

Sermon for August 20, 2017
Joseph: Beyond the Technicolor Dreamcoat
“The Prince of Dreams”

Genesis 41:1-16, 25-36

I am older than Contemporary Christians Music. When I was a youth the term “Contemporary Christian” had not been coined. We called it “Gospel Rock” and it included groups like Petra and singers like Amy Grant and Keith Greene. It was still a sub group of Gospel music. The radio station I often listen to would play the modern sounding songs along with some black gospel and southern gospel and even some jazzed up hymns.

One southern gospel song caught my ear. It was based on Romans 8:28 and was sung by a male southern gospel quartet. It went: “Romans 8:28 does clearly state ‘All things work together for good, for those who love the Lord.’”

The words caught my attention. I had never heard that verse, but it intrigued me. It said that all things, not just the “good” things, but even to bad things, could be used by God to bring about some good in our lives. As a young man who had recently lost my mother that idea captivated me. In God’s hands even the worst things that happen in our lives can be used in a positive way.

Well, some bad things had happened to Joseph. Sure, Joseph had been blessed with the gift of having and interpreting dreams. But his brothers, his own family, had plotted to kill him and had thrown him in a pit. In the end they ended up selling him into slavery. He was carried off far from his family to Egypt and sold.

Despite that tragic event, God blessed him. He gained his master Potiphar’s trust and rose in rank in the household. He was running the household for his master. But then Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. When he refused, she accused him of attacking her and he was thrown in jail.

It was bad enough his own brothers sold him into slavery. Now he was thrown in jail for a crime he did not commit. He was both a slave and a prisoner. Truly some bad things had happened to Joseph.

Even in a jail cell, Joseph was not alone. God was with him. Even in prison, God blessed Joseph. He gained the trust of the jail keeper, and he was entrusted to care for the other prisoners.

This was when he had an encounter with two of the servants of Pharaoh’s court. They were the cupbearer and the baker. There was a long history of Pharaoh’s being poisoned. So the baker and the cupbearer, who were in charge of Pharaoh’s food, were important positions. They bore a lot of responsibility.

Apparently Pharaoh got word that someone was planning to kill him, so he preemptively imprisoned both until everything could be sorted out. In prison they both had dreams. Joseph, being the Prince of Dreams, interpreted their dreams for them. The cupbearer would be returned to his post, but the baker would be executed. Joseph’s prediction came to pass, and he told to cupbearer to remember his plight to Pharaoh and free him from prison.

Two years passed. For 2 more years Joseph rotted in prison. Meanwhile, back in the palace, Pharaoh was having some dreams. Pharaoh’s dreams disturbed him, and no one could interpret them. Then the cup bearer remembered his promise to Joseph. He told Pharaoh about Joseph and they sent for Joseph.

Pharaoh said “Joseph I hear you can interpret dreams.” Joseph responded, “I cannot, but God can give you the meaning of the dream.” Joseph had come a long way from the boy that lorded his place among his brothers. He was no longer the youth who strutted around in his robes and bragged of dreams that appeared to make him lord of the whole family, even his parents.

In humility, Joseph listened to the dreams and told Pharaoh that they were a warning from God that there will be 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine. He also said that Pharaoh should find someone wise to be in charge of buying the excess grain during the years of plenty, and then sell it back to the people in the years of famine so that people would not starve. Pharaoh liked the idea and appointed Joseph to be that administrator. In the verses following what we read this morning, Joseph is given fine robes and gold chains to wear. And he became second only to Pharaoh in all of Egypt. He goes from being a slave in prison, to being the Secretary of State of Egypt, and he is once again dressed in royal robes!

Things didn't go smoothly for Joseph. He experienced dramatic ups and downs in his life. But God was with him through it all. And Joseph humbled himself before God through it all.

“What does the Lord require of you but to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”(Micah 6:8) Those words would not be written for another 1,000 years or so, but Joseph had lived into them. It took a while, especially the humble part, but Joseph sought to act justly to Potiphar, to show mercy to his fellow prisoners and the people of Egypt, and to be humble, giving God credit for his gift with dreams. Through all the ups and downs, he walked with God.

Sure some bad things happened: slavery, imprisonment ... , but God was with him blessing him along the way. In the end God used him to fulfil the promise made to Sarah and Abraham. God had told them that their descendants would be a blessing to the nations. In the end Joseph was used by God to avert a possible catastrophe and save untold numbers of lives.

Was it God's “plan” that all that happen? I don't believe that God wants people to do bad things. God did not will that Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery and fake his death causing great emotional pain to his parents, not to mention what it did to Joseph. I also don't believe that God willed that Potiphar's wife would sexually harass him and have him thrown in prison. And I don't believe God wanted the cupbearer to forget about his promised to Joseph either. But sometimes people with free will do bad things. In all of it, God was there to redeem the situation, and use Joseph to bless others even in slavery and a prison.

“Romans 8:28 does clearly state, all things work together for good for those who love the Lord.” That does not mean that everything will go smoothly. Sometimes bad thing will happen. Sometimes you may be betrayed and abandoned by the people you trust the most. You may find yourself in a pit. You may find yourself in chains. You may be slandered and accused of crimes you would never commit. People may betray you and fail to keep their promises to you.

But God's people are never alone. God is with you in the midst of the troubles. Put yourself in God's hands. Humble yourself and stay true to your standards. Act justly and mercifully and acknowledge that God is caring for you. And God will see you through.

Learn from Joseph. God took the hateful actions of his brothers, the deceitful actions of Potiphar's wife, and made something good come out of a horrible situation. God redeemed the situation. Humbly place yourself in God's care, and you will never be alone! And like Joseph, God will use you, wherever you are, to be a blessing to the nations.