

Joseph: Because God Meant It for Good

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Now, I want you to turn to the last chapter of the book of Genesis, chapter 50, and we're going to begin and then do a little bit of a flashback. As you know, we are in a series called "Unlikely Heroes" that is already a prepared book and it will be available to you by the end of August. You're going to enjoy reading this book and we're taking a look at some of the...some of the heroes, some of the men and women that God used in remarkable ways who at the beginning were very unlikely to have the level of influence that they have had.

And tonight we're going to talk about Joseph...Joseph, because God meant it for good. If you look at chapter 50 of Genesis and verse 20, Joseph says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result to preserve many people alive."

You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. That introduces us to a characteristic, an attribute of God which we often call His providence. That is to say that God works His own ends, no matter what the intention of people be it good or bad, God will bring about His own ultimate end. And what God means to happen, will ultimately happen. God coordinates and organizes all the apparently independent activities, and thoughts, and ideas, and movements of people, pulls them all together, makes them harmonize with one another to effect His ultimate ends. That is revealed to us in many stories in the Bible, none more dramatic than the story of Joseph.

As we come to the fiftieth chapter of the book of Genesis, there are eleven grim faces staring down anxiously at the floor. All attention is focused on the man who is enthroned in front of them. They are huddled, these eleven are, before one of the most powerful rulers in the world, one who stands only behind Pharaoh in Egypt and he has the authority to execute them. He is dressed in fashion that would be fitting for one who had the position he had. He is the Prime Minister of Egypt; he looks down on these humble Jewish herdsmen as they stoop before him. He has had a long history with these men. It is a history of pain and suffering, and rejection, and the memories are vividly etched into his mind. They had wronged him, this Prime Minister, in the past greatly. They had done great damage to him from a human perspective and now the tables are turned and he has the power and the authority and the ability to enact severe retribution against them. They are, in fact, his brothers who had betrayed him and the Prime Minister of Egypt is none other than Joseph, the one betrayed.

And the question that is posed is that what is the action that Joseph will take against his brothers? His father, Jacob, is dead. They have already buried him. And now they are bowing before their brother,

they know who he is, they know the history. It again is vivid to them. And they beg him for mercy. They are frightened because they wonder with their father's passing if Joseph might finally, though he has been kind to them, might finally seek revenge for the severe cruelty that they had enacted against him decades earlier.

Reuben, the oldest of the brothers, had blamed himself for what happened to Joseph. Judah, another of the brothers, felt the heavy burden, the stinging weight of guilt. He was the one who initially suggested Joseph be sold into slavery. But all of the brothers, all of them with the exception of one brother, the youngest by the name of Benjamin, all of them had been involved in essentially an unthinkable act of treachery and they were all guilty and they were all blame worthy and now...maybe this was the day finally after the death of their father who may have held off the revenge of Joseph, at least that was their thinking, now that he's gone, their crimes have finally caught up with them. Will Joseph take his revenge?

When the silence is broken, it turns out that it's not anger, and it's not hostility. It's not threats. It's not statements of harsh punishment; it is rather the sound of weeping, crying. One by one as they lift their eyes and look at Joseph, he looks back and he looks back with a forgiving smile, tears stumbling down his face. His tears prove to be contagious and they all begin to weep. And we read the text, Genesis 50 verses 19 to 21. Here are the words of Joseph.

"Do not be afraid for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good in order to bring it about as it is this day to save many people alive. Now, therefore, do not be afraid, I will provide for you and your little ones. And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

There was no vengeance here. There was no hatred. There was no animosity. Joseph treated his brothers with mercy. He treated them with loving kindness. He treated them with undeserved favor.

But the question is this, How does kindness and love and mercy and grace become cultivated in the heart of one so wickedly treated? How does this attitude of complete forgiveness and compassion and affection and provision and comfort and kindness come out of the heart of one so horribly treated? The answer is found in Joseph's theology. He had a clear understanding that what his brothers have done to him is evil. But though they meant it for evil, God meant it for good. He had a clear understanding that God was at work and God is in control and you can trust God for the outcome. It was his theology of the sovereign purpose and providence of God that generated the attitude of his heart.

Boy, that's a great lesson. Unless we see the big picture of what God is doing through the difficulties of life, the suffering, the pain, the iniquities, the injustices of life, we will miss the profound and foundational truth that God is using all of it for our ultimate good and His glory. The big picture that

Joseph saw was the reality that though they had mistreated him, it was in the purpose of God. And that purpose was so vast, and so all encompassing, and so far-reaching as really to be staggeringly amazing. Bottom line, the Lord used Joseph's suffering and his subsequent circumstances to accomplish His own sovereign purposes. Far bigger picture. God had a plan for the world and in order to fulfill that plan for the world, He had a plan for the nation Israel. And in order to fulfill the plan for the nation Israel, He had a plan for Joseph. And it all was tied together. The plan for His chosen people included their survival, their survival during a seven-year famine. During that seven-year famine they had no food in Israel.

That brought them to Egypt where there was plenty of food. And when they arrived in Egypt, because of the greatness of Joseph, they were given a land of their own, the best of land called the land of Goshen. And over the next four centuries, that group of people would be transformed from a family into a nation that would witness to the glory of God. It was all a part of God's plan to fulfill His covenant promises of a seed and salvation that would extend to the whole earth as He promised Abraham in Genesis 12. God was making all things work together for good to the accomplishing of His great plan.

God intended that the trials of this one very unlikely hero would be for the good of his family and then the good of that nation that would come out of his family and through that nation, the good of the world. Joseph suffered. He suffered repeatedly in his life. But the Bible never tells us that God was punishing him for sin. Joseph did not suffer because God was punishing him for sin, but he did suffer so that God could ultimately save sinners. There had to be a nation, Israel, so out of that nation could come Messiah who would be the only Savior the world would ever know.

Now, let's go back to the beginning of the story which takes us back to the thirty-seventh chapter of Genesis...chapter 37. We're going to move fast, so hang on. It all starts with a family feud...a family feud. Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan. As the story unfolds, Joseph is seventeen years of age. He's pasturing the flock with his brothers while still a youth. This is where the whole painful story begins. The problem that generates the feud in the family is indicated in verse 3, and we're going to be skipping so stick with us. Verse 3, "Israel, which is the new name of Jacob, remember his name was changed to Israel and you have that in Genesis 32:28 and repeated in Genesis 35:9 to 11. He's given the name Israel which then becomes the name of the nation.

"Israel loved Joseph than all his sons." That's not good. That's not good. Because he was the son of his old age, and he made him, the NAS says "a very colored tunic." Some translations say a white tunic in the sense that the white was such a pure white that it sort of splattered the reflection that could give hues of various colors. Others would say that the actual word here simply means a full-length robe; a kind of formal robe with long sleeves and that would reach all the way to the ground. I know that tampers with your children's story books, but we don't know for certain that it was a multi-

colored robe, but it was a robe symbolic of family favoritism. It's one thing to have one out of twelve as your favorite; it's something else to make him wear something around all the time that symbolizes that favoritism. That is where the problem began.

There was another problem. The ten brothers who came before him were born to another woman. So they were only his half-brothers. They were not born through his mother, Rachel, who had two sons, Joseph and Benjamin and she died giving birth to Benjamin. So Joseph grows up as his father's favorite son because, frankly, Rachel was his father's favorite wife. Conflict runs deep in the family. His father, Jacob, had tricked his own father, Isaac, you remember, to cheat his brother Esau out of the family birthrights. So there was bad history in this family about their relationships. Joseph's maternal grandfather, Laban, was also upset at Jacob for trying to sneak away from the homestead in Heron, and you, of course, remember that first there had to be Leah and then more work to get to Rachel and there were two wives and they hated each other. Rachel then in constant warfare with her older sister who was the first wife of Jacob. They raced to have children and Leah wins and that doesn't help.

And in order to win the race, you know what they did according to Genesis 35:23? They gave Jacob their handmaids as concubines. They took the women that worked for them and passed them off to Jacob just to produce babies. I guess it counted as yours if it was your handmaid.

The story gets uglier. When the family finally arrives in the land of Canaan, two of Joseph's half-brothers, Simeon and Levi, are angry with a village, this is in chapter 34, because they have degraded Dinah, a sister. They have treated her like a harlot; they have taken sexual advantage of her. So Simeon and Levi murder an entire village to seek revenge for their sister Dinah. This doesn't sit well with the neighbors, as you can imagine. It makes them a threat. Joseph's oldest brother Reuben has an affair with one of his father's concubines which Jacob later hears about. Needless to say, he grew up in a messed up family. Things didn't get any easier for the young man after his mother died because then his brothers began to unleash on him their hostility and their resentment. It was unlikely from that kind of beginning and that kind of context that Joseph would ever amount to anything, making him the favorite, only made life all the more difficult.

Now come to chapter 37 with me for a moment. And I want to introduce you to how much his brothers hated him. In verse 3 he is indicated to be the favorite. Verse 4, his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, so they hated him and couldn't speak to him on friendly terms. He has this symbolic favor in this robe which was given to him to set him apart from everybody else. And the whole scene just continues to escalate because apparently Joseph appeared to his brothers to act as if he was superior, as if he was some kind of royalty because verse 2 says, "Joseph brought back a bad report about his brothers to their father."

Now look, it's bad enough to be the favorite son, but to be the guy that snitches just compounds the problem. He brings back bad reports about his brothers behavior. He wears this kingly robe around. He acts and talks like a superior. And then he reports badly concerning the contact and behavior of his brothers. Even more offensive.

He kept having dreams and his dreams were just outrageous dreams in which in every dream that he reports here, his brothers are seen bowing down to him, paying homage to him. One day he meets his brothers, chapter 37 verse 6, and he says to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had. For behold, we were binding sheaves in the field and lo my sheaf rose up and also stood erect and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf. And his brothers said to him, Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words."

Now, in all honesty, keep your mouth shut might have been a better policy, you know. Keep the dream to yourself. They viewed him as spoiled rotten, overfed ego, gone too far. The Bible never ascribes pride to him. The Bible doesn't tell us why he felt he needed to tell them these dreams. Maybe he believed that these were given to him by God and he needed to do his duty in reporting to his fellow family members. But whatever his motive was, they fed the hatred and the vitriol that was set on a course against him.

They wanted him out of the family. And their opportunity came on a day when...by the way, he had another dream, I should point that out, in verse 9 in which he said, "The sun and the moon and the eleven stars were bowing down to me." And they ask in verse 10, "Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" His brothers were jealous of him. Well that escalated it, of course.

But the opportunity for them to take some action happens when they arrive in a place called Dothan where they're feeding their flocks. Obviously flocks move around and they're in Dothan. To make matters worse, apparently Jacob used Joseph as his personal spy to go check on the brothers. So he sends Joseph to Dothan, by the way 63 miles away. So Joseph goes on a multi-day trek and we pick up the story in verse 17. They have gone to Dothan, so Joseph went after his brothers. Found them at Dothan. When they saw him from a distance before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. And we will say a while beast devoured him. Then let us see what will become of his dreams. But Reuben, the oldest, heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." Verse 22, Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness but do not lay hands on him." He said that that he might rescue him out of their hands to restore him to his father.

He was going to have him thrown in the pit and when they left, he would come back and rescue him and take him back to his father. So that's all being plotted. That's exactly what they do, verse 23. "When Joseph arrived, he reached his brothers; they stripped him of his robe, his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him. They took him, threw him into the pit. The pit was empty without any water in it."

These were pits that were shaped like a bottle. They had a narrow neck, big enough for a bucket to go down. And the pit was much bigger than that. The walls of the neck of the pit would be slick masonry. There would be no way to come up and get out. He would be in that dry well at the bottom, scared, confused. He's frightened. And they sit down to have lunch, verse 25. They're just done with him.

And while they're having lunch, somebody spots a caravan coming. Verse 26, "Judas said to his brothers, 'What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come; let's sell him to the Ishmaelites.'" You remember Ishmael, right?...the son of Hagar, the handmaid of Sarah. Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, he's our brother, our own flesh. The brothers listened to him. And some Midianite traders passed by, they pulled up, lifted Joseph out of the pit, sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Apparently they offered the deal to the Ishmaelites and the Midianites and they took the highest price. Twenty pieces of silver, by the way, was the average price for a male slave. The terrified teen-ager has been hoisted out of the pit, handed over to a group of north Arabian Ishmaelite traders headed for, of all places, Egypt. Joseph continues to plead with his brothers. You won't find that in Genesis chapter 37 but you find that mentioned later in chapter 42 and verse 21 which says, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother as they look back because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we wouldn't listen."

So he pleads with them, "Please don't do this to me." He's pleading for his life. They want him gone permanently out of their lives. They've satisfied themselves that they're not going to kill him, they're not going to murder him, they're going to sell him for what they can get. So he descends from being a favored son, wearing the regal robe of favoritism, to being a kidnapped slave. They have engaged in human trafficking, if you will. And surely you begin to wonder what Joseph must have wondered. How can this happen to me? I'm doing what my father tells me to do. I'm obedient, my father has sent me on this mission, I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. And then he must have been asking this question. What do those dreams mean, right? Cause my brothers aren't bowing down to me, my brothers have sold me into slavery. He's seventeen years old, by the way, he's seventeen years old. His whole world has flipped completely on its head. Betrayed by his brothers, all the joys of home, the security of his father's love violently ripped away from him. The Lord doesn't condone this evil, of course not. But God will overrule this evil and accomplish his purpose, and bring those dreams of bowing brothers to pass in the future.

By the way, Reuben, during the negotiation with the Midianites and the Ishmaelites apparently had wandered off somewhere and he didn't return until Joseph was gone. And so Reuben's response is in verse 30. He returns and says, "The boy isn't there. As for me, where am I to go? How am I going to face my father?" He tears his clothes. We've got a problem here. How do we explain what we've just done with our father's favorite son?

Well they concoct a very elaborate lie. To make a long story short, they kill a goat. They get all the blood, then they take the robe that belonged to Joseph and they throw it in the blood to deceive their father as if this is Joseph's blood and he's been killed by a wild animal. Ironically Jacob had fooled his father Isaac by using a goatskin many years earlier in Genesis chapter 27. They took the blood-stained robe back to Jacob. Jacob slumped into a prolonged depression, mourning the loss of his favorite son. The other sons tried to console him, Genesis says, but he would not be consoled, Genesis 42:22 indicates that guilt was eating away at Reuben and probably the other brothers as well. But it was mitigated by the fact that they had gotten rid of this irritating boy, or so they thought.

So we go from a family feud, just some points of connection, to a false accusation in chapter 39. Let's go to chapter 39 and pick up the story. Verse...chapter 38 doesn't advance the story, we go to chapter 39 and pick up the story there.

Joseph has been taken down into Egypt. When he gets to Egypt, do you remember what happened? Verse 1, he's taken to Egypt and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard...that's a very important position, he is the main guard of the greatest ruler in the ancient world. Brought him...bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. So now he's sold again and he's sold to Potiphar to be a slave in the house of Potiphar. This again is another sad incident in the life of Joseph. Sold once, sold again. But sold into a very prominent house, from itinerant meandering traders, he finds himself in a wealthy, prosperous home of a man with a very high position who interacts with the royalty of Egypt. He is gone from a caravan, if you will, to a castle, a palace.

It doesn't take long for Potiphar to find out that Joseph is a very, very capable man. Verse 2, "The Lord was with Joseph so he became a successful man and he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Now his master saw the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand, so Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant. He made him overseer over his house and all that he owned he put in his charge. It came about from that time he made him overseer in his house over all that owned. The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph, thus the Lord's blessing was upon all that he owned in the house and in the field." So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge, and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Joseph was over all of it. It was the providence of God that he ended up in Potiphar's house because his master was an intimate in the court of Pharaoh. It allowed Joseph to meet royalty and to interact with royalty and to become very familiar with the noble customs of Egypt. Such knowledge would later prove critical and essential for the role that God would have him. He is now directly the manager of all of his master's resources and he's responsible and he's getting on the job management training for a much bigger management experience that he's going to face very soon in his future.

If Joseph was found guilty of any crime, any wrong doing while he was in the house of Potiphar, he would then end up in the same prison where Pharaoh's personal prisoners were confined. There was a prison, or a part of the prison where those who had violated the Pharaoh were placed, or violated those near to the Pharaoh were placed. According to Genesis 39:20. That also is crucial to the plan. And the plot thickens when Potiphar's wife begins to notice Joseph. And she likes what she sees.

The end of verse 6, he is handsome in form and appearance. And it came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, she's pretty direct, she says, "Lie with me." And Joseph responds, he refused, said to his master's wife, "Behold with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, that's the highest level of trust. He has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I. He has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God? It's not just Potiphar, it's God.

And as she spoke to Joseph day after day...same message, "Lie with me," he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. She attempts repeatedly to seduce him. He rejects every attempt. He takes the noble ground, asserts the trust of his master of far more value than some dalliance with her. However, on one of those days when Joseph is alone in the house, according to verse 11, and none of the men of the household was there inside, she caught him by his garment saying, "Lie with me. And he left his garment in her hand and fled and went outside." He just bolted. He was fleeing immorality and she's standing there holding the garment.

When she saw that he left his garment in her hand and fled outside, she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us. He came in to me to lie with me and I screamed when he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." So she left his garment beside her until his master came home, then she spoke to him with these words. "The Hebrew slave whom you brought to us came into me to make sport of me and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

You know, hell hath no fury like a scorned woman. And you kind of want to say for Joseph, "Give me a break. I can't win in life. What next?" And so far we don't see him doing anything wrong. And the

question has to be rising as his theology is developing, since he doesn't have a Bible to read, he's got to be asking the questions, "God, why is this happening? I was faithful to my father and I end up being sold into slavery. I'm then sold again, I am completely faithful to my master, and I am lied about and now the first time my brothers took my robe, and threw me in a pit. And now this woman takes my robe and I get thrown in prison."

Her fury rages against him and she hangs his garment in her hand as proof. It was his word against hers. It was going to be Potiphar's slave going to prison and not Potiphar's wife. However, a little bit of history in the background, indicates to us that adultery was punishable in Egypt, certainly at that level, by capital punishment. Normally, someone who did that would be executed. The fact that he was not executed may indicate that though Potiphar was angry, he also knew his wife. And he gave Joseph the benefit of the doubt. So Joseph is bound again and becomes a captive in prison.

And he must have wondered why are all these bad things happening to me? In the fact of obedience to my father, I end up in a pit. In the face of honoring my master, I end up in prison. As far as we know from the text, he hadn't done anything. This cannot be construed as divine punishment. He is endeavoring to honor the Lord by honoring his father, honoring his Lord by honoring his master. He's doing what is right. His circumstances seem completely unfair. But God by the evil deed of others which God does not condone, has Joseph exactly where He wants him. The Lord is perfectly in control. The Lord doesn't do evil. The Lord doesn't condone evil. The Lord isn't in the evil. But the Lord uses the evil.

So we go from a family feud to a false accusation. Let's go to third point in the story in chapter 40, a forgetful friend. It sounds strange but everywhere Joseph goes, he's blessed. He was blessed by the love of his mother. He was blessed by the favoritism and love of his father. He was blessed by God in the house of Potiphar so that Potiphar's entire fortune increased. Now he goes to prison and he's followed again by divine blessing. Come to the end of chapter 39, verse 21, he's in prison. He's in the place, according to verse 20, where the king's prisoners were confined, in that place where only the prisoners of the king were placed. But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. He had favor with Reuben, which saved his life. He had favor with Potiphar which saved his life. And here he has favor with the jailer, the chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail. This has got to be a remarkable guy. Everywhere he goes his leadership skill, his trustworthiness is so manifest and so fast manifest that everything is put into his care...high level of trust. Verse 22 actually says, "Whatever was done there, he was responsible for." He's in the jail, running the jail.

Verse 23, "The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him and whatever he did the Lord made to prosper." This isn't natural skill, this is supernatural help. God is doing something really amazing with this young boy.

The keeper of the prison doesn't look into anything under Joseph's authority because the Lord is with him. And by the way, some archeological evidence from this period indicates that within the Egyptian penal system, there are positions and those positions are found in some of the ancient documents. One of the positions was that under the prison warden, whoever the chief jailer was, there's a position called "scribe of the prison." He was responsible for keeping all the records of the prison and managing all the assets of the prison. Given Joseph's experience, working for his father as the one who was in charge of his brothers, given his experience working for Potiphar as the one who was in charge of everything that Potiphar possessed, it was pretty clear to the chief jailer that his skills were formidable or the jailer wouldn't have known that he was being aided and abetted by God Himself.

Well the story gets very interesting in chapter 40 because apparently the baker...the baker who baked for the king and the cup bearer who provided drinks for the king, the wine steward, you might say, and the baker are accused of a crime. And what would the crime be? What crime could a baker and a wine steward be accused of in a royal environment trying to do...what?...poison the king. Not good. So get thrown in the jail were the prisoners...royal prisoners go.

Chapter 40, the cup bearer and the baker for the King of Egypt defended their lord, the King of Egypt. Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cup bearer and the chief baker, so he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard in the jail, the same place where Joseph was imprisoned. You wouldn't think that God was involved in Egypt in any way directly, but a plot surfaces. At first it looks like this is collusion between the baker and the cup bearer to poison the Pharaoh. They go to the prison, there's Joseph. Verse 4, "The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them." Again he rises to leadership. He took care of them. They were in confinement for some undesignated time. It could be days, weeks.

Then the cup bearer and the baker for the King of Egypt who were confined in jail both had a dream, the same night. Each man with his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation and it just so happens that there is another dreamer there who will turn out to be the greatest dream interpreter ever. Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them and they were very dejected. He asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" Then they said to him, "We've had a dream and there's no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please."

So they tell him the dream. And Joseph interprets the dream. I won't go through all of that. It's wonderful to read it. But the message is this, "You, cup bearer, you're going to be restored to your position in the palace, you're innocent. You're going to be fine."

Baker, you're going to be hanged. Wow. And so, that's what happened, verse 21, "The chief cup bearer was restored to his office." Verse 22, "The baker was hanged." So the baker was the one

plotting and the cup bearer was innocent.

It is clear from the text of Genesis that it is God who gives to Joseph the interpretation. Joseph can't read the future, Joseph can't predict the future any more than Daniel could centuries later when God gave him dreams. No man has the ability to tell the future.

Well, you would assume that the cup bearer would have been a good friend to Joseph because Joseph had given him such a good interpretation. And so Joseph speaks to the cup bearer, chapter 40 verse 14, I just think this is so...so wonderful. "Keep me in mind when it goes well with you. Don't forget me here languishing here in prison. Do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this place, for I was, in fact, kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and even here, I've done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."

That's a simple request, right? When you get back to the palace, would you just say a word for me? Look at verse 23, "The chief cup bearer didn't remember Joseph but forgot him." That's how the fortieth chapter ends. He forgot him. So for two more years he's stuck in that prison. He just keeps being mistreated by everybody, mistreated by his brothers, mistreated by Potiphar's wife, by Potiphar, and when he had one hope, this man adds to the mistreatment. And again, we have to ask the question, "Why is all of this happening to this innocent man?"

But God had not forgotten Joseph and God was not about to abandon Joseph, nor would God allow the cup bearer's amnesia to last indefinitely. Pharaoh is going to have a dream. And guess what? Pharaoh is going to ask for an interpreter and guess who knows an interpreter who's accurate? The cup bearer. And that leads us into the forty-first chapter, and a famine. We've seen a family feud, a false accusation, a forgetful friend, and now we're introduced to a famine.

Verse 1, it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream. You remember this dream, don't you? He's standing by the Nile and the Nile comes seven cows sleek and fat and grazing in the March grass. And behold, seven other cows come up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt and they stood by each other by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows, then Pharaoh awoke. He fell asleep and dreamed a second time and behold, seven years of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good and behold seven years thin and scorched by the east wind sprouted up after them, the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears and Pharaoh awoke and behold it was a dream.

He wakes up in a cold sweat, by the way, because he's had these...these dreams that he can't comprehend, he doesn't understand them. They're shocking. It's a shocking pattern of the skinny cows eating the fat ones and the skinny grain gobbling up the thick, plump grain.

Verse 8 says, "The next day his spirit is troubled in the morning. He sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men." This falls into the category of a frightening, terrifying nightmare. The images are rather benignly presented, cows and grain. But whatever the form of this dream, it was a very, very troubling experience, elements of fear had gripped his heart, he is deeply troubled in the morning, he gets the magicians and all the wise men, tells them his dreams and there's no one who can interpret them to Pharaoh...no one.

Then verse 9. "The chief cup bearer spoke to Pharaoh saying, "I would make mention today of my own offenses." Pharaoh was furious with his servants and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker. We had a dream on the same night, he and I, each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream, now a Hebrew youth was with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard and we related them to him and he interpreted our dreams to us, to each one he interpreted according to his own dream, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me in my office, but he hanged him, meaning the baker.

"Well the alarming situation of Pharaoh showing up in the morning before all the people in his intimate circle jogs the cup bearer's bad memory and he remembers Joseph. Pharaoh wastes no time in securing Joseph. Pharaoh called for Joseph. They hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh."

So whatever they were allowing him to do, he was still a prisoner in filthy clothes, unshaven. A change of clothes and a quick shave, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I've had a dream. There's no one who can interpret it. But I've heard it said of you that you can understand a dream to interpret it."

So Joseph answered Pharaoh saying, "It is not me. God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace." So the king does what? He tells him the dream. Starting in verse 17, he reiterates the dreams, both of them had the same kind of imagery, both depicted some future reality. And what is the future reality? It is this, Joseph interprets the dream. "You will have seven years of plenty in Egypt, followed by seven years of famine." That's what those two dreams convey. Seven years of plenty, seven years of famine. You need to be ready during the seven years to prepare for the seven-years of plenty for the seven years of famine. You need a man with administrative skills, management skills to organize the storage effort, to make sure that you take those seven years of plenty and save enough for the famine.

Think about where we are in the story. If Joseph's brothers had not sold him into slavery, he would not have been brought to Egypt. If Potiphar had not purchased him from those slave traders, he would not have gained the experience he needed to manage people and commodities within an Egyptian context. If he had not been falsely accused and sent to prison, he would not have been the interpreter of the dreams of the baker and the cup bearer. If that had not happened, he would not

have been summoned by Pharaoh on this divinely appointed day. In other words, our Lord had overseen every single detail in the life of Joseph...every detail.

Well, the King believed. And if you go down to verse 38, Pharaoh says, "Can we find a man like this in whom is a divine spirit, is this not one of a kind?"

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there's no one so discerning and wise as you are, you shall be over my house and according to your command, all my people shall do homage. Only in the throne I will be greater than you."

Wow! Is that an ascendancy, or what? You shall be over my house and all my people shall be ruled according to your word. Only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt," verse 41.

In a moment, all of Joseph's fortunes have been reversed. It's stunning. In the morning he's awakened in a prison cell. At night he goes to bed in a palace. Thirteen years earlier, thirteen years earlier he had come to Egypt as a slave. Verse 46 of 41 says, "He was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh." Thirteen years have gone by and now he has become the second most powerful man in Egypt. Just a thought. The Lord had revealed to him the meaning of other people's dreams, but what about those dreams that he had that he told his brothers about them bowing down to him, what about those dreams?

Well they're about to become a reality. In a fifth scene that I would call a family reunion...a family reunion. Chapter 41 verse 50. We've seen the family feud and the false accusation, and the forgetful friend, and the famine that's foretold. Here comes the family reunion. We start in verse 50 and we read, "In the year before the year of famine came, during still the years of plenty, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On bore to him. Joseph named the first Manasseh, for he said God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."

So there was a real reversal in his fortune so that he named his son Manasseh which means forgetful, because God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house. He had another son and his other son is named Ephraim which means fruitful for God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction," verse 52.

Now look, he's in Egypt. It's been a long time, years have gone by, thirteen years and more years have gone by. We're in to the famine, maybe in the last year of the famine, seven more years have gone by and just note this, he is still referring to God as the one at the center of his life. That's who he's referring to. God has made me fruitful. God has made me forget. This is a godly man. God is on his mind.

Well, the good years end and the famine begins. And not only were the Egyptians themselves saved from mass starvation...this is huge, this is an entire nation of people. They are saved because of the dream interpretation of Joseph and their planning led by him during the seven years of plenty. But multitudes of other people surrounding Egypt are saved from suffering starvation because Egypt has enough for them and enough for others to come and buy. And this makes Egypt richer and richer and richer. Joseph's foresight and careful planning literally could have saved millions of people throughout the Middle Eastern world. And if we had the time, you can look at chapter 47 of Genesis and from verse 14 to 24 you can see a chronicling of the wealth of Egypt that came pouring in as they sold their available food to the surrounding world. It was Joseph who at that time also instituted the first income tax, twenty percent, which is where I think it still should be, twenty percent, one-fifth of your income as given to the government for the public good.

Well, back in Israel they're being affected by the famine. This is where the story is so wonderful. They're being affected by the famine. Joseph's family is being affected by the family. They ran out of food. Where are they going to get food? Verse 2, chapter 42, "Jacob says, 'I heard there's grain in Egypt. Go down there, buy some for us from that place so that we may live and not die.'" Ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. Benjamin didn't come. There's grain in Egypt. Let's go down to Egypt.

Well, we don't have time to go through the whole story, our time has flown by. They went down, didn't they? And they went before Joseph and his dreams were fulfilled because all his brothers bowed down to him. Just exactly as his dreams indicated. They didn't know who he was, he knew who they were. He gave them some tests. Do you remember? Go back, get your brother Benjamin, bring him. And then he did something quite interesting, they did come back, they did bring Benjamin, and then he instructed his servants to hide a silver goblet in Benjamin's pack when they left, and then stopped them, searched them and find that and drag them back on the pretense that they had stolen this goblet, to see if they were willing to let Benjamin go. The plan was arrest Benjamin, tell the rest of the brothers you can go, we'll keep him and punish him. The test was, if they will give up their brother so easily, they haven't changed because that's what they did to me.

Well you know the story. They wouldn't give him up. And they all came back and they all fell down and through it all, of course, Joseph reveals himself, he reveals who he is. There's a wonderful embrace. The words, I think, that tell the story simply and magnificently, you have to go over to chapter 44, they come back...I can't get into this or we'll never get out of here. That is for sure. They come back, they're honest, they don't want to give their brother up. Go down in to chapter 45, verse 1, "Joseph couldn't control himself before all those who stood by him and he cried. Have everyone go out from me. So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He wept so loudly the Egyptians heard it, the household of Pharaoh heard it and Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph.'" I love that. "Is my father still alive?" His brothers couldn't answer for they

were dismayed at his presence.

Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me," and they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."

God used Joseph to preserve the family of Jacob. They stayed in the land, They went back, they brought all their children. They brought their family. If you go over to chapter 46 verse 5, Jacob came, the little ones, wives in the wagons which Pharaoh sent to carry them. They took their livestock, their property, everything they had acquired in the land of Canaan, they came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him, his sons, his grandsons with him, his daughters, his granddaughters and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt. When they got to Egypt, they were given the land of Goshen. They were there four hundred-plus years and in that four hundred years, they became two million people. And then they had a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph and they turned them into slaves. And God brought the Exodus and they went to Canaan and the rest is redemptive history.

God used this very unlikely hero to save His people. God did this to preserve your lives so there would be a nation called Israel. The witness nation, the nation from whom the prophets would come. The nation who would be given the Scriptures. The nation from whom the Messiah would come. The nation through whom the world would be blessed. Genesis 46, "I am God, the God of your father, do not fear to go down to Egypt, I will make of you a great nation there." And that's what God did.

Jacob died at the age of a hundred and forty-seven, but the nation became two million. And as I said, the rest is the redemptive history.

Just in closing, chapter 50 and we'll skip, you can read it on your own. This is a beautiful ending to the book of Genesis. Joseph's...this is where we started and this is where we'll end, Joseph's brothers realized their father is dead. They take him back to the land of Canaan, they bury him. And now they say in verse 15, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him?" Verse 17, "Please forgive, I beg you," this is their speech, "the transgression of your brothers and their sin for they did you wrong. And now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." This is what they said to Joseph. "And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came, fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.'" Just what his dreams said they would do. Joseph said, "And don't be afraid, am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Is that not a glorious principle? Whatever happens in life, whatever people intend, God orders it for His own children for good.

One closing parallel. Between the life of Joseph and Jesus, Joseph was dearly loved by his father. Joseph was a shepherd of his father's sheep. Joseph was hated by his brothers, stripped of his

clothing, sold for the price of a slave, taken to Egypt to tempt him, falsely accused, bound in chains, condemned with criminals. Yet after he suffered he was highly exalted, he was 30 years old when he began his public service. He wept for his brothers, forgave those who had wronged him and ultimately saved them from certain death. Moreover, what men did to hurt him, God turned around for good. All those things in a wonderful analogy were also true of the Lord Jesus.

We may not always understand what is happening to us, but the Lord is always in control. Amen?

Father, we thank You for our opportunity tonight to look at the life of Joseph, an incredible account, it fills up such a huge section of holy Scripture because it's so important for us to know not only Your purposes for Your people Israel, but Your control over lives and destinies on how all of history is ordered to the ends which You have ordained. Thank You for our time tonight, and the opportunity to know the story better, and in the story to know You better and to trust You more, we thank You in the name of Christ. Amen.

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