

“Heeeeeeeer’s Jospheh!”
Genesis 45:1-28, 50:15-21

Well, that’s the story of Joseph. Disregarded by his brothers, sold into slavery in an Egyptian household. Then he spent years in a prison. Cast out. Forgotten,

But that was then, and this is now. The moment no one imagined was possible. The moment when all the people who thought he'd never amount to anything would watch him come out center stage. Where the spotlight would be on him, and the audience would stand and the entire hall would hold their breath as he spoke.

This was the moment when a man dressed in the finest of clothes would stand in the Egyptian court and make himself known to his impoverished brothers. "It's me, Joseph! Remember me? The brother you threw in the pit? The one you sold into slavery for a few dollars?"

At first sight the brothers do not remember. Twenty years made a great difference between the men. Joseph had changed. He no longer had the soft, pampered, playful look of the spoiled boy from Canaan. And now he was dressed in fine clothing and had the demeanor of a high counselor and kept his distance from those who stood in his audience.

And the brothers had change, too. They had first come to the house of the governor to ask for grain. They had returned because Judah had come to offer himself as a slave in the hope of saving his family. It was Judah who once said, "What profit is it if we slay our brother ... Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites" (Genesis 37:26-27). How strange the turn of events that Judah now offers himself as a slave.

As Joseph stands before his brothers, he has them right where we'd love to have all those petty gossipers who have told tales on us. All those co-workers and colleagues who take great joy in criticizing us behind our backs.

Joseph must have felt like the Psalmist (35:15, 26) who said: "At my stumbling they gathered in glee ... slandered me without ceasing ... Let them be put to shame and confusion altogether who rejoice at my calamity!"

There are some people we would love to have at our mercy, as Joseph had his brothers at his mercy. But what did Joseph do at this crossroad? He sends all the Egyptians, all of the witnesses, out of the room. And when they're gone, he starts bawling. Not crying - bawling. Scripture says it was so loud that his weeping was heard throughout the house and even next door!

But his brothers still didn't know who he was. (I'd love to know what was going through their minds when this Egyptian breaks down and cries uncontrollably in front of them)!

Finally, slowly, Joseph regains his composure and invites them to come closer, crossing that boundary between peasant and ruler. And after exposing his emotions, he says it: "I am your brother, Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt" (Genesis 45:4).

I imagine that the brother's feelings of confusion turned, at that point, to outright terror and fear – terror at seeing this brother back from the dead; fear for their very lives now at the hands of this powerful person standing in front of them.

Because they knew that Joseph had them right where he could humiliate them. Right where he could even the score for the pain and hardship he endured.

But Joseph pulls himself together and realizes, perhaps for the first time in his life, that everything his brothers did - every miserable thing that happened to him - was twisted by God into something good. Because of his past, God had placed Joseph in a position that enabled

him to save a new nation from the ruin of famine. The brothers' actions was the work of God sending Joseph ahead to ensure their future.

Joseph was unable, even with all the power in Egypt, to do anything to change the past. But now he could see that **God had been at work redeeming those years**. Perhaps Joseph bawled because he was finally released from his captivity of sadness and frustration, and now his brothers were finally freed from their guilt.

Joseph basically took a big eraser and wiped off the names of all the people he had blamed for his misfortune. Then in the cleared space he wrote in "Praise only one name, GOD." It was not in a vacuum that Jacob favored Joseph. It wasn't an isolated event that Judah and his brothers sold him into slavery, or that Potiphar's wife sent him off to prison.

God chose him. God enslaved him. God imprisoned him. God taught him the way through dreams and set him as counselor to the Pharaoh. So to God praise was due!

God took what the brothers had done and used it to bring about this end. Their actions became God's actions and were woven into His life-giving purpose. Even more, Pharaoh's actions -- elevating Joseph as ruler -- became God's!

You and I are unable to change many of the lousy things that happen to us at the hands of others. But we can allow God to redeem them. All the terrible comments and relationships and events that we've endured in life can become God's life-giving purposes.

If these incidents have matured us in Christ, if they have made us empathetic and able to help others out of their lethargy, hurt, or bitterness, then our past is redeemed. We have been sent ahead.

Blaming others traps us in the past with them. A black picture of others sticks us with a dim image of God.

Preacher Charles Stanley put it this way: "There have been times when I felt as if I was on a Ferris wheel. Round and round I would go, experiencing the same hurt over and over again. "Lord," I would say, "What are you doing? I've already been through this." It was as if He said, "You're right, and when you respond correctly, I'll let you off."ⁱ

Joseph was helping his brothers off the Ferris wheel. They are getting off together. They were going as a family into the future that God had planned for them. In his tears, Joseph tells his brothers to come closer. He realized that he holds no power over them, just as he realized his brothers never held any power over him.

God was and is the One shaping history, even our history! Which is what Augustine states in the Second Helvetic Confession: "Everything which to vain men seems to happen in nature by accident, occurs only by His Word, because it happens only at His command."ⁱⁱ

Even if we live through unemployment, or slavery, or imprisonment, or chemotherapy, or whatever, we can claim our life with pride. The Apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose."

ⁱ Charles Stanley, *How To Handle Adversity* (Nashville, Tenn.: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1989), p. 184.

ⁱⁱ The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 6, 5.031.