



Week 4

Worst Nightmare or Dream Come True? Pain and Providence.

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Joseph is seventeen. He has a dream. His brothers are bowing down to worship him so he wakes up and tells them. It really ticks them off. He has another, similar dream and tells them again. This time even Jacob gets peeved. Do you wonder what on earth Joseph was thinking? Was he really that young and arrogant or did something in the dream disturb him? His father seems to imply some arrogance or naivety was to blame. Truth be told, he was at the whim of those older brothers who despised him and it had to feel good to have a dream where he might one-up them at some point. Most likely that would have been a dream come true for Joseph.

God's providence starts playing out in Joseph's life right then because God gives him a good dream. That's how God works; He gives us just enough information to keep us moving in the direction he needs us to go. Imagine Joseph falling asleep and God speaking to Joseph:

"Joseph, I'm going to allow you to be sold into slavery, by your brothers. Right after you get comfortable I'm going to tempt you and even when you do the right thing I'm going to allow you to be thrown into jail. I'm doing that so that after you spend a few years there you can interpret a dream for Pharaoh and rise up as a leader of the Egyptian nation so that you can save multitudes (including your rotten brothers) from dying. Then your whole family will move to Egypt. Your dad is going to die. You are going to die rather young. A nation will be formed from your family. Then Egypt is going to turn all of your people into slaves, for hundreds of years, but that's just so that... look this is a really, long story. It turns out pretty good though, so, what do you say? You in?"

His response would have been something like, "Ummm... is there a plan B God?"

Sounds like a nightmare doesn't it? That's a whole lot of pain and a whole lot of providence people. Could God lay out your entire future and you not turn and run, do everything and anything in your power to change the outcome just to make it a little more comfortable.

When we take our children to the doctor we tell them they are going to get a sucker, not that they are going to get a shot. When we buy a new dress we try it on for our husband before we tell them what it cost. We don't buy the mom-to-be painkillers for her baby shower we buy her cute little baby things. Deep down we get it.

Joseph being sold into slavery, put into jail – all of it was God's insightful care for His creatures. Joseph recognizes that God ordained every step to bring about the current outcome and he is grateful. He says, "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life." Genesis 45:5

Joseph was obedient and grateful; every step of the way, this guy understood providence. He didn't stomp his feet and complain or cry about being a slave. He didn't set out on a Facebook rampage about how unfair life is, he took it all like a man, like a man who understands that God's loving hand is not always an easy hand, that his own life wasn't really "his own life."

Our challenge as God's children is to stay obedient, to stay faithful. What has sold you into slavery? Was it divorce, cancer, finances or a family crisis? Can you look that thing in the face and say, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people."

Challenge: Stop and get a sucker! Get somewhere quiet and write down a current trouble, either your own or one you are walking through with someone else. List any blessings you can think of that could come out of it. Next, ask yourself, how can I be more obedient? How can I honor God through these current circumstances? Look at what you've written down and pray that the Lord will show you your next step, that as you take those steps you won't lose the taste of that sucker in your mouth, let it represent His Providence in the situation, His sweet goodness. When we are obedient we can rest in knowing that the outcome will be for His glory, that's sweet indeed!

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people."
Genesis 50:20

For further study: Read Genesis 37-50