

Gen 45 – God Works for the Good

Joseph in our Old Testament lesson gives us a good word. An encouraging and beautiful word that reminds us that God can work good out of evil. He says, “Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.” And in verse 7: “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.”

When do you think he realized that?

When do you think he finally saw that God’s hand was working for good in his life, even through the bad?

Do you think it was when he was flung into a pit by his brothers? Do you think it was when “Ok haha, funny joke, now get me out of the pit...” only to realize there were Midianite traders there and the brothers were actually, actually going to send him with them... “You’ve got to be joking! No, please, what? I’m sorry for everything! Please don’t...” And off he goes to who knows where, with who knows who. (God knows, of course – but that’s my question: when do you think Joseph realized that?)

Was it when he, mercifully, lands at Potiphar’s and has tasks to do and he does them well. Maybe then, “Ok God, alright, maybe you have a hand in this somehow.” Until he is falsely accused of sexual abuse and thrown in prison. Think he realized it there? “God I am trying to do things your way... and what does it get me?” Are we ever tempted to say, “Well God’s ways don’t work out, so maybe I should try the world’s way...”

And yet, there he is in prison and there are things to do and he does them well. He finds some dreams to interpret, too, but for so long it’s still him, in prison unjustly...

Until the King needs a dream interpreted. Until the King sees the gift that this prisoner is to the kingdom. Until Joseph is lifted up to save so many by organizing storage for the famine – don't let anyone tell you administration is not a life or death gift! One I wish I had...

And then his brothers come before him asking for food... and he has the chance to avenge himself, to kill them, to send them to starve slowly... or he has the chance to save them.

Where in there do you think he realized it... that God used his foolish spiteful sinful bickering with his brothers to save nations?

I don't know where or when he realized it. But I bet it wasn't when he was in a pit, or when he was falsely accused and the "justice" system landed him in prison. I bet he had a hard time seeing how God was at work then.

And I imagine you do as well at times. When the loved one dies, when the family member gets cancer, when you fall back into the same stupid pit of sin and shame and addiction, when you try to do things God's ways but it blows up in your face.

"How, Lord? How are you working this for good? And it's all well and nice for Joseph's story to turn out alright, but mine doesn't seem like I'll be saving any nations or reconciling with the estranged family like he did. Good for him, not so much for me. Just because God CAN work good out of evil doesn't mean he will, right?"

Or will he? Is the word of Joseph just a nice realization for his life, or is it also a reflection of God's promises to all his people, which then would include you. Romans 8:28- you know it, God works in all things for the good of those who love him.

And we might think, “well I guess I don’t love him enough, because things aren’t working for my good, that’s for sure.” Think Joseph ever thought that?

If you doubt your love for God, and whether it’s strong enough, I would strongly urge you to stop playing that game. First, you can always love him more, and so you are always going to find some place for doubt or fear in there, because, as St. John tells us: perfect love drives out fear, and when we look inward I bet we will see imperfect love and therefore: fear.

I think a better question to consider is, not your love for him, but his love for you.

Joseph is sold as a slave, goes down to Egypt, is falsely accused, and then wins a mighty salvation for nations. Consider Jesus, the greater Joseph, he went down to Egypt, chased by unjust rulers. He was sold as a slave, 20 pieces of silver, the cost of a slave, and he too is falsely accused. And the plan of the Father takes him not to a palace, but to a cross. For His Good? Or for yours?

There on the cross he is lifted up to suffer. And he could have brought vengeance down on us. He could have had us all out for death, for our sins, he could have given us what we deserve. Yes, we talk about what we deserve all the time, “for all my work and no one thanks me!” We say. We say, “those people don’t deserve forgiveness and I do!” But why do you? You’ve done wrong, that deserves justice. And a good judge doesn’t let evil off the hook.

Oh, but now we’ve used the judge word, and we all know the verse we had from Jesus today.

“Judge not lest you be judged.” And so now we can’t say a word about good or evil ever, right?

Or does our Lord invite us to do just that at times? He does... But don’t think I’m trying to get out of Jesus’ command, no, I’m not. No doubt a full discussion on this topic does have to do with him resetting us to a default of mercy, that discussion still doesn’t get us off the hook. The reality

is that we do judge, rightly or wrongly, and guess what, you will be judged! By God and against his perfect standard!

And how are you going to stand in that judgment? On what you've done? On being better than the person next to you? How will you avoid the justice you deserve? By saying, "Look how much I love you Lord! And I showed it in these ways!"

Or might we stand in the judgment saying, "For the sake of Jesus and His undeserved love shown on the cross... have merc."

Here we might stand, in a judgment that has already been carried out, a judgment paid by another, by one who takes what he doesn't deserve: judgment, to give us what we don't deserve: forgiveness.

The cross is where the justice and the mercy of God meet. The cross, and ultimately the victorious empty tomb, is where we see how God uses evil for Good. It is where we see his love for us. And if his love is for us, promised and shown, then perhaps his promise, his word, to work for our good is for us too.

That isn't to say it's easy to see how he is working for our good all the time. But someday it will hit you. Just like Joseph. We pray that day would be here and now "Lord show us how you are working in this painful brokenness for the good!" That's a good prayer. But rest a little, you will see it one day. Even if it is in, as Paul talks about, the resurrection where things are healed, things are forgiven and reconciled. It may take till then, I don't know, but it will happen. His Word is sure, his word is for you, and his love has been made known in the greater Joseph where in the death of an innocent man, that evil, is turned into the greatest good – life and salvation for you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.