

EVIL INTENT GOD MEANT FOR GOOD

Final Joseph Message – Genesis 50: 15-26 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Almost a year ago, we began our Joseph series which today makes 28 messages from Genesis 37: 1 and today ends with Genesis 50: 26. For me, it has been an epic series, for the Joseph story is my favorite Old Testament story. As I have researched, studied, developed, and preached this series of sermons, one thing is certain for me. God is sovereign over every single event in each one of our lives. Nothing happens by chance, luck, coincidence, or by accident. God is behind every event in our lives by His sovereign will and His amazing providence, as in spite our obedience or disobedience. He works all things together for good, to those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8: 28) which is only to use His providence and the outworking of the perfect will of God. Do any of you remember Harold Kushner's popular book, "When Bad Things Happen to Good People"? Rabbi Kushner says, "In life, God does not will bad things to happen to people. When bad happens, it is the result of lousy luck. The world is a great spinning roulette wheel. When your number is up, it is up, for good or ill. Nothing is meant by either one. It is mostly a matter of chance." The scientist Pascal said, "There is nothing in nature that can be called chance...there is probability." Albert Einstein said, "I don't believe God plays dice with the universe." Beloved, never forget what we have learned together. No matter what happens, God is always in control and He never is confused by what happens.

The poet A. M. Overton, wrote, "My Father's way may twist and turn, my heart may throb and ache but in my soul, I'm glad I know, He's making no mistake. My cherished plans may go astray, my hopes may fade away, but still I'll trust my Lord to lead, For He does know the way. There's so much now I cannot see, my eyesight's far too dim; But come what-may, I'll simply trust and leave it all to Him. For by and by the mist will lift and plain in all He'll make, through all the way, though dark to me, He made not one mistake." When terrible things happen to us, we have two options. Either God is still sovereignly on the throne, and He allowed it to happen, or God isn't sovereign at all and this one slipped by His gaze and control unnoticed, because He can't keep up and cope with all the evil in the world. No, no, no! God is still on the throne. In this final message of the Joseph story, Joseph reminds me of the racehorse Secretariat. He wins the race of life, going Home to Jesus, but he wins going away. My favorite part of the 2010 Movie Secretariat, the true story of the Belmont Stakes is where Secretariat wins the Triple Crown in the 1973 race by 31 lengths—when Secretariat set a world record time on dirt of 2 minutes and 24 seconds flat for a mile and 1/2, breaking the track record by 2 and 3/5 seconds. That victory earned Secretariat the triple crown. In the movie, Secretariat's trainer yells to the jockey, Ronnie Turcott, "Don't Fall off!

As I read the final laps of Joseph, Prime Minister of Egypt, and as I read about this man Joseph, an amazing type of Christ in the Old Testament, I see a picture of the kind of people God uses. This final picture Moses gives us of Joseph, reveals three godly responses of a man or woman of God who accepts God's sovereignty over every event in life. Let's explore these three godly responses of Joseph. They are meant to quicken our spirits to follow Jesus as we reach for the finish line, in this amazing first book of the Bible, the book of beginnings, the book of Genesis.

ASK GOD'S HELP TO RELEASE THE PAST WITH THE FORGIVING GRACE OF GOD. (I.) Notice Genesis 50: 15-19. When Joseph's brothers saw

that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." So, they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell-down, before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?" Jacob, the last of the three great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had gone Home to the Lord. He had been buried in the cave of Machpelah, where his relatives were buried. Now the brothers of Joseph had a sudden fear come to them, like a thunderbolt. The Bible says, "Be not afraid of sudden fear." (Proverbs 3: 25) If we had listened to them, what might they have been saying? "Dad was our buffer with Joseph, the Prime Minister. Our wall of protection is gone now. What will Joseph do to us now that Dad is gone? We mistreated him, planned to kill him, and sold him into Egyptian slavery. Who is going to protect us from his righteous wrath now? Who will protect us from the one who rules the land in Pharaoh's name? He'll, without a doubt, seek revenge."

Joseph's brothers were gripped with sudden terrifying fear. Sadly, with a false expectation of Joseph's punishment for their sins, it appears, they may have falsely made up a plea from Jacob, their father. The word they claimed, before he died, was that he issued a charge for Joseph to forgive his brothers. Now I wonder deep in my soul if Jacob said these words, but it is possible. Jacob and his sons recognized Joseph forgave them. Why would they doubt that now? Yet, fear causes us to shake in our boots over our guilt and to try, by hook, or by crook to try to save our skin. Joseph had the power at his disposal as Prime Minister, to have all his brothers, but Benjamin imprisoned, and even executed in a moment's notice, if he so chose. Perhaps, Joseph did really forgive them, but now he might change his mind, about all those lost years and lost time away from his father who had died now. A guilty conscience is never at ease and at rest. Despite Joseph's assurances of forgiveness in the past, these brothers were still feeling the weight of their sins against Joseph. Maybe they knew too well how they would respond if they were in

his shoes. They perhaps couldn't see Joseph being more forgiving than they would be. So, these brothers seem to have contrived a call from beyond Jacob's grave begging Joseph to forgive their sin as his 10 older brothers. If this was a contrived lie to find out where Joseph stood, it was a well-thought out lie to try to secure them from not being punished by Joseph. If Jacob really said these words, it would have been no less effective a plea. Instead of petitioning Joseph as his brothers, in fulfillment of his dream back when he was seventeen years old, once again, these brothers fell-down in homage before Joseph as servants of the God of their father Jacob. Their appeal to Joseph as servants of the God of their father, was a stronger appeal than of being his brothers. Notice v. 17. Whatever Joseph would respond, and whether they lied or told the truth about what their father said, it was a humble act for them to bow before Joseph once more. If Joseph rejected their petition, nothing further would avail. They had pulled out the stops in crying for mercy.

What would Joseph do? With tears he showed them in the best love language he knew, weeping with tears, that he released them from the past with the forgiving grace of God. Three times in Joseph's story, he wept. He wept when Jacob died and fell on his father's face and kissed him. But the first time he wept was when he revealed who he was to his 11 brothers. His first weeping was in Genesis 45: 4-8, when he finally asked the Egyptians to leave and he revealed his identity as the Egyptian Prime Minister. As he was crying uncontrollably, he blurted it out, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" The brothers were dismayed and speechless. Again, Joseph sobbed out more, "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... So, it was not you who sent me here, but God." To forgive others, we must take our proper place before God. Do we do that, or do we judge others in wrath and anger? Millions of American Christians do not respond God's way. Many professing believers live on the edge or the verge of leaving, leaving their spouse, leaving the house as a teen, or leaving the church where they attend or are members. Do you live on the edge? We know that's how Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah used to live. And that fact showed up in Jacob's blessings of them. Do you live on the verge of exploding with your spouse in anger, disrespect, or cursing, or even on the verge of divorce? Many do. Do you live on the verge of leaving your church? Over the years, I have heard so many excuses for leaving. "One of the elders there walks right by me without speaking." "I passed you Pastor on the road and you never waved." "You left out one song in the printed bulletin." "You don't sing all praise songs, or you don't sing all hymns." Beloved, when will we all learn to release the past with the forgiving grace of God? I have told many people, "Please go and speak with that elder who walked past you without speaking." Most often the answer is "No, I'm done." What a type of Christ Joseph is, as Jesus kept praying as he was crucified, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But you may protest,

“You don’t know what he or she did to me.” You are right. I don’t, but will God bless you for taking His place and pronouncing final judgment or announcing, “I’ll never again do this or that.” Beloved, are we in the place of God?

When Joseph’s brothers approached him, on their knees, whether they spoke the truth or a lie, his spontaneous response, because of the grace of God in him, his response was to weep. The past seventeen years of living in love with his brothers flashed before his eyes. What a tender heart Joseph had! What a big heart! Then, Joseph’s release came in the form of a question, v. 19. “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?” Joseph was the second most powerful man on the face of the earth, but he knew his place before God. He could not live on the verge of explosion, on the verge of disrespect, on the edge of spiritual Christian road rage, on the verge of divorce, or on the verge of leaving church. Joseph was one command away from destroying his 10 older brothers, but taking his proper place as their brother, with the ground level at the foot of the cross, Joseph knew he was not in God’s place. What a question Joseph asked and so should you and I when we’re tempted to withhold forgiveness, to hold onto the past, and put ourselves in God’s place!

Are you ready to release the past with the forgiving grace of God? Write it down—some changes inside us will have to occur that had already happened to Joseph. To forgive others. (1) We must allow God to be the Judge and humble ourselves under His sovereignty. (2) We must love others and put ourselves in their shoes. (3) We must quit insisting others pay for what they did, holding the past, over-their heads. Jesus paid it all for us. (4) We must quit keeping score, pressing charges, holding grudges, reminding offenders of their sin, and privately gossiping. (5) We must quit taking offense easily, but learn to speak the truth in love. (6) We must quit saying, “I will never forgive unless this offender repents the way I demand. (7) We must as Peter commands, in I Peter 2: 17, “Honor everyone, Love the brotherhood, Fear God, Honor the king,” we must weep with those who weep-Romans 12: 15.

ASK GOD’S HELP TO RESCUE THE PRESENT WITH THE FULL AWARENESS OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE. (II.) Notice Genesis 50: 20-21. “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So, do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus, he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” God doesn’t call for contrived, false confession, saying sorry for an accused sin truly admitted or committed, to humanly try to patch up a problem—to say whatever to fulfill someone’s false expectation. When true forgiveness is part of our lives, and we honestly confess and forgive sins, we can, with God’s help, rescue the present after releasing the past. Each of us are one day closer to the rapture or the day of our death, our Homegoing, when we leave this world behind. Will we leave this world with a clean conscience? We can’t if we know we have

been an offending party. Until we go and ask forgiveness, our relationship with God will have a fly in the soup. It's hard to eat the best soup without removing that fly. Matthew 5: 23-24 says—go make it right. If we are the offended party, we need to forgive, whether we get the perfect repentance of others or not. Jesus said, in Luke 17: 3, “Pay attention to yourselves.! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents (notice, not if he perfectly repents like you demand it) if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying “I repent,” you must forgive him.” We won't rescue the present by sugar coating sin. We must call sin--sin, but with God's help, as we forgive those who have offended us, even those who have died, we will not carry offenses to our grave. Without dealing with a clean, clear conscience with the past, we cannot ask God to rescue our present with a full awareness of His providence.

Knowing and accepting God's providence is the only road to seeing Him help you rescue the present. In one single verse, Genesis 50: 20, Joseph looked back on thirty years of the hardest of trials and the most glorious of triumphs. He saw past the sins of his brothers and acknowledged God's hand in every detail of his life—including being sold by his brothers. Joseph knew the inside out of his brothers' hatred, betrayal, being sold into slavery, being imprisoned, loneliness, separation, and his conclusion was a divine gift—God had a bigger plan and purpose in it all. Are we willing to accept God's will, when it goes against our will, knowing He will develop us and make us anew through it? In Paul's experience, 2 Cor. 12:7-10. he was content, saying, “when I am weak, then I am strong.” The providence of God supplies us with a mixture of valleys and victories, muddy-muck and mountains. Are we willing to joyfully accept and endure everything life throws at us knowing God is out to teach us in the hardest situations, and are we willing to let Him rescue our present with His loving, wise, providence? God will get glory from it? This is how God helps us after releasing the past to help us rescue the present as we rest in His providential arms. Thirdly and lastly,

REACH FOR THE FUTURE WITH THE FOCUS OF GOD'S PROMISES.

(III.) Notice Genesis 50: 22-26. “So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were counted as Joseph's own. And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” So, Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.” Beloved, this calm, but courageous way to face death, while claiming the promises of God for his family is the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy about Joseph. Do you remember what Jacob blessed Joseph with? Notice Genesis 48: 23-25. “The

archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the mighty One of Jacob, from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, by the God of your father who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above..." Joseph swiftly wrapped up a long, productive, and glorious life. He asked his brothers to one day take his bones with them, when they came out of Egypt. As Joseph was dying, he was remembering the promise God made to His father Jacob, as the whole family set out for Egypt, Jacob got cold feet—Genesis 46: 2-4. "And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here am I!" Then He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes." Joseph already had fallen on the face of father, Jacob, weeping and kissing him. Joseph did by prophecy hold Jacob's eyes closed until those eyes stayed shut, a wonderful kindness from a loved one to do. But the promise yet unfulfilled was God's promise—not only to take Jacob—and that meant all his people, the nation down to Egypt, (all 70) but to bring them up again (3-5 million). Joseph died believing God promise for those he left behind, that God would one day visit His people and take them to a better land. We as saints have this assurance today. We're looking for a visitation from Lord.

Beloved, all of us are going on a trip someday soon—going Home to Jesus, either like Joseph did, by way of the clouds in the rapture, or by way of the clouds, in the release and rest of death. Joseph died clinging to the promise of Almighty God. When your time to leave here comes, and it will, how will you leave? Joseph went Home to the Lord right with God and man. He left with full assurance that God had led him every step of the way. He left knowing that death was not the end, but that there was a better future down the road, for death is not final. There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun, and every person will live eternally in one of those two places. Are you right with your spouse and every family member? If there are problems, address them today! Can you face death with confidence assurance that you are saved, that you will spend eternity with the Lord in Heaven?

Joseph lived a long life, long enough to hold his great, great grandsons on his knee, v. 23. Joseph's coffin with his embalmed body, was kept by the Israelites and anyone who saw it, had a continual reminder of God's promise, that the exodus from slavery in Egypt would occur. Day after day in Egypt, that coffin spoke of Israel's future and Joseph's faith. For 40 years, in the wilderness, the Israelites marched carrying the casket of Joseph. Both Jacob and Joseph, determined that their death and burial must be a testimony to their faith and a stimulus to the faith of their offspring, both gave directions as to their body and bones. That body of Jacob and those bones of Joseph were precious, and even in death—they pointed to

the Lord. These are the last recorded words of Joseph. Of all his honors and accolades in his long and fruitful life of 110 years, these words about the Exodus and his bones are the only words recorded about him in the New Testament's Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11: 22. What did the apostle say? "By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites, and gave directions concerning his bones." After all Joseph did, and this is the 28th message of his glorious life, in which he exhibited patience, love, forgiveness, and hope in the midst of untold affliction, God wants us to remember him most for his faith in the unseen future, (the Exodus) based on faith in His holy Word. Above-all else, that is what pleased God the most. Exodus 13: 23 is so beautiful. We read, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here." The sixth book of the Bible, Joshua ends in Joshua saying he and his family would serve the Lord, and then we read Joshua 24: 32, "As for the bones of Joseph, which the people brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a 100-pieces of money. It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.

The narrative of the immediate family of Jacob/Israel ends with the promise of redemption from Egypt which is based on the oath made first to Abraham. God keeps His promises, all of them. To Abraham, in Genesis 15: 13-14, God had said to Abraham hundreds of years before, "Know for certain, that your offspring will be sojourners in the land that is not theirs, and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for 400 years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Beloved, the Joseph story is finished until we continue it in heaven with Joseph. But our story still goes on, and God is calling us to go Home to glory trusting all His promises to us. May God bless this series of messages now to your hearts for days, months and years to come. Amen.