

Coincidence, or the Hand of God?

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

INTRO:

I don't know about you, but sometimes I wonder whether some things happen just by coincidence, or if they are something else. **Why do things happen the way that they do? Do they just happen, or is there some motivation behind the scenes?** I wonder if *something*, or *Someone* is at work behind the scenes. This is what we are going to think about this morning. *We are going to look at one of the most amazing stories in the Bible!* I realize that is saying a lot. The story of Joseph in Genesis will help us as we consider whether things happen by **Coincidence, or by the hand of God.**

It is not enough for Christians to think our lives are just the sum total of our **choices** or as just **luck** and **chance**. Behind the scenes, guiding and calling, God works to redeem our lives, to move us from the bad that we deserve to the good that God has in mind for us.

ME:

I read about an advertisement for a credit card that featured a set of human hands with a small globe in the center of the hands. There was a big headline over the picture:

"You have the whole world in your hands... MasterCard."

That's how we Americans like thinking of ourselves:

it's all up to us.

We've got the whole world in our hands. ***Yeah, right?!!***

I believe that God is at work behind the scenes. He is not like a puppeteer controlling us like a puppet show, but He is involved in our lives directing us in our desire to bring Him honor.

WE:

We all have experienced things that were just too perfect to be coincidence, haven't we? When we have, we may have asked "Was it God, or did it just happen?"

Let's pray together and see what God has for us in this part of Joseph's story about this . . .

GOD:

Genesis 45:3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I'm Joseph! Is my father really still alive?" His brothers couldn't respond because they were terrified before him.

4 Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me," and they moved closer. He said, "I'm your brother Joseph! The one you sold to Egypt. 5 Now, don't be upset and don't be angry with yourselves that you sold me here. Actually, God sent me before you to save lives. 6 We've already had two years of famine in the land, and there are five years left without planting or harvesting. 7 God sent me before you to make sure you'd survive and to rescue your lives in this amazing way. 8 You didn't send me here; it was God who made me a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and ruler of the whole land of Egypt.

9 "Hurry! Go back to your father. Tell him this is what your son Joseph says: 'God has made me master of all of Egypt. Come down to me. Don't delay. 10 You may live in the land of Goshen, so you will be near me, your children, your grandchildren, your flocks, your herds, and everyone with you. 11 I will support you

there, so you, your household, and everyone with you won't starve, since the famine will still last five years.'

15 He kissed all of his brothers and wept, embracing them. After that, his brothers were finally able to talk to him.

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It's tough for us to do justice to the Joseph story . . . without telling the whole story. We are focusing on one event in the story. If you think about it, Genesis 45 is a key episode in a story that fills up Genesis 37, 39 - 50. We're looking at the climax of this wonderfully told story. In this passage all of the tensions of the story are resolved, and now the significance of all the events leading up to this moment are being revealed.

Let's try to set this in the context of the larger story. The story of Joseph is a long, carefully developed story that has a definite plot from beginning to end. Many compare the story of Joseph to a modern novella. The saga shows interesting character and personality development, and human emotions. No surprise that Andrew Lloyd Webber transformed the story into the popular musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

By the end of the story a spoiled brat grows up into a generous, compassionate adult. The proud brothers who schemed against Joseph are now old men guiding an extended family through chaos. The murderous plot against Joseph and its aftermath are about to be resolved.

You may remember, the brothers were so jealous of Joseph that they planned to kill him and then thought better of it, instead sending him into slavery. Even in slavery little brother Joseph landed on his feet and prospered. He has even been elevated to the second highest office in Egypt.

There was a great famine and his brothers came to Egypt looking for food. *The tables are turned!* The plot takes an unexpected twist.

The story makes us wonder if there has been someone at work behind the scenes, some unmentioned force driving the story to this conclusion.

That's what the narrator wants us to think.

Most of our passage is a speech by Joseph, filled with emotion because of the family reunion. When Joseph reveals his true identity, the brothers are both confused and afraid. **Will this powerful man now seek revenge?**

Joseph will forgive his brothers. The story will move on, and the family will be saved through this act of forgiveness. Joseph gives us a theological explanation for his actions:

"God sent me before you to save lives...God sent me before you to make sure you survive."

The ultimate climax of the story becomes clearest in Genesis 50:20, **"You planned something bad for me, but God produced something good from it, in order to save the lives of many people, just as he's doing today."**

Behind these twists and turns in the story of a human family, divine purpose is being worked out. The purpose only becomes obvious at the very end. God works behind the scenes to bring about God's intention for God's family. And yet . . . human forgiveness also plays a role in moving God's plan forward.

There is no explicit command here in the story of Joseph. We are reading a story about a troubled family with a sad history. And yet surely the narrator

intends for us to read this as a story about God. Joseph is not presented as an example of moral virtue. He's presented as someone living by his wits, attempting to survive and thrive, but someone who actually lives as a part of a larger story of God's salvation of the world.

In this we have the opportunity to see ourselves and our history is in the same God working behind-the-scenes way.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Life is an opportunity to see God at work behind the scenes.

YOU:

How about your life? How about the twists and turns that you have made along the journey? Are you willing to be as imaginative and faithful as Joseph appears to be at the end of his life story?

Sometimes others meant it for bad, sometimes you were messing up on your own, but through it all God was meaning good, working to bring you home, even though you were wandering.

Here are your action steps for this week. These are ways you can begin to apply this to your life today:

- **Look for God.** Don't assume things are just happening. It may be tough to see God at first, but give Him time. Allow Him to reveal Himself to you through the good and bad things that happen in life.
- **Give God Honor.** Do like Joseph did. He could have said, "**Yeah boys, how do you like me know?**" They were kneeling before him just like he dreamed they would be! But he looked back on all the good that had happened since then. Up to and including them being

saved from the famine. That's wisdom. The wisdom of giving God the honor for transforming the bad to life saving good.

WE:

Imagine how that would change our view of the world . . . Imagine if we could see God at work converting evil to blessings. . . Imagine we had the wisdom to honor God at work behind the scenes . . .

CLOSE:

Now, Joseph doesn't look back on all that happened in his life and say, **"This was good."** It would've been wrong for him to say that about what his brothers did. Instead, Joseph said that God was busy meaning it for good, taking the bad that was produced by his brothers and moving it towards something good.

Let's pray for that kind of wisdom as God works behind the scenes...