

Understanding God in the Old Testament

A God With a Plan

Genesis 37-50

This morning I want to continue on in our study of the God of the Old Testament. Up to this point we have seen the faithfulness of God, we have seen the forgiveness of God, we have seen the patience of God, and the provision of God. Since the beginning of time God has always been one who walks by man's side, one who longs for relationship, one who wants to prove his love and faithfulness, and one who has already orchestrated your life and mine so that in the end we become what he has always intended for us to be.

Romans 8:28 tells us:

28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

I don't know about you but when I look at my life, I wouldn't have chosen the path I have been on. I wouldn't have purposefully walked into difficult time, painful time, times of conflict, times of facing the most difficult of odds. I would not have picked my life because of the struggle I have faced, yet it is in those times that character and integrity are molded and formed, and it is those times that have made me who I am today. I have my issues, and I am in no way saying that I am perfect, but I see in my life more grace, forgiveness, boldness, confidence, faith, and humility than I have seen in times past.

That is the beauty of the Christian walk, that **God loves us too much to let us stay the same. He wants to mold us and work in us bringing us to fruitfulness.** I can guarantee you this morning, that our look at the life of Joseph is the same. I know he wouldn't have picked the path that his life took, but in the end it created opportunity and character. Today, we will see the God of the Old Testament through the life of Joseph, a son of Jacob, born to his wife Rachel.

Jacob has just settled in the land of Canaan where his father Isaac had lived. At the time he has 12 sons but what stands out about Joseph is that he is Dad's favorite. **Genesis 37:3-4** tells us:

3 Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe.* 4 But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him.*

Because Jacob showed partiality the result was jealousy. We saw a great example of this in the life of Cain when God accepts his brother's sacrifice and in **Genesis 4:6-7**:

*6 "Why are you so angry?" the Lord asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected?
7 You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is*

right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

When someone else is shown more favor, more acceptance, we have the tendency of becoming jealous, and if we aren't careful it can control us and make us do things that are rash and thoughtless. That is exactly what happens to the brothers of Joseph, they become so jealous that the scripture tells us that they couldn't say a kind word to him.

As fallen human beings, I believe that there is some of this problem in all of us. Instead of just looking at what we have, at what we are, and at what God is doing in us, we have a tendency to compare with others, and when we see something in their life that we don't have, we tend to become jealous, and if we aren't careful it can control us and misdirect our lives. **We have to learn to just look at our own things, our own victories, our own conditions, and our own relationship with God, and embrace what we have without comparison.**

Jealousy, however, gets the best of the brothers. Yet, Joseph's attitude doesn't help either. It seems like he rubs it in their face. Look at what he does in **Genesis 37:5-7**:

5 One night Joseph had a dream, (and he promptly reported the details to his brothers, causing them to hate him more than ever. 6 “Listen to this dream,” he said. 7 “We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!”

The dream wasn't well received to say the least. But Joseph decides to bring more focus to his favored status by sharing another dream he had in **Genesis 37:9**:

“Listen, I have had another dream,” he said. “The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!”

This time Joseph's bragging was met by a rebuke not only from his brothers, but his father as well. When someone starts going around, talking about all the great things happening to them, it is hard for us not to take it personally, especially when we find ourselves in a period of struggle.

Is it then wrong for people to share the good things in their life? No. But if it is done with a sense of arrogance and not humility, and if it is done with a sense of self-accomplishment and not in acknowledgement of God's provision, then it is better for one to keep their mouths quiet. **Arrogance and self-accomplishment turn people off while humility and God's provision stirs up faith and the possibility that God can do the same in me as well as you.** I like the words of Paul in **Galatians 2:6**:

6 And the leaders of the church had nothing to add to what I was preaching. (By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favorites.)

I believe that as human beings we have tendency of positioning ourselves in order to gain more acceptance, more value, and more power. Not only did Joseph know he was the most favored son, not only did he have these great dreams, but there is some question as to Joseph's motivation from what we read in **Genesis 37:2** it tells us:

But Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing.

Was this done with humility or arrogance? We don't know for sure, but what we do know is that at the beginning of our look into the life of Joseph we find one who needs a lesson in humility.

We all know the story, Joseph is sent out to check on his brothers. When he arrives at the place where they are suppose to be, they aren't there. He is then told to find them in a town called Dothan. When Joseph's brothers seen him coming, they first plot to kill him, but are then diverted by Reuben who proposes that they simply throw him into a pit to die. What is interesting about Reuben however, is that his whole motivation was to save Joseph, and the scripture tells us that he was going to come back and rescue him.

The brothers, after throwing Joseph into the pit, get ready to sit down to eat, when a caravan of Ishmaelite traders heading to Egypt approach. Another brother, Judah, steps up and proposes that they not let Joseph die in the pit, but instead that they sell him to the traders as a slave. Both Reuben and Judah show a sense of conscience and it leads to the saving of Joseph's life.

Outside of the dreams, no where up to this point to we see or hear God's involvement in Joseph's life – is it true? Absolutely not! We see the beginning of God's plan for Joseph. Even when it seems like things are falling apart, God is still working.

With the dreams, we read that Joseph doesn't just use what God spoke as a guide and promotion of faith, but he uses it with arrogance and as a mark of favoritism.

We can, if we aren't careful, take what God has spoken to us and do the same proving that we are better or at a higher level of spirituality. And instead of using God's word as direction and promotion of our faith, we end up using it as a pedestal. We need to be careful! At the beginning of Joseph's life we can see the lesson of humility needs to be learned, and God knows exactly how to make it happen. **Proverbs 11:2** tells us:

2 Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

We will find that Joseph's life will make him into one the most powerful and wise men on the face of the earth. And if God can do it in the life of Joseph, he can do it in you and I. Joseph is sold to Potiphar, the captain of the palace guard for the King of Egypt. It tells us in **Genesis 39:2-6**:

2 The Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. 3 Potiphar noticed this and realized that the

Lord was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. 4 This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. 5 From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master's household and property, the Lord began to bless Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. 6 So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!

I want you to notice that it was God who blessed what Joseph did, and God's blessing on Joseph was what granted him favor in the eyes of Potiphar. This was God's first point in positioning Joseph to become second in command of Egypt. **We serve a God who will put us in the right place at the right season of time.** And just as Joseph must have thought that he had finally arrived, everything came crashing down when he is accused of trying to rape Potiphar's wife, when in reality he was framed. Sometimes setback are simply another step towards God's purposes and plan. Genesis tells us in **Genesis 39:19-23**:

9 Potiphar was furious when he heard his wife's story about how Joseph had treated her. 20 So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained. 21 But the Lord was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And the Lord made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden. 22 Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison. 23 The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. The Lord was with him and caused everything he did to succeed.

We serve a all-knowing God who knows what is going to happen and will use it for his good. **Even when mankind functions in his deceitfulness and his sin, God takes it into account and uses it as a lesson right to bring even greater fruit, even greater character, and even greater faith.** Despite what Joseph's life may have looked like in prison, God still took care of him and used it as a stepping stool to become a great leader in Egypt. **1 Peter 1:6-7** tells us:

6 So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. 7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*

The scriptures tell us that God was with Joseph and showed him his faithful love. It is as if God tells him to hang on, let him fight his battles for him, just remain faithful, keep your eyes on him, and he will take care of the rest. I believe that God come to us and tells us the same. We think we have to solve our own problems, we have to fight our own battles, we have to figure things out, when in reality things won't make sense and it

will seem like it is too overwhelming to bear. But **the God we serve is one who longs to show his faithful love and walk with us no matter where we go.**

God is more interested in who you become in your character than he is in who you become in your accomplishments. That's hard for us because we want the recognition, and power. But I believe that before things get better, they always seem to get worse. **I believe that a lesson in humility is always learned before a time of promotion by the Lord.**

It is as if God wants us to keep a proper perspective, otherwise we may think we got their on our own. I think Joseph was very clear as to who brought the promotion in his life. He knew that everything he touched and every bit of favor he found with Potiphar and eventually the King of Egypt, was only because of God. Just as everything we have today, every bit of favor we find with people, every promotion comes from God. **Psalm 75:6-7** tells us:

No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges; He brings one down, he exalts another. (NIV)

We serve a God who brings promotion to those who remain faithful and who depends upon him to direct their paths. At times all we need to do is be where God has us, do what he has called us to do, and let him figure out the future.

It just so happens that one day Pharaoh become offended and puts his cup-bearer and chief baker in prison – the same prison that Joseph is at. Joseph is put in charge of their care. The baker and the cup-bearer have a dream – something the Joseph just so happens to have experience with. Look at Joseph's words in **Genesis 40:8**:

8 And they replied, "We both had dreams last night, but no one can tell us what they mean." "Interpreting dreams is God's business," Joseph replied. "Go ahead and tell me your dreams."

Obviously, Joseph knew who gave him the ability to interpret dreams. Instead of turning the full credit to himself, he gave credit where credit is due. **We serve a God who gives and prepares us with abilities to live out our God-given purpose.** From the time he was a child, God was equipping Joseph for this time and for a time to come.

When I think of my own life, I think of the talents of art and color, I think of when I taught myself how to play the guitar, the bass, how I loved to sing (most importantly about Jesus), and how I loved to create things from nothing – and today I realize that all of these things were God's way of preparing me for today. For some of us it may be playing with tools, or martial arts, or sports, or cooking. Your past is a preparation for the future.

Joseph interprets the dream of the cup-bearer and the cook. He tells the cup-bearer that he will be released, while the cook was going to be beheaded and impaled. It happened

just as Joseph said. This was simply another set up to bring Joseph to his God-given destiny.

I want to stop here in or study of Joseph because I feel there is so much more to learn as we progress in his life. But this morning we see that God has a plan. He has a plan to work out our lives for our good. He has been preparing us for our future through life experiences, through talents, through passions and desires, only to be used today. He wants to develop character, fruitfulness, show his provision and faithful love. He put us in the right place at the right time through his sovereign plan, he walks with us, and he gives us the hope that our lives are full of meaning and purpose.

This morning God has a plan for you to live out, he will give you favor, influence and abilities to get you to where he wants you – just remain faithful to him and love him, listen to him, and learn from him in the process. And when the time of promotion comes it will be clearly seen that God has put you there, and that he is the one who deserves all the glory and honor. Let's pray!