

Joseph: The Principle of a Greater Good

Genesis 39, Genesis 45, Genesis 50, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 1:11, Galatians 6:9

Good morning, men. We want to do a couple of shout outs this morning. One is the South Side Men's Group, 12-15 men meeting on Wednesday nights at 7:00 pm at Southside Baptist in Lufkin, TX. Their leader is Troy Christmas. Welcome to you guys.

Then World International Ministries, 40 guys that are meeting on Sunday mornings in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Their leader is Bobby Santos. We want to welcome these guys to the Bible Study this morning, so would you join me in giving them a warm Man in the Mirror welcome. One, two, three hoorah! Glad to have you men with us.

The series that we're in is called *How God Makes Men*. Nothing is more painful than feeling like you've been abandoned by God. You pray and you pray and nothing ever seems to change. In fact, sometimes things appear to get worse rather than better, and who among us hasn't thought, "God, if you love me so much, then what are you doing? Why are you letting this happen to me?" Nobody in the Bible personifies that whole idea more than Joseph, who was caged like an animal and sold like a slave by his brothers.

It may be that you feel like you are in a dead end marriage, that you are stuck in a job that's going nowhere, or maybe you have money problems that have been going on for so long that you've lost all hope. If that is you this morning, you've come to the right place, because God has an astonishing, hopeful, liberating message for you. It's through the life of Joseph. We're going to see how God helped Joseph to finally understand the reason that was behind his feelings of abandonment, and he was able to make sense of his life. The title of the message is *Joseph: The Principle of a Greater Good*, and the Big Idea today is this:

God makes men by orchestrating even the toughest circumstances of our lives for a greater good.

The Day That Changes Everything

You should be at Genesis 39, and we'll be starting at the first verse. First up, I want to talk about this day that changes everything for Joseph. In the Joseph story, you may recall, he was sold at the age of seventeen by his brothers into slavery. He was his father's favorite, and his brothers hated him for it, they were very jealous. So Joseph had these two dreams that seemed to indicate that his family would bow down before him, that he would rule over his family, and his brothers hated him all the more for them. So they sold him into slavery to a caravan of Ishmaelite merchants on their way to Egypt, and when he got to Egypt, he was purchased by the captain of the Pharaoh's guard. We'll pick up the action here at Genesis 39:1-4:

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of his guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he had trusted to his care everything he owned.

So right in the middle of this gut wrenching story, this terrible tragedy, we find that this story takes a turn, and Joseph finds favor with his master. It says the Lord was with Joseph. The Lord gave him success in everything he did. Joseph found favor in his master's eyes. And you know that this is true, even in those times when you feel utterly and completely abandoned by God, when nothing is going right, and you're at the end of your rope, there are these kindnesses that God brings into your life.

Now, you've seen what it was for Joseph, but it can be as simple as somebody offering you an encouraging word or maybe in your quiet time or devotions you have this incredible encounter with Jesus and he encourages you and gives you the hope to go on. That's part of the way that God works. But Joseph's troubles are far from over because Potiphar has a wife. She's wealthy and powerful, beautiful and immoral. She seduces Joseph, and he holds on to his integrity. In retribution, she grabs his cloak and accuses him of rape. His master becomes furious, and enraged by this, puts Joseph into prison. If you look over at verse twenty in the same chapter, it says:

Genesis 39:20-21: Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

The warden put him charge of everything and then verse 23:

The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Once again you see that even in the midst of the abandonment, God was with him. Look at what it says again, it says, "The Lord was with him. He showed him kindness. He granted him favor in the eyes of the warden. Because the Lord was with, he gave him success in whatever he did." And so even though Joseph has been separated from his family as a teenage boy, God was with him.

Then in the prison there was a story in the Bible we won't look at specifically, but there was a cup bearer to the king and a baker that were arrested. The cup bearer was liberated, the baker was killed, and Joseph had correctly interpreted their dreams. When the cup bearer was restored, he promptly forgot about Joseph, but a couple years later the Pharaoh had two dreams. It was the same dream in two different forms and nobody could interpret them. Then the cup bearer recalled Joseph, this man in prison who had the ability to interpret dreams. So Joseph was brought into the presence of the Pharaoh and he was able to interpret these dreams. He said the dreams are of famine to come. You should pick somebody, the wisest man in the country, and put him in charge so that he can prepare for this.

For those of you that don't know, the substance of the dreams was that there would be this great famine that would come in seven years time, but in the seven years leading up to it, things would be incredibly prosperous. So the idea was to put somebody in charge during the prosperous times to prepare for famine. Pharaoh said who better to do this than you, you are the wisest man. So at the age of thirty, once again Joseph is promoted to a high position. He becomes the "Prime Minister of Egypt," if you will. He's had these three situations, and in all three situations God has promoted him, looked after him, taken care of him, and given him success. But there's still this anguish and this pain of being betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, and now here he is in a foreign land.

The seven years of prosperity went by; it says that Joseph accumulated so much grain that he stopped keeping records. The famine struck, and then two years into the famine it ended up affecting his father's family back in Canaan. So his father sent his brothers to buy grain. Joseph recognized them, but he didn't reveal his identity and sent them away. They came again for a second trip, and Joseph did a little ruse. He planted some silver in their sacks and then he ends up revealing himself. I'm going to show you this in chapter 45. This is a day like no other! This is the day in Joseph's life that changes everything! This is the day that helps him finally make sense of his life. It says:

Genesis 45:1-3: Joseph could no longer control himself before his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But they weren't able to answer then because they were terrified.

Do you feel it? It's now twenty-two years later. Joseph is now thirty-nine years old; he became Prime Minister at thirty, there were seven years of prosperity, then there were two years of famine. So he is now thirty-nine years of age, he's been separated from his family for twenty-two long years, and there is this turning point now that takes place. He's at a decision point. Which way does he go? Does he go to the left, or does he go to the right? Does he exact his revenge? Does he punish them severely, or does he go a different direction? Really, we're here today in some respects because of what Joseph chose to do. This was a turning point for his life. He can either continue to stumble along in the confusion of his circumstances, or he could look to God and he could find the message from him in this situation, and that's exactly what he did. What happens next is a turning point in history; it changes everything in his life! It can change everything in our lives if we can see what he saw. Let's take a look at it, verse four:

Genesis 45:4-8: And Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into slavery. And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there's been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God has sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

So what did Joseph see? He saw that God had been orchestrating all these extremely tough circumstances. He had been doing that for a greater good, and that changed everything for Joseph! And that can change everything for you! You may have been alienated from your family for two decades. You may have been in a dead end marriage for a decade. You may have been stuck in a job that you just feel like is going nowhere for twelve years, or you might have been upside down in your finances for the last six or seven years. But whatever set of circumstances that you're in, God wants you to know that he has orchestrated even what seemed like the toughest circumstances that are humanly possible. He's done this for a greater good, and he will reveal it to you in due time. I'm a testimony to that! There are many men in this room who can give testimony to that, and you can give testimony to that as God has been building you up in your faith, too.

The Big Idea today is this: **God makes men by orchestrating even the toughest circumstances of our lives for a greater good.** You know men, it's okay to long for this day. So if you have a long term problem, something very painful, it's normal for you to long for this day. This week I finished exactly one year of fasting one day a week for a very painful problem, something that's very difficult for me to watch happen. And so a year ago I made a commitment that I would fast one day a week until the problem got resolved, and I'm just now completing the fifty-second week. I'm longing for the day when God will resolve this problem, but I already know because of Joseph, and you can know too, that you don't have to wonder whether God is in it or not. God has not abandoned you, you can see from Joseph that he was sovereignly orchestrating everything in his life in his own strange mixture of sovereignty and freewill.

God enables our freewill within a limited framework of what he allows or causes to happen. Sometimes he induces action, like hardening Pharaoh's heart, other times he allows the actions of others to take place. But then in the Romans 8:28 sense, God causes all things to work together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. In that context, he allows things to happen, he allows people to do things, but then he comes in and he fixes it in due time.

Ephesians 1:11: He works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

God is in charge! God hasn't abandoned us! Even though sometimes twenty-two years go by before we get to see what it is that God is actually doing.

You Are Under His Protection

Next up, we must understand that we are under his protection. You are under his protection. Nothing that ever happens to you can ever happen to you apart from the will of God! Do you understand this? Nothing that ever happens to us by human will can ever happen apart from the will of God. Two sparrows are bought and sold for a penny, and yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from God. And the very hairs on our heads are numbered. This is a God who is involved! He knows how many hairs are on our heads, and it's easier to count on some of us! He is a God of minute detail, he is omniscient, he knows all things, and he cares so deeply about us that no person exercising the sinful nature of their freewill can do so unless God allows it or causes it. We call this in theology the doctrine of meticulous providence. You've heard me say this some of you. God allows no evil except that which prevents a

greater evil or brings about a greater good. Do you see how many problems that resolves? It's Romans 8:28.

So that's what Joseph saw. He saw that the evil that God had allowed prevented a greater evil, the death of the Jewish nation by famine. It brought about a greater good, and that was the salvation of many lives. That's what Joseph saw. He realized he had not been abandoned. He realized that what he thought was abandonment was just part of the master plan of God! It's like the man born blind so that the glory of God could be revealed! It was like the raising of Lazarus so that the glory of God could be revealed! Jesus said that in the healing of the blind man that this was not because of anybody's sin, but this has happened so that you might see the glory of God when he healed him.

Joseph saw that God had been sovereignly orchestrating what seemed like random circumstances in his life to bring about a greater good. Look at chapter 50, verse 19. His brothers, after the death of his father, came to him and lied to him about what his father wanted, and in verse 19 it says:

Genesis 50:19: But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

The Lord was with him, God had not abandoned him. The constant that Joseph realized was always in place was that God had always been with him and that God had always been using him as a showcase for his glory! When Joseph held on to his integrity in the midst of these problems, he became a showcase for the glory of God. When he came to this turning point, he chose to see what God was doing. So your sacrifices, if you don't grow weary and give up, will bring glory to God. Whatever it is you're going through, the feeling of abandonment that you have, the feeling of sacrifice that you're making to stay in a marriage where you have a bad relationship, it's an opportunity for you to bring glory to God, to show the reality. So every time a non-Christian suffers, a Christian suffers the same things so the world can see Jesus Christ is real.

The Big Idea today is this: **God makes men by orchestrating even the most difficult circumstances of our lives for a greater good.** That's how he does it! That's part of how he makes us!

The Greater Good in the Realities of Life

Let's take a look at the greater good in some of the realities of life. We'll talk about three this morning, the first one is marriage. You heard me say it many times; of all the problems men struggle with, this is the most difficult. I was with a man one day, and he was telling me about how his marriage was hanging on by a thread. He said what should I do? I said what do you want to do? He said, well, I want it to work. So I said, are you willing to be absolutely loyal to God? He said yes, I want that more than anything. I said that's good, but you can't do that, but Jesus Christ in you can do that. So put your faith in Jesus, and give it a few more years.

Men what we're talking about this morning, this commitment to not grow weary and give up, you can't do that. Jesus did that, and he can do that in us. We grow weary in our own strength; we don't grow weary by our faith in Jesus Christ. We put our faith in Jesus Christ and continue to do good. That's what

the Bible tells us, that's the gospel, men! If you're stuck in a dead end marriage, you can't keep that marriage together. But you can get up every day, surrender yourself to the lordship of Jesus Christ, put your faith and trust in him and ask him to give you the strength to not grow weary. If you don't, then you will not reap. That's Galatians 6:9.

Maybe it's in your work life? Maybe you feel like you have so much more to offer and you know what? You probably do! My brother Pete drives a bus for Disney. His life turned around dramatically when after several years of talking about it, he finally came to understand that it was God's will for him to drive a bus and not to be the president of some company. Even though he probably has the ability to do more, he's going to put his faith in Jesus to continue to do that because he can't do it on his own. You might have that kind of a job. The message this morning is that God will give you favor if you put your faith in Jesus. He will give you success, he will take care of you, and he will not abandon you. It may well be twenty-two years, but there will be a point where you will finally realize why he put you in the position that he's put you in. It's kind of like Esther's for such a time as this.

The third reality is money. Lots of you guys are upside down financially, or you are ministering to men in that state. It just looks like there's no way out. With God, there's always a way out. God is not going to abandon you. You may have to go through bankruptcy, you may have to live on food stamps, and you may lose your home. These things may happen, but God is working all things together for good when you love him and you are called according to his purpose! Sometimes these things are his disciplines. David said it was good for me to be afflicted. Now I obey your word, indicating he had been disobedient. The discipline of a father taking care of his son, that's not abandonment men, it's love! The message is God loves us very much. The message is we should trust him, we should not give up, we should not grow weary in doing good because in due season we will reap if we faint not. How do you do that? You can't do that in your own strength. The only way you can do any of this is through putting our faith in Jesus. Jesus has done all this, Jesus has been through this. Joseph in a way is a precursor to Jesus in his sufferings. He sold for twenty pieces of silver, and Jesus sold for thirty, a lot of similarities there. You can do this by putting your faith and trust in our lord and savior Jesus Christ. It's all about changing the core affections of our hearts to trust him, it's the gospel.

The Big Idea today is this: **God makes men by orchestrating even the toughest circumstances of our lives for a greater good.** He's got you. So if you want to make it work, you can't make it work, but Jesus can. Put your faith in him and continue to do good. Wait for him to act, help is on the way and he is going to sustain you in the meantime, just like he sustained Joseph. Let's pray.

Closing Prayer

Our dearest Father, we all have these long term problems we face and we all from time to time have feelings like, "Gosh, if you love me Lord, this seems like a strange way of doing it." But Lord I pray that you would take this epiphany that Joseph had that helped him to finally make sense of his life, and you would help each of us to let it help make sense of our lives, too. That we would continue in our faith in Jesus, to trust you for this greater good, and we pray that it would come quickly. In Jesus' name, amen.