

Origin Stories, Genesis 50, Joseph's Redemption, 6/16/24

How would your outlook on life change if you believed God was really with you—in every situation?¹ In that divorce you went through. In the rejection letter from college. In that disability or disease. In unwanted singleness. In financial struggle. How would your outlook change if you knew God is in this. Even though it feels out of control and it's painful, he's in it. You say, "I'm not sure if I believe that about everything." Just suppose for a minute that you did... how would your outlook on life and attitude change if you did believe it? Joseph believed this and it enabled him respond to struggles in his life with one of the most theologically significant and encouraging statements in all the Bible- Genesis 50:19-21. Let me set the scene.

Genesis 37-50 tells the story of how Joseph from the pit of betrayal by his brothers, to the prison in Egypt after being falsely accused, to the palace as Pharaoh's Prime Minister², helping save lives during the famine, which becomes the setting for this incredible story of forgiveness and reconciliation with his family that we looked at last week. At the end of Genesis, Jacob brings together his children, blesses them and then he passes away. But Joseph's brothers start to get paranoid, "What if Joseph was playing nice because dad was still alive and NOW he's going to get revenge on us?" And so his brother come to him and basically say "Um...Dad told us before he died that have to be nice to us." And Joseph's response is so powerful I could preach a series on each verse...

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

How would your outlook on life change if you believed God was really with you—in every situation? The answer is, it looks like Joseph's response to his brothers! In this response we see three marks of the presence of God in Joseph's life.

#1 Let God be God. v.19 "Am I in the place of God?"

Joseph is tapping into an important theme in the book of Genesis. All the biggest sins and catastrophes in Genesis are traced to this one sin: putting yourself in the place of God. In fact this was the original sin from Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent who said, "You can eat the tree God told you not to eat, you will be like God when you do!" What is this about? Moral authority! Decide what is right and wrong for ourselves. Functionally becoming their own gods. Cain killed his brother taking vengeance in his own hands, tower of Babel- they wanted to make a name for themselves. Putting ourselves in the place of God is one of the biggest mistakes you can make in your life. Today, don't we struggle with this same sinful

¹ Question presented by JD Greear <https://summitchurch.com/GetFile.ashx?Guid=b8865a2b-d84b-4edb-88c7-3a8ba981fbac>

² Thanks again to JD for these three terms.

impulse? “I will make my own financial decisions instead of doing it God’s way.” “I will decide what parts of the Bible I like and want to live out and which parts I don’t.” Or like the community at the Tower of Babel “I will make a name for myself.” And we particularly are tempted to function in the place of God when our lives feel out of control, when pain and disappointment comes our way, or like Joseph, when people hurt us and sin against us.

When we refuse to forgive, when we stay resentful, seek revenge...we are in the place of God. In Romans 12: ¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.* At my parent’s house, my dad has a designated chair at the dinner table...and because we enjoy messing with him, we will sit there sometimes, and he says, “Nope. Up. That’s MY chair.” When we are resentful, when we are trying to control the outcome, or are vengeful, God says, “Nope. Up. That’s MY chair, get out of my chair!”

Tim Keller says it like this, “If you try to become ‘god’, it’s the fastest way to become unlike God.” This is what Satan did. If you try to do this we are going to make a mess of it. We are going to be anxious, controlling, manipulative, angry, restless, power-hungry, spiteful...We will end up repaying evil with more evil. Only God has the wisdom, power and purity to repay evil without becoming evil himself. “But if we refuse to become ‘god’, we become more godly.” That’s when we become wise, generous, loving, gracious like Joseph.

Where do you need to let God be God? In your marriage? With your kids’ futures? With your financial decisions? With the state of your health? Letting go of a grievance or resentment?

Mark #2 See What God Sees. ²⁰ “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good...” Most of us have probably been on an airplane when you’ve gone through turbulence.³ And sometimes it can be pretty rough, where you’ve got a death grip on the armrest, your stomach is in your throat, and you start praying the sinner’s prayer. And some of you are thinking, “Yes and that’s exactly why I don’t fly, Nate!” Last year I was on a flight with some of the worse turbulence I can remember and the pilot came on the speaker with a calm voice, “Hi everyone, we are going through just a little patch of turbulence, nothing to worry about. I’m in full control and the plane is designed this way. So hang tight and keep your seatbelts buckled. And we will be through this in no time.” From the pilot’s point of view, everything is perfectly fine, the plane is doing exactly what it’s supposed to do, he’s in control...but from my vantage point, it feels like chaos, it feels like out of control...and I might be thinking, “Can I trust this pilot? Who’s flying this thing?” And isn’t this often how we approach our lives with God?

See from our vantage point of our lives back in coach- when things are going smoothly, we might say, “God is doing a great job up there...God is good, praise God for his blessing.” If things are getting turbulent, if our life feels out of control, we might say, “Can I trust God? Who’s flying this thing? I don’t see how anything good can come out of this?”

³ Illustration from Summit Church- <https://summitchurch.com/GetFile.ashx?Guid=6f12ddf-10ab-4405-8015-c750aa4958da>

[Blank Slide] But what Joseph's life teaches us is, yes- our life will get shaken, life is hard, and evil is real...but God is still good and he's still in control and we can trust him. It's designed this way for a purpose. In fact, it is often not in the smooth patches when we are growing and experiencing God the most is it? It's in the turbulence, it's when anxiety comes and we aren't in control. That's when sense God at work, and our faith gets tested and resilient. We need to learn by faith to see what God sees from the cockpit. Think about it: Had Joseph's brothers not sold him into slavery, he wouldn't have been in Egypt with Potiphar. Had he not been falsely accused by Mrs. Potiphar, he wouldn't have been in jail. Had he not been in jail, he wouldn't have met the cupbearer. Had the cupbearer not forgotten about him and left him in jail, he wouldn't have been around to interpret Pharaoh's dream. If he didn't interpret Pharaoh's dream, thousands of lives would have come to Egypt and be saved. And if Egypt wasn't the only place to buy grain, Joseph's brothers would have never come face-to-face with their brother. And if they didn't meet Joseph, they may never have repented and reconciled with God and Joseph. What they intended for harm, God intended for good. Joseph, through faith, was able to see what God sees from the cockpit.

Now you say...OK hold on though Nate because I have some questions about all this. First of all, doesn't this trivialize or even excuse all the evil that was done against Joseph? No, notice, Joseph says "You intended harm." Remember, God is just and he will settle the accounts. Part of experiencing God's healing for our past involves facing up to the fact that people have sinned against you and that's not OK. It's just that that is not where the discussion stops. God can overwrite, reuse, redeem the bad stuff that others have done, and that you have even done in the past to turn to good.

But, how does God's sovereignty and man's free will fit together? Well, if I solved that seeming paradox for us I would be a very rich man selling millions of books, because that is a question people have wrestled with for centuries. We might scratch our heads, but God doesn't- God has no problem somehow bringing these two fundamental truths together perfectly- man is still responsible for his choices and yet God is sovereign and everything is right on schedule.

OK, fine, but my last question is does seeing what God sees mean that I will always be able to see God's ultimate good come out of the messed-up stuff in my life or our world? No, for 13 years Joseph couldn't make sense of any of it. From 17 to 40 he probably was still scratching his head until the puzzle pieces started coming together, and he said...Aha! Now, the longer you live, the more trust the Lord, the more you begin understanding the story of our lives in retrospect, you begin to have more and more "Aha!" moments. What looked like random occurrences, detours, obstacles, become some of the most significant aspects of our story.

[Blank Slide] After I graduated from high school and before I went to college, I moved 2 hours away from my hometown, away from all my friends, to go live with my parents for the summer, who moved to York a year before me. I didn't know anyone, I had no friends, I worked at a terrible job at a machine shop for part of that summer...I often thought, "What am I doing here?" It just really seemed like any boring and pointless detour. And because I had no friends, I hung out with my parents and their friends...and during a poker game, one guy just happened

to be talking about this great church in outside of DC called McLean Bible Church. I didn't think anything of it at the time. Fast forward 5 years, Shannan and I got married, my investment advisory job just happened to take us to the DC Metro area and we were looking for a church, and I remembered that random conversation that I had that night at the poker game with my dad's friend about McLean Bible Church. We looked it up and it just happened to be 5 minutes from our apartment. So we started attending, ultimately I ended up joining the pastoral staff. About 8 years later, in the summer of 2014, a group of members at Brandywine Valley Church started praying for their next Lead Pastor as Bo was retiring, and they just happened to start praying the very Sunday morning I was preaching at McLean Bible Church when God put me on my knees and began to whisper to me that He wanted me to prepare for my calling as a lead pastor...which seemed like it came out of nowhere. And I believe that is the sermon that Don Kugelberg, a member of the Lead Pastor Search Committee and Deacon Board, just happened to watch of me...and well as they say, "The rest is history." Now listen, it's very likely that none of that happens and I'm not here unless I had that boring, annoying, seemingly pointless summer at my parents' house before college. And that's only one of likely thousands of things that God was doing and is doing behind the scenes that he just happened to allow me to see. And the same is true in your life when we begin to see what God sees like Joseph.

Now God doesn't always show us what he's doing, and he doesn't always show us in this lifetime. And we certainly can't see into the future. You say, "But I want to know now why God allowed this pain, or what he's up to in this season of waiting. I understand. Me too. Can I remind you of something that's true...Two seconds into eternity, however, that's not going to matter. Pauls says **2 Corinthians 4:17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.** Eternity will be one heavenly "Aha!" moment after another.

Where do you need to see what God sees? Your past mistakes? Your present regrets? The hurts that you harbor? The confusion in your life?

Mark #3 Love How God Loves. ²¹ *So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

Joseph forgave them, gave them grace beyond what they could ever earn or deserve. Now we aren't going to spend much time here because that was last week's focus. How could Joseph do that? How can he love his brothers after all they did to him? Because of #1 and #2- Because he let God be God and because he could see what God sees. They are the prerequisites. But also Because Joseph's heart was changed, he experienced the love and the presence of God in the pit, in the prison, AND in the palace. And because of that he was able to give love as an overflow of the love poured into him. And that's the only way our hearts can be opened to love how God loves. We can't fake that- God does that through us by faith.

If you have been through pain, hardship, if you have experienced disillusionment or seasons of suffering, and you have come through all that letting God be God, seeing what God sees, and he's given you the ability to love how God loves- friends, that is a blessing, but also a

responsibility. Others need you, they need your encouragement, your perspective, your hope, your counsel through those seasons to trust God. One ministry that may be suitable for you- **Stephen Ministry**- come alongside others in difficult seasons of life- to ministry the grace, wisdom and love of Christ. Some team members are in the lobby to today if you'd like to learn more about becoming trained to be a Stephen Minister or are in need of care.

How would your outlook on life change if you believed God was really with you—in every situation? Few Christians have modeled this more than **Corrie Ten Boom**. Corrie and her family were Dutch Christians during WWII. She was put into a concentration camp by the Nazis for hiding and helping Jews escape. Her life for many years was brutal, humiliating and isolating. And yet, like Joseph she knew that God was with her. And it gave her the perspective to let God be God, to see what God sees, to love how God loves. After the war ended, Corrie became a writer and speaker, making an indelible impact in millions of lives even to this day. She wrote a poem describing her life like a tapestry.

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaveth steadily.

Of't times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned

He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.

Joseph points to Jesus: One day, many years into the future, Jesus would come and face the same kind of suffering Joseph faced. He would be betrayed by his brothers; and then lied about and falsely condemned. Of course, unlike Joseph, Jesus wasn't just sold into slavery; he was put to death; but like Joseph, he would be raised from that pit of death to sit onto the highest

throne of heaven and like Joseph, instead of exacting vengeance from that throne, he would use his exalted position to forgive and save his brothers. And, like Joseph, he would weep tears of joy when we were reconciled to him. Jesus is the whole point of this story, as he is every story in the Bible. The main point of the Joseph story is not to amaze you with Joseph's incredible faith; nor is to try and say that regardless of what bad things have happened to you, his ultimate good can come. The whole point is to make you to show you that in all things God is fully in control of history, working out his perfect plan to put Jesus on the throne, and save and glorify us through his resurrection. Trust him.