

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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JOSEPH: Our God Is Always Faithful (He is God and He is Good)

Genesis 50

For many of us, change can be a frightening and disconcerting prospect.

- Our world changes. The Leave it to Beaver culture the 1950s became the hippie, anti-war generation of the late 60s. Many of us look out over our world today and can barely recognize what we see, as Elon Musk talks about going to Mars, many of us feel like we are already living on an alien planet.
- Our jobs change. From layoffs to promotions to retirement, our work won't stay the same.
- Our churches change. Leaders come and go. Ministries morph over time. We welcome new believers in and say earthly goodbyes to precious friends.
- Our families change. Children grow up. Parents age.
- Even the bodies we live within change. I'm at the age now that if I get injured, it's likely to last the rest of my life. Spraining my ankle at 15 meant getting a roll of tape and a bit of ice and getting back in the game as soon as possible. Spraining my ankle at nearly 50 means buying a cane and never playing anything again. Things are different. Things have changed.

Change is inevitable. It can be frightening and disconcerting. But, in another way, change is the deepest longing of all our hearts. We don't want our world to stay the same. We don't want our lives to stay the same. We hope for change and most of God's good plans and promises revolve around change.

So, how do we navigate the inevitable changes of life without being held captive by fear?

That dynamic is at the center of our final study in the life of Joseph in Genesis 50.

Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 17 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." ' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

The first half of this chapter tells about the death and burial of Joseph's father, Jacob. And all of Joseph's brothers know that Jacob's death represents a massive change for their family. But they don't know what that change will bring. And it has them scared to death.

Notice how they talk amongst themselves in verse 15.

Genesis 50:15

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."

As the brothers begin to think about their futures, they start to play the “what if” game. That’s nearly always a recipe for fear.

- “What if Joseph has just been pretending to like us for Dad’s sake?”
- “What if Joseph has a hidden, diabolical side to him and has been planning revenge for 40 years?”
- “What if our whole lives come crashing down?”

The “what if” game is a dangerous game.

We’ve all been there before. I’ll never forget the day in March 2020 when several of our leaders gathered around the conference table in our church offices and made the decision to indefinitely suspend meeting together as a church family – perhaps the single, biggest change in the history of our church family. The “what if” scenarios were knocking at the door of all our hearts...

- What if this virus is worse than anyone can imagine?
- What if this pandemic drags on for years?
- What if this virus is nothing serious? When will we know?
- What if we have to lay off all of our church employees?
- What if we can’t finish the renovations?

On and on the “what ifs” went.

Perhaps you are in that place this morning. Facing substantial changes or significant unknowns. And your mind is filled with “what ifs.”

- What if I don’t find a job for another year?
- What if my spouse doesn’t get better?
- What if I never have a spouse?
- What if we can never have children?
- What if my prodigal child doesn’t come home?

The “what if” scenarios can paralyze you. That’s what happens to Joseph’s brothers. They become so paralyzed by fear that they can’t even bring themselves to face Joseph. Verse 16 says they sent him a message.

16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: 17 ‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.”

Since they don’t know what’s going to happen with Joseph, they send a message that’s basically like “Dad’s dying wish was for you to really forgive us. So, what do you say?”

Verse 17 ends with the phrase, ***“Joseph wept when they spoke to him.”***

We don’t know exactly why Joseph wept. But I don’t think it’s a total mystery. Clearly, his brothers don’t completely trust him. It’s been 17 years since he came back into their lives. That’s the exact amount of time he lived with them before they sold him into slavery. In that time, he has been nothing but good and kind to them. But they don’t trust him. Even more, they don’t completely trust God.

Even though He has shown up time after time and has proven Himself faithful in all things, they are still afraid. The “what ifs” about the future are blinding them to “what is” about God.

And it breaks Joseph’s heart to think about his brothers living trapped in a prison of fear, slaves to the “what ifs.”

Look at Joseph’s response to his brothers...

Genesis 50:19-21

But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph’s first and last sentences begin with the words, “Do not fear.” And, in between, he gives them the reason they don’t need to be afraid.

1. God is Always Faithful to Be God

Here’s where I’m getting that. Joseph asks, “For am I in the place of God?” That’s a rhetorical question. He’s saying, “I’m not God. I don’t stand in His place. God is God. Joseph understands that and He wants His brothers to understand that. God is always faithful to be God. That’s the first reason they don’t need to live in fear.

2. God is Always Faithful to Be Good

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...”. Joseph says that in all the sin and betrayal and hardship, God was always working out something good. He was using His mighty power to bring about good plans and purposes. That’s who God is and what God does...always.

Joseph is saying you can always count on God to be God and to be Good. Always. No matter what. And, since that is always true about God, His people never have to fear their future. Seasons will change. Circumstances will change. Our families, our nation, and even our church will change. But one thing that will never change is the truth about God. He is always God and He is always Good. He is faithful.

That’s Joseph’s message to his brothers and that’s our big idea for this morning.

Big Idea: Since God is always faithful, we never have to be fearful.

Friend, I can’t tell you most of the things about your future. I don’t know what the next four years will be like for our nation. I don’t know what the next four hours will be like for your family. I can’t predict the future, but I know you do not need fear it, not because your future will be pain-free or easy but because our God will be faithful. You can take that to the bank.

Just consider the ways Joseph says that God is faithful.

1. God is Always Faithful to Be God

And you might think that’s a no-brainer – “Who would be so foolish to put themselves in the place of God and not know only God is God?” Be careful, though. Joseph refers to two things about God that people often try to take over in God’s place.

God is Judge. That's Joseph's primary meaning behind the phrase "Am I in the place of God?" His brothers assume that he is going to punish them for the way they sinned against him 17 years ago. Joseph responds by reminding them that he isn't in God's place. God will judge. God will avenge. God will right every wrong. And God will also forgive and pardon those who are repentant. We spent several weeks in this study talking about that dynamic.

But that's not the only thing Joseph refers to here. He says that God is in control.

Look again at verse 20:

20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

That word "meant" is a word that means "to intend, or to plan." So, while the brothers were planning and intending something when they sold Joseph into slavery, God also had a plan. His plan was bigger and stronger than theirs. His plan included their plan and superseded their plan. That's because God is in control. His plans always come to pass.

God is in control. Now, this is a huge view of God. He is so strong and so sovereign that He can allow His creatures to exercise free will, which means they can and often will choose to do what is wrong and not in alignment with God's moral will, yet His eternal plans will always come about. He will rightly judge the wickedness of this world and He will powerfully make that same wickedness serve His purposes and His plans.

There is no greater example of this than the cross of Jesus. The greatest sin that has ever been committed was the murder of the only sinless person to have ever lived. But listen to the description of the greatest sin in Acts 2:

Acts 2:23

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Again, listen to this same truth:

Acts 4:27–28

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

God is in control. He has a purpose and plan that cannot be thwarted. Though He is never the author of evil and though He hates sin and the damage it brings, He is able to cause the wickedness and evil of this world to serve His purposes and plans. He is stronger than slavery and betrayal and abuse. God is in control.

And fear comes when we don't believe God is in control. Do you ever live like you believe someone other than God is in control? Politicians? Deep State? The wicked people of this world? Most of all, do you ever live like you believe YOU are in control? How would your family answer that for you? When we live like we believe someone is in control other than God, do you realize what that means? It means we don't believe God is faithful to be God, as though He has surrendered control to someone else.

And Joseph says we need not fear because He is always faithful to be God. He alone is Judge and He alone is in control.

But those truths in themselves don't release us from fear. Unlimited power isn't a comforting thought if it's possessed by an evil tyrant. That's why Joseph points to another facet of God's attributes.

2. God is Always Faithful to Be Good

20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today

God's plans aren't just guaranteed to come to pass, God plans are guaranteed to always be good. Because God is always Good.

That's what Joseph is pointing to here. God had a good plan to save His people. How did Joseph know that was the case? How did He know that God was behind all of that and it wasn't just good luck? Because God revealed His good plan by making great promises. Listen to the word of God to Joseph's forefather, Abraham.

Genesis 15:5–6

And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

God made a great promise about His good plan: Abraham's descendants would be a multitude. Joseph would have known that plan. He would have heard the story of God's promise. And, just like Abraham, Joseph believed it.

I can only imagine the many sleepless nights that Joseph lay awake as a slave in Egypt. He didn't know how it would all unfold...he didn't know the details...but he knew the plan. God would bless Abraham's descendants. As Joseph looked up into the night sky and saw the stars, he heard the echo of God's promise to Abraham: "I'll make your offspring like those stars." And, Joseph thought, "That's me. I'm one of those stars. The God who put them in that sky put me here on earth...He put me here in Egypt. He's in control. He has a good plan, and it includes me."

That belief is so central to Joseph, look down at his last word to his brothers before he dies...

Genesis 50:24

And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

How does Joseph know that God's good plan includes this? God promised it.

Genesis 15:13–14

Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Joseph could reassure his brothers. They didn't need to live in fear over their future. Their good God had a good plan that He made known with great promises. And, since God is always faithful to be God and to be Good, His people never have to live in fear.

And, brothers and sisters, if this was true for Joseph and his brothers, how much more is this true for you and me in Christ?

- You see, the ultimate fulfilment of God's good purposes and great promises comes to us through Jesus. He is the better and greater Joseph. He is the beloved Son of God the Father who was sent into this wicked world so that God could save a people for His very own.
- Jesus suffered on the cross so that God the Judge could forgive our sin when we place our faith and trust in Him.
- Jesus rose again as the glorious display that God is in control over sin and death and hell and the grave.
- Jesus reigns on the throne of Heaven, working all things according to the purpose of a plan that is for God's glory and your good.
- Jesus is coming again to receive us to Himself so that we can live in the land of eternal blessing.

You need not fear, only believe. God is always faithful. He is always God and He is always good.

Are you trusting Jesus?

Are you trusting Jesus to be in control of everything that's out of your control?

Are you trusting Jesus to be good and fulfill God's good promises to you?

What promises do you need to rest in today?