

Genesis

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[0 : 00] Three stonemasons were working on a hot sunny day. You can walk up to them and ask the first, What are you doing?

And he will tell you, I am laying stones in this hot sun. Ask the second, what are you doing? And the second stonemason will say, I'm building a wall.

Ask the third stonemason, what are you doing? He will say, I am building a cathedral. There's a sense in which our passage today, Genesis chapter 50, is a lot like that.

In one sense, there's something hard and brutal. Joseph is going to say to his brothers, you meant evil against me. But in another sense, even when it's hard and it is also beautiful, he's going to say, but God meant it for good.

We've been in a sermon series here. We've surveyed the book of Genesis. And we're actually praying about extending the survey series actually to the whole year and the whole Old Testament.

[1 : 13] We're certainly going to step into the book of Exodus next and complete a survey series through that. It'll take us a little bit past Easter. And we have up to this point seen God be gracious to unfaithful people like you and me.

We've seen him make unbelievable promises. And Joseph himself is actually a fulfillment of that promise. We see him here today. He is the grandson of Abraham who went a long time without children but was promised offspring that would bless the whole world.

And today we see just a bit of that. So this sermon is going to be in Genesis chapter 50, verses 15 to 21. And Joseph is going to be evaluating the biggest events in his whole life.

So in order to understand his evaluation, his response, we need to hear his story. So briefly, Joseph's story really kicks off in Genesis chapter 37.

He's Abraham's grandson. So again, if you've been with us in this narrative the past several weeks, what you're seeing here is God is faithful to his promises because Abraham finally does have offspring.

[2 : 26] Joseph's father, Jacob, gave him special treatment, including a robe of many colors you may have heard of that makes his brothers very jealous. Not only that, but Joseph kept having dreams that seemed to make him prominent above his family.

And not only that, but Joseph brought a bad report about his brothers to Jacob. So they did what any reasonable brothers would do. They threw him in a pit, sold him to Egyptian slavers, and told Jacob that a lion ate him.

When he arrived in Egypt, things started to look up for him. He impressed his master with his abilities and became the household manager. But then things started looking bleak again.

He was falsely accused, thrown in prison. In prison, things started looking up again. Two of Pharaoh's officials were thrown into prison, had interesting dreams.

Joseph interpreted them through the Lord's strength. The Lord led him to realize the dreams indicated that Pharaoh would restore one of the officials and execute the second.

[3 : 34] And sure enough, that's exactly what happened. But again, things looking back down, the official who was raised back to his position forgot about Joseph.

Until Pharaoh had a dream that he couldn't understand and no one could understand. So the official remembered, oh, I know that Jewish guy who can interpret dreams.

The Lord led Joseph to realize that Pharaoh's dream indicated that there was going to be seven years of plenty in the land of Egypt, followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh put Joseph in charge for preparing for those seven years of famine.

And through his planning, not only was Egypt saved from starvation, but they could sell food to people from the surrounding countries, including 11 brothers who were sojourners in the land of

Canaan, the same brothers who had sold him into slavery.

And so Joseph brought his whole family to Egypt. He saved the very people who had betrayed him. He saved them. Now if that sounds familiar to you, perhaps like a first century rabbi born in Bethlehem who washed the feet of the man who betrayed him.

[4 : 58] Keep that in the back of your mind as we look to today's text in Genesis 50, because that's where we're going to end. So let's pray. Father, as we approach this difficult passage, Lord, I pray that you would speak to our hearts from your sovereignty, from your great love.

Lord, that we would be comforted knowing that there is a greater Joseph who came for us and bought us, who saved us.

We pray that in Christ's name. Amen. As we walk forward into this week's text, I'd like to invite you to almost draw alongside Joseph.

No one here, I think, has been sold into slavery. But everyone here, I'm certain, has felt betrayed. Sometimes almost without realizing it. Sometimes we experience a disappointment that feels like a betrayal almost. You wouldn't even necessarily put the label betrayal on it, but that's really how you do feel.

[6 : 12] Everyone has been let down by someone they care about, right? In some area of their life that they care about.

And that disappointment can easily feel like a betrayal. Sometimes no promise has even been made verbally, but it's something that's understood.

And then you find out that the other person has a very different understanding about what's supposed to happen, your implicit agreement. Maybe you go into marriage with expectations, stated or otherwise, about how rhythms of life are going to be, activities, distribution of chores, whatever it is, and that's not really what materializes.

You feel duped. For me, an admissions rep, when I was headed to seminary, said I was approved for a scholarship. And then, after we had quit my job, moved my family, the dean said, you're not approved.

I felt kind of betrayed by an institution. Maybe you've felt that way, too. Why does betrayal hurt so much? It's for one of either two reasons.

[7 : 28] It only happens in a context where the stakes are high. Either it's a relationship that really matters to you. You've given your trust to someone, or you're dealing with an issue that's really important to you, right?

That's what makes it so devastating. Both of those are high-value items. For Joseph's case, it was his family, and it was his own freedom. Those are, you know, on both sides of the issue.

His betrayal was giant on both sides of that. You expect, you know, your enemies to treat you poorly, but it's devastating, surprising when someone you love turns their back to you, right?

Or, you don't mind disappointments in the small things, but you really feel messed up when, you know, it's the issue that really counts, that really matters to you. And that brings us now to Joseph's assessment of his own life.

In chapter 50, we get to hear him reflect on what he thought of all this, his betrayal. Their father, Jacob, has died, and now Joseph, he's scary to his brothers.

[8 : 43] Perhaps he had never retaliated before because, you know, his dad's alive and he doesn't want to upset his father. But now, there's nothing holding Joseph back from destroying them if he wants.

He was thrown into a pit, dragged to Egypt, lived like a slave, and thrown into prison. But, it also put him on the path to power. He's now basically the prime minister of Egypt because Pharaoh put him in charge of all the land.

So he could destroy the ones who tried to destroy him if he wanted. And so, as we pick up the story in verse 16, his brothers sent a message to Joseph saying, your father gave this command before he died.

Say to Joseph, please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin because they did evil to you. And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.

Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, behold, we are your servants. Basically, dad said you have to be nice to us.

[9 : 59] Right? That's what's going on here. How would you respond? In this situation? Like, honestly, how would you respond? What would you want to do?

He holds all the power. There isn't anything standing in his way anymore. He can do anything that he wants to them. He can throw them in a pit.

He can sell them into slavery. He can put them into prison. He can do all of that without being unjust. That's actually justice, wouldn't it? An eye for an eye. And what's more, since he's essentially the second most powerful man on the planet, he can do far worse than him.

He can utterly destroy them. Oftentimes, that's just what powerful people did and do, right? Today, I'd be surprised if anyone here today couldn't give an example of someone in a place of authority abusing that when they felt slighted.

But that's not how Joseph responds, is it? There's no wrath. There's no malice. There's no retribution. Instead, his brothers find grace, mercy, and love.

[11 : 22] When Joseph responds, we can see quite clearly that while his brothers acted with their own interests at heart, they expect him to have his own interests in mind.

He has God in mind. That makes all the difference. What we're going to see here is that Joseph is living out his faith. And he's walking with God even as he replies.

And so, we see in verse 19 that Joseph avoids taking God's position. We see in verse 20 that he takes God's view.

And we're going to see in verse 21 that he shows God's love. Let's look at each of those in turn. Verse 19, But Joseph said to them, Do not fear for am I in the place of God?

I'm betting that everyone here has seen at least one movie or read one book about revenge. Someone's been wronged and wants to hit back.

[12 : 28] So, on one end of the spectrum is the revenge action movie, right? Where, you know, guns and explosions are used to get back at someone. A couple of guys did a guys' night out a couple weeks back, right?

And went and saw a movie just like that. On the other end of the spectrum is the Shakespearean play where the villain gets his comeuppance due to some devious plotting.

And so there's drama on both sides. There's just different ways of exacting revenge. And in either case, the person who's out for revenge, how do they end up? Are they happy? What's the moral of basically every revenge tale in literature?

No, they're not happy. At best, at best, they're vindicated and justice is served, right? But are they happy? No. Why not?

See, even if the writers of literature don't know God, the best ones still know the world that God created. And they know this basic truth that getting even doesn't make you whole.

[13 : 39] It doesn't restore anything. It doesn't make you any better. Getting even just makes you even, right?

There's nothing restorative about it. So Joseph doesn't look for comfort in revenge because it's not there. It cannot be found there. So friends, refusing to take justice into our own hands, we walk in faith.

Trusting God to make things right in His wisdom, His way. And there is comfort there. Because as we're about to see in verse 20, it means taking God's perspective.

Joseph says, 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.

We began today with a story about stonemasons, right? One was laying stones in his own mind. Another was building a wall in his own mind. And the last one was he saw the big picture.

[14 : 51] He was making a cathedral. See, the same event can be brutal and punishing from one perspective and transcendent from another.

It depends on where you're standing and how you're looking. Now, Joseph doesn't excuse his brothers, does he? What they did was brutal and punishing.

You meant evil against me, he says. They were responsible and they were liable for the evil in their hearts and their evil deeds. And, and, Joseph has walked with the Lord his whole life.

He has learned that God's ways are higher than man's ways. He knows that God cares about every sparrow. How much more valuable are we to the Lord?

He's learned to see things from God's perspective. And, and, and so, it's as if Joseph is looking at his life through a camera. Zoomed in all the way on just that one event, he can say, yes, it was brutal and it was punishing and it was evil.

[16:09] But when he zooms out And, sees the whole of it, he sees the contours of God's greater plan for his life to save many. 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.

See, God was building a glorious cathedral brick by brick. So, when we look at our lives, when we look at the difficult things, betrayal, disappointment, hardship, grief, friends, the things that Joseph endured, we need to move our eyes beyond our own perspective.

Look at things through God's eyes. Here's an example. The Apostle Paul says that even in the face of the last enemy, death itself. Christians don't mourn like those who have no hope.

Why? Because death isn't bad? No, death is awful. But because in Christ we can see the bigger picture. Christ is risen.

And if we have been united to him in faith, the old man is gone, the new has come, and even though we will die, that won't be the end of our story.

[17:39] Because, friends, we will live forever before the face of our God because Jesus Christ is risen and we are bound to him. And so there is no sickness that can truly harm us.

There's no condition that can ultimately shake us. there's no malady that can scare us because we rise with Christ on the last day to life imperishable.

God isn't just laying stones. He isn't just building a wall. He's building a temple where heaven will meet earth. now, you may be saying, that's pretty hard to have that long view in mind.

And in fact, Joseph kind of has it easy here. He has the benefit of hindsight, right? He can look back on all of this and he knows. He sees the whole story.

He can say, yeah, it's great that I saved all these people so I can deal with the fact that you sold me into slavery. But we're not at the end of our lives.

[18:53] Everybody sitting here is not at the end of their life. And so we don't have the benefit of hindsight, do we? When Joseph's brothers turned on him and threw him in a pit, did he know where he was going?

When they sold him to slave traders, did he know? When he was sold to Potiphar, the slave master in Egypt, did he know?

When he was falsely accused, did he know what God was doing? When he was thrown in prison, did he know what God was doing? While he languished there, forgotten, did he know that his name would be recorded in God's word to this very day?

No. Every step along the way, Joseph did not know the big picture. And that's why walking through betrayal and disappointment can be so bleak for us.

God's building a cathedral, but it feels like laying stones in the hot sun. And what's more, we may never have that moment of clarity that Joseph has at the end of his life.

[20:14] We may never see what God is doing in our lives, in any individual circumstance. It is a blessing when he does, but we are not promised that, we are not guaranteed that.

But what we can know, we can absolutely know that God is working all things for our good because of what happens in verse 21.

Joseph says, do not fear, I will provide for you and your little ones. Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. He looks into the eyes of the men who betrayed him and sold him into slavery and were the cause of so much pain in his life.

grace. And he gives them grace. And it's not just that he doesn't take revenge on them and just says, you know what, we'll just call it quits here. That's not what he says, that's not what he does. He comforts them. He speaks kindly to them, the text says. He provided for them. This is a picture of unrestrained grace.

[21:29] It's not just we're going to cancel the debt, it's we're going to shower you with grace. Where do you get the strength to do that? Where did Joseph get the strength to do that?

I mean, they sold him into slavery. And he returned it to them with love. How do you and I get to do that? Only from a God who has blessed you out of your mind.

Right? And that's just the God that Joseph served. And we know even better today than Joseph did that that's the God we serve.

He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? God's grace produces grace in the hearts of his people, the people that he has shown grace to.

So if I can gently confront you this morning, if you aren't feeling gracious, it's probably because you're allowing your focus on hurt to displace your view of God's grace.

[22 : 48] grace. And so this becomes for us a template for the Christian life in a couple ways. First, it's a template for those who do not yet know the Lord.

You need to see your sin as a cosmic betrayal of God. We are Joseph's brothers in an ultimate sense. We have betrayed the Lord.

And we need to see that Jesus took our sin, bore the weight of its judgment on his shoulders, took it to his cross, made an end of it there, rose to new life, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, ready to give you grace.

And just like Joseph's brothers, this grace is a gift. It caused nothing. There's nothing you could do to earn that. Follow Joseph here. And recognizing that you are not, as he said, in the place of God. That's repentance. Rest on his mercy. That's believe, repent and believe. And he will cause you to be born again into his kingdom as his child. It's a template for those who do not yet know the Lord.

[24 : 01] It's also a template for those who look to comfort those who walk through suffering and betrayal. Right? If we follow the pattern that he has laid out for us here, we don't sit in God's seat.

One of the least comforting things you can do to somebody who's feeling betrayed is ask a question like, so, what's God teaching you right now? Right? Has anybody ever asked you that in a moment of real grief?

That's a question for a year later, not in the moment. Right? Or, what did you do wrong to deserve this? How are you being punished? Right? That's how Job's great friends asked him.

See, God knows the answers to those questions, but we do not sit in his seat. We are not in his place. We do not know the answers to those things. And it's rare, especially in that moment of pain, that we would have that knowledge.

So that's the first thing that you can do to comfort is to not ask those questions. don't steal God's seat, but also do share God's perspective. Verse 20, remind your friend that Jesus went to the cross for them, and has promised to be with them all the way, so they can bank on those things, even in the midst of deep troubles.

[25 : 22] We evaluate our circumstances based on God's love for us, not the other way around. We evaluate our circumstances based on God's love for us, not the other way around.

And, then we show God's love, just like Joseph did in verse 21. We help our friends as we can, we comfort them as we can, and we encourage them to rely on Christ's body, the church.

So this is a template for those who do not yet know the Lord and look to comfort those beyond, or who are in a period of suffering, especially in betrayal. And last, it's also a template for the Christian life for those who themselves feel betrayed.

Now, you might be saying, hey, that's nice that you've got that. I understand God gives us some trials like the betrayal that Joseph has for a good purpose, finally.

but you don't understand. I've been wounded way too deeply. You might be thinking, for this to come to good.

[26 : 43] I mean, I was victimized. I was traumatized. I was betrayed in the most awful way. That might be what you're thinking. I was utterly shamed.

There was absolutely nothing good about this. And maybe you're saying, I don't just feel betrayed, I feel abandoned in that betrayal. In fact, I feel betrayed and abandoned by God.

You might be thinking that. And so you might be saying to yourself, don't make light of my sorrow and give me three steps to fixing it. I can't get past that.

I can't stop thinking about it. I will be forever marked by it. That might be where you're at right now.

And even if you're not there right now, we need to end here anyway. First, because I want you to be prepared for real hardships.

It would be unloving of me not to think through that with you. And secondly, because either Christ is risen from the grave and there is grace and power for every moment of life.

[27 : 52] Or he's not. And we should all just walk out that door and not come back. Christ is either risen and there is power and there is grace and there is love for every hurt.

Or this isn't worth our time at all. God. And I want to tell you that even in the face of monstrous evil, that God is sovereign and God is good and he is sovereign and good to and for you.

Now, in that cry of hurt that I just kind of expressed, maybe on your behalf, there are kind of three ideas in there that we need to bring to the Lord.

The first is feeling marked by our betrayal and suffering. The second is being in a place where we feel we have been betrayed or abandoned by God in the midst of our suffering. And last, feeling the weight of the injustice of betrayal so severely. first, being marked by suffering. You're going to be marked by suffering and betrayal.

[29 : 12] So this isn't just saying get over it, right? What it is saying is, I mean, look at Joseph. He probably felt like that his whole life. He probably had some trust issues, right?

It's impossible to forget something like your own brothers throwing you a pit and selling you into slavery. Like, you're not going to forget that one. What you need to hear when you don't know if you can bear being marked by betrayal is this.

Your Savior, he is marked by his betrayal. Judas, one of his disciples, betrayed him, and that took him to the cross, and Jesus still physically bears the scars of the crucifixions that he suffered on your behalf.

Right? In John chapter 20, the resurrected Jesus said to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands and put out your hand and place it in my side.

Do not disbelieve, but believe. Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. See, our Lord is marked by his suffering on our behalf, and that's actually why we sing hymns like, before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever pleads for me, my name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart.

[30 : 56] And I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence to part. The second thing we want to think about is that in great betrayal we can often feel like we have been betrayed or even abandoned by God.

Right? I suspect that Joseph, sitting in that pit by himself, waiting to be sold into slavery or on the journey to Egypt or rotting away in jail or any of the other things that he suffered, far from his home and family, probably felt abandoned by God.

Didn't he? And so when we look narrowly at any individual moment in Joseph's life, we might conclude that God really had abandoned him, if we're looking only at that moment.

But when we look at Joseph's life as a whole, we'll see that even when God is silent, that does not mean that he is absent. Don't confuse the two. But it's not only that God is present when he's silent. It's not just that he'll work it out in the end. Those things are true and they are precious, precious. But here's the greatest thing. God has actually joined us in being abandoned in a way that you and I need not experience.

[32 : 32] When our Lord Jesus went to the cross, he was truly, utterly abandoned by his friends, by his countrymen, and abandoned by the Father himself.

My Lord, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That was his cry on the cross. See, Jesus was betrayed and suffered the greatest suffering and God intended it for good.

Your good, my good, our good. He was abandoned so that you and I might not ever be separated from the Lord.

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else. And all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Third, in severe betrayals, injustice weighs on us, does it not? Like Joseph's story, one of the worst parts of betrayal is it just feels so unjust.

[33 : 49] The world isn't supposed to work this way. And again, we look to Christ. Jesus suffered the ultimate injustice for me, for you, when he, the only truly righteous man, was condemned as a criminal.

And it experienced not only the wrath of Rome's executioners, but also experienced the weight on the just wrath of God on human sin.

he was despised and rejected by men, which is a tremendous injustice. A man of sorrows, Isaiah says, and we're about to sing a song, man of sorrows, unacquainted with grief.

That song, man of sorrows, man of sorrows, lamb of God, by his own betrayed. We're about to sing that. He was acquainted with grief and as one from whom men hide their faces.

He was despised and we esteemed him not. By oppression and judgment he was taken away and for his generation who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.

[35 : 13] And listen to this injustice. They made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence. There was no deceit in his mouth.

And here is again an echo of verse 20 where Joseph said you meant it for evil. All of that was you meant it for evil.

And here is God meant it for good. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring.

He shall prolong his days. the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. And friends, if you are in Christ, you are that will of the Lord that is prospering in Christ's hand. You see, the gospel is the only story where the hero dies for the villain.

So as we close this morning, it's difficult to see how the Lord intends to use the troubles of our lives. See, I haven't said to you, you're going through this or that for reason X, reason Y, reason Z.

[36 : 28] I haven't said it. I can't tell you why he would ordain a particular difficulty in your life. I don't know it. I am not, as Joseph said, in the place of God.

I do not know his secret counsels. And you are not in the place of God either, I hope. And so, you might discern some of the things that the Lord chose to do through your troubles, but you might not ever know in this life.

In the light of that uncertainty, we have two options. We either live in a universe where God is sovereign over all things, telling the end from the beginning, purposing and planning your hardships for your everlasting joy, to drive you to himself, to show you the depths of his love for you as you consider the cross of Christ, to bring you to his side redeemed, reconciled, and renewed forever. Or, we live in a world where none of that's true, and we walk through life without hope. God is in control, and we know that God is in control, and that he is working all things for good, that he is present in our pain.

How do we know this? How do we know this, friends? We know that he cares because he went to the cross for us. We know that he is powerful to redeem any trouble because he walked out of the tomb.

[38 : 07] He defeated death, the last enemy. And so Jesus was marked by his betrayal. He was truly abandoned in it, and he suffered the ultimate injustice all on our behalf, and he triumphed over it all so that those who are found in him might not despair, might not languish in their troubles, might not walk through this life just devoid of joy, but might have life, might have life in him, and might have it to the fall.

Friends, let's pray. Lord, I am so grateful that as we have said over and over in this series of sermons in Genesis, that we have seen that you made us for covenant fellowship, with the living God.

And so, Lord, help us not to only follow the rules, a three-step process, or something like that, but, Lord, help us to walk with you.

It's the only way Joseph was able to do what he did, and, Lord, we ask that you would help us to walk ever before your face, so that can be a living reality in our lives.

So, Lord, thank you that you walked this road of betrayal before us to save us, the very ones who betrayed you. Lord, help us to remember that we, in fact, are Joseph's brothers who have been showered with your grace.

[39 : 57] Lord, thank you that you suffered evil so that we could receive blessing, so that we could receive you, walk with you, forever.

We pray that in the matchless name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen.