

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

07.07.2024 | Joseph's Story and The Greater Story | Genesis 37:1-11 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 37. We're going to be in Genesis 37, the first 11 verses of that chapter this morning. If you want to use the Bible that might be in the pew or the chair in front of you, Genesis 37 is on page 31 of that Bible. Today we are beginning a new sermon series. We've just spent a few months studying the book of Proverbs and considering the wisdom that God's Word has for different areas of our life. And today we are going to start studying the book of Genesis, particularly the story of Joseph. You know, you look at the book of Genesis, it contains a lot of really fundamental foundational truths for our faith. The story of Genesis shows you all about God and His creation of the world and how He's ordered things to be, how God called a people to Himself. When you look at the book of Genesis, as much important information it has, the story of Joseph takes up really the last fourth of the book. So a book that contains so much important information for us to glean from as the people of God devotes one-fourth of the book to the story of Joseph, which I think shows us how significant this story is to our understanding of God and His people and the way that we come to see ourselves in God's greater story.

And because I think this is such an important story, it's also a really popular Bible story. The story of Joseph, I think you could probably find it in almost any children's Bible that you pick up. Not too long ago, the story of Joseph was a Broadway musical, Joseph in the Technicolor dreamcoat. I found that as I talked to people there seems to be this kind of generational thing where the younger generation doesn't know about this Broadway musical quite as much. But this was a popular idea, this idea that Joseph had this coat of many colors. I think many people outside of those who just read the Bible and know the Bible know somewhat of the story of Joseph. I think what so often happens with really popular stories is that we often think we know them better than we actually do. So many times with a popular story, a well-known story, we might think we know what the story is all about. But sometimes I think we miss some of the major themes or important points of the story. And so today we're going to get an introduction to Joseph's story. As we studied just the first 11 verses of Genesis 37, it really just introduces the story of Joseph to us. But what I want to do this morning is I want to use that introduction to help us to capture, to grab hold of some of the major themes of Joseph's story. And I want us to see that these major themes in Joseph's story are not just themes in his story, but they're themes throughout the greater story of the Bible, the greater story that God is writing, which means they're really important themes for our stories as well.

So Genesis chapter 37, we're going to read verses 1 through 11. Moses writes to us in Genesis 37 starting in verse 1, "Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being 17 years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed. Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us, or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed another dream. He told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." But when he told to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Now this series that we're going to spend studying the life of Joseph, I've decided to kind of give it the tagline, "God Works for Good." I chose that tagline because I think it's a really helpful statement to summarize the story of Joseph, but it's also an allusion to another passage in the Bible. You might recognize that phrase from a famous verse, Romans 8, verse 28. Romans 8, 28 is one of the more famous verses in the Bible, and it says this, "And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Now you'll notice there in the English Standard Version that we typically use, it says that we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. But actually in other translations, I think it gives a better sense that God works all things together for good. It's not just in some coincidence or some fate that things work together for good, but the idea that Paul is getting

at in Romans chapter 8, verse 28, is that God is over all things and that he is working all things together for good or for a purpose. And this well-known verse I think is popular probably for many reasons. One of the reasons I think is most important about this verse is that it speaks to both the greatness and the goodness of God. This verse reminds us that God is sovereign, that he is great, that he is over all things. He is in control of all things, able to work all things into a certain place. But it doesn't just remind us that he is sovereign or great, but the verse also reminds us that God is good, that he is working all things together for good or for a purpose. In many ways, I do think that this verse is very similar to a summary of Joseph's life. At the end of Joseph's life, as we'll get to in a couple of months, Joseph says, "What you meant for evil, God meant for good." Another way of saying that is God is working all these things together for good. But I want you to notice that Paul in Romans 8, 28 doesn't say that in all parts of Joseph's life, God worked things together for good. He says, "In all things, God works together for good."

Meaning what is true of Joseph's story is actually true of each one of our stories. That God's goodness and greatness that we can see on display in Joseph's story, that I hope will draw our attention to as we have this series, is I hope something that we'll also learn to see in our own lives. That God's goodness and greatness are on display in each of our own lives. That God is working all things together for good. That doesn't necessarily mean, I think, that all people's stories have a happy ending that they would want to write. I don't know if God working all things together for good means all things work out according to our measure of good, or how we would have written the story. Brother, I think what Paul is saying is that there is a greater story that God is writing. That from the beginning, before the foundation of the world, God began writing a story. That he is still writing until completion when he returns. And the end of that story is good. That God is writing this great story, and in his sovereignty and his greatness, he is working all things together for good. And what I think Joseph's story reminds us of, what the whole Bible reminds us of, is that our stories are really woven into this greater story.

That each one of our stories, each one of our experiences, we can see God's greatness and his goodness at work because we can see ourselves within this great story that God is writing. So that's why I've entitled this first sermon in the series, "Joseph's Story and the Greater Story." Because as we see this introduction to Joseph's life, what I want to do is I want to point out some themes in Joseph's life in his story, but I also want you to see that they are themes in this greater story. And my hope would be that as we study Joseph's life, we would not just look to Joseph as an example to follow, even though he might set a good example for us. I hope we would not just see it as a piece of history or how God worked in the past, but I hope that we would allow it to point us to this greater story, and that thereby we might see ourselves and our stories in God's greater story. In fact, I think even the way that Joseph's story is recounted for us in Genesis, I think that Moses, who first wrote the book of Genesis, wanted us to connect Joseph to the greater story. I say that because of the way the story of Joseph begins.

If you go to Genesis chapter 37 and verse 1, it tells us that Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. And then it says that these are the generations of Jacob, Joseph being 17 years old, and then he continues on with Joseph's story. But notice how Joseph's story is introduced, that these are the generations of Jacob. If you're just picking up the Bible and reading it here, it might kind of surprise you. You're expecting to read about the generations of Jacob, but then all you do hear about really for the next 12 chapters, apart from a few breaks, is really all about Joseph. This is actually a common heading in the book of Genesis to refer to the father and the generations that follow, and then to pick up a main storyline. You see, it's being written like this because the author wants us to realize that what's happening in Joseph's life is not just some isolated story, but it is connected to this greater story that's been written throughout the book of Genesis so far.

So you might remember, if you know much about the book of Genesis, in Genesis chapter 12, God called a man named Abram out of the country of his family to follow him. And the promise that God gave Abram was that he was going to bless him with this great large family. In fact, his family was going to become a nation. And it was through his family and through this nation that all the other families and nations in the world would be blessed. Of course, Abram and his wife Sarah had trouble believing this because they were very old and they didn't have any kids yet. How could they have a great big family with no children? But through sin and bad choices and all sorts of circumstances, God brings about a child, Isaac, in which this family is going to be grown from. Isaac, you might remember, had two sons, twin sons, Esau and Jacob. The Bible tells us that they were twins and that there was a God prophesied beforehand that the younger Jacob was going to rule over, or to be the one to carry on the line rather than Esau. And through sin and bad choices and

all sorts of circumstances, that comes about. Jacob actually steals the birthright from his older brother Esau and deceives his father. And so now the line is going through Jacob, who God renames Israel. And now you have the story that is being picked up with, here are the generations of Jacob or Israel. Here's the story that's being told, continued on specifically in the life of Joseph. You see, what the author of Genesis wants us to see is that what's happening to Joseph is connected to this greater story. That God has been calling a people to himself. He's been redeeming a people for himself. And that's going to continue on in Joseph's story.

Specifically, I think what we see in Joseph's story is that God is going to continue to work his plan. He is going to continue to shape this people and this family to who he had called them to be, specifically through Joseph. And so what I think that leads us to the first theme that I want you to see this morning. And that is really the probably prominent theme of Joseph's story is the providence of God. When we see here at the beginning that Joseph's story is connected to the greater story. That God's been calling and redeeming a people. It ties us into this fact that all of this is happening by God's design. And probably the greatest theme in Joseph's life and Joseph's story. A theme that we're going to come up to time and time again as we study his story is the providence of God. So what I want to do is I want to first show you how we see the providence of God I think in these opening verses. But then I want to talk about how we see the providence of God in our own lives. So the providence of God I think we see it primarily in this introduction to Joseph's story in these dreams that Joseph In fact if you follow along with us through Joseph's story as we study it. You'll find that there's many other times that dreams come up in the story. And each time it's clear that these dreams come from God as some divine revelation of something that is going to take place.

So in this first part of the story these dreams come to Joseph and they're all about how he is going to be the kind of center of this bowing down of his family. So we read in verse 7 Joseph tells his brothers behold we were binding sheaves in the field and behold my sheaf arose and stood upright and behold your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf. So he says I have this dream in which you are all bowing down to me. And then he has another dream. Verse 9 he says I had another dream. He told it to his brothers. He said I've had another dream. The old the sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me. In some ways the imagery is growing. It's not just about sheaves in the field. It's now about you know all the planets. Everything is bowing down before Joseph. This is a foreshadowing of what's going to happen in Joseph's life. And it's clear that God has revealed this to him through a dream and that it is going to come to pass. Why? Because God is providentially at work. All these things that God is revealing are going to come to pass because of God's providence. Because God is sovereign over all these things.

But it's not just about Joseph's life you see. It's not just that God is sovereign over Joseph and his specific circumstances. God is sovereign over all the things that are happening in this greater story. God is working in his providence in all these ways. You might remember back in verse one it said that Jacob was living in the land of Canaan where his father had sojourned. The land of Canaan was the promised land. But God had told Abram some years back that before his people, his family settled down in the promised land they were actually going to go into a foreign land. And they were going to spend 400 years in slavery. They were going to be servants for 400 years before God led them out of that foreign country with all the goods that they could carry. And you have to think about it. Moses is recording this story in Genesis to a people that have just left out of the land of Egypt where they had just spent 400 years in slavery. And what God is doing in telling the story of Joseph is he is letting the people know that when they came into Egypt and they spent those 400 years in slavery that was actually part of his providential plan. That he had prophesied it before him. That what happens in Joseph's story is central to how they got to Egypt. How they ended up being enslaved for 400 years. But it's also fulfilled in his covenant to Abraham that they were going to leave that land, that foreign land with all the goods that they could carry and return to this promised land. You see, Joseph's story is explaining how the people of Israel got to where they were as they're reading the story of Joseph.

God's providence, the fingerprints of God's providence is all over the story of Joseph. God is wanting us to see that he is working all these things together for a purpose. And I want to connect it to the great story today because I wanted you to see that God's providence is at work in your story as well. It's not just true in the life of Joseph. It is true in each one of our lives. Now I've been speaking about the providence of God and you might wonder, well, what exactly does that mean? So let me give you a really sophisticated, you know, definition, a description of the providence of God. This is from the Westminster Confession There's a lot to that, but if you were just to go back, I don't know how many slides it was on. If we go back to that beginning of it, the beginning of this description of God's providence really speaks to, I think, the

greatness of God that we've been talking about. That God is the creator of all things, but he's also the director of all things. He upholds, he directs, he governs. And notice that it tries to describe everything in creation. All creatures, all actions, all things, all of them are under his control. That means nothing comes into our world or into our lives without first passing through our Father's hands. He is the creator, he is the sustainer, he is the director of all things. Now that beginning part is really, I think, all about the greatness of God, his sovereignty over all. That's how the description progresses, that he makes these decisions by his infallible foreknowledge and the free immutable counsel of his own will, meaning he alone is making these decisions, but for what purpose? To the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy. In other words, God's providence means that God is sovereignly in control, but it also means God is directing all things for a purpose. What is the praise of his glory? God is writing this great story that ends with his glory covering the earth like waters cover the sea. God is writing this great story to where his glory will be known and will be worshipped and will be praised. But notice what he is praised for, for his wisdom, for his justice, for his mercy, for his grace, for his goodness. What that means is when God is working for his glory, he is also working for our good. So when we speak about God's providence, I think we are speaking about God's sovereignty, that he is over all things, but maybe a directed sovereignty towards a specific purpose, his glory and our good.

And I know that you'll be able to see this in Joseph's life because it is so clear, but I hope that you'll be able to see this in your life. I don't know what you are going through, what season of life you might be in, what kind of good things or bad things, what kind of questions you might be dealing with. But the reality is, the Bible is trying to help us to see that God is great, he is sovereign, and he is also. And that in his providence, he is upholding all things, he is working all things together for a great purpose of his glory and for our good. We see this in the life of Joseph. Now, one of the things that often comes up in our lives and in Joseph's story, one of the biggest, I think, perceived obstacles to God's providence is man's sinfulness.

And this is actually the second theme that I want you to see in this introduction to Joseph's story, and that is the sinfulness of humanity. One of the biggest obstacles that I think we would recognize in life to say, "Can God really be providential? Can God really work all things according to his plan?" is sinfulness. Now, sometimes it is really just more circumstances. If you have been reading through the book of Job, as we have been doing in our Bible reading plan as a church, the book of Job is really all about suffering that is not directly connected to sin, but just living in this broken world that we live in. But there are many times that our circumstances or our suffering is directly related to and that is especially true in Joseph's story. All throughout Joseph's story, sin comes into play. We see it here at the beginning with the sin of his father. Notice it says in verse 3 that Israel loved Joseph more than any of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. Jacob here, Israel, shows a favoritism to Joseph that is deeply sinful.

Sometimes I think we could almost make light of this favoritism, because you might always make the joke that, "Well, you know who your mom and dad's favorite was." We say, "Oh, yeah, they loved them all the same, but we know who they really liked the best." I mean, I'm the baby in my family. I'm the only boy in my family. I am my mom's favorite. I could probably tell you that my sisters would attest to that. But the reality is my mom loved me, but she also loved my sisters. There was never any question about where her love was devoted. This was not just kind of some light favoritism or, "Oh, we really get along well." This was deeply sinful what was happening here. Part of it is I think Moses connects it to that the Joseph was the son of Jacob's old age. Now, it might be that Jacob was just really happy to have a son in his old age. But I think actually if you know the story of Jacob, you know that there's something to that timeline. Jacob, you might remember, he loved a girl named Rachel. Jacob agreed that he would work seven grueling hard years to marry Rachel. At the end of those seven years, Rachel's father tricked him into marrying her sister, Leah. Jacob was married to Leah, but he worked seven more years so that he might marry Rachel. The Bible says that while he stayed married to both of them, Jacob really loved Rachel, and he was cold and harsh to Leah. In fact, the Bible says that God saw Leah, and he loved Leah, and knew that Jacob did not love Leah. And so God blessed Leah with children. The first sons that come to Jacob all come from Leah. God does not bless Rachel with children for a while.

What Jacob is showing in Joseph with this favoritism, as he gives him this coat of many colors, a special gift that he does not give to any of us other children. It's not just a light thing, it is a deep disdain for their mother, for his whole circumstance in life. That he is showing favoritism not just to a certain son, but to his mother, to the way that their family is shaped. Jacob should have known just how problematic this could be. I mean, Jacob, we're told his mother loved him,

but his father And as always is the case, that type of division between the parents leads to not love, but hatred amongst the siblings. That's what it says in verse four. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and they could not speak peacefully to him. Because of the favoritism that is shown to Joseph, his brothers hate him. Now, all these dreams about them worshipping him and bowing down before him, they certainly don't help, it just grows for them to hate them more, but the hatred begins there as they see that their father loves him more. This, of course, is not new in the Bible. The book of Genesis, you can see this kind of division between Jacob and Esau. You see it between Cain and Abel. And I think very early on, the Bible is showing us that sin doesn't only cause us to hate those who look different than us or who are on the other side But so many times sin causes us to hate and bring pain to those who are closest to us. Those who we are supposed to care for. So often we mistreat. Maybe that's been your story. Maybe the person that you really trusted in that was supposed to really be there for you as someone who actually really hurt you. The sinfulness of humanity is really clear throughout Joseph's And by the way, this is just kind of a side note. It pertains to all the different parts of the story, but particularly maybe to the sinfulness.

But as we try to relate ourselves to Joseph's story, one thing you do need to know is Joseph's story is rather dramatic. It's not that it's dramatized, that it's not real. I believe what happened to Joseph really happened. Part of the reason it's such a compelling story and it's told so many different times and places is because it is a rather dramatic So Joseph's brothers don't just hate him. They want him dead and they sell him into slavery. Somebody doesn't just gossip about Joseph. They tell a lie. They get him thrown into prison. And Joseph is not just restored to kind of a place of normal position, but to like the highest position in the land. In other words, Joseph's lows and his highs are quite extreme. Maybe you've experienced that some in your life. Maybe you've had some extreme highs and lows, but probably most of us won't have stories just like Joseph. But the reality is, I think we'll see these themes at play in Joseph's life also in our lives. That the sinfulness of humanity, our own sin, the sin of those around us will so often lead us to wonder, can God's plan of providence still prevail? When we look at this and we see God is saying that Joseph is going to be kind of high and lifted up and his brothers are going to bow down before him. But in the very next story, we're going to see that Joseph takes just the opposite turn. He doesn't start to get lifted up. He goes down low being a slave in a foreign land.

You have to wonder as you read the story, is man's sinfulness going to prevent God's plans? And of course, the answer in Joseph's story and throughout the whole Bible is resoundingly no. Man's sinfulness cannot prevent God's plans. God works many times in spite of our sin, but actually what we see in Joseph's life is that actually God works many times even through sin. You have to be careful with that because so many times people will hear that and they think, well, that means it's an excuse for me to sin because God's going to work through it. But that's not the case. Throughout the Bible, people are held responsible for their sins. It also doesn't mean that God approves of any sinful action. Sometimes people hear about God's providence and sovereignty and want to make God the author of sin. What I would say is that God's providence doesn't mean he's the author of sin, but rather he's the overcomer of sin. That God's plans will not be thwarted by man's sinfulness.

We see this in Joseph's story and of course we see this in the greater That from the time sin enters the world, God doesn't say, well, I don't know what I'm going to do now. It's clear that God has a plan. God had a plan before the foundation of the world, before sin ever entered the world. That even through sinful actions, God is working to bring about his plan. We see specifically in the life of Jesus, as Jesus comes into God works both in spite of sin and even through sinful actions to bring Jesus to the place of death on a cross. I mean, crucifying an innocent man is about as sinful as it comes. But yet God uses those sinful actions to accomplish his plan of redemption, to bring forgiveness. This is God's providence at work, even in the midst and even through sin. And so I say this not to comfort you in your sinful actions. I don't think the Bible wants to do that, but I do think the Bible wants to give us hope beyond our sin. Our own sin and the sin that has been maybe inflicted upon us. That that sin cannot thwart God's plans. That what the world might mean for evil, God is still working together for good.

I don't know what kind of sins you've committed. I don't know what kind of sins have been committed against you. But I want you to know that it does not thwart God's plans. It does not stop God's providence from being at work in your life. In fact, all throughout the Old Testament, there is this clear plan from the enemy to try to stop the Messiah from but yet God continues to work and he does it even through the life of Joseph. Part of Joseph's story is God continuing to call that people to himself, continuing to bring about that line so that the Messiah might come. What's interesting is that in Joseph's story, we don't just see people kept alive so that God might bring about the next generation, although that

happens. But through Joseph's story, we see something even deeper. Joseph is not just used to keep his family alive and sustained through a really hard time, even though he does that. But Joseph's story is used to bring healing, to bring reconciliation, to bring forgiveness. And that's all because of the grace of God.

And that is the last theme that you, I think, need to know as we get into this story of Joseph. To see the grace of God at work. Now, I think in these opening verses of Joseph's story, the grace of God isn't maybe as explicitly clear as some of these other themes, but I do think it is there. In some ways, I think we see the grace of God as we just consider, why would God continue to work and to call a family that is so jealous and so hateful and so sinful? I mean, if you read the book of Genesis, you'll see that this family that God has called and is using to bring about his Messiah, he's not doing it because they're such good people. As we've already recounted, they're very sinful. They make a lot of bad choices. God is in choosing to work through the family of Israel or the people of Israel because they are good, but because he in the same way, God is working all things together for good, not because you are good, but because he is gracious. So just the fact that God hasn't given up on this messed up family, I think, is a sign of the grace of God.

But I think even we get a hint of it as we see the dream of Joseph and we see what is foreshadowed and what really comes about, I think teaches us about the grace of God. So go with me one more time to that dream, the first dream that Joseph has. In verse 7, he says, "Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. Behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf. And his brother said to him, Are you indeed to reign over us or are you indeed to rule over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words." Now think about the imagery there, the imagery of Joseph's brothers bowing down before him. As I've said before, and as you know, probably the end of the story, that actually does happen. We see Joseph's brothers literally bowing down before him as God's providence has been at work.

But you know, the final picture of Joseph's story is not really his brothers bowing down before him. It's really Joseph embracing his brothers. The end of the story is not so much about the younger brother who is the underdog and kind of made it to the top, and now everybody has to bow down to him. The story of Joseph is really about God's providence and his grace at work in spite of sinful humanity to bring about his plans and by his grace allow one to show that grace to others. You see, we've kind of tried to depict the story of Joseph through these pictures that you'll see on the graphic or on our banners. It doesn't mean that those are the five sermons we're going to cover, but it just kind of gets to the story in your mind. And that last picture that we've chosen, it's not brothers bowing down to another brother, but it's this kind of picture of embrace or reconciliation. The picture here is of Joseph not just being a receiver of God's grace, but a conduit of God's grace. Joseph gets to the place that he has, not because he earns anything, but because of God's favor on him. But it's clear that God is not gracious to him just for his own blessing, but so that he might be gracious to others. This is the picture of God's grace that we see in this story that I think is so important for us to grasp onto in our own stories. To not just be able to trust that God is providentially at work, even in spite of and through sin. But God's grace is at work to forgive us of our sin and to give us the ability to show grace and forgiveness to others.

I pray that as we study the story of Joseph, you would not only be able to see God's greatness and goodness in your own life, but you would also be able to display God's goodness to others. You would be able to extend God's grace and forgiveness to others, maybe specifically extending grace to those who have sinned. Because of course, this is the theme of the greatest story, that in the end God's grace is going to prevail. The great story that God is writing is that one day sin and death will be swallowed up in victory. And one day God's glory and God's grace will cover the earth as all things are made new. It is God's grace that will prevail in the end as God works all things together for good. Which means that as people who have trusted in God's grace, who can now look forward to the end of that story when God's grace prevails, we are able to exhibit that grace in our own lives. And so I pray and I hope that as we study the story of Joseph and we see these themes at work in his life, that most importantly, it would draw our attention to this great story that God has been writing. The story of redemption, that found its climax in the person and work of Jesus. But it's a story that is still being written when God's grace will one day prevail. And I pray that it will help us to see God's providence in our lives. See God working in spite of and even at times through sinful actions of ourselves or others. That we might know the grace of God, but also that we might show the grace of God to those around us.