

**“With All That’s Going On”
Genesis 37: 1-8**

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I think this story can sound like a classic, archetypal story of sibling rivalry. It might harken back to something like Cain and Abel- where one brother is jealous of another. Let’s examine this from the perspective of Joseph’s brothers.

1) In **verse 2** brings, **“A bad report about his brothers.”** If you’re his brother, you’re like, “What’s up with that dude?” It sounds like Joseph is being a SNITCH! And there’s nothing worse than being a snitch!

2) In **verse 3**, it says, **“Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons.”** So not we’ve got some favoritism going on. His Father loves him more than his brothers. I’m not saying this is right, but it’s how the story tells it. If you’re Judah, his brother, that has to make you mad. (game as a child was always to get my parents to say who their favorite was).

3) In **verse 3b**, it says, **“Jacob made Joseph a robe of many colors.”** Now the jealousy and envy grows, because Joseph is being given luxurious gifts by his father. You can see Joseph wearing this thing around all the time, just to flaunt it in front of his brothers. Obviously this makes his brothers really mad!

4) then **verse 5-11**, what I call, **“THE DREAMS.”** This is the one that really sets off his brothers, and really his whole family. Joseph, being the little punk that he is at this point, says to his brothers, “I had a dream about all of us last night. We were binding sheaves and my sheaves stood upright. And your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.”

And the brothers immediately get angry. They say to one another, “Is he to rule over us? Does he think he’s better than us?” It’s a really uncouth thing to say.

But Joseph doesn’t stop. It’s like this guy is totally socially unaware. He then goes to the whole family, even his parents, and says that he has ANOTHER DREAM! IN this dream, the sun, moon and 11 stars bow down to him. (What an ego on this guy, right?). And the implication is that Jacob will be rule over everything in the universe. Even Jacob can’t put up with this sort of arrogant dreaming from his beloved Son.

When you look at this story from the ground level, from the perspective of the brothers, Joseph doesn't look too great. He looks like a snitch and a dreamer, ambitious, vain, arrogant, power-hungry, even greedy.

-And so, a little bit later, **in verse 19, it's not surprising that Joseph's brothers conspire to kill him.** If you're reading the story from their perspective, you feel a sense of justice in the idea. Yea, he's terrible. He's sabotaging us. Let's get rid of him. So they decide to kill him.

-But then one of the brothers, Reuben steps in, **in verse 21,** and says, **"Don't kill him, just throw him into the pit. If you kill him, you will be guilty, but if you throw him in the pit and he dies, no problem, you're innocent."** They decide to throw him in the pit. And when they do, of course, they take his fancy, daddy-loves-you most robe.

-Then, **in verse 25,** the story takes another turn. The brothers sit down to eat and some Ishmaelites come along. These Ishmaelites are not the chosen people. They are foreigners and dirty ones. But the brothers see these Ishmaelite traders coming along and they decide, "hey, why kill him? That's unprofitable. Let's sell him into slavery to these men. We will get rid of him, and we will make some money."

Again, this seems a terrible fate for Joseph. Slavery was not a kind situation when in the hands of savages like Ishmaelites.

-And now the story has reached what appears to be its conclusion- the snitchy, cocky, annoying brother is gone. Now all they have to do is cover the thing up. They dip his favorite little coat in blood. (I think it's interesting how they use the coat as evidence of his death and not something else). They take the bloody coat to Jacob and they show him saying, **"your son has has been devoured by fierce animals."**

Jacob is tricked. Just like Jacob tricked his father Isaac and stole the birthright, so what goes around comes around. Jacob is tricked by his sons into believing that his favorite, Joseph, was devoured by animals. Joseph believes them and says that he will go down to Sheol, his death, mourning his son. It's a very, very sad ending.

It all feels very, familiar and worldly. Brother hates brother. Brothers kill brother. Brother tried to cover it up. Nobody really seems to win.

And the plot line of God's people almost seems to move on to another topic in Genesis 38, the story of Judah and Tamar. The story ALMOST leaves the whole saga behind and moves on, except for one little sentence at the very end:

-verse 38, "MEANWHILE.....The Midianites sold Joseph to Egypt, to Potiphar, and office of Pharaoh."

And here's the truth, that word "Meanwhile" changes everything. "Meanwhile" makes us re-read the story. It causes to re-evaluate what we thought was going on. Because "Meanwhile" indicates that there was something or someone else at work. And of course, when we first read this story, we don't account for one very important person: GOD.

Now it's easy to forget about God and read this as a human story of jealousy, envy, murder and lies. It's easy to forget God because **he isn't mentioned one time in the story, AND YET, God is at the center of everything that is going on here.** I'm not saying that in a religious sense because God is always at the center. I'm saying that because **the story is pointing to the sovereign will of God at work in every moment of this seemingly terrible story.**

And the reason God is not in the story, but is the main player, is because this is how it really is in life. God is at work, yet we don't see him.

Let's go back and read the story from a God-centered view.

1) That Joseph gives a bad report about his brothers is not about snitching, it's about Joseph's righteousness. The Bible is telling us that Joseph is a man of great integrity and righteousness. He is not like his scoundrel brothers.

2) That Jacob loves Joseph more than his other sons is screaming the truth of God's DIVINE FAVOR upon Joseph. Now I know we like everything to be fair and we think that's just. But God's justice doesn't require our approval. God shows favor to whom he chooses to show favor. And in this case, God is favoring Joseph. We're going to come to find out why that's a really good thing.

3) The robe, what's with the robe? I think the robe points to Joseph's royal calling. I think the coat is a sign that Joseph will be a KING of Sorts.

4) What about the dreams? The dreams are given by God. Joseph is actually telling the truth of what he dreamt. When people have dreams, these are signs of the divine insight.

So when we see God at work in this story, we see that Joseph isn't petty, ambitious, vain, arrogant or snitch. Joseph is something different. He's something of a Christ-figure, a called one of God. And God's hand is all over him and this story from the beginning.

Directing In Sin:

Now here's where it gets interesting. God's sovereignty continues to direct the course of salvation through the sin of people. Look at the sovereignty of God at work

1) His brothers go to murder him. That would have been bad. That would have been the end of the BIG STORY of Salvation that God is telling. Joseph is a critical piece of that story. But Reuben steps in. And when Joseph is thrown in the pit instead of being killed, it is no accident. It is the hand of God.

2) And after they have thrown Joseph into the pit, it is not an accident that some Ishmaelite traders come walking past. It is the hand of God.

3) And when they sell Joseph into slavery, it is not an accident, it is the hand of God.

4) And when the Traders just happen to be on their way to Egypt, it is not an accident, it is the hand of God.

5) And when the whole story seems over, yet there is this "**Meanwhile**" tacked onto the end, it is not an accident, it is the hand of God. God places Joseph in front of one of the most powerful men in all of the world- Potiphar. And something really big is going to happen because Joseph just so happens to serve in the house of this Egyptian officer.

What I love about this story is that what appears as a horror, whether that's the arrogance of Joseph, or the cold-blooded sale of him to slavery, is all a disguise for the **HAND OF GOD**. What appears as a horror is a disguise for the hand of God.

Scripture tells us this is what's going on at the end of the book of Genesis. Joseph, at the end of it all says to his brothers, "**What you meant for evil, God meant for good.**"

I think this is a theology to interpret all of your life- the good and the bad. That what is meant for evil God means for good. It's an explanation of everything that is happening around us. That evil is not so much the thwart-er of God's plan, but is a tool of it.

That though the sinner and the Devil intend bad things, **God doesn't simply use them, doesn't simply allow them, God Directs them for his good.**

Everything that goes on in this story is God-directed for the glory of his name and the salvation of his people. God causes the jealousy. How else do you explain the dreams, or the coat or the favor? These are God-caused actions in the story, and they are met by God-intended responses of sin. Not just that God knows they are going to happen, but God is intending they will happen, so that something else can occur.

How else does a little guy like Joseph end up in the house of World leader named Potiphar than by the hand of God worked out through sin and righteousness?

I know this seems ugly. But it's not. It's beautiful. We don't like to say that God is the author of sin and evil, because God cannot be the author of sin and evil. Yet, it is an equally awful and terrifying thing to say that sin and evil are occurring outside of the sovereign will of God himself. And so we say things like, "God is allowing people to choose sin." And there's some Biblical reason to agree with that. But it really just lets us off the hook. It really forces us to avoid the tough, but ultimately beautiful reality that God means evil for Good. That God controls and uses and intends evil for the salvation of his people and the glory of his name.

Evil is a tool for his glory. And he used here in Genesis 37 to lead to a "meanwhile." He intended the jealousy and envy, the terrible intentions of the 10 to lead to Joseph to Potiphar's house. And from Potiphar's house, something big is going to happen.

Application:

I don't know how that sits with you. That God means evil for good, that even the worst is the tool of his glory and intention of his sovereignty should not create an anger at God, but something very different. I think it should create a fearless hope inside of you.

I preached the sermon a few months ago in my congregation, and it sort of lit a fire for discussion and wrestling for us. My small group especially really wrestled with that thin line between God not authoring sin but directing the evil for his glory. It really became a question of how far and how much do we believe in the sovereignty of God. And if we do believe in it, is it ugly or is something beautiful?

I had one woman in our small group, named Meg, who particularly wrestled with the issue. She pounded me hard on this stuff. I remember her telling the group she just couldn't swallow all of it. And I retorted- this stuff matters. It may not matter as we

sit here and talk esoterically about the sovereignty of God, but when things go wrong, when tragedy and pain and suffering hit, when evil strikes, this is where you're going to run. I wasn't sure they exactly believed me.

Fast forward to two weeks ago. I'm sitting in the middle of this massive Catholic cathedral at funeral of Meg's mother. There are hundreds of people there. It's huge. The priest stands up and kind of says something about the four levels of love or some bologna. We stand up, we sit down, I'm not really sure what was going on. It was hard to understand what was happening.

But then this young woman Meg climbs to the elevated pulpit. And with the legion of robed professional clergy standing behind her, and the myriads of confused mourners in front of her, she throws a fastball right down the middle. She says, "My mother had Alzheimer's. She got it when I was 14 years old. I'm 28. For half my life my mother had this disease. It has been hard. It has been ugly. It has been painful to watch her for this many years. And I can't make sense of why it happened this way. I don't know the purpose. But I do know this- GOD IS SOVEREIGN, and I WILL TRUST HIM EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THIS AWFULNESS.

And I was weeping. I was weeping with great sadness for her. I was weeping with great awe and joy because I knew she got it. I knew she understood the beauty and the wonder of the sovereignty of God. That he is not reacting or standing by. Her mother's Alzheimer's and the awful years that ended death were not beyond the absolute power and control and will of God himself.

And it may sound ugly, it might sound strange, but when you have been there, when you have been to the depths of suffering, when you have stared evil in the face and seen the possibility of its hopelessness and its meaninglessness nothing seems as beautiful or as wonderful as the sovereignty of God over all things- good and evil, bad and marvelous.

Maybe what appears as evil, God intends for good?

Maybe "with all that's going on" you're asking the question, "Why God?" Why is this happening, why are you causing, or maybe just allowing any of this? Why aren't you fixing this sooner?

Maybe what appears as evil, God intends for good.

My older brother works with thousands of church plants around the globe. In the month of April, after the virus really broke out, they recorded 65,000 conversions.

Maybe God is using all of this to break us of all our idols and little soothing mechanisms and awakening us to the glory of salvation in Christ.

Maybe what appears as evil, God intends for good.

My mom asked me the other day, “What have you learned in all of this?” And I said, “I learned how much I miss my church.” We didn’t meet, and now we’re sort of meeting, and then we’re not seeing each other. And I’ve just learned how much I want to be with God’s people in God’s house, worshipping the God who rules and reigns over all things.

I don’t feel that way about the other things I’ve given up. I don’t miss the 1 million activities in my old life. I don’t miss the going and coming like a mad man. I have LOVED the slowed down pace. I have LOVED the time with my family. But I have also realized how deeply I yearn to be in the fellowship of believers. God has awoken me to that treasure.

Maybe what appears as evil, God intends for good.