

Genesis 39
The Sovereignty of God
WRCoB 9.25.22

I have been intrigued
With the intersection of two contrasting ideas

- God's Sovereign Will
- Humankind's Free Will

They are contrasting in that if God is truly sovereign
Meaning all things happen according to God's will
Than humanity cannot be truly free, can we?

We become just puppets in God's hands
And are not morally responsible for our actions.

However, if we are completely free
To make our own way in life
And we live a life full of sin and dysfunction
How does God's will get accomplished?

If you go to the Bible to discover what it says
You'll learn that both positions
God and human's will, are valid positions.

Jesus believed in the intersectionality of wills
When he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane
Not my will but Thine be done.

Well, how can that be
One supersedes the other?

Truthfully, I don't know.

Isaiah explains it this way.

Isaiah 55:8-9 CEV

⁸The Lord says:

**“My thoughts and my ways
are not like yours.**

**⁹Just as the heavens
are higher than the earth,
my thoughts and my ways
are higher than yours.**

Somehow the Bible speaks of them both
As if they were two sides of a coin.

So, to be faithful to Scripture
We have to acknowledge that somehow

God is all sovereign and humankind has free choice.

Again, I don't get it.

But there seems to be evidence
For both positions in my own life.

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The generations that followed Abraham and Sarah
Are good examples of the contrasting of wills.

We see it specifically here in the story of Joseph
Summarized here in chapter 50.

Genesis 50:20 NLT

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

Any person interested in the Bible should read Genesis 12
Through chapter 50 the end of the book

Fascinating reading.

You discover these beginning generations
Were quite dysfunctional.

So, by the time we come to the story of Joseph
This family had gotten quite messed up.

Even still, God made good on God's promises
That through Abraham and his descendants
The nation of Israel will be firmly established.

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In our passage today, we find Joseph in a prison cell
Wrongfully accused of violating his boss' wife.

So, as he sat in his cell
He commiserated that this must be payback
For sins earlier committed

It's true his brothers sold him into slavery.
Their actions were completely reprehensible.

But isn't it also true that Joseph kind of had it coming to him?

He 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
Dreaming his brothers and his father bowed down to him?

In reality, Joseph was the spoiled one
Who liked to rub his father's preferential treatment
Into his brothers' faces.

The brothers' resentment grew
Until they couldn't take it anymore.

But you can't blame Joseph altogether.

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.

Rebekah favored her son, Jacob
While Isaac favored Jacob's twin brother Esau.

In turn, Jacob favored Joseph
Over all of his 10 older brothers.

His older brothers were hurt
By Jacob's favored treatment of Joseph.

So, when the opportunity presented itself
His brothers threw him in a dry well
And later sold him into slavery.

They soaked his precious coat of many colors
In blood of a domestic goat

And informed Jacob
The son he loved more than anything else
Was killed by a wild animal.

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Well, somewhere along the way
Joseph has some kind of “Jesus moment.”

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

He is honest, hardworking and reliable.

He ends up chief of staff for Potiphar
A five-star general in the Pharaoh’s army.

But Joseph is quite the looker
And draws the attention of Potiphar’s wife.

She tries to seduce him
A case of real sexual harassment
And an abuse of power.

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

Potiphar throws Joseph in prison.

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

All the while, Joseph asks, “why is this happening to 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 why would the author of Genesis say that?

Joseph was wondering that too.

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We, on this side of history, know the rest of the story.

We can see the larger picture.

We can see how the story plays out.

The author’s statement that the Lord was with Joseph
Points to the larger scope of God’s will.

According to God’s covenant promises
Joseph needed to be in Egypt.

Joseph was needed in Egypt to be the instrument
In saving his people from the coming famine.

For following Joseph’s imprisonment
Joseph became Egypt’s agricultural director.

And with his wisdom and help
Not only did Egypt escape the famine
His own people were able to do so as well.

Because of his position of authority in Egypt
He was able to bring his whole family to Egypt
Where they not only survived but prospered.

The only way Joseph could be of help to his family
Was to be in Egypt preparing the way.

The only way, he could get to Egypt from Canaan
Was to have his brothers sell him into slavery
And shipped to Egypt.

Here we see the juxtaposition of God and humanity's wills.

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The story of Joseph is a glimpse into God's sovereign will
Accomplished through the free will of humankind.

Joseph didn't know why all this had happened to him
Until he saw how things were unfolding.

R. C. Sproul in an essay entitled *The Purposes of God*
Describes this as proximate and remote purposes.

He believes the story of Joseph is a prime example.

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 [proximate], but God meant it for good [remote] (Gen. 50:20).

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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

For the bad things that happen to good people

But, if we know anything about God's character
Through his son, Jesus Christ, this we know
God's purposes are always good!

When Joseph told his brothers
That they had intended him harm
But God had intended it for good

Joseph caught a glimpse of God's ultimate purposes.

The Apostle Paul says the same thing in Romans.

Romans 8:28 NRSV We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

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 the author mentions
The Lord was with Joseph four times in Genesis 39.

That despite Joseph's dire circumstances God was there!

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

The Lord was with him
Though many meant him harm.

The Lord was with him.

That despite all the evil intentions
God would somehow turn it to good.

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He was the poorest man in the village, but he owned the most beautiful white stallion. And the king had offered him a small fortune for it. After a terribly harsh winter, during which the old man and his family nearly starved, the townspeople came to visit.

"Old man," they said, "you can hardly afford to feed your family. Sell the stallion, and you will be rich. If you do not, you are a fool."

"It's too early to tell," replied the old man.

A few months later, the old man woke up to find that the white stallion had run away.

Once again, the townspeople came, and they said to the old man, "See. If you had sold the king your horse, you would be rich. Now you have nothing! You are a fool!"

"It's too early to tell," replied the old man.

Two weeks later, the white stallion returned, and along with it came three other white stallions.

"Old man," the townspeople said, "we are the fools! Now you can sell the stallion to the king, and you will still have three stallions left. You are smart."

"It's too early to tell," said the old man.

The following week, the old man's son, his only son, was breaking in one of the stallions and was thrown, crushing both his legs.

The townspeople paid a visit to the old man, and they said, "Old man, if you had just sold the stallion to the king, you'd be rich, and your son would not be crippled. You are a fool."

"It is too early to tell," said the old man.

Well, the next month, war broke out with the neighboring village. All of the young men in the village were sent into the battle, and all were killed.

The townspeople came, and they cried to the old man, "We have lost our sons. You are the only one who has not. If you had sold your stallion to the king, your son, too, would be dead. You are so smart!"

"It's too early to tell," said the old man.

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The story of Joseph juxtaposes

God's divine will and humanity's freedom to choose.

Scripture is very clear that God has nothing to do with evil

Evil originates, either out of our own wicked intentions
Or from some-sort-of malicious principality.

Let me assure you
God can and will bring good out of bad.

Take for another example, Jesus' own death.

Wrongly accused, and wrongly punished
God was able to turn an innocent death on a cross
Into something unbelievably good for all.

Not all things happen according to God's will
But all things that happen can be used for good

In the very name of Jesus
Whose gave up his own will
To follow God into the pits of hell
And then onto the heavenly kingdom.

Praise be to God.