

SOVEREIGN GRACE SAVES THROUGH SUFFERING

Genesis 45: 1-24

Please review this week's catechism question.

Were you able to visit with anyone you didn't know this last week Sunday?

INTRODUCTION

Describe a time when a friend or family member was very excited about the announcement of a new product, service or event and talked with you about it. You, however, did not find the news very "good". You were at best, disinterested and maybe even surprised that your friend would be so foolish as to consider this thing "good". Why did your friend consider this announcement "good news"? Why did you not consider it "good news"?

Some examples: A person is very excited about a new movie that is coming out and you think it's boring. A person is excited about a new car that you think is ugly. Someone is excited about the start of deer season and you think they are nuts.

The message about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is called "good news" (That is what "gospel" means.). The ultimate reason it is called good news is because, through Jesus, sinners whom God hates and who are headed for hell are forgiven and enabled to love and treasure God above all things, forever. However, no human being naturally views this as "good news" (Romans 3: 9-18). A message that promises wealth, health, good children, a fulfilling career, escaping hell, a meaningful life or a great marriage would be considered good news. However, a message that promises that you will enjoy God forever is not good news because humans are naturally God's enemies (Psalm 2: 1-3, 5: 4-6, Romans 5: 9-10). Nobody views loving their enemy and living in intimate fellowship with their enemy as good news. Therefore, God's work of saving humans requires that God work to not only overcome his just anger against us but also our resistance to viewing a relationship with him as the best thing that we could ever obtain. In

Genesis 45 we will discover three ways that God accomplishes that work as we watch the climax of the story of Joseph and his brothers.

STUDY

1. Review chapter 44. How would you describe the emotional condition of the 11 brothers at the end of chapter 44?

It would be hard to imagine a group of men more despondent and hopeless than Joseph's eleven brothers at the end of chapter 44. They know, without a doubt, that God has found out their sin and he, through this Egyptian prince is going to make them pay for their sin. Judah has admitted that it would be right for him to be a slave for life in Egypt and has begged this prince to let his other brothers return to their father and just keep him in Egypt.

2. Why are his brothers terrified of him when he reveals himself to them? (Consider: when was the last time these brothers saw Joseph, knowing he was Joseph?)

The last time they saw Joseph was 22 years ago as he was being dragged off into slavery while he was pleading with them to have mercy upon him. Their last memory of Joseph was when they were treating him cruelly. Now, they convulse with fear as they contemplate his power and their guilt before him. They are completely defenseless and helpless before the person they have treated with the utmost contempt. James Boice says about this encounter: "These brothers were wrong for over 20 years. They thought their sin was forgotten and it would never be found out. They had put Joseph in a pit, but God took him out of the pit and placed him on a throne. They embittered their father's life for twenty-two long years and cared not a wit for his anguish; but God caused them anguish instead and restored the lost son. In this moment—to their dread—the brothers saw that sin is futile, that it cannot be hidden, that its consequences cannot be escaped, that God must judge it fiercely."

3. Have you ever felt terrified, as you have considered how you treated Jesus and how powerful and just he is? Why or why not?

4. Would it be good or bad for you to feel terrified? Why do you think so? (See Revelations 6: 15-17, Luke 12: 4-5, Hebrews 10: 26-27, 31)

This sense of terror is a good thing. It is an act of love on the part of God, for if we have no terror of him, then we will not make use of the provision he has made to escape his awful judgment. It is God's intention for us to feel our sin and his judgment upon our sin as our greatest problem so that we will joyfully receive the provision he has made for our sin. What God has done to these brothers and what he wants to do to us is what every good doctor does. He is describing the disease we have and all of its horrible consequences so that we will take the medicine that will save us. God's work of saving sinners begins with his bringing us to the point of despair, hopelessness and terror over our lost condition. Every human being is going to feel the terror these brothers feel sooner or later. This emotion will grip every human being who has not trusted in Christ when he returns. In their terror, they will cry out for the mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of this crucified Christ. I beg you to not wait for that day of terror but to face your sin and Christ's anger against your sin now. Come trembling with fear before him.

God powerfully and successfully saves his people by terrifying us.

5. According to Joseph in vv. 5-9, how did he end up as the "prime minister" of Egypt?

God sent him to Egypt and caused Pharaoh to appoint him as Lord of the land.

6. Make a list of all of the human actions, emotions and decisions that Joseph attributes to God when he says in v. 8, "...it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father (this is a metaphor for chief advisor) to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt."

God ordained that Joseph's brothers hate him, beat him, and throw him into a pit. It was God's will that his brothers sell him as a slave to the Midianites. God wanted him to experience the terror and grief of that attack and that betrayal. God ordained that he be sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. God intended that Potiphar's lust filled wife seek to seduce him and then out of spite falsely accuse him of rape.

God ordained that he be thrown in prison by the jealous husband, his reputation ruined. God ordained that he remain in the dank, dark prison in order to meet the Pharaoh's chief wine taster and baker. God ordained that the wine taster despise him and ignore him for two years so that he was still in prison when Pharaoh had his dreams. God sent the dreams to Pharaoh. God kept the magicians of Egypt from knowing what the dreams meant. God caused the wine taster to remember Joseph. He enabled Joseph to understand the dreams. He enabled Joseph to have a plan for how to prepare for the famine. He caused Pharaoh to appoint Joseph and all the advisors to think it was a good idea.

7. According to Exodus 21:16 did the brothers sin when they sold Joseph? How can it be that they disobeyed God when they did exactly what God wanted to happen?

These brothers sinned when they kidnapped and sold Joseph into slavery. Although the Scriptures teach that God is the author of Joseph's suffering, the brothers are guilty of doing evil and will be judged by God for the evil they have done if they do not repent. God is sovereign over human actions so that every human action perfectly fulfills his good and holy will and humans make choices for which they are responsible. How this is possible we do not fully understand. We can only say that God is far greater than we are and is able to do what we cannot do. If you want to read more before you get to this question read chapter 16 on God's Providence in "Systematic Theology" by Wayne Grudem.

8. According to Joseph, why did God send him ahead of his brothers? (Note God's promise to Jacob in 35: 11-12 and consider what would have happened if Joseph was not prime minister of Egypt.)

He says the reason that God brought him here and placed him in this royal position was for the sake of his brothers and father. God sent him ahead so that God's promise to Jacob and his descendants would be fulfilled. Beginning with Abraham God promised that the Jewish people would become a great nation with as many descendants as there are stars in the sky and sand on the seashore. They are in the second year of a seven-year famine that God has sent upon the whole world. In order to preserve his promise that Israel will be a great nation and

through them, all the nations of the world will be blessed, God sent Joseph ahead. It was in order to preserve the lives of these brothers that God sent Joseph ahead of them and made him ruler over Egypt. God sent a suffering brother ahead of them in order to preserve their lives. Please don't miss this, God did this to Joseph in order to preserve the lives of these murderous, treacherous brothers. God sent this suffering so that his faithfulness to his promises would be guaranteed to these men.

9. What is the most shocking thing about v. 7 to you?

While Joseph's saying that it was God's will that he go through all the suffering is shocking the most shocking thing is that God did this for the sake of these wicked murderous brothers.

10. In what ways is Joseph a "type" of Christ (1 Peter 1: 10-12, Luke 24:44-47)?

God sent one greater than Joseph to suffer for you. He did this to fulfill his promise to save his people out of all the nations of the world. God sent Jesus, the suffering Son of God, ahead of you, to preserve your life. He left the joy and glory of being heaven's firstborn Son and was born as a baby to an unwed, peasant teenager. He lived as an alien for 33 years away from his home and his Father. He endured the contempt and indifference of people he made. He was falsely accused, beaten, mocked, spit upon, murdered on a torturous cross and died alone. He was abandoned by all his friends and despised by his enemies. God is the one who sent him to do this and he sent him to do this for you. Jesus willingly endured all this suffering so that your life can be preserved and God's promise fulfilled to you. This "great deliverance" that Joseph was sent ahead to prepare was not simply escape from the famine but rather the greater deliverance from sin and its penalty. Joseph used his power as the prince of Egypt to bring these brothers face to face with their sin and to create in them repentance and fear of God so that they would come and be forgiven and enter into God's promise through his suffering for them, which God caused through their evil hands. God has sent our suffering brother ahead of us, for us, to preserve our lives.

11. How do you feel that God sent Jesus ahead of you to suffer for you? How should you feel?

12. How much of this suffering was necessary for Joseph to gain the glory of being the prime minister of Egypt and for the brothers to be saved?

All of it.

13. What difference did it make in Joseph's life that he knew that God was working out a plan of salvation in and through his suffering?

He flourished as a slave and in prison because he knew God was at work. He could see the hand of God in the dreams of Pharaoh and knew how to respond to what God was revealing. He faithfully served God in a pagan culture because he knew that God was working out all things for the joy of his people and the glory of his name. He patiently worked for the salvation of his brothers out of love for them and confidence that God could save even these hardened men. Now, look at his joy, love, forgiveness, and passion for the welfare of these men. There is no resentment, no bitterness, no desire for revenge, no anger with the brothers or with God because his assurance of God's sovereignty over all the painful details of his life have freed him from these soul-destroying emotions.

14. What difference should this fact make in our lives?

By looking at the intricate way God worked out all the details of these lives, including suffering at the hands of evil people, we can have hope that God is working out all the details of our own lives for a great and glorious end. We do not know the exact results that God is creating through our suffering, just like Joseph and Jacob did not know for 22 years what purpose their suffering was serving. However, we do know that all the suffering is necessary for the glory that is coming. Whether the glory is our own enjoyment of heaven or the salvation of others so they will join us in the joy we do not always know. However, we do know that all the suffering is ordained by a merciful and loving God for our eternal joy, the eternal joy of all his people and for the glory of his own name.

God powerfully and successfully saves his people by sending suffering for us and to us.

15. What are the “gospel” promises that Joseph wants his brothers to relate to his father in vv. 9-11?

Jacob is to be told that Joseph, who was dead, is alive and exalted to the highest position in Egypt. God made him lord of Egypt. He has a place for him to live and for his entire family in the fertile plains of the Nile River. He will be near him. He will provide for him there so that the five remaining years of famine will not destroy him and his family.

16. Why might Jacob have a hard time believing these promises and so coming to Egypt? See Genesis 26: 1-3 & 42:36.

Convincing Jacob that the son he has presumed to be dead for the last 22 years is actually alive is going to be hard. Jacob does not really trust these sons. He is suspicious of them. Convincing him to leave behind the land of Canaan, which is the Promised Land, to come to Egypt when God forbid his father Isaac to go to Egypt during a famine is going to require persuasion.

17. What does Joseph do, with Pharaoh’s help, to convince Jacob that he must leave Canaan and come to Egypt? How are these things a foreshadowing of Jesus’ persuasion for us to leave behind the pleasures of sin and join him in heaven?

First, he has to persuade the messengers that he can be trusted, that this “too good to be true” news is true. He first appeals to the verifiable testimony of their eyes. “You can see for yourselves and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you.” Just like Jesus with the twelve apostles, Joseph appears to the brothers and offers them many convincing proofs that he really is alive. Second, notice what happens when Joseph’s servants, most likely at his direction, take news to Pharaoh that Joseph’s brothers have come to Egypt and that his father is still living in famine plagued Canaan. Pharaoh promises to give to Jacob’s family the best land of Egypt and the best provisions in Egypt. He sends royal, ox drawn wagons to carry the women and children and aged Jacob. He tells them that they do not need to worry about packing up their stuff because when they get to

Egypt he will replace everything with the finest that Egypt can provide. Then Joseph gives to his brothers clothing and food for themselves and for their father to use on the journey there and back again. He gives 20 donkey loads of grain and gifts from Egypt for his father so that his father will be persuaded to come to Egypt, to believe the promises and leave his life behind. All that is done here is for persuading Jacob, his sons and their families to leave their life in Canaan behind and to come live with Joseph. The last thing that Joseph says to his brothers, when he sends them off to their father is “Do not be stirred up to anger while you are on the way.” Why would he say this? He knows that once they are out of his presence and the shock and joy of his appearing has worn off, there will be many opportunities for them to become angry. Here we have Jesus telling his disciples that the chief way that the world will know that he is alive and he is the Savior is by the love we have for one another. The primary evidence that we are on a journey to heaven, to join our Savior in the eternal pleasures of living with him, is that we love each other and do not become angry with one another or with the troubles of our lives. The absence of grumbling and complaining against other people and our circumstances is the chief evidence that we are stunned by the love of God and joyfully looking forward to our reunion with Jesus. Jacob will be convinced to come to Egypt when he sees the transformed lives and relationships of these eleven brothers.

18. Have you left “Canaan” behind because you believe that the suffering Savior is alive and has place for you to live near him where he can take care of you? What has persuaded you to do so?

God powerfully and successfully saves his people by persuading us his salvation is better than the whole world.