

Scripture: Genesis 50:15-20

Message: "Behind the Scenes"

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There is something wonderful about miracles and other obvious examples of God at work. The parting of the Red Sea, the feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, miraculous healing, a resurrected Jesus eating breakfast with his disciples are just a few examples of God at work. It's so clear to see. It's so easy to trust a God who works in such obvious ways.

The challenge is to trust this same God when life goes 'bump' and 'bang' and we are jolted around. The challenge is to trust this same God when there are no obvious signs that he is doing amazing things. Or to trust God when the things that are happening seem to deny that he is at work at all.

A vivid example of this is Joseph. He was just a regular guy like you and me, who had a role to play in God's Grand Story. But it took some time before Joseph fully realized or understood this.

Joseph was the son of Jacob and Rachel. He had eleven brothers but his home life was not so pleasant. Joseph was a favourite son and, because of that, his brothers hated him. To add to the tension and animosity, Joseph told his brothers about two dreams he had in which he saw his brothers and parents bowing down before him. Who knows if he told about these dreams with an air of pride in his voice, taking pleasure in rubbing it in that he was a favourite.

As a result of this hatred and jealousy, Joseph finds himself sold by his brothers as a slave. He ends up in Egypt, in the house of Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. We read that "the Lord was with Joseph and he prospered." Potiphar promotes Joseph to a place of authority. But after a run-in with Potiphar's wife, he is falsely accused and gets thrown in prison.

Perhaps Joseph asked himself, "Is this where obedience gets me? What about it, God? Where are you now?"

Even so, Joseph trusted God. We read "the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden." We're not told if Joseph knew that the Lord was with him, or if he thought it was his own effort, but Joseph gains the

trust of the warden and is again given a place of authority.

Joseph correctly interprets a couple of dreams and sees that as his ticket out of prison. But his kindness is forgotten and he remains in prison for another two years. Did he again ask, "Why?"

When it seems like this will be Joseph's story, he gets an opportunity to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. As a result, he again finds himself in a place of authority, second only to Pharaoh.

Joseph's story continues with a visit from his brothers, coming to buy food. They bow before this ruler of Egypt, not knowing it is their brother. When Joseph eventually makes himself known to them, the brothers are terrified, fearful of his anger and revenge.

Joseph reassures them (45:5-7), "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... 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."

It wasn't always so obvious that God was at work. But Joseph came to see God at work behind the scenes. It's an expression of faith and trust in the One who is Almighty God and loving Father. God doesn't shove and push and jostle us around. He doesn't pull strings as if we are just puppets. He shapes and guides and works, often in way that we do not see right away.

After their father Jacob dies, the brothers are still afraid that Joseph will now exercise his revenge. But Joseph reassures them again, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

God at work behind the scenes. He has been writing his Grand Story, but not always showing his involvement in obvious ways. If he has been at work behind the scenes in the past, with people like Joseph, we can trust him to be at work in our lives as well, even if it is not always so obvious.

We may be going through some major struggles or pain or doubt. Or we see terrible tragedy and destruction and it's hard to imagine that God is at work, somewhere, somehow. We might wonder about what God might be up to, or if he is even real.

I'm not suggesting that we have to find something positive in every particular circumstance of life. It's not that we have to find some reason for every particular thing that

happens. We *can* ask 'why' over and over and there's nothing wrong with that. We must also accept that we do not always have to find an answer.

I *will* say, with confident faith, that we can know and trust that God *is* somehow at work, often behind the scenes. This can give hope and comfort in the difficult times. We can say this because we believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. We can say this because it's what the Grand Story is all about. God is working out his plan to reconcile the world to himself, and nothing can stop him, and everything that happens somehow finds its place in that plan. We may not understand it from our perspective when we focus on specific events or individual challenges, yet God is always at work to fit the big picture together.

Consider Joseph. The saving of Joseph ensured the continuation of the people of Israel, from whom the Messiah, the Lord Jesus was to come, and did come. We can be sure that Joseph did not understand what was happening to him when his brothers sold him into slavery. It was only in retrospect that Joseph was able to explain what happened. But that is not always the case.

We don't always have an answer as to why things happen as they do. There is evil in our world, alongside of all that is good. Remembering the Grand Story reminds us to take a very wide view of life and history. Our view is easily very limited, and therefore we struggle.

But that's why it's so important to remember that we are part of a much bigger story. Like Joseph, we can trust that God is vigorously at work in and with a lot of human treachery. Three times Joseph insists that God, not his malicious brothers, sent him on ahead to Egypt to save lives. What's more, Joseph also insists that God, not Pharaoh, made him ruler of all Egypt.

We preach and teach in a culture that claims people are responsible and should receive credit for all that happens. We're part of a society has constructed a kind of closed universe in which everything has a material cause. God's work in Joseph's life, however, is part of a Grand Story that reminds us that we always have to also take our unseen God into account. God is at work to accomplish his purpose, sometimes in spite of or even against, human plans.

Yet while God always graciously does his work, Joseph's story reminds us that God often does it precisely in the context of human choice. Jacob's sons choose their respective

plans and do their respective work. Potiphar, Pharaoh and even Joseph also choose, plan and work. Yet in the end God is also at work, behind the scenes.

We might question God's work. Our decisions might seem to delay God's work. But God is still at work, even using the dark side of human action and planning to carry out his will.

At the heart of both this and Joseph's whole story is God's work. It's not obvious or identified directly to everyone involved. Yet God is always at work behind the scenes. Trust him in the obvious miracles. Trust him when his presence and work is not so obvious.

Joseph came to see his life as a small part of God's working in human history, a part of God's Grand Story. Are you able to do the same in your own life? What might God be accomplishing through you?

Will you trust that God is at work, the God who sent His Son to be our Saviour to reconcile you and me and all things to himself?

Will you trust that God is at work in your life as part of his Grand Story?

To God be the glory!

Amen.