

God's Good Purpose

Genesis 45:1-28

There is a lesson I often learn through the experiences of life week by week, especially the difficult weeks. It is a lesson I already know, I learned it a long time ago, but it is something I learn again, time and time again. It is a valuable lesson, a necessary lesson in terms of living out what it means to have faith in God. And in simple terms, that lesson is this—God is in control of everything. Every circumstance. Every event. Every person. God's good purpose will be accomplished. And in the midst of every circumstance and situation of life, for me and for you, in the midst of every week of every month, there is incredible encouragement and strength in that assurance. I don't mean those words lightly or flippantly, nor in any sense to disregard the real pain and struggles of life. Rather, that lesson is the source of great strength hope, even in those difficult days. Always.

So, this morning, we'll study God's good purpose. And in God's providence, according to his good purpose, we come to a passage in Scripture that perhaps, more than any other, demonstrates the goodness of what God does. It's one thing to say that God is sovereign. And he is. He can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, wherever he wants, as long as he wants. He answers to no one. He is God.

It's one thing to talk about the doctrine of election and predestination, about the doctrine of providence, that God governs all his creatures and all their actions. And he does. But when you think about those doctrines, you must also think about the doctrine of God's goodness. How horrible it would be if the sovereign God wasn't a good God! How horrible it would be if the God who could do whatever he wanted wasn't governed by his own intrinsic and essential goodness!

That goodness jumps out at us in Genesis 45. Joseph and his brothers are reunited.

v.1-8

Notice what Joseph says about everything that has happened. God did it.

v.5 "God sent me before you..."

v.7 "God sent me before you..."

v.8 "It is not you who sent me here, but God."

Do you get the point? It's not hard to see, is it? Joseph attributes everything that happened to God! God did it. And his point is that since God did it, it was good! Indeed, as we know from the clear meaning of,

Rom. 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

I. GOD'S PURPOSE IS TO WORK ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR GOOD.

Remember what happened to Joseph. He was sold into slavery, almost killed. He spent thirteen years in prison. All because his brothers were jealous of him. He could have become bitter toward them. Or vindictive. At the very least, he could have lost the passion of his brotherly love for them. But none of that happened. This is such a joyous reunion.

v.1-2

Joseph draws his brothers close to him.

v.4

Joseph is the one who encourages and comforts his brothers! He tells them not to be distressed or even angry with themselves.

To say that he forgave them is a dramatic understatement. He actually speaks of the good that came of what happened, good that came as a consequence of their evil done to him. Specifically, he tells his brothers that,

A. God sent Joseph to Egypt to save lives.

v.5-6

Don't be distressed, or grieved, he tells them. That grief would have been a proper response, the grief of repentance. There should be grief when we are confronted with the reality of our sin. But Joseph puts that away. The sin is covered, done away with.

Don't be angry with yourselves, either, Joseph says. Don't think about any hatred or indignation you might have with yourselves because of the wickedness of your sins. Why? Because God was in control to work all things together for good.

Now, remember something. Remember that Joseph had put his brothers to the test to bring them to repentance. The sin was not just ignored or passed over. It was not treated lightly. Joseph tested his brothers by sending them back to Egypt to bring Benjamin, and he tested them by accusing Benjamin of stealing the silver cup. They passed the test. Not only was there genuine repentance, but those tests proved that the sin of their heart was gone. The jealousy of the heart was gone.

So Joseph puts them at ease. He grants them peace. With such genuine repentance and with such obvious sanctification, all that is left to see from the past is that God was working all things together for good. And humanly speaking, the highest good. The saving of lives, verse 5. And we know how that happened, verse 6.

But during those seven years of famine, there would not be death in Egypt because God had sent Joseph into Egypt with an interpretation to Pharaoh's dream. And because of that, Pharaoh made Joseph his overseer to ensure that adequate food and supplies were gathered during the previous seven years of plenty.

Because Joseph's brothers sold Joseph into slavery, God would save the lives of the Egyptians and of others throughout the whole earth, including the family and nation of Israel! Amazing, isn't it? We need to stop and think about it, and reflect upon the past many chapters of Genesis. God sent Joseph to Egypt to save lives.

But there was an even higher good in God's purpose. Not merely saving life physically, but saving life spiritually. Indeed, God's greatest purpose in sending Joseph and the other sons of Israel into Egypt was to save them. To deliver them.

v.7

That deliverance would be accomplished under the leadership of Moses, and we call it the Exodus. The Exodus of Israel from Egypt was a deliverance. It was a redemption. It was a salvation. They were saved from slavery. They were delivered, redeemed, from slavery. And that deliverance of the Exodus is the primary OT event which foreshadows and symbolizes the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ. For salvation in Jesus Christ is also a deliverance from slavery. The message is as clear as can be.

B. God sent Joseph to Egypt to deliver his people out of slavery.

v.7

From the time of that deliverance on, God would identify himself as he did giving the law at Mt. Sinai, Exod. 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of

the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

So Joseph tells his brothers, God did it. God sent me into Egypt.
v.8

Joseph makes the same point again after his father’s death, saying to his brothers in,

Gen. 50:19 Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”

I hope this is as clear and as encouraging to you as it is to me. God is in control of everything that happens, even the sinful acts of men. Everything in life comes about “according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.” And the purpose of his will is GOOD.

Rom.8:28 “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

Illus: Understanding that verse was a life-changing experience for me. And it continues to be a life-changing experience, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. Especially in the midst of difficult circumstances. This is not an easy answer to difficult problems. This is not a simplistic, uncompassionate response to the great struggles that we all experience. Instead, it is the context in which we experience those great struggles. God’s good purpose, shown through the life of Joseph, is to work all things together for good.

But lets go even deeper. It gets even better. Even better than just saying God is working all things together for good. How can it

be better than that? Well, I’ll use another NT verse written by the Apostle Paul to explain how. The verse is Eph.3:20. In that verse of praise, in that doxology or benediction, Paul describes God as,
Eph. 3:20 “...Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”

II. GOD’S PURPOSE IS TO ACCOMPLISH IMMEASURABLY MORE THAN ALL WE ASK OR IMAGINE.

The idea goes something like this. God is able to do whatever we ask. And that is absolutely incredible. That is the encouragement we have to pray. “Ask and it will be given to you.” But Ephesians 3:20 says more than simply that God is able to do whatever we ask. He is able to do above that all we ask. More than what we ask for.

But there’s more. Paul says that God is able to do ABUNDANTLY more than whatever we ask, Immeasurably more. You can’t even define what God can do. You can’t put any limits upon it. No restrictions. No boundaries. Nothing. Whatever it is that you ask for, however bold you might think your requests, God can do immeasurably more. Exceedingly abundantly.

And the final step of Ephesians 3:20, God can do immeasurably more than all you ask for or even think. In other words, you can’t even imagine what God can do. In your wildest dreams, you can’t even comprehend what God is capable of doing.

Surely that fits our current context of Genesis 45. Remember, Jacob is home alone, with no children left, likely preparing himself for the grief of losing Benjamin now in addition to the loss of Joseph. And what do his sons hear from Joseph?

v.9-11

Specifically, we see that,

A. God would provide for the family of Jacob with incredible abundance.

v.9-13

And in fact, when Pharaoh heard about Joseph's family, he, too, of his own choice, issued the very same offer. Jacob the Israelite, with all the sons of Israel, would be provided in rich abundance by the Pharaoh of Egypt.

For Jacob and his sons, surely that was immeasurably more than all they could ask for imagine!

v.16-24

To say it again with appropriate emphasis, this is absolutely incredible! This ought to be a great encouragement when you pray, not just praying for little things, as we might judge them. But pray for big things, too. Pray for the church, that we would have a great impact upon this community. Pray for the church as a whole, that we would have a great impact upon our community, and upon this whole country. Pray for this country! Pray for the kingdom of Christ around the world, for the work of the kingdom.

Pray for God to change someone's heart! Pray for God to put to death the sin that is in your heart, so that your life will actually change. God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."

I understand God doesn't always do those things we ask, but not for a lack of power. He will often determine not to give that for which we ask, ultimately for his own good purpose, but not because he can't. Not because he is unable, for what a despairing practice it would be to pray to such a powerless God.

For our encouragement, we know that there is not limit to what God is able to do.

And so, not only would the sons of Israel have incredible abundance, but we see also that,

B. God would restore the family of Jacob with incredible joyfulness.

v.14-15

Don't miss that. Don't miss the personal element. The element of joy. The emotion. The depth of personal connection. Remember the contrast. Jacob had, in good faith, resigned himself to the possibility of losing Benjamin. He had no choice but to let him go, but he did so with a heavy heart.

Gen. 43:11 And their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this...13 Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man. 14 And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"

But now there was the joy of uncontrollably weeping, the joyful cries of a family reunited. Incredible joyfulness. That's what God does. That's God's good purpose. To do what's good. To do more than we can even think or imagine. Exceedingly abundantly more.

That is who God is. This is what he is like. This is he whom I preach to you today. This is he whom you are here to worship and praise. Worship him, God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth. And as that verse I keep reading continues,

Eph. 3:20 "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus

to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

But let me go one step deeper, if I dare. Not only does God work all things together for good, as great as that is. We could stop there and be entirely satisfied. But there was more. God does immeasurably more than we can imagine. But not only that. It is personal.

III. GOD’S PURPOSE IS TO SATISFY THE DEEPEST DESIRES OF OUR HEARTS.

God’s good purpose is actually focused upon the desires of our hearts. So the Psalmist declares,

Ps. 37:4 “Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.”

Now, I want to be very careful, and not present God to you as a celestial slot machine, encouraging you to put your money in the slot and to pull the lever back looking for your payback. God is not a gum-ball machine, where you put in your quarter and automatically take out your piece of gum. God is not a God who honors selfishness and greed, though many people have demonstrated such horrible sins in his name. Nor is he a God who gives us everything we want or ask, even very good and appropriate things. But still, it remains that God’s purpose is to satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts. That is, the hearts of those made pure.

Even with that, let me state that as a proverb, not as an absolute law. There will be exceptions, and God includes the experiences of sorrow and trouble in the context of what he works for our good, even as he has done all these years for Jacob and his children, but those exceptions don’t cancel the principle. And the general principle is that God will give you what your heart desires, as you express that desire to God with a ultimate desire

for his glory.

Jacob deepest desires certainly focused upon his beloved son Joseph.

v.26-28

It is obvious from that, that,

A. God’s blessings can be a stunning shock.

v.26 “Jacob’s heart stood still.”

Literally, his heart grew numb. He couldn’t feel anything. It was too good to be true, and I say that not to demonstrate a lack of faith, but rather to illustrate how something so incredibly good can actually stop us cold. God can be stunning in pouring out the riches of his blessings.

Sometimes, we remember and focus too much upon the trials and the troubles that are so inevitable in this world, in this age. God’s blessings can be so rich, and so marvelous, so glorious, that when they come to, your heart would stand still! Chief among those blessings is your redemption, so no matter how long you have been a Christian, no matter how long you have known and loved the Lord, that that greatest act of God’s goodness cause this sort of stunning shock, such as we often sing, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”

And if you would, pray for God to pour out his blessings in a way that would cause that very reaction. For that shock would be the shock of genuine worship, for when God blesses you in such a way, you realize that you had no part in it. And that is when your praise is the most genuine.

Many of our answers to prayer, and I include myself in this,

many of our answers to prayer we really expect anyway. It's good to pray for people who are sick. It's good to pray for people who are traveling. But if you aren't careful, you have to admit that you really expect those things to happen anyway, don't you? So we are even very surprised, let alone stunned. But sometimes, sometimes when you are bold to pray for things that seem otherwise impossible, sometimes God will pour out his blessings that should cause your heart to stand still, in awe and delight at the work of God.

That's at least part of what it means to,
Ps. 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God."

The whole context,
Ps. 46:8 "Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. 10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! 11 The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge."

It is when God's blessings really shock us that the deepest effect comes upon our hearts. We see in Jacob that,

B. God's blessings can bring exhilarating satisfaction.
v.27-28

Those words, nor any words, could possibly communicate the fullness of Jacob's experience. Exhilarating satisfaction is how I have tried to express it. That's what God does in us! Exhilarating satisfaction, having experienced the goodness of the richness of the blessings of God.

Again, I don't want to imply that this means that all your

troubles should go away, and if they don't, then your faith must not be very strong. That's not the point I'm trying to make. Instead, perhaps in the midst of some of those troubles, I simply want to proclaim to you the goodness of God. And the richness of his blessings. In your own experiences, I want you to taste and to see that the Lord is good. I want you to be stunned by the shock of God's blessings, and to find your deepest satisfaction in them.

So I call you to worship by reading from,
Ps. 34:1 "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. 3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together. 4 I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears. 5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed. 6 This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them. 8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him! 9 Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. 10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing."