

June 2, 2013
Excerpts from Genesis 37
Joseph: God Meant it for Good

When I read it, see how many red flags go up in your mind about this family. Things that make you go, "uh oh." Ok, red flag! This isn't going to turn out right. (We can pretend we're all "Super Nanny" assessing the issues to address in the family dynamics...)

Genesis 37 (excerpts)

I don't know if you've ever come home after spending time with your extended family over the holidays or at a family reunion and you come to the realization: My family is really strange. Most of us don't grow up feeling that way- It's the only family we know so we think our family is normal... But that thought can change over time.

Well if you think your family is a tad bit dysfunctional, Jacob's family will most likely make you feel a lot better about yours.

Before we say anything else about the family or this story, I want to point out, **THIS IS THE FAMILY GOD USES.** This is the family God chose **TO FULFILL GOD'S PLAN FOR THE WORLD.**

And it's not just Jacob's immediate family, the family God uses began with Adam and Eve, and continues today with us and the entire family of God.

I love that the recorders and writers of Scripture didn't try to hide the unpleasant details. There was no skirting around the issues or polishing things up to make the family seem better or more holy than they were.

God's people were a **MESS, AND WE ARE OFTEN A MESS...** But **WE ARE A MESS THAT GOD HAS REDEEMED.**

And through stories like Jacob's, we can see how God takes a particular mess of a family and works his way and will into their lives to accomplish something beautiful for God's glory.

Remember God's promise to Abraham-- I'm going to make you the Father of a great nation-- I will bless you and all the nations of the world will be blessed through you... Well as we look at the heroes of the OT we'll see how God's promise is fulfilled, (even through kind of messed up people!)

The story begins with 17 year-old tattletale Joseph who was treasured by his Father and hated by his brothers... SuperNanny obviously didn't have the opportunity to tell Joseph it's probably not the **BEST** idea to share his dream w/ his brothers (2 of them!) of them bowing down to him.

But of course Joseph doesn't care. He is 17. He is spoiled and proud (he's kind of a brat!) and he's had this fabulous dream-- what youngest child of 11 brothers wouldn't **LOVE THAT DREAM** and want to tell it to them, probably over and over again???

But of course the brothers were not impressed. They were outraged. And their hatred and outrage sent them **OVER THE EDGE.** How many of you think the brothers went a bit too far in their outrage? But that's what happens with hate- it sends people over the edge, and that's

what happened with the brothers.

They tore off that treasured robe his father gave him and ALMOST killed him, but instead sold him off to Midianite merchants.

Think of that- your own brothers plan to kill you, ok they sell you and tell your father you are dead... Think of the hurt and heartbreak it caused Joseph and Jacob, the guilt and anguish (I would think) upon the brothers...Think of the mess something like this would make of their lives...

But of course that's not the end of the story. The story goes on. And it's quite a story! So many ups and downs... I'll briefly explain what happened. (I'll mention key points, but read it yourself!)

In Potiphar's house Joseph was so well regarded he eventually became manager of Pharaoh's household, (yay!) but then Pharaoh's wife tried to seduce him- Joseph said no, she lied and then he got thrown into prison. (Quite a soap opera!)

In prison, Joseph was able to interpret a prisoner (the cupbearer's) dream, and that prisoner was released! And it looked like the cupbearer would be able to get Joseph out of prison! (yay!) But this prisoner FORGOT about Joseph (ugh!) (So there are these ups and downs...suspense and intrigue-- you REALLY need to read the story!)

EVENTUALLY Joseph got a hearing in Pharaoh's court in order to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, and that led the way for Joseph to become Pharaoh's most honored official. And the position Joseph held in Pharaoh's household enabled Joseph to save his family from famine and to preserve the nation of Israel for years to come.

What captivated me was seeing the evolution of Joseph-- from a bratty teenager to a man of God who obeyed and persevered and came to forgive them. The story also reveals the evolution of the brothers- from jealous, hateful and vengeful, to remorseful, repentant and grateful. God's will prevailed on a grand scheme in preserving the nation of Israel-- God's will also prevailed in God's people- as Jacob and Joseph and his brothers grew to be people who were blessed to be a blessing.

What the story reveals: The story's not over until GOD SAYS ITS OVER.

When the brothers contrived a plan to have Joseph die in the pit, it's easy to think—OVER!
The story's over!

When he got thrown into prison because of Potiphar's wife's lies and lost favor with Pharaoh, it's easy to think--OVER!

When the cupbearer, the fellow prisoner forgot about Joseph and never pleaded for Joseph's release as he promised, it's easy to think—OVER!

But there was always more to the story. God's will prevailed. Joseph's life was spared but more than that, The nation of Israel was preserved.

So much happened in his life. So much sorrow, but so much GRACE. God's favor was upon Joseph to the point where, at the very end of the story, he was able to sit down with his brothers after so many years and talk with them about that horrible, horrible day... This is what he said.

And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life It was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:3-5, 8). Later, in the last chapter of Genesis Joseph says to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for

good, the salvation of many lives. Therefore, do not be afraid”

Wow. Do you see what God can do to a life, to a people, to hearts and to nations?

And so I want to ask you all... This reminder, that “The story's not over until God says it's over...” Where, in what way do you need to hear and live into this truth today?

In those relationships that seem beyond repair... In the midst of a circumstance that has caused great suffering... As you think of situations and crises that just seem hopeless...

The story's not over until God says it's over.

May we pray that God's glory be revealed and God's will be done...!

Can we ask the Lord what part in the story he would have us play?

How is God calling us to participate in the will and purpose of God amidst those things that make us think, OVER- the story's over! Because it's not.

That leads us to the 2nd thing I'd like to point out -- I want us to see how God used the actions and decisions of others to fulfill God's plan.

Think way back with Reuben-- he's the one who said, “wait! Don't kill him...throw him in the cistern! (ok, it wasn't the best alternative, but it's better than killing him!)

And then Judah's involvement-- HE said, “Wait! Don't throw him in the cistern, sell him!” (ok, still not the best alternative but better than making Joseph rot in the cistern, or well)

And then Potiphar bought Joseph...- I don't know if he did this out of compassion, maybe he just needed a slave... But his decision led Joseph to Pharaoh... AN INTEGRAL PART OF GOD'S PLAN!

EVEN Potiphar's wife-- she lied, framed him, was responsible for Joseph going to prison-- but that's where he interpreted a dream, that's how he eventually got a hearing with Pharaoh...

(slow)Neither Jacob, nor Joseph nor Jacob's other sons, not Potiphar's wife or even Pharaoh himself could prevent or even delay the sovereign purposes of the God of Israel.

Which begs this question: If God's will prevails no matter what, what difference do our decisions make? Do we even have free will at all?

To answer that, I LOVE how Barbara Brown Taylor answers that.

God isn't a puppeteer, making things happen. God, Taylor says, is more like an artist, 'like one of those genius sculptors who can make art out of anything.' For this kind of artist, 'Nothing is too bent to be used – not even tragedies, not even bad decisions, not even plain human meanness.' Joseph, she says, is 'a living work of art.

You are a work of art! We are works of art! Our church is and can be a work of art! Weaving God's beauty of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace to a world that is hungry for just that. How can we live into this more faithfully?

3. Which brings us to the last thing I want to mention about the story. You know how Joseph was a living work of art?

He contributed to the tapestry God was weaving in the Jewish people and throughout the

whole world BY CHOOSING TO FORGIVE.

You can say God's will prevailed in how the nation of Israel was preserved but the whole thing came about through Joseph's decision to forgive. Joseph participated in the miracle of forgiveness. That's the ultimate way God's will prevailed in the story!!!

When Joseph came face to face with his brothers after so many years, how easy it could've been for him to be bitter and hateful. All those years Joseph's last memory of his brothers was when they threw him in the cistern and proceeded to have lunch, talking about how to get rid of him. And then they sold him to strangers and walked home...

Instead of being bitter and hateful, Joseph chose to forgive. If we, for one second, conclude that this was an easy choice... After all, God was with him, God shaped him... It goes back to what we said before, if God was in control, didn't it have to go that way???

What set me straight about that thought was when I read the story and came across all the times Joseph wept as he met with his brothers.

Just to recap the "cliff notes version"...

Famine led the brothers to Egypt where they heard Pharaoh's prime minister (Joseph!) was supplying people with grain. Jacob's family certainly weren't Egyptians but they knew it was their only hope.)

When they got there, Joseph recognized them, but they did not recognize Joseph. After all, they had been living as if Joseph was dead for a long time now, and the thought that he could be living in Pharaoh's palace was of course the furthest from their minds!!!

Joseph didn't reveal his identity to them but decided to test them. He took one of them captive until they went home and brought their youngest brother, Joseph's real brother... He framed them by slipping silver in their bags... (So it looks like Joseph was getting them back he was in power to trick them this time...)

But all this time, seeing them, conversing with them-- HE TALKED WITH GREAT POWER AND AUTHORITY (after all, he was 2nd in command to Pharaoh!) but he was in agony inside.

Listen: 42:24: "He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again."

(When he saw Benjamin) 43:30 "Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went to his private room and wept there. After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said "Serve the food."

I just have to read this part: 45:1-12 (Read)

We know God has full reign in our heart in our life when we choose the path of forgiveness.

Think of what Jesus did. Think of the cross. When we look at the cross we remember that Joseph's words, "What Satan meant for evil, God uses for good" is the miracle of the cross

and in our lives. We are broken. We are a mess. But God restores us. God works out his will and purpose through it all. God's will prevails. May we live out that truth, as God has called us to partner with the Lord in turning what Satan intends for evil to be used for the glory of God.