

FORTY YEARS OF GRACE
ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

I am your brother...

AM I
IN THE
PLACE
OF GOD?

NOEL A. ESPINOSA

Among Evangelical preachers, CH Spurgeon (1834 – 1892) holds the record of the number of published sermons. His Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit containing his sermons in his church pulpit released its first volume in 1855, and would expand posthumously into 63 volumes in all! It is good to be reminded of the conviction that moved him to bring his sermons into print. In the Preface to the first volume, he remarks:

The Preaching of the Word by the chosen servants of the living God, is the ordained means for the gathering in of the elect. It is not the Word *read*, so much as that which is *heard*, which has the promise attached to it; hence the importance of a devout attendance on the ministry of the Gospel. Nevertheless, without doubt, the Holy Ghost who has helped us in the delivery of these Sermons, will also afford his divine assistance now that we send them forth in this volume.

Though without Spurgeon's giftedness, the preacher of the following printed sermons shares Spurgeon's conviction. Preaching, by definition, is the oral proclamation of the Word. For that, there is no substitute. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14). Preaching is not simply the delivery of words. It is the event that delivers the Word! God Himself is engaged in it. The Lord Jesus is said to be active in the preached Word (Eph 2:17). The Holy Spirit is the Power that animates the proclamation, so that it results in conviction and conversion of hearers of the Word. As an event, every preaching encounter is unique, and cannot be repeated and duplicated.

Put in print, the reading of a sermon is not the preaching of it. But, without substituting for the hearing of the preached Word, its reading can have tremendous blessing under God. In that hope, the sermons in these pages and by this publication are offered to the reader.

They were first preached in the pulpit of Grace Baptist Church of Los Baños. The feedback to the preached Word from the congregation is one to encourage a preacher of even modest abilities. It is a joy to preach to people who love the Word! They are a mixed people, some are high on the perch of the academe, while others are simple domestic folks. It is this fact that, hopefully, justifies the expectation that the sermons may yet bless others way beyond our church.

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Reconciliation of Brethren

based on a sermon preached on October 10, 2021

The filing of the Certificate of Candidacy is done. That does not mean the list of candidates is complete. The COMELEC will yet do a trimming of these candidates. As it happens in every election, the nuisance candidates will be removed. That makes sense on many levels. Just imagine on the practical level, if all those candidates are put on the list of the ballot, we might have a kilometric ballot to fill. But more important, in order not to make a mockery of the elections and this exercise of democracy, we must only have serious candidates to choose from. And so, a trimming has to be done.

Consciously or unconsciously, we all do some trimming of our list of friends and associates. The common reason for removing from our list of friends is conflict. When you are wronged and offended, it is easy to trim that person who wronged you or offended you, no longer to be considered a friend, no longer to be an associate. For Christians, when it comes to just ‘friends,’ that is our right to do. We have free choice in the selection of our friends. It becomes more complicated when it is about the brethren in faith. Even if our instinct is to remove them, it contradicts the very Christian spirit and the very root of the Biblical faith, which is rooted in reconciliation with God. If there is reconciliation with God which is part of His gracious salvation, the product of that is to be reconciled with those who are thus reconciled with God. If I am reconciled with God, I must be reconciled with all others, who are also reconciled with God.

We come to the most thrilling part of the narrative of Joseph. This is the time when Joseph will reveal himself to his brothers. Remember that the brothers were forced to go to Egypt because of the famine. And the brothers had no idea that they were facing their long-lost brother that they thought they had done away with. Now they are actually facing Joseph and bowing down to him, which is a fulfillment of what Joseph had originally dreamed. Joseph treats them a way that is bizarre unless we understand this to according to Joseph’s purpose, and that is to test their character. That is what explains the bizarre treatment that these brothers were subjected to. Joseph tested their character in terms of conviction of sin, in terms of transformation of character, and the last and the most important for him is their being rooted in redemption, by way of substitution. The last test happens in the

second visit of the brothers. This time, Benjamin is tagged along their company. This test is what persuades Joseph that his brothers, at last, have truly changed.

This is still the most fundamental test as to who truly belongs to God: **A sinner enters God’s kingdom rule by gracious redemption.** As we saw, redemption means deliverance from slavery to sin. That is by way of the purchase of a price and the price is substitution by a redeemer. In our case, the Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ. In the story of Joseph, it is Judah, among the brothers, who comes forward prepared to be the redeemer of Benjamin. And for that act, God honors him. He will become the source of the Messianic line that will ultimately find fulfillment in Jesus, who belongs to the tribe of Judah.

Now Joseph is ready to reveal himself to his brothers. The question that we are confronted is, “What is he ready to do as against what is he able to do?” In his powerful position, there are many things he could do if he wished to avenge himself against his brothers who, of course, had done him wrong. Instead, we see a different Joseph and there is an explanation for that. We will be reading several passages that will give us the substance of the story.

Genesis 45:1 – 8

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, “Make everyone go out from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Genesis 45:25 – 28

So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, “Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all

the land of Egypt.” And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, “It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

Genesis 46:31 – 34

Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, “I will go up and tell Pharaoh and will say to him, ‘My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. And the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock, and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.’ When Pharaoh calls you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ you shall say, ‘Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,’ in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.”

Philippians 4:2 – 5

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand...

Imagine yourself in the place of Joseph. An average person, even a Christian, in the position of Joseph would not miss the opportunity to avenge. Imagine the long years that Joseph must have entertained vengeance in his thought of coming back to his brothers and doing to them what they had done to him. But Joseph is of another spirit and that is for a reason. I told you early in our series how to understand this narrative of Joseph. This is the longest among the patriarchs of Genesis. I told you to look at this story with two concentric circles. The larger circle is that of providence, and the smaller circle is that of redemption. This is the reason why we see Joseph, able to reach out to his brothers in reconciliation. We see his tender disposition to his brothers, his readiness to reconcile with them.

MESSAGE

God's kingdom rule is the foundation of reconciled relation of brethren.

We can look at this from those two concentric circles we should be using in looking at the story of Joseph – providence and redemption.

1. In providence, wrongs done are overruled for God's blessing
2. In redemption, wrongdoers are transformed for God's kingdom

Let us look at the way that reconciled relation is built up by Joseph, because of his belief in these two circles that interpret the story of Joseph.

In providence, wrongs done are overruled for God's blessing

We see the faith of Joseph in all that has transpired going back to the evil act of his brothers. Remember he was a young 17-year-old, when out of rage and jealousy, his brothers conspired, first to put him to death, but then later on relented and instead sold him to Egyptians, as a slave. But listen to his revelation to his brothers: *I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold to Egypt.* Their offence is recalled and the reaction of his brothers, we are told: *his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.* I imagine a genius painter would paint the countenance of his brothers and reflect that horror on their faces. They realize that their sin of many years ago is coming back to them, not only in terms of conviction but they are now in the mercy of this powerful man whom they have sold once as a slave. Understandably, they were dismayed, they were in fear, in sheer terror. But Joseph assures them with his tender words: *Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves. God sent me before you to preserve life.*

What words of faith on the part of Joseph! What faith is being spelled out here is Joseph's belief that, after all, it was not his brothers ultimately that brought him to Egypt, but it was God. He states it positively first and then later on states it negatively by saying: *It was not you, but God who sent me.* Is Joseph denying the culpability of his brothers in selling him as a slave to Egypt? Of course not. That is his very introduction to them. Yet, in his ultimate understanding, these things would not have happened without the overruling control of God, that is providence.

POINT: Mature understanding of God's providence appreciates its control even of evil.

The general teaching of providence is that God is in control and He arranges events to fulfill His purpose. That is providence in general. There are many aspects to the providence of God, such as His preservation of things. What is calling our attention in this passage, is its overruling aspect, that in providence, God overrules that which is evil. Let me be very clear, God is not the author of evil. He does not create the evil people do. The brothers, in this case, were the ones who intended, and put to action, their evil intent. They were evil, and their intention and action were evil. We are evil, and what we do, that is evil,

When we say God in providence overrules evil, He is not the author of evil, but even evil is not beyond the control of God in order to carry out His purpose. That is what we are saying. He overrules it for His own purpose. The result: unintended by the evil plotters, the evil will still carry out the purpose of God. This is not in the intention of the brothers when they sold Joseph as a slave to Egypt. And yet God is the One, according to Joseph, who sent him to Egypt before even the plotting of the brothers, even before their action which are all evil. That is belief in providence. This demands a belief in the sovereignty of God that does not reduce Him to a mere spectator of events.

Unfortunately, there is a very low view of divine sovereignty today. Professing Christians will concede that there is a good God. However, He is hindered from doing His good will by the free will of man. God intends good, God plans for what is good but human free will is just stubbornly resistant to God's will. What you have in this picture is a good God but helpless to carry out His purpose. The free will of man is much stronger. That is unacceptable for someone who knows the Word of God and His teachings. This is not the kind of God that will inspire someone to let go of the evils done by people. How was Joseph enabled to let go, even of the evils

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of his brothers? Ultimately, he could see that what brought him to Egypt, even though instrumentally, the brothers in their evil plot did it, he could say: *God sent me here.* He could even say, you did not, even if you were the instrument, ultimately, you did not send me to Egypt, but God did in order to save lives. Joseph displays mature belief. What is amazing is that this is very early in the period of Revelation so much so there is not even yet any scripture written when it happened. It was put into writing by Moses. But when it actually happened, no scripture was written yet. Still, that early, Joseph had that strong belief in the sovereignty of God, in His providence that He controls even evil.

If Joseph could believe that, so much more should you and I believe in the overruling sovereignty of God, in His providence. We see this at its most highlighted demonstration in the Lord Jesus when He was crucified, and when the church was beginning to preach that He was risen from the dead. They suffered persecution. Listen to how they responded to this in their prayer in Acts 4:27-28 = *truly in this city of Jerusalem, there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.* Whatever Herod, representing the Jews, and Pontius Pilate representing the Gentiles, whatever people of the world did to Jesus in that event of crucifixion, perhaps the greatest evil ever done, yet the early believers could say with confidence, whatever evil people did, they did according to plan, they did according to God's predestined will.

A good chess player will be able to calculate many moves ahead against his opponent and perhaps will even make a move that will create a series of moves in which the opponent will make a move that he thought would be winning. But the good chess player knows and has calculated what would happen because of that. It is still the free choice of the opponent to make his move but the genius chess player would have calculated what would happen. God is so much better than a genius chess player. So much so that Joseph could say before what the brothers did, God already did the sending. That is belief in providence. It challenges us as it relates to relationship with brethren.

CHALLENGE: Let faith in God's providence even over evil overcome vindictiveness and bitterness.

Joseph's disposition to, and treatment of, his brothers reveal a man without vindictiveness. He is without bitterness, after all the humiliation he has gone through: he became a slave, he became a prisoner. Yet he sees God's purpose in the end, so

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that he could truly say: *God sent me before you to preserve life.* He is not discounting the culpability of the brothers. But for his part, he is not in bondage to bitterness, because he could say, *God sent!*

That is the way to overcome bitterness and vindictiveness when you think you are wronged and offended. Surely, Joseph has not forgotten how he was put in that pit and while he was crying, ignored by his brothers while they were eating. How miserable it must have felt for Joseph to be tied by his own brothers, sold like an animal to be a slave in Egypt. But because Joseph can see beyond the second causes, beyond the instruments, even evil, he has his peace, he has his *shalom*.

This is in stark contrast with the way the present generation is taught to always blame others. We live in the culture of victimhood. Others must always pay for their wrongs whether real or imagined. This is a generation, even among professing Christians, that has no place for God's providence. The doctrine of providence has fallen into obscurity. Very little is known, much less appreciated, of God's providence. That is why when you read the story of Joseph, you cannot help but see the providence of God. I count the story of Joseph, along with the story of Esther, as the masterful narratives of Scripture giving a weaving of providence at its most beautiful. Everything is what God's purpose is that will be fulfilled no matter the evil intent and plot of wrongdoers.

Today, everything is about, to use favorite vocabulary, empowerment. Blame the oppressors. Reverse systemic oppression. That's the language that many Christians are now adopting. None has been more oppressed, other than Jesus, than Joseph, coming from the most unlikely people, his own brothers in flesh. But now that they have passed his tests, he is convinced they are convicted of sin, transformed in character, believing in redemption, Joseph is ready to reconcile.

Is this not what Jesus Himself has done on behalf of sinners? Salvation, in one of its aspects, is reconciliation with God. That is what you need to know in your own natural standing, you are at enmity with God. Your religion may have taught you, you are moral and good, and God is so in love with you that He will be skipping your little wrongs and accept you just as you are. That is religious trash. The truth of the Scriptures is that in your standing, you are at enmity with God. But He sent His Son in order that He may redeem sinners, and redeeming sinners, He reconciles sinners with God.

Reconciliation is a big word in true salvation. When there is reconciliation there will be, as its fruit, reconciliation of the reconciled with God, despite differences. This is what we find in Paul's appeal to the reconciliation of two feuding sisters in the church in Philippi. Whatever their conflict is not told us, but what Paul appeals is: *Rejoice in the Lord always.* In other words, see your privileges as redeemed. Both of you, whatever your differences in personality, perhaps differences in approaches that cause the feud, but whatever it is, when you rejoice in the Lord, you will have the accent of your thought upon your blessing of reconciliation. To rejoice in God is to have a sense of being a beneficiary of God's good. You cannot rejoice and at the same time be bitter. No matter the opposition, no matter the evil done, you will know that you are in God's hand.

On October 10, 1520, Martin Luther received the papal bull of excommunication. The bull was actually published in June but such was the communication at that time, it only reached Martin Luther three months later. He was being excommunicated by Pope Leo X unless he recanted his, what the Roman Church considered, heresies. Martin Luther refused. Despite the opposition, he had his company, he had his friends and brethren who shared the standing of an outcast from the powerful church. That makes the reconciliation of brethren so necessary when against this world. We must understand whatever wrongs have been done to us, God's providence is behind the wrongs.

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In redemption, wrongdoers are transformed for God's kingdom

Joseph mentions a word here that will be significant in its later use in the prophetic literature. He tells his brothers: *God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth.* This is the first time in the whole Bible, the word *remnant* is used. But it will later become a prominent theme in the prophets. Because the nation has sinned, Israel is now apostate, and Judah has also sinned, God is going to continue his redemptive plan through a remnant. Joseph is telling his brothers, you are the beginning of that remnant, the line of redemption. They are the remnant. They are the ones who sold Joseph to be a slave. They were the ones in rage and jealousy, they were evil, many years ago, before this encounter. Yet Joseph could look at them and see them as redeemed, therefore remnant.

POINT: Redemption transforms sinners into servants of God to advance His kingdom.

The famine could have wiped out the peoples ill-prepared for its deadly effect. Whole populations were known to be wiped out by ancient famines. It could have been the Hebrews, but the Hebrews needed to be preserved because of the Messianic line. What God has done in providence to overrule evil, now connects with His redemptive plan. The brothers will assume the role of remnant to begin what will be the nation of Israel. We know that these brothers will serve as the beginning of the 12 tribes of Israel, and from out of this nation will come the Messiah. Be awed at the wisdom of God! His preservation of the brothers is not for their own sake, but for the sake and purpose of redemption. God has woven, in all His wisdom, this providence in order to carry out redemption.

Every time you neglect the message of redemption, every time you hear the invitation of redemption in Jesus Christ and go away and just be back to your routine as though nothing has happened to you, you are neglecting the wisdom displayed in all these generations to carry it out and fulfill it in Jesus Christ. Because Joseph could see the greater redemptive purpose in the providence of God, he is reconciliatory. Yes, the brothers have treated him badly, but his tests reveal that they are penitent, and he believes that they are redeemed. Understanding this, Joseph would have Jacob fetched and would have the clan settle in Goshen. It is in Goshen that another great man will be born and be raised to be the mediator for Israel, Moses. The purpose is to preserve a remnant, not for their own enjoyment, but because of the Messiah. God is still in His work of transforming sinners by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit,

pointing every regenerate to Jesus Christ. That is still the invitation to you. Seek Christ as the fulfillment of what God has planned and has woven for many, many generations, now fulfilled in Christ, and that fulfillment is inviting you to come to him for salvation.

When one has this perspective, like Joseph, he would have a reconciling spirit, even with his wrongdoers. When he believes that his wrongdoers are recipients of grace, there is to be reconciliation. Unfortunately, reconciliation is badly used in many contexts today.

There is an ongoing US budget debate. To sweeten the idea of this budget, the Biden administration is calling it *reconciliation package*. There is very little reconciliatory about it. It is accenting conflicts between classes and yet they call it reconciliation. The reconciliation that is true is first, reconciliation with God, and when you know reconciliation with God through Christ, then you can reconcile with brethren.

CHALLENGE: Appreciate the place of brethren in reconciled fellowship in God's redemptive plan.

God's plan is to display to this world that in Christ, He has formed one new humanity that brings together now, Jews and Gentiles. Ephesians 2:15-16 makes this very clear: *he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.* That is the real peace, that is the real shalom. When there is reconciliation with God through Christ, the reconciled ones are also reconciled with each other. Do you now see how ugly, and how contradictory it is for us to claim reconciliation with God and still be embittered with our relationship with each other? This is what the Cross has accomplished. Every other human attempt for world peace is doomed.

We are supportive of every step of progress that can avoid conflict and war. We pray for that in our prayer meeting every now and then. But there will be no real *shalom*. What Paul expects is that there will be *shalom* in Christ, one new man. He expects this to be manifested on the individual level. Again, in his appeal to the feuding sisters, Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi, he appeals based on their redemptive commonality, not their personality. What he says is that *whose names are in the Book of Life*. You should reconcile not because you can find correspondence in your personalities, but you should reconcile because you are both written in the Book of Life. This is the higher purpose of reconciliation between brethren, not to enjoy each other's company. We are the achievement of Jesus Christ in His cross.

Joseph's tenderness to his previous wrongdoers is such a model, when he saw them and finally revealed himself to them, he could not help himself but weep. And we have the greatest model and spiritual motivation for reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Are you nurturing any bitterness? Is there anything that is hindering you from reconciling with brethren? Look at the story of Joseph and its most thrilling part of finally revealing himself to them. The brothers were so afraid in their natural thinking, *what else is there to happen but our execution?* Instead, Joseph tells them *do not fear and do not be angry with yourselves because it is not you, ultimately, but God* in providence and in redemption.

In the 4th Century, one of the Church Fathers, Tertullian, has written a book of defense of Christianity. One of the things he said is that how Pagans are startled when they observe the meetings of Christians. According to Tertullian, the reaction of Pagans is: *Oh, how they love one another!* Would to God that that could be said of us, and that can only be said of us if we know this reconciling grace, that is in the Lord Jesus Christ

Understanding providence and redemption, remember, the first imperative is, when we are reconciled with God, and we understand his providence and redemption, let us be reconciled with one another. This is the thought of our response hymn: *How sweet, how heavenly is the sight, when those who love the Lord in one another's peace delight and so fulfill his Word.* That is what we are after, fulfill the word of reconciliation delighting with *shalom* in each other.

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Just a Hand Reaching

by Pastor NAE

In the mire, my brother falls.
Repentant for his folly,
For rescue he keenly calls,
“Help me from my misery!”
None heeds, his cry enfeebles –
They blame him for idiocy.

I reach out a helping hand;
The crowd jeers, “Just let him drown!”
“His own fault, you understand?”
Each face warped into a frown.
They throw mud, this raving band,
Casting judgment, tearing down.

As I grasp him hand-in-hand.
I cannot help but recall,
Once, I was in that quicksand –
Jesus saved me from my fall,
Pulled me on the Rock to stand.
So I must pull, scorn and all.

I tugged ‘till he’s back on land,
While they reproach my helping.
If only they understand,
Keeping someone from sinking
Is what Jesus would have done –
Mine is just a hand reaching.

Affirmation of Control

based on a sermon preached on October 24, 2021

Today is the 76th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations (UN), established in 1945, at the end of World War 2. Its mandate was to prevent war between states, settle disputes diplomatically. Since then, it has given birth to many agencies in the hope of helping world problems. What of that original goal of preventing wars between states? The record is mixed. We cannot deny that it has done some good and preventing some disputes into exploding into wars. But it has not been able to prevent wars altogether because it has not been able to control states. There have been wars since the founding of the UN and it is still ongoing. It only shows that while the UN is an influence for some good, it really has no control over states.

‘Control’ is a loaded term. It conjures up for many the idea of tyranny or else, control of programmed machines. It is understandable that many avoid using the term as an aspect of the power and sovereignty of God. It often ends up with the depiction of God as wanting to do good, but He will not intervene in man’s exercise of his free will. It is thought that is the only way to retain the freedom of man and that leaves God somehow helpless because He may want do good but is not able to overcome man’s will.

We are coming now to the near conclusion in the story of Joseph. We are in the final encounter between Joseph and his brothers. In the initial encounter, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, after letting them undergo some bizarre tests in order to bring out the real transformation that his brothers had undergone. We saw how Joseph displayed his forgiving spirit; he reconciled with his brothers. But now Jacob is dead. In the minds of the brothers, the only restraint on Joseph not to punish them is for the sake of Jacob. But now that Jacob is dead, they thought that Joseph is now free to do what he would have wanted to do in avenging whatever they have done against him, which they did not deny was evil. Once again, the brothers try to pre-empt whatever punishment they deserve, they offer themselves to be slaves to Joseph. Once again, Joseph shows his forgiveness and reconciliation are for real, not just because of Jacob. But in this encounter, Joseph gives an affirmation of his faith. He explains why he has that forgiving disposition. You can understand the reservation of his brothers. After all that they have done from Joseph’s childhood

when he was sold as a slave to Egypt, that has led to a series of misfortunes, as far as human perspective is concerned. Yet by the providence of God, Joseph was brought to this exalted position, second only to Pharaoh. And he has all the powers, if he wishes to, to avenge whatever was done against him. However, he was forgiving. He was reconciling in the first encounter and now in this last and final encounter, we will see that Joseph explains further and this leads us back to the Sovereignty of God as Joseph affirmed the overall control of God over all things.

For reading, Genesis 50:1 – 21 with verses 12-21 quoted below

Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them, for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: ‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

2 Corinthians 7:9-12

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the

matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.

While Joseph has stated already in the first encounter or his first revelation to his brothers his belief that dictated his reconciling and forgiving disposition, here Joseph gives a clearer explanation. We have here one of the most balanced statements in the Bible on God's sovereign control. Joseph here reveals his belief in God's sovereign control that does not absolve the evil of the brothers. Their freedom remains but that belief in God's sovereign control of all events, including evil, explains Joseph's disposition to his offending brothers. I am invoking here the sovereignty of God, which I have made reference to again and again, but this time, I make reference to the sovereignty of God in order to shape our attitudes when it comes to God's good purpose for His people, especially, in times of offense.

MESSAGE

God's kingdom rule exercises sovereign control for good purpose for His people.

In the first encounter in which we also affirmed God's sovereignty, we connected it to His redemptive purpose. There is still that in this passage, but in this context, the heavier emphasis is on Joseph's forgiving spirit. Why was he able to forgive? Why was he able to reconcile with the people who had done him so much wrong and that has led to the series of misfortunes he had undergone in the course of later coming to his position of higher rank. His belief that God has been behind all that happened, this explains his acceptance of his brothers.

We may profess to be believers in God's sovereignty, we believe in His control, but the proof is dealing with wrongs. That is when your doctrine of the sovereignty of God faces real challenge is when you are confronted with wrongs and people who do you wrong. That is when your belief in the sovereignty of God and in His total control is truly challenged.

Our New Testament corroborating text helps us in dissecting this encounter between Joseph and his brothers. Paul is explaining what the Corinthians have

undergone which resulted in grief but Paul is explaining, it is a grief that leads into something good.

There are two factors to consider in God's control that pertains to how we look at the wrong things that happened to us.

1. Sorrow that leads to repentance
2. Comfort that grows from forgiveness

Do you really believe that God is sovereign in control of all things? You can make that fair statement but the challenge is that if you are faced with something that made you sorrowful, something that perhaps offend you. Here is the challenge! Your belief in God's sovereign control is tested in sorrow that leads to repentance.

Sorrow that leads to repentance

For the second time (I am sure, there are more), but at least in the narrative, we have these two encounters between Joseph and his brothers. Once again, what comes to the surface is forgiveness and reconciliation. The brothers express their penitence, their sorrow for their evil. The death of Jacob, in their minds, takes away the restraint for Joseph to finally avenge himself. The point is, they know they are deserving of whatever vengeance Joseph might inflict on them. They appeal to Joseph to remember Jacob's plea for the brothers to be forgiven. But not only that, they offered themselves as slaves for Joseph. Joseph rejects that and then explains why he is forgiving and reconciling towards them.

POINT: God is in control of sorrowful events for His purpose of granting repentance.

Paul explains the sorrow that the Corinthian believers had to endure. Paul is referring here to a harsh encounter that transpired between him and the Corinthians that led him to write a letter that was grievous. That letter was not meant to be part of the canon of Scriptures. It was a letter written most probably between our 1Corinthians and 2Corinthians. It was meant really just for the Corinthians and not for the world to see. There was that harsh encounter. It led to a very sorrowful and soured relationship between Paul and the Corinthians. He wrote a very sharp letter of rebuke. Then the Corinthians repented. Paul sees in that the grief that leads into repentance as He calls it. Paul sees God's purpose: *I rejoice, not that you were grieved, but that you were grieved into repenting.* This is the exact thing that Joseph is mindful of in

explaining to his brothers why he is forgiving towards them. It is not just because of Jacob. The brothers are afraid now that Jacob was dead, Joseph will inflict his restrained vengeance. Joseph explained, it's more than Jacob. It's because I believe that God is in control that though you meant evil, God meant it for good.

This reminds us of an important teaching about repentance. Even as it is a part of the saving response to God's offer of mercy in Jesus Christ, the Bible teaches very clearly that repentance itself is a gift of God. *You cannot repent unless God gives you the grace of repentance.* This is so clearly stated in the New Testament in Acts 5:31, *in order to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.* If anyone of you is going to repent and acknowledge that Jesus indeed is the Messiah, Peter is saying, *this is the gift of God.* Later on, in Acts 11 the church is now giving glory to God as they listened to Peter's report of how Cornelius and the Gentiles were converted and they said in Acts 11:18: *To the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.* So whether Jews or Gentiles, the church in the New Testament acknowledges that if anyone repents, it is because God has given it to them. It is not mere resolve of mind, not a mere decision of free will. It is your responsibility! You are called to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. But if ever you will repent, it is a gift of God. Repentance is a change of mind about sin, a declaration of war against sin, a change of direction. None of these is a matter of sheer resolve and formula of words or steps. You are helpless! But you are responsible to repent. Such is the sinner. He must despair of himself! Do you feel this despair? It is right that you should be in despair, because that is the beginning of

true sorrow to repentance. No, it does not depend upon you. It depends upon the gift of God of repentance and faith. It is God who grants repentance.

His ordinary way of doing so is through bringing you to sorrow for sin. That is where events that are sorrowful are used and directed by God in order to lead to repentance. Such have been the events of the brothers of Joseph. Many sorrowful events, especially when they were put under the test by Joseph, but God directed all these to bring forth repentance and manifest their repentance to Joseph. Joseph is persuaded of their penitence after his subjection of his brothers to his tests. He sees God in it. That is why he would not avenge himself against his brothers despite the death of Jacob because the reason why he is doing this is not because of Jacob, not because of some external compulsion, but because of his belief in God. This is one way to make sense of the sorrowful events in life. It maybe God's leading you to repentance. Those are the reasons why we go through exertions in life that maybe self-denying and give you much challenge.

I had a military father. I myself underwent advanced military training in UP. I know that in the military background and experience, you are made to undergo exertions that you would not ordinarily and voluntarily go through. But you are under your superiors' control. They are bringing out the best in you, in preparation for battle and military duty. That is what God does. He directs events in our lives that maybe found very exerting, self-denying and even sorrowful. Remember that one good purpose of God is for that sorrow to be leading to repentance.

CHALLENGE: Use the sorrows of your life to heed the call to repentance.

This applies to those who are still outside of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may have been through sorrowful events, perhaps during this pandemic. Behind those sorrowful events is the call of God, His call to repentance. Heed the call! It is a signal goodness of God when He directs sorrowful events in order to lead someone to repentance.

The opposite of this is a sobering warning, when sorrow after sorrow make no effect of repentance upon you. That is what exactly happened to Israel under Amos' ministry. He explained to them the various calamities that have transpired in the nation's various plagues and yet they would not respond until Amos says in Amos 4:12 = *Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!* You have met plagues, calamities, enemies and you are not repentant. This time, there will be no remedy. You will meet God in final judgment. That is the warning! If you have been going through some sorrowful

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event of your life, there is a greater sorrow. This sorrow is just a token of what you will face if you remain unrepentant.

It is hard to call a happy man to repentance, even if that happiness is hollow and temporary. That is why people would rather have their entertainment than listen to serious gospel preaching. But in the course of a sorrowful experience, one might yet heed the call to repent of his sin, then the heart becomes more tender to the call to repentance. But the call of repentance is not just for unbelievers.

For believers, repentance is not a one-time response. The Christian life is a life of daily repentance. Remember Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, Thesis # 1: *The Christian life is a life of daily repentance.* It does happen that a believer's attitude to sin may relax and cool down. He becomes complacent. Over the course of his life of faith, he becomes cold about issues of sanctification (holiness) in his life. One of the effective ways that God uses to call back His child to serious faith are the sorrows of life.

We need to have an ever-fresh and reinvigorated belief in God's control, for a good purpose. To affirm that God is in control is not to absolve the evil and culpability of the sinner. Joseph tells his brothers, in a very straightforward way, you *meant evil against me.* But his faith affirms that *God meant it for good.* In the collision of evil intention of men and God's good intention for his people, what do you think will overcome – not man's free will, but God's sovereignty. But to the right-minded person, belief in God's sovereign control, gives insight into providence, especially when providence is afflictive and sorrowful.

One of CS Lewis' apologetics books (apologetics means defending the Christian faith against unbelieving arguments) that may be considered one of his masterpieces is the *Problem of Pain.* He gave one of the most famous metaphors for pain – he says *"in blessing, God speaks in a whisper; in pain, God's speaks through a megaphone."* He is

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screaming at you through your pain because you would not listen in the blessings that you probably are relishing. He directs the sorrows that do not intend to destroy, but to grant repentance.

Comfort that grows from forgiveness

Joseph does not simply give his brothers a lecture on the sovereign control of God. He shows it in action. His treatment of his brothers we are told, he *comforted them and spoke kindly to them.* This is Joseph's forgiving spirit. This is the outgrowth of belief in God's sovereign control in providence, in the face of wrongs done.

POINT: Belief in God's sovereign control over wrongs done yields a forgiving spirit to offenders

There is something in this second encounter that Joseph mentions for the first time that is not in first encounter. It is in the form of a question which highlights Joseph's belief. And it will do well with you if you always ask the same question when faced with unwelcome events, especially wronged. Joseph asks, *Am I in the place of God?* Joseph was in a very high pedestal of rank, second only to the most powerful man on Earth at that time. And yet, he still puts himself in his place in so far as God is concerned: *Whatever I am and power I have, whatever it is that I can will from my authority, I am not God! I am not in the place of God!*

God could have judged his brothers for what they have done long ago; He has not! Why should I? Am I in the place of God? God could have made them slaves. The brothers are offering to be slaves. If God did not, why should I? *Am I in the place of God?* Here then is the real spirit behind lack of a forgiving spirit, behind bitterness, without actually verbalizing it, but the spirit is I am in the place of God! If God did not punish the wrongdoer, I will correct what God did not do because I am in the place of God!! Behind bitterness and vindictiveness is somehow to judge that God has not done what He should. The embittered and vindictive sees himself doing just what should have been done, that God failed to do. This is a test of your belief in God's sovereign control. Many think they believe in God's sovereignty and they think they do so because they can debate with everyone about the sovereignty of God. They are sensitive to any question of God's sovereignty, sensitive to Arminianism miles away, but they cannot be forgiving of a brother beside them. Whatever the wrong, whoever the offender, the question is, do you believe in God's sovereign control? Really?

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In the present, especially in the west, especially in America, there is cancel-culture, where anything who have discovered to have said something offensive is cancelled. A case in point is that of a *Jeopardy* host who replaced the longtime host, Alex Trebek, because he died. This *Jeopardy* host has been removed because he said a wrong word years ago. This is happening in many institutions. People are being removed because they found that in some high school yearbook they said something politically incorrect. The west is, awash in politically correct culture. Anything wrong that you say that is suggestive of anything they consider racist, you will be cancelled. That's our world, a world of politically correct people and everybody will be cancelled, who is not of their mind. This is not the Christian spirit. The Christian spirit is asking, Am I in the place of God? No! I am in the place of sinners, like everybody else. If there is anything that God has granted to me, as He has granted to Joseph, it is because God has been gracious, not because I am superior to anyone.

CHALLENGE: Connect your disposition to offences with God's sovereign control for good of His people.

Perhaps, you are wondering why this series on Joseph has had to address this issue of forgiveness for quite an emphasis. You may have expected a lot to be said about just the sovereignty of God, and you are willing to just accept God creates good or derives good out of bad events. But, it is not just about bad events. The life of Joseph is about events done by bad people to him. Joseph sees God in his brothers' experience, seeing their penitence. We are told, once again, and we have seen this several times already, *he weeps*, a tender-hearted man. What made him tender through the harsh experiences he has gone through, is again is his belief in sovereign control of God.

This is where Paul's experience with the Corinthians adds a very helpful insight. He sees God in grief that leads to salvation, and he is without regret. Whereas worldly grief leads to death. Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret. Paul just had a very grievous confrontation with the Corinthians, but because of his belief in the sovereign control of God, he nurtures no bitterness.

Why is this important? Because of its effect on the offender who is penitent. We are told that they were comforted. This is the comfort of *forgiveness*. For a sinner conscious of his sin, there is no comfort like that of forgiveness. This is for those of you who, probably in some deep state of mind, accept that you are sinner. Somehow you make your life livable by entertainment, by social media, ambition. All these things of this world you will find them to be hallow in the end. The only real comfort in life and after this life is the guarantee and assurance of forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ. Come to Christ for real comfort. In Christ is forgiveness of sins. For us believers, we must show that life of forgiven people and forgiving people.

Many are in bondage to the discomfort of an angry and embittered spirit. You need to ask the same question Joseph asked. *Am I in the place of God?*

Jonathan Edwards was excommunicated unjustly by the conspiracy of some men in his church when he was just preaching the word and putting it into practice in terms of the Lord's supper. But he did not live in bitterness. In fact, there had been

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times after his excommunication, he went to his church to preach by invitation showing that there was no bitterness on his part. Many of those who had been part in the conspiracy sought his forgiveness. There is the man who believed in sovereign control of God. That is the challenge of the life of Joseph in this final encounter with his brothers. After this, we will see the concluding message of Joseph's preparation of his death. Here is the right step of preparation for dying: to have no bitterness, no unforgiving spirit. How can we do that? Not because of a personality that is naturally gentle. It is not temperament. It is belief, it is conviction that God has sovereign control that as Joseph said, you meant evil, but God meant it for good. God's intention will always have control over what man's evil intends.

Do we really believe in God's sovereignty? Let the test be on His control of the bad leading to the belief that whatever happens, it will be well with our soul.

For a sinner conscious of his sin, there is no comfort like that of forgiveness. This is for those of you who, probably in some deep state of mind, accept that you are sinner. Somehow you make your life livable by entertainment, by social media, ambition. All these things of this world you will find them to be hallow in the end. The only real comfort in life and after this life is the guarantee and assurance of forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ. Come to Christ for real comfort. In Christ is forgiveness of sins. For us believers, we must show that life of forgiven people and forgiving people.

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Dreamer Come Truth (The Story of Joseph)

This publication includes sermons from a series originally preached online on October 2021.

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