthless brothers, should the opportunity ever present itself.

But through it all, this admirable man stayed steady, exhibited a gentle, forgiving spirit, allowed God to work in him and through him. It was **as if he was living by a different script—one that empowers a person to glorify God no matter what.** Is it really possible to rise above the raw deal, to stay clean and focused when your severely tempted and tried?

This message is for all who have been

- abandoned,
- betrayed,
- wronged,
- slandered,

- robbed,
- or forgotten.

Gen. 45, We have come to the climactic point of this story we have followed for weeks.

Last week, we saw what happened when Joseph, now the Prime Minister of Egypt, recognized his brothers who had come to purchase grain during a famine.

- **I Believe Joseph is lead of the Lord to conceal his identity from them for several months in order to lead his sin-hardened brothers to a point of repentance and readiness.**
- The culmination of this came in 44:16 when Judah, perhaps the most immoral and heartless of all Joseph's brothers—the very one who, 22 years before, had suggested that they sell Joseph into slavery 22 years before--**comes as a broken man to openly confess the sin he and his brothers had committed against God and their younger brother.**

Verse 16: *And Judah said [to Joseph, whom he doesn't recognize], "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants. Judah will ultimately do what he didn't do two decades earlier with Joseph—he would offer himself as a slave in the place of Benjamin, the youngest brother.*

That did it for Joseph. What happens next unfolds two of the deepest and most important truths we can learn about life—two truths that need to become convictions of our heart,

- They can equip you to march to a different drumbeat
- And live life according to a different script.
- As Joseph stands before his brothers, he reveals the first conviction we need to honor God when it all goes south:

I. God Brings Light to the Darkness.

Luke 12:1-3

In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his

disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 3 Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

Joseph had just heard Judah's pleas offered while his brothers stood close by. He knew that his brothers were becoming transformed men.

Genesis 45:1-3:

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

Imagine your in the corner of that royal room,

- You can see Joseph burst into tears.
- Years of sorrow and longing pour out in sobs before these bewildered brothers, who still don't know who this Egyptian official really is.
- And then suddenly, Joseph utters a sentence that left everyone reeling: I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?

Notice the brothers as they were processing what is going on.

- The Bible says they were dismayed at his presence.
- That's a rather calm way to translate the Hebrew.
- Actually ill bet they felt shocked, terrified to the point of trembling.

Genesis 45:4

"Come near to me, please." And they came near.

The Hebrew verb that Joseph uses for "coming near" means more than just a closer proximity.

- The word was sometimes used for coming near for the purpose of embracing or kissing someone.

- Joseph was inviting them into a new relationship as they stepped a little closer to him.
- Notice what he says as they huddled around him. "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt."

One-by-one recognition begins to dawn on them.

- The best-kept secret in all of Canaan was now out in the open.
- What will he do with them now?
- What would their father think of them when the truth comes to him?
- Joseph, whom they had so deeply wronged, was a living indictment, not just a guilty memory.
- Their chickens had come home to roost.

God's character demands that justice will be fully served.

- No one ever gets away with anything.
- You can be sure your sins will find you out.

Hebrews 4:13

There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

But God will deal with the events on a timetable different than ours. We are called to allow him to work in his own time.

Our world doesn't need more Clint Eastwoods, taking justice into their own hands because they don't think God is doing a good job of it. Instead, our world needs to see a Christian who will rest in this personal promise from God:

Rom. 12:19

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Joseph was convinced that God would handle the reckoning, and it freed him from the poison of vengeance.

"Like hate, vengeance is something that takes a toll on the person who feels wronged, as well as the enemy.

- It is inherently unhealthy because it takes a psychological and physical toll on the person.
- Venting those feelings of anger and hostility does not decrease those feelings,
- It may give you a cathartic feeling, but it doesn't last.
- We become trapped in an endless cycle of retribution

As ABC news called it we're in a "The Tug of War between Jesus and Batman"

- Our society constantly seems to be in a constant tug of war between seeking revenge and "turning the other cheek."

So how does someone cope with a need for revenge? The first, and perhaps most important, step is taking responsibility for your emotions.

(Bud Welch Story)

II. God transforms Evil for Good.

Genesis 45:5-9, (watch for how many times he refers to God)

*And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for **God** sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And **God** sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but **God**. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, **God** has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry.*

He sees God behind it all. Joseph consistently related everything that happened back to God.

- When Joseph was tempted to commit adultery with the wife of Potiphar, he said, “How could I do such a wicked thing and **sin against God?**” (39:9)
- When he was falsely imprisoned and was told of dreams that Pharaoh’s officials were unable to interpret, he responded, Do not interpretations **belong to God?** Tell me your dreams. (40:8)
- When he stood before Pharaoh, he said the same thing: I cannot do it... but **God will give Pharaoh the answer** he desires (41:16). Later he reflected again, **God has revealed to Pharaoh** what He is about to do (41:25)

Joseph had two sons with his Egyptian wife.

- One of whom he named Manasseh, saying God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household. (41:51)
- The other he named Ephraim because, he said, God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering (41:52).

Genesis 50:20

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: 17 ‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” 19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?

Genesis 50:20

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. 21 So do not

fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Conclusion:

And then there is our passage, where he makes the same affirmation four times:

1. God sent me before you to preserve life...
2. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep you alive.
3. So it was not you who sent me here, but God...
4. God has made me lord of all Egypt.

Joseph looked past secondary causes and God making good from evil intents.

- Gods hand was in it all, governing, limiting, and tailoring every circumstance to bring about the best possible outcome for the most people for the longest possible time.

To see God in all things, both good and evil, enables us to forgive easily those who injure us.

- It does not incline us to condone their fault as if they were unconscious instruments...for they act as freely as if God had no part at all.
- But we can pity, forgive, and pray for them...for often they are the unwitting benefactors to our souls.

God had used their evil plans to accomplish His own gracious purposes.”

Is there someone you're struggling to forgive?

- Maybe the very mention of their name causes you to tense up with anger! You've prayed about it and had little relief?
- If so, try thinking of their words and actions as part of God's providence.
- See His hand in it.
- Anticipate the good that He will bring from it.

What this world needs to see are real Christians who stand out in the crowd because they simply believe God.

- Life is not always fair, but God is always good.
- Circumstances out of our control will come our way, but God is always over all.

Let today be the day of relief and release.

It's time to stop carrying your wounds and let Him who was wounded for you take them.