

GOD IS NOT ABSENT IN THE CHAOS

6. God's Place and God's Point of View

Genesis 50:15-21

Genesis 50:15–21 (ESV) ¹⁵When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷"Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." ' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Over the last five weeks we've been working our way through a short series based on the life of a young man in the Old Testament named Joseph. One of the great overarching truths that we see played out in Joseph's life — that is so relevant to our lives today — is that **God Is Not Absent in the Chaos**.

We're going to wrap up the series this morning by looking at how Joseph responded to his brothers who — out of murderous envy — sold him into slavery. In Joseph's response we see two very radical trademarks of his relationship with God.

1. JOSEPH REFUSED TO TAKE GOD'S PLACE

Genesis 50:19 (ESV) "Am I in the place of God?"

With this single statement Joseph speaks to two most important questions:

First Important Question — Why is everything in the world broken?
Everything in this world is broken because in **Genesis 3** man decided to put

himself in the place of God. We've all done it! That's at the core of every sin! We decide that we want to sit on the throne of our lives — we take the place that rightfully and only belongs to God. Every one of us has done it. And every time we put ourselves in the place of God we add to the brokenness of the world.

Second Important Question — Why did Jesus die on the cross? This one statement of Joseph gives us the reason for the cross: We put ourselves in the place of God. Because we put ourselves in the place of God — God had to come and put himself in our place. The King took the place of the rebels.

Those two questions are essential to our understanding of the nature of sin and our need for redemption.

It's reasonable to ask the question, "What does it mean to put yourself in the place of God?"

Here's what it looked like in the lives of our first parents — and it looks the same in our lives today. You put yourself in the place of God when *you* make yourself the ultimate moral authority; when *you* determine what's right and wrong; when *you* determine what you can and can't do.

In [Genesis 3](#) Adam and Eve were living in a perfect world that God had created for them. God gave them a single command. That single command was pretty much their Bible! It was so short it would fit in a fortune cookie. God said, I only have one command: Don't eat from that tree. Then Satan came and told Eve that if she ate from that forbidden tree she would become like God! That didn't mean that the fruit of that tree would make her God. It didn't mean that if you juiced from that fruit you'd get God juice! Satan was totally right! Satan understood that if *they* decided what was right or wrong for them, rather than following God's Word, *they*, by that action, would put themselves in the place of God.

Whenever you decide for yourself what is right or wrong rather than following God's Word and authority, you're putting yourself in the place of God.

Here's how that looks in 21st century fallen culture: "The Bible is so old — it is so out of step with modern thought — it's so primitive, so narrow. We simply can't accept the claim that the Bible is the final moral authority."

So, men and women pick and choose what parts of the Bible they're comfortable with — or they reject it all together. In either case, they allow their cultural perspective to dictate moral choices rather than God. By the way — THAT is exactly what Paul said in Ephesians 2

***Ephesians 2:1-2 (ESV)** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—*

When you and I do that, we're doing exactly what Satan proposed in **Genesis 3** — we're putting ourself in the place of God.

Timothy Keller made this amazing observation: *The fastest way to become like Satan is to try to be God.*

***Isaiah 14:13–14 (ESV)** ¹³You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'*

Here's another way you can put yourself in God's place. It's way more subtle: Let people look to you to meet their deepest needs instead of looking to God.

In the Old Testament (**2 Kings 5**) we're told about a mighty general in the Syrian army whose name was Naaman. Naaman had leprosy. By way of a Jewish slave girl, it was made known that there was a prophet in Israel who was being used by God to heal. So, the king of Syria sends a letter to the king of Israel saying

"When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." (2 Kings 5:6)

As wicked as the king of Israel was — he freaked when he got the letter. He tore his clothes and said, *“Look, I’m a king. There are a lot of things I can do, but Naaman’s deepest needs are beyond me — they can only be met in God. Don’t ask me to do what only God can do.”*

You might be thinking, *“So how does this relate to me No one’s coming to me to miraculously meet their life and death needs.”* It relates to you way more than you think. Everyday a man meets a woman, a woman meets a man, and stuff starts to happen in their hearts. They start to think: *“Wow — this person is what I want — this person is what I need. If I get married to this person, my life will count — they will save me from being alone — they’ll give me love — they’ll give my future meaning.”*

Ladies, when a guy looks at you like that, begins to talk about you like that, you need to look him in the eye, (don't tear your clothes), say, *“I can never take the place of God! I can never meet the deepest needs of your heart.”* The same is true for you men. If you don’t do that — you will be contributing to the brokenness in that person’s life! But here’s the tricky bit: It’s really easy to want people to look at us like that. We feel good when someone needs us that much!

Here’s another every day way we put ourselves in the place of God. This one has my name written all over it! We can put ourselves in the place of God by worry.

Matthew 6:31 (ESV) Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

Jesus isn’t telling us to never think about such things. He isn't advocating or encouraging us to be irresponsible. He’s telling us to not be anxious, worried about them. We might read it as *“Don’t worry so excessively about what you will eat or about what you’ll wear.”* Then Jesus told them that their heavenly Father knows exactly what they need — and He has the power to provide for them.

We worry because we think we know how things are going to roll out. We think we know what has to happen tomorrow. We think we know what has to happen this month. We think we know exactly what has to happen — and we're afraid God is not going to get it right.

We obsess over solutions so we can control outcomes — so we can get what we think we need! We worry because we're afraid God's plan won't be as good as ours! The remedy for worry is to step away from the place that only belongs to God!

Here's one more way we can put ourselves in the place that belongs to God — it's heavy — and we've all done it. It's directly related to what Joseph's was going through with his brothers. His brothers said, "Please forgive us." Joseph said to them, "[Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?](#) The Holy Spirit inspired Moses to record this exchange so we would know how heavy a thing it is to make yourself the ultimate judge. When you and I choose to withhold forgiveness from those who repent and ask for forgiveness — we are putting ourselves in the place of God. Joseph is a real-life illustration of Romans 12

[Romans 12:19 \(ESV\)](#) Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Let me paraphrase — God is saying "Get out of my place." Only God has the knowledge to sit in judgment. When someone hurts us, we think we know what they deserve. Reality — We don't know what they deserve. When we take the position that we know what a person deserves — we have taken the place that only God can stand in.

Only God is all-knowing. Only God is all-wise. Only God is perfectly just. Therefore, only God has the power to judge somebody without becoming evil himself. But when we take it upon ourselves to not forgive the person who has wronged us and asks for forgiveness — or seek revenge — we are working against the purposes of God and the ways of God.

Ephesians 4:31–32 (ESV) ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 5:1 (ESV) Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us

You and I can know a lot about the Gospel. But the trademark of the man or woman who truly understands the Gospel is that they will refuse to put themselves in the place of God by ^{1.} setting themselves up as their own moral authority, ^{2.} inordinately worrying, ^{3.} letting people look to them for their deepest needs, or ^{4.} refusing to forgive.

Refusing to forgive the person asking for forgiveness — or thinking about how vengeance will make you feel better — shows that you have no concern for how broken the person is who wronged you. There's no thought for how they need Jesus. And there is no thought for what God might be doing by way of all you've suffered. Which leads us to the next trademark of Joseph's life

1. JOSEPH REFUSED TO PUT HIMSELF IN GOD'S PLACE

2. JOSEPH PROCESSED HIS TROUBLES FROM GOD'S POINT OF VIEW

Genesis 5:20 (ESV) As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

I want to preface what I'm about to say with this: It is way easier to talk about this than to actually live it.

Joseph said, *Everything you did was filled with evil intentions, but everything you meant for evil God meant for good.*

From man's point of view that is really hard to process! From our point of view, we just can't keep those categories in the same box. How is it that evil

and God's goodness can occupy space in the same human experience?
Here's how most people process life:

When everything is going well — God is good.

But if things are going badly — God is bad, or maybe he's not there.

For most people it's either/or. They can't see how things can be horribly bad and God be good at the same time.

But Joseph was able to say, "My life has been really hard. My life has been filled with pain — but God is good." Joseph was saying what the Bible consistently says. The Bible consistently says that life is hard. The Bible consistently addresses the existence of evil. The Bible never makes the promise that if you're good to people, people will be good to you. It never promises that if you live a good life, bad things will never happen to you. The lesson of the book of Job is not WHY do we suffer. It assumes suffering. The book of Job is all about HOW we suffer.

Joseph not only said that evil is real — he said that his own brothers intended evil and did evil things to him. That is reality in a world ruined by sin. But Joseph didn't stop by making this declaration about his brothers' evil intentions. **In the same breath** he said that God is always working in and through suffering and evil to accomplish His saving plans and purposes.

DON'T MISS THIS — Processing our suffering from God's point of view is crucial to our ability to forgive. Joseph said, Here's why I can forgive you: You tried to sink me, but you can't sink me. You meant it for evil, and it was evil, and it hurt, and it was painful — but ultimately, you could never sink me **because** God meant it for good.

CHRISTIAN — The life of Joseph informs us that everything happens **for** us! Everything! The [KJV](#) reads [verse 20](#)

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good,

NOTE — YOU thought! GOD meant! You thought evil (you sold me into slavery to prevent the dreams God gave to me), but God meant to use your evil to result in the fulfilling those dreams — resulting in a greater blessing than you could have ever imagined.

QUOTE: J.I. Packer — *That God’s rational creatures, angelic and human, have free agency (power of personal decision as to what they shall do) is clear in Scripture throughout; we would not be moral beings, answerable to God the judge, were it not so, nor would it then be possible to distinguish, as Scripture does, between the bad purposes of human agents and the good purposes of God, who sovereignly overrules human action as a planned means to his own goals (Genesis 50:20; Acts 2:23; 13:26-39).*¹

HERE’S THE DEAL — No matter what the world means to do to us, we KNOW that God means good

Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV) For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

It DOESN’T matter what EVENTS come into our lives. God means them for good

Romans 8:38-39 (ESV) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DONALD GREY BARNHOUSE said **that** is “One of the strongest rocks in the foundation of our faith and one of the softest pillows on which faith may lay her head”

CHRISTIAN — You can’t be sunk. That’s God’s perspective.

¹ Packer, J. I. (1993). Concise theology: A guide to historic Christian beliefs. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.

Like I said, it's way easier to **talk** about this truth than **live** it out. Knowing this truth doesn't mean that that we will always FEEL good in the midst of suffering — or that we will, in that moment of suffering, UNDERSTAND that good thing God is working out by way of suffering.

In the midst of the suffering, in the midst of the ache, we might not see it. It may be weeks or months or years until we see it worked out. It might be centuries before we see how the suffering of God's people resulted in the advance of the Gospel. On this side of heaven, we might not ever see how God was using evil to accomplish His good. We might not ever see it until we stand in His presence; and then the Bible tells us that we will know even as we are known. But faith means that despite everything we don't feel, and everything we don't see — we LIVE in light of how God sees it and in light of what God says He is doing.

Genesis 50:20 (ESV) but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

THIS IS HUGE — The words of Joseph tell us that NOTHING can obstruct God's redeeming plans and purposes! Satan's greatest attacks against the purposes of God have resulted in the greatest victories in the Kingdom.

The Cross — was not the defeat of God's redeeming plans and purposes. It is the place where Jesus triumphed over the demonic realm — where Jesus destroyed the works of the devil.

Persecution of the church in Jerusalem — It didn't stop the Gospel.

Those who were scattered went about preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

A COUPLE OF THINGS IN CLOSING

FIRST — Joseph was able to love his enemies because he was humble; he never presumed to put himself in God's place. It takes great faith to trust God that God knows everything about what has happened and that He will right all of the wrongs we've endured. Will my response to the wrong I've

suffered at someone's hands be one of faith? Here's what that faith will look like —

1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV) *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.*

If someone repents and asks for forgiveness — withdrawal or avoiding them are just as much payback as going out of your way to do something bad to that person in return for the bad they've done to you.

Faith is living as though God will sort out the person that's wronged you — freeing you to forgive the one who asks for forgiveness.

Joseph was able to forgive his enemies because he saw things from God's point of view. He was confident that God is always working for us. That freed him to not only forgive them but to actively **seek** the **good** — seek the wellbeing of those who had wronged him. We might say that Joseph's response to his brothers is the sneak preview of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said

Matthew 5:44 KJV *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*

FINALLY — Jesus is the ultimate Joseph!

Genesis 50:20 (ESV) **As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.**

Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because he didn't put himself in the place of God.

But Jesus stood in the place of God because Jesus IS God. The Gospel says that Jesus left His throne in heaven, laid aside the expression of His divine glory so He could stand in our place. He added humanity to His divinity. He became a servant. He became poor.

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers; sold into slavery, and was thrown into prison on false charges. But he was able to forgive because he understood that all that his brothers intended for evil God meant for good so that many would be saved.

Jesus was wickedly betrayed by all of mankind. Jesus was betrayed by His brothers, the Jews. Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver and condemned to death on false charges. Jesus was mocked, beaten, and spit upon. Jesus was taken by wicked hands and nailed to a cross. Jesus referred to all of that as the cup the Father had given to Him. Jesus drank that cup! Jesus embraced the shame and suffering of the cross so that by His suffering and death many could be saved!

When we see the love of Jesus, the humility of Jesus, the willingness of Jesus to suffer in our place — when we see all that God was willing to do and endure to save us — we begin to experience the assurance that God means everything for our good! We begin to understand grace and mercy — we find the ability to extend grace and mercy.