

The Denouement, or Adoring the Results
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So we have come to the climax of the Joseph narrative, a more than fitting indeed a superlatively fine resolution embodying true spiritual progress and a real enhancement of estate. A whole vista of divine fulfillment is spread before us—the long lost (and presumed dead) brother has revealed himself to his brothers whose repentance seems genuine based on the several tests devised by Joseph (under the guidance of divine wisdom no doubt). *Joseph embodies the high privilege of serving God and of advancing the Kingdom of God—the aspiration of every true believer.* Another such vista appears after the resurrection and vindication of our Lord Jesus Christ—Christ has to remind his followers of the necessity of all that went before: Did you not know that the Son of Man must be delivered over to sinful man, suffer many things and be put to death and after three days rise again? (Luke 24: 7, 26) The whole narrative of Joseph is framed in the understanding, recognition that God is the source of it all: the journey and the electing grace. The career-shaping God, our Father, is still active in believer's lives! God designs the purpose of, and for our lives—He is the source and the what! “This then is what it is all about—its coherence, its significance.” We remember that Job was about a heavenly contest wherein God purposed that His servant Job would defeat the Adversary, humiliating him for doubting the authenticity of Job's faith! Something bigger than Job's suffering was at play, something of higher consequence. The same observation could be made of Joseph's older brothers, with regard to the main action (the preservation of the chosen family), they were unconcerned, clueless even. They were selling their brother into bondage, not sending him off on a journey of ascent to worldwide prominence! (Rather what those adolescent dreams hinted at!)

We may be of the opinion that “conscious consent” is superior to ignorant consent. But we have learned that conscious consent is not necessary: we can be used by God regardless—they were, and many unbelievers are similarly harnessed to purposes that they are oblivious of. Again, I say, it is a high privilege to be used of God, or of serving God knowingly. That was Joseph's joy. Rising above all personal considerations, all temporal and short terms goals, all worldly ambitions, Joseph was in the service of His Majesty. Conscious consent is akin to trust, or, more pointedly spiritual submission to the will and purpose of God. Joseph trusted God, and **God was with him.**

As in a play what follows the climax is *the denouement*—the falling action, or the resolution of matters. I am using a play as an analogy! All the brothers are together in Egypt and Jacob, aged and discouraged, have no idea what is about to happen to them. The news that Joseph is alive and prosperous would sound preposterous to him, absolutely unbelievable. Yet it was true—the climax! Materially, it is as if Jacob's family has won the sweepstakes—from hungry and destitute shepherds, they have been vaulted into incredible wealth and property. They have wagon loads of riches, and necessities and they have been promised the use of the best land in Egypt, land situated on the irrigated and fertile delta, a region known as Goshen. And like all who are

catapulted into great wealth, they are at risk for quarreling: envy, jealousy and greed, all grounds for rivalry and arguments—quarrels over who has what, and how much and if it's all fair and equitable. That is why Joseph warns them (v.24): **Do not quarrel on the journey.** *Now winning graciously is rare, but winning generously is rarer.* Joseph fears that his brothers may be neither gracious, nor generous on the trip home.

Before we move on I want to observe something: the privilege of privilege is the *privilege* of serving the eternal purposes of our everlasting King. It is enough to have a part to play—to know that we are links in the chain of God's unfolding play, the chain of divine destiny!

There is little dispute that this turn of affairs is divine providence—and a special grace. Joseph is very gracious and he attributes his captivity to God three times in four verses. He seeks no revenge and tries to lessen guilt (even while acknowledging responsibility). Among the things that he learned in servitude, Joseph learned to rule, and to reign in humility, with both humanity and justice. He also learned that “even our foes can serve as the hand of God” and this despite themselves and their evil intentions. Jesus' plea for forgiveness, **Father, forgive them; they know not what they do** reflect a similar awareness to what's really up, what really matters. Because it's Thanksgiving season, I want to mention the Pilgrims. They knew what they were doing! They knew that they were not about “the money,” or worldly possessions and they trusted in the providence of God. Strikingly, the Pilgrims also experimented with socialism by having a community garden. *However, no one was willing to work for the common good*—and the experiment failed after one growing season. Apparently too many sat around wanting to feel good about doing nothing productive. *It's important to learn from our actual history.* While they were obligated to meet their financial commitments, they were resolved to extend Christ's Kingdom and to bring the gospel to those in ignorance and spiritual darkness. The King they served was greater than James 1, or Charles. *They knew their purpose and that knowledge helped them contribute to the greatness of America.* One survivor of that dreadful first winter, when asked if she wished to give it up and return to England—responded she would rather die than to retreat on what God had called her to do. That is commitment, bold faith . . . greatness!

But prosperity brings its own perils. Additionally, there are serious impediments to even experiencing that providence: I can think of five impediments: 1. the quarreling just mentioned; 2. guilt issues arising from their collective past; 3. doubt—we see this in Jacob's initial response to the great news from Egypt (that his favorite son is alive and well, and that he desires most to be reunited with his father and family—even with those who betrayed him unto certain death and obscurity as a slave in Egypt; 4. present difficulties and challenging circumstances; and 5. despair—the emotional toll from a life of serious griefs and losses. We should proceed through these impediments in order.

Quarreling. There is no use underplaying the tendency that we human beings have to fight and quarrel—especially over wealth, possessions, position and power. It is easy to envision king of the mountain being played in any, some, or all of those intangibles and

assets. Self-interest, greed, looking out for one's own—even where the abundance of wealth makes scarcity a non-issue. Meaning, we quarrel when there's actually plenty and nothing to fight over! The temptations to resentment, suspicion, envy and greed are disruptive tools used by the enemy to disrupt our peace. One of the results of great prosperity could be a separation such as the family division which came between Abraham and Lot—the flocks and herds were so numerous that the pressure for pasturage grew intense and conflicts broke out, *even among brothers/kinsmen*. I don't mean to discount the influence of hostile and competing neighbors, but our focus here is on the matter of intra-familial conflict.

Guilt, our second impediment, is particularly germane for ten of these twelve siblings who have a history of twenty-two years of crimes and sins against the family. The attempted murder of Joseph, and the subsequent act of selling their own flesh and blood—it should seem more heinous to sell a brother than to sell war captives who are total strangers and might otherwise simply be exterminated. Admitting what they had done was unavoidable now—they had faked Joseph's death and lied about it. It was extraneous to say, “Well, here he is . . . at least we didn't actually murder anyone.” If it happened today, they might have said, “Yup, we even failed at murder!” *They were such a group of good, old boy losers—always getting into trouble, making mischief, like bored school boys*. Nothing like that would have assuaged the years of heartache and grief endured by their beguiled father—along with dishonor and hatred, all wrapped up in what they had actually done.

Lesser guilt may have arisen from the wildness of their undisciplined youth (the treachery, slaughter and rape of the Shechemmite women— **they captured and looted all their wealth, and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the house**—all to avenge the rape of their sister . . . sin, general immorality, adultery and idolatry) which they sought to hide by ridding themselves of that pesky spy Joseph, the one with the *aspiring* dreams. The problem with that last complaint against Joseph is that God was dream messaging him; the dreams were not properly speaking about his personal ambitions. In short, the ten, at least as far as we know, had plenty to experience guilt over. Much of their behavior was violent, viciously cruel, and heartless—wicked even. *Seeing God behind the secondary causes both defuses inflammatory situations and de-escalates conflict!*

That brings us to the third impediment: doubt. We do not have to go any further than Jacob's initial response to his sons upon their return from Egypt. He plainly was not overjoyed; rather he was suspicious and stunned. He did not believe them. Why? Well, living with liars can tend to breed distrust, especially over time. It would take time to overcome the momentum of prevarication. “It's just not possible” was his doubtful response. It is interesting that when people have been lied to about God and about the Bible, as seems to be generally the case among the enlightened, liberal elite, many false propositions (lies) about God, such as asserting that he is harsh, unloving, unfair and cruel . . . or lies about the Bible, it's all made up, invented by humans, idle myths and unreliable . . . “religion is a crutch for the feeble-minded” and “religion is an excuse for

racism, or discrimination, or abuse,” or that “religion is the opiate of the masses” -K. Marx (I wonder if anyone else has pointed out how *un-people friendly* this Marxist maxim is?) The phrase has the scent of death camps all around it!—all of these lies given the lie by the teachings and ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Lamentably, these prejudices are repeated and passed on by authority figures who have much less than a passable knowledge of God or religion . . . have a corrosive effect over time, creating doubt dishonestly.

A second leg of this doubt links to our proverbial wisdom: “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably isn’t true.” People “know” that “people don’t typically live happily ever after” in this life—that’s not reality. The gospel is rejected because it actually is that good, and true. It is a lie to say “the best we can do” is try harder, resolve to be a better person, and respond to failure with repetitive resolutions (that also fail!), and with sheer grit and determination, we can work our way into divine approval, or heaven, or self-salvation. Please note: every cult that I can think of teaches exactly that same gospel of works! ***By contrast, Jesus paid it all. God has already done everything necessary for our salvation, through Christ on the cross, and our part is to receive this good news with faith—and we shall be saved.*** We actually do get to come as we are—but we shall not be the same after we do! We declare that it is a free gift because . . . it actually is.

Unfortunately, there is a third leg to doubt and that is the all too common tendency to be negative—a deep-seated pessimism feeds doubt. The perpetual pessimist, the continual nay-sayer, actively discourages himself and spawns self-doubt: it feeds the unhappy thought that God is more *against us* than he is *for us*! We think that if we expect bad outcomes we won’t be disappointed. I am afraid that doesn’t work: we will still be disappointed. Using psychology on disappointment is, well, disappointing. Thinking about bad outcomes is as pointless as fantasizing about good ones—neither changes anything.

The fourth impediment is present difficulties. In Jacob’s day there were no commuter flights to Cairo, or Ramses, no trains, nor paved roads for traveler in this 300 miles trek! And the older you are, the tougher travel was—particularly back then what with camels, and donkeys and all. There was travel uncertainties, robbers and thieves, foul weather and poisonous snakes, no rest stops and massive inconvenience! The hardship of warehousing, or storing one’s stuff was real. Besides change is very difficult for many who aren’t even that old. We stay put because we are comfortable where we are, and even if you think of that as being stuck—the thought of moving can be emotionally prohibitive. Frankly, these factors play into decisions on whether to deploy to the missions field, or to take a job overseas. In this light, Pharaoh’s command **Forget about your stuff** was intended to be liberating. He was telling them, “When it comes to stuff, I’ve got you covered!”

The fifth and final impediment *to experiencing God’s provision* is that emotional state known as despair. To be in despair is to be at an emotionally low ebb. Probably despair

spoke through Jacob when he said that **Joseph was dead, and probably Simeon**, too . . . and now they **wanted to take his Benjamin** . . . he would likely never see him again either.

He wasn't making up his despondency! Many griefs and losses had taken their emotional toll. We know that lots of people die from giving up—we think they have a lot to look forward to, they only see despair. So, although we cannot explain it, it is very encouraging when we read that Jacob's spirit revived. The word used refers to dying embers being breathed back to life. What happened? Did he realize that God does not forget? That God keeps his promises? That God is for us and not against us? That God remains faithful despite evidence to the contrary? We cannot know exactly. But we can affirm that 1. he heard the testimony of his sons, 2. that he heard Joseph's words in his message, 3. that he received back his sons, and he received the gifts that they came bearing, 4. that he saw the ample provisions supplied by Joseph and by Pharaoh(!), and 5. as a result of these rather unspiritual things, his spirit was revived. They expressed hope and cleared the fog of futility which despair had tried to envelope him in. *From that moment on, family reunion became his hope, his goal and his stay.* I would like to say that he saw divine providence behind it all—but I am afraid that that would be too positive. That the realization of God's faithfulness would take root and grow from this "materialistic" plane of existence is marvelous. At least Jacob embraced the evidence.

The more we try to find out what God means by setting us where we are, to do our piece of kingdom business, the better for our peace of mind, our sense of dignity because we are pursuing His glory, praise and honor right there and now. What we need to discover is the divine intention *and follow it like a thread out of labyrinth of competing paths, and agendas.* That thread is, depending on your perspective, our way out, our escape, or our way through life. We are assured that there will be palaces and dungeons on our pilgrimage. Following the narrow path, or the appointed road, rehires us to walk in his ways, seeking personal holiness, purity, love and truth. We should be compassionate, do beauty, and love excellence because they are part of God's way. Be merciful, and kind, and wise! Like Joseph was imitate how he treated Jacob. Live above reproach and you will avoid as much reproach as possible. Be decisive, make plans, risk failure because it is impossible to risk success without failures. Reach high, and when you fall down, get up and keep moving. Others, looking on, will be startled if not amazed. *Life is some trial of the stuff you are made of, and that is true for everyone.*

And, friends, take care to love family and honor your parents . . . even if onlookers gawk at you. Be a model of sharing your prosperity with those who gave you life and invested in you at such a high cost—call it payback, call it gratitude, call it whatever you want, but be sure to do it. (I can say, for myself, neither my mother nor my father died abandoned, or alone. We were never ashamed of them. Always aim to treat them better than they deserve and do not let them be brought down with sorrow to the grave. Love them to the utmost, honor them to the end and **it will go well with you.**

At his advanced age, it was challenging for Jacob, overwhelmed as he was by circumstances, by his suffering of many defeats, losses and set backs. Jacob felt discouraged, humanly speaking, and I get it. But I find it wondrously odd to find myself in tandem with Jacob with regard to my mother-in-law. Both Joseph and I are dealing with the relocation of an aging parent.¹

I cannot but invite you to reflect upon the disciples of our Lord Jesus, who experienced deep grief, sorrow and despair even on the darkest weekend ever, the last weekend of Jesus life—from crucifixion to resurrection. It was shattering and scary. They struggled with disappointment over their unbelief, their failure to be there when their Lord needed them most (**they all fled**)—they all abandoned Jesus, Peter denied him and Thomas refused to believe. Thomas may have been the Jacob in the room: **Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger in the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.** (John 20:25) I wonder how many of us have brushed over the fact that, after Thomas said these things, it was a full eight days, Sunday to Sunday, before Jesus reappeared and resolved Thomas' unbelief/ his despair!

Now the disciples also had *eyewitness testimony* such as Jacob's son had regarding Joseph's life and situation—to answer their despair. They had *Jesus' words*, even as the sons had the words of Joseph. They had evidence of Jesus' *faithfulness*, even as Jacob's sons had evidence of Joseph's fidelity and love of family. The disciples had *a history with Jesus*, the disciples had the past three years to draw upon—Jesus had kept them and provided for them as a good shepherd.

And, we, in our seasons of despondency, of despair even, we have the same resources to draw upon. Pull up your memories of God's provision, rescue, protection—rehearse them. There's a record we have to go on. Live by the Law of Christ. Be the first, though offended, to see reconciliation *because that is the example Christ set for us to follow*. He was envied—(Jewish leaders for jealous brothers); He was sold by his brothers (Judas did his part); His sufferings were meant to preserve life—save us from sin's penalty (as Joseph saved many from starvation)! There's revelation, there's the word, and truth and life. Receive and believe it. He who was sinned against, pleads with us . . . He says, "Draw nearer . . . Come unto me." He urges us to put hard thoughts of Him aside, and to cherish only loving ones. Seek a heart, like His, void of anger, yearning to love, to forgive . . . he graciously offers us a place to dwell beside him . . . with abundance of all necessities besides His very self. Be thankful. I find it very interesting that Jacob, for all

¹—Martha is over ninety and Jacob is over one hundred. But Lynne and I feel so very blessed—blessed in the prayer support of our church, your prayers and our prayers. And we are so very blessed in Courtney, Martha's personal support specialist (PSS), who day by day, week after week has been communicating life, hope, strength and mobility to Martha in a professional and loving manner. An answer to our prayers! And we, who have been holding our breath, are able to breathe a little easier now—seeing the fruit of Courtney's ministry, and seeing how God is moving through her. We have seen "revival," too.

his materiality, doesn't make much of the stuff that Joseph and Pharaoh sent—that's hopeful, that's new. No, he is focused on seeing his son, before he dies. Isn't it wonderful that we can focus on seeing Jesus now . . . with the promise of all that is to come. We don't have to take any stuff with us to heaven . . . everything we need is already there! How's that for denouement? Praise God.

Amen.