

II. Crisis and the Christian in Biblical Perspective
“The Providences of Providence”
Genesis 50:15–21
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We are in Genesis 50 looking at a concluding statement in the life of one of my favorite characters to study in the Word of God and that's Joseph. This is our second study in the series crisis and the Christian in Biblical perspective. In this study we'll begin our case studies. This series will continue through this interim plan until we can get back to our regular plan of meeting face to face together. I thought this would be appropriate for where people's hearts and minds are during this corona virus pandemic and look at how Christians approach crisis. I realized all the case studies in the Bible that would help Christians know how to look at crisis. So I want to take one snippet out of the life of Joseph at the end of the book of Genesis.

Genesis 50:15–21 says [15] *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."* [16] *So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: [17] '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. [18] *His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."* [19] *But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? [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. [21] So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."* Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

The grass withers, the flower fades but the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it now be preached for you.

This corona crisis happening right now is a crisis in the world and we need to know how a Christian should respond to this crisis. I will be using various times in history to show how Christians have responded in crisis and I will center that on particular characters from the Word of God who existed in the midst of crisis and how they handled it. Yet this is not new for believers. Unfortunately we live in a culture that does not value history and for many it's just 'can I remember what I had for breakfast this morning?' There is a lot more to history than that.

We mentioned in the last study how Calvin dealt with the pastors in Geneva to deal with the three plagues happening during his lifetime and how Martin Luther equipped pastors who wrote to him telling them how to deal with crisis, particularly the plagues/viruses that decimated the world during his ministry in the 16th century and modeled for them how he was doing it. I also mentioned Richard Allen who bought himself freedom from slavery and established a church where in 1793 when many fled due to the yellow fever virus they stayed to help minister and gave nursing care even to the prisoners in the area. The 10 minute program I do called Today in Perspective I will deal with how in the Cyprian and Antonina plagues of the 2nd and 3rd century the church of Christ grew 40 percent in that decade. It was amazing what happened as they ministered to the people who were thrown out into the streets.

So what do we do in this present distress? First of all we realize the doctrine of God's providence and that God is sovereign. God is at work. We know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28) so I'd

like to say what this verse isn't saying. I hear people say a lot 'Be patient for things are going to work out.' News flash – things don't work out for things have no power to work out, but a believer has a promise from God that is infallible and reliable. It is not that things that are at work are good but that God is at work through things for our good, even though the things themselves might not be good.

So because of the providence of God we know as believers that in this time we have an opportunity to grow as believers and in the church. When crisis comes that's a test and tests are valuable before the Lord because they tell you what you know, what you don't know and what you need to know by the grace of God. This is a time of growth in a framing, molding, forming dynamics that happen in a moment of crisis which is a test.

Secondly, it becomes an opportunity for us to display the Gospel in word and deed. I have already seen how God's people this week have found out a need of an elderly person who is shut in and they were there proper social distancing to meet their needs. We can also minister through technology and with proper precautions take care of one another. My wife and I were able to get a medical instrument to people that needed it and didn't have this past week. We were able to pray with them, encourage them and share the Gospel with them as we did so which is what we do for one another especially during these times.

Thirdly, it gives us a chance to observe and participate in God's providence. As we take a look at the life of Joseph in this study, God's providence is never singular for His providence is multiple. This applies to the crisis we are facing right now in a world. God is multi-tasking. He is working in people, through events and in all kinds of situations. I know this because of what the Bible says and by looking at the life of Joseph.

When I teach on God's providence I like to bring out how we learn to trust the Lord and not tempt the Lord, to be prudent but don't panic, and how to be fearless because we're faithful. In other words, God's Word and God's Spirit is building up our faith and as our faith is built up there is a corresponding diminishing of fear. If you let your fears run rampant there will be a diminishing of your faith. Joseph becomes a great example of this. Not only is God's providence multiple in Joseph's life but his life had multiple crisis – a personal crisis, a family crisis, a nation's crisis and a global crisis of the whole known world in his time.

I have a top 5 of character studies of the Bible and they are of Joseph, Enoch, Nehemiah, Joshua and Daniel. All of these men faced significant crisis. So during what we are dealing with now you may hear more about these people in future studies. In this study we'll concentrate on Joseph and his life starts in Genesis 37 going all the way through Genesis 50. We pick him up at age 17 and his father's eleventh son. He is also his father's favorite son which shouldn't surprise us that Jacob had a favorite because Jacob was raised by two parents who had favorite sons. It's interesting how we parent how we were parented in our homes so many times.

Early on we find out Joseph goes out to check on and work with his brothers then goes back to report to his father what they were doing. We call that a tattletale and the eleven brothers are now upset with him. Joseph's father then makes a colorful coat from him that obviously shows his favoritism for his son. Joseph would get dreams and one day he tells his brothers about a dream where he was a sheaf standing straight up while 11 other sheaves bowed down to him. His brothers didn't need Divine intervention for that interpretation. It's amazing how God gives certain insight to people yet they don't know when to share it or how to share and Joseph is a prime example of this. He ends up telling them another dream he had where not only the stars bow down to him but also the sun and the moon and his father Jacob says 'Are you saying your mother and father plus your brothers are going to bow down to you?' And the text

says the brothers hated him all the more (Genesis 37:5) but his father kept these things in his mind (Genesis 37:11).

Then his father send Joseph out to find the brothers and the brothers have had enough of Joseph so they put him in a pit and sell him into slavery. They probably would have killed him if it wasn't for his brother Rueben's intervention. Joseph is bought by this man who was likely the captain of the imperial guard of Pharaoh, named Potiphar. Very soon after Joseph rises right to the top. It was revealed earlier in Scripture that Joseph was handsome in appearance and now that is about to get him in trouble as Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce him. He gives her five reasons why he can't do anything with her yet when she gets his robe she concocts a story that he has tried to take advantage of her and Potiphar to some degree believes her and puts Joseph into jail.

In jail Joseph has two cell mates – one being a baker for Pharaoh and the other a cup bearer for Pharaoh. Another crisis is about to happen after we have seen a family crisis, a personal crisis and a crisis of Joseph's employment. He interprets dreams these two cell mates have which means death for the baker and restoration for the cup bearer. Joseph says to the cup bearer 'When you are restored remember me to Pharaoh and see if you can get me out of this situation.' When the cup bearer is restored he doesn't remember Joseph so the crisis of disappointment as Joseph stays in prison, but Joseph is a good steward in prison and becomes over the prison as the prison keeper finds a man he can trust.

Then Pharaoh has a dream that nobody can interpret or nobody wants to interpret for him. The cup bearer who sits next to him realizes that Joseph who is still in prison could interpret dreams. So Joseph is called and he interprets Pharaoh's dream as there will be seven years of fullness and seven years of famine that is coming to the land so Joseph gives Pharaoh a plan as to how to handle it and Pharaoh says the 'Spirit of God is on this man.' Joseph then becomes perhaps what we would call the Prime Minister of Egypt for Joseph becomes second in command and the only one above him is Pharaoh.

Then comes the days of plenty where they garner and store food followed by the seven years of famine which strikes the whole global world. But Joseph has a policy in place in which Egypt is protected and becomes a resource for others to come. Who comes, but his brothers sent by his father and Joseph is unnoticed or unrecognized by them but he knows his brothers. This back and forth situation happens between Joseph and his brothers where Simeon is kept until they bring back Benjamin and the father Jacob returns. They come in for the meal with Joseph and Joseph ultimately reveals himself. Now we get to this final scene in Genesis where Jacob has died.

The brothers are concerned about what Joseph would do to them given what they have done to him. Then we see from the text for this study that the brothers get word to Joseph about being forgiven for what they did to him and somehow they get in front of Joseph and bow down before him telling him they are his servants. What does Joseph say? He says 'Am I in the place of God? I am not the one to bring judgment or justice for I'm going to give forgiveness because God is greater than the evil you did to me. You meant it for evil but God meant it for good.' Joseph handles a crisis with equanimity because he has a big God. God is a lot bigger than the crisis. God is bigger than Joseph. His God is sovereign and at work.

God is not only working with Divine providence but with multiple providences. This is how I want to close this study with you. Here is the takeaway for this study. God's providence in moments of crisis is seldom singular in purpose or effect but is better understood as His providences of plurality in people, events and purpose. He is not only working in your life, on

your life, to your life but He is working through your life. He wasn't just working in the midst of Joseph but He was working in Joseph, to Joseph and through Joseph to many others for many reasons.

God has multiple purposes for how He is using the sovereign hand of God in the lives of multiple people. God was working in Jacob's life and one of the reasons I love Joseph is I'm challenged by him in amazement. He gets thrown in a pit and he ends up becoming the best slave Potiphar ever had. Joseph is absolutely trustworthy. Joseph is convicted in a kangaroo court, thrown into prison and instead of going to a corner in self-pity he begins to minister to two of the prisoners. He is abandoned when someone promises to remember him in prison and he ends up rising to the top of the prison becoming the trustee of the prison in control of everything, reporting to the warden. He is finally remembered and becomes prime minister in Pharaoh's house of all of Egypt. In this position he brings thoughtful, wise, public policy to not only benefit Egypt but benefit the surrounding nations, his brothers and the burgeoning nation of Israel, a covenant nation with the Lord.

Joseph didn't start off that way. Joseph was handsome, loved by his father and ended up being hated by his brothers, why? It was wrong for his brothers to hate him but it was wrong for Joseph to share his dreams with his brothers in a manner that was self-serving. He doesn't even consider his brothers. Joseph is at best immature. When God reveals something to us in His Word He expects us to use it in love – truth in love. Yet when the brothers come to Joseph for food it will say in Genesis three times that they bowed to him. The old Joseph might have said 'Do you all remember those dreams I had?' Yet Joseph doesn't even reference it and as they bow on those occasions it causes Joseph to weep each time for where they are and where he is.

God not only works in Joseph but through Joseph. Joseph is not used in the providences to deal with his father Jacob. Jacob was a man who had parented with favoritism for after Joseph was gone he picked Benjamin as his favorite, even naming him 'my life, my right hand' but at the end of his life he ends up blessing all the brothers. In the midst of all of this Jacob is brought to a proper view of all of his sons and not just his favorites.

God is also at work in the lives of the brothers. These brothers got mad at Joseph because he was the favorite and they hated him for this and the dreams he told them. When Benjamin is the favorite and they go to see Joseph in which he invites them for a meal they are sat down according to their age. They had to have wondered about that, thinking what the chances of that happening were. Joseph is starting to gain their attention but he is not through for he puts five times as much food on Benjamin's plate showing favoritism. What will the brothers do now? They do nothing for no longer are they jealous or envious. Right now in this providence God is working on your life. God is working on our church but God is not just working on us for us but God is working to us to work in others through us. His providences are multiple.

God's providences are also working on multiple events. In Genesis 15 it is revealed to Abraham that God has a covenant with him that he will have a seed which is Isaac and his descendants will be like the sands of the seashore or the stars of the sky. Abraham has a dream and is disturbed and God tells him why. His offspring, this nation that God will bless other nations through, will not only be established to bring the Seed (Christ) but God will put his people in a nation where they will be in bondage for 430 years.

How do they get there? God puts Joseph in the land of Egypt. Then God brings the famines. The famines brought the brothers. Then the brothers end up staying with Joseph and the next 400 years God's nation will be matured, multiplied and mobilized and then be brought

back to the Promised Land. They will remove the Canaanites when their iniquity is full. Then will come a Seed through that nation where God will bless all the nations of the earth. God is multi-tasking not only in the people in this providence and crisis with Joseph but also through the events.

In the midst of God establishing His covenant nation, there are nations starving all around the Mediterranean and God is feeding them. God's providences are not only providing the line of redemption in redeeming grace but God's providences are reaching out to the lost with common grace as He provides food for them. So it is in every crisis where God's providences will work His redeeming power to save, sanctify and send His people but also in His common grace He restrains the effects of sin and that common grace is a call to repentance and to flee to Christ. God's providence is seen in providences.

There we see multiple purposes. Joseph is matured. The brothers receive the redeeming work of grace. Jacob is matured. A witness is put in Egypt. The blessings are put to the nations around them but within those purposes is the development of Joseph's personal life. Instead of an immature young man he is now so mature that a pagan emperor who is probably the most powerful man in the whole world looks at Joseph in amazement, trusts him with everything and says 'the Spirit of God is on this man.' In Joseph we have a pattern for Christ. I wish I had time to show you how his life is a pattern for Christ but I don't.

In this occasion we see one of his brothers, Judah, who the Lord works through. Genesis 43:2-6 says [2] *So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food."* [3] *But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'* [4] *If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. [5] But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'"* [6] *Israel asked, "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?"* Then Judah says in Genesis 43:9, [9] *I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life.* Judah basically says I will give my life in return for Benjamin's.

It is the Seed of Judah who gives Himself for us who is Christ the Lord. The purposes are so glorious not only in personal lives in the pattern of life set by Joseph, the anticipation of a Redeemer through the tribe of Judah, the establishment of a nation that God is going to bring to the Promised Land and then bring a glorious work of grace into our lives. There are so many places in the Bible we see event after event through the lenses of God's providence and the providences that come.

Stephen was the greatest apologist in the early church and Scripture says they couldn't stop him or confound him by the way that he proclaimed. I am deeply appreciative of the insights of Dr. Sinclair Ferguson on this. When I think of God's providence there are four illustrations that immediately come to mind. One illustration has to do with my wife's needle point. Whenever she would work on a needlepoint and I could only see the back side of it I couldn't tell what picture she was doing and she would turn it around and let me see the picture. The back side was a jumbled mess of multi-colored threads but I could tell something was going on. The front side showed a beautiful picture and that is exactly what God does with His providence. For us, we're on the back side and it looks jumbled as we think 'how is the Lord doing anything in this?' That's where you know how great your God is because every once in a

while He will flip it around and let you see a little bit of what He is doing. And when you get to heaven you will really get to see its beauty unhindered.

Sometimes I like to think of God's providence as the game that my sister and I would play in the back seat as we would travel. It was called connect the dots. You would ask a question, get to put a dot and then connect to another dot and so on. I used to beat my sister all the time until she reached 8 years of age and then she would beat me all the time. Do you see the dots God is connecting here? We see a jumbled mess yet we get to see a little bit of the picture, the tapestry, the needlepoint.

Another illustration of God's providence is from crossword puzzles. I love to work crossword puzzles for it gets me through an airplane trip, especially the New York Times puzzles which are usually very challenging. When I do them I start with all the easy ones just to get something filled in to work from. The easy way to look at God's providence is that He's sovereign. Nothing out there is arbitrary for God is always doing something. We are not accidents. We are not in a series of what is going to happen next for this is the hand of God at work.

I love the way Tolkien and Lewis put it. They see God's providences unfolding in the midst of catastrophes but because it's God's providence they are really not catastrophes, they are eucatastrophes where 'eu' stands for good. So they were good catastrophes.

The four illustration of God's providence I see in a jig saw puzzle. We would always do jig saw puzzles on family vacations. The way I would do jig saw puzzles is I would first find the four corner pieces and then I would look for every straight edge piece and get the puzzle framed. Thirdly, I would look at the picture on the box to see what it looked like. The problem is on this side of eternity we don't have the picture. God's got it and now you're trusting Him. He is using you to accomplish that picture. Go ahead and put the corner pieces in – good theology. Understand God's providence and its multiple purposes and watch what God is doing.

Stephen was a great preacher who gets killed and some would think 'God, with Your burgeoning church how could You allow Stephen to get stoned?' Guess who was standing there in the crowd as Stephen was stoned and God uses this to begin His work of conversion in the life of Paul who was Saul at the time. Paul will take the Gospel throughout the world. Paul gets to Philippi and faces false judgment, gets thrown into jail, then God delivers them and prisoners get converted. How do I know this? Something happened to those prisoners because when gates fall out every prisoner I know would have left but these all stayed. Then the Philippian jailer says 'What must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16). God gives Paul a Philippian jailer, his family, a delivered teenage girl who had been possessed by a demon, and a wise business woman named Lydia which becomes a church plant in Philippi because of a crisis of a false imprisonment. That's what God was doing to Paul through Paul to many others through multiple providences.

The greatest one for me, is there a greater crisis or catastrophe than sinful men putting the Son of God on the cross? But it was there that salvation was secured. It was there a dying thief was converted. It was there that the Godly women were established. It is there that John was commissioned. It was from there Jesus went to a tomb and rose again. Because He is risen and lives you and I can live. Know this Savior in your life today.

I'm not simply preaching this for you to cope with a crisis, but I want you to know the God of glory who is sovereign who can save you from your sins and then send you to the crisis with the full knowledge that the providence of God has multiple providences in this for God is doing something in me, to me, through me, in many people, with many events and many purposes are being accomplished for His glory. Therefore I'll trust Him but not tempt Him. I'll

live with prudence but I will not panic. I will live fearlessly because of His faithfulness and I will serve Him with anticipation. God, what are You doing for Your glory and our good? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for the blessings of the Gospel of saving grace in Christ. God would You now work in the hearts of many? Take a few moments in silent prayer right now. Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? This is not coping mechanisms for this is the God of glory who will save you from your sins and that ultimate judgment and catastrophe for those who don't know Christ at the Day of Judgment. This is your day of salvation. I invite you to Him who not only works all things for the good of His people and secures all things for His glory but can secure you today with forgiveness. My dear brothers and sisters lift up your prayers. God, help us live sensibly, righteously and Godly in this present distress because of our confidence in You. God, every once in a while will You turn the tapestry so people can see something You're doing and be encouraged? In the meantime, help them have their vision fixed on Jesus who's providence is not simply singular but multiple. Then Father, do Your work in us, to us and through us that many might see and hear Christ in these moments, in this day, in this present distress. Do great works God and help us be ready for any event and accomplish Your purposes and in that we will rejoice. Lord, we will rejoice in all things for You are at work in all things for our good and for Your glory, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

The Amazing Moment

Life Takeaway

God's providence in moments of crisis is seldom singular in purpose or effect, but is better understood as His Providences of plurality...

- People
- Events
- Purposes