

“God’s Divine Preservation!”—Genesis 45:5-8

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “God’s Divine Preservation!”, is Genesis 45:5-8 → *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.*

This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” “Every cloud has a silver lining.” “The sun will come out tomorrow.” “You have to look through the rain to see the rainbow.” Maybe you’ve heard clichés such as these or a hundred more during your lifetime. Such statements of “optimism” are usually given as advice to people going through struggles, sicknesses, tragedies and any number of unfavorable circumstances in an effort to provide some kind of strength and hope to get through them. While such “advice” may be true it is usually

meaningful after the unfavorable event has passed because, after all, “hindsight is better than foresight.”

Our text brings us into the interaction between Joseph and his brothers in the land of Egypt. Joseph resided in Egypt in connection with the treachery of his brothers who were jealous of him because he was “dad’s favorite.” Deciding to kill him, they changed their minds and sold him to some Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt and sold him as a slave. (cf. Genesis 37:12-28) Do you think Joseph felt like “making lemonade” in his new “vocation” as a slave?

While faithfully serving as a slave, his master’s wife tried to seduce him. When he refused to *do this great wickedness of adultery and sin against God*, she falsely accused him of rape and his master sent him to prison. (cf. Genesis 39:6-20) He ended up spending *two whole years* in prison for doing the right thing! While someone might have told him that “every cloud has a silver lining” he could have responded by saying, “Well . . . if life is a bowl of cherries, then why am I always in the pits!” Strength, comfort and hope are not found in clichés. Rather, they are realized in the divine providence of Yahweh, as Genesis 39:2-3 says: ***The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and . . . LORD was with him and . . . caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.***

As a result of two dreams which Pharaoh had, Yahweh opened the

door for Joseph to come to Pharaoh's attention as an interpreter of dreams. After reassuring Pharaoh that the interpretation of dreams belongs to God, not only did he give God's interpretation to Pharaoh but he also advised Pharaoh what to do in preparation for the impending seven years of famine. Pharaoh appointed Joseph to administer the work of preparing Egypt for those years of famine (cf. Genesis 41). Thus, his words to his brothers in verse 8 of our text that God had *made him a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt*.

Joseph's brothers were sent to Egypt because the famine had hit their household and their father heard there was food in Egypt. In the process, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, a very difficult and frightening experience for them. When Joseph revealed his identity, they *could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence* (cf. Genesis 45:3). They had good reason for being terrified *at his presence* considering what they had done to Joseph as a teenager could be detrimental to their lives in the present situation. After all, "what goes around, comes around." Even his words in verse 5 of our text when he told them to not to *be distressed or angry with themselves* because they had sold him into slavery, may not have helped to relieve their fears. This might have been "easier said than done."

Joseph's response toward his brothers' injustices goes directly

against the most “logical” reaction on the part of many. Being in such a position of power would provide the perfect opportunity for revenge—to “give them a dose of their own medicine.” Circumstances were perfect for Joseph to not just “get back, but get even.” After all, it is the nature of sin to breed more sin in heightened conflict between people, thus also sinning against the LORD. Their physical situation looked bleak in two ways. First, they might die of starvation as a result of the famine throughout the land. Secondly, they could die at the hand of Joseph’s revenge at that moment. It would be natural for them to be *distressed*, wondering what was next and *angry* with themselves with regret for doing such a deed to Joseph so many years ago.

In the midst of their fear, Joseph tried to reassure them of **God’s plan** despite their uncertain future and situation. Notice his words throughout our text: *God sent me before you to preserve life . . . God sent me before you . . . So it was not you who sent me here, but God (verses 5,7-8)*. What a perspective after all unjust suffering he went through! He saw God’s divine providence and preservation through it all! You may marvel at such a display of love which Joseph had for his family. 1 Peter 4:8 says: *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*

However, no mere love for one’s family can produce the kind of faith and forgiveness of sins pronounced by Joseph in this situation. It is only

the love of God which produces such a respond after being victimized in sin. It is described in Scripture as His *steadfast love which endures forever* (cf. Psalm 136) It is a love bound up in a plan for sinners to live forever in God's presence perfect, blameless and righteous in His sight. This is the *life* to which Joseph referred in our text which Yahweh wanted to *preserve*. It had to do with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and now Jacob according to His promise to them: *in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed* (cf. Genesis 12:3; 26:4).

God's work through the life of Joseph was not just to save a bunch of people from starvation and extinction. He said in verse 7 of our text that it was to *preserve **for you** a remnant on earth, and to keep alive **for you** many survivors*. It was the preservation of these people for the salvation of all mankind in Jesus who came from their lineage. God preserved a *remnant* of His people *on earth* so that through their family line Christ would come and accomplish the great deliverance from sin **for all peoples on the earth!** Paul referred to the deliverance from sin in this connection for the Gentile Christians in Galatians 3:16 → *The promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, "And to seeds," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your seed,"*
Who is Christ.

Yahweh's steadfast love worked out His plan of eternal life and salvation in the Person & Work of Jesus **for you!** Psalm 33:11-12 says:

The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage! Why is the nation blessed whose God is Yahweh? Because they brought the Savior of the world through their lineage. Yahweh worked through the situations and circumstances of Joseph's life and many other lives so you can be delivered from the power of sin and the devil, from the sting of death and from the curse of hell.

The unfolding of this plan of salvation for you in Jesus also happened according to God's plan even amidst the sinful plans of people. While the people thought they were seeing to the execution of Jesus, Peter told them in Acts 2:23 that *this Jesus, Whom they crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men, was **delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God***. While Pilate thought he had Jesus' life in his hands, Jesus reminded him in John 19:11 → *You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above.* Through all the mess of sinful lives, God made atonement for the sins of the whole world.

This is God's divine preservation and providence which extends beyond 1st Article gifts (your creation and physical preservation), into 2nd Article gifts (the forgiveness of your sins through faith in the Person & Work of Jesus), and into 3rd Article gifts (your preservation spiritually by

the power of the Holy Spirit working through His means of grace amongst the “communion of saints”). And when we’re in situations which look rather “bleak” in our own lives and satan tries to pull us away from God’s plan in Jesus, the Holy Spirit brings us to see God’s larger plan at work through His deliverance and preservation of eternal life in those means of grace. It is there that we can confess in the words of Romans 8:28-29 → *We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called **according to His purpose**. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined **to be conformed to the image of His Son**, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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