



TEMPTATION UNDER TRIAL

Genesis 49:20 – 50:28 is a favorite passage of Scripture of mine. It details the death of Jacob and the return of his body to his homeland to be buried. The narrative begins to heighten after the funeral. *When Joseph's brother's saw that his father was dead, they said, 'What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back in full for all the wrong we did to him?'*

First they sent him a message they purported to be from their dead father to please forgive them.

Next they noticed that Joseph was crying when they told him this. They wondered, "What does this mean?"

Next they just decided that the best course of action was to fall down and cast themselves totally on his mercy: "PLEASE FORGIVE OUR TRANSGRESSION."

This is the part I love: Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? 'And as for you, you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to prepare many people alive. 'So therefore do not be afraid, I will provide for you and your little ones.'

A Key Question

When things don't go as we expect in our lives, how are we supposed to reconcile those things with the providence of God? Things happen in our life that we don't want, that we never wish for, that we certainly never pray for, and we long that they would go away! These things cause stress and pain, and make us cry out to God (or even worse, make us mad at God). "Why?" Life can be hard on some counts, it seems to be more difficult for Christians, because being a believer in Jesus Christ does not eradicate the possibility that things that are hard (or impossible) to understand do happen.

If you can read the story of Joseph and see the fingerprints of God on these closing chapters, I think you can begin to catch a glimpse into what William Cowper was trying to say when he wrote: "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform, He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. In deep and unfathomable minds of never failing skill, He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will." Consider if you will...

1. THE PERFECT WISDOM OF GOD IS MANIFESTED IN A VARIETY OF CIRCUMSTANCES

This is a truth that is declared for us three ways in the closing verses of the book of Genesis. It is seen in a variety of circumstances.

-At an early age, Joseph was looked upon by his brothers in a less than favorable light. He had "THE COAT." He was left in a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused of rape, and forgotten by his fellow inmates. Imagine that for a start of a career. He was in prison for 10 years. I doubt that he was planning how to make it to the top Forbes. Then, one day, he is summoned to the Pharaoh. Next thing he knew, he was the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Hindsight is 20/20. But three days before he was released from prison, do you think Joseph could have told you what God was up to in His life? What about when they came and got him from the prison area? Do you suppose he was reading "The Purpose Driven Life?"

You see, as Joseph grew older, I think, maturity and wisdom begin to replace quick judgment and premature guessing about God. Joseph is able to LOOK BACK and discerns what occurred in his life experiences what he never could have seen when he was in the midst of them. THE SAME THING IS TRUE FOR YOU AND ME.

One of the Puritans, John Flavel put it like this: "providence is like reading Hebrew. You read it backwards. And providence is best read backwards because it takes time." We do well when we internalize the truth that GOD IS NOT IN A HURRY. Sometimes it is years after a tragedy or disappointment before we begin to gain perspective on something that occurred in our life. Sometimes we may never understand the purpose. What is important, however, is for us to discern GOD'S HAND IN EVERYTHING IN OUR LIVES.

2. THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MANIFESTED IN A VARIETY OF PEOPLE

Genesis 32:46 is a record of Jacob speaking. The other brothers have come back to get Benjamin. Jacob says "You have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin? All these things are against me." As far as Jacob is concerned, he can see nothing good. Is that not also our tendency? To dwell on the bad? We ask the question, "WHY ME?" And so long as we ask that question, we are never going to get our eyes on God.

Look next in 50:20 again. Look at what Joseph was saying. He was looking not at himself but at others. "WHAT IS GOD DOING?" It is always something for more than

just YOU. So long as we make ourselves the center of the universe, we will never understand all God is doing

You remember the boy in John 9 who was born blind? There was a big discussion about who sinned and caused the boy's blind condition. Jesus said, "Neither. That the works of God may be manifest in him." Ask a narrow question, and you will have a narrow understanding.

I think one of the things God was doing in the life of Joseph was undoing the knots that were passed down to him by his father. He was untwisting a twisted man's life. Remember when the early Christians took up the body of Stephen after his martyrdom? Certainly they were asking the question, "Why?" Standing close by was at least part of the explanation. Saul of Tarsus. The death of Stephen affected Saul so much that PAUL became obsessed with the doctrine of the Union with Christ. Because when he heard the voice from heaven that said, "Why do you persecute Me?" the question was not, "Why do you persecute Stephen?" That truth shook Paul to the core.

3. **THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MANIFESTED IN A VARIETY OF PURPOSES**

The big picture in the book of Genesis asks the question, "How is the promise that God had given to Abraham going to be fulfilled?" At the very end we are given a little glimpse of it, when Jacob says, "I want to be buried, not in Egypt, I want to be buried in Canaan. I want to be buried in the Promised Land." It is as if Jacob was saying, I am still believing God in His promises." THAT IS THE BIG PICTURE.

There is also a little purpose to this unfolding which had to do with Joseph Himself. The first time we meet him he is 17 – a typical teenager who has a lot of growing up to do. Don't we all? What is one of the ultimate lessons God is growing us toward? *One of the best lessons we can learn in life is that the will of God is the most ultimate thing in the entire world.* I am not the most ultimate thing. My well-being or comfort zone is not the most ultimate thing. The most important thing in the world is the sovereign will of almighty God. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

CONCLUSION

Maybe you are thinking, "Yes, but look at Joseph. He ended up living in a palace with servants, power, prestige, and anything he wanted. Sure he had it tough, but look at him now." YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I AM GOING THROUGH. You are right. I don't. But there is one who does. Sometimes the only ground you have to stand on is the piece of ground where there stood a cross with the Son of God dying for our sins. Among other things, that was God's promise that He had not forgotten us in our

problems and plight and here was proof. That is why He says: "*GOD WORKS ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE THAT LOVE HIM. **AND HOW SHALL HE NOT ALSO ALONG WITH HIM FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS.***"