

PM Genesis 39 God has a Good Purpose

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Preacher: Dr Neil Macdonald

[0 : 00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 39. Genesis chapter 39 on page 39 of the Bibles.

Genesis chapter 39. Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

So Joseph found favor in his sight, and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.

The blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him, he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

[1 : 31] Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance, and after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, Lie with me.

But he refused and said to his master's wife, Behold, because of me, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge.

He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife.

How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her to lie beside her or to be with her.

But one day, when he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me.

[2 : 47] But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of her household and said to them, See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us.

He came into me to lie with me. He came into me to lie with me. And I cried out with a loud voice. And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.

Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home. And she told him the same story, saying, The Hebrew servant whom you have brought among us came in to laugh at me.

But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house. As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, This is the way your servant treated me.

His anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in prison.

[4 : 11] But the Lord was with Joseph. And showed him steadfast love and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison.

Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge. Because the Lord was with him.

And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. Amen. And may God bless to us that reading from his word and to his name be the praise.

Shall we come before the Lord again? Please turn back in your Bibles to the passage we read together. Genesis chapter 39, which I'd like to look with you at under the title God has a good

purpose.

God has a good purpose. What do we mean when we speak about the providence of God?

[5 : 28] God has a plan for his world. We mean that God has a plan for his world. For this world which he has made. A plan which he is working out over time.

He has a plan and he is committed to implementing it. His providence is specifically his guidance of people and events which ensures his purpose is fulfilled.

Some of us may have learned in Sunday school the shorter catechism answer which defines God's acts of providence as his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

His most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

In many ways that is a difficult concept to come to grips with. But in the life of Joseph we see God's providence fleshed out in relation to one individual.

[6 : 58] And I think it helps us to understand God's providence at least in a measure. The story of Joseph is one of the best known stories in the Bible.

Joseph was born into the covenant family of Jacob. He was the son of Jacob's favourite wife, Rachel.

And of Jacob's twelve sons, he was his father's favourite. His father even made for him a robe of many colours or possibly a robe with long sleeves.

Whatever was distinctive about the robe, it was showy and ostentatious. It made Joseph stand out from his brothers and it aroused their jealousy.

Their resentment increased when Joseph told them about two dreams he had had which appeared to suggest that he would one day rule over his brothers and even his parents.

[8 : 13] this was too much for the brothers and they decided to kill Joseph. In the event they didn't go as far as that.

Instead they sold him to passing Midianite traders who were on their way to Egypt and they told their father Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

They produced Joseph's robe which they had dipped in goat's blood. There was no doubting whose robe it was and Jacob was understandably distraught.

Life would never be the same again. His favourite son was dead. The Midianites or Ishmaelites took Joseph down to Egypt and they sold him on to an important official in Pharaoh's household in Pharaoh's court the captain of the guard a man called Potiphar.

That's where we are when chapter 39 opens. Joseph is a slave in a foreign land.

[9 : 33] He has been cut adrift from all that's familiar. He has lost his freedom and he is having to adjust to a new language and a new culture.

There are some positives in his situation. He is in a well-to-do household where his general demeanour and capability soon impress his master.

Before long he is running the household. Potiphar confidently leaves everything in his care. In the words of verse 6 because of Joseph he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

But that state of affairs did not last. Jacob was a very good looking young man. He was handsome in form and appearance.

he was probably well-built and handsome. And he began to receive unwanted and unsolicited attention from his master's wife.

[10 : 49] She repeatedly tried to seduce him. Joseph resolutely resisted her advances but one day when there was no one else in the house Potiphar's wife got hold of him by his outer garment and pleaded with him to come to bed with her.

Joseph's response was to run out of the house and in his panic to get away he left behind his outer garment in Potiphar's wife's hands.

Potiphar's wife called for help. She screamed and she spun a tale about how Joseph had come into the house to seduce her and had fled when she screamed.

It was the same tale she told her husband when he came home. There was no truth in her story but it did sound convincing especially since Joseph's outer garment looked like incriminating evidence.

Potiphar was understandably incensed and he threw Joseph into prison. It just happened to be the royal prison.

[12 : 13] So for Joseph things had gone from bad to worse. Being a slave was bad enough. Now he was a prisoner too and again he didn't deserve to be where he was.

But despite everything Joseph kept his head. He won favour with the prison keeper and was given charge of the other prisoners.

just as he had been running Potiphar's household he was left to run the prison. So what do we learn about God's providence from the life of Joseph?

I'd like to highlight three things this evening. The first thing I'd like to mention is that God is in ultimate control.

God is in ultimate control. That's not immediately obvious from this chapter chapter 39 taken in isolation.

[13 : 29] We need to see the events recounted here in the context of Joseph's life as a whole.

In a way that's obvious because when God allows anyone to understand something of his providence in their experience that can only be done in retrospect.

God sees the end from the beginning but we can't. It's only as we look back that we can on occasion not always discern the working of God's providence.

Years later Joseph was reunited with his brothers and this is what he said about the circumstances which had brought him down to Egypt.

Joseph said to his brothers 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 God he says sent me before you it was not you who sent me here but God what Joseph means by that is that what the brothers did in selling him into slavery was the means God used to bring Joseph and later his whole family down to Egypt and God's purpose in doing so was to provide for his covenant people in a time of famine and ensure their survival that's the big picture which

[15 : 52] Joseph was able to discern in the future but against that big picture the individual events of Joseph's life begin to make sense his time in Potiphar's household gave him the opportunity to adjust to Egyptian life to get used to Egyptian culture and it allowed him to develop his administrative skills his time in the royal prison saw him rub shoulders with Pharaoh's baker and chief cup bearer because he interpreted dreams that these men had in prison the chief cup bearer recommended him to Pharaoh when

Pharaoh had dreams that no one else could interpret and so Joseph found himself in the presence of Pharaoh himself Pharaoh's dreams disclosed that there were going to be seven years of famine in Egypt seven years of plenty in Egypt followed by seven years of famine Joseph's advice was that someone should be appointed to ensure that enough grain could be gathered during the years of plenty to provide for the years of famine the grateful king promptly appointed Joseph to that role it meant that Joseph became second only to Pharaoh himself in power and authority he effectively became

Egypt's prime minister and in that capacity he was able to supply grain to his own family when they came looking for food and he was also able to invite them to move down to Egypt in accordance with God's purpose looking back Joseph was able to discern how God had been in ultimate control of all that had happened to him he was able to see that God had been at work for good in it all God had used him to do the people of Egypt good but even more importantly God had used him to do good to his own covenant family

Jacob and his family who were the line through which God purposed to bring blessing to the entire world Joseph being where he was in Egypt was able to ensure the survival of the covenant people in his providence God is at work for the good of his people and his gracious purpose will not be thwarted we may not always or even often be privileged to catch a glimpse of the big picture but we can trust that God is in ultimate control the new testament tells us that

Jesus is head over all things for his church and in the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans the apostle Paul writes we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose because God is at work and he is in ultimate control against that background we see secondly that God's providence embraces the sinful actions of men and women Joseph was time and again the victim of sinful attitudes and actions on the part of others for a start he suffered on account of his father's favoritism

[21 : 16] Jacob made it all too obvious that Joseph was his favorite son by making him the robe of many colors he provoked his other son's resentment towards Joseph and it wasn't as if Jacob was unaware of the havoc that parental favoritism could wreak remember how he had been his mother's favorite and his brother Esau his father's arguably Joseph didn't help the situation by telling his father tales about the brothers with whom he pastured his father's flock and by openly disclosing

the dreams he had he may have been unwise in some respects but as regards his overall treatment by his brothers there is no doubt that he was more sinned against than sinning they conspired to kill him this was no petty jealousy this was visceral hatred which wanted rid of

Joseph once and for all it is interesting how in the Sermon and the Mount Jesus puts anger and resentment on the same continuum as murder you have heard he says that it was said to those of old you shall not murder and whoever murders will be liable to judgment but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council and whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire Joseph was the victim of his brother's hatred and he was also the victim the innocent victim of Potiphar's wife's immoral behavior his behavior towards her was exemplary he rejected her advances he made clear to her that to comply with her requests would be a great wickedness it would be a sin against her as Potiphar's wife it would be a sin against Potiphar himself and it would be a sin most importantly against God we're told that Joseph kept out of her way as best he could so as to minimize opportunities for temptation but despite that when Potiphar's wife didn't get what she wanted she gave false testimony against Joseph and had him thrown into prison just as his brothers had sinned against him so did Potiphar's wife and they were responsible for their actions when he was later reunited with his brothers Joseph didn't mince his words he told them plainly you meant evil against me you meant evil against me but the amazing truth is that

God overruled their intentions for good God worked through their sinful actions to accomplish his purposes that doesn't make God responsible for their sin the apostle James makes clear that God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one but it does mean that sin even sin whether it's our own sin or other people's sin cannot derail God's purposes there may be things which we ourselves have done which we bitterly regret we may be conscious of having been sinned against by others after all we have little or no control of what others do to us but the fact is that God is in ultimate control and he is able to work in and through these things for our good and for his glory

God is in ultimate control God's providence embraces even the sinful actions of people and thirdly we see in this chapter how God's grace enables a believer to cope with a baffling providence God's grace enables a believer to cope with a baffling providence in due course as we have seen Joseph was able to look back and discern God's hand in all that had happened to him but that was not the case here in Genesis chapter 39 Joseph didn't have that knowledge he didn't have knowledge of the big picture when his brother seized him and threw him into a pit he didn't have that knowledge when he was sold to the

[27 : 04] Ishmaelite traders he didn't have that knowledge when he was a slave in Potiphar's household he didn't have that knowledge when he was slandered by Potiphar's wife he didn't have that knowledge when he was thrown into jail it would have been understandable in many ways if Joseph had harbored resentment because of all that had happened to him in the face of so much unjust suffering he could so easily have become bitter and yet he did not that's one reason why Joseph comes across as such an attractive character he had remarkable resilience to cope so well with one knock after another to keep going and to make the very best of each situation but more importantly he held on to his faith in

God he continued to have reverence for God and to trust in him we see that in the way he reacted to temptation how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God there was probably no one else in Pharaoh's court who feared God but Joseph didn't forget what he had learned back home in Canaan he was as conscious of God in polytheistic Egypt as he had been growing up with his family even in the dark experiences he went through he clung firmly to all that he knew of God he didn't forget in the dark what he had known in the light and there was an even deeper reality here in chapter 39 there's an interesting refrain which keeps being repeated four times we are told that the

Lord was with Joseph the Lord was with Joseph verse 2 the Lord was with Joseph and he became a successful man verse 3 his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands verse 21 but the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison verse 23 the keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him and whatever he did the Lord made it succeed I think we're meant to get the message that the Lord was with Joseph that was the underlying reality

Joseph hadn't given up on God because God hadn't given up on him the Lord was with him that didn't mean that bad things didn't happen to Joseph but it did mean that the Lord sustained Joseph even when his circumstances were darkest even then there were gleams of God's favour and love shining through we see how when he was Potiphar slave the Lord made what granted him success in all he did when he was a prisoner the Lord made whatever he did succeed Potiphar and the prison keeper saw that they saw there was something different about Joseph that's why they gave him positions of responsibility not only did

God bless Joseph he blessed others through him Joseph was not only blessed himself but God in turn made him a blessing to others we read in verse 5 from the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the Lord blessed Potiphar house for Joseph's sake the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in house and in field and in verse 23 we read the keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him and whatever he did the Lord made it succeed the Lord sustained and upheld Joseph at every point if we are

[32 : 51] Christians we may not understand why God orders our circumstances the way he does we may well not be able to see the big picture but our circumstances don't define us if God is with us the writer to the Hebrews counsels his readers to keep their lives free from the love of money he tells them that they should be content with what they have and how does he back that up he says for the Lord has said I will never leave you or forsake you so we can confidently say the Lord is my helper I will not fear what can man do to me the writer to the

Hebrews can urge his readers not to give in to the love of money because they can be assured that the Lord is with them and that he is able to give them what they really need elsewhere in the New Testament the Apostle Paul tells us that he had what he calls a thorn in the flesh we don't know exactly what that was it may have been a physical ailment and three times Paul asked for the thorn to be removed and three times the answer that came back was no my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness the Lord left Paul with his thorn but he promised him grace to cope with it our

God grants grace in time of need do you know the words of the old hymn he giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater he sendeth more strength when the labors increase to added affliction he adds his great mercy to multiplied sorrows his multiplied peace the Lord was with Joseph and he assures each one of his people that he is with them too but we need to ask the Lord to make us aware increasingly of his grace and we need to live more and more in the good of it in one important respect

God's overarching purpose for each one of his people is the same our circumstances are different in all kinds of ways but as regards God's overarching purpose for his people there is one thing that we have in common we touched on words from Romans chapter 8 earlier we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose how does the apostle Paul go on to define that good to which he refers he goes on for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the first born among many brothers

God's purpose is that his people should be conformed to the image of his son he wants Christians to become progressively more like the Lord Jesus he is creating a family which increasingly bears more of the family likeness and God's providence is directed to that end in conclusion it's worth noting how in God's providence in the life of Joseph we see a foreshadowing of the life of Jesus Joseph suffered unjustly at the hands of his brothers so did

[38 : 13] Jesus the apostle John writes he came to his own and his own people did not receive him Joseph faced temptation so did Jesus he knew what it was like to be tempted in all points just as we are yet without sin Joseph's life took a downward trajectory as he experienced first slavery and then imprisonment think of the downward trajectory Jesus followed though he was in the form of God he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and he didn't stop there he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death obedient to the point of death even death on a cross and just as through his suffering

Joseph secured the future of his family so Jesus has won eternal life for his family what Jesus accomplished through his life and death and resurrection gives us hope whatever our individual providence as Christians may be in the words of the Puritan Richard Baxter Christ leads me

through no darker rooms than he went through before and because he did so because he experienced these darkest of rooms he bore the penalty of sin for all who put their trust in him he has drawn the sting of death itself and he has secured eternal life
Christians have an assured future for God in his providence will bring each of his sons and daughters home to glory God has a purpose and he will implement it shall we pray oh Lord we thank you for your providence in the life of Joseph for what we can learn from it that gives us comfort and hope we thank you even more for your providence in the life and circumstances of our Saviour himself we thank you that through all that he has done a future that is glorious has been secured for all those who put their trust in him we pray that we may do so and that we may have hope hope for this life and hope for the life to come we ask it in his name amen