

Patriarchs

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

Sermon 4: Joseph: Resting in God's Sovereignty

Genesis 37-50

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- March 1, 2020

Video Link for "Genesis: Part 2" from The Bible Project:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpbWbyx1008>

Jon: We're walking through the book of Genesis which is made up of these two main parts.

Tim: And the first part begins in the Garden where we watched humanity spiral downward in self-destruction and it ends in the Tower of Babel where a rebellious humanity is scattered by God.

Jon: Then the second part Genesis zooms in and focuses on just one family.

Tim: And right in the middle is this story that links the two parts of Genesis together and helps us understand what the whole book is all about.

Jon: So how do we get from the Tower of Babel to the story here in the middle?

Tim: Well after the scattering at Babel there's this genealogy and it follows one of the tribes all the way down to this one guy named Abram.

Jon: You probably know him as Abraham.

Tim: And God starts making all these promises to Abraham like He's going to bless him and give him a ton of kids and He says that through him and his family all the nations of the earth are now going to find God's blessing.

Basically, God is trying to restore humanity back to the goodness of the Garden into His original intentions for the world. So, it's like His rescue plan for humanity. That's why the whole second half of Genesis is about this one family. And so, you have Abraham and then he has a son Isaac who has Jacob and then Jacob has twelve sons. And to each generation God renews His promise to bless them and all nations through them.

Jon: So, because of this promise to use this family to rescue the world it's pretty easy to read these stories as examples of how to be a good person.

Tim: But actually, for the most part, this family is totally dysfunctional. So, for example, let's go back to Abraham. This whole story is about God giving him and his wife Sarah a family. But two different times he basically gives Sarah away to other men by denying that she's even his wife.

And then Sarah gets impatient about having a son and so she makes Abraham sleep with her serving girl which then causes all of these other problems in the family.

Jon: So, they get really old and you begin to think that there's no way they're going to have a kid of their own. But then, miraculously, they do. It's Isaac.

Tim: And Isaac, he has two sons: Esau and Jacob, and it seems like things are going pretty good.

Jon: But, Jacob, the younger brother, wants the family's inheritance, which belongs to Esau, the older brother, so he devises a plan where he's gonna steal it from his father Isaac who at this point in the story is now old and blind.

Tim: Which, who does that? It's horrible -- stealing from your blind father.

Jon: Yeah, and then he just takes off.

Tim: So, Jacob goes on from there to have twelve sons, a big family. But, Jacob loves his eleventh son, Joseph way more than all the others and so he gives him this special technicolor dream-coat and his brothers, because of this, come to hate him.

Jon: So much so that they plan on killing him.

Tim: But they don't. They, instead, just sell them as a slave down in Egypt.

Jon: Now, while in Egypt, through this crazy series of events, Joseph goes from being in a prison cell to becoming the second in command there.

Tim: And so later on the whole Middle East falls into this food shortage and Joseph's brothers come down to Egypt looking for food.

And then, when they get there, who should they find as the ruler of the whole land?

Jon: It's Joseph, that guy they sold into slavery. But, he actually saves them from starving to death.

Tim: And so here you have it: these are the great-grandchildren of Abraham who have done this heinous act to their brother, but God has transformed to their evil into something good.

Jon: And that's exactly what Joseph says here in the last paragraph of the entire book. He says, "You guys planned all of this for evil but God planned it for good, to save people's lives."

Tim: Now these words – they conclude the book because they actually summarize the message of the whole story so far. Humans keep choosing evil and we are thinking they are screwing up God's plan, but He keeps turning their evil back into good. And somehow he's going to use this family to restore humanity back to the garden.

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Well, that was a four-minute summary of the Book of Genesis. We are reading through the Bible together as a church and we are finishing up today on that book. And I thought that would be a brilliant way of surveying up to where we are and also exposing you to a wonderful ministry called The Bible Project. And it's part of our app for reading through the Bible. You can click on some of those lessons to help summarize. They're available right there on that Bible app.

Genesis 45: 5, 7

"Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life ... ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance."

At the end of Genesis it is repeated twice for a purpose. It says, "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. For God sent me before you to preserve life. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth and to keep you alive by a great deliverance." Those phrases are repeated because it summarizes – not just the story of Joseph --- but also the whole story of the Book of Genesis, the whole redemptive story that's

going on. And particularly in the Joseph story, and actually, the Abrahamic story that we've been looking at up to this point, two things are consistent throughout those family generations.

One, that progressively and repeatedly, each family is falling more and more into sin and away from God and His purpose and jeopardizing the rescue plan that God has through that family of Abraham.

The second thing that's consistent throughout the storyline is that God steps in and remains faithful to that family and to His promise. With each generation He's going to repeat the promise that He makes and makes sure that that promise will come about. Because God's redemptive plan will not thwarted by human sin.

Israel's Identity Is in Being Sacred

Now when we look at today we're going to see that last section being played out in the life of Joseph. The key to understanding the redemptive plan, especially, particularly, in the life of the family of Abraham, is to know this: that the Jews, the Hebrews, are to find their identity in being sacred. They're to find their identity in being sacred. And "sacred" means "to be set apart for a purpose." It means to be called out for a meaning. It means to be like nothing else. And that's where they're to find themselves. That's what gives them motive and purpose and life.

A good example of something that's sacred is a lighthouse. A lighthouse is set apart for something very special – to save lives. It is not like any other house. It is something very special. And sometimes a lighthouse would lose its ability to do that. Sometimes just through neglect – it takes a lot of work to work a lighthouse, not like other houses. It's a maintenance sort of thing. And then the other thing that happens sometimes is a lighthouse loses its vision, its purpose, its meaning. And it finds itself becoming a tourist spot where it sells cookies in the shape of the lighthouse or it sells trinkets that are a lighthouse. All the while, sailors drown – because they lost their purpose and meaning.

Israel is that lighthouse. That's their purpose in life. They're to be a lighthouse to everything and everyone. They are called out. They are supposed to be doing this. They are to reflect God's will in the expression of trusting Him for provision and protection. They are supposed to be modeling what it means to be a follower of YHWH so that they would bring envy to other people and those other people would be drawn towards them, just like a lighthouse draws you to it, so

that they might be invited into that community and be saved. They're supposed to stand out so that the people are drawn to them so that they might be invited in to be saved.

But in the storyline, they're not sacred. They've lost their meaning and purpose. They're actually being conformed to their culture. And so, in the story of Joseph, there's more written about Joseph than any other character in the Book of Genesis. And why is that? Because it is a story of profound importance. It is the story of God rescuing the rescue plan. It is Him saving the salvation. It is Him setting apart the people that supposed to be set apart, since they aren't. Because there are four generations at this point and they're descending. There won't be a fifth generation and there won't be salvation. There will be humanity lost at sea. And so, God is stepping in. And because all the angels are crying out, *For the love of God and for the love of man, do something! Do something, God!* And you might think, *Well, just start over.* But He can't. God promised that His salvation plan would be with this family. And so, He must stay within this family and make sure this happens, but without ever ... within the context of violating free will. God's going to make this plan work using humans, but without violating free will.

Soft Determinism

He'll do that using big words here: soft determinism. And the idea of soft determinism in theology is the acknowledgment that human actions are influenced by causations, but at a point where it doesn't violate free will. Decisions are made by different causes, but those causes are not to a point where they unfairly influence free will. So there are a couple of ways that we practice soft determinism, especially as parents, or in our experiences sometimes ourselves.

One is pre-existing preferences. So, if I were to put down two platters of food right here and one had brisket and one had tofu, I would probably be able to guess that for many of you, that you would eat the brisket and not the tofu ... just knowing you. That's Texas --- that's what we do -- that's what we do well. And I know that preference and so if I'm a gambling man, I'm thinking, *This is what they're going to eat.* It's taking advantage of pre-existing preferences. Now I could turn up the soft determinism to a medium determinism and let's say you go without food for two days. Then you put out just the tofu. What would you eat then? Nothing. Yeah. Let's try four days. But you get the idea. At some point I'm taking away human freedom. Soft determinism respects human freedom.

The other way that soft determinism is expressed in our own life and the way that God works with us is by limiting our freedom; by putting us in a place to protect us from our own choices. So in our neighborhood – I’m sure there are some house in your neighborhood as well -- - on the busy streets some families have realized they can’t trust their children in the front yard. And so, they put up a fence in the front yard. That’s not to keep bad people out, it’s to keep their kids from making bad choices. And so, they have quarantined them to the front yard. They have put them in time out. You can only stay in the front yard. It’s not a violation of freedom. It’s just a limitation of those freedoms. It’s soft determinism.

God’s Sovereign Power Displayed

And so, in God’s sovereign power --- that’s what we’re going to look at here – God’s sovereign power being displayed and how he’s going to fix this problem. And what’s the problem? Left to themselves, the family of Abraham – there will be no fifth generation. There will be no family. They are not sacred. They are not set apart in any way. And God’s plan for them is to be a nation of priests. And in another forty years they won’t be a nation. And they are certainly not priests.

And so, God, in His answer to this, will quarantine them. He will put them some place for 400 years, say. He’s going to build a fence around them so that they can only make a certain amount of choices. He will put this group of seventy, the fourth generation of Abraham, in time out. And they will only be able to marry and associate with the people of faith. That solution is Egypt. He will bring them to Egypt. And here’s why. The Egyptians hate everyone. They hate, especially, Hebrews.

Genesis 43:32

They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians.

I assume you know the story – you can read that and then you can re-watch this sermon – but when Joseph brings his brothers in and has a meal at the palace now that he’s in charge, it says this: “They served Joseph by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who

ate with him by themselves.” And why is that? “ ... because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews.” Not would not eat with Hebrews, but could not eat with Hebrews, “for that is detestable to Egyptians.” Egyptians look at Hebrews and they think, Tofu. Not going to touch it. Could not eat with them.

Genesis 46:33-34

“When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, ‘What is your occupation?’ 34 you should answer, ‘Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.’ Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.”

Now it says this three different times. Here’s another way they say it, a second time. This is later on when the seventy members of the family are going to come and introduce themselves to Pharaoh. And Joseph says this. He gives them their lines. He says, “ ‘When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, “What is your occupation?” you should answer, by this. Say “Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did. We are generations of shepherds.” Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to Egyptians.”’ Boy, did I tell you they hate everyone?

So, what we have here is Egyptians – they hate Hebrews and they think shepherds are detestable, so it’s like tofu with tofu marinade all over it. And because of that, what’s going to happen here is this will be the fence that God builds for them. And this is how they’re going to live in this quarantine. And the quarantine is called Egypt.

If he can get them to Egypt, they won’t have a lot of moving around to do. They can’t get lost in the culture because the culture doesn’t want anything to do with them. So how does He get them to Egypt? How does He get the seventy to Egypt?

Well, that’s not all that difficult, actually. A famine comes and the only food that’s in the land is in Egypt, so He’s going to send them there. But that’s not the problem. The problem comes with how do you get them to show up and when they get there, they are in good standing with the Pharaoh? Because the Pharaoh doesn’t like Hebrews and he doesn’t like shepherds. But to get Goshen, He’s got to get them in good with Pharaoh. So, it has to be a positive Pharaoh. And how they’re going to do that, is that they’re going to communicate in a mystic language that

Pharaoh already believes in and that value system is dreams. God will give Pharaoh a dream and he's going to need someone to interpret the dream. And that's where Joseph comes in. Joseph will be needed to interpret that dream.

And what's really great about the dream is that it's a very popular dream for Pharaoh because it includes him making a lot more money and more power. Brisket. He's going to give him a brisket dream.

So now He needs to get Joseph over here to Pharaoh to have an audience with him to interpret the dream. How does God do that? Well, the way to get to the Pharaoh is probably through his most trusted person, and that is the cupbearer. And the cupbearer is like the food taster. He's the most trusted person in Pharaoh's life because the way to poison a king or kill a king is by poisoning him. And so, this cupbearer or head butler or whoever he might be doesn't leave the palace, because the Pharaoh can't trust him leaving the palace. So, he's always within the confines of the Pharaoh. And so, how do you get the person talking to Pharaoh to introduce Joseph to Pharaoh about interpreting dreams? Well, what you do is you get the cupbearer to go to jail. If we can get that cupbearer in jail and then maybe Joseph could meet him in jail. We could get the cupbearer falsely accused of something. Joseph could meet him there, and he's falsely accused of things, and they could bond over that. And then God could give the cupbearer a dream and then Joseph could interpret that. And then the cupbearer would know later on when he meets with Pharaoh and Pharaoh has a dream that he can't interpret, that Joseph is the guy.

Okay. Well, I understand if he gets falsely accused, but how do we get Joseph to jail? And it's got to be the right jail, by the way. Well, it turns out that the guy running the jail is a guy named Potiphar. And if Joseph worked for Potiphar, then he might be able to be falsely accused and end up in that same jail. So, God arranges for Joseph to work for Potiphar, and in the context of that, Potiphar has a wife who in every single lifetime in every possible creation possibility is a sensuous woman. And she will always go after whoever her husband is hiring. And so, sure enough, Joseph is approached and he denies her, and a woman scorned ... you know how that goes. And so, she accuses him of attempted rape. He ends up in Potiphar's jail, falsely accused, able to interpret dreams.

But how does Joseph get in Potiphar's house in the first place? Well, we don't really know that part of the story, but maybe God provides a good year where he has to buy more slaves and

Joseph ends up on that slave block – that’s where Joe is – and when Joseph’s up for auction, Potiphar sees him.

Have you ever seen *Star Wars*? ... the really good one where:

This is the slave you want.

That’s the slave I want.

You’ll pay whatever it takes.

I’ll pay whatever I have to.

And that’s what happens. It’s not a violation of freedom because Potiphar is going there anyway to get a slave. So, he gets Joseph as a slave.

But how do you get Joseph on that slave block, on that auction block? Well, it turns out that the slave route, the railroad that goes into Egypt goes right by a place called Dothan. And this is where it gets really hard. You’ve got to get Joseph to Dothan. How does that happen?

Well, he’s going to go see his brothers who are herding the sheep. But they herd their sheep in Shechem, and that’s where you’re supposed to, because that’s where their fields are, in Shechem. The problem is that the rail stop is in Dothan, and if Joseph doesn’t get to Dothan – if he gets there late and misses the train or if he doesn’t get there at all – all salvation history is lost.

Now getting the brothers over to Dothan from Shechem – that’s no big deal. Because all you have to do with those guys is just get them bored and then they’re going to wander off. Or maybe there’s free beer in Dothan and so they go there for that.

Here’s the problem. Joseph is in Shechem and he needs to get to Dothan so his bloodthirsty brothers can try and kill him or sell him on that train stop. This is, right here, the hinge of history. This is where it all hangs. And if you look, when Joseph goes looking in Shechem for his brothers, there’s a man that’s standing there out of nowhere and he tells him to go to Dothan. And a lot of your Bible commentaries will say this about that man. This is how important that is: that that man was an angel. God sent an angel to tell Joseph that his brothers are in Dothan so that he could catch that slave train so that he might be on an auction block so that he could be hired by Potiphar so his wife could accuse him and sentence him to jail so he could meet the cupbearer, the cupbearer would tell Pharaoh about him when the dream would happen, so that everyone would end up in Egypt.

Now you might be thinking, *Sending an angel because all of this matters, right here? This is the tension of the story? That's kind of cheating.* It's God's creation, so He can send an angel anywhere He wants.

Here's an interesting thing. How do you get brothers to hate their youngest brother so much that they're willing to kill him or sell him? Here's what God does for that. Nothing. He doesn't have to do anything. This is a selfish, digressing, sin-filled, God-void family. And He just leaves them alone. And by leaving them alone, they incite riots with one another. The story begins with Jacob, who should know better. He is the victim of being favored and not favored by his own family. And instead of bringing that to the Lord and working that out in himself, he does that to his own son, Joseph. He makes him the favorite child with ten older brothers. He incites this riot. He makes them hate this young boy, or they do it on their own as well. And by the time he shows up at Dothan, they have set themselves up for this storyline that leads to this 400 years, so that they could become a nation so that they could be a nation of priests. That's how it happens.

It's just working the maze backwards, you see? It's just working the maze backwards. It's like a game. But it's not a game. This Joseph – he's a human soul. And he loves God. And he's being played like a pawn or a knight or something on a chessboard. Joseph is hated by his family, sold into slavery, falsely accused and imprisoned, and then forgotten. Then when he's finally found, he finds himself married and there's no one sitting on his side of the wedding feast. There's no one there from his house. He has a couple of children. There are no announcements to give out – not to his family. There are no grandmothers or grandfathers to come and visit.

Genesis 45:4-5, 7-8

Then 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. ⁵ Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life ...

⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. ⁸ Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt."

So how does Joseph feel about being used? Because here's the thing: Joseph is the one that's paying the price for being part of God's redemptive plan. What does Joseph think about this? Look what it says in chapter 45, verse 4. We've read a little bit of this. "Then Joseph said to his brothers" – when they see him for the first time and realize what they've done -- 'Please come closer to me.' And they came closer. And he said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold to Egypt. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.'"

Verse 7: " 'God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth.' " *You're supposed to be a redeemed group of people. You're supposed to be sacred, so God sent me here to keep you sacred.* Look what it says: " ' ... and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and the lord of all his household and the ruler over all the land of Egypt.' "

Joseph is the only lighthouse in this story. Joseph is the one who is separate, set apart. He stood out. And he would say this. He would say, *I'd rather live my life being in this mess but being part of God's redemptive work than to be any other place in my life. I'd rather be hated by my brothers – older brothers, by the way. These are brothers that are supposed to be looking out for him and protecting him, but not that. I would rather be part of Potiphar's property. I'd rather be accused of something I didn't do and be in prison. I'd rather have to suffer that than to live a life with the rest of you back home. I would rather be part of God's rescue plan for redemption than to have any kind of peace or comfort outside of that plan.* That's what he's saying.

Romans 8:18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

All that misery. All of that misery in this life, he would say what Paul said in Romans chapter 8: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us later."

Application #1: Is This the God You Serve?

Here's the first application. Is that the God you serve? Right there? The one who is sovereign over all of mankind, who works in the context of evil, who is able to do that. If you

don't think God can work around and with evil, think about this ... what else does He have to work with? All of the clay is contaminated. And in that contamination, *God says, I can work with that. I can make this work. My prescriptive will is going to happen. My providential will shall absolutely take place here.*

If God can only work with goodness and when things with men and women are righteous, then what does He have to work with, really? And what kind of God is that, by the way, that's not this God? If He is so feeble that He can't work with evil in life, in humanity, in your life --- if He can't work with the evil to make good things happen, then He's nothing more than a great-grandfather who might love you and have good intentions but is powerless. And the God in the Bible is a loving warrior king. That's the God of the Bible. The first application: is that who we serve, that works within the context of evil and hardship ... in all of humanity and in our life individually?

Application #2: Be Like Joseph: Resting in God's Sovereignty

The second part – you can see this in Joseph's life – is be like Joseph. And when you look at Joseph's life, you can see that he's absolutely surrendered to this sovereignty of God. He's surrendered. There's a peace about him that is very difficult to understand. But he's resting in that.

Resting In His Sovereignty for the BAD

He's resting in the sovereignty of God in all the bad and evil things he's experienced. You can't have what Joseph had without going through what Joseph went through. And in that "going through", in the drama that he goes through, the evil that he suffers, he has become like Christ in his life. He's the Christ figure in this story because he rested in the sovereign power and plan of God. This story of Joseph is, on a personal level – this is the big picture level – but on a personal level, this is a story of Joseph constantly being wrung out and then wrung out again. And then, finally, every bit of his will, every bit of his dreams, every bit of his hopes is gone. And now, after two years in this prison, after two years, after he'd been found out to be the dream interpreter, he's chosen to go and talk to Pharaoh. But at that point he has nothing left but

wanting to be used by God. There is something about suffering, if you choose not to let it embitter you, cause you to sulk, become angry. But if you look at Joseph's life, it's this quiet peace, rest. And then, ultimately, love. Because he surrendered.

Listen. This path that he's on, this path – it's the Via Dolorosa, friends. It's the same path Jesus was on. Did you know that it says in the Bible that Jesus learned obedience through suffering? Joseph learned obedience through suffering. There's something about suffering that can refine us ... if. Sometimes only pain tells the truth ... if ... if we listen. If we allow it. And so, if this is your life, if you've been on this road, and you might be there right now, consider it all a joy, my brothers and sisters. Because if you allow yourself to rest in the sovereignty of God, then it can produce in you Christ-likeness in all of your life. It has that potential.

Resting in His Sovereignty for GOOD

And what I love about the Joseph story is, not just that he rests in the sovereignty of God in the sorrow and the difficulty, but also in his exaltation and his prosperity. You know, for every hundred men you know that can handle adversity, there's only one that can handle success. And this man, Joseph, is able to be a lighthouse, even in success. This is how it was described, that we read before. Listen to the triple here. "God has made me the father of Pharaoh, the lord over all of his household, and the ruler over all the land." And he uses this blessing, not as an expression of selfish ambition, but rather, as an expression to serve God and His redemptive plan, and to serve mankind in any way that he can. That's what he does.

Be like Joseph – surrendered in the sovereignty of God, resting in that. So what does that look like, really? I mean, how does it play itself out in our souls and how we end of thinking about this in our heads?

Here's where this story on a macro level shows up in our individual lives. In the Bible this is pervasive throughout. There are primarily two ways of wrestling with the sovereignty of God.

Final Justice

One is justice. There will be final justice. And when we have experienced injustice or people that we love suffer from injustice, or we just see the world around us and we think, *What's going*

on? We can become anxious or angry or resentful. You can just see a person twist and become that way because they are not trusting in the sovereignty of God. And what that means is you have to believe in the promises of God, in the teachings of Jesus, in the Book of Revelation. You don't have to make sense out of the Book of Revelation, but you need to know this about that book. It says that justice will reign. And you have to believe in those promises, knowing the boundaries of what you can do and what God's in charge of and what He's promised, by His nature and by what He's said.

Genesis 50:15-17

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?"¹⁶ So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died,¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

Here's how it's expressed in Joseph's life. This is a tragic part of their lives. So, "Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong that they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.'"

And Joseph knows. He knows they're just lying. He knows that they do not understand. They can't have what he has because they haven't been through what he's been through. So it says in the next sentence, "And Joseph wept as they spoke to him." They don't know that in his wringing out, he lost any vision of justice happening in his terms, on his timeline, the way he expected it. And he gave it to the One who's in charge of that.

Genesis 50:19-20

But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? ²⁰ 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.”

And so he says this to his brothers: “But Joseph said to them,” – he’s drying his eyes and he says – “ ‘Don’t be afraid, for am I in God’s place? 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.’ ”

Joseph is saying here what is true about the sovereignty of God. You have to believe what God says about this, you have to believe what Jesus says about this, you have to believe what Revelation says about this. That there will be justice in the end. And the reason justice is left to the end is because we don’t know the cost of people’s choices yet. Hitler hasn’t been judged because Hitler still has disciples. And so, he’s got an open tab that’s still going. And he’s going to have to pay that tab. But we don’t know what the tab is until the end of time. So the end of time is the place for final judgment.

When you trust God for that, that He’s going to work all this out, then you don’t have to be angry or anxious or resentful.

Final Rewards

Another way that we show ourselves to be trusting God in His sovereignty is not just in justice, but in final rewards. Because now the lighthouse – at least in this era – is the church, the bride of Jesus Christ. And when we are to be the group that is called out, that is set apart, and to be sacred. And to be that lighthouse -- I told you a lighthouse is a high-maintenance thing – it is work and difficult to serve the sovereign King. And God says that you would have to believe what God says about this and what Jesus has said and what the Book of Revelation says about this, that when you serve the King and sacrifice for Him, you will be paid back. You will be rewarded. When you serve the church – I know it’s pretty easy to feel like when you’re working in the parking lot or serving in the infants or children’s ministry, or even in the student ministry,

and you feel like – *Yeah, I'm not getting very much thanks for this.* And sometimes even in teaching and serving in the adult ministries you feel like, *I'm not being congratulated very much. In light of how much I'm working, I should be getting more 'attaboys!'*

Well, first – oops! I'm not sure you're doing it for the right reason if you're doing it for the “attaboys!” But second, which is our subject matter here, is that you will be celebrated. When you give and you serve the bride of Jesus Christ, you will be rewarded for that. That's what God says, that's what Jesus says. That's what Revelation says.

Look, let's just put it this way. I know everyone that has done good things for my wife and my bride. Oh, yeah. I'm taking names. And it's so much more for Jesus and the way people treat His bride. You'll be rewarded.

So when you find yourself giving generously to the church because you feel like you want to be part of this mission of being different and being separate so that it might draw people to salvation in Jesus Christ alone; when you find yourself giving sacrificially and losing opportunities that you could have, or stuff, or whatever it might be; you find yourself doing and you think, *Man, that feels foolish sometimes.* And God says, and Jesus says, and Revelation says, *That's not foolish; that's shrewd investing. You'll get a return on that.*

And forgiveness – that's an act of a lighthouse member, right? And sometimes you have to remind yourself that you are forgiven and you let go of that, because that's where freedom is found. And in this age, especially with the young, the fight for purity and holiness in a world that is decadent and literally mocks purity and holiness --- you think, *Does this even matter? Is there any way -- to get the things that God has put in my heart to desire – can I contain those things? By being holy and pure and set apart?*

And God says and Jesus says and the Book of Revelation says there's a crown for that. Did you know there's a crown for that? There will be rewards. But rewards are given at the end. And do you know why rewards are given at the end? Because we don't know the cost of people's decisions and sacrifices yet. Billy Graham has not been rewarded for his life because he is still making disciples and he is just accruing interest right now.

That's what it means to rest in the sovereignty of God. That's what it means to grasp this and enjoy this. It means that justice is God. He will repay. It means that you will be rewarded for the life that you've lived that is set apart, holy, for the purpose of the kingdom of God. It means you are not alone.

In the story of Joseph – “And the Lord was with Joseph, and the Lord blessed Joseph.” It says this. This says that though it looks like our world is out of control, it is not. Because God is using the free will of man, as decadent and depraved as we are. And He’s getting His will done, His providential will, to bring salvation to all men for them to respond in any way that they choose, so that ultimately, we would all bow on our knees and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. That’s the purpose of life.

If you find yourself absolutely surrendered to that purpose, you would rather be part of that suffering than to ever experience the fulfillment of your own dreams. God says, Jesus says in His invitation, *Give me all your dreams so that I might give you my dream for you. Trade up.*

Is this the God you serve? Let’s pray.

Lord Jesus, you know, when we step back and we look at history, the history of just one man, we can see – Oh, you know, You’re right. I can see that in him. And Lord, I’d ask that You would help Your Spirit help us see that in us in the lonely times, in the rejected times, when we find ourselves when we think family and friends should be supporting us and they’re not, they’re rejecting us. Or maybe that we find ourselves unjustly accused. Whatever it might be – our own Via Dolorosa. Lord, I’d ask that you would help us see that that is a path that Jesus crawled so that He might learn to obey. And it’s the path of Joseph, it is the path of every saint. So, Lord, would You help us learn how to trust and be at peace in Your sovereignty, in hard times and in blessed times, for justice and for rewards? For the feeling of being alone and helpless in a hostile world? For the feeling like the world is out of control, but it’s not? Lord, give us that peace, so that we might be generous with forgiveness and bountiful in our love of one another. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.