

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

May 5, 2013
No. 3670

A Memorable Family Reunion
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear fellow saints in the church of Jesus Christ,

Last week in our series of messages on the life of Joseph we looked at the passage in which Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers, a moving scene of shock on the part of the brothers and compassion and forgiveness on the part of Joseph. Today we move on to the next scene, one in which Joseph's entire family is reunited in Egypt. We will begin in Genesis chapter 45:16 and go all the way through chapter 46. This passage records what I call a memorable family reunion.

In this section in Genesis there's a shift in emphasis. For almost nine chapters the focus in Genesis has been on Joseph and his experiences in Egypt. But the story of Joseph is just one small part of a much greater story, the story of God's covenant people and God's faithfulness to them. This is the story of God keeping the covenant promise He had made to Abraham that He would make of him a great nation; that He would raise up the promised seed, that is Christ, in his generations; and that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. In the passage we look at today we zoom out from Joseph and God's care of him, to Jacob and his family, and God's care of them. Through Joseph, God is saving and preserving His covenant people, His church, in the family of Jacob, and He is doing that so that the promised Messiah may come in their generations.

In the passage we look at we have not only a family reunited, but the church reunited; and in bringing the whole family of Jacob down to Egypt, God is setting the stage for them to become the great nation who will return to and take possession of the promised land of Canaan. Now they live in Canaan as pilgrims and strangers, a small clan with no territory of their own, but they will come back from Egypt as a great nation and take possession of Canaan.

And so, we have a shift in emphasis in this passage. The Holy Spirit, who inspired this sacred narrative, calls attention to that shift by changing the name of Jacob to Israel, partway through this passage. In chapter 45:27-28 we read this: "And Jacob their father revived, and Israel said, It is enough." We could easily read over that, without noticing it, but that shift is significant. Jacob is his name as an individual, his name when he is working independently and trying by his own strength to attain the promises of God. Israel is the name that God gave to him that identifies him as the patriarch who acts in faith. And now he is given that name again, because he begins, here, to act in faith. Before, when he was acting in unbelief, Jacob said, "All these things are against me." Now, acting in faith, he sees this bigger picture, and he sees that God is working to save a people and a nation from his family. And I would point out too, that Joseph's brothers in this passage are now called, "The children of Israel." You see that in chapter 45:21 and chapter 46 verses 5 and 8.

So this is the story of God bringing His church together as one. There is unity and peace again in the family of Jacob, and that is a unity and peace in God's church. A memorable family reunion, indeed.

There are three things we want to say about this reunion. The first is that it was satisfying. At the end of chapter 45, Jacob, who is called Israel, says, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet

alive; I will go and see him before I die.” Jacob means: This makes me truly happy. Now, I am satisfied.

In the verses leading up to this, Jacob’s sons come back from Egypt with the news that Joseph is yet alive, and that he is the governor over all the land of Egypt. When they first tell their father this news, we read in verse 26 that Jacob’s heart fainted, for he believed them not. That means that momentarily his heart stopped. The news was too shocking. He did not believe his sons, even when they told him all the things that Joseph had said.

And why should he believe them? For 22 years now they had been telling him that Joseph was killed by a wild beast. For 22 years he has grieved over the death of Joseph. Why should he suddenly believe that Joseph was alive? Was this something that his sons knew all along? And if it was, were they lying to him? Why should he believe their words now? There is still mistrust here.

But Jacob does believe after he sees the wagons that Joseph sent to carry him and his family down to Egypt. He would not believe his sons, but he will believe Joseph. And once he knows that Joseph is alive, he is satisfied. He says, “It is enough.” As I indicated, Jacob is now speaking in faith, and that’s why he is called Israel.

If you know something of Jacob’s character, you know that he was a man who was always wanting more. Yes, he was a believer, and what he truly wanted was the full experience of God’s promises; but very often Jacob ran ahead of the Lord. He was born the second twin, but held on to his brother Esau’s heel. He ran ahead of the Lord to get the birthright blessing from Esau, first by purchasing it in exchange for a bowl of soup, and then by deceiving his father Isaac. When he worked for Laban, he devised ways to make himself wealthy from Laban’s cattle. He was always saying, it is not enough, I am not satisfied.

And his discontent was with God’s timing. He was not willing to wait on God to fulfill His promises. We see that also in Jacob’s wrestling with the angel of the Lord at Peniel. He fought all night in his own strength to overcome. Now, over the last 22 years, in the misery that has come in his family, Jacob has learned that all these things are out of his hands—that the fulfillment of the promises to him will not come through his strength. He experiences the emptiness of grief, and he sees a spiritual emptiness in his family. These are things that he is powerless to rectify. He complains, even, “All these things are against me.”

But now, he says something quite different. It is enough. I am satisfied. But what exactly is it that satisfies Jacob? What is it that he as Israel, the patriarch, finds pleasing?

There are several things. The first, and most obvious, is that Joseph is alive. He is going to see his long lost son again. He will not only see him, but he will hold him, he will live with him again, he will enjoy his company. What a thrill to the heart of this old man. This my son, which I thought was dead, is alive.

But, Israel’s joy goes beyond this. If it were merely Joseph that he was interested in, then that would be quite selfish and he would not be speaking in faith as Israel. No, Jacob’s true joy here is that now he sees the faithfulness of God to him and to his family.

He sees that first in the provision that God gives to his family in this famine. Joseph, and Pharaoh, had sent back supplies and wagons to carry his entire family down to Egypt where there was food. Not only did Joseph invite Jacob to come and live in Egypt, but Pharaoh himself, the ruler of the most powerful kingdom of the earth, Pharaoh himself, said to Jacob’s sons,

Take your father and your households and come unto me; and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land. Now thou art commanded, this do ye; take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. Also, regard not your stuff, for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours.

What an invitation. The famine will last five more years, but Jacob and his family will be well cared for. Jacob sees the truth of what Joseph said to the brothers, “God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” When everything seemed against him, God was in fact working to save his covenant people.

This is Jacob’s joy. That comes out in the next chapter when the whole family goes down to Egypt. Chapter 46 lists for us the names of all Jacob’s descendants who went down to Egypt, and verse 26 says, “All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, all the souls were threescore and six.” That’s 66. And then verse 27 continues, “And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob which came into Egypt were threescore and ten,” that is, 70 in all. Here, Joseph and his wife and two sons are added to the 66 to make up the 70. And the point is that God in His faithfulness has brought this entire family back together, in peace, in one place. This is Jacob’s joy. He delights in the covenant mercy of God toward him. He delights to know that God has worked to save his entire family. His joy is that God has brought salvation to his entire household.

And in that, Jacob is able to see God preserving His church, and keeping the line of the promised Messiah alive. How hopeless that had looked before. How wretchedly wicked his sons had been. How broken and torn apart with strife this family, this church, was. But now there has been repentance and reconciliation and salvation. His sons, who were spiritually dead, are now spiritually alive.

In the book of Third John, the apostle says, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” This is the satisfaction that now overwhelms Jacob as the covenant father.

And I must ask you, dear radio listener, what is your greatest desire and joy? When will you finally be happy? What is it that will make you say, I am satisfied, God has been faithful, He has given me all I could ask or want? You see, too often we are like the earlier Jacob, and not the later Israel. We want wealth and material comfort for our families. We want popularity and achievement for our children. And we pursue these things, too often, at the expense of the souls of our home. Oh, that Jacob’s longing for and satisfaction in the salvation of his family might be ours, and that it might govern all our desire and living in this world. It is enough. I am satisfied that God has been faithful and that He has saved our family. You cannot want anything better than this for your children.

The second thing we want to notice about this family reunion is that, from Jacob’s point of view, it was an intimidating reunion. What do we mean by that? We mean that, as Jacob contemplated it, he still had many fears and anxieties. In the beginning of chapter 46 we read that Jacob and his family began the journey to Egypt, and when they came to Beersheba, on the southern border of Canaan, Jacob made a sacrifice to God. And then, while he was sleeping that night, God came to him in a vision and told him not to be afraid.

Why does Jacob, at the border of Canaan, make a sacrifice to God? And why does God come to him and say, “Fear not”? Well, the obvious reason is that Jacob was afraid.

Of what?

Well, first, he was afraid to leave the promised land of Canaan. There was a history here in his family of going down to Egypt. Abraham had done it without permission from the Lord, and God had chastened him for that. When there was famine in Canaan during his father Isaac's life, God had made it very explicit that Isaac should not go down to Egypt. And so when Jacob comes to the edge of the promised land, doubts enter his mind. Should he be leaving the promised land of Canaan?

Why would he be afraid of this? Well, it was because he was afraid that the blessing of God would not go with him if he left the land of promise. When we walk in a way of disobedience, God's blessing does not rest on us. And if there was one thing Jacob had learned through his life, it was this, that he needed the presence and blessing of God. Much earlier in his life, when Jacob was fleeing from Esau to Laban, God had said to Jacob, "I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." God kept His word, and brought him back to the land of Canaan, full. But now, if he leaves again, will God go with him?

Another fear for Jacob would have been the spiritual well-being of his family in their generations. How would things go for them living in the wicked and idolatrous culture of Egypt? Would God's people lose their identity and be swallowed up in Egypt? Would this be a good environment for his children and grandchildren?

These were Jacob's concerns.

And so God comes to him and says, "Jacob, Jacob." He repeats his name. There are 15 times in the Bible that someone is addressed that way, and every time it indicates intimacy. God comes in tenderness to a fearful Jacob and He begins to give him reasons not to fear.

He reminds him, "I am God." That is, Jacob, all these things are in My hands. Is that not an important reminder for us when we're afraid? And then God reassures him of His covenant promises. "I am the God of thy father." He is saying, I will not forget the promises that I made to Abraham and to Isaac. Then He reiterates His Word, "I will make of thee a great nation." You see, God's promises and His Word are reliable. The problem with fear is that we do not know, or we are not trusting God's promises. And then God assures him, "I will go down with thee into Egypt, and will also surely bring thee up again." So, God is saying, "Don't worry Jacob, I'm leading you and My people to Egypt, and I will be with you there, and I will remain with you in order to lead you back again." And, in fact, we know, God has already been down in Egypt for 22 years with Joseph. Then God adds to His promises a personal touch. God promises that Joseph will put his hand on Jacob's eyes, meaning that when it comes time for Jacob to close his eyes for the last time in death, Joseph will be there. His loved ones will surround him.

Strengthened thus by the promises of God, Jacob and his entire family went on to Egypt. And God went with them.

There is a reminder here for us, when we are fearful about the future, especially when we are afraid for our children and their future. If we think forward, there are so many uncertainties. We too live in the midst of a very wicked world and can wonder how our children will remain pure and strong. The wickedness of our society is not just around us in a culture, but it begins to influence national and local policies and laws, and that will mean persecution in the end for God's people. And if we think too much about that, without thinking on God's promises, we do begin to fear for the future of God's church and people in this world. And then God comes to us and says, "My

people, My people, don't be afraid. I am God over all these things. I will be faithful to you in the future just as I have in the past. I will be with you, and I will lead you through the fiery furnace of persecution or whatever it is that lies ahead of you, and I will bring you the promised land of Canaan. Don't be afraid." God's word, here, is intended to strengthen us in our fears. As Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

When finally Jacob and his family make it to Egypt, Jacob sends Judah ahead to alert Joseph of his coming. Joseph, the governor of Egypt, readies his chariot, and goes out to meet his father. It is an emotional reunion. Joseph presented himself to his father and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. And then Jacob says, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

All of us, I think, understand the emotion of a reunion like this. There has been a long separation, and a period of uncertainty, or perhaps some near escape from death, and then loved ones are with each other again, in each other's arms. Recently I've been reading a book about the ordeal of the American Prisoners of War in North Vietnam from 1966 to 1973. In prison, there was severe torture and starvation and disease, and prisoners were not allowed to write or receive letters. Back home, parents and wives and children of the POWs did not know if their loved one was dead or alive. And then, finally, after years of separation, they are reunited. There is emotion.

That is something like the meeting of Jacob and Joseph here after so many years of grief and not knowing. But I think there is more here, because the joy is the joy of God's people coming together again, and seeing together the hand of God that has kept them and had a purpose for them. It makes me think of what must happen in heaven when one of God's saints here on the earth dies, and his soul is immediately taken into the presence of God, and he is reunited with loved ones who have gone before. Some day in the future, all of us, all of God's people who are now going through trials and sufferings, will all be together in one place with Christ our Savior, and with each other. What a day of satisfaction that will be. Then what we see now darkly will become clear. Then we will see our Savior face to face. Then we will see the faithfulness and purposes of God in our lives. Then the peace and fullness and joy that Jacob and Joseph experienced here will be ours. Oh what a glorious day that will be.

Let us pray.

Father, fill us with Thy joy. Satisfy us with Thy presence. In Thy presence is fullness of joy, at Thy right hand are pleasures ever more. Oh may we always find our fullness in Thee. And so keep us from the pleasures and fears that are so present with us in this world. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

May 12, 2013
No. 3671

Israel Preserved in Egypt
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Are you a good steward of the resources God has given you? You realize, do you not, that everything in this world belongs to God. Psalm 24 tells us that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Whatever we have—possessions, gifts, time—all of it belongs to God, and He has given us the privilege and responsibility of being stewards or caretakers of those things. This means, not simply that we must take good care of these things, but that we must use them in a God-glorifying way, that we press them in the service of the Lord. Which means that stewardship is a spiritual responsibility. Our concern is not merely to be wise in the use of material things, but to use everything in a way that promotes the spiritual well-being of ourselves and others.

In Genesis 47, Joseph, as ruler in the land of Egypt, acts as a wise steward. He is not only a wise steward of the resources of Egypt, but he also takes spiritual care for his family in Egypt. And he does all this in faith, because he has his eye on God, because he believes the promises of God, and because he seeks a heavenly home.

In the middle part of the chapter, verses 13-26, we read about Joseph's financial stewardship of the resources of Egypt. This is what happens.

During the seven years of prosperity, Joseph had prepared the nation for the coming famine by storing up grain in all the cities of Egypt. He did this through a tax system, in which the people had to give one fifth of what their land produced to him. Pharaoh, thus, became the owner of storehouses of massive amounts of food. Then, when the famine came, and the land produced no food for the people, they came to Joseph to buy their food.

Now it seems that the people themselves were not prepared at all for the famine. They knew it was coming, or at least they had heard about Pharaoh's dreams and why Joseph was appointed to store up all this grain. But they ignored it. There were only two people in the whole land that took Pharaoh's dreams seriously, and those were Pharaoh himself, and Joseph. In all their prosperity, the Egyptians had done nothing to prepare for the coming famine.

And so, when the famine comes, for the first year or two, they come with their money to buy grain from Joseph. But soon they run out of money. The next year they come to Joseph, they are hungry, and they say to Joseph, "Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? Our money is gone." Joseph's reply is, "Give your cattle; and I will give you food for your cattle." And Joseph gave them bread in exchange for their animals. Instead of just giving them food, he sells it to them on a barter system.

Then the following year they come to him and they say, we have no money, and no cattle to trade. All that we have left is ourselves and our land, which in time of famine is useless. They say to Joseph, "Give us grain, that we may live and not die." And again, rather than just giving them grain, Joseph trades food for their land and ends up buying all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, and the people are moved to cities from one end of Egypt to the other.

By this time, the famine was coming to an end, and the land was starting to be productive again, but now it all belonged to Pharaoh, and the people had no seed to plant in the ground. So

Joseph, who had the foresight to prepare for this too, gave the people seed to plant in the land, and he made a deal with them. “You may freely use the land that now belongs to Pharaoh, you plant and grow this seed that I give to you, and 80 percent of the produce you can keep to feed yourselves, and the other 20 percent you give, as a tax, to Pharaoh.” And so, post-famine, this is what they did.

Reading this, we might be inclined to criticize Joseph and his management of Egypt during the famine. Some have done this and have labeled Joseph as ruthless and unmerciful, a man who grabbed power for himself and for Pharaoh and who oppressed a helpless people, who took advantage of them when they were in a desperate situation and produced a communist-like state.

But that is not a fair or true evaluation of Joseph’s national economic policies. There are some important biblical principles for financial management that we should draw from what Joseph does, which we can apply personally, and which, if applied nationally, would help immensely. Now, I do not want to enter into an evaluation of the economic problems of our nation and world; maybe you can make some of those applications yourself from what I say.

However, I do want to say this, that the problem with our economy and the economies of the world today is much more than simply poor money management. The problem is that most of the politicians and rulers of today are unbelieving men and women, who do not see themselves as stewards before God in their position and with the resources and decisions they must make. An unbelieving politician is not going to take God into account. He may operate in the interests of the people, or of the nation, or he may operate out of self-interest for power or votes, but unless he or she is a true believer, things will be man-centered, and not God-centered. That gives us reason, too, to pray for kings and those in authority, to pray that God would turn their hearts from unbelief to faith and worship of Him as God alone. Only then can we expect any true answers to our political and economic woes.

And you see, Joseph is that kind of a man. He is a believer. He is not making decisions with the next election in mind, or to win votes and favor from the people. No, he is living as ruler in Egypt, answering to God and to Pharaoh, who is over him. He is being faithful in the position in which God has placed him. And out of that come his economic decisions.

Let me point to a few important principles that motivate Joseph’s behavior here.

First, Joseph acts in the interests of the people; he makes decisions that promote the welfare of the people of Egypt. You will notice, that at the end of the famine the Egyptians do not say, “Joseph, you ruthless and heartless ruler. You’ve plundered our land and left us empty.” No. Instead they say, “You have saved our lives and the lives of our children.” They were not prepared for the famine, but Joseph was, and his preparation saved them. Joseph acted in their interests also when, instead of just giving them handouts, he bartered with them. There was some accountability here. We all know that spoiling a child by giving him everything he wants ruins a child. That is true for grown-up citizens of a nation as well.

Now if the Egyptians had nothing to pay, and Joseph just watched them starve, that would be one thing. But that is not what happens. Instead, they have the resources to buy, and so they willingly trade their things for food. Joseph operates a free and open market in which citizens learn financial responsibility. Joseph does this because he realizes that it is debilitating and destructive to the citizenry of any nation if they just sit around and receive food for nothing from the government.

The biblical principles here for finances have to do with personal accountability and work and productivity.

If you get something for nothing, and if you are going to keep on getting something for nothing, you have no vested interest in it, and no sense of responsibility toward or care for that thing. This produces laziness and a sense of entitlement. And then, if you simply sit around, spoon-fed, you lose your ability and desire to be productive at all.

So many today deal with depression and problems of self-esteem and acceptance exactly because they have never done anything productive that has contributed to the life of others or society more generally. Over against this, Ecclesiastes 5:12 says, “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much,” the idea being that productivity and not consumption is what will give man a proper sense of satisfaction. Man has been created to work, not to sit around.

So Joseph handles the situation very wisely. Before the famine, in the years of prosperity, the Egyptians had taken their wealth for granted. Life was so easy. But during the famine they learned to feel the pressure of financial accountability, and when the famine was all done, they went to work to produce their own food by sowing and harvesting from the seed Joseph gave them. He taught them to work, and even in the poverty after they lost all their assets, he put them to work so that they continued to be resourceful and productive. Notice, too, that he treats the people with equality by imposing a flat tax of 20% on all the people, rich and poor alike. He does not create a divide in society, by giving privileges either to the more productive or the less productive. All of them have the same responsibility.

And there is one more thing he does. He plans for the future. A famine can easily decimate, not just an economy, but a people and the land. Joseph plans ahead, so that when the famine is finished, there is still seed ready to be planted and there are people who are ready to get working in agriculture. The result is that the land does not lie waste and become a wilderness.

Now you take all those things into account and you see why the Egyptians said, “You have saved us.” Joseph was given wisdom, from God, to administer Egypt’s affairs so that they survived the famine and continued as a nation. And why did God do that? Was it just so that Egypt could become the bread basket of the world? Was it simply so that this great culture might survive? No, God did it for the sake of His church and people. Egypt became the bosom of God’s people, the place where they would not only survive, but grow into a great nations. God preserved Egypt as the incubator for His people.

Now, I am not exactly sure how Joseph’s economic policies would be implemented nationally today. And, as I said earlier, our problem is not simply financial policies, but unbelieving rulers. A ruler who does not live before God would exploit a situation like the one Joseph had to deal with in Egypt. Later in Egypt’s history, the Pharaohs did abuse and oppress the people. So I am not going to give answers for our nation’s economic woes, except to say that we need to pray for those in authority.

But certainly there are, in this story of Joseph, things for us to learn and apply individually and in our Christian homes and churches. Yes, there ought to be mercy and help for those who are truly in need and who are incapable of meeting their own needs. Paul, in the New Testament, speaks of the deacons helping those who are widows indeed.

But if you find that you do not have enough to meet your needs, and you are capable of work, then rather than having a sense of entitlement for support from others, and rather than becoming

a burden to others or to society, you should, as a Christian, have a desire to work and should be busy looking for opportunities to work. We need to realize that God holds us accountable for our finances, and for the use of our time and talents. God does not bless a lazy person who simply expects others to take care of him. That kind of attitude will only produce other problems in your life. One of the best medicines for man is work. God created the ant to work, and he tells us to go to the ant, and learn from him.

So Joseph is a good financial steward in Egypt. But we should see that he also shows himself to be a good spiritual steward in the way that he deals with his own family. As they come into a strange country, Joseph acts responsibly with regard to their spiritual welfare. We have this in the beginning part of chapter 47, where Joseph presents five of his brothers and his father to Pharaoh. Jacob and his family have settled in Canaan, and then Joseph brings these five brothers to Pharaoh. Pharaoh asks them, “What is your occupation?” They answer, “Thy servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers.”

Why do they answer that way? Well, if we look back into the last four verses of the previous chapter, we see that Joseph carefully prepared his brothers to meet with Pharaoh, by telling them exactly what they should say. He told them that when Pharaoh asked of their occupation, they should tell him they were shepherds, because he knew that shepherds were despised by the Egyptians, and because he knew that Pharaoh, because of this, would give them a section of the land for themselves, the land of Goshen. The point is this: Joseph wants his family to be despised and unacceptable to the Egyptians. He gives his brothers this advice so that the Egyptians will isolate them.

And Joseph does this because he wants to protect his family, spiritually. He knows the pressures that will come on them in Egypt. He has lived under those pressures in Potiphar’s house, in prison, and now in a position of prominence. He is married into one of the elite priest families of the false religion of Egypt. He has been pressured to and tempted to immorality. He has been invited to join the Egyptians in their idolatrous worship. Joseph lives at the heart of one of the most worldly kingdoms of his day, with all its culture and splendor. He knows the difficulty of maintaining a good testimony in the midst of all these pressures. Yes, Joseph has been strong, he has resisted these temptations for decades now. He, like Moses after him, has chosen to be identified with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. But Joseph knows what his family will be up against and he knows his own brothers and their spiritual vulnerability. They do not need to be exposed to Egypt. They do not need to be in the heart of this godless culture. They need to be a separate people, distinct.

And so, when the brothers appear before Pharaoh, following Joseph’s advice, they plead guilty to being in this occupation that is socially unacceptable in Egypt. And because they are Joseph’s brothers, Pharaoh treats them very kindly, and gives them the land of Goshen to dwell in. On top of this, he employs them to take care of his cattle—perhaps the cattle that Joseph was buying from the Egyptians, in exchange for food.

You will remember that Jacob was nervous about bringing his family down to Egypt. He was fearful that God’s people would lose their identity and be swallowed up in Egypt. Now God answers that fear, through the spiritual insight of Joseph, and through their isolation in the land of Goshen.

Today, the passion of too many Christians is to become as much like the world as they can, to get as close to the world as possible, without getting burned. Churchgoers want to participate

in every aspect of our godless culture, and believe that what makes them Christian is that they go to church. Sadly, there is no real difference between their lives and the lives of the unbelievers around them. Why does this happen? Well, it is because too often we want the acceptance of the world. We ask, How can we become more acceptable in this world? Many churches adopt this mentality in their worship and evangelism too. "Let's adopt the trends and morals of our culture, and then we'll be more acceptable." And you know, it does nothing to win the world or help society. Instead, it simply drags the church down, until they are swallowed up in a godless culture.

Joseph comes at this from exactly the opposite direction. Not, how can God's people become more accepted in Egyptian culture, but what will make the Egyptians despise us, so that we can live separately? There is a very important message here for us amidst all the pressures and temptations of the modern world in which we live. There are things that the Bible teaches and that Christians believe, things in the lives of true Christians, that will be offensive to the world. We should not be ashamed of those things. In fact, those things become a kind of protection from the influences of society.

God's people are called to live a life of spiritual separation from the world. There are things in this world that we simply should not participate in. We may be despised for that, but that is okay. We are standing with God on our side. I think of the sexual permissiveness and immorality of our culture. Or of what goes for entertainment today. James says that pure religion is to keep yourself unspotted from the world. If you participate, if you try to get as close as possible, and think it will not hurt you spiritually, you are wrong. Sin always brings death.

So that is the warning and calling here. Israel's separation meant that they were preserved as God's people, and they were prepared to enter the promised land of Canaan. You see, that was really Joseph's motivation here. He had in mind the promise of God to preserve His people, to make of them a great nation, and to bring them back to the land of Canaan where they would wait for the Messiah. Joseph, and Jacob his father too, saw themselves as pilgrims and strangers here in the earth who were looking for a heavenly city. Here, they were simply passing through.

That comes out in this chapter, in Jacob's appearance before Pharaoh, and then also at the end of the chapter in Jacob's request that he be buried in Canaan after he died, a request that Joseph himself repeats in chapter 50.

When Jacob comes before Pharaoh, he is asked, "How old are you?" And Jacob, who had reached the amazing age of 130, answers, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." Notice, he calls life here in the earth a pilgrimage, and he means by that that he did not view this life as an end in itself, and he did not find the purpose for living here in this world. We are just passing through this world, to our true home, which is in heaven with the Lord. And the days of this life, though they may be filled with evil and trouble, are few compared with the days that we will live with the Lord in eternity.

So Jacob says, bury me in Canaan. What was Canaan? It was the land of promise, which was a biblical picture of heaven to come. And when Jacob and Joseph asked to be buried in Canaan, they were saying, God is going to keep His promise to bring Israel back to the promised land, and there He will send the Messiah, through whom is our salvation and our entrance into the heavenly Canaan.

In faith, Joseph acted in Egypt. He lived before God, and because of this he was a faithful steward of finances and was responsible spiritually.

May God give us that same faith and faithfulness.

Father, we are so thankful for the account of Joseph's life in Scripture. Every time we look at it, there is more for us to learn. And it helps us, too, to see how living by faith in this world has an impact also on our daily lives. Bless us in this week we pray. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

May 19, 2013
No. 3672

The Blessing on Joseph
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

In our weekly messages over the past few months we have been following the life of Joseph as recorded in the last section of the book of Genesis. Next week we will conclude our study of Joseph, so today's message, and the one next week, will be looking at two passages toward the end of the book of Genesis that give us a kind of review of Joseph's life. Next week, from Genesis 50, we will review Joseph's life from his own words to his brothers shortly before his death. Today, we review Joseph's life from the perspective of his father Jacob, in his words of blessing to Joseph.

The blessing that Jacob gives Joseph is recorded in Genesis 48, where he blesses the two sons of Joseph, and then also in Genesis 49, verses 22 through 26, where Joseph is blessed along with his eleven brothers. What I want to do today is work backwards, first looking at the passage in Genesis 49, and then looking at Genesis 48. My reason for doing this is that Genesis 49 focuses on Joseph, and then Genesis 48 expands the blessing to his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Now the first thing I want to call your attention to here is the behavior of old man Jacob shortly before his death. He is a godly old man who is sick on his bed and knows that he is soon to die. What does he do? There is something here for us to learn as Christians, both as regards to how we should die, and as to how we should treat elderly believers as they approach death.

Today, nursing homes have become a common place for elderly people to live out their final years. And for many of these elderly folk, life in a nursing home is a very lonely existence. They sit or lie forgotten and eventually die all alone. Family and loved ones, in whose lives they had invested for decades, have become too busy or too materialistic or too selfish to care about the aged and dying. And both parties suffer. The old are not blessed by the love of their families, and the young miss out on the wisdom and blessing that comes from the aged.

For Christians, it should not be this way. We should, instead, treasure God's faithfulness and promises in generations. We should want to learn from the experiences of dying saints, and we should want to impart a blessing and wisdom from our past experiences to the generations to come.

This is what we see happening in Jacob's family toward the end of his life. In both chapters 48 and 49 we are presented with family scenes. Joseph hears that his father is failing, and he quickly takes with him his two sons to see Jacob, who sits up on the bed to talk with them. Soon after this, Jacob calls together his twelve sons in order to speak with them from his deathbed, and when he is done talking to them, Genesis 49:33, he gathers his feet up into his bed and yields up the ghost.

Jacob did not die a lonely death. The whole family is there to witness the death of their father and to hear his last words. This is a good thing, also for us today. Ecclesiastes 7:2 says, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart." There are important lessons to learn in death, and the pain and grief of death. We should not be afraid to face the reality of death in a hospital, a funeral home, or a graveside. It is good, too, for our children to see this reality, and to think and ask questions about the reality of death, and to hear what the Scriptures say about this, the cause of death in man's sin, and the victory over death in Jesus Christ. The living will lay these things to heart.

Hebrews 11:21 tells us that when Jacob died, he died in faith. That means, he died believing the promises of God. Death is grim and fearful. There is nothing in death itself to give hope or comfort. It is the bitter last enemy. But Jacob faced it in faith, that is, he believed the promises of God. He did not view death as an end, but believed it was a servant to bring him into the heavenly Canaan. This is why he wanted to be buried in Canaan, and this is why it says, in Genesis 49:33, that he was gathered unto his people. That means he went to be with his people, that is, he went to be with all God's people who had gone before him to heaven. He went to be with his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, in the presence of God. He died in faith.

Jacob's dying faith was not only personal, that is, he believed not only that he was going to heaven, but that God's promises were also for his children and grandchildren. That is why Hebrews 11:21 says, "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph." He blessed his children and grandchildren, believing that God would be with them and keep His promises to them. Faith, you understand, is the opposite of sight. It looks to God and not to circumstances. If Jacob had looked at circumstances, he might have wondered about God's promises. Here he was, dying, in a strange land, far from the promised land of Canaan. How could he know that his children would not simply be absorbed in the nation and culture of Egypt? How could he know that they would keep their identity, and that they would go back to the land of Canaan? It was because he believed God's promises. And so, when he dies, he speaks prophetically of what will happen to the nation of Israel in its future. In faith, he repeats the promises of God to his sons, and speaks also of the coming of the Messiah, Shiloh who will come from the line of Judah. These prophecies concerning each of his sons are recorded in Genesis 49. We do not have time to look at each of them, so we are going to focus just on the words he spoke concerning Joseph in verses 22 through 26 of chapter 49.

There are three things for us to note here.

First, Jacob gives an overview of the life of Joseph. Jacob says, “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength.”

Joseph was fruitful under fire.

The metaphor is of a well-watered and fruitful tree, whose branches hang low over the wall so that passersby can pick off the fruit and enjoy it themselves. This is what Joseph had been throughout his life, and especially during the famine, not only to his family, but to the nation of Egypt, and even to the world. Joseph’s fruitfulness had fed the world, and Joseph was a blessing especially to his own family, bringing them together again after years of estrangement and conflict.

And this fruitfulness had come despite the difficult circumstances of his life. Jacob uses another metaphor of archers, shooting at him because they hated him. This was his brothers, who, out of spite, determined to kill and destroy him. This was Potiphar’s wife, who had Joseph thrown into prison. But, despite all this, Joseph’s bow abode in strength, that is, he was not destroyed by the troubles of his life. He never became bitter or selfish, but he remained strong and fruitful. Think of the blessing he was in Potiphar’s house and in the prison. Think of the grace and kindness he showed to his brothers who had hated and hurt him. He was fruitful under fire.

Are you under fire? Are you going through severe trials? Are you being attacked and opposed? What does it produce in you? Bitterness, self-pity, anger, discontent? Or fruitfulness? The trials God sends us are means of grace to produce godly character in us and to make us a blessing to others.

Joseph was fruitful under fire.

How? That is the second thing here. Jacob continues, “the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee.”

Joseph’s ability to remain fruitful under fire came from his God. Over and over, in this series of messages, we have emphasized that Joseph lived before the face of God, and that Joseph depended for strength on his God. This is how he could remain godly while his brothers were wicked. This is how he was able to serve God, even in the position of a slave. This was the secret to his resisting the seduction of Potiphar’s wife, to whom he said, “How can I do this thing and sin against God?” This was the secret of his endurance in prison, and this gave him the ability to stand before Pharaoh and answer his dreams. God, his God, was his strength.

Jacob captures that beautifully here by giving some of the names of God, names which are descriptions of God. He says of Joseph, “The arms of his hands were made strong by the mighty God of Jacob.” That is, Joseph trusted in the God of his father, and knew him as a God of strength, a God of sovereign power. In Psalm 56:11, “In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.” Joseph trusted in a God greater than any of his adversaries.

Jacob continues by calling Joseph’s God a Shepherd and a stone or a Rock. That tells us about Joseph’s faith. He trusted that God in His good providence was leading him, as a loving shepherd leads his sheep. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” He saw God as a Rock, the stone of Israel. Joseph depended on a God who would never fail him. On Christ, the solid

rock, I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. Throughout his life, with all its troubles, Joseph went back again and again to his God. His God was dependable.

Further, Jacob says that Joseph was helped by the God of his father, that is, the God who is faithful to His covenant promises from generation to generation. Joseph looked back at God's promise to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant with thee and thy seed after thee in their generations." Joseph looked back at the faithfulness of God to his father Jacob, leading him from Bethel to Haran, and then back to Peniel and the promised land. He saw that despite Jacob's weakness and sin, God cared for him and kept him. He trusted in a God who was faithful and who kept His promise to generations.

And then, lastly, Jacob calls him "the Almighty," that is, El-Shaddai, the God of hosts, the God who, from the abundance of all that He possesses, blesses His people.

What was Joseph's strength? How did he remain fruitful under fire? It was his God, "the mighty God of Jacob," the Shepherd, the Rock, the God of his father, El-Shaddai. And, dear Christian listener, this God is also the source of our strength. He is the God who, according to Ephesians 1:3-4, has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."

What an encouragement it is for us to look at the life of Joseph, to see him fruitful under fire, and then to see that his strength was in his God, the same God who is our God and remains faithful to us today.

The third thing to take note of in what Jacob says concerning Joseph is the blessing that he speaks to Joseph. Jacob says to Joseph that God will "bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren."

This is first a blessing of fertility, from heaven above, from the earth below, from the breasts that are a source of food, and from the womb, which is the source of life. God will give to the family of Joseph a fruitful portion in the land of Canaan, and God will give to Joseph a large offspring, larger than his brothers. Jacob is telling Joseph, here, that a portion of the birthright blessing will be his, that the birthright blessing he had received will rest on the head of Joseph, the one who was separate from his brethren.

Now, what is the birthright blessing? It consists of two main parts. First, it gave the recipient a double portion of his father's goods, and second, it included the messianic promise, the promise that Christ would be born in his generations. Isaac and Jacob both had received the two parts of this birthright blessing. They were blessed above their brothers, and the promise of the coming Christ was to be in their family line. But, as Jacob blesses his sons, he divides the birthright blessing. Judah receives the promise that Shiloh, the Messiah, would come in his generations, but Joseph receives the double blessing.

That is the significance of Genesis 48, where Jacob blesses the two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim. In Genesis 48:5, Jacob says to Joseph, "And now, thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt, before I came unto thee in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine." Jacob adopts the two sons of Joseph as his own and they become two of the tribes of Israel, and in this way Joseph receives a double portion in the inheritance.

As Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, we see again his dying faith. Jacob is 147 years old and is blind, and when Joseph comes into the room with his sons, Jacob wants to put his hands on their heads and bless them. Manasseh is the older boy, so Joseph leads him toward the right hand of his father, and Ephraim toward his left hand. But Jacob crosses his hands and puts his right hand on Ephraim's head, rather than Manasseh's. Here is another instance of Jacob blessing his children in faith. By nature, the primary blessing was supposed to go to the older boy, and later this would be a law in Israel too, but God is not bound by such laws. He blessed Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Joseph over his brothers, and so here Ephraim is blessed over his older brother, Manasseh. Alongside Judah, Ephraim would become one of the prominent tribes in the nation of Israel.

The faith of dying Jacob is evident especially in what he says in his blessing to the two sons of Joseph in Genesis 48:15-16. In these words of blessing, Jacob describes God in three different ways, each of which show how God will bless the children of Joseph.

First, he describes him as the covenant God of his fathers, as "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk." He is saying that God will work out His covenant promises and faithfulness in the generations of Joseph and will bless the sons of Joseph by making them also walk with God.

Second, Jacob refers to God as the one who "fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from evil." Jacob looks back at the care of God and the protection of the Angel of God, and he says that God will care for Joseph's boys in the same way. He will provide for them, and He will protect them. We see this when we look at the nation of Israel wandering in the wilderness, fed with bread from heaven and guarded and guided by the Angel of the Lord in the pillar of cloud.

And third, Jacob refers to God as the God who saves in generations. He says, "Let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." The name that Jacob speaks of here is the new name he received, the name Israel, which refers to him as a prince with God. "Jacob" was his natural name, which described him as he was by nature, a sinner, but his new name, "Israel," described him as the one whom God had worked on spiritually, and to whom God had given strength. The blessing here is a salvation blessing.

What wonderful comfort this blessing was to Joseph, especially after he had been separated from his brothers and had brought forth two sons in a foreign land to an Egyptian wife. Not only is Joseph received back into the fellowship of God's people, but the promises to him are immense and beautiful. God will keep him and will be faithful to him in his generations.

Now I ask, do you walk with God, just as Abraham and Isaac did? Then God's promise comes to you also in your generations, to you and to your children. That is not God's way of working just in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament. In Acts 2:39 Peter says to New Testament believers, "the promise is to you and to your children." And we can rest in that as believers. We can trust that as we walk with God, He will save our children also, He will put on them the name that He has given us, His own name. He will care for them and provide for them and protect them from evil, just as He has us. The promise is to the children as well as to the adults.

There is great comfort here for us, especially as we bring forth children, and then think about the world and future in which our children must live. Just as God promised to Joseph that He

would care for his sons in Egypt, so He promises to care for our children in the midst of a wicked world that is opposed to the faithful. Our confidence is not in ourselves, or in the strength of our children, but in the character and promises of God Himself.

Let us pray.

O God, help us to trust on Thee and Thy word and promises. And as we do, bless us, also in our generations. For Jesus' sake we ask. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

May 26, 2013 Joseph's Confession Concerning Providence

No. 3673

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Today we turn to the last chapter in the book of Genesis to conclude our study of the life of Joseph, Genesis 50:14-21, with our focus especially on what Joseph says in verse 20 to his brothers. "As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive."

These words of Joseph state an important biblical truth, the truth of God's sovereign providence. The Bible teaches that God has absolute control over all things and over every event in the history of this world. There is no creature that can move and not a thing that can happen apart from the will of God. He determines even the evil deeds of wicked men, and He uses all these things to accomplish His eternal purposes in the salvation of His chosen people through Jesus Christ. That is the truth that Joseph states here.

But, understand, this is not simply a doctrinal statement. Joseph does not sit in a classroom or at a desk and study the Bible to come up with this truth. Rather, it is spoken in the context of the experiences of his life. It is a confession that he makes as a believer, in response to the difficulties and troubles that have come to him in his life. Here we see that truth matters in very practical ways. Instead of Joseph becoming bitter and vengeful, and getting back at his brothers, he forgives them, because he realizes that though his brothers intended evil against him, God is sovereign, and He had a greater purpose in the events of his life. He responds to God.

These are words that Joseph spoke to his brothers after their father Jacob had died. For 17 years Jacob and his family lived in Egypt. All this time, Joseph continued in his position of authority as the governor of Egypt. When Jacob died, Joseph and his brothers, as well as a host of Egyptians, took the body of Jacob back to the land of Canaan to bury it there with the bones of Abraham and Isaac. After this they returned to Egypt, and then we read this in Genesis 50:15: "And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him."

There are several things going on here.

First, the brothers are still dealing with the guilt of what they had done to Joseph. Even though 17 years have passed, they still feel extremely guilty for the evil they had committed.

Second, they judge Joseph by themselves. In their thinking, the only reason Joseph has been kind to them to this point is that their father was still living, that because of Jacob's presence, Joseph avoided causing a disruption in the family.

And so, third, they act irrationally, and what is irrational is their fear of Joseph. For 17 years Joseph had cared for them and shown them forgiveness. There was peace in this family, and just now they had come from a family funeral in unity, and with great hope in the covenant promises of God to them. But, all the while, these men, plagued by their guilt, were afraid of Joseph. They are so afraid that, rather than going to Joseph themselves, they send a messenger to him.

Verses 16 and 17: "They sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father."

Was this a lie, or were they telling the truth? Were they making something up in order to manipulate Joseph, or did Jacob their father actually say these words?

Well, we do not know the answer to that question, and the answer is not really all that important. To Joseph, it made no difference. More important is what the brothers were communicating to him in these words, and that is what Joseph heard. What were they saying? Three things.

One, they were openly confessing their sin to Joseph. You see that in the candid words they use to describe what they had done. Twice they call it trespass, once they use the word sin, and once the word evil. They do not use mild and indirect language. They do not call their sin a mistake or a lapse in judgment, as is so often done today. Up to this point in the story of Joseph, we have not read such an open confession from the brothers of their sin. Maybe, because of the grace of forgiveness in Joseph's heart, that had not been necessary. But the brothers, because of their continued guilt, need it now.

That is the second thing in what they say to Joseph. Twice they plead, Forgive us, Forgive us. This is a cry that comes from guilt-ridden hearts. They experienced the graciousness and kindness of Joseph, but they want forgiveness affirmed.

And then third, they speak as believers. Joseph hears that from them too. They say, "Forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father." Those words express their true humility and repentance. Like David in Psalm 51, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and in thy sight done this evil," they repent before God. They come before him as lowly servants.

And that is what Joseph hears. Irrational as their behavior and their fear are, Joseph sees that his brothers are still hurting because of the pain of their guilt, he understands that they need to have his forgiveness affirmed to them, and so he responds with grace.

When the messenger comes to Joseph with word from his brothers, Joseph weeps. And when his brothers hear this, they come bowing before him, saying, "We are thy servants." And Joseph weeps again.

Why does he weep? Why is he sad? It is because his brothers are afraid of him, because they still come bowing before him, treating him as a ruler, and not as a brother. He loves them, he has

forgiven them, and in his view the relationship is completely restored. But they are afraid. They still feel estranged. This is what makes him weep. That is clear from the answer he gives to them, in which he repeats the words, “Fear not.” His answer is, “Don’t be afraid of me, don’t be afraid of me, I have forgiven you, completely.” He wants them to know this, and so in verse 21, at the end of his words, he affirms his forgiveness by telling them that he will not repay them evil but will continue to nourish them and their little ones. And verse 21 also says that he comforted them and spake kindly to them. He overflowed and abounded in words of love and forgiveness to them.

But there is something unique about his forgiveness, and that is what we see in verse 19 and 20. He does not just look at his brothers and say, “I’ve forgotten it, we will go on from here as brothers as though it didn’t happen.” That is something that it is really impossible to do. What is unique is that Joseph responds not just to his brothers on the horizontal, but before God. And doing this, he commits to God’s care what his brothers had done, and he confesses that God intended these things to happen, and so he is not going to be bitter about them. That is what is amazing here. The sovereignty of God overrules the evil that his brothers have committed.

Joseph gives his brothers two reasons not to be afraid of him.

The first is in verse 19, where he says through tears, “Fear not, for am I in the place of God?”

Certainly Joseph could have played “god” here. The Egyptians had hailed him as the savior of the world. And at this time he was pretty much the most powerful man on earth. To play “god” in his brothers’ lives, and to execute a little divine justice in behalf of God here would have been very tempting. But Joseph, because of his clear view of God and of himself as a man before God, had no desire to get back at his brothers. He understood that the righting of the wrongs done against him was not his to administer, and so he committed it to Him who is faithful. He left it in God’s hands.

Now, how often are not the troubles in our relationships caused by our attempting to be “god” in the lives of others? We think that we understand justice, and we make others pay for the evils that they have committed against us. And we justify it in the name of justice. Sin, we say, has consequences. And by doing that, we make reconciliation and forgiveness all the more difficult. Whereas the Bible says, in Romans 12:19, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” And, “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men” (I Thess. 5:15).

Joseph had no desire to play “god” in the lives of his brothers, so they had no reason to be afraid of him.

A second reason that they need not be afraid was that Joseph believed in the sovereignty of God over their evil, and he responded not just to their evil, but before God. Doing this, he was able to see that God had a good purpose even in the evils that he experienced.

Joseph says, in verse 20, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”

Now, notice, just like his brothers, Joseph does not minimize the evil they had committed. He does not say, “Don’t worry, it was nothing.” but rather, “Ye thought evil against me.” That comes out especially in chapter 37, at the beginning of this story, where there is a build-up of hatred that leads to a murderous spirit towards him. They first hate him because he is the favorite son, then they hate him because of his godliness and honesty, and then they hate him for his dreams, sent from God. And so, when he comes to check on them, they say, “Here comes the

dreamer, let's kill him, and then we'll see what becomes of his dreams." They thought, they intended, evil against him. And their selling him as a slave and lying to their father about it did not lessen their evil intentions. In their hatred, they wanted him out of their lives, and so they disposed of him, and for 22 years lied also to their father.

Joseph experienced this as evil and hatred too. He cried out from the pit for mercy, he toiled in slavery, he hurt from iron shackles in prison, and the memory of those pains stayed with him, even when he became ruler of Egypt. When his two sons are born, he gives them names that remind him and us of all that he has gone through. In Genesis 41:51-52, "And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." He mentions his toil, his father's house, and he calls Egypt the land of his affliction.

The pain of it was especially these two things: 1) it came from those closest to him, his own flesh and blood, and 2) it was completely unjust. He was wronged by his own brothers, and it resulted in immense pain for him for many years.

But Joseph says to them, "Don't be afraid of me, even though you've done this evil. I understand what you've done, I understand the guilt you are experiencing, but you see, God meant it for good, and I am responding, not to you, but to God."

You remember when Joseph first revealed himself to his brothers, 17 years earlier, in Genesis 45, he said, "God sent me before you to preserve life." Here he reiterates that to them, explaining to them why he has forgiven them, and how he can do so. He sees God as sovereign over the evils he experienced. In his mind, his brothers and their evil purposes are really not the important thing. Instead, it is that God decreed and planned and brought about what happened to him in his life.

In the verse here there is a parallel between what the brothers did and what God did. In the original Hebrew, it is the same word, something that not all the English translations capture. Joseph says, "you planned evil, but God planned good." Even their evil purposes and deeds were a part of God's purpose. God does not merely allow evil to happen, and then overturn it, but He includes evil in His plans and purposes. Through the evil, God brings about a greater good. Evil men have one purpose by their wickedness, but God has another, and their evil purposes serve His good purpose. The prophet Amos put it this way, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" That's what Joseph is saying. This evil that came on me, God brought on me. He did it, and He did it with a saving purpose.

Joseph explains God's good purpose this way: "to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Now, Joseph does not mean merely that his family and the Egyptians were spared from starvation during the famine. Rather, he has in mind the salvation of God's covenant people, the preservation of the church, and the keeping alive of the covenant promises of God. That comes out in the last verse of the chapter, where on his deathbed he tells his family that God will remember them and bring them back to the promised land of Canaan, and where he asks to be buried with the patriarchs in Canaan. Joseph sees that God's purpose is salvation, the salvation of His people, in the coming seed of the promise, Jesus Christ. Hebrews 11 tells us that in faith Joseph "made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." In faith Joseph believed the promise of God, the promise being Christ,

who would come. He saw Christ afar off, and he believed that God was working in everything, even the evils in his own life, to bring the promised Messiah.

That's the beautiful truth here. And in the same way, God also controlled the action of Satan when he came into the garden of Eden and drew Adam and Eve into sin. God decreed and purposed that, so that Christ could come as Savior. That is also true of the most wicked thing that man has ever done, the crucifixion of the Savior. In Acts 2:23, Peter says to those who had killed Christ, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Notice, just like Joseph, he does not minimize the wickedness of what they did. They had crucified Christ by wicked hands, and what Peter says pricks them in their heart; but at the same time, God determined that they would do this to His Son. God by His causative decree made it happen. And God sovereignly used their evil to accomplish His purpose in our salvation through the death of His Son. Paul says, in I Corinthians 2:8, that if they had known this, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

This is the sovereignty of God in providence.

So, why did Joseph have to go through all that he experienced? Why the hatred of his brothers, the life as a slave, the isolation from his family, the imprisonment? Think of Joseph, and of all the pain he experienced for so many years. Why? He went through all this for the salvation of God's people—his own salvation, the salvation of his family, and the salvation of the entire church of God. That is why.

God in His decree works out every detail of our lives with that same saving purpose. In the New Testament, that is summarized in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

The first three words of that verse are often overlooked, but they are the most important. "And we know...." Joseph knew. And we know. How do we know? Because we look up to God. We believe in the sovereign providence of God. Through faith, we know.

And so, no matter what may happen to you in the future, God is in control. The reins never slip from His hands. Whatever happens is decreed by Him. Man may intend evil against you, or against God's church and people, but God means it for good.

When you can see that from Scripture, and say that in connection with your life, it changes everything. If you don't say this, you will become bitter against people, you will blow up when things seem out of control, or you will clam up and withdraw when you are hurt. But when you truly believe this, you will learn in the troubles of life to respond to God and not man. Instead of bitterness will be forgiveness. Instead of anxiety will be trust and peace. Instead of doubt there'll be confidence. Instead of paralyzing guilt, a joy.

Our God is in the heavens; He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.

Let us pray.

Father, we rest in Thy power and grace. The purposes for us are always good, and by Thy power everything is used for our salvation. Lord, in whatever troubles we experience, give us to believe this, and comfort us through this word, we pray. Amen.