



One hundred and twenty-five years ago a tornado struck the prairies of Minnesota. Many were killed, hundreds were injured, and one small town was almost demolished. In the midst of the disaster, an elderly British surgeon and his two medically trained sons worked almost around the clock for days aiding the stricken, bandaging wounds, and setting broken limbs.

Their heroic work did not go unnoticed. Their excellence as physicians and their selflessness in services of those in need created a following among the tornado victims. The doctor and his sons were offered financial backing to build a hospital, provided that they took charge. The men agreed and in 1889 founded a clinic that soon attracted nationwide attention. Their little clinic grew. The city was Rochester, Minnesota. The elderly doctor's name was William W. Mayo. His sons were William J. and Charles Mayo. Their clinic is called simply "The Mayo Clinic."

It now consists of over 500 physicians treating more than 200,000 people a year. It is known worldwide as one of the premier places of health, healing and excellence in medicine. I'm sure if you asked the citizens of Minnesota about the Rochester tornado at the time they would have said it was all about death and destruction, an unqualified disaster.

But, in the perspective of better than a century, and in the hands of a creative God, the tornado was really about life, help and healing.

The Story today takes us to one of my favorite stories. It's the story of Joseph. When this story begins we too are thinking about unjust suffering, destruction and disaster, but as we see God's purposes flowing through it we start to see life, help, and healing.

Last week we were in Chapter 2 and we learned about Abraham and his faith. Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob, and Jacob had 12 sons. These sons were the fulfillment of God's blessing on Abraham that said from his seed would come a great nation. Jacob was a man with spiritual maturity. He wrestled God for a blessing, got the new name Israel, which means "struggled with God," but like all of us he had flaws. We see in Genesis 37 where our story begins that Jacob showed favoritism that caused great distress to his sons. He was so obvious and publicly favored the 11th of his 12 sons, Joseph.

**"Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him" (Gen. 37:3-4).**

**"His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind" (v. 11).**

Do you really think these older brothers were going to live with that kind of favoritism going on? Absolutely not. They probably started out envious, and then it turned to jealousy, and then it turned to anger and then to bitterness. It was intolerable that the punk brother Joseph even got the cool coat.

Picture the scene: Joseph is 17 years old and he has this dream. This young man with no seasoning, few life experiences to teach him humility, keeps having this strange dream. Also—and God will use it later—Joseph is given a gift to interpret dreams. His father sends him out to check on his older brothers who were grazing their flocks, and Joseph goes to them and says, "You guys want to hear about the dream I had? You don't? Let me tell you anyway. In this dream you guys are going to serve me. Some day you are going to bow down to me." Not what an older brother wants to hear from their younger brother. Maybe there was a better way such as, "Guys, I think God gave me the gift of leadership. Help me grow that gift." Nope, he said, "Some day I am going to rule over you. Isn't that great? Let's celebrate!"

The brother's response? "I resent you. Dad gives the pipsqueak the coat, and then sends the spoiled punk out to check up on us. I resent you Joseph. I resent you dad. In fact, I resent you God. Did you really put this boy in charge of us? He thinks you did."

All of us have struggled with envy, jealousy, bitterness. Isn't that what is at the foundation of all of that? "God, I'm not satisfied; you didn't give me what I want! If I could I would knock you off the throne and put me there and re-deal myself a better hand... a hand that would put me on top. In fact since you won't we are going to knock that little bird Joseph off his perch. We don't have to hear his chirping anymore."

When they saw him at a distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him, like Cain killed Abel out of envy and hatred. But the brothers got to thinking, murder is a bit extreme. So they re-think their plan, "When Joseph reaches us, we grab him and throw him into a well. That's the plan. Now what about Dad? We'll tell dear old dad that a vicious animal ate him up. Then we will see what happens to his dreams. We have dreams too!"

So they stripped off his robe, the sign of all their bitterness, threw him in the cistern, and sat down nearby and ate lunch. They are eating their sandwiches and you wonder what they were hearing from the bottom of the cistern. "Simeon? Levi? Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, why are you doing this to me? Dan? Naphtali? This isn't funny anymore. I'm hungry. Gad? Asher? I'm going to tell dad on you guys and he is going to be mad. Ruben? Tell them to stop. Hey, could someone toss me my coat? It's cold down here."

Then the brothers see some Ishmaelites in the distance on their way to Egypt. Remember Isaac and Ishmael? These were the sons of Ishmael. These were from "that side of the family," the side we don't talk to. They are all a little crazy. They came from great grandpa Abraham and that relationship he had with his girlfriend before great grandma got pregnant with grandpa Isaac. We don't talk about them. And they are definitely not invited over for Thanksgiving!

Brother Judah got the idea to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites as a slave and they did. They slaughtered a goat and dipped Joseph's coat in the blood and returned to their father Jacob and told him their whole sad story as a cover-up for their sin. It was the worst moment in Jacob's life.

His sons sold their brother into slavery, covered up their crime, and then went to comfort their dad for his loss.

**“All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted” (v. 35.)**

Joseph’s story starts out with everything that makes a good story—jealousy, envy, hatred, bitterness, assault, betrayal, cover-up. So bound in shackles Joseph descends on the Nile Valley. This young man sees for the first time the most prosperous kingdom in history so far. He saw pyramids, he heard the cultic hymns sung to the Egyptian gods. He was sold as a slave to the Pharaoh’s captain of the guard, a man named Potiphar.

Yet the whole life of Joseph is the doctrine of God’s providence. In other words, God’s purposes run through it. He lost his family, his friends, his home, his fellowship, but God is still with him.

**“The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him in that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant” (Gen. 39:2-3).**

So Joseph prospers. He is well liked, a hard worker, made the best of his situation, and tried to bloom where he was planted while being haunted by his brothers’ betrayal. When we are not where we want to be, Joseph’s example reminds us that we are to still serve God wherever we are and however long we’re there. He rises to the point of being in charge of all of Potiphar’s affairs. He loves and honors God. We see this proven as our story continues.

**“Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’” (v. 7).**

“Mrs. Potiphar, are you trying to seduce me?” While most guys in the Bible have a keg in their middle, Joseph has a six-pack. This is his boss’s wife. He can’t sue for sexual harassment because he is a slave. He can’t quit because he is a slave. It wasn’t unusual for slaves to be used for sexual favors. Potiphar’s wife is probably attractive and bored, probably a Desperate Egyptian Housewife who just read *50 Shades of Gray* and Joseph is the innocent pool boy.

Consider the temptation. Joseph is probably 18-20, a virgin, has every reason to be angry at the world and want revenge, power and pleasure. And he has no friends, no girlfriend, no opportunity to get married or even touch a woman. She is aggressive and experienced. What could be easier and more fun? This is literally a defining moment in Joseph’s life. “I’m going to go to bed with her and live a secret life of sin, or I’m not going to bed with her and suffer whatever consequences may come.”

**But he refused. ‘With me in charge,’ he told her, ‘my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing against God?’” (verses 8-9).**

To fight temptation he remembered his responsibilities, his purpose and who he is responsible to. In other words, he thought about someone beside himself. Joseph thought of his heavenly master God and his earthly master Potiphar who entrusted him with his possessions. When tempted, we as well need to thank God for our responsibilities. We need to remember our families, our jobs, our church. We think about how our sin will affect those closest to us. It’s a very healthy way to think.

Over and over again she tried and he refused. One day she literally caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me” and he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. This part of Joseph’s story reminds us that we need to know When, Where, and How we are weak. Leave the party! Walk away from the joke! Don’t listen to gossip! Avoid that person! Block whatever is on your computer!

Are you more susceptible when you are tired? Traveling? Had a rough day? What’s going on with you when you fish for attention or compliments? Or why do you feel the need to flirt? Or spend money foolishly? Or lash out at your children or spouse? The Bible says that God provides an escape. A timely phone call you can make. A trusted friend you can text. People who are strong against temptation know where they are weak too.

How many of you might be thinking now, “If I love God, if I honor God, life will go well.” At this point I am supposed to say that Joseph lived happily ever after. But instead Joseph is wrongly accused of attempted rape and he goes to prison, an Egyptian prison, 4000 years ago, no cable, or weight lifting or counseling. A very bad place. Imprisoned because he did the right thing. But a theme continues as we seek to apply Joseph’s lower story to our lives: Even when we don’t understand what’s going on, trust in a sovereign God.

**“While Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden” (Gen. 39:21).**

We saw that Potiphar saw something in Joseph, and now we see the same in the prison warden. We can read between the lines and see that Joseph’s character continues to grow. In similar circumstances another man might become harsh, bitter, withdrawn. I think we have two choices: we can become bitter and disillusioned or we can use our difficulties as a means of displaying our hope and trust in God. I was challenged to think about this prayer: “God, every situation is an opportunity to serve you.”

After being in prison for a substantial amount of time the Pharaoh, who was ruler of Egypt, got really mad at two higher-ups on his staff—the wine guy and the baker. The wine guy had the job of tasting the wine to make sure it wasn’t poisoned before it was given to Pharaoh, and the baker made the Pharaoh’s food. We are not told why they were in trouble. The point is, they were in trouble and they were thrown into jail with Joseph.

**“So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in this master’s house, ‘Why are your faces so sad today?’” (Gen. 40:7).**

Here is Joseph trying to show compassion in the jail for these guys. These guys were scared. They didn’t know what the future held for them, but they also had their own dreams, and they can’t interpret them. God could have given them an interpretation, but he didn’t want to because God wanted Joseph to interpret.

The chief cupbearer (wine guy) and the baker told Joseph their dreams. Now Joseph could have said, “Dreams? Don’t talk to me about dreams. God gave me the gift to interpret dreams and look where it got me. Trust me boys, don’t get into dream interpretation.” But Joseph didn’t do that. He still believed that God had a plan for him and that his brothers would one day bow down to him.

So Joseph interprets their dreams. The chief cupbearer gets his job back. You can read what happens to the baker in your copy of *The Story*. Then look at what happens:

**“The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. When two full years had passed....” (Gen. 41:1).**

Joseph was doing everything that God wanted him to do, and two full years passed. Those were maybe the toughest two years of his life.

As we seek to relate Joseph’s story to our story, we do what Joseph does. At points along the way we place our trust in man; in our brothers, in a boss, in someone seductive, in a guy who makes us promises. We see Joseph’s character develop to incredible levels while he is in the dungeon. Very soon Joseph will have an opportunity to seek out revenge, but he doesn’t. Instead he will tell them, “Do not be afraid. It is I, Joseph. What you meant for evil, God used for good.”

Two years later Pharaoh himself has become haunted by his own dream. None of his magic men or his wise men could interpret it. The Pharaoh was deeply troubled by his dream. And then the Pharaoh’s chief wine guy suddenly remembered. “Remember that time you were really mad at me and threw me in jail? Well, I had this dream and this young Hebrew guy interpreted it. He is actually not that young. I think he is about 30 years old now. He has been in that jail for a long time.” And Pharaoh had Joseph brought to him.

Joseph is quickly rushed out of the dungeon, He is shaved, de-liced, scrubbed up to be presentable. He sees for the first time the beauty of the palace, the aroma of real Egyptian food, standing before who loyal Egyptians viewed as god in the flesh. And yet the king of the world was a mere man troubled by a dream. He told Joseph his dream. And here was Joseph, a man of God who responds:

**“I cannot do it,’ Joseph replied to Pharaoh, ‘but God will give Pharaoh the answers he desires” (Gen. 41:16).**

In essence Joseph said, “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Elohim, the Creator of the world, the God above all your gods will give you the answer that your gods couldn’t give you.” Joseph interpreted his dream, and said, “This is a warning from God. There will be seven years of abundance in Egypt, and then seven years of world wide famine. Store up your food during those years of abundance, because a famine is coming.”

**“So Pharaoh asked them, ‘Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?’ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you” (Gen. 41:39).**

Joseph was placed in charge of the whole land of Egypt. He went to work and he stored up huge quantities of grain. It says there was so much they stopped keeping records.

He got married. He had two sons. His first he named Manasseh, which was a Hebrew name that means “brings me great joy,” joy to help him forget his hardships, his longings for his father and brothers and sisters. His second son he named Ephraim, another Hebrew name that meant “celebrate the blessing and success God has given you.” Even in this pagan place of Egypt, Joseph remained faithful to God in how he raised his family.

**“And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe in all the world” (v. 57).**

So it seems like we could end the story right here. And we would all say in our lower stories, “When we don’t understand what is going on, trust

in a Sovereign God. He is faithful.” But there is an upper story that has yet to be finished. What about Joseph’s brothers?

**“When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, ‘Why do you just keep looking at each other?’ He continued, ‘I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.’” (Gen. 42:1-2).**

**“They said to one another, ‘Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come upon us” (Gen. 42:21).**

**“Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, ‘What is this that God has done to us?’” (v. 28b).**

Do you see what is happening? In their guilt, these 10 brothers are being led back to God. It’s been what 22 years since they sold their brother into slavery. In the sadness over their sin, they are being led back. Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who mourn their sin, for they shall be comforted”* (Matt. 5:4). Paul says, *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death”* (1 Cor. 7:10).

They had to be pretty desperate to make the journey to Egypt to barter for food. There was a real possibility that Jacob and his sons and their wives and their children would starve to death. And it’s likely they saw the famine as punishment for their sin against their brother and their father.

Here is a question for us. I imagine the brothers were considering this question on the camel ride down to Egypt. Might God be putting some kind of lack, or loss in your life to bring you back to him? The idea of waking us by pinching us with our wants and needs is all through the Bible. David said in Psalm 119:67, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.”* May God awaken us to obedience to God’s Word. *“Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?”* (Psalm 130:1-3).

All of Joseph’s brothers except for the youngest, Benjamin, went to Egypt to buy food. Genesis 42:6 says, when the brothers arrived, *“they bowed down to Joseph.”* They had no idea it was Joseph under all the Egyptian clothing and make up. And if Joseph was alive they wouldn’t have expected him to be the prime minister of the most powerful country in the world.

But Joseph recognized 10 of his brothers and then he noticed that his younger brother Benjamin was not with them. What was to stop them from throwing Benjamin into a well like they did him? So he tested them. He treated them harshly to see what would come out. He accused them of being spies and he jailed them. For three days they stewed in an Egyptian jail. Then he brought them to himself, and told them that he would get them food, but they were to bring their youngest brother to him. He made them keep Simeon with him to make sure they would come back with the younger son. Here is what they said among themselves.

**“Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded for his life, but we would not listen, that’s why this distress has come upon us” (Gen. 42:21).**

They had no idea that Joseph understood them. They spoke Hebrew and Joseph was so moved that he turned away to hide his weeping. They were blaming no one but themselves and this was the start of healing. Yet Joseph continued to test them. He secretly returned the

silver that they used to pay for their grain to each of their sacks without their knowledge so when they got back to Canaan they opened their sacks and again cried out. God is punishing us!

Soon they needed more food, so Jacob reluctantly allowed them to take Benjamin and they returned to Egypt. This time they took double the silver to try to get back in the Prime Minister's good graces. When they got back, Joseph could hardly contain himself. He asked about their father, "Is your father still living?" He looked around and he saw one who looked like him—Benjamin, his little brother, his own mother's son. Again, he was so moved he rushed out of the room to weep. He then returned and ordered to his servants, "Serve the food." This must have really freaked out the brothers; he had them sit in the order of their ages. How would he have known? And why does he ask about dad? Then as he served the portions, look at verse 34.

**"When the portions were served to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's. So they feasted and drank freely with him."**

Then Joseph loaded them up with one final test. He secretly put his personal silver cup into Benjamin's sack. After they left he sent his security to stop them. They searched Benjamin's sack and found Joseph's cup. Then all the brothers tore their clothes in grief, all headed back to receive what they certainly thought was a punishment of death for stealing. When they stood before Joseph to give an account, it was Judah who stepped up and took responsibility. It was Judah who was willing to sacrifice his life to save Benjamin, his father's son by Rebekah. And remember it was Judah who had sold Joseph for 20 shekels of silver who stood up and took responsibility.

**Judah said, "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father" (Gen. 44:34).**

It was now clear to Joseph that his brothers had changed. They were now willing to lay down their lives for their youngest brother to honor their father. We know now that Judah's tribe would go on to be blessed. Jesus himself the savior would come from this new nation. This new nation of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and through his Son Judah, the tribe of Judah would bring to this world Jesus the savior of the world.

Joseph once again couldn't contain himself.

**"Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Have 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" (Gen. 45:1-2).**

In this strange scene, the attendants are told to leave. Through the thin walls they heard their master sobbing. Joseph clears the room so his brothers' reputation is protected.

**"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" (v. 3).**

What would have been the first question you would have asked if you were Joseph? He asked about his dad. "How's dad? Is he alive? Is he well? Is he happy? Is he walking with God?" They were so stunned they couldn't speak. This is how it will end. Our brother will kill us right here. He won't forgive us. But then look at the next verse.

**"Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me. When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (verses 4-5).**

You separated me from my dad. My sons have never met their grandpa. My wife has never met her father-in-law. I didn't get to grow up with you. I missed out on everything. I was a slave. Prison was long, dark and cold. I was accused of rape. I am the only believer in this country. But I forgive you. I don't want you to have pain. I want to set you free. God sent me on a mission to rise up and feed millions and save lives. Now all my prayers have been answered. You guys have to understand this. God spoke to me and said, "Just wait and see. I will cause everything to work together for good to such an extent that you will be tempted to say that even bad things that happened led to good and right outcomes."

**"But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (verses 7-8a).**

This is as good as it gets for guilty sinners. God lets Joseph's brothers see meaning from their past sins for God to use to bring good in the present. I hear story after story of how God uses our past sins to bring about glorious purposes in his perfect timing.

Joseph gave them the best available. He said go get our father. Move here. We will raise our children and a great nation here together. Our kids will play on the same soccer teams, we will have BBQ's and car-pool and everything! Go get dad! And then he says, please don't quarrel along the way. He gave them new clothes. For Benjamin he gave him five sets of new clothes and 300 shekels of silver.

What does Joseph's story teach us about God's story? God will build a great nation to save people from their sins. And out of that nation will come a savior who will reverse the effects of sin. His name is Jesus.

**"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).**

What does Joseph's story teach us about our story? God's purpose runs through it. We can trust God, even when we don't understand what's going on.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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