

The Classic Case of Joesph

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[0:00] Well, we've been talking about spectacular sins and the glory of Christ. And I want to remind us why are we doing that?

! Why are we going into this study? And the goal is twofold. One is to increase your faith. And the second is to increase your joy.

Your faith and your joy. Paul in Philippians is torn in two. He doesn't know what he should do. He wants to go and be with Christ, which is better by far. But he says, I need to stay.

And he says, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. But it would be better for you if I were to stay. So I'm torn. I don't know which one I should choose.

Well, he knew he would stay. He says, I know that I will remain and I will continue with all of you. So why is Paul going to keep living? Why is he going to keep ministering?

[0:58] What is his aim? What is his purpose? What does God want to do through him? He says, for your progress and joy in the faith.

That was the end of his ministry. To make people's faith strong and to make them joyful in their faith in Jesus Christ. So progress and joy.

Now, what's the whole point of this Sunday school? It's to do those two things. It's in the everyday bit of life. It's not academic look at how God uses evil.

But it's for your progress and your joy. Your progress and your joy. And so I want us to be able to, I want you to be able to look at the fall of Satan and say, if God is able to orchestrate and use that for the glory of Christ, for the fame of Jesus and the extension of his kingdom, then surely what is going on in my life, he can do the very same thing.

We want to be able to argue from the greater to the lesser. So if he can take the fall of Satan and use it to magnify Jesus Christ, then whatever is going on in my life, surely he can do the very same thing.

[2:17] And so the sin that I'm struggling with, the sin of other people against me, surely he can use those and orchestrate those things for my good and for the glory of Christ.

And so are we experiencing the sin in this world? Are we experiencing that sin is so rampant? Yes, we are.

We live in a fallen, diseased world. It's like a leaf rotting at the edges at autumn time. You've seen that.

Or it's green in the middle, but it's slowly dying. That's a picture of our world. You can see a picture of it even outside now. This is almost probably the most depressing time of the year because it used to be so white and beautiful.

And now everywhere you go, it's all the dirt and the grime on the snow along the road. And so it used to be pure, but now it's dirty. And we're waiting for spring, for everything to come back to life.

[3:22] And that's a picture of our world. That's what our lives are like. We're wearing away. Sin is destroying us. And so the real question is, how in the middle of that, when other people are sinning against me, I'm living with the confrontation of my own sin, the battle with my own sin, where I'm living under the effects of the curse.

How can I have joy and peace and growing confidence in these present circumstances? Well, learning to see how God uses these things for his son's glory, for our good, that will help us.

The fact that God doesn't only work despite sin, he uses the very worst sins to glorify his son. So God is able to draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

And so when you see that, that changes things. That gives us a lot of confidence and joy and peace, even in the middle of a lot of nastiness.

So think of some terrible sin in your past or in your present, something that you're suffering under, not necessarily your personal sin, but how someone has sinned against you.

[4:49] Can God use that? Can God use that for good? Can God use that sin for the glory of his son? Can he take it up and use it to glorify his son?

And the Bible's answer is yes. And so we want to look at the way God does things. And realize, this wouldn't be the first, this wouldn't be the way that I would have done it.

In my finite, very small, and even very childish wisdom, I wouldn't have done this. I would have chosen a more direct course. But look at God's ways, and believe, and rejoice, and really doing us good, even when it seems like everything is against us.

Now, today we're going to look at perhaps the classic case of God using sin to further his purposes. And it's the sale of Joseph into slavery.

And this is a story that I think most of us know, and probably all of us know very well. And so I pray, and I have been praying, that the Spirit of God would take these things and make them fresh to us.

[6:03] And so that this old story would be new to us and useful to us. Now, before we begin, this is probably the longest introduction ever, before we begin, it would be helpful to remember that the Bible is not a series of disconnected stories.

The Bible is a chapter book with lots of chapters that build upon each other. The Bible is a record of redemptive history, of how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ.

It's a long story about God revealing the gospel and accomplishing redemption through his Son.

Now, this story of Joseph is one early chapter in this great story about Jesus Christ and salvation.

And so the pieces fit together. What goes before helps us to understand what comes after. And what goes before in the story of Joseph prepares us to see and understand what's going to happen with Jesus later on.

History is building toward Jesus. And so we saw last week that the Tower of Babel was man's self-salvation efforts, eternal life.

[7:18] He's going to get a name for himself, and it ends up in judgment. But Abraham and Sarah is the beginning of God's forever city.

And so God promised Abraham, I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you. And him who dishonors you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So at Babel, and in the fall, the families of the earth were cursed and scattered and judged.

But God is going to bring them together through Abraham. So this is the beginning of God's forever city. And so in one sense, it's the beginning of God saving the world.

That's Genesis chapter 12. Now in Genesis 15, God makes a covenant with Abraham. And that's basically taking the promise that he already gave Abraham and sealing it with blood.

[8:26] A solemn, blood-sealed promise. So you remember the picture, the scene. God walks through the broken and cut up pieces of animals in the ceremony.

Abraham has a dream. And God walks through the animal pieces. And he's saying, if God is saying this, if I don't keep my promise to you, Abraham, then let me be like these animals.

I guarantee my promise with my very life. Do you see how secure God wants Abraham to feel? How comforted and sure.

Do you see how even humble God is? To walk through the pieces himself while Abraham watches. And that's the gospel in a nutshell.

God saying, I'm going to do it. And I'll do it all for you. So trust me. But in Genesis 15, he says, I will make you a great nation.

[9:36] Then he says, Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own. And they will be enslaved and mistreated 400 years.

But I will punish the nation that they serve as slaves. And afterward, they will come out with great possessions. So at the very beginning, God promises there's going to be 400 years of slavery and being strangers and foreigners in a land that's not your own.

They're going to be a pilgrim people. And so they're going to have to wait for their time to come.

That's surely a picture of us. Strangers.

Not feeling at home. And so if you feel that way, know that your ancient brothers and sisters felt the same way.

God says, through many tribulations, you must enter the kingdom of God. Now, the question is, how will this happen? So how is God going to fulfill his promise to Abraham?

[10:41] And the answer is, it's going to be through a spectacular sin. And that's surprising.

Spectacular sin. Now, of all the hundreds of ways that God could have brought this about, he chooses something really nasty and bad and ugly and sinful.

So through sin, he preserves his people. And through sin, he saves his covenant people. And through this spectacular sin, he saves Judah specifically.

And you remember, Jesus is called the lion of the tribe of Judah. So how is God going to save the lion that's going to bring out the Messiah?

He chooses the spectacular sin of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery.

[11:43] Well, we're all familiar with it, but let's turn to Genesis chapter 37 and go over the important points. Remember, God is teaching us his ways.

These things are not what we would have expected to happen or the way we would have thought God would use them or work these things out. And this is meant to broaden our minds and increase our faith and help us to live in this fallen world.

And so let's just remember some of the highlights of Genesis 37. You remember Jacob, Abraham's grandson, has 12 sons. And Joseph is the favorite. And Jacob gives Joseph this beautiful coat.

And I think if we're going to understand it properly, it's probably, if we understand it in its context, it's probably more than just a nice gesture. And it's probably even more than just a sign of favoritism, of simple favoritism.

It's definitely a sign that Joseph is the favorite, but I think it means a little bit more. It probably meant that Jacob was picking Joseph to be the head of the clan, the head of the family after he left.

[13:00] That Joseph was Jacob's choice to be the next leader of the family. And that was unorthodox and that was unusual. But if you think about how God has been dealing with this family, it's the younger that serves, or the older that ends up serving the younger.

And it's the second that ends up having the promise and not the first. And so, in some senses, it's culturally unexpected. But for this family, it might just be the way things generally are.

The first are going to be the last, and the last are going to be the first. It was surprising. But interestingly enough, it's exactly what God had planned.

Now, so the brothers didn't just hate Joseph because daddy got him a fancy coat. They hated him because their father was probably saying, this one is going to be the ruler over you.

And they hated him even more when Joseph starts having dreams that say the very same thing. Dreams about their wheat stalks bowing down to his.

[14:03] And then another dream about the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowing down to him. And again and again, it's the same thing. Joseph's going to be the head, and the brothers are going to bow before him and serve him.

And that's really, they hate him. It's not just simple favoritism. It's, he's going to rule over us, and we don't want that. And so you know, of course, what happened.

The brothers are out taking care of animals a ways away, and Joseph came to see how things were going. And again, he's on this special mission from dad.

Apparently, Joseph is already learning what it means to, you know, to be in charge, to check up on his brothers. And they saw him coming, and look at verse 19.

Genesis 37, verse 19. Here comes that dreamer, they said to each other. Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him.

[15:07] Then we'll see what comes of his dreams. And so they decide to kill the dreamer. And in doing so, they're doing more than just attacking Joseph personally.

They are threatening God's plan for this family, for his people, that it would be Joseph who would rule over them. And so they first strip him of his robe, and then they throw him into a pit, and then they see a caravan of Ishmaelites coming, and they decide that rather than making nothing out of this deal, they might as well make a buck.

And so they make a quick buck, and they sold them into slavery. And that's it. They go back to dad. They tell dad that Joseph's dead, and that's it.

The brothers think that's the end of the story. But we have a saying. The truth will out. The truth will out.

The truth will come out. You can't keep it down forever. So no matter how hard you try to forget it, no matter if a brother is shipped to a distant land, to Egypt, at long last, everything is going to be made known.

[16 : 21] So they thought that was the end of the matter. But they have no idea what was going on. They are completely oblivious to what God is doing, what God's invisible hand is doing in their action.

So they don't know that their very action to kill the dreamer is making the dreams come true. And the question I ask myself is, when am I going to learn that this is how God does things very often? He takes the sin of the destroyers, and he actually uses that to save them, to save the very ones who are destroying his plan, or attacking his plan.

And so it's sovereignty, but it's grace. He's having mercy on Reuben, and Issachar, and the rest, and Judah.

You know, later on, 1800 years later, after this scene, people commit another spectacular sin, and they snuff out a life.

[17 : 48] And God took that sin and used it to save the very people that did it. We read about it last week in Acts.

Now, you know what happens. Joseph goes to Potiphar, and then he goes to prison, and at long last, he goes to Pharaoh's side. And there's seven years of plenty, and then seven years of famine. And somewhere in the middle of that famine, Jacob and his sons got hungry. They ran out of food. Now, I think if you do the math right, it's now 22 years later.

22 years have passed at this point. 22 years of lying. 22 years of covering up. 22 years of guilty feelings.

22 years of those knowing looks behind Dad's back. 22 years for Joseph of cruelty and injustice.

[18 : 55] 22 years of waiting. And now the story comes to a head, and the brothers are in a room with a man who can kill them with a softly spoken word.

And they have been caught stealing, or so it seems. They have no idea who this man is. And all they know is he seems to be angry, and he seems to have it out for them.

He has a real malevolent interest in them from their perspective. They don't know why he's paying such attention to them. It's not good. He's a bully, and they're his prey, or so it seems.

Now, where are Judah and his brothers? Turn over to Genesis 44.

Genesis 44, and look at verse 14. Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves on the ground before him.

[20 : 10] So now they're groveling, and they say, they end up saying, we'll be your slaves down in verse 16. So are they bowing before him?

Are they serving him? They're doing it even of their own will. So Jacob's proven right. Joseph's dreams are proven right, and they bow before him, and it all came about just as the Lord planned. And soon the whole family is in Egypt. Seventy go down, and they grow to thousands and thousands, and we know the rest of the history. Exodus happens about 400 years later, and now there are a countless multitude.

So how did Joseph get to Egypt? How did Israel end up there? On one level, it was through the spectacular sin. The brothers first were going to murder Joseph, and then they sold him as a slave, and they turned around, and they lied to a brokenhearted old man.

And they just kept lying to him that whole time. Now, how does the Bible describe the very same thing, the very same set of actions? Look over at Genesis 45 in verse 5.

[21 : 33] And now, do not be distressed, and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

God sent me ahead of you. God was going to bring me here all along, but bring you here all along. He promised that to Abraham, that they were going to go down into Egypt.

God was going to bring you here all along, but he sent me ahead of you. He was planning, and he was preparing for you to have a place here.

And it's interesting. So now Israel and the family, they don't come into Egypt as like completely anonymous strangers. Now they have a friend who is the second in the land.

God is preparing a place for them, even in Egypt. Now, just in case we think this is some sort of side comment with little significance, the psalmist back in Psalm 105, looking back on this, he says, the Lord called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food, and he sent a man

before them, Joseph, sold as a slave.

[22 : 51] So God called down the famine, but he also sent Joseph, sold as a slave, down to Egypt to save them.

So God sent the trial, and God prepared the deliverance. And he did it through the spectacular sin of selling Joseph into slavery.

Now, were the brothers responsible? Yes. But what they did was wrong, but what they were doing was what God was doing in one and the same action.

What they were doing and what God was doing in that same action were completely different. So God is not acting in the same way as they are acting.

Their action was sin, and his action was salvation. Now, look over a few more chapters to Genesis chapter 50. Now, at this point, Jacob has died, and you can imagine how the brothers are feeling now.

[24 : 03] They're thinking, okay, now dad is out of the way, and now Joseph can do whatever he wants, and there's not anyone who's going to be able to stop him or even to make him feel bad about what he's going to do.

So this is after Jacob died, but Joseph sent to them, don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? So he's saying, am I to judge you and to execute you?

Is that my role? No. You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

You meant it for evil. God meant it for good. Now notice, and this is very important, and notice that it doesn't say God used what they did after they did it and turned it around for good.

God didn't use their evil for good after they meant it for evil. It says that in the very act of evil, there were two designs, two intentions, two, I meant to do this.

[25 : 11] They were designing evil, and God was designing good. And that's important. God is not reacting to what those people were doing.

He's not cleverly reacting and adapting to ever-changing situations. He's the author, but he's also the participant. He's writing the story, but he's also an actor in the story, and he participates, but he's always participating as the Lord, as the one who is in control, as the planner and the designer, as the one who does what he wills in heaven and on earth, and no one can thwart him.

So that's your Father. That's your God. So men mean things for evil. They do, and they hurt us, and they do foolish things that end up hurting us directly or indirectly, but God means those very same things for our good.

A couple of years ago, we went through the book of James, and you remember in James chapter 1, it talks about, consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds.

But then it turns around and says, when anyone is tempted, don't let him think that God is tempting them. It's the idea of, there's no temptation that comes from God. Trials and temptations.

[26 : 41] And the important thing that we saw was that those were, those looked the very same to us. They're one and the same thing from our perspective.

They look the same to us. So a tire goes flat. You get stuck in your driveway. All of a sudden, you're unprepared.

It's a temptation to sin. But it's also a trial from God to test and grow your faith. God means us to make us holy. Satan means to make us sin.

And there's two designs in that one event. And God's design always ends up winning.

God's design and his purposes always end up overcoming man's designs and Satan's designs. And even if it looks like Satan is winning for a time, it ends up turning around for our good.

[27 : 44] So this story teaches us and prepares us to think about and to understand Jesus. It's teaching us God's ways.

Because when God comes into the world to save sinners, what is that going to look like? And I think everyone was expecting it to look like one thing, but it ended up looking like something totally different, didn't it?

Again and again, the Bible see, in the Bible we see that God's victory for his people often, and almost most, I would say most of the time, usually comes through sin and suffering.

Joseph's brothers sinned against him. Have you been sinned against? Can you relate to him?

Joseph's brothers sinned against him and he suffered for that.

Can you relate to that? But in all this, God is at work to save his people, including the very ones who destroy the Savior.

[28:53] Now Joseph is the Savior in the Genesis story, and they were trying to destroy him. And in trying to destroy him, it ends up for their salvation.

You see, it's all preparing us to see Jesus. It's all preparing us to see how God works. It's trying to get us to see that God's ways aren't our ways.

In all this, God is preparing us to see the glory of Christ, his patience, his humility, his servanthood. So the best things that we see in Joseph is what we see in Christ, taken to the highest degree. And he is loving them and serving them and forgiving them all the while while they are the very ones who are trying to get rid of him. We sing that song.

Died he for me who caused his pain, for me, who him to death pursued. That is a haunting line.

[30:07] Who was killing Jesus? Well, it was people like us. To him, pursuing his death. And it says, amazing love. Amazing love.

How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Now, the last thing I want to point out, and this comes, again, in connection to the Joseph story. In Genesis 49, Jacob blesses his sons.

And in the middle of the blessing, we get a messianic prophecy. Genesis 49, and verse 8.

Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies, and your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah.

You return from the prey, my son. Like a lion, he crouches and lies down. Like a lioness, who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his.

[31:26] I think this morning we're going to hear about Jesus taking and ruling among the nations. And he says, you're the, you're a lion.

The king is going to come from Judah. You know which brother it was that came up with the idea to sell him into slavery? It was Judah.

So God used Judah's sin to rescue Judah and to bring in the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the Savior. And it is the lion of the tribe of Judah that purchased men from God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

That's what Revelation 5 says. Now, this is where this story connects to you. Why are you saved? Well, a long time ago, Judah committed a sin and sold Joseph into slavery.

[32:34] And God used Judah's sin to bring in and protect the seed of the Messiah that would rule among the nations and save and purchase your souls. So, Judah meant it for evil.

God meant it for good, for the saving of many lives and here you are. So, God uses the spectacular sins to save his people.

So, what a God, what a Savior. In a few minutes, we're going to sing his praise and if anyone should sing his praise, it should be us. Well, we are dismissed.