

God's Blessing Revealed

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[0 : 00] I'm going to start with a discussion. I want you to turn to the person next to you and ask them if they can tell you about a time when they did something wrong, but it turned out good.

Well, I could tell you about a thousand different lessons that I've learned from mistakes which turned out to be good, like the time that I accidentally started a fire under the house, or that time that I thought I should ask dad for permission because mum had said no.

Don't do that. Any number of other times, but at all these times, and I'm sure you'll agree, even if we learned an important lesson, the immediate outcome was always bad, like the judgment or the bullying or something else that you did. I never did these things planning a good outcome, and I'm sure you didn't either. Tonight, as we look at Genesis 45, we're going to see the outcome of the evil actions of Joseph's brothers, and while we'll see that what they did is absolutely wrong, we'll also see that God was at work for his own purpose. Now, over the last few weeks, we've seen Jacob and the family on a bit of an emotional roller coaster, haven't we? At the start, there was already plenty of emotional tension in the family, and then on top of that, this man from Egypt. He treats them harshly, wild accusations, imprisonment, then more family tension and stress, and then another stressful visit to Egypt, and at the end of chapter 44, Judah is facing the prospect of slavery in Egypt in

Benjamin's place. And in tonight's passage, the tension begins to be revealed. The Jacob story doesn't end until the end of Genesis, but here there is a kind of conclusion. As we get started tonight, it'll be good to keep this tension in mind, particularly right from the end of chapter 44.

Do you remember the feeling in the room where we finished last week? Benjamin had stolen a cup, at least from the brother's point of view, from this seemingly emotionally unstable Egyptian ruler.

[2 : 21] Would they be killed or enslaved for this offence? Well, no, but Benjamin might not be able to return, which would be the death of their father. Judah steps up for a surprising substitution of Benjamin.

It's a stressful moment, isn't it? And on top of everything else, how would they be feeling? How would you be feeling in their shoes? Well, the passage begins in verse 1 by reminding us that it's not just the 11 brothers who are tense and stressed. Emotions are high for Joseph too. In fact, they're about to explode.

So can you picture the room? The brothers, remember they came in and they lay down, bowed down to Joseph, lying face down, wondering what's going to happen.

Judah has played his hand. The silence hangs. And then suddenly out of nowhere, everyone out!

Joseph says in verse 1, it says, sorry, in verse 1, Joseph could no longer control himself. You might remember back in chapter 42, Joseph had to go away and weep. Do you remember that?

[3 : 45] He was moved to tears, but he still kept his cool. In chapter 43, verse 30, when Joseph saw Benjamin, he hurried out to weep and then came back controlling himself.

But here Joseph tells everyone to get out because he could no longer control himself. In verse 2, it says, he cries so loudly that all the Egyptians could hear it and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Now, I think it's easy for us to read this without really thinking about it. He cries so loudly that the people he sent out could hear him.

It helps to paint the picture of Joseph's emotional state, doesn't it? Can you see? This isn't a controlled sob. We are trying not to make a scene, just like keeping it in.

This is, it's my party and I'll cry if I want to. This is extreme bellow crying. I'm not going to do it. I did think about doing it, but I'm not going to do it.

[4 : 50] You can picture it. Let's feel Joseph's feelings. It gives some insight into Joseph's mind, doesn't it? It shows us that Joseph was longing for a reunion.

He missed his family. He was desperately seeking reconciliation. And while at times we may wonder about Joseph's actions, well, we know that reconciliation is not smooth and simple, but often emotionally tense and overwhelming.

Joseph is overwhelmed by this situation and the brothers are freaking out. Surely this doesn't bode well for them. But despite what they may be thinking in this moment, this isn't bad news.

In the midst of the cries and wails, Joseph finally reveals himself. Verse 3, I am Joseph. Is my father still living? After all this time, Joseph finally makes himself known.

This is what we've been waiting for ever since we saw the sentence, Joseph recognized them, but they didn't recognize him. And for a moment, they still didn't recognize him.

[6 : 02] And you probably couldn't blame them. And so in verse 4, he tries again. He says, come close to me. And they did. And he says, I am your brother, Joseph, the one you sold into slavery.

And I don't think he says that last bit just to be a cruel reminder, but more of a final proof comment, because no one outside this group of 12 would know what they did.

This is definitely Joseph. But they still don't respond. In fact, they don't respond at all or interact with him until verse 15. But I wonder if they were thinking something.

Joseph is here? What? How? The whole issue about the silver cup and slavery has probably just dissolved in the background.

Maybe now they're more worried about how Joseph will repay them for what they did 15 years ago. That was surely much worse than this. And so it's not surprising that they're speechless.

[7 : 07] But whatever their worries are, they don't have long to wait. And oddly enough, Joseph doesn't want to get payback for their evil treatment of him. And believe it or not, he wants to encourage them and comfort them despite their sinful behavior.

In verse 5, Joseph comforts them instead of rebuking them. They did wrong, but God was working through them. Take a look at verse 5. 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 has been famine in the land and for the next five years there will be no plowing or reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by great deliverance.

What? Can this be right? Not only does he say, don't worry about that terrible thing that you did to me, but he also says, God sent me ahead of you.

What? No, no, no. That's not what happens. We put you in that well. Do you remember that? We sold you into slavery. We faked your death and got you out of our lives.

[8 : 24] It was our actions that sent you here. We are responsible for what happened. But this isn't what Joseph says, is it?

He says, God sent me ahead of you. God sent me here. Joseph's revelation doesn't mean the brothers didn't do what they know they did.

But it does mean that God did do what he says he did. They did wrong. And at the same time, God did right.

God was at work in their actions for his greater purpose. You acted sinfully with evil intent, the brothers. And God was working at the same time for his purpose, salvation and blessing.

In the rest of the chapter, we get a picture of the outcome of God's plan, his blessing for his people and even the world. But before we look at that, I just want to take a moment to think a little bit more about the relationship between the brothers' actions and God's.

[9 : 46] In these verses, Joseph makes it abundantly clear that it's God who has been doing the doing, doesn't he? We see three times in these few sentences.

Verse 5, God sent. Verse 7, God sent. Verse 8, God made. God made. But it's more than just in the brothers' lives that God is at work.

And we looked at that last week, didn't we? But it's also in their actions for the sake of his purpose. You may have heard me say a few times in the last couple of weeks that God is at work in our lives for his purpose, which is for our good.

I think what Joseph says here helps to focus or sharpen this idea a bit. We've seen in the last two weeks that God is at work in our lives.

He's with us in our trial and pain. He's at work over the years in sanctification. Here we see that God is at work in our actions, even sinful actions, yet with a different purpose towards a different outcome.

[11 : 03] This doesn't mean that God forced the brothers to sell Joseph. They chose to sell Joseph. We saw this really clearly in chapter 37, didn't we?

They didn't like him. They conspired to kill him. They did exactly what they wanted. But all the while, God was at work in their evil actions for his purpose.

Well, in verses 9 to 28.3, Joseph tells his brothers to go home, but not to get them out of his life. In fact, the opposite.

Have a look. Verse 9. Now, hurry back to my father and say, this is what your son Joseph says. God has made me lord of all Egypt.

Come down here. Don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me. You, your children and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds and all you have.

[12 : 06] I will provide for you there because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise, you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute. Joseph wants his father and his brothers and his whole extended clan to come back to Egypt and not just for a visit.

He wants them to live with him. This journey has really turned out very differently than what they expected and definitely for the better. Not only is their brother alive and the most powerful person in Egypt, but they're going to get a new home for the family plus food and care in the famine which is far from over.

This is a pretty great result, isn't it? And that's not all. It's not just a new house and food. In verse 17, even Pharaoh commands Joseph's brothers to bring their families back to receive the best of Egypt.

Have a look. Pharaoh said to Joseph, verse 17, Tell your brothers, do this, load your animals and return to the land of Canaan and bring your father and your families back to me.

I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land. This can feel a bit strange. I thought this felt a bit strange when I was reading it because often when we think about Pharaoh, we think about Exodus and that nasty, cruel Pharaoh.

[13 : 31] But not the case here. God is at work despite the sin of these brothers to save and bless his people.

How would you be feeling in the shoes of the brothers now? Shocked? Disbelieving? A moment ago worrying about your life?

Slavery? Now I'm going to live like Egyptian royalty? So what do they do? They hurry back to Canaan. They get their father and they bring the unbelievable news.

And unsurprisingly, he doesn't believe them at first. And after telling the story and showing all the carts that Joseph, sorry, that Pharaoh sent, he believes. In verse 28, Jacob says, I'm convinced my son Joseph is still alive.

I will go and see him before I die. This is a crazy story, isn't it? Isn't it? It is crazy. It's pretty hard to believe, isn't it?

[14 : 38] Considering what's happened, all the things. But it's helpful, I think, because it shows God's goodness, his love and his faithfulness.

Just like the barren Sarah getting a son and the sorrowful Jacob expecting a sad, lonely death. We see that God is faithful to his people.

He blesses them as he promised. And in the outcome of this story, we even see the world being blessed through this family. In the lives that are saved in the famine.

This passage shows us how God is actively at work in his people for his purpose. He's never not at work to bring about his purpose and promise.

Even when his people do evil, God is working in their actions to keep his promise. Before we finish tonight, I want to spend a bit of time thinking about God's character and his actions in this story in light of the cross and in light of our sin.

[15 : 48] Firstly, it's good for us to realize that this main idea of God being at work in the evil actions of people to bring about his purpose is a really major theme in the Bible.

And the way in which we see God bringing his plan to its climax in the death and the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. That was a long sentence. Did you hear it?

I hope you heard it. In the story of Joseph, we can see an allusion to Jesus in the way that he's revealed as the one whom God sent to save many lives.

In the Gospels, Jesus is revealed to be God's Messiah sent to save. You might remember Mark and Luke chapter nine at the transfiguration where Jesus is declared to be the son of God and the disciples are terrified and they don't understand.

In the Gospels and Acts, we learn that it was God's plan for Jesus to die at the hand of evil people. There's actually a verse reference up on the slide.

[17 : 01] Acts chapter two, verse 23. Peter says, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge. And you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

We see that God is at work in the evil actions of those who killed Jesus according to his plan. And finally, as a result of what God did through the sinful actions of those who killed Jesus and God raised him to life.

To save everyone who believes in him becoming a blessing to the whole world. Peter says again in Acts chapter two. On the next slide, verse 38. Eight, I think, there it is.

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off.

Through Jesus. It's not only the children of Abraham who are blessed, but everyone who believes. And in Jesus, we see that God is not undone by sin.

[18 : 14] Instead, he is sovereign in it. Even working through sin to bring salvation to everyone who believes. So, what about my sin?

If God is sovereign in sin, working for his purpose, how should we think about our own sin in God's sovereignty? Well, what I think we can be absolutely sure about in the Joseph story is that the brothers did wrong.

They knew it. Joseph knew it. And we know it. They plotted and planned. They hated him. They almost killed him.

They put him out of their lives and they faked his death. This is thoroughly selfish, evil behavior. Of course, you know that. But realizing God's greater purpose, which is for the good of the family and even the good of the world, doesn't make it okay, does it?

Sinful behavior is absolutely wrong, whether deliberate or accidental. And we know what sin is. We know how to be selfish. We know how to put ourselves before others.

[19 : 35] It's human nature, isn't it? And it's never okay. But we also know that our sinful actions aren't ever outside of God's plan or purpose.

We know that we can't undo or undermine God's plan when we do the wrong thing because God is sovereign and working for his purpose. So how should this affect my view, our view of our sin?

Well, there are three things that I want to look at in this story which challenge our response to sin. And I put them on your outline. Firstly, it's wrong. I've said this already and we all know it, but if you're anything like me, it's good to hear it again.

Sinful behavior is wrong. It will be pointless, I think, and time-consuming for me to try and mention every manifestation of sin. So let's take our lesson from the brothers of Joseph.

Don't sell your sibling into slavery. Or more realistically, don't let jealousy and anger get the better of you.

[20 : 45] Sinful behavior is wrong. God hates it. It's never okay. Secondly, grief. Sinful behavior, both in us and others, should make us sad.

I actually think that this is something that takes practice, which when I say out loud sounds a little bit weird. I think it probably has something to do with our sanctification.

In these chapters, we see how evil behavior, cruelty and selfishness constantly causes grief and pain and regret.

I'm not saying that we should let our wrong choices hang over us. But just remember that sin is awful and destructive.

And we should consider it unnatural and unhelpful. Our attitude to sin should make us grieve when we see it.

[21 : 49] Thirdly, this passage shows us how we should respond once we've recognized sin. And that is repentance and reconciliation.

In verses 14 and 15, when the brothers have finally understood that this is really their brother, they literally kiss and make up. Repentance and reconciliation should always be the goal and outcome of acknowledging our sin.

Some sin is harder to acknowledge. Selling your brother into slavery, for instance. Or perhaps a particularly unkind word. But this isn't about doing it the right way.

It's just about doing it. Repentance and reconciliation are perhaps the hardest part of the whole process. I know I did wrong. I shouldn't have said, did that.

Please forgive me. Only this will enable reconciliation and healing. You may have experienced that feeling when you try and sweep some tension and bad feelings under the carpet and not dealing with it.

[23 : 04] Repentance and reconciliation is harder at first, but better for the relationship after. Repentance and reconciliation is harder. Repentance and reconciliation is harder. Some of you here, right now, might be somewhere along this path.

Some of you might have sin that you need to deal with. And either you don't know how or you don't want to. And I could fully understand.

There are no warnings in this passage and there are no timelines. Sin causes real and long lasting pain and shame.

And healing is slow. If you're sitting here tonight and this is you. Let me encourage you to pray to our gracious God.

Ask him to work powerfully in your heart and your mind. Ask him to bring about real and willing repentance and reconciliation.

[24 : 11] There is no sinful divide so great that God can't bring this about in your life, in your heart, in your relationships. I've done and said some pretty cruel things to my brothers.

Yet God has healed our relationship. Joseph's brothers did and said something far worse to their brother. Yet God healed their relationship.

We all, through our sin, took part in nailing Jesus to the cross. Yet God is able to change our hearts and reshape our desires.

And heal our relationship with him. Whether you need to say sorry to God or to someone in your life. Don't go to bed tonight without asking God to change your heart.

Don't go to sleep without saying, please God, work in me. Heal my relationship. Heal the damage. Sin is always wrong.

[25 : 25] And whether we do it deliberately or accidentally. We should be sorry and seek repentance and reconciliation with God and his people. But our great comfort is this.

God is sovereign in our sin. God's plans can't be undone by our failure. And God is always at work in our sin.

For his purpose. Which is for our good. How about I pray? Will you join me? Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are working in us.

Even in our sin for your purpose and our good. Please change our hard hearts. Help us to turn away from sin. To seek repentance and reconciliation.

Amen. Amen.