

Place: Lurgan Baptist 7:2:2010

## GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD ( JOSEPH )

Reading: Genesis: 39:1-6 13-23

### 4. WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

**Why ?** How often that question comes in life and how difficult it is to find an answer. Why should that young beautiful girl be stricken with an incurable disease ? Why should the innocent child of devoted parents be born mentally handicapped ? Several years ago I stood in a country cottage in Co. Antrim and gazed at the bullet holes that had shattered that home. A Christian mother had been shot dead by terrorists through her bedroom window. As I gazed on the tear stained faces of her daughters I asked “ **why,**”? On Wednesday the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1989 Linda Knox, Robert Patton’s daughter was traveling between Carryduff and Dundrum when she had a serious accident. For six days I sat beside her bed in the Royal Victoria Hospital and watched her fighting for life helped by a life support machine. On Tuesday the 4<sup>th</sup> July I was there with her husband and her father when they told she was clinically dead. A few days later I preached at her funeral service to a vast multitude of people. We wept as her two children laid a flower on their Mother’s coffin.

**Why ? Why do the righteous suffer ? Where is God when tragedy strikes ? Why do bad things happen to good people ? Does God care ? Is God in control ?**

We don’t know if Joseph asked those questions, but what we do know is that few people have faced more disappointments than Joseph. For about thirteen years from the time he was seventeen until he was thirty, things did little else than go wrong for him. The Psalmist speaking of Joseph says this, “ *He, ( God ) sent a man before them, even Joseph who was sold for a servant.* ” ( Ps 105:17 ) Joseph was sent into Egypt. Now Egypt in the Scriptures is a type of the world. Egypt at this time was an advanced nation.

Economically: the riches of Egypt were indescribable. We all have heard of the wealth that was buried with the Pharaoh’s.

Agriculturally: the land was very fertile. Egypt had great natural resources.

Scientifically: they were making great advances.

Architecturally: they were renowned for the pyramids

Religiously: however, this nation was corrupt.  
( Rom 1:20-23 )

Now this was the society into which God sent Joseph. What a radical change has taken place in this young man’s life. He who was the object of the loving attention of a doting Dad is now the object of curiosity to people in the market place. *Can you imagine what this meant for Joseph ?* A slave auction, a leering crowd, a teenager perhaps stripped naked, standing there on sale. “ *O God,* ” he surely prayed, “ *remember me. At least let my master be kind.* ” So God sent along Potiphar, an important court official, and a captain of the royal bodyguard. Potiphar’s job was to remove threats to his boss. He was a powerful

man, probably with a potential for harshness. Can you see that the circumstances into which Joseph was thrust were anything but ideal ? Indeed, here we see,

### (1) JOSEPH IN THE DUST

For the dreamer hits the dirt. Indeed the opening statement of the chapter says that “ *Potiphar bought him,* ” ( 39:1 ) Here he was a slave in a foreign land unable to understand the words that were spoken to him. His life at this point was far from ideal. Joseph was in the dust, yet he knew,

#### (a) GOD’S PROTECTION:

I mean, can you imagine the human emotions that could have so easily destroyed him ? ***Resentment, self-pity and bitterness.*** Based on what had happened to this teenager to this point, he was a prime candidate for these powerful and destructive emotions. I wonder what went through his mind on those first nights of his slavery in Potiphar’s home ? *Did he wake up in a sweat remembering vividly the hatred in his brother’s eyes when they grabbed him and he pleaded with him not to be left in the pit ?* Then when he awoke his chains reminded that it because of his brothers hatred that he was a captive in a foreign land. My .... In moments like that resentment can begin to grow. Perhaps, on other nights he dreamed that he was back with his father and his family and all was fine again. Then he awoke to the reality of his circumstances. How he must have missed his father and his brother Benjamin. He could so easily have given way to self pity and bitterness. *Could it be that you feel trapped by your circumstances ?* Do

you feel that you are victim because of the cruelty of others ? Do you feel resentment rising up within your heart urging you to take revenge ? Or perhaps you feel sorry for yourself, or may be you have become bitter ? How can we avoid these destructive emotions ? By seeking God’s protection. Paul says in ( Eph 4:30 ) “ *And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.* ” How can we do that ? He continues, “ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.* ” ( 4:31 ) You say, “ ***But I can’t.*** ” You can’t or you won’t ? You see, God’s commands are God’s enablings. My .... if God tells you to get rid of something, you can be certain that He will give you the power to get the job done. No wonder Joseph remained sweet to the very end, he would not allow these destructive forces to flourish in his heart.

#### (b) GOD’S PROSPERITY:

Look if you will at ( 39:2 ) Where was Joseph ? What were his circumstances ? He was a piece of human property, the slave of an Egyptian official named Potiphar, yet the Bible says, “ *and he was a prosperous man.* ” You see, prosperity is not necessarily being famous, wealthy or healthy. You say, “ *But wasn’t Joseph wealthy and famous when he was exalted as Prime Minister in Egypt.* ” Yes, but that was still years ahead. Joseph even though he was a lowly slave was “ *a prosperous man.* ” Evidently God views prosperity far differently than we do. We define it in terms of money, new cars, new houses, a good job, prestige and earthly

position. But God views prosperity from a spiritual standpoint. You see, there is the prosperity of Joseph in which the poor are rich, but there is also “ *the prosperity of the wicked,*” ( Ps 73:3 ) in which the rich are poor. The church at Laodicea thought they were prosperous because they had much in terms of material goods. They boasted, “ *I am rich.*” ( Rev 3:17 ) But the Risen Lord said they were “ *poor.*” On the other hand the church at Smyrna looked really desolate compared to the church at Laodicea. They were experiencing “ *poverty,*” ( Rev 2:9 ) but the Risen Lord said “ *Thou art rich.*” Joseph’s brothers, may be outwardly free, making good money, having much in earthly possessions, and yet not be prospering at all spiritually. Do you know something ? God measures success differently than the world measures it. You see, prosperity is not a factor of circumstances but a factor of character. I think as Christians we have the mistaken notion that prosperity involves some level of material abundance and freedom to do what we want. In God’s eyes, prosperity is a function of character, of being faithful to God and to His Word. Could it be that you are a success in the eyes of the world but a failure in the eyes of the Lord ?

### **(c) GOD’S PROMOTION:**

“ *Seest thou a man diligent in his business ?*” said Solomon, “ *He shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men.*” ( Prov 22:29 ) Those words could have been written of Joseph. The man who knows God should be the best man on the job. Of all the people on the payroll, he should be the most conscientious and diligent.

Can’t you imagine Potiphar telling his cronies, “ *Best day’s work I ever did buying that Hebrew slave. Everything he touches turns to gold. And honest ! Never saw anything like it.*” You see, Joseph’s promotion not only says that Joseph worked well, but it also says that he worked better than all the other slaves. Do you know something ? The usual reaction when circumstances go sour is to act foolishly, but Joseph did his duty diligently. One of the best medicines in adversity is to give ourselves energetically to our duties. What a testimony Joseph had in the work place. Potiphar would have said, “ *I wish all of my servants worshipped the same God named Jehovah. There is something different about Joseph.*” My .... what about your testimony in the work place ? What do your work habits say about you ? Is it not tragic that often believers are the people who do just enough to get by.

Work only when the boss is looking, loaf about every chance they get, gripe and complain incessantly, and are often late for work. But not Joseph. He served God by serving Potiphar. He said to himself, “ *everybody thinks I am Potiphar’s slave. But I am actually God’s slave. And since I am God’s slave serving Potiphar I’m going to be the best slave Potiphar ever had.*” (1)

### **(2) JOSEPH IN THE DOCK**

The dock is an enclosed space in a court of law where the accused person stands. Is this not exactly where Joseph is now ? One of the world’s maxims says that “ *hell has no fury like a woman scorned.*” Potiphar’s evil wife was no exception, You see, when she discovered that she unable

to get her way with Joseph, her lust turned to loathing. Joseph had lost his cloak but not his character. He had kept his purity but was about to lose his position. He had previously been dumped into a pit by his brother's, and not he was about to be thrown into a prison by his boss. *Having had the run of Potiphar's house, he now was being run out of the house.* The one who had been in charge was now charged with a terrible crime. Rape. Now let's not forget Mrs. Potiphar's

**(a) DISPOSITION:**

No doubt she was on the society pages in Egypt. I mean here was a woman who had everything. She had prestige, power and position. She looked good on the outside but her life was in absolute shambles. No doubt she would have concurred with actress Sophia Loren who said some time ago, ***"In my life there is emptiness, it is impossible for me to fill."*** She was a woman with an adulterous mind, a murderous heart, and a lying tongue. Do you know something ? We need to be careful about believing the accusations made by the ungodly of the godly. We need to examine the source of the accusations made against good people. *We cannot trust the mouth of corrupt people to speak the truth.* They will lie about anything even God. Their objective is to incriminate character and exonerate corruption. So beware when you hear carnal Christians speak against dedicated saints, beware when you hear casual members speak against devoted servants. Check the sources, when Potiphar's wife speaks, ignore what she says, for she is nothing but a liar. (a) But can you see here her,

**(b) INSINUATION:**

For she insinuated that Potiphar was at fault for what had happened. Look if you will at ( 39:14 ) In other words, *" this is all your fault Potiphar. If you hadn't bought this slave, this wouldn't have happened to me."* My .... to speak in such a way about her husband in front of others, indicates that all was not well in her married life. Watch the woman who criticizes her husband in front of others, it indicates that there is trouble behind closed doors. I think as far as Potiphar was concerned **" wedlock,"** had become **" dreadlock."** Tell me, how do you speak of your spouse in public ? Do you run each other down before others ? I know we often speak of the wife's cooking and I am no spoilsport but wives can be reduced to tears because of hurtful comments made by husbands. I wonder was Potiphar unduly influenced by his wife ? There is no doubt that she had a pretty good tongue in her head, and plenty of influence in her home, thus Joseph was quickly imprisoned.

Have you ever noticed that many a man whose leadership is strong in the church, is weak in the home ? John Calvin says, ***"Husbands are especially taught that they must use prudence, lest they should be carried rashly hither and thither at the will of their wives."*** Husbands are we exercising our responsibility of leadership in the home ? Can you see this woman ? Can you see her (a) (b)

**(c) HER ACCUSATION:**

“ See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us, he came in unto me to lie with me and I cried with a loud voice.” ( 39:14 ) What a bold faced lie. There was not one bit of truth to it, in fact nothing could be further from the truth. *Untrue accusations!* You don’t have to live long on this earth before people begin to say false things about you. The tragedy is that those false words are heard by people who don’t any better and they believe them. These untrue statements become as impossible to correct as catching feathers on a windy day. Before long, you throw up your arms in frustration saying, “ **How can I ever set the record straight?** ” Well, look at Joseph. For surely one of the things that strikes you at this point in his story is his silence. Not a word of defence, not a word of explanation from Joseph, thus we see,

### (3) JOSEPH IN THE DUNGEON

Years later the Psalmist referred to his imprisonment when he said, “ *whose feet they hurt with fetters, he was laid in iron.* ” ( 105:18-19 ) You see, in the dungeon Joseph was,

#### (a) *PAYING A PRICE:*

As the doors shut Joseph in, what do you think what was going through his mind ? *Is this what I get for doing it right ? Is this the reward for integrity ? Maybe I’m missing something here.* Can you imagine what some of the fellows in the prison were saying, “ *Here comes holy Joe, no smoke without fire.* ” You see, they got a laugh out of it, they were laughing at the servant of God. **Bad things**

**happen to good people not because they are doing something wrong but perhaps it’s because they are doing something right.** I heard about a preacher who out west in the United States and he came home from holiday. One of his members met him at the train station. The preacher said, “ *Well, how are things at home ?* ” The man said, “ *Real bad, Pastor. A tornado came through here and wiped out my house.* ” “ *Well,* ” said the preacher, “ *I’m not surprised I’ve been warning you about the way you’ve been living. I told you that God would punish you for your sin.* ” The member said, “ *Well, preacher, it also destroyed your house.* ” “ *It did,* ” the preacher said, “ ***Well sometimes the ways of the Lord are just past human understanding.*** ” My .... Joseph was paying a price.

- **He lost his Reputation:**

He was accused of the very thing he refused to do. How the devil loves to slander good men. *Reputation is what people think you are character is what God knows you are.* Don’t be overly concerned about your reputation. Take care of your character, and let God take care of your reputation.

- **He lost his Occupation:**

Joseph had a good job. He had been promoted. But all of that was now gone. Many a believer has lost his job and missed out on promotion because of their testimony, because they would not compromise their convictions.

Sometimes we must choose between a job or Jesus. If that happens choose Christ, for He'll never let you down. I wonder this .... are you paying a price because of your faithfulness to the Lord ? Are you in some prison and is Satan whispering in your ear, " *Now what about your God ?*" Here was a young man who was suffering for doing right. Peter reminds us " *For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults ye shall take it patiently ? but if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently this is acceptable with God.*" ( 1 Pet 2:20 )

**(b) SENSING A PRESENCE:**

Isn't it amazing to see how many times it is said in this Chapter that God was with Joseph.

- ( 39:2 ) " *The Lord was with Joseph,*"
- ( 39:3 ) " *The Lord was him,*"
- ( 39:5 ) " *The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.*"
- ( 39:21 ) " *But the Lord was with Joseph.*"
- ( 39:23 ) " *Because the Lord was with him.*"

Would that not take the sting out of the injustice ? What an encouragement to this young man. You see, no dungeon is too dark, too dismal, or too far down to be out of the reach of the Lord's presence. The faithful saint may be forsaken by every one else but there is One who will never betray him. Do you recall that as Paul looked around that Roman court room for a familiar face he said,

" *At my first answer ( defense ) no man stood with me, but all men forsook me .... Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.*" ( 2 Tim 4:16-17 )

My .... you may get lonely but you never be alone. No matter how deep the water, you will not drown, no matter how hot the furnace you will not burn. For has the Lord not promised " *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee, when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*" ( Is 43:2 ) Do you know what our problem is ? We forget that the Lord is with us. When difficult times come we think that we are all alone in the midst of our trouble, forgetting that He is right there as well. (a) (b)

**(c) FULFILING A PURPOSE:**

Spurgeon said Joseph was like a cork. *You know, you take a cork in the water and you can push it under the water, and the moment you take the pressure off it just pops right back to the top.* That's the way it was Joseph, no matter how much you pushed him down, he just kept popping up. He didn't know it at the time, but his experience of overseeing Potiphar's house, and looking after the prison were excellent preparation for his eventual promotion to overseeing all of Egypt. ***In other words, our present duties be they good or bad, difficult or easy, often prepare us for future service.*** I mean, what would Joseph know about running an entire country ? Nothing, so God sent him to school, first running Potiphar's large household and then running the king's prison. Then he was ready for God's ultimate purpose, to put him in a

place of highest authority, so he would be able to grant his family safe harbour in Egypt when they came to escape the famine in Canaan. Meantime in prison he served the Lord diligently. He said to himself, “ *I did not ask to be in prison, I do not want to be in prison but now that I am here I will be the best prisoner this jail has ever seen.* ” Do you know something ? One of the worst things that you can do when trouble comes is to sit down and do nothing but worry and pout and wallow in self pity. That only adds to the problems. Get up and get busy if you want to see light at the end of the tunnel. Isn't it interesting to notice that in the midst of his suffering, Joseph ministered to others who were suffering. In ( Ch 40 ) we read “ *and he served them.* ” That is, he ministered to the butler and baker of Egypt. My .... God comforts you in your suffering, that you might be able to comfort others in their suffering. ( 2 Cor 1:4 ) Tell me, in your prison experience, in the midst of your trials are you fulfilling a purpose, are you ministering to others ?

***(d) PERCEIVING A PROVIDENCE:***

He hadn't read ( Rom 8:28 ) he didn't have it hanging on the wall of his dungeon. But he understood the truth behind it, and even in the worst of human circumstances he displayed patience endurance and quiet confidence. He was the object of God's sovereign care and so are you. *Do you feel as though you are in a dungeon right now ? Are you suffering mistreatment ? Have you been falsely accused ? Do things seem to be going against you ?* God knows, cares, and understands. Some parents lost their little boy in a tragic car accident. Their hearts were

breaking, as ours would be. They both were very bitter at God. When the pastor came by to see them, the mother said, “ ***Where was God when my son died ?*** ” The pastor said, “ ***The same place He was when His Son died.*** ” Where is God when everything goes wrong ? He's “ *on the throne watching over His own.* ” And He will work it out for His glory and for your good.

**Sometimes on the mountain  
When the sun shines so bright  
God leads His dear children along  
Sometimes in the valley  
In darkness of night  
God leads His dear children along**

**Some through the waters  
Some through the flood  
Some through the fire  
But all through the blood**

**Some through great sorrow  
But God gives a song  
In the night season  
And all the day long**

Charles Spurgeon was right “ **when you cannot trace the hand of God, you can trust the heart of God.** ” Joseph did that. Will you ?

