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Genesis 45:1-20 – *God's Providence in the New Year*

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Narrative, Doctrine, Application.

### Narrative

Joseph, a young, spry Hebrew teenager of 17...

Rolls out of bed one morning happy to be alive.

And, why not?

Life is good.

His family is well-off...

He has a big family—

11 brothers—

And a father who favors *him* especially.

Joseph's dad favors him so much...

That he gives Joseph a shiny new coat of amazing colors—

Purple, green, blue, yellow and gold.

On this particular morning Joseph slips on his sandals—

Puts on the special robe his dad gave him—

And comes out of his room with a smile.

His dad, Jacob, is already awake...

Working around house:

“Good morning my beloved son,” he says to Joseph kissing his cheek.

“Your brothers are down in the valley with the flock grazing...”

“Do me a favor and go check up on them.”

This is nothing new to Joseph...

He has been tasked with this before.

In fact, last time he did this, Joseph caught his brothers messing around...

So he came back and told this to his dad...

Which didn't make him popular with his older brothers.

Lately, there's been a lot of tension between Joseph and his brothers...

His brothers don't like how much their dad favors Joseph.

I mean, it's obvious that Joseph is the favorite...

And Joseph kind of rubs it in their faces.

Oh well, the tension doesn't bother Joseph today...

He's happy to go check up on his brothers on this bright, sunny day.

Unexpectedly, things quickly go south for Joseph though.

His brothers see him coming...

And they make a plan to get rid of him for good.

When Joseph reaches the place they are grazing...

His brothers surprise him by ganging up on him...

Rip off his colorful coat...

And throw him in a deep, dark hole...

His own brothers!

"Maybe they're doing this just to teach me a lesson," Joseph thinks.

He is only down there for a little bit when it seems like his brothers have a change of heart.

They throw down a rope and help him out.

Joseph makes it out of the hole...

But then his stomach drops.

They didn't have a change of heart after all...

Because what Joseph sees is a group of travelers with camels loaded down with supplies.

These people are going someplace far, far away!

Next thing he knows, Joseph is being tied up and shoved along with the caravan.

His brothers have sold him to these travelers!

He is now a slave!

This isn't the way Joseph expected his day to go:

First his brothers turn on him and throw him into a hole...

And now he's sold into slavery...

Being taken to...who knows where!

It turns out that the travelers are going to Egypt...

Far, far away from Joseph's home.

When these travelers reach Egypt...

They sell Joseph to someone who works for the great Pharaoh...

He's the captain of Pharaoh's guard.

So, Joseph is forced to work in the captain's house.

But you know what?

Joseph does a good job.

The captain sees that Joseph is a good worker—

And that Joseph is bringing him success—

(actually it was God) ...

So the captain puts Joseph in charge of *everything* he owns.

Things start looking up for Joseph in Egypt.

Sure, he isn't at home with his family...

But he's starting to make a life for himself.

Until things go south again.

The captain's wife lies and says that Joseph did something that he really didn't do.

But the captain believes his wife and not Joseph...

So the captain throws Joseph into prison.

Two whole years pass by...

With Joseph in prison for something he didn't do.

One day the dungeon door opens up:

“Slave, we hear you can interpret dreams.”

“Come with us,” says the guard.

It’s true that God has given Joseph the ability to interpret dreams...

But it hasn’t ever helped him out of prison before.

Pharoah has had a dream and wants someone to tell him what it means.

Joseph tells him the meaning of the dream...

That there will be 7 years of abundance in Egypt—

More food than you can eat or even count—

And then 7 years of famine in the land—

A severe famine that will ravage the land.

Pharoah is so impressed with Joseph...

That he makes Joseph second in command of all Egypt.

From the dungeon to the second most-powerful person in the world...

At 30 years of age.

Joseph is put in charge of all the food supply and distribution.

If you want food during the famine...

You have to go to Egypt...

And you have to go through Joseph.

Well, guess who needs food...

Joseph’s family!

The same brothers that threw Joseph into the deep, dark hole—

The same brothers that sold Joseph in to slavery—

Are now standing before him asking for food.

But it’s been 22 years!

And they don’t recognize Joseph...

They have no clue what happened to their brother...

And this is the last place they’d expect to find him.

It’s been a long time since Joseph woke up on that sunny day and put his shiny, colorful robe on...

Joseph has seen a lot of hard times these last 22 years...

Because of his brothers.

What do you think he'll say to them?

Let's find out.

Now we come to our Scripture passage...

Joseph's response to his brothers.

### Genesis 45:1-20

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. <sup>2</sup> And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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! <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. <sup>7</sup> But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. <sup>10</sup> You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. <sup>11</sup> I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

<sup>12</sup> "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. <sup>13</sup> Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."

<sup>14</sup> Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. <sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

<sup>16</sup> When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. <sup>17</sup> Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'Do this: Load your

animals and return to the land of Canaan, <sup>18</sup> and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.’

<sup>19</sup>“You are also directed to tell them, ‘Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. <sup>20</sup> Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.’”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

### Doctrine

I hope you give this story some thought...

Not just today...

But throughout the year.

This story hinges on the doctrine of God’s providence...

It’s an important doctrine...

And an important story.

Simply put, the doctrine of God’s providence says that...

God is in control.

God is in control of everything...

And guiding *all things* to God’s intended purposes.

God uses his power to uphold, guide and care for his creation. (Paul Helm)

Not only does God create the world...

He continues to hold it up...

Providing everything that is needed.

Some of us might be confident that God created...

But then we think God stepped back and let that creation unfold.

God wound the clock of creation...

And then let things play out the way they would...

Without interfering.

We confess that the Bible teaches that God is involved in all of the affairs of the world.

Not only is he involved...

God is in control of it all...

Guiding it toward his desired ends.

It's easy for us to say, "Yeah, okay, sure..." about the good things that happen...

But what about the not so good things?

When Joseph looks back on his life—

All of the hard things he has had to endure—

He says to his brothers, "God was behind it all."

"It was not you who sent me here, but God." (Gen 45:8)

Joseph is not absolving them of their guilt—

He's not saying, "It's okay what you did to me"—

He's saying, "*Your* plans got sucked up into *God's* bigger plans."

God gives humans the ability to think and act and cause things to happen—

Good things and even bad things—

But these secondary causes—

These things that people do—

Are never outside of God's larger purposes.

Picture God's control like this large circle...

And all of our decisions and choices land in here...

They are never outside of God's sovereignty.

All of our objectives get sucked into the orbit of God's purposes. (Stan Mast)

We are responsible for all of the things we think, say, and do—

Good and bad—

But all of them ultimately fall into God's plan.

Don't hear me saying, "I've got this all figured out."

There is profound mystery in how human decisions and God's plan fit together.

But from Joseph's story—

And from stories like Job and Esther and Revelation—

We know that God holds up the universe...

Providing for exactly what is needed...

Working all things to his intended purposes.

That's the doctrine of God's providence.

### Application

Now for how it fits into our life.

Today is January 2<sup>nd</sup>...

We just entered into a new year.

These past two years have been hard on a lot of people...

Hard on the world.

These last few weeks have been especially hard:

With the emergence of a new variant...

And Kevin's death right before Christmas.

We often have high hopes entering a new year:

"Let's get rid 2021 and move fresh into 2022..."

"Things are going to be so much better."

Like Joseph our feet may hit the floor—

Anticipating a good day or a good year—

But things may go south:

Maybe we or a loved one will get sick;

Maybe we'll lose our job...

Or we'll be relocated;

Maybe a significant relationship will end;

Maybe school will be moved back to online;

Or maybe we'll be moved back to online worship.

We're not promised a pain-free or struggle-free year.

We don't know what is going to happen in this next year.

What we do know is that...

The decisions that we make this year—

The decisions that the government makes...

The decisions that friends, family, or strangers make—

Will impact us...some for good and some for bad...

And a lot of times these things will be outside of *our* control.

But they are never outside of God's overarching control...

Nothing comes to us by chance...

“Not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven.”

As the catechism says—

And as Joseph's story clearly spells out—

*All things* come to us by God's fatherly hand.

And just as God arranged Joseph's life—

Through struggles and hardships...

To provide for his well-being, the well-being of his family and the world—

God's larger purposes always lead to life...

Maybe not physical life here on earth...

But life in his fatherly hand...

Life in his love...

Where we will never be separated from Him.

We see this ultimately with the story of Christ.

We know that God used the evil intentions of religious leaders and Romans soldiers—

People who killed Jesus—

To bring life to all of God's people...

Full life...everlasting life.

With this we can be confident that whatever happens to us...

Ultimately ends up being for our good...

Because God is in control and loves his children and care for us...

And his purposes always lead to life.

So, when things aren't going well...

We can be patient...

Knowing that God is in control.

When things *are* going well...

We can offer our gratitude and thanksgiving...

Knowing that God is in control.

And when we're unsure of what the future will bring...

When we're living in fear and worry of what's up ahead...

We can be confident and be comforted knowing that it will never separate us from God's love...

Because God is in control.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.