

LXV. Genesis in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of Christ from Genesis
“The Life of Joseph #9—Reality Christianity”
Genesis 43
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Let’s look at the text in the last study in order to understand the text for this study. This is where the sons of Jacob are coming back from the emissary, Pharaoh and in fact it was their brother whom they did not recognize, who has Simeon their brother, now in captivity. They have met with their father and given him their report. Genesis 42:35–38 says [35] *As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid.* [36] *And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.”* [37] *Then Reuben said to his father, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.”* [38] *But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, this is the Word of our God, it abides forever, and may His Word be preached for you.

We have now been on the onslaught of new television called reality television. We have found out that as people have done investigative work people are not too real, in fact they are pretty scripted. So it’s not reality. What you perceive as reality television has been pretty well scripted so it’s not reality.

Then we all labor under a statement that is said with great wisdom. People will make this statement and you are just to bow underneath its power and accuracy and that is ‘perception is reality.’ I would like to say categorically today that statement is absolutely false. Perception is not reality. What you perceive may be a part of reality but it’s only a small bit of reality. There is much more in reality. In fact I want to say as clearly as I can, not only is perception not reality, but it’s only a small slice of reality and your perception may be out of touch with what is truly reality. Meaning that when I look at something and make my judgment about what is reality, I actually may not be in touch with reality but I might actually be out of touch with reality.

Jacob’s sons have returned. God is doing a work in them through their brother Joseph whom they don’t even know is still alive, yet they just met him. He recognized them but they didn’t recognize him. One of the ways He is working on them is that Joseph sent them back with grain and kept Simeon. Now we find out that all of them had the money in their sacks. Immediately that guilt they have carrying with them for twenty plus years comes to the forefront and says “God is finding us out” and they are fearful. Jacob is fearful. Jacob makes this assessment of reality – Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, if I follow your direction Benjamin will be no more and finally everything is against me. I am the object of a grand conspiracy, from Egypt into my own household, even to the weather of the day with the famine, everything and everyone is against me. So he basically says we’re all going to stay right here.

Jacob is probably banking on three things right now. One is that he hopes they won't kill Simeon. Two we have some grain to get us through the famine and three the famine can't last forever. Really? Let's see how long it lasts and look at Genesis 43. Genesis 43:1–10 says [1] *Now the famine was severe in the land. [2] And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food."* [3] *But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.'* [4] *If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. [5] But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'*" [6] *Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?"* [7] *They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'"* [8] *And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. [9] I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. [10] If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice."*

You are about to see the second visit to Egypt. After the first visit, Jacob had a cushion so he had not planned for them to return because he also thought the famine would not last. He just found out he couldn't live out the famine. He has now outlived the grain and he may not even be able to live with himself because of what he is doing to Simeon. The cushion is being deflated.

Do remember how Joseph was testing the brothers to see if they would sacrifice another brother? They sacrificed Joseph for twenty pieces of silver. Will they sacrifice Simeon? God's working on the brothers hearts and they said 'no' they would not sacrifice Simeon but yet it seems as if Jacob is willing to sacrifice Simeon for Benjamin. The situation has gotten worse for the famine has increased in severity for he is out of food and has no other plans. So now he wants the brothers to go buy them some food.

Look at what Judah now does. Judah is the man who led the conspiracy to get rid of Joseph, who committed sexual immorality, who abandoned his son's wife, has entered into conspiracies with his other brothers with a holocaust of the Shechemites and now he has recently cried out "Oh God our sins have come upon us." Now Judah begins to ascend to leadership and gives a clear evaluation of the situation to his father. We can't just go down and buy grain for the man was clear that we can't even see his face unless we bring Benjamin with us. So if we don't bring Benjamin we're not going but if you do send him we'll go. I pledge my life for Benjamin's as assurance that I will bring him back in my hand. This was certainly more receptive than what Rueben had offered which was his two sons in place of Benjamin's life if Benjamin didn't return. Judah's plan has a ring of sincerity and focus to it.

Now we begin to see not only Judah turn, but Jacob who has been inundated with his self-centeredness and dominated by his fears also begins to turn. The situation has brought him to an end of himself. Genesis 43:11–14 says [11] *Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. [12] Take double the money with you. Carry back*

with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. [13] Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. [14] May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

Jacob realizes the seriousness of the situation and when he stops to pray he goes all the way back to the name that was given to him. He says "May El Shaddai, God Almighty bless you and may the children (Simeon and Benjamin) come back with you in your hand." It is no accident that he goes back to El Shaddai, God Almighty, for it was in that covenant that God said "I'll bless those nations that bless you." May the power of God cause these Egyptians to bless us. It is in that covenant in the name of El Shaddai that He said He would be a God to you and to your children. If God Almighty decrees otherwise and I am bereaved, then I am bereaved.

I want to give you a thought from this text and then three practical insights that come from it for our lives. The thought is this; God's providence. What is God's providence? It perhaps described best is the verse from Romans 8:28 which says *[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* Not all things look like they are for God's glory but is working in all things, even Satan, sin and spectacular sins, God works all those things together for His glory and the good of His people. Now that promise is only for His people. He doesn't say all things are going to be good but He says He'll work all things together for good. That is what His hand of providence is doing.

The hand of God's providence is doing far more than our initial read of the circumstances would suggest. All things are being used by God for His glory and all of them are being worked together for our good and that work of God's providence goes far beyond our initial read of the circumstances. Much more is going on than what we see. The hand of God is not only visible but invisible.

This last week I was on a Christian character trip and when I got on the bus on Tuesday there was a man on the trip who was downcast. His stocks had not gone south, but left this planet and he was looking at this Wall Street nosedive. He said "Don't talk to me about all things working together for good." I said "Not only am I going to talk to you about it but I'm going to tell that your situation is under God's hands, God is doing something in this and you may have no idea what God is doing through this." You don't know the families He is working in or the lives He is changing, a nation He is dealing with or a community He is working on. We have no idea what God is doing all through life. We can read some things but sometimes we misread those things. Even in those things we read God is doing much, much more than we can know here but we will know there.

I want to further show you how God's providence is doing far more than our initial read of the circumstances around us through three Christian realities. Christian reality number one is God's people can get in touch with reality if they know the hand of God's providence is really doing more than you initially think or see and then in confidence you trust Him. Jacob has been looking at the circumstances of life, reading it and coming up with a reality assessment. Assessment number one is that Joseph is no more. Assessment number two is that Simeon is no more. Assessment number three is that he is about to lose Benjamin and he'll be no more. Assessment number four is everything is against me.

Do you think Jacob is reasonable in his analysis of the situation to come up with those assessments? I think it's absolutely reasonable. He said that Joseph was no more. Was his assessment reasonable? One, the brothers say he is history. Two, he had a blood soaked coat he had made for Joseph. Three, he hadn't seen him for over twenty years. His perception is reasonable. Joseph is no more. Is Simeon being no more a reasonable analysis of perception? Simeon is in prison accused of being a spy and the sentence for being a spy is death. The only way he can be freed is if the brothers bring Benjamin back. They have not brought Benjamin back. As far as Jacob knows Simeon is in a prison under a man who he thinks hates Hebrews, as most Egyptians did, accused him of being a spy and had already thrown all the brothers in prison before this and made it clear that if they don't come back he'll be dead. So it's reasonable for Jacob to think Simeon is no more. The same thing will happen to Benjamin.

His final assessment is that everything is against him. My sons are murderers, thieves, sexually immoral and did they steal from Egypt by coming back with the money in their sacks that was to be used to buy grain. Jacob is hoping it was an oversight. My sons keep giving information to people that use it against me. Egypt is against me and now there is a famine that won't stop. It is getting more severe so everything and everyone is against me. I am the object of a grand conspiracy existence of life and that is his read on the situation, his perception of reality. Jacob's perception of reality right then has never been more out of touch with true reality than at any other time in his life, when it looks like Jacob is just being real. This is my reality and I just have to deal with it.

He has never been more out of touch with reality for Joseph is not dead. He is alive and well in Egypt. In fact, he is the second most powerful man in the world right now. Joseph is alive and functioning under the guiding hand of the living God, having been grown in humiliation and exaltation, having been put in a position of power and the perseverer of humanity in general and the perseverer of God's people in particular. Joseph isn't no more. Joseph is busy doing in the lives of Jacob's sons what Jacob should have been doing all along and all the while.

Simeon is not dead. Simeon has never been more safe in his entire life than he is right now. He has free room and board. He is under the care of the second most powerful man in the world. He has food, provisions and pardon. The man taking care of him is his brother who loves him.

Benjamin is not on the brink of disaster for on the contrary for he is about to be positioned to work in absolute concert with the in whom God is going to choose to bring a Redeemer, Judah. Jacob has never had more going for him than right now. God has brought what was necessary to get your attention. God is working on your sons to turn them in from a treacherous mob into twelve patriarchs for God's covenant people. He is breaking them. Jacob you've never had more going for you than right now. Through you is coming the Presever of the world. The patriarchs are being established. God is working in the life of Judah so watch him step up as through him will come the Lion of Judah.

I understand why the initial read of the circumstances would lead Jacob there through the eyes of fear but there are some other eyes. Lord, teach me to look through the eyes of Life, the eyes of faith which focus upon You that has fully realized that the hand of God's providence is always accomplishing far more than the initial read of the circumstances which suggest to me. While you thought everything was against you God

was working on Joseph and O Jacob, I can't wait until you become like your son Joseph who when everything was seemingly going against him, realized that God was with him, whether it was Potiphar's house, the pit or prison. Joseph never read the love of God through the circumstances. He believed the love of God and the presence of God would take him through those circumstances and in fact God was using them in his life.

My dear friends, I know a job loss, loss of a loved one, a sickness or other things, hurt deeply and they strike deeply and by no means is this text calling you and me to cavalierly say 'they died but that's God's plan.' No, that's not what it's telling us. It is calling us to understand that even in a broken world your God is at work in ways that you cannot see and most of all God is at work in you. That's the good. As soon as I use the doctrine of divine providence from Romans 8:28 which says [28] *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose*, we immediately remember a time that we saw God working in something and I understand when that happens. What is more glorious is what is happening in us. There is the real good. It's not that we keep seeing God work in our circumstances but what is He doing in you, that is the real good.

Here is an example. A couple of weeks ago we took a team of people over to Scotland to do an Embers to a Flame conference. As we were on our way over there we sat for almost two hours at our airport because of a weather delay. Pastor Cheely went up to a flight attendant to explain how we needed to catch or connecting flights to get over to Scotland by a certain time and the attendant said 'oh all the connections will be fine so no need to worry about that.' We sat down with no worries and as we got to the next gate we saw them close the ramp and the plane began to pull out. We started waving at the pilots who started waving back at us saying "Can't you stop we have six people and we're on a mission!" I had an initial read of the circumstances at the time that wasn't going too well then.

I started feeling some angst and my son reminded me how we had been looking at the life of Joseph and how God is still working. So we all went to sit down and figure the best way to handle this. Sure enough we got on another plane with only about six extra hours of traveling time but now instead of getting my beloved window sitting next to my wife I'm now in the middle of the middle section, the place I most despise in an airplane. Thankfully my wife is on one side of me but I have no idea who'll be on the other side. It probably would be a six foot eight man that was 320 pounds but thankfully it was a lady who sat there. I started opening my books and Bible for reading and as I read through John Blanchard's book Has Science Got Rid of God, I could feel her attention on me.

I could sense she was going to say something and I wasn't going to start it but I was going to let her say something first. She said "That subject your reading is my problem." I said "What is that?" She said "I'm a scientist. I want to believe in God but I can't because I'm a scientist and I can't believe stuff in the Bible." I said "I'm not a scientist but I love science. I actually believe that's the only reason you can do science because of God." I found out she was a scientist that just finished her work on the Genome project and we spent the next two hours talking and sharing. I began to answer her questions and the conversation began to shift. I wish I could tell you was converted but she wasn't but I did get her hooked up with a man in our church who is an elder and scientist and she knew his name. He was going to work with her and then I gave her Tim Keller's book The Reason For God and we're continuing to correspond back and forth.

I would have never had this divine appointment without missing that next plane. The bigger deal with that was not that I was able to plant the seed of the Gospel and see God doing a lot more in us missing that next plane but God was doing something in me. There was the good. He was working in my heart. He is always doing more than the initial read of the circumstances tell you and you need to see it through the eyes of the Lord, even in the difficult times.

One of my favorite hymns is God Moves in a Mysterious Way. It says;

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He (to you) will make it plain.*

The second thing I want to point out is this. We get to see a true prayer of faith. The Bible calls us to pray believingly. What does believing faith look like? The prayer of Jacob is Genesis 43:14 which says [14] *May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.* Bless this trip, this event, my children, this act and bring back my children, Simeon and Benjamin. The prayer of faith is not a leverage tool in our hands to make God do what we think ought to be done. The prayer of faith is to call upon God, to reason with God, to bring to God all of our heart, desires and all that

we see. As we bring it to Him our God almighty is our Father and then we rest in Him and His answer.

It is what Jesus did in the garden when He said “If there be any way let this cup pass from Me, yet not My will be done, but Thy will be done.” It was done by Job with all of his friends. As they are reasoning through why all this is happening to Job, his sickness and losses and then they get to the end and Job utters the prayer of faith. Job says “Though He slay me yet will I serve Him.” It was in the lips of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when Nebuchadnezzar raised the idol and then men tried their best to connect to that society and bore witness, with good patriotism at work even in a pagan society but they would not bow down to the pagan idol. They get reported and were sentenced to death by the king who said “Who will deliver you from my hand?” They said “Hear this O King, whether He delivers us through the fire or from the fire we know not but this we know O king is that our God will deliver us and we will not bow down to your idol.”

When we call upon God knowing that God’s providence works with the prayers of His people God moves in concert with His people and His people, their prayer and His providence are tied together yet part of our prayer of faith is not only coming to the Almighty who alone to whom we can turn, but it also means we rest in Him because when we ask Him for an egg He will not give us a snake, when we ask Him for bread He will not give us a stone but sometimes when we think we’re asking for eggs and bread, we are really asking for snakes and stones. Our God knows it and knows how to answer us. So God we rest in You. That’s the prayer of faith. The prayer of faith is not a leverage tool to rewrite the course of history around my desires or my read of life. The prayer of faith is to bring all before my God and then rest in Him. If I am bereaved then I am bereaved. I rest in You.

Finally, the last practical aspect is that you and I will never surrender to God’s providence with a prayer of faith unless we surrender our idols. Jacob is evidencing the work of grace for now in the text he is again called Israel which was his name given at his conversion. No longer is he Jacob with the eyes of fear but now Jacob prays with faith, trusting the Almighty and resting in Him. You might be thinking that he is doing this because the situation shows that he can’t do much else but pray to the Lord. Oh, well have you and I never been there? Praise the Lord that Jacob did turn to the Lord. Praise the Lord that He orchestrated the situations that were necessary to bring him to the Lord. When that prayer of faith comes Jacob finally gives Benjamin and Simeon to Him for no longer is there the idolatry of Benjamin. I now surrender all. I hold nothing back. My life is not my children or my marriage or my job. I surrender all. I not only surrender the idols of death in this world but I surrender the tendencies as Calvin says, ‘in my perpetual idol making heart, I surrender my tendency to make even Your good gifts an idol in my life.’ I surrender Benjamin, Simeon and myself. If I’m bereaved I’m bereaved. I surrender.

Dear friends, one last thought. I would be remiss if I didn’t do this. As we get to see how God’s grace in Jesus works in our lives, we keep getting a little peak to Jesus. Here we see Judah and who is going to come from Judah? We will get to see Jesus. Judah says “Father, I’ll go and I pledge my life, I offer my life. Your sons I will bring back in my hands.” Little did Judah know that he was just barely opening up a picture of One who would come from him who would say to His Father, “All whom You have

given Me, I lose not one.” If this God gives His Son and you are in His hands and nothing can pluck you out of His hands, He has given Himself as a pledge and a surety, then we can know our God is working far beyond all that we see or read for our God is working all things together for our good in our heart and around us, not that the things are good but that He is orchestrating them in such a way that He is doing something in our life, making us what He has called us to be. He is raising us through us a testimony but don't read life through the eyes of fear and call it reality. Read it through the promises of God. They are 'yes' and 'amen' in the One who gave Himself as a pledge, Jesus Christ, Amen. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the privilege to be in this, Your Word. Father, give us not the reality of the world, but the reality of seeing things through the eyes of our God and what You are doing. Then O God, allow us to surrender, not only our idols but ourselves. If you haven't surrendered to Christ today I invite you to a Savior who has brought you to this moment this day, who has displayed before you the riches of the One died on a cross and gave Himself as a surety for you. Would you come to Him? Put your trust in Him by saying “Lord, I know I'm a sinner. My hope is not in myself and I come to Your pasture to feed from the Shepherd, Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord.” Those who have already committed their life to Christ, join me for a moment and surrender all idols and yourself. Trust the providence of God as the reality of your life in Christ. Jesus You gently and many times firmly call us into Your presence. We come, O Potter, mold us and teach us to see through the eyes of Your Word, for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.