

Covenant Troubled

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Date: 23 July 2023

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[0 : 00] I want you to open to Genesis chapter 50. Genesis chapter 50 verse 20. And as you're turning there, I just want to review what we've talked about.

We've talked about the creation, that God is the creator of that which is invisible and visible. He is the creator of all things, whether thrones, dominions, powers. He has created all things and therefore in charge of all things.

And yet mankind whom he created rebelled against him and fell into sin. And all people, all humans, we have fallen in Adam.

We've inherited his guilt and corruption. And the curse was placed not just upon us but the whole of the cosmos. Which is why there is suffering and death and disease and natural disasters and attack from animals.

Because all the cosmos is under the curse of sin. This world is not as it was. This world is not as it shall be.

[1 : 03] But God, in the middle of all this, made a promise. This promise was to reverse the curse. Not so that we could return to Eden.

But to reverse the curse so that it would be better than the beginning. And this promise was that the offspring of the woman would come. And he would crush the head of the serpent.

And generation after generation, they thought maybe this one is it. Maybe this child is this fulfillment of this promise. And the promise narrows down to a man called Abraham.

Abraham. And to him it was promised land, seed, and blessing. Which meant he had to have a child. And what we've seen under the title of covenant, we have seen that God established this covenant.

And proved this covenant that he would give Abraham a son. He swore by himself. But then God said to Abraham to sacrifice this only child.

[2 : 06] And as Abraham went to obey the Lord, God provided a substitute for that child. That that ram would die in his place.

And so now we skip ahead from chapter 22 all the way to chapter 50 as we take up the story of Joseph. Because the promise looks like it's on the precipice of failure.

The promise looks as though it's about to just be null and void. Because severe famine is coming upon the whole world. So that all people would perish.

And that's where we pick up the story of Joseph. And that's where in chapter 50 verse 20. Joseph speaking to his brothers after he's rescued them from the famine. And after the death of their father says to them these words.

As for you, you meant evil against me. But God meant it for good. In order to bring about this present result.

[3 : 06] To preserve many people alive. This is the word of the Lord and all God's people said. When I had to go to the eye doctor for the first time.

I had to go because I was having trouble with my vision. I have a doubling of my vision. I don't know if you understand what I'm saying. It's not just that it's out of focus. It's that I see two things.

And they're overlapped very, very closely to one another. So when I look at text, it looks like I'm reading, you know, two different things. They're just right there. So it's very fuzzy. It's difficult to focus.

When I look at you, you have four eyes. I just want you to know that. So just letting you know that.

Anyway, so the point is, is that I didn't realize how bad it was until the doctor is sitting there.

And he's saying, number one or number two? Number one or number two? And we would go all the way around. And finally, when it got cleared up, I thought to myself, he raised it up, put it back

down.

[4 : 07] And I said, wow, that was a lot worse than I thought it was. And I think sometimes what happens is we get very comfortable with thinking of who God is because we've heard things all of our lives and we believe things all of our lives.

And some of those things are actually fuzzy pictures of God that need the word of God to come in and sharpen the focus so that we really understand exactly who God is.

We are raised sometimes believing the things that we were taught. And sometimes the things that we were taught are shades of the truth or were a part of the truth at a basic level but never went beyond that or left off a nuance.

And so what we want to do is in the story of Joseph, we want to have our vision sharpened about who God is to understand something about who he is as he has revealed himself, not as I wish he would be.

One of the biggest fights that we will fight with ourselves is believing God as he has revealed himself versus believing God as I wish he would be.

[5 : 16] Most of us struggle wanting God to be a certain something in a certain area. And what we need is not to say, well, this is what I want, so therefore this is what I believe about God.

But we need to say, what does the word say about God? And in the story of Joseph, we see these things. But I want to recap the story of Joseph for just a second.

You can read the story of Joseph from Genesis chapter 37 to chapter 50. It will take you about 25 minutes just sitting down reading from 37 through 50. You just want to read the whole story.

And I'm going to challenge you to do that because we're not going to read the whole story here this morning. Amen. Okay. The story begins with Joseph as one of 12 brothers.

He is the son of Jacob. Now, Jacob had four wives, which was a violation of God's standards and God's law. So Jacob was a sinner living in sin in the middle of all this.

[6 : 18] You just have to remember that. Jacob loved one of his wives, not really the others. And Joseph was the firstborn of his beloved wife.

Joseph was the favored one of his father. And his father gave him what we normally call the coat of many colors. The idea is not that it was colorful. The idea is that it was signified royalty.

Signified royalty. But as much as his father loved him, his brothers hated him. They hated him because the father doted on him. They hated him because he would return back to the father with a bad report about them being out in the field, which makes you say, wait a minute.

They're out in the field working. He's not. And he comes back and says, Dad, they're not doing it right. This is a problem in the making. But they also hate him because of his dreams.

Because he dreams a couple of dreams that basically signify that his brothers and even his father and mothers are going to bow down before him as a ruler. So Joseph goes from his favored position into the pit.

[7 : 25] Because one day as he goes out to find his brothers, to give them a message, to check on them, they see him coming from afar, and they want to pounce on him, and they want to kill him. They can't stand him.

They want to take his coat, rip it, pour animal blood on it or whatever, and report back to the father, hey, listen, he is dead. Reuben saves his life. Reuben says we shouldn't kill him.

We should throw him in the pit. But then eventually it's Judah who says, hey, listen, here come some people. Let's sell him off into slavery. So Joseph goes from his favored position to the pit and off into Egypt and eventually to Potiphar's house.

Now Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, and Potiphar put him in charge of certain things. And over time he prospered. He was successful in Potiphar's house, so much so that Potiphar put him in charge of everything and didn't hold anything back from him except his own wife.

And that was the very thing that comes into play as she approaches Joseph, seeks to seduce him, and he runs from this and now is falsely accused of something he did not do.

[8 : 36] And it goes from being in Potiphar's house into prison. There in prison again. He works his way up in the ranks, benefiting the warden, making things successful.

And along comes the baker and the cupbearer who have dreams. And they're disturbed. And Joseph interprets their dreams. For the cupbearer, his dream meant that he would return back to Pharaoh.

For the baker, his dream meant that he was going to die. And all Joseph asked of the cupbearers, please don't forget me when you get to Pharaoh. But as it would be, the cupbearer forgets Joseph. Until one day, the Pharaoh has had two dreams, cows and corn. And these two dreams disturbed him so much that he wanted someone to tell him what these dreams meant.

So the cupbearer remembers Joseph. They sinned for Joseph. They cut off all of his hair because that was offensive to the Egyptians. They bring him before Pharaoh. And he tells them the interpretation of the dreams.

[9 : 45] The seven good cows, the seven good ears of corn, or seven years of plenty of food. And the seven terrible cows and the seven ears of corn that were terrible gobbled up the others because there were going to be seven years of famine.

And he says God is going to do this thing. And he's determined to do this thing. And he's told Pharaoh what he is about to do. So he says put somebody in charge of all of the produce of Egypt so that they can store up for such a time.

So Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of this. And he becomes number two in the nation of Egypt. And in time, the famine begins to hit. And his brothers have to come to Egypt to get grain because they heard that there was grain there.

And as they come, they encounter their brother without even knowing it. He puts them through a series of tests, looks for his father, eventually reveals himself to his brothers and says, Bring my father here.

The famine has got more time still to come. And eventually, all 70 people make it into Egypt. And before he dies, Jacob gets to see his son one last time.

[10 : 58] So what we have then is from the favored position to the pit, to Potiphar's house, to prison, and to the palace, in case you ever wanted an alliterated outline of Joseph's story.

Now, from all of this, we do learn two things about the sovereignty of God. That's what we're talking about this morning. God's sovereignty is on display in the story of Joseph so massively.

And one of the things I want you to remember is that though this is the story of Joseph, God is the hero of every story of the Bible. We always are looking not for what the humans did primarily, although there's some secondary things we can look for.

We're looking for God. And we're looking for who God is. And we learn two things about his sovereignty from this story. And the first is that God is sovereign over his promises.

He's sovereign over his promises. And by that, I'm talking about the big ideas, the big movement of things, how the promise is woven from generation to generation to generation, how the promise is kept safe from generation to generation to generation.

[12 : 06] But he's also sovereign over our individual lives, the little things that happen, the little things that don't seem to add up to much, the little things that don't seem to be all about the big promises.

God is sovereign over the promises and our lives. So let's just look very quickly at these two things. Number one, God is sovereign over his promises. You'll remember that primarily the promise we want to look at today is that of a great nation.

Genesis chapter 12, he says, I will make of you a great nation. And that promise gets woven in so many times as he talks about things like, you're going to be as numerous as the stars in the sky. You're going to be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. God is staking his name on this promise, giving an oath to Abraham that his descendants would be this numerous.

And he also promises they will go into Egypt, become slaves, and suffer affliction for 400 years. And so what we see in Genesis chapter 50 verse 20 is that Joseph is saying something about this promise as he says, God meant this in order to preserve many people, to keep many people alive.

[13 : 23] So in God's providence, he's promised the numerous offspring. Now through Joseph, God is keeping them alive in order for them to expand and grow.

As a matter of fact, Israel stays in Egypt. They're 400 years. Moses comes along. They get delivered. They go out of Egypt. They go to Mount Sinai.

They leave Mount Sinai. They go to the promised land. And they freak out. And they say, no way. We're not going in there. Bunch of giants. We're grasshopper people. We're not going in.

And so what does God do? He says, oh, that's fine. You're going to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that generation dies out. And so when the next generation has risen into leadership, the book of Deuteronomy has Moses preaching five sermons to the new generation, rehearsing what

God has done, rehearsing the law, rehearsing the covenant.

And he says to them as they start to go into this land that in Deuteronomy 10, 22, he tells them that they are as numerous as the stars in the sky.

[14:38] In other words, this promise to make them a great nation has been fulfilled in a foreshadowing sort of way. But that's not the fullness of that promise.

You see, that's the way the Bible works, right? You've got this whole foreshadowing, shadowy part of the Old Testament and this substance there in the New Testament. I just love the way the Bible is written because it always speaks to us to look for more than what we're seeing.

And that is that we get to see Christ in the Gospel through the Old Testament. The substance of this fulfillment.

Or in other words, the promise to Abraham to have numerous offspring is ultimately fulfilled in the Gospel through Christ.

Let me give you a couple of examples in Romans 4, verse 16. For this reason, it is by faith in order that it may be in accordance with grace so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants.

[15:42] Not only those who are of the law, that would be the Jews, but also those who are of the faith of Abraham, that would be the Gentiles. In other words, if Abraham is promised numerous offspring, the ultimate fulfillment of that numerous offspring is a kaleidoscope of people who will stand before the throne of both Jews and Gentiles from every nation, tribe, and language.

As a matter of fact, in Revelation chapter 7, he says that, After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes and palm branches and the palm branches were in their hands.

Do you get the feel of this? Do you see what I'm saying here? What I'm saying is that this promise that starts way back in Genesis 3 of the offspring gets woven into Abraham in Genesis 12 which gets protected in Genesis 37 through 50 as Joseph goes to Egypt which then gets protected through the rest of the Old Testament until we come to Jesus who in Jesus now, it expands past Jews and includes Gentiles from every tribe, nation, language, and people and will one day yield in looking before the throne and seeing people from every skin color, every language, every nation across this globe standing before the Lord singing and praising His name.

God promised and God is going to fulfill it. He's sovereign over His promises. The threat of famine cannot thwart God from fulfilling His promises.

That's the point. Nothing can keep God from doing what He pleases to do. God cannot be thwarted.

[17:55] He cannot be thwarted by Saren's barrenness. He cannot be thwarted by Abraham and Sarah's sin with Hagar.

He cannot be thwarted in offering Isaac as a burnt offering. He can't be thwarted with Joseph's slavery. He can't be thwarted by a worldwide famine.

He can't be thwarted by Pharaoh longing to destroy Israel. His promise will be fulfilled and nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing will stop Him.

He will never fail. That's a great spot for you to go. Amen. Amen. There's nothing in all the Bible to me that is more powerful and potent for fighting against our sin than understanding that God never fails.

And this particular point is that He will not fail to surround Himself with people from every tribe, nation, language, and people.

[19:12] That's what this whole great nation thing is all about. It is God's gospel going forth into all the world rescuing and saving sinners.

He will save all whom He pleases to save. He will not fail to save a single solitary one. When He promises something, He never fails.

He always accomplishes it. And He puts us on the field to collect the rewards as He accomplishes the task. You understand what I'm saying? You remember the story in 2 Kings 7?

The Armenians are surrounding Israel and they're about to attack and destroy them. They've been surrounding them for days and they are at such a place that there's a famine inside the city so much so that people are going down into cannibalism and such.

And there are four lepers who are outside the city and they think to themselves, you know what? We could either go into the camp of the Armenians and just be killed and be done with this or go

into the city and die of famine so maybe we could get some food if we go to the Armenians.
[20 : 24] Let's go over there. And as they go into the camp, the camp is empty. Not a single soldier is in the camp. And the text tells us that God brought about a sound in which He drove the soldiers all away and then the doors open upon the city as the people run out and take the spoils off of the field.

This is God. This is how God works. God is the one in charge of all things. He is going to save from every tribe, nation, language, and people. It will happen without fail and we will go on to the field and we will collect the spoils and the rewards that He has there.

Because you see, we've got to separate responsibility when it comes to missions, evangelism, and gospel. It is God's responsibility to awaken the dead and sinner.

It is God's responsibility to convict the sinner of their sin. It is God's responsibility to convict the sinner that Jesus is real, that Jesus is true, that Jesus is the way. It is God's responsibility to give faith to the sinner in order to respond to the gospel.

It is God's responsibility to justify that sinner upon their faith response. None of that is our responsibility. We can't do any of that. Our responsibility, three things.

[21 : 48] Pray for God to save. Proclaim the gospel truth. Patiently wait upon God.

God is rescuing people from every tribe, nation, language, and people. He is making them his people. He's making them his priests.

And we can be involved in the mission of God as he's doing this by praying for missions, giving for missions, and going on missions.

God will not fail. And here's the thing. Perhaps you're someone sitting here today that you're not a Christian. You're saying, okay, well, that's great.

So what does this have to do with me? You need to understand that God is in charge of all things, including salvation. And he is not waiting on you like a scared little codependent boyfriend for you to finally trust in him.

[22 : 50] You are without hope because God is in charge. So what is your duty? What is it that you must do? Repent of your sin and turn to Christ for salvation. And today, if you sense at all that God is convicting you and calling you, then it is vital today for you to come to him.

But God is not just in charge over his promises. He's in charge of our daily lives. And this is really where things get interesting because there are things that we often want to say about this.

But let's just say a few things that I think are true here from the text, here from what's going on in this story. God is promising this numerous offspring, and he's protecting this promise with the things going on in the individual life of Joseph.

The things that happen to Joseph, including the bad things. Joseph was hated by his brothers. He was threatened with death. He was sold into slavery. He was falsely accused of a crime. He was wrongly imprisoned.

[24 : 01] He was forgotten in prison. All of which God brought about sovereignly in Joseph's life. Now we have to separate a couple of things and understand some things.

So let's look at Genesis chapter 45, verse 4. Joseph is talking to his brothers, and he says, please come closer to me. And they came closer, and he said, I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

Joseph rightly holds his brothers accountable for their immorality. It was immoral and sinful and wicked for them to sell him into slavery.

But he says they did it. He holds them accountable for that action. But if we keep reading in verse 5, he says, now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here.

For God sent me before you to preserve life. God sent me here. Well, which is it?

[25 : 04] Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, or God sent him there. Look at verse 6. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

Verse 7. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, all well and good.

Except we still have these two sides. We have the brothers who sold him there, and God who sent him there. So what is the conclusion of this? Verse 8. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

And he has made me a father to Pharaoh and Lord of all of his household. In other words, there's two sides to every act. Man acts and God acts. Man acts out of his heart.

Man does exactly what he wants to do, always doing what he wants to do. And sometimes man gets thwarted in what he wants to do. God acts out of his plans, promises, and desires.

[26 : 11] God does as he pleases in all the earth and in the heavens and in the deeps and in the seas. God does what he pleases. And he is never thwarted in what he wants.

God's motives are always for his glory and our good, while man is always seeking after his own glory. These men are responsible for their actions, but God is the one who sent Joseph there. So the question is, is God sovereign over everything? The answer is yes, he is. Genesis chapter 50, verse 20. If you'll look at that again, you'll see that God and his brothers both meant this event. The Hebrew word for meant is the idea of plan or consider. God planned the selling of Joseph into slavery.

God planned the false accusations against Joseph. God planned the forgetfulness of the cup bearer. But God also planned the favor that Jacob had for his son Joseph.

[27 : 28] God planned the prosperity that Joseph had in Potiphar's house. God planned the success in the prison that Joseph had. God planned the success that Joseph had before Pharaoh.

God planned it, but he planned it for different reasons than the brothers. The brothers wanted to destroy Joseph. God wanted to save a people.

So Christians, we need to believe. We need to believe and understand who it is that we're talking about when we talk about God and God Almighty who sits on the throne and who never looks out over the course of your life and says, Oops.

He never looks out over the course of your life and says, I didn't know that was going to happen. But instead, who has meant it for good? In Ephesians chapter 1, verse 11, it's the middle of a sentence, but I'll show you why I did this.

He says, Also, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to his purpose. And then we have this last phrase. This last phrase stands by itself as a description of God.

[28 : 36] You could have said, who predestined according to his purpose, who is good? Who is the Lord? Who is Jesus Christ? Anything you could have put there, it's a title.

It's a description of who God is. And look at this description of God. He is the one who works all things after the counsel of his own will.

He works all things after the counsel of his own will. There is not one radical molecule in the universe that isn't doing according to the plan of God.

He decreed everything that occurs without reference to anything outside of himself. However, he did it in such a way as not to be the author of sin and evil, and so as not to violate the will of the human.

You were meant by God. You were planned by God to be here this morning. But nothing violated your will to come this morning. You came because you wanted to.

[29 : 43] This is what we're saying. There's nothing in this life that God is not in charge of, in control of, or sovereign over. Now, some are going to object and say, but no, this really does make God the author of evil and sin.

And I say, no, because you do not get darkness and cold from the sun. So, therefore, you do not get sin from God. What comes from God is goodness.

But in his purposes, he allows things to happen. He plans, decrees these things, but they're not from him. You say, what do you mean? Well, look at it in the life of Jesus.

In Acts chapter 2. In Acts 2? 2? In Acts chapter 2. Beginning of verse 22. This is the sermon of Peter.

Men of Israel, listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs, which you performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know.

[30 : 46] Verse 23. This man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death.

God planned it. Men did it. There is this relationship that there's nothing that happens by accident in this world. God is in control of all things.

And yet, humanity is responsible for our actions. Acts chapter 4. Verse 27 through 28. Peter's been released from prison and the church is gathered and they're praying.

And this is a part of their prayer. So if they're wrong in what they're saying here, they're saying something wrong about God in their prayer. But listen to this. Verse 27. For truly in this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.

You see how many people are gathered against them? They've got a plot. They don't like Jesus. They want to kill Jesus. They want to get rid of Jesus. They want to do whatever they are going to do to Jesus. Because, verse 28, to do whatever your hand and your purpose predestines to occur. [31 : 59] To do whatever. So all of that pulling out of the beard, all of that hitting in the face, all of that spitting upon Him, all of that and nailing Him to the cross by the predetermined plan and hand of God.

Because nothing happens by accident. He is sovereign over all things or He's not God at all. And yet, we are responsible for every action we take.

He understands. He knows who we are. So what are we supposed to do? What are we supposed to do? We are supposed to throw ourselves upon the triune God.

Because not only is He sovereign, but He is good. He is compassionate. He is kind.

He is wise. He is just. And He is righteous. He is the one that Romans tells us did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all.

[33 : 08] So what are we to do? Romans chapter 8, verse 28 and 29 gives us, I think, a couple of hints about what we need to do, what we need to believe, how we need to live.

Look at verse 28. We know this verse. You've seen this verse. You've quoted this verse. You've written this verse and sent this verse to friend after friend. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Great hope has been in that verse for so many people, knowing that this terrible thing that happened to my loved one was not useless.

You see what I'm saying? Because here's the thing. God is either in sovereign control of all things, or who is? You want Satan in control of certain things that are bad?

That's what you want? Or you want no one in control of it? Therefore, it happens without a reason, without a purpose. Great hope is found knowing that God causes them to work together for good.

[34 : 20] For good. And what is that good? Verse 29. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers.

Here's the point. The good is our conformity to the image of Christ. The reason Joseph went through what he went through was that Joseph not only was a part of this big plan of God in order to save many people, but Joseph needed to be conformed to the image of Christ.

He was a sinner who needed to be rescued and sanctified so he would look like Jesus. And when you and I go through the things that we go through in our life, good and bad, He's bringing those things into our lives to conform us to the image of Christ.

I had a lady tell me one time, she was going through something pretty difficult, and she said this, she says, Well, you know, the Lord must think I'm pretty strong to bring this bad thing into my life. And I thought to myself, No, ma'am, that's not at all how this works. We're sinners and we have no idea the kind of depths of sin that we have and we need to be sanctified and we need to grow in the image of Christ and God brings suffering into our life to make us more like Christ.

[35 : 50] So then, we need to remember two things. Number one, nothing happens by accident in your life. It was meant and planned by God. And number two, trust that God is conforming you into the image of Christ.

Even if you can't feel it, even if it doesn't look that way, you need to believe and know and trust that as God is bringing this into your life, He's doing so to form you into the image of Christ. Trust that. Trust what He has said. Believe what He has said. Lean upon what He has said. Work with Him in that. And one final word I would say is this, is that if you'll notice, this passage says that He works all things for good to those who are called.

That's for Christians. It doesn't work that way if you're not a Christian. If you're not a Christian, He's not promising to work your suffering for good.

And why is that? Because you can't be conformed into the image of someone you're not following. But you can be. You can be following Him. You can be walking after Him.

[36 : 58] You can become a Christian. You just have to have a conviction about the truth of the gospel and a commitment to the Christ of the gospel.

And I pray today that you would turn to Him in that commitment. Let's pray. Well, Well, let's pray for you. let's pray for you. let's pray for you. Well, let's pray for you.

Well, Well, let's pray for you. let's pray for you. let's pray for you. Well,