

My God is so Big! Why does it matter?

Tonight we're going to look at God's sovereignty because I think, when we look at the whole story of Jacob's family we see God's sovereignty as the overarching driver behind everything. Now sovereignty is a word we don't tend to use very much. So what is sovereignty? I think there is a kids song that sums the concept of God's power and control well. Do you know it? My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty there is nothing my God cannot do. It's actually an interesting song when you look at it, it is potentially a good basic way of describing God's sovereignty, but it doesn't really explain to us why it matters. It doesn't say God is so strong or so big so he can look after us. It doesn't say God is so strong and so big, so evil won't happen. It doesn't really do any of that. Now in fairness it is just a kid's song and there's just not enough space for us to explain why God's sovereignty matters in a kids song. But as we look at God's sovereignty in our passage tonight, I want us to not just think of God's sovereign power as a nice thing to know, or just an academic concept, but that it can and should impact our everyday life. So how does knowing God is sovereign effect our lives? Let's look at Genesis 42 to 45 to see why God sovereignty matters. We first look at why God's sovereignty matters to Joseph and then secondly why does it matter to us.

Reunion: Revenge or Redemption

We start this section with Joseph's family starting to feel the effects of the famine that Joseph interpreted from Pharaoh's dreams last week. They turn up in Egypt and Joseph immediately recognises them, but they do not recognise him. What follows then seems to be an elaborate plan that Joseph has concocted where his brothers go back and forth between Egypt and their home bringing brothers and leaving them and being framed for a variety of crimes they did not do. It leads to the question, why does Joseph put them through all of this? Why doesn't he just reveal who he is as soon as he sees them? Is he trying to get revenge on them by imprisoning them, unjustly accusing them and mucking them around with the food?

At first glance it looks like Joseph is exacting his revenge on his brothers. But to answer whether this is revenge or something else, I think we can look at a number of verses which show Joseph's true feelings about his meetings with his brothers. We see in in chapter 42 vs 24 Joseph weeps, in chapter 43 he again weeps and finally in chapter 45 just before he reveals himself he weeps so loudly that Egyptians outside his

rooms could hear him. These don't sound like the actions of a man getting revenge. So what was Joseph doing?

Joseph needed to know what was in his brothers' hearts. Were they the same people who happily talked about murdering him over lunch while he lay in the well? Were they still envious of Rachel's children? Would they sacrifice another to save themselves? Joseph needed to know the truth. And he knew that he might never know if he revealed who he was. So on the spot Joseph conceived a brilliant strategy. What at first appears to be Joseph playing a long drawn out game with his brothers is actually a series of very clever tests to replicate parts of what happened to himself to see if they have repented.

First he keeps a brother, in this case Simeon, to see if they will come back for him. Secondly he tests them with money, silver to be exact, like he was sold for, to see if they would value that compared to their brother by giving it back to them on their first trip. Then finally he shows favouritism to Benjamin, the same brother that is still being favoured by Jacob and gives the brothers the opportunity to save themselves by leaving him behind in slavery. Sort of like they did to him all those years ago.

How do the brothers respond to this test? With flying colours. They show clear repentance. When they find out it is Benjamin who has the cup, they tear their clothes. This contrasts with only Jacob tearing his clothes when Joseph was thought dead. This time they would not abandon their father's favorite son, in fact because Benjamin is their father's favourite is now the reason they want to save him. Finally it is Judah who is now leading the plea for Benjamin's life, offering himself instead, in contrast with Judah being the one to suggest Joseph should be sold into slavery. What a redemption story.

Way back at the start of the story of Joseph, in chapter 37 it can seem strange to read that this is the account of Jacob's family line when Joseph is the one who dominates the narrative, but I think this and next week's passage highlight why it's called the account of Jacob's family. You see, while it was Joseph who remained faithful and ended up saving many people it's actually the other 10 brothers who really develop as characters. They started out like a lot of this family line as very flawed people. Simeon and Levi Murdering whole villages, Rueben sleeping with his father's concubine, Judah sleeping with his daughter in law and them all plotting to murder Joseph and eventually selling him for silver. But now right near the end of Genesis we see 10 repentant men who have realised their wrong and are determined not to do it again. It is a very encouraging way to end the book.

But what about God's Sovereignty? I started the sermon by saying we would see how God's sovereignty effects Joseph and us. Well, let's turn to the last chapter of the section we are looking at, Chapter 45:4-8

God's Sovereignty allowed Joseph to...

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.[a] 8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

This is Joseph showing he understands that God is in control, that God is sovereign, and that there is nothing that God can not do, as the song goes.

Joseph understood that every part of his life's story, and that of his brothers, was under God's direct rule. And I think that it was this understanding, the understanding of God's sovereignty that gave him hope during his tough times and allowed him to forgive his brothers.

Because Joseph believed that God was in control, he could have hope while being transported as a slave, he could have hope while working for Potiphar, he could have hope in Pharaoh's jail. He could trust that he would be able to interpret Pharaoh's dream despite the dream he had as a teenager not yet being fulfilled. Joseph faithfully believed that God was the one in control of the situation and therefore Joseph could have hope. Joseph knew from the dream God sent him that there would be a positive ending so through the toughest of times he had hope. This meant, that even as a slave he worked hard, he did his best, he wanted to honour God with how he acted.

And it wasn't just in the tough times that Joseph's belief in God's sovereignty affected him. It also allowed Joseph to forgive his brothers. We wonder how he could have forgiven them after all they did to him. We look at Joseph's actions in these chapters and the default answer to what was Joseph doing, is revenge. But as we saw it wasn't

revenge. It was because he trusts God that was able to forgive his brothers and give them an opportunity to repent.

God's Sovereignty allows us to...

So what about us, if God's sovereignty gave Joseph hope and allowed him to forgive what does it do for us today. Well in the simplest terms it does the same for us. But let me go into a little more detail.

I remember when I was in Year 10 or 11 at Youth group giving my first testimony, I remember preparing it for ages and finally we had a youth group night where we could invite our non-christian friends and I was to give my testimony. Now, I don't have a testimony that shows me going from being a criminal to being a saint, my testimony is one where I have been a Christian for as long as I remember and I gradually came to a more complete understanding of who God means to me. So my focus in the testimony was on how knowing God gave me comfort in tough times. I remember finishing and one of the non-christians saying "Well, its alright for you, but I don't need a blanket to confort me, Im fine." I remember being gutted. I remember thinking I must have given a really bad testimony. And to be honest I have thought that, until last week as I prepared this sermon.

You see as I thought through what their response was, I realise that I had actually accurately portrayed one of the benefits of knowing God. That we do not need to worry. That despite the tough times we can know that God has prepared a place for us. And really despite what that person had said, there would undoubtedly be times when they did need soothing, when they did feel out of control. And in those times, I am very glad to know that our God is sovereign. I can proudly say that God is my security blanket.

It reminds me of John 14:1-6 when Jesus speaking to his disciples not long before being crucified he said; "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God[a]; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Contrast this comfort with not knowing God. Not knowing he is in control. A quote from Richard Dawkins book River Out of Eden says;

“The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute that it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive...thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst, and disease...In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”

Richard Dawkins, River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life

You see, that is the power of knowing God is Sovereign. We no longer face the thought that the world has no purpose, that there is no justice. By knowing that God is Sovereign we can have hope. Now I am not saying that it means bad things won't happen to us. As Richard Dawkins rightly points out, there is an immense amount of suffering in this world. And while whole sermons can be given looking at how God being Sovereign fits with us still suffering, we don't have time left in this sermon to look at that in detail. What we should remember is that for Joseph he had many many years of misery before he started to see the promises to him become fulfilled. And he got see the promises fulfilled within his lifetime. And for us, our promise from God is not that we will live healthy and prosperous lives in this life, but we can have hope because we know that God has promised a place prepared for us in heaven. That's what gives us hope. That's what can get us through our tough times. In some senses it's harder for us to have hope and faithful than it was for Joseph, because his promises was in his lifetime, but ours are in eternity, but one thing that we have that is better than Joseph, is that, we can see that All of God's promises have been fulfilled in Jesus. We can have certainty because time and time again we can see God's sovereignty at work through the bible.

I have found it particularly comforting myself in these last couple of years. Without sounding too “woe is me” as I know many of you here have also gone through very tough times, I have in the last 2 years been let go twice from work, and ruptured both my achilles. I am currently struggling to find work and still recovering from my injury. I have days when I get quite down about things. But as I read the bible, I am reminded again and again that God is Sovereign, that he is in control and that ultimately he

knows what's best for me and the world, and that gives me hope. It helps me be faithful as I struggle finding work, as I struggle to recover from my injury. So let me encourage you to remember that God is Sovereign, and allow HIM to bring you hope. Let me finish by going back to the kids song that we started with. There's a little addition which I think turns the kids song from impersonal academic theory into a reason to have hope.

My God is big so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do, for you. And That's true for me, and it's true for you too! AMEN