

GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD: Genesis 41-50  
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I love to hear the stories of godly men and women who have gone before us. People like Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, Amy Carmichael, Lottie Moon, William Carey, Jim Elliot. What really grips me about these lives is not so much their impressive intellect, or their intense passion, or their wholehearted devotion to the cause of Christ, although those things are certainly encouraging and inspiring. What I find so exciting in the lives of these men and women is how their lives testify to the grace and goodness and power of God. I'm not so interested in the men and women themselves, but the God they served. That's where the real glory is! That's where the wonder and awe is found. That God takes sinful men and women and uses them to accomplish His amazing purposes. That's exciting! And that can keep me going when I feel discouraged. God is mighty, and He is working out His plans in and through our sin, and the evil and wickedness of this world. He is bigger than these things, and even the actions that are intended for evil, He intends those very actions for good.

This is what we see in the story of Joseph's life. Genesis 37-50 is Joseph's biography, and the greatest lessons we learn from this story are not the lessons about Joseph, himself, although those lessons are very valuable. The greatest things we learn are about God. The whole story, and the whole Bible, and all of history, is about God! Throughout Joseph's life we see God's grace and goodness and power. And that's what I want us to see this morning. I have four observations to make about Joseph's life, and each one teaches us something about God.

Last week I contrasted Joseph and his older brother Judah, and we covered the events in chapters 37-40. This morning I want to cover chapters 41-50.

**Joseph was humiliated and then exalted.**

The first observation I want to make from Joseph's life is that he was humiliated and then exalted. He began life as the favorite son of Israel. His father favored him above all his brothers, and his coat of many colors was a constant reminder of that. But at age 17 Joseph's exaltation was replaced by humiliation. His brothers threw him into a pit and then sold him into slavery. Then Potiphar's wife accused him falsely, and he was thrown into prison. In prison Joseph interpreted the dream of Pharaoh's cupbearer, and asked that the cupbearer mention him to Pharaoh. But he forgot about him, and Joseph remained in prison for another 2 years. The exalted son was humiliated. He was a slave and a prisoner.

In chapter 41, though, the story turns around and Joseph is exalted again. It's a story of going from riches to rags to riches. Exalted, humiliated, then exalted again. Pharaoh had two dreams, which nobody could interpret for him. And that's when the cupbearer remembered Joseph. For 2 years the cupbearer had forgotten, but now he remembers. And in God's providence this is the first step of Joseph's exaltation.

Pharaoh sent for Joseph. Joseph interpreted the dreams with amazing insight and wisdom. And it pleased Pharaoh so much that he said to Joseph in verse 39, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards

the throne will I be greater than you.” And Joseph rode in Pharaoh’s second chariot, and everyone bowed down to him. He was second in command. He ruled over all of Egypt.

He who was once in an exalted position and was then humiliated, has now risen to the right hand of the throne. This sequence of exaltation, humiliation, and then exaltation, ought to remind us of the One who is so much greater than Joseph. Our Lord Jesus Christ, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing [here’s His humiliation], taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him [here’s His exaltation] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow [the people of Egypt bowed the knee to Joseph, but *every* knee will bow to Jesus], in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:6-11). Joseph’s humiliation and exaltation is a type of Jesus’ humiliation and exaltation. We have a Savior who humbled *Himself* on our behalf. Joseph’s humiliation was involuntary, but Jesus willingly made himself nothing. He suffered and bled and died. And now He is highly exalted. He is at the right hand of the Father, and one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

That’s the first observation, that Joseph was humiliated and then exalted. And in this way his life points us to our Savior Jesus Christ, who humbled himself for our sakes, and is now highly exalted.

#### **Joseph gave God the credit.**

The second observation is from 41:15-16. This is when Pharaoh summoned Joseph to interpret his dreams, and Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” This would have been a great opportunity for Joseph to exalt himself in Pharaoh’s eyes. He could have said, “Yes, Pharaoh. I can interpret dreams. I accurately interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker, and I can do the same for you.” But instead Joseph very intentionally shifted the focus away from himself and gave God all the credit. He said to Pharaoh in verse 16, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

Then in verse 25 he says, “God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.” And again in verse 28, “God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do.” Finally in verse 32, “And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.” Joseph gave God the credit. Joseph is radically God-centered throughout this entire conversation with Pharaoh. He had a great opportunity to make much of himself, but instead he took the spotlight off himself, and directed it squarely on the One who deserves all our praise and honor.

Let’s look for ways to do this in our lives. It’s so easy and so tempting to take credit for ourselves, but it’s not us. It’s God! God is the powerful One. Every good thing we have and every good thing we do is a result of His grace. Look for ways to deflect glory from yourself, and point it all to our glorious God.

#### **Joseph recognized God’s providence over evil.**

Through these dreams it was revealed that a famine was near at hand. There was going to be 7 years of plenty and then 7 years of famine. During the 7 years of plenty, Joseph went throughout Egypt and stored up food in each city. So Egypt was prepared

when the famine came. And apparently they were the only ones prepared, because the last verse in chapter 41 says, “all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth” (v. 57).

This is what sets the stage for the reunion of Joseph and his brothers, and the fulfillment of Joseph’s dreams. Joseph had dreamed about his brothers bowing down to him, and now he is a ruler in Egypt and his brothers come to him in desperate need for food.

Let me summarize this very interesting saga, and then I want to highlight how Joseph recognized God’s providence over the evil things that had been done to him. This is my third observation, that Joseph recognized God’s providence over evil.

At the beginning of chapter 42 Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. Verse 6 says, “Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.” And Joseph recognized them, but they didn’t recognize him. And Joseph didn’t reveal his identity immediately. He first wanted to test his brothers to see if they had changed at all.

So he accused them of being spies. And he demanded that they return home and bring back their youngest brother. He kept Simeon in custody, and sent the other brothers home. It was obviously difficult for the brothers to convince their father to part with Benjamin. Jacob had already lost Joseph, his favorite son. It would be unbearable if he lost Benjamin, too.

Eventually, when they needed more food, Judah convinced his father to let Benjamin go with them to Egypt to get more grain. Look at what Judah says to his father in 43:9, “I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.” Israel their father reluctantly agreed and sent them back to Egypt with double the money and many gifts.

When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin, he was overcome with emotion and rushed out of their presence. He still didn’t tell them who he was, but he continued to test them. He wanted to see if they were still filled with jealousy. So he had them seated according to their birth order and served them a meal, and Benjamin, the youngest, received a portion 5 times larger than the others. Then the brothers headed back to Egypt, but Joseph set up a trap for them. He had his steward put a silver cup in Benjamin’s bag, then the steward ran after them and asked, “Why have you repaid evil for good?” (44:4). The brothers insisted they were innocent, but then the steward found the cup in Benjamin’s sack. It’s hard to imagine the despair that the brothers must have felt at this point. This is exactly what they had hoped would not happen, and what they were confident could not happen. This is the pledge that Judah had made to his father, that Benjamin would return safely.

In chapter 44:18ff Judah makes a long speech to Joseph, explaining the entire situation and pleading for mercy. Let me read the conclusion of his speech in vv. 33-34:

“Now, therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before

my father all my life.’ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.”

This is an interesting contrast to the Judah we looked at last week in chapters 37-38. The man who sold his brother Joseph into slavery and was so morally perverse, is now changing and *has* changed. And he is even a type of Christ here, as he offers himself in order to restore Benjamin to his father. In a similar way Jesus Christ offered his own life in order to free us and restore us to the Father.

Judah’s Christ-like, sacrificial attitude impressed Joseph. He could see the moral transformation that had taken place in Judah’s life. It was at this point that Joseph made himself known to his brothers. Chapter 45:2-3, “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.”

What a reunion this would have been, filled with a massive range of emotions for everyone involved. Joseph had surely struggled with resentment toward his brothers who abused him and almost killed him, and then sold him as a slave. But Joseph had forgiven them and was now delighted to be with them. For the brothers, though, this would have been terrifying. The brother they abused now has absolute control over them. He can do with them as he pleases. And this is his chance for revenge. They thought they were done for.

But look at the amazing things that Joseph says in the following verses of chapter 45. He says these things to comfort them, and what he says is an amazing testimony to God’s providence over all things, especially evil. Joseph recognized God’s providence over evil.

Read vv. 4-8.

Notice a couple things about Joseph’s words here. Notice his God-centeredness again. Just like we already noticed in the things he said to Pharaoh, Joseph gives all the credit to God and recognizes that God is in control of everything. He refers to God 4 times. Verse 5, “God sent me before you to preserve life.” Verse 7, “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth.” Verse 8, “it was not you who sent me here, but God.” And verse 9, “God has made me lord of all Egypt.” Joseph sees God’s hand in all these events. He knows that his brothers sold him into slavery. He acknowledges that in verses 4-5, “you sold me here.” But he can also say in verse 8, “it was not you who sent me here, but God.” Do you see how Joseph understood the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility? Yes, the brothers had done a very wicked thing against their brother, and they were guilty for that sin. *And* that evil was part of God’s providential plan to save his people.

Another thing to notice is that Joseph’s understanding of God’s providence is what enabled him to forgive his brothers. This is such an important application for us. When you’re struggling to forgive someone who has done evil against you, remember that God is in control of that evil that was done against you. This doesn’t minimize the gravity of the sin. It doesn’t diminish the guilt of the person who committed the wrong. But we can forgive others because we know that God has a good plan for us.

Joseph makes another amazing statement in chapter 50, after his father dies. In the intervening chapters Joseph is reunited with his father, and the whole clan moves to

Egypt and settles in Goshen. Then their father, Israel, dies. And Joseph's brothers become worried again, that Joseph is going to take revenge now that their father is dead.

Read 50:15-21.

Again, Joseph demonstrates his forgiveness. And he forgives because he recognizes God's providence over evil. This verse is the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, in Paul's letter to the Roman church, he says essentially the same thing as Joseph is saying here. Paul writes in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

If we take this truth to heart, it will change our outlook on everything in life. And the specific application I want us to see this morning, is that it will enable us to forgive others.

When someone commits an evil against us, like Joseph's brothers did to him, and our anger burns against that person and all we can think about is wanting revenge and wanting that person to be punished for their sin, we need to step back and see the big picture. We need to realize that we are not in the place of God. And we need to recognize that God's providence encompasses even that sin. And in God's providence, even that evil that was meant against us, God intends for good. He doesn't just *use* it for good, after the fact. He intended it for good. He designed it. He planned it. All things, even the evil and sin and wickedness, will work together for our good if we belong to God. That is an amazing truth and an amazing promise.

**Joseph saved those who once hated him.**

My final observation from Joseph's life is that he saved those who once hated him. Joseph forgave his brothers. And he saved them, even though they were the ones who abused him and turned their backs on him. He saved them from the famine. When they were helpless and needy, he provided for them beyond what they could have imagined.

This points us to our Savior Jesus Christ, who forgives and saves those who once hated Him. We hated Him. We were His enemies. We put Him to death. But Christ died for His enemies. He suffered and died for our sins, so He can forgive us and save us. Romans 5:10 says, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, not that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." And Christ saves us from much more than a famine. He saves us from hell. And he provides much more than food and a place to live. He gives us the inheritance of eternal life in heaven. Joseph's life points us to Christ, but Christ is infinitely greater than Joseph. Trust in Christ today. See the glory of this forgiveness, of this salvation. Give yourself to the God-Man, Jesus Christ, who forgives and saves His enemies.

The words of Charles Wesley's hymn capture the awe that should fill our hearts because of this truth:

"And can it be that I should gain  
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"