

The Sovereignty of God

I entitled the Call to Worship today as Joseph's Lament.

But we could easily entitle it
Depending on the outcome of the investigation
As Brett Kavanaugh's Lament.

Remember not the sins of my youth!!

University professor Christine Blasey Ford
Has come out of Kavanaugh's past
And alleges he sexually assaulted her
Thirty years ago while they were in high school.

Whether it is true or not remains to be proven.
And whether it should impact his nomination
Is a matter of opinion.

But the reason I call our Call to Worship Joseph's Lament

Is because I can imagine Joseph sitting in prison
Under the false allegation of sexual assault

Thinking this must be some kind of payback
For the sins of his own youth.

For what did he do to deserve this?

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Now it's true it was his brothers who sold him into slavery.
Their acts were evil indeed.

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But isn't it also true Joseph flaunted his father's favoritism
By strutting around in the coat of many colors
Jacob had made especially for him?

Isn't it also true Joseph shared his dreams of grandiosity
Of his brothers and his father bowing down to him?

In reality, Joseph was a spoiled brat
Who liked to rub his brothers' faces
In his father's preferential treatment.

And the brothers' resentment towards him grew and grew
Until it reached out of control.

But you can't blame Joseph altogether can you?

As in all families . . .
Dysfunction has a tendency
To trickle down through the generations.

Joseph is four generations from the patriarch Abraham
And there was dysfunction at every level!

No one was immune to it.

So when the opportunity presented itself
His brothers sold him into slavery

They soaked his coat of many colors in blood
And inform Jacob that his favorite son
Was killed by a wild animal.

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Between then and today's story
Joseph must have had some sort of
"Come to Jesus moment."

For by the time, we find him in Egypt
Joseph is a changed person!

He has become an honest and trustworthy man
And ends up chief of staff for Potiphar.

But to his downfall, he is well-built and handsome
And draws the attention of Potiphar's wife
Who tries to seduce him.

Joseph cuts short her advances
Only to have her accuse him of sexual assault.

It was truly a "he said, she said" scenario.

Maybe it was Joseph
Who actually started the "MeTooMovement!"

Joseph is thrown in prison.

Even then, the warden notes his leadership skills
And places him in charge of everything.

All the while, Joseph asks the question, why me?

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The author of Genesis informs us four times
That the Lord was with Joseph.

We read it in verse 2 and 3, and again in 21 and 23.

Now if Moses wrote Genesis

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As tradition suggests

Why would he write that?

Joseph wondered that too . . .

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We have the luxury of knowing the rest of the story.

We see the larger picture.

Moses' statement that the Lord was with Joseph

Points to the larger scene of God's sovereign will.

Knowing the story

We can read the next chapter

And see what comes next.

Why God would allow

Or would create the circumstances surrounding

Joseph's predicament in Egypt?

It goes back to God's covenant promises

We touched upon last week.

God promised that through Abraham and his descendants

A people would be formed

Blessed by God to be a blessing to all nations.

In God's sovereign purposes

God places Joseph strategically in Egypt

To further that purpose.

Following several other interesting twists and turns

In the story of Joseph

We eventually find him second-in-command to Pharaoh

Just where his family could really use him.

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For his family faced a famine back home.
And Joseph was in a perfect position to assist them.

Though he taunted his brothers
Made them sweat a little
Because of their earlier actions against him

The bottom line is
He was there to save his family from starvation.

And not only there for his family to survive.
But due to his position of authority in Egypt
They not only survived but prospered in Egypt.

At least until later the Egyptians
Threatened by the Hebrews' prosperity
Forced them into slavery.

~~

The story of Joseph is a glimpse into God's sovereign will!

Joseph didn't know why all this was happening to him?

We know because we know how the story ends.

But having said that
I will be the first to confess having issues
With the concept of the sovereignty of God.

As I look back in history
As I see how the present is unfolding

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I want to question God's sovereign will.

For example, I think of the holocaust.

Was it God's sovereign will to allow it to happen?

Or worse yet . . .

To intentionally create the circumstances

Surrounding it expressly for God's purposes?

Heaven help us if that be the case.

But you see, my problem is your problem too.

We can't see the larger picture.

The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12

We see but a poor reflection as in a mirror.

We cannot truly know God's providence.

We look through a tiny window onto a limitless landscape.

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R. C. Sproul in an essay entitled *The Purposes of God*

Describes this as proximate and remote purposes.

The proximate [purpose] being what is close at hand and the remote [purpose] referring to the distant and ultimate purpose.

He believes the story of Joseph is a prime example.

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At the story's end, Joseph's brothers express their fear that he will take revenge on them for all that they had done to him.

Joseph's response shows us a remarkable concurrence at work between proximate and remote purposes.

[Joseph] said, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good (Gen. 50:20).

Even though his brothers meant Joseph harm
 God's divine purpose, God's sovereign will
 Meant the exact opposite.

Joseph's brothers had one goal; God had a different one.

The astounding thing, Sproul writes
 Is that the brother's evil intentions
 Served God's ultimate purpose.

Yes, what the brothers did was evil
 They were guilty of wrongdoing
 And were culpable for it.

Yet despite their evil intentions
 God accomplished his ultimate purposes.

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We've all been in situations
 When we cry out to God "Why?"

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Why is this happening to me?
 Or to them?
 Or to anyone

I think about some of the wrongs done me
 Heck, I think about some of the wrongs I've done

What greater purposes might they have
 When I consider the providence of God?
 This I know . . . because of my divorce
 Of which both my former wife and I were at fault.

I wouldn't have met Judith
 We wouldn't have known our precious child Zherina
 And I wouldn't be preaching here today!

Isaiah reminds us:

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)

***8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 neither are your ways my ways,” declares
 the Lord.***

***9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
 so are my ways higher than your ways
 and my thoughts than your thoughts.***

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We may never know on this side of eternity
 All the reasons for evil acts and intentions
 For accidents and tragedies

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For bad things happening to good people

What we do know is the answer to this question:

Is God's purposes in allowing bad things to happen
Expressly for good?"

If we know anything about God's character

Through his son, Jesus Christ

This we know:

God's purposes are always good!

God's purposes are never random!

God's will is never evil.

*Sproul: The pleasure of his will is always the **good** pleasure of his will. His pleasure is always good; His will is always good; His intentions are always good.*

When Joseph told his brothers

That they had intended him harm

But God had intended it for good

He catches a glimpse into God's ultimate purposes.

The Apostle Paul says the same thing

When he says in Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

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Brothers and sisters this is good news!

Paul doesn't say all things are good.

What Paul says is that **IN ALL** things
Whether good or bad, right or wrong
Intentional or accidental
God is working for good.

The ultimate purposes lay beyond our limited understanding
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This is the reason Moses mentions four times in Genesis 39
That the Lord was with Joseph.

That despite Joseph's dire circumstances
God was in control!

The Lord was with him
On the mountaintops and in the valleys.

The Lord was with him
Though evil was inflicted upon him.

The Lord was with him
Though many meant him harm.

The Lord intends all things for good.
~~

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To trust in God's good purposes
Is the key to faithful living.

So the next time we find ourselves
Wanting to ask the question, "Why me?"

Remember that in all things
God works for the good of those who love him.

Joseph's imprisonment, our tragedies, others' foibles
Are all parts of the unfolding plan
Of God's redemption and sovereign will!