

“Living in God’s Plan” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Epiphany 7 February 20, 2022

- I. **Genesis 45:4-5** – “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.
⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.”
- II. **I read a story recently about a failed business venture.**
 - a. A young man started out in a low-income family and was trying to get out of poverty.
 - i. He wanted a better life for himself than how he grew up – just scraping by, barely getting enough to eat or survive.
 - ii. So he saved every penny he could (which wasn’t much) and somehow found a loan so he could start a new business.
 1. It was a grocery store in a town called New Salem.
 2. Unfortunately, his business partner had a drinking problem that ruined everything... he ended up so far in the hole that he referred to his financial problems as the “national debt”.
 3. At that point, he gave up on any dreams of a business getting him out of poverty... and he began a ten year journey of paying back his debt over a huge failure.
 - iii. So, he went into law, and then politics, and in 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected president.
 - iv. It’s interesting, but he was a big Shakespeare fan, and his favorite quote came from Hamlet: “There is a divinity that shapes our ends, roughhew them as we may.”
 1. In other words, God shapes the final outcome of our lives, no matter what our plans and designs might be.
 2. President Lincoln came to believe this deeply about his own life... but also about our nation –
 - a. In his second inaugural address, he reflects on the Civil War and the mysteries of how God worked in it all.
 - v. The story ends by saying, “What a loss it would have been—not just to [Abraham Lincoln] but to a whole nation—if the doors of that little grocery he started in New Salem had not closed.” ¹
 - b. Many of us can relate to this story – maybe not on the same level as becoming President of the United States of America – but how God is at work to bring about His will, even when we are suffering and struggling.
- III. **Joseph’s story is the gold standard for God working in the background.**
 - a. I can’t tell you how many times I think about poor Joseph and the trouble he went through to ultimately bring about the rescue of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people.

- b. He was a favored child who was looking forward to a comfortable life as the son of Jacob and Rachel...
 - i. You see, Rachel was Jacob's chosen wife, not Leah, so all those sons of Leah would be second in line to Joseph and his inheritance.
- c. Joseph went from favored status to getting thrown in a pit by his brothers and sold into slavery to the Egyptians.
 - i. If that weren't bad enough, Joseph starts making a good name for himself under his master, Potiphar, but is falsely accused of attempted rape and tossed in jail!
 - ii. The whole thing finally turns around after a couple of years when Joseph is given an audience with the Pharaoh to interpret some dreams.
 - iii. Out of that, God raises Joseph to Pharaoh's right hand man – probably the second most powerful person in the world at the time.
- d. How many times do you think Joseph questioned God?
 - i. How many times do you think Joseph wondered what good could possibly come from me being attacked and sent away by my own family – the brothers I trusted?
 - ii. How many times do you think he wondered how he could have been thrown in a dungeon under false charges – all for doing the best he could?
 - iii. How many times had Joseph's plans and dreams been crushed – even when he was trying to follow God's will?

IV. **Do you trust God's plan?**

- a. Many of you in this sanctuary today can tell a Joseph story... about your plans and designs going in a completely different direction than the outcome.
 - i. If I asked people to stand up to the lectern and give a faith story about how God's plan came out of tough times – I would get a long line – except nobody likes to speak in public 😊
 - ii. We might hear about things like unexpected health problems... car accidents... divorce... business failures... unwanted pregnancies... deaths and loss... natural disasters... abuse... addiction...
 - 1. And through all these terrible burdens... some of our own making, and some that just happen to us – our plans and designs for the outcome were totally different than God's.
 - 2. Many of us look back on these horrible times, and we see God's hand working in the background for good. (Romans 8:28)
- b. Maybe some of you are questioning the current place you are in... like Joseph... sitting in a dungeon of suffering and despair.
 - i. It's easy for the other guys to say, "Oh just trust in God's plan" when they aren't the ones dealing with all these questions and pain...

- ii. In the dark times when we cannot see the purpose or know the answer to our “why?” – we can trust God and His ways.
- iii. You might wonder how I can be so confident in saying this... but I have several places that I receive my assurance... and so do you.

V. **Our greatest source of confidence to trust God’s plan is Jesus.**

- a. Just remember, Jesus is the culmination of God’s great plan to redeem us all from sin, and death, and the devil.
 - i. The plans of God’s people in Jesus’ day were about a great warrior-savior who could help them rule themselves rather than the Romans.
 - ii. Not even Jesus’ own disciples could understand the mystery of God Himself coming in human form to save them.
 - iii. And imagine their despair and feelings of hopelessness when their Savior was dead in a tomb after being crucified!
 - iv. The pain and loss they felt couldn’t be more opposite than the next day when Jesus rose from the dead and a living Savior showed up.
 - v. God’s greater plan was to redeem and restore all things – including you and me.
- b. The freedom we now have in Jesus by grace through faith is the only way we can trust in God and His plan for our lives...
 - i. So, the first place we receive our assurance in God’s plan is Jesus... the second is our faith given to us by grace.
 - ii. Of course, faith is a gift from God to us, but that faith is anchored in us by the Holy Spirit who continually directs our eyes to Jesus.
- c. The third place we get confidence in God’s plan is the Bible; God’s Word...
 - i. How many times do we see people in the Bible delivered against all odds – through the worst of times?
 - ii. From the beginning of the Bible to the end, we see God’s hand and plan working to redeem and restore... just like Joseph
- d. Finally, we have confidence in God’s plan because of each other.
 - i. In the struggles and trials, we see in each other a quiet faith and confidence that encourages the body of Christ to keep going.
 - ii. I know many of your stories, but to watch the faithful go through life trusting in God and His plans inspires me to do the same.

VI. **We might ask, is there any way to redeem this trial or situation we are in?**

- a. Considering all the evil and plans of satan coming at us, is God able to bring about His will?
 - i. The answer is a resounding yes... we can trust in God and His plan to redeem and restore all things.
 - ii. It may not come about in the ways we plan or imagine, but make no mistake, we are not in charge.
- b. Living in God’s plan means we are confident that He knows what’s best, and our future is secure regardless of the current circumstances.

c. No matter how things might seem, the great God of our salvation has no intention of abandoning us – not now, not ever. Amen.

¹ John Ortberg, *All the Places You'll Go. Except When You Don't* (Tyndale, 2015), pp. 216-217