

"Am I in the Place of God?" The Joseph Story

Covenant Church
Sunday, February 24, 2019
Zack Phillips, Pastor

Gen. 45:1-15 (NRSV)

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me."

So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?"

But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me."

And they came closer.

He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here."

Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

I. Observations

1. Joseph suffers: Gen 37:18-36 (betrayed and sold by his brothers); 39:13-20 (falsely accused and imprisoned); 40:23 (chief cupbearer forgets Joseph);
2. Joseph has success: 39:2-6 (put in charge of Potiphar's house); 39:21-23 (put in charge of the prison); 41:38-45 (put in charge of the land of Egypt); 47:5-6 (allowed to settle his family in the best part of the land); 50:7-9 (given a very great company from Pharaoh to travel back to Canaan to bury his father)
3. Joseph changes: from spoiled, arrogant, idler tattletale (Gen 37:2-4, 5-11, 12-13) to a man of deep faithfulness (Gen 39:8-9 [refusing Potiphar's wife]), compassion, and faith (Gen 45:1-15; 50:19-20 [forgiving his brothers and seeing God's providence hand in his life])
4. Ultimately, Joseph is deeply faithful.

II. Words For Us

1. How not to read this story
2. Our God is in control of world history
3. Our God is a redeeming God
4. Our God is a mysterious God

Rom 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

The problem is: Why is *this* miracle granted, and *this* miracle withheld? Why does this child live and this child die? Why is one person cured and not another? Why is this prayer answered with a wonderful *Yes*, and other prayers with silence, or a *No*?

We don't understand the "no" answers, and probably we are not going to understand many of them in this life. But we will understand ultimately that the "no" always has a reason. When we say *No* to our children, we say *No* because there is a reason for saying *No*, a reason for their greater good. —Madeleine L'Engle¹

I plead with a God of Maybe, who may or may not let me collect more years. It is a God I love, and a God the breaks my heart. —Kate Bowler²

Rom 9:20-21 But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?

5. Our God is a "with us" God (but we need eyes to see) and can be "more" "with us" (if we are open to His ways)

The God who showed my great-grandfather Abraham the stars walks with us... The God of my fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is with us. When my brothers threw me into the pit, God was there, in the pit with me. When I ruled over Potiphar's household, God was there in my ruling. When I refused Potiphar's wife because I would not dishonour my master, God was there in my refusing. When I was in prison, God was there in my bondage. In my days of power, God is with me, guiding me.³

What would it mean for Christians to give up that little piece of the American Dream that says, "You are limitless?" Everything is not possible. The mighty Kingdom of God is not yet here. What if *rich* did not have to mean *wealthy*, and *whole* did not have to mean *healed*? What if being people of "the gospel" meant that we are simply people with good news? God is here. We are loved. It is enough.⁴

¹ Madeleine L'Engle, *Sold Into Egypt: Journeys Into Human Being* (vol. 3 of the *Genesis Trilogy*; New York: Convergent, 2017, orig. 1989): 192.

² Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Learned to Love* (New York: Random House, 2018): xv.

³ L'Engle, *Sold Into Egypt*, 220.

⁴ Bowler, *Everything Happens*, 21.

Oh, my brothers, because God is with us, how can I turn away from you without turning away from God?⁵

Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Learned to Love* (New York: Random House, 2018).

Madeleine L'Engle, *Sold Into Egypt: Journeys Into Human Being* (vol. 3 of the *Genesis Trilogy*; New York: Convergent, 2017, orig. 1989).

⁵ L'Engle, *Sold Into Egypt*, 221.