

God Meant It For Good (Genesis 50:20)

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Preacher: Evan Alexander

[0 : 00] Amen. At this time, children, you are dismissed for Children's Church. You can head on back with Miss Savannah.! For everyone else this morning, I want us to think through what I believe is somewhat of a difficult question.

Have you ever questioned the goodness of God? Maybe as we sing songs like Gratitude or Good Good Father, you just think to yourself kind of silently and think, Yeah, I just can't.

Is God good? Is that something I'm confident in? This morning, I asked the question, Is God good? Out of a bit of a personal dilemma I've had to walk through at various seasons of my life, where I know God would be good up here in my head, but when I started to go through things, I started to question it a little bit here in my heart.

I know that God is good, but I don't feel it too much. There's something about the struggles and suffering we face in life that calls us at times to ask the question, Is God really good?

There have been seasons where I've wrestled with that question, and that's a bit difficult to admit. I feel bad for asking it even. We don't always feel as though church is a safe place to express doubt and concern, so often we just push that question to the side, suppress it, and we continue to struggle in silence.

[1 : 11] But friends, this morning, I want us to think through the fact that the scriptures are filled with people who ask that very question. Al Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, writes that the Bible is strikingly candid about human suffering, including the vexing or confusing reality that God's own people suffer, and often suffer excruciatingly and lastingly.

So I want us to earnestly seek an answer to this question this morning, because to me, even what may be a solid biblical truth may seem as though a cheap platitude when genuine suffering is placed in my lap.

And I would think some of us may have wrestled with the same question. So this morning, I want us to look at the life of a man who experienced great suffering in his lifetime, and our search for the question to the answer, Is God good?

And my prayer is that if you've been suffering silently, or ever questioned this great question, that today we can examine these scriptures together, and be reminded that God is good, even in the most broken parts of our lives.

If you have your Bibles this morning, turn with me to Genesis 37, where we are introduced to a young man named Joseph. His story spans about 14 chapters towards the end of Genesis, and throughout these chapters, we read a great deal about the trials that are thrown Joseph's way.

[2 : 25] He suffers from some family drama as his brothers planned his death and throw him in a pit. He suffers some social trauma as he is stripped away from his family and his homeland and sold into slavery.

He experiences suffering after suffering. He experiences suffering in isolation due to the sins and decisions of others, even being wrongfully terminated at work, where he's accused of a sex scandal and tossed in prison.

Joseph also experiences the loss of his father after being robbed of the time that he could have had with him. So if there is someone that can relate to any of the struggles that you perhaps have gone through this morning, Joseph has felt your pain.

He's a real person in a real story that has experienced real suffering. So we're going to look at Genesis chapter 37, starting in verse 3, and we're going to work through the story of Joseph together. His story starts off in what we call the pit.

Chapter 37, verse 3. Now Israel, or Jacob, his father, loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he was a son of his old age, and he made him a robe of many colors.

[3 : 29] But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. Joseph was the son of his father's favorite wife.

Now that's a story in and of itself. Being the favorite son of your father's favorite wife, that's a story in and of itself. And there was some resentment that had built up towards Joseph from his brothers. They were jealous of him, and it says that they hated him. Joseph was hated by his brothers. Not a good start, but the story continues. Verse 5. Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

So in this dream, Joseph tells his brothers that one day it's going to come, and you are going to bow down before me. Obviously, if your brothers already don't like you, that is a bit of a difficult truth to swallow.

And it says in verse 8, they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Well, Joseph dreams again. And in this dream, he not only sees his brothers bowing down to him, but he actually sees his father and his mother bowing down to him as well.

[4 : 29] Where we read in verse 11, And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. So we're introduced to Joseph, and we already see some family dynamics that are already kind of coming into play to show a bit of an awkward situation.

They're causing issues. Joseph is favored by his father and seemingly by God. Seemingly by God as well with his dreams. And so when Joseph is sent by their father to go and check on his brothers in the pastures as they labor, their inside thoughts begin to be said out loud.

Genesis chapter 37, verse 18. They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, Here comes this dreamer.

Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what becomes of his dreams. Now again, these words are not being said in a vacuum.

Years of resentment and bitterness have grown and festered in their lives to where Joseph is not only hated by his brothers, they treat him as they are jealous of him, and they are now plotting his own death.

[5 : 37] Now the firstborn brother, Reuben, Reuben's an interesting fellow. He had already sinned against their father pretty horribly in a few chapters before this, to the point where Reuben gets an idea.

He tells his brothers, Hey, let's not kill him. Let's just throw him in the pit and leave him to die. That way, his blood's not on our hands. Reuben hopes that with this idea, he can come back later and save his brother, and his father will love him once again.

Reuben's an interesting fellow. So we see in chapter 37, verse 23. So Joseph, he came to his brothers. They stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore, and they took him and threw him into a pit.

The pit was empty. There was no water in it. Then they sat down to eat. Now, I'm not sure of what problems you may have in your family. But I would dare say, reading this story, the fact that they can so easily plot the death of their brother, strip him of his robe, throw him in a pit, and still have a bit of an appetite, speaks to a bit of the chaos of what we're reading in this story here.

There are problems in Joseph's household. Well, at that time, a caravan of traitors passes by, and in verse 25, another brother we're introduced named Judah, he says, again, the private thoughts out loud.

[6 : 54] He writes in verse 25, or says in verse 25, what profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not let our hand be on him. For he is our brother, our own flesh, and they listened.

So while the narrator is focusing on the brothers on the outside of the pit, I cannot help but imagine what is going through the thoughts of Joseph in the pit. I would have to think after all of this going down, after all of this starting to occur, I would have to think that Joseph starts to ask here, why me? This doesn't seem like the life that I was promised, not what I deserve. And so Joseph, he's in the pit, his life having been flip-turned upside down, and whatever might be left of it, it will never be the same.

That's Joseph in the pit. His story continues to a prison. Chapter 39. We'll come back to 38 in a little bit, but chapter 39, verse 1. 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.

Now whereas God is not mentioned at all in chapter 37, in chapter 39, the narrator wants to make it abundantly clear that God is with him during this season. So chapter 39, looking at verse 2, it says, The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

[8 : 15] His master saw that the Lord is 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 an 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 in field.

So all things considered, at this part of Joseph's story, everything seems to be coming up Joseph. He's being favored in this house. All things are prospering. Things seem to be going well, until we get to verse 7.

And in verse 7, we start to see another event take place. Potiphar's wife begins to have eyes for Joseph, and she says to him, Lie with me. Joseph refuses, and day after day, she continues to pursue him, until one day, she finally gets the opportunity to make her move.

She grabs Joseph by the clothes, and Joseph runs away with his garment still clutched in Potiphar's wife's hands. Now, the last time that Joseph was disrobed, he ended up in a pit.

[9 : 22] And this time, the very same thing happens again. The very same thing happens again. Joseph finds himself in a pit, a prison due to the anger and sins of another, where I have to think that Joseph asked himself during that time, why me?

This does not seem like the life that I was promised. This does not seem like the life I deserve.

Joseph's story goes from the pit to another pit, a prison here, and whether Joseph was aware of it or not at the time, the narrator makes this very clear again in the very next verse, chapter 39, 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.

So just as before, God continues to work through the life of Joseph to show favor on the people around him. It seems as though, even in this situation, Joseph is being blessed.

He's placed in charge of all the prisoners there, and the keeper of the prison gives him a responsibility and a little bit of freedom, but he's still in a prison over all these prisoners, which after a time would end up including the chief baker and the chief cupbearer for the pharaoh himself. And one night, the cupbearer and the baker, they both have dreams. They both have dreams, and Joseph just so happens to have some experience interpreting dreams. So they bring their dreams to Joseph, and they tell their dreams to Joseph, and Joseph interprets them through God's intervention here.

[10 : 45] He interprets these dreams that the cupbearer, the cupbearer, you will be restored to your position in three days' time. You'll be freed and restored to your position. But the baker, you'll be hanged and put to death.

So Joseph makes a request from the cupbearer in anticipation of his freedom, and we see in Genesis 40, verse 14, he tells the cupbearer, only remember me when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.

For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit. So despite even these events happening just as they interpreted to happen, the cupbearer is restored to his position, the baker is hanged, and when the cupbearer gets back to his position, we read these haunting, haunting words at the very end of chapter 40, verse 23.

Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. So for two more years, for two more years, Joseph sits in the pits of this prison.

He sits lonely and forgotten, but his story is far from over because he then goes from the prison to the palace. At that time, Pharaoh has a dream, and no one else in the kingdom is able to interpret this dream, and it's at that point when the cupbearer remembers, there's a guy in prison that I met that interpreted a dream for me.

[12 : 07] So he tells the Pharaoh of this, and in chapter 41, verse 14, we read this, then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. I love that imagery there.

They quickly brought him out of the pit, and when he shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. So Joseph again trusts God for interpreting this dream. He trusts God, and from this dream, Joseph interprets that there will be seven years of good harvest and plenty in the kingdom. There will be seven years of good harvest, and it will be followed by seven years of famine.

Seven years of famine, and Joseph instructs the Pharaoh, he says, during the seven years of good harvest, you're going to need to store some things back so that we can survive the years of famine. That seems like a great proposal, so chapter 41, verse 37, this proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants, and Pharaoh said to his servants, can we find a man like this, in whom is the spirit of God?

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command.

[13:15] Only in regards to the throne will I be greater than you. So Pharaoh places him over this entire endeavor, places him over so much responsibility in the kingdom. He even gives Joseph a wife.

Pharaoh even gives Joseph a wife, and the names of his children that he has with her are so significant. Chapter 41, verse 51, Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, for he said, God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.

In the name of the second he called Ephraim, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. You see, during these seven years of good harvest, it's not only that Pharaoh and his kingdom start to prosper, it seems as though Joseph starts to heal.

He starts to put behind him some of the things in his past. He starts to look forward. He starts to create a new family, a new life. Things seem to be going well for Joseph. But then the time of famine comes.

Two years pass, and all of a sudden people from all over begin to come to Egypt for food, including ten brothers from the land of Canaan. Over twenty years have passed since Joseph has seen his brothers.

[14:27] Twenty years have passed since they tossed him in a pit and left him for dead and then sold him into slavery. Twenty years have passed and now they bow before him begging for food to live.

Joseph sees his brothers going through this and they don't recognize him at all. So Joseph spends the next few chapters putting them through a mirage of tests that while I wouldn't say these tests are necessarily sinful, I would probably interpret this as saying Joseph most likely has not forgotten his past.

He puts them through the ringer here. He puts them through several various tests but all of a sudden in chapter 45 when he's finally reunited with all of his brothers including his younger brother Benjamin he admits with tears flooding down his face.

Joseph says to his brothers in chapter 45 verse 3 I am Joseph is my father still alive? And in verse 4 he says I am your brother Joseph whom you sold into Egypt and now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here for God sent me here before you to preserve life for the famine has been in the land for these two years and there are five years still in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest and God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep you alive for many survivors so it was not you who sent me but God he has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

So Jacob's Joseph's father Jacob Israel all of his brothers all of their kingdom comes to Egypt to live to survive the famine all of his family moves to Egypt and they are finally reunited he finally sees his dad again he finally is with everyone after all these years Pharaoh gives them land in which they can settle and develop a new life here 17 years then pass before one night Jacob Joseph's father calls him into his bedchambers Joseph and his two sons and he blesses them he blesses them before he passes away he calls in all the other brothers of that time and prophesy over them and at the end of chapter 49 after prophesying over all his sons Jacob Israel Joseph's father breathes his last breath and dies now if you have stayed with me we have gone through about 14 chapters of Genesis you may be wondering at this point you may be thinking to yourself this is why Pastor Brett usually goes through one chapter in like three weeks and you're perhaps thinking Evan you bit off way more than you should have and I want to let you know

[16:56] I thought the same thing this week several times but this isn't what I'm speaking on this morning it's not necessarily 14 chapters because all of Joseph's story is crescendoing to this point in chapter 50 where after all that he has endured after all that he has gone through after all the suffering that he has been through Joseph turns to his brothers and says this in chapter 50 verse 20 as for you you meant evil against me but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today looking here Joseph after all that he has been through after all that he has endured this is not a statement by someone who has not experienced any suffering this is from a 60 year old man who has been through various seasons of immense difficulty he has experienced hardship at the hands of his brothers at the hands of others he has experienced great suffering and he turns to his brothers and says without a shadow of a doubt even in the most broken parts of my story

God has been good God has been good Pastor Sinclair Ferguson compares the story of Joseph to that of a jigsaw puzzle and he says this he says after long meditation he is able to say these things that you brought upon me along with others were meant humanly speaking to harm me even to destroy me but I see now looking back putting together the jigsaw puzzle pieces that there is a single word written over all of these hardships all of the disappointments all of my confusions and perplexities and it is the divine word good if you've ever found yourself in a season of doubt if you've ever found yourself asking this question is God good if you've ever found yourself silently suffering then I want to spend these final few moments we have together this morning to hopefully encourage you from this verse about what God still has for you first I want to remind us all that God is not absent from your story in the midst of all that Joseph has been through in the midst of all the hardships that he has endured he reminds us

God is not absent from his story God's been present in the thick of it all now we see hints of this throughout Joseph's story where at various points like in Potiphar's house in the prison it says very clearly that the Lord was with him that the Lord blessed him and showed steadfast love to him but Joseph reminds us here that it's not just in the times of good that God has been with him it is even in the times of brokenness that God has still been there meaning this that in the depths of that pit that his brothers threw him into God was still there when he was stripped away from his homeland and stripped away from his family God was still there when he was wrongfully accused and thrown into prison God was still there and when the cupbearer forgot about him and he was left alone in the prison God was still there God is not absent from our story God is not absent from your story there are times where we may feel isolated or even forgotten but Joseph's life reminds us that God is not absent from your story

God is not absent from your story there are times where we may feel abandoned or alone or isolated but I want to remind us today that that is a work of the enemy Satan himself to make you think those things God is not absent from your story God is present with us even in the brokenness a powerful reminder of this a powerful reminder of this can be seen just by looking around the church Pastor Brett shared with me a quote the other day from one of his favorite books Gentle and Lowly and this is what is written by the author in that book he writes when you look at the glorious older saints in your church how do you think they got there sound doctrine yes resolute obedience without a doubt suffering without becoming cynical for sure but maybe another reason maybe the deepest reason is that they have over time been won over in their deepest affections to a gentle savior perhaps they have simply tasted over many years the surprise of a Christ for whom their very sin draws them away and notice this maybe they have not only known that Jesus loved them but they felt it

God is not absent from your story secondly your life as disastrous and damaged as it may seem is no mistake your life as disastrous and damaged as it may seem is no mistake this truth is so abundantly clear throughout the life of Joseph had any piece of this puzzle not fallen into place just as it had Genesis would end with a famine going on and God's people dead while I cannot theologially argue or state that God would purposely cause evil suffering or harm I can say without a shadow of a doubt that I know for a fact he uses it for good God can use it for good in a fallen and broken world none of us can escape unscathed nor unscarred suffering is real pain is real the things that we go through are real but your life as disastrous and damaged as it may seem is no mistake through it all his sovereign grace reigns preeminent and he can ensure that we do not senselessly suffer nor experience pain without purpose there's another pastor named

[22 : 38] Ligon Duncan he writes it this way he says the promises of God do not exempt us from suffering and calamity instead they enable us to suffer with hope hope that a good and gracious God can take the broken pieces of our life pick them up and arrange them into his glorious masterpiece your life as disastrous and damaged as it may seem is no mistake now I skipped chapter 38 earlier of Genesis because chapter 38 is not necessarily the story of Joseph it's the story of Judah when we look at this this truth is not just evident in the life of Joseph it's also very true in the story of Judah because next week as we transition to Advent and you look at the genealogy if you read that you should read that if you look at the genealogy in the gospels of Jesus' lineage you will not find Joseph there instead you find Judah you know the guy who said let's just sell our brother instead of kill him that guy is in the lineage of Jesus

Judah's story in chapter 38 is something significant Judah's story what we see in his life he marries a Canaanite woman and with that woman he has three sons to the first son he gives a wife named Tamar well that son was so evil where it says the Lord put him to death so Judah gives that wife Tamar to his second son that son was disobedient and said that the Lord put him to death because of his wickedness well finally he has this daughter-in-law who's widowed now and Judah tells her I will provide for you you can treat yourself as part of our family and when our third son gets to be old enough you can have him as a son with no intentions of actually doing so Judah's evil and wickedness is so evidently clear throughout all of chapter 38 and through some even more terrible circumstances in Genesis 38 Judah he's mourning the loss of his wife and Tamar deceives him Tamar pretends to be a prostitute and Judah sleeps with her has more sons and finally he starts to shift the blame off to Tamar he starts to shift the blame but it comes back on him and chapter 38 actually ends with what we see to be some element of reconciliation or restoration or redemption in the life of Judah it says that he changes a bit so fast forward to this

Judah is in the line of lineage of Jesus with Tamar not Joseph and you may be wondering Evan why is that important because I want to say this very clear while some of you may have experienced suffering or hardship due to others sin against you some of you may be sitting here today having messed up your own life and sinned and you're left to pick up the pieces to you I want to say very clearly God's grace is sufficient for you God's grace is sufficient for you that is seen throughout Joseph's story but it's evidently clear through Judah's story as well your life as disastrous and damaged as it may seem is no mistake finally and this is the last point here finally in all of his goodness God is still worthy to be praised God is still worthy to be praised after all that he has endured Joseph recognizes that God in all of his goodness is worthy to be praised the apostle Paul makes a very similar statement to Joseph in the New Testament Romans 8 28 where he writes this and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purposes one writer remarks about this phrase in Paul's writings he says he doesn't tell his readers to grin and bear it

Paul tells them to recognize that even the evil and wicked parts of the story do not fall outside of the plan of God God will use every circumstance to accomplish his plans and help conform his people into the image of Christ you see God's plans are much bigger than ours God's plans are much bigger than ours I saw a quote from John Piper Pastor John Piper this past week where he said that God at any point in our lives is doing at least 10,000 things and we may be aware of three of them God's plans are bigger than yours bigger than mine from the moment the sin entered the world God had a plan to redeem it God had a plan to redeem this brokenness and while we experience real suffering due to the sin and brokenness of the world Jesus Christ took that suffering upon himself he was beaten bruised and crucified so that in him we might find forgiveness and life abundant so that in him we might find hope joy peace love everything we desperately need

God is worthy of our worship he is worthy of our praise this morning as we think about the life of Joseph we are reminded that God is good even in the most broken parts of our lives he never leaves us he can redeem the darkness and he is still worthy of worship this morning we're going to end with a time of invitation Clay's going to come and sing a song and as he sings I invite you to respond as you best see fit maybe you're sitting here today and you're like Evan I don't have a relationship with Jesus I've been hurt I just don't think that's for me God's grace is sufficient for you at this time if you need to respond in any way I invite you to sing to praise God but most importantly to pray thank God and if there is any hurt any damage in your life that you think cannot be fixed on its own I tell you this God is good even in the most broken parts of our lives let's pray together God we just want to thank you so much for this day Lord we praise you and thank you and God I think

back on the days of my life where life's been hard

[28 : 34] Lord I think through loss and grief and questions and God I just thank you and praise you that you didn't leave me to question that you didn't leave me to wonder but Lord instead you reminded me of your goodness and your grace and Lord I praise you during those seasons and God I pray for this congregation today if there is anyone here that is silently suffering and questioning about your goodness may you remind them very clearly that you are a part of their story you are present you still care and you still love and Lord I pray that as we are redeemed individuals that you may encourage us to go back out into a broken world and tell of your goodness to others Lord we thank you for all that you are for all that you do and Lord at this time I pray that if there is anyone that doesn't know you as Lord and Savior if there is anyone that needs to respond in any way I pray that you may give them the boldness to step out to have a conversation and Lord to respond as you need them to Lord we love you and in your name we pray Amen