

# Through many dangers, toils and snares

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[ 0 : 00 ] We read from Genesis chapter 45, beginning at the first verse. You'll find that on page 50 of the Church Bible.

Page 50 of the Church Bible, Genesis 45. We continue the story of Joseph. Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, Make everyone leave my presence.

So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers, and he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

But Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph. Is my father still living? But his brothers were not able to answer him because they were terrified at his presence.

And then Joseph said to his brothers, Come close to me. And when they'd done so, he said, I'm your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt.

[ 1 : 18 ] And now, don't be distressed, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

For two years now, there's been famine in the land, and for the next five years, there'll be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and so to save your lives by great deliverance.

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

Now hurry back to my father and say to him, This is what your son Joseph says. God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me.

Don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me. You and your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds and all you have, I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come.

[ 2 : 36 ] Otherwise, you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute. You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it's really I who am speaking to you.

Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you've seen, and bring my father down here quickly. Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept. Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterwards, his brothers talked with him.

But when the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. Pharaoh said to Joseph, Tell your brothers, do this.

Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, bring your father and your families back to me. I'll give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you can enjoy the fat of the land.

[ 3 : 45 ] You're also instructed to tell them, Do this. Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come.

Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours. So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey.

To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave 300 shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. And this is what he sent to his father.

Ten donkeys laden with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey.

Then he sent his brothers away. And as they were leaving, he said to them, Don't quarrel on the way. So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, and they told him, Joseph is still alive.

[ 4 : 52 ] In fact, he's ruler of all Egypt. Jacob was stunned. He didn't believe them. But when they told him everything that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

And Israel said, I'm now convinced. My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die. And so Israel set out with all that was his.

And when he reached the Asheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in a vision of the night and said, Jacob, Jacob, here I am, he replied.

I am God, the God of your father, he said. Don't be afraid to go down into Egypt, for I'll make you into a great nation there.

I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes. Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel's sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him.

[ 6 : 17 ] So Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt, taking with them their livestock and the possessions they'd acquired in Canaan. And Jacob brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons, his daughters and granddaughters, all his offspring.

Thanks be to God. Good morning, St. Silas.

Thank you, Malcolm, for reading. If we've not met, I'm Martin Ayres, the lead pastor here. And we're working in this series through this latter section of Genesis, chapter by chapter, as is our custom as a church.

And we're going to be in these 45 and 46, these chapters. So if you could keep your Bibles open at pages 50 to 52, that would be really helpful.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you'd find that helpful to follow along as we look at these together. So let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a speaking God and that you speak precious words to us, words that can make us wise, words that can correct and encourage us, rebuke us and train us in righteousness.

[ 7 : 42 ] We ask that this morning you will open our ears and our minds. You will open your word to our hearts and you will open our hearts to your word. For we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, some years ago, the radio presenter, John Humphreys, ran a short series called Humphreys in Search of God. And he interviewed various religious leaders, but he disclosed of himself that he used to believe in God, he said, and that over the years it had been chipped away, his belief in God.

Those were his words. And he said that it was the presence of suffering in the world that had chipped away at his belief in God. He said it's the classic thing. This is very cliché, but nonetheless very real.

At the same time, when you spend time with people who do know God and follow God, and you hear their own story of living life knowing God, it's often Christians with the deepest faith and the strongest convictions about God's goodness who are the ones who have suffered.

Sometimes suffered greatly. And they will say things like, through what I went through, I learned what it really means to depend on God.

[ 8 : 55 ] And more than that, I don't know how I would have got through it without holding on to God. So, suffering evidently can either turn someone away from believing in God, or it can draw someone closer to God, trusting in him, depending on him more fervently.

And that faith that they display can be used by God to reshape and refine them for their good. So, how do we respond to suffering wisely and well?

Well, our two chapters of Genesis this morning are about a very emotional family reunion. If you see it in verse 14 of chapter 45, if you look down there, Joseph has made himself known to his brothers.

They haven't so far realized who he is, as they've gone to Egypt and seen him, and he was there giving them grain. Verse 14, Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping.

And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterwards, his brothers talked with him. These brothers talking together is remarkable.

[ 10 : 09 ] Embracing one another is a miracle. And at the end of our section, the next chapter, Joseph's father, Jacob, arrives in Egypt, a very old man.

Remember, when it calls someone Israel in these chapters, it's talking about Jacob, because God gave him the name Israel. So, those names are used interchangeably, but shows how he is the father of what became the Israelites, God's Old Testament people.

And he arrives in Egypt, and if you look at verse 29, Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel.

As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time. Israel said to Joseph, now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive.

So, there's deep emotion, there's relief, there's happiness in this family. But the big question for us, as we've been following Joseph's life, is how could Joseph do this? How can Joseph, who has experienced such terrible wickedness against him, be this agent for such good?

[ 11 : 26 ] When he was 17, his brothers sold him, they dropped him into a cistern, they were going to leave him for dead. Then they decided they would sell him, they heard him crying for mercy, they continued to eat their lunch. They sold him in great distress to slave traders, they took him to Egypt.

He went to Egypt, he worked as a slave in Potiphar's household, and God blessed him there, until Potiphar's wife accused him of sexual assault, and he was unjustly imprisoned, he was forgotten in prison for a couple of years.

Now, his whole life has changed. He has been, he's had this meteoric rise, and he's serving Pharaoh as prime minister, he is lord of the land of Egypt, and he's stored up grain during years of plenty, so that he can give that grain out to people who come to Egypt in the famine, so that the whole region is finding bread when they need it.

At the same time, he could look back on his life, and see all through his adult life that he's had lost years, years of suffering, years of loneliness, years when he'd lost his family, life in an Egyptian prison, and knowing that all of that affliction was brought about by the desire and the schemes of these men who are in front of him now.

And I think one thing that would make it harder for Joseph through those years would be that he would have had to face up to the miserable reality that one of the reasons he was there was his own foolish behavior that had contributed to his brother's hatred of him.

[ 13 : 02 ] What can bring a man who has experienced such dreadful suffering to become what we see here and in the rest of Genesis is a man who trusts God and becomes this agent for the goodness of God.

A man who can work with all his power, as we saw last week, for the good of his brothers and their transformation. The first people who heard these stories, these events, needed to hear that.

It was Israel, and they too had an experience of living in slavery in Egypt, just as Joseph did. They experienced being mistreated. And they needed to understand how to respond well to that kind of experience of hardship.

How do you go through that without becoming embittered so that your suffering becomes part of a story of your growth with God? And for us, all of us are going to suffer, and I take it, virtually all of us will think of suffering that we have gone through in our lives already, and for some of us, that's a very real thing in our lives this morning.

How do we learn to process personal hardship in a way that means good can come from it in your own life? Well, how did Joseph become this character?

[ 14 : 25 ] I think we learn four things about God that Joseph has learned through the difficult years he's endured. And the first is, Joseph's speech points to the sovereignty of God.

This is where we'll spend most of our time. As Joseph makes himself known to his brothers, he can't help but confront them with the sin that they committed against him those years ago as they realize this is the brother that we sold.

And now he's standing over them as a powerful judge. And they're terrified, but what saves them is Joseph's theology, his understanding of God.

It's summed up as, you sold me, but God sent me. Look at that in verse 5 of chapter 45. Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, you sold me, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

[ 15 : 39 ] So then it was not you who sent me here, but God. It's an extraordinary speech from Joseph to say that your evil act, your you sold me, does not undermine God's sovereignty in the whole thing he sent me.

So he's not just saying what I think we might say, which is that people are doing evil things in the world or even against me, and they might try and undermine God's plan for my life, but don't worry because God is bigger than that.

And he will overcome, and he will win in the end. So people out there in the world, they're doing bad things, that kind of is trying to thwart God's purposes, but God is powerful enough to achieve what he wants to achieve.

He will overcome that. What Joseph is saying is bigger than that. He's saying God is at work for good, and God is so big, he works for his good purposes through the evil schemes of men, which he sovereignly permits.

God sovereignly ordains everything that happens in this world, even things that he doesn't want to happen, in the sense that what we mean by that is that God wants goodness.

[ 16 : 56 ] We know from God's commands in the Bible what goodness looks like, and yet when somebody acts in a way that goes against God's decreed will in his word, he is ordaining something that he doesn't want in that sense, because greater good can be done by him through what they've done.

All of that is packed inside Joseph's, you sold me, but God sent me. And God is not the moral agent in people's bad actions, and yet he can work through that, as they are morally responsible for what they've done, but he is achieving something good from it.

All of that is packed inside, you sold me, but God sent me. And it foreshadows God's work at the cross, when the Apostle Peter tells the crowds at Pentecost what's happened in Jesus being put to death.

He says, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

You killed him, God sent him. When people did the worst evil that's ever done, killing Jesus, God achieved the greatest good that's ever been done in saving us.

[ 18 : 16 ] So Joseph has learned to trust God's hidden hand at work in his life, and he's able to help his brothers by urging them to see that God has been at work even through their sinfulness.

And let's notice as well that it's this faith of Joseph that empowers him to offer forgiveness to the people who've wronged him. In that, he is like Jesus who can say at the cross, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.

And he knows that God is the just judge who will work all things out. So in 1 Peter, Peter says that Jesus entrusted himself to the one who judges justly when he gave himself to die on the cross.

And we're told to be like this. So in Romans chapter 12, the apostle says, the apostle Paul says in Romans 12, Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

So knowing that God is in control and knowing that he is just means that we can leave the judging to him and that frees us, it empowers us to offer forgiveness to people.

[ 19 : 30 ] And let's notice too that Joseph can see the sovereignty of God in the awful things that he's gone through and he can say to his brothers, I forgive you without ever having to say I don't feel sad about what I went through.

There's a lot of self-help material out there that says the way to thrive in your life today is to make sure you just don't let things affect you too much. This is kind of modern stoicism that says people's big problem is they're too affected by what's around them.

You're going to suffer, just go through life and don't let it affect you. Well, God's word assures us that it's okay to feel distress about what we go through and Joseph cries at least four times in these chapters.

If you look at verse 2 of chapter 45 it says he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Why does he weep? Well, we could say that in the foreground as he weeps what we're seeing are tears of joyful relief that he's with his brothers and his father again.

[ 20 : 43 ] They're tears of love. But I take it that the reason he cries the kind of crying you can hear along the corridors and gets reported back to the king is because these tears reflect many years of

loss and anguish coming to the surface all at once.

They're tears of relief now but they also reflect years of bottled up pain and suffering in a foreign land. In other words it is okay to hold together that God is sovereign and everything that's happening is in his sovereign will and he is at work for good purposes and there is real deep sadness and grief in my life.

These things can be held together biblically. If we know God is in control it gives us the tools to process what we've gone through and what we're going through and to grow through it with God and be refined by it by him and God's word does that for us without ever saying we shouldn't feel sad.

So that's the first lesson we take it's from Joseph's speech that God is sovereign but if we're being urged in these chapters to have faith that God is at work in every moment of our lives and in everything that happens in the world what is he up to?

What is God's purpose in it all that he's working out? That's our second point. Jacob's vision reaffirms the promises of God. So the brothers they go back to their father in Egypt and they tell him the news that his son is alive and Jacob sets out to see for himself and he goes to Beersheba in chapter 46 verse 1 so that's on the very edge of the promised land on the way to Egypt so he's in Canaan which is the promised land and he's leaving and he's heading to Egypt but Beersheba is really significant because there's a well at Beersheba and it got named Beersheba because it means the well of promise and Jacob's father Isaac was at Beersheba camped when God met with him and God reaffirmed for Isaac Jacob's father that God will keep the promises that he'd made to Abraham Isaac's father now as Jacob leaves the promised land for Egypt

[ 23 : 04 ] God meets with him in that place of promise and look at verse 2 God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said Jacob Jacob here I am he replied it's just what Abraham said when God appeared to him and God says I am God the God of your father do not be afraid to go down to Egypt for I will make you into a great nation there I will go down to Egypt with you and I will surely bring you back again and Joseph's own hand will close your eyes in other words God is saying I will keep my promises don't fear that by going to a different place my promises are not sure he's promised and he promises here again that he will give his people a land to rest in and he is still committed to that promise just as for today we can be confident wherever we live however broken our world gets that God is at work to take his people to a place of rest with him he is good for that promise and God also promised that through Abraham's offspring he will gather a new humanity a people to himself who will know him and he will be their God and they will be his people

Abraham's descendants are this remnant of people who trust God when the rest of humanity has turned from him and we see in verses 8 to 27 of chapter 46 this long list of the people who Jacob took with him out of Canaan to Egypt with him now back in Genesis chapter 10 we have a list that's called the table of nations because it's a list of the people who were family heads as after the flood humanity started growing again and spread across the world and at the end of the list of 70 names Genesis 10 ends by saying that these these people became the nations that were formed and spread across the world after the flood so that number 70 when we see 70 reading Genesis we're to think of humanity as a whole but in Genesis 10 it's humanity that has turned from God and then in Genesis 12

God chooses Abraham and says through your descendants I will build a great nation God's nation and now Jacob sets off for Egypt with his family and he's got the four women with whom he's had children and their children and grandchildren and look at verse 27 where the list ends and it says with the two sons who'd been born to Joseph in Egypt the members of Jacob's family which went to Egypt were 70 in all in other words this family the children of Abraham are God is keeping his promise these are the new humanity people who are spiritually alive because they know God God keeps his promises and he's at work today for that same purpose of building his new humanity as he gathers people to himself through Jesus Jesus is the seed of Abraham through whom when we come to him we become children of Abraham because Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters and so we're seeing that God is sovereign in control in these chapters and we're also seeing what his purposes are his priorities in fact we were reminded on our weekend at home when we looked at 2 Peter chapter 3 with Trevor Johnston a few weeks ago in 2 Peter 3 that the reason that Jesus has not returned yet is that

God is patient he doesn't want anyone to perish he wants more and more people today to join that new humanity through Jesus sometimes we're going to see things going on in the world and things

will happen in our lives and we're not going to be able to draw the threads together like Joseph was and say we can see why God did that for good we look at the Kakovka Dam being destroyed in Ukraine this week that we just prayed about or the COVID-19 pandemic and how that harmed so many people in so many ways and we might not see in our lifetimes the good that God is bringing out of these things but we can be assured by God that he is at work by his hidden hand for his good purposes and his purpose in the world today is to save people by gathering them to himself so Joseph's speech reminds us that God is sovereign

Jacob's vision reminds us that God has made promises that he's keeping how then should we the people of God live in light of that well that's our third point Jacob's journey is a model for the people of God so Jacob gets called Israel and that helpfully reminds us that he is he's like an archetype for the people of God and he gets given a challenge in verse 9 of chapter 45 from Joseph who's sending the brothers back to Jacob his father in 45 9 now hurry back to my father and say to him this is what your son Joseph says God has made me Lord of all Egypt come down to me don't delay and then the assurance in verse 11 I will provide for you there so they go and take the news to Jacob and Jacob sets off in faith he used to be a man who wanted riches for himself earlier in his life but when he sees this great caravan of gifts arriving from Egypt from Joseph from Pharaoh all it is now for him is evidence that shows him what he most longs for that Joseph is alive and we hear [29:12] Jacob's response in verse 28 he says I'm convinced my son Joseph is still alive I will go and see him before I die then in Egypt he sees Joseph they embrace and he says verse 30 of the next chapter now I'm ready to die since I've seen for myself that you are still alive so this is the model for God's people hearing the word the word of God as Jacob has trusting that word and responding in obedience obedience that displays trust Jacob is a very old man to travel to Egypt he brings a whole family with him uproots everybody to go to Egypt what makes him do that he trusts God he takes God at his word and on the way God meets with him and reaffirms his promises at Beersheba on the way so we've seen Jacob in these chapters he's not just on a physical journey he's on a journey of faith a kind of spiritual journey earlier in his life he was a man who deceived people to get what he wanted he couldn't leave things to the sovereignty of God and trust him he grasped for things but last week he sent the brothers to Egypt for grain a second time at great risk and he said to them may God almighty grant you mercy as for me if I am bereaved

I am bereaved so he's submitting himself to the sovereignty of God and saying even if that brings in my life great sadness I will still trust the goodness of God even if it means grief and we can think of the Christian life a bit like Jacob's journey there's just some pictures there of what it's like for anyone to start on the journey of trusting God so he starts in Canaan feeling unable to trust God and he's protecting himself from harm not doing a particularly good job of that and then he is given evidence that Joseph is alive again and it's the brothers arriving with a testimony we've seen him it's as though Joseph has died and risen again in his mind he thought he was dead now these 11 brothers 12 minus Joseph arrive saying we saw him he's alive trust our testimony come with us to him and Jacob is being asked to on the basis of that testimony make this costly journey to go to him well today you and I we hear the testimony in the scriptures of Jesus apostles 11 of them minus Judas who saw him alive again and they tell us he really did die and Jesus rose and they really saw him alive and Jesus has sent that testimony to us today through the Bible that he is alive to urge us to take up the costly risky journey of going to him in faith and for those of us who have already come to Jesus day by day in our own lives we're called to show the trust in God that Jacob showed by living lives of costly obedience obeying God is always going to be costly we should expect it will make our lives look a bit more like Jesus' life a life of service of others for their good even when that involves sacrifice sacrifice of our own gifts and time and comfort in order to see people come to know God and grow in knowledge of him our lives if we're following a life of costly obedience might well take a shape that our non-Christian friends will look at and think that is failure that is foolishness but we live like that because we trust that God is in control and he is at work to achieve his purposes of gathering people to himself and he will bring us safely to be with him so from Joseph's speech we've thought about the sovereignty of God through Jacob's vision we hear about the promises of God and finally we're just going to think about how God keeps those promises in our world it's that Joseph's life is a pattern for the work of God so Joseph sees that God sent him because he's using Joseph now as a rescuer for his people for the nations back in verse 7 of chapter 46 look at how he puts it sorry chapter 45 verse 7 God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance and this is how

God keeps his promises and gathers a people through a deliverer he raises up from affliction Joseph saved God's family and rescued the nations in his time and now Jesus the true and better Joseph saves people from every nation into God's family today these people were perishing in a famine over the region and today without Jesus everyone is perishing they're heading for an eternity without God in everlasting destruction and Joseph gave grain to everyone who came to him so that through that grain they could have bread and have life and Jesus promises today that anyone who comes to him and feeds on him by believing in him that we will never go hungry and never go thirsty because he is the bread of life the brothers are assured that if they go to Joseph then his lord

Pharaoh will give them rest in fact Pharaoh even says in effect come to me and I will give you rest and today we're promised that when we go to Jesus his lord God the father will give us rest so that Jesus says come to me and I will give you rest and we find rest in him Joseph is in a position to deliver and save his brothers because of the suffering he went through to get there you sold me but God sent me and Jesus had to go through the oppression and affliction sold out led like a lamb to the slaughter so that God could exalt him but count his death as ours and this morning Jesus can stand at God's right hand ready to offer rest and salvation to you if you come to him so when Jacob sees Joseph in verse 30 he says now I'm ready to die since I have seen for myself that you are still alive and when Jesus was taken to the temple as a baby there was another old man who'd been longing to see him

Simeon because the spirit had said to Simeon that he would he wouldn't die before he saw God's rescuer the Messiah and when Simeon took Jesus in his arms he said sovereign Lord now I'm ready to die for my eyes have seen your salvation which you've prepared in the sight of all nations so let's pray together sovereign Lord and heavenly Father we praise you for Jesus that you have raised him up to be our saviour and that you've opened our eyes that we might see your salvation in him whatever we're going through and whatever trials and troubles we may face help us to turn to you deepen in us our confidence in your good purposes as you remain faithful to your good promises and by your spirit move us to obedience that displays trust in you we ask these things in Jesus name

[ 37 : 29 ] Amen