

Genesis 37:12-36; Genesis 50:15-21; Joseph's Hard Providence I. The Hatred of His Brothers II. The Mysterious Providence of God

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever wondered why your someone was so mean to you? Have you ever been the brunt of your brother or sister's tease or torture- a joke that went too far? Well, this evening as we continue our series through the Sibling Rivalries we come to Joseph and his brothers. The fact is, people can be cruel. Added to this, crowd mentality and jealousy can cloud a person's better judgement. But this evening as we consider the life of Joseph, we are going to see how God works through difficult providence for a reason. Evil actions are worked unto good ends. Hard events resolve into a blessed ending. As the common proverb says- when life gives you lemons- make lemonade- right? Well, we find Joseph receives a lot of sour moments in his life. Now this is a common question that most of us have asked before- why are these things happening to me. For example, if you have ever been picked on at school, you have likely asked yourself- what did I do to you? Why are you treating me like this? We could even take a step back and ask- why do bad things happen to God's people? Why do the righteous suffer- even while they are living an upright life? We know why the wicked and rebellious people should suffer- but what about the upstanding and upright members of church? Must they suffer as well? So this evening we consider this theme: Joseph's life illustrates the sovereign providence of a good God!

### **I. The Hatred of His Brothers**

In our first point, we consider the hatred that Joseph endured from his brothers. Now it must have been difficult being son number 11 in this household. As we considered a few weeks ago, there are 4 different mothers in this home and some of Joseph's brothers are not the most upstanding roll models. Our passage finds Joseph around 17 years old- his older brothers have been tasked with taking the sheep out to pasture which leads them far to the North. Joseph, being the favorite son, is kept closer to home by his father. Little Ben is still too young to work in the fields. Now Joseph is clearly the favorite son- and Jacob has not even tried to hide his preference. Jacob gives his son a beautiful, multi-colored robe. Now this robe indicates a

kingly position in the home. Added to this, Joseph has become a dreamer. Imagine having your younger brother tell you that he had a dream in which you would be bowing down to him! That is not how things work around here, Joseph! So added to his kingly position, Joseph is also fulfilling the roll of prophet. Joseph's dreams reveal the future- and Joseph runs to tell his brothers and his parents that they are going to bow down before him. That was not very wise of a 17-year-old to tell his family that he would be better and greater than them all! So there is an underlying hatred that is brooding. So in our passage we find that Joseph has been wandering around- looking for his brothers. We find ourselves over 70 miles from home- as the dreamer finally catches up with his brothers. We note the quick turn of events- the hatred of the brothers leads to their conspiring to kill him in v. 18. They catch him, strip him, and throw him into a pit in v. 24. Recognising that they cannot make money off a dead brother, they decide to sell him into slavery. So in v. 25 he is sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites who later sell him as a slave to Potiphar in Egypt in v. 36. With brothers like this- who needs enemies! This is their own flesh and blood- at only 17 Joseph loses everything and is removed from everyone he knows. Yet as his story unfolds, we consistently find that the LORD was with him! The LORD would prosper and protect Joseph wherever he went. So his brothers take his ornate cloak and bring it back to their father soaked in the blood of a goat in v. 32. Jacob is convinced his beloved son is dead. His brother think they have gotten away with their crime, and life goes on so it would seem. But what we see in the life of Joseph is this, a righteous innocent young man is hated and despised by his own brothers. He was abused and stripped of his cloths- cast into a pit of despair. Joseph endures a figurative descent into the pit of hell. And again, we are left asking ourselves, why would this happen? Where is the God of Joseph's fathers? Where is the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob when all this going on? Doesn't God see? What is stopping God from intervening? Why do the righteous suffer? Psalm 73 promises that God is good to those who are pure in heart. But it sure does not look like it in Joseph's life? As Eccl. 7 says- there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness. So what is it? Is God not sovereign- or is God not good? What are we to do with this?

## II. The Mysterious Providence of God

To answer this question, we have to jump all the way to the end of Genesis. Our reading from Genesis 50 brings us to the end of Jacob's life. God is both sovereign and He is good! Now Joseph's brothers were scared that Joseph might avenge himself on them for the wrongs they had committed against him when they were younger. But in v. 19, Joseph makes a startling assertion. You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. To start off, Joseph does not just brush away their actions. He does not say- don't worry about it, it was no big deal. No, a grave sin was committed and this evil must be identified and confessed. You meant it for harm, your actions were evil and done with wicked intent. You sought to harm and injure- you wanted to destroy me as you acted out your anger and jealousy. So Joseph does not excuse the sinful actions of his brothers- they are not off the hook. This is sometimes our tempted response. When people sin against us or we are injured in some way, we say that it is no big deal. Well, Joseph is not saying, don't worry about it, it's no big deal. Rather, he acknowledges the wicked deed and intention as such. But that is not where he stops. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Although it was not your intention to do me good- God did! God knows the best means to bring about His best end. God's timing is not ours- His ways are higher than ours. The manner of His work is beyond all tracing out. We do not see the end of the matter nor how all these pieces fit- but we know that God is at work! Because of his brother's wicked actions, Joseph will be nearly 40 years old before he sees his father again. But in confessing that God meant this exile into Egypt for God, Joseph is clearly teaching what we call the providence of God. As we confess in LD 10, the providence of God is almighty and ever-present power of God by which He upholds and rules over all things. So much so that nothing comes to us by chance, but rather all things come by the hand of our God and Father. Joseph is teaching that God is sovereign over all. That His plan and work includes everything that happens. That His path is being walked even when that path leads through the mud and the valley. Everything that happened to Joseph was in God's control and was being sent as a part of God's purpose. Even the difficult things like being cast into a pit and sold into slavery- even this was evidence of

God's work. Even then, God was working! Now this is an incredibly encouraging and challenging truth. It is encouraging to know that God is present and actively working in every situation. Nothing happens by chance! This truth is challenging because this means that hardship and trials are also a part of His plan. Everything that comes is sent from the hand of our loving, heavenly Father! It takes faith to accept and submit to this truth! So the thorns and thistles of life- the sickness and death of loved ones- the times of drought and storm. These times are also included in the "all things" that God is sending. You see, our lives are sort of like a jigsaw puzzle. Each moment is a piece of this puzzle that being set in its place. We do not and cannot see the finished work- we are too close to be able to view the end result. But God is at work- putting all the pieces in their place! The comfort is found in this- not only is God at work- the work He is doing is good! Although we do not always feel like it is- the fact remains that God is working- bringing about good. God is and He remains good- and the end He is bringing is good! As the well-known words of Rom. 8:28 state- God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. So there must be an good end that God will bring in your life as well!

But what about Joseph? What was the good end that he was able to see? Well, the good end that he saw was the saving of many people- keeping many souls alive as v. 20 concludes. It was because of his brother's sinful actions that Joseph found himself in a position to save many lives- both that of the Egyptians and the Israelite people! He would be put in this position by God so that he might rescue many people from starvation during this 7-year famine. And here we learn another important lesson- sometimes the good that God is bringing is a good that others will see or benefit from! We can tend to focus on our own good- how will this trial be worked towards my good. But both Rom. 8 and our passage from Gen. 50 point to a broader focus. For the good of those who love him- for the saving of many souls. It is important to remember that God is not only working in your life, He is working in the lives of others as well. Joseph needed to suffer so that others might be saved! His suffering was for the benefit of others! Sometimes God's people need to carry the cross so that God might use our suffering to be a blessing to others! The

trials we endure are not just about you- but many others are affected! In addition to your own good- the good of many others might be attained! So your suffering may be used by God to bring other into the kingdom- or used by God to expose sin or to sanctify fellow saints. We never know how God may use the trial we endure to bless others. But at the root of it all- we strive to bring God glory. So now, even in times of difficult providence, God can and will be glorified. I Cor. 10:31 says that whatever is done, let it be done to the glory of God! So we can learn this truth- in some way, even the suffering of the saints and bearing of their crosses brings glory to God through Christ Jesus!

Yet it must also be said, Joseph in a unique way is fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Not only historically as Jesus was also exiled in Egypt, suffered in the pit of despair and mistreated by His brothers. But redemptively and specifically, Jesus fulfills what Joseph spoke of in Gen. 10:20. What men meant for evil, God meant for good, even the saving of many souls. The suffering of Jesus and His death on the cross at the hands of wicked men- we could say His descent into the pit of hell- was used by God in a very specific way to purchase the salvation of the church. The saving of many souls was attained because Jesus suffered in this way. Although used by God to save many lives, Joseph did not purchase their salvation by his suffering. But Jesus did that very thing! Purchasing our salvation and securing our deliverance from death because He did suffer! And this brings to mind one more lesson we learn from Joseph. In a very clear way, the suffering of Joseph brings about the glory of Jesus Christ! As John 13 says, the Son of man is glorified.

As we close, Joseph had learned this lesson- am I in the place of God? God is sovereign- His will be done!

The divine providence of God covers all times and includes all things. Both good and ill are from His hand as Job would say. Submitting to difficult providence enables us to look for the good God is bringing- while trusting in the Father whose will is being done. As our theme stated: Joseph's life illustrates the sovereign providence of a good God! So may we learn as Jesus prayed- Not my will, Your will be done! God can take the evil of this world and turn it too good! Knowing that God's will is for your good- and the salvation of many souls- is the truth we all need to remember.