

“Surprised by God’s Purposes”

Text: Genesis 50:15-21

It had been quite a journey for Joseph. Jacob had made the coat of many colors and his brothers despised him. It came to the point where they actually desired to kill him. (Genesis 37:18) Reuben rescued him from that and had the brothers throw him into a pit. While Reuben was gone, Judah decided to sell his own brother into slavery.

The saga continues...Joseph became overseer of the house of Potiphar, because his master saw that God was with him and gave success to all that Joseph did. Potiphar’s wife approached Joseph regularly for sexual purposes and he fled. (Genesis 39:12) She spread a vicious rumor about him that he had attacked her and he was placed in prison.

In prison, Joseph had helped two of the king’s servants with dream interpretation. The cupbearer remembered what Joseph had done for him two years later and mentioned it to Pharaoh after the king had two horrible dreams. Joseph interpreted the dream to mean that there would be seven prosperous years and seven years of famine. Joseph’s suggestion was that Pharaoh should appoint someone to store up food during the prosperous years so that there would be plenty of food in the years of famine. Pharaoh knew of no one like Joseph upon whom the Spirit of God rested, so he was appointed to the position he suggested. (Genesis 41:40)

Through the good and bad times of his life, God was with Joseph and he is with us too. His brothers did not receive what they expected or do we as we are-

SURPRISED BY THE PURPOSES OF GOD

I. Forgiveness is in His hands

II. God always accomplishes His good

I.

A.1. The brothers probably had been bothered by the actions for some time. When the famine was in full swing, they went to Egypt. Joseph recognized who they were, but they were kept from recognizing them. Joseph toyed with them for a while until they were all re-united. Imagine the amazement and surprise of Jacob, for his son's had implied that a wild animal killed Joseph! After some time in the land of Goshen, Jacob had died. Now the safety net for the brothers was gone. What would powerful Joseph do?

“It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil we did to him.” That is the reaction of the world isn't it? It is not natural for people to forgive especially considering all that Joseph had been through at the hands of his brothers. Their real fear was retaliation. Joseph was second in command in the land of Egypt; he wielded great power.

2. Jacob had given a command before he died: “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin because they did evil to you.” They now asked his forgiveness. They were comforted by a command of their father. What they received as an answer was a great surprise to them. It was not what they expected.

Their situation is much like the Prodigal Son. After he had wasted his father's inheritance, he too had a plan. He would come back as a servant in his father's house. Instead, his father rejoiced in his return and he was welcomed back as his son. (Luke 15:11-32) That was not a true story but a parable. That parable and the story of Joseph and his brothers tell us of the wonder of God's forgiveness.

B.1. Like the brothers, we do not deserve God’s forgiveness. In the meaning of the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Martin Luther says, “For we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment.” We deserve nothing from God but his wrath for our sins. Because of Jesus Christ, God forgives our sins and hears our prayers.

St. Paul says: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-24) Joseph’s brothers fell down before him and received an answer they did not expect.

2. The grace of God is totally overwhelming to us. We don’t understand it. It is that way because we operate by the law. That comes very natural to us. When we sin against someone, we do what Joseph’s brothers attempted to do. We buy them off by offering something in return or by acting in an overly kind way to them so they will forget what we have done. Our guilt motivates us as it did with Joseph’s brothers. Worse yet, we may only be concerned with our welfare and not of the one we have sinned against. Forgiveness is in the hand of God and operates by his grace instead of our actions.

II.

A.1. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul says: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) The ESV heads this section of Genesis-“God’s Good Purposes”. I can think of no better application of St. Paul’s words than the life of Joseph.

Sometimes we think that our problems get in the way of what God desires to accomplish. Nothing could be further from the truth. Consider what these brothers had done to Joseph. God was active in the life of Joseph and he is active in your life as well. Your sin, your problems cannot deter God gracious working in your life!

2. Joseph answered his brothers in a way that must have been very surprising to them. Instead of retaliating or bargaining with them he said: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

Joseph had the big picture in mind. He saw God’s purposes and forgot his hurts, but was more interested in what God accomplished in his life. By the way, his answer to his brothers is a good example of how we deal with those who sin against us. We can acknowledge their sin and not ignore it, but we must forgive as we have been forgiven.

B.1. This was all according to God’s plan for Joseph and his people. He still carries out his plans in our lives today. His plans and purposes are always much greater than ours are. There had been some real setbacks in the life of Joseph and certainly anger and disappointment. God’s plans go above and beyond ours. He accomplishes good in our lives through some very difficult circumstances. If we were the ones in charge of planning we would be stopped, but God is not.

2. The brothers of Joseph did not need to worry. They were forgiven by God and by Joseph as well. David said: “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” (Psalm 103:12) That is one of many passages in Scripture that assure of the total forgiveness of our sins in our Savior Jesus Christ. Joseph not only forgave the sins of his brothers, but he would provide for them and their families as well.

God’s purposes are always a surprise to us because of God’s great love for us in Jesus. This is a promise that keeps us from day to day and eternally as well. Amen.

