

Freedom from the Evil of Afflictions, 2

Christian Liberty

By Bob Vincent

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Bible Text: Genesis 50:15-21; Romans 8:28-29
Preached on: Sunday, February 26, 2023

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Now I want to focus today again on this statement in this first paragraph, and that is that Christ has purchased for us freedom from, what? The evil of afflictions. That's an interesting statement, isn't it? Christ hasn't freed us from afflictions. As I look out over this congregation, I see lots of affliction, probably isn't a soul here that doesn't experience some of affliction even right now. It's amazing. We all have affliction, so it isn't saying that we are freed from afflictions. One day, we will be freed from the afflictions of this world but not now, not yet, and that reminds us of a passage over in Hebrews 2, if you'd just flip over there for a quick second. Hebrews 2 where he talks about the Lord Jesus and how he was made for a season a little lower than the angels, and we're told there, it's very striking, he says in verse 8, the first full paragraph underneath it, "In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him." Now notice the second sentence, "Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him." That's interesting.

Now everything is under the sovereignty of God, let's make no mistake in thinking about that, not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from our heavenly Father (Matthew 10:29), but we're thinking here of what we might call, some theologians have called, the mediatorial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, died, and rose again, and ascended to heaven in order to begin his reign on our planet.

He is now King of kings and Lord of lords. He is progressively subduing his enemies to himself, and the beautiful thing about being an enemy of Christ: He subdues sometimes the wickedest, meanest, orneriest, most contrary of his enemies and makes them burning flames for himself. Think of the Apostle Paul, an arrogant man who was very self-righteous and yet he was subdued to Christ sovereignly.

So, the Lord Jesus is progressively changing our world, and even though the whole world is under the absolute authority of God the Father, this progressive, redemptive reign of Christ in history is not yet fulfilled. So, we have afflictions. One day, we will be freed from afflictions, utterly, totally, and completely. But notice, I think what's important in the first paragraph of chapter 20 of our Confession of Faith, it states that Christ has purchased for believers freedom from the evil of afflictions. The evil of afflictions. What are the evils of afflictions? Well, that's when something happens to you and it makes you into a bitter, mean, ornery cuss. That's the evil of afflictions. Something happens to you, and it makes you into a mean, ornery cuss, somebody that nobody wants to be around, just full of bitterness, it just spews out of you.

Now I want us to take this time this morning to look at Genesis, if you'd turn back there with me, because I think it stands out as a profound example of what God can do in afflictions. And here we go, if we turn to Genesis and we look here in Genesis 37 and we pick up with a few things. I'm going to do a running, skip over pages, of Joseph. Joseph.

Joseph was a very bright young man. He was favored by his father. He was not the firstborn child. Reuben was the firstborn child, but Reuben committed incest and slept with his father's concubine, and so he's removed from that position of being the firstborn (Genesis 35:22; 1 Chronicles 5:1-2).

Joseph is then put in that position as the firstborn, and one of the things when you were the firstborn, you got a double portion. That's why Ephraim and Manasseh are tribes of Israel, just like Judah is in the tribe of Israel, under Israel (Genesis 48:5).

Now Joseph has these dreams, and Joseph's trouble is he didn't have good sense. He was very wise, he was very smart, but when it came to sharing information, he didn't have a filter. Remember this, just because God has revealed something to you doesn't mean you need to share it with people now; he may have you share it with people 10 years from now.

But Joseph began to have these prophetic dreams, and he didn't even understand the dreams himself at that time, so he's telling them, and other people could understand them clearly. His father rebuked him, he said, "You dreamed that your mother and I and your brothers are all going to be bowing down to you. That's a shameful dream." (Genesis 37:10) He should have just kept his big mouth shut.

So, the other thing we see is that his daddy favored him (Genesis 37:3-4). It was very plain. Have you been in a family where you sensed that a sibling

was favored over you? That's really something. When my brother was very old, he died at 46, he and I were talking one day and he said, "You know, I always felt like Mama and Daddy favored you over me." And I said, "Well, I felt the other way." So, it's not always what you perceive but sometimes it is, and so Joseph was favored by his father and the other thing was he was a rat. He ratted out his brothers. He brought back a report, "You know, I saw them doing this, Daddy. They were doing this. They were doing that."
(Genesis 37:2)

So, the brothers hated him and so he goes down there looking for his brothers, you can pick it up in Genesis 37:14.

"So he said to him, 'Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.' Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, 'What are you looking for?' He replied, 'I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?' 'They have moved on from here,' the man answered. 'I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"

So anyhow, Joseph goes down there, now notice what happens. The brothers spot him, verse 18, "They saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. 'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'" Now it's interesting, here is Reuben. When his father was on his deathbed, Israel or Jacob said to Reuben, "Reuben, unstable as water" (Genesis 49:4). Reuben had a lot of good intentions, but he never could follow through.

"When Reuben heard this," verse 21, "he tried to rescue him from their hands. 'Let's not take his life,' he said. 'Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him.' Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father."

Did Reuben love the old man? Yes, he did, even though he slept with one of his father's wives. He loved the old man, but his love was, what? It was fickle. When it came to counting the cost, he could have stopped them. He could have said, "No, we're not going to do this." But he didn't.

He was a shrewd man, but he was somewhat cowardly, and so what happens is they strip Joseph of his beautiful robe, look at verse 23, "When Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing—and they took him and threw him into the cistern.

Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal.”

Now just think about it: they’ve done all these shenanigans, and they’re sitting down to enjoy a meal. Isn’t that a picture of human nature?

“They looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.” Now here’s Judah and Judah says, “Let’s get some money out of this deal.”

“Judah said to his brothers, ‘What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.’ His brothers agreed.” Now that is a striking story, isn’t it? Later you’ll see that Judah got saved. You know that Judah was not a believer at this point in time. Judah later is converted (Genesis 38:26; 43:8-9; 44:16-34), and we’ll talk about that another time.

But here’s the deal: they sell Joseph and Joseph ends up getting bought by a man named Potiphar, and I just can’t believe what they did. They took that robe back to their daddy, and Reuben shows up in verse 30 and said, “What happened to Joseph?” And so anyhow, what happens is they took in verse 31, “They got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, ‘We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.’”

What heartless people! What heartless people! Can you imagine children being like that? They let their daddy suffer this way. They brought it there; it broke the old man’s heart. He wept and he sobbed and in verse 34:

“Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. ‘No,’ he said, ‘in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.’ So his father wept for him. Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.”

Now this is amazing, so Joseph gets bought by Potiphar, and it’s amazing everywhere Joseph went, Joseph had the Midas touch, whatever Joseph was involved in from this point on prospers. It’s amazing. So, Potiphar begins to recognize this amazingly talented young man and he puts him in charge of things, and so if you turn on over to verse 39—and by the way, Judah gets converted in chapter 38, in my opinion. So in chapter 39, the story picks up in verse 1, page, 64:

“Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.”

And so what happens? Now we read down at the bottom of the page, first full sentence of verse 6, “Joseph was well-built and handsome.” He was well-built and handsome, “and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’” Now what did Joseph do? Joseph was being refined into being a man of God, and he refused her overtures. Over and over again she made overtures to him, but he refused. One day she plotted and when the servants were out of the house, she grabbed him and said, “Come to bed with me now!” And he fled, and she grabbed his outer garment and kept it and then she began to scream, “Rape! Rape! Rape!” And the servants come, and she said, “That Hebrew that my husband brought in this house tried to rape me!” (Genesis 39:13-18)

And so what happens to Joseph? He’s thrown into prison, and he’s thrown into the prison in verse 19:

“When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, ‘This is how your slave treated me,’ he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.”

Now we’re going to move over to the end of Genesis, chapter 50, because we won’t continue to alight in the story. Joseph—think of the afflictions Joseph has had. Think of being betrayed by his brothers. Think of them picking him up and throwing him into a pit. Think of them, and he could hear them talking, “We’re going to kill him. We’re going to do this. We’re going to do that. No, we’re going to sell him.” And all of that, and then he’s

sold as a slave. You know, being a slave has never been a pleasant thing and people are forced to walk barefoot and usually with chains or ropes, but wherever he went God was overseeing him. “All things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28).

He was afflicted and imagine the affliction. Have you ever really tried to be faithful in a particular situation only to have it turn around and bite you really badly? I mean, here he is, he’s faithful to his God, he’s faithful to his master, Potiphar, and when Potiphar’s wife goes after him, he remains faithful to God and faithful to his master, and what does it get him? It gets him thrown in jail. And Joseph is one of those rare people you meet in jail who tells you, “I’m being falsely accused.” No, no, they all will say that, won’t they? But Joseph is one of those rare people who says, “I didn’t do this. I’ve done nothing wrong,” and it was actually true. Joseph was thrown into prison because of his faithfulness to his God.

And then along the way, two of Pharaoh’s servants are thrown in prison as well, his baker and his butler. And so, they both had a dream and Joseph has become known in the prison as a man who can interpret dreams. So, he interprets the dreams. He tells the butler that, “Within three days you’re going to be restored your position of office next to Pharaoh as one of his chief advisers,” the cupbearer (Genesis 40:9-13). And then the baker’s all excited, “Well, tell me, I had a dream too! Tell me what my dream means!” And it was about the birds eating the wonderful bread and sweet things he had cooked that were sitting on top of his head in a basket and the birds came and ate them and Joseph said, “In three days’ time, you’re going to be hung and the birds are going to come and eat your flesh.” (Genesis 40:19). And then he says to the butler, he said, “Please, remember me” (Genesis 40:14). Well, did he remember? No, he forgot him. He forgot him. Totally forgotten.

What do you think he felt like? What do you think he felt like? I mean, abandoned by God, he’s in prison, and when he’s done kindness nobody remembers, and now the old man is dead and what do we read?

Let’s read here in verse 14 of Genesis 50,

“After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father.”

Verse 15, “When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?’”

Now think about that for a moment. Why do you think evil of other people? Because you think to yourself, “Well, if I was in his shoes, I know what I’d do.”

And that’s how they’re thinking. They’re thinking—by and large these people don’t know the Lord, by and large they don’t know the Lord, and so what you find is they send word, you see?

“They sent word,” verse 16, “to Joseph, saying, ‘Your father left these instructions before he died: This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.’ When their message came to him, Joseph wept.” (Genesis 50:17)

Why did Joseph weep? Because he understood his brothers weren’t Calvinists. Now that’s said in an anachronistic way. Joseph was a Calvinist. Joseph believed, and the way it’s actually worded in Greek in Romans 8:28, it doesn’t say God works, it says “And all things work together for good to those who love God.” (Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν)

Of course, God does it, but God does it very indirectly. He does it by manipulating people’s wills. He does it by engineering circumstances just so.

So, Joseph wept. Verse 18:

“His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. ‘We are your slaves,’ they said.”

Look at verse 19, “But Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”

I want that to sink in. What’s he saying? He saw, what? Joseph saw the hand of God in his brother’s jealousy. Joseph saw the hand of God in Reuben’s scheme to come back and rescue him, but his cowardice didn’t allow him to carry through. Joseph saw the greed in his brother Judah, who at the time was unsaved, what he was going to do, “Let’s sell him.” Joseph saw that. He heard all that. It must have been terrorizing to him. And then being marched as a slave.

They didn't put slaves on camels or donkeys, they made them walk, and it's a long hard trip from there down to Egypt. And then he's sold. "Who's going to buy me?" And he's bought by this man Potiphar, and Potiphar's lustful, wicked wife goes after Joseph, and he refuses her in loyalty to his God. And then he reveals a dream and he's forgotten once again. There he lies languishing, a forgotten man.

Do you ever feel forgotten by God? Do you ever feel that as you've tried to serve God, "What has this gotten me? How did I end up in this awful mess? It was because I was loyal to God and tried to do what was right, and now I'm suffering for it." Was that Joseph's attitude? No, Joseph believed, Joseph believed what Jesus taught, that not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from your heavenly Father, and the very hairs of your head are all numbered by him (Matthew 10:29-31).

And notice how he says this, he says, "As for you," look at that, that's so important, he says, "As for you, you meant it for evil," verse 20, "You intended to harm me."

He's not excusing their sin, but he's not holding it against them. Do you know when you forgive other people, you're releasing yourself? Should you wait until somebody asks your forgiveness before you forgive them? No. You never know relief from your pain and suffering and bitterness in your heart until you self-consciously, make a decision to forgive them regardless of their attitude. I'll say it again, regardless of their attitude.

"Bob, you're saying that, and that's something really hard." I've heard teachers say, "Well, you shouldn't forgive anybody until they really repent."

Nonsense! The longer you refuse to forgive somebody from your heart, the worse the pain in your heart is going to be. Bitterness will devour you. What have you got to do? You've got to forgive them. God takes care of the problem when you forgive people. You forgive them. And he said,

"You meant it for evil. You intended it for evil to harm me. God intended it for good."

Now I want you to think with me for a moment. You've got the same act or the same acts from God's perspective and from the brothers' perspective, and it's one and the same act. There's no difference in what the brothers did and what God did but God was working it to keep Joseph from experiencing **the evil** of afflictions. Joseph was afflicted. I mean, the kinds of afflictions that Joseph experienced are unbelievable as we live in today's world. Unbelievable experiences. Unbelievable afflictions. But Joseph all along

confessed that God is sovereign. God is sovereign. God has a plan. And then God revealed that plan because Joseph is in a strategic place. When the cupbearer remembers his fault, when Pharaoh has had two dreams about skinny cows eating fat cows and the good healthy grains of corn being devoured by unhealthy grains, and Pharaoh is very perplexed (Genesis 41:1-8).

Have you ever had a dream when you were perplexed about it, “Lord, what does it mean?” Do you know that God still speaks in dreams today? Would you like to get a message to Joe Biden? Why don’t you pray for him to have a dream, a dream that will disturb him so much that God will speak to him through somebody. Or Donald Trump, would you like to speak to Donald Trump? Pray for God to visit him with a dream that will be so real and so terrifying that he will seek out somebody to interpret it, a person of God who won’t trivialize it away.

So the cupbearer said, “I remember my fault. There was a Hebrew slave in the prison, and he could interpret dreams.” And he tells Pharaoh about what the dream was for himself and what the dream was for the baker (Genesis 41:9-13). And so, they send for Joseph. First thing the boy did was shave. Then he changed his clothes, because I guarantee he did not smell good. So, he’s shaved, and he’s cleaned himself, he’s got on clean clothes and he goes in before Pharaoh and explains to Pharaoh the dream (Genesis 41:14). Now God the Holy Spirit was working inside the heart of Pharaoh as he’s hearing this interpretation—somehow, he knew that he knew that he knew that this Hebrew man had real insight into what was going to happen. And so he said, “Can we find anybody in the realm as capable as this man to prepare us for the famine that’s coming after seven years of plenty?” (Genesis 41:14-45)

So he appoints Joseph as his vicegerent to rule over all the land of Egypt, and Joseph is there preparing a place. God speaks to rulers to give them a word about what may happen so they can be good rulers over their people, even if they’re wicked people who don’t know the Lord. God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him, and that’s why Joseph, as his father’s dead, as Joseph has understood the grace of God, as Joseph sees the plan of God, he has no bitterness towards his brothers.

Can you imagine that? Would you be that way? Would I be that way? Suffering all that way? And his comfort was this, that one and the same act is wickedness on the part of the brothers but on God’s side it’s good.

And it reminds me of a passage in the New Testament we won’t look at, but it is that Jesus was crucified under the plan of God, and this is what you need

to understand: What was the worst act that ever took place in the entire history of our planet? It's when Jesus was killed because man killed God in his human nature.

In his divine nature, of course, man can't kill God, but man killed God in his human nature because Jesus is God and man in one person.

That's the most despicable thing that human beings have ever done. Why is it so bad? Because you need to understand something about the nature of sin and guilt. The majesty of a person makes the offense against that person greater than something else, and so the worst act ever committed on our planet is when man killed God in his human nature, and yet who put Jesus on the cross? Who killed Jesus on the cross? Who ordained that the Lord Jesus Christ would die and rise again? It was God the Father (Acts 4:28).

So, it's **one and the same act and yet radically different in terms of intention**. So, I want you to take a moment and reflect on this. You've got afflictions right now. I can look over you, I know virtually every one of you, your afflictions. I don't in every case but in most cases I know what you're suffering with, and it's painful. It's agonizing. You know, I think about things just this week in our lives we learned some things about people we loved that we did not know. Agonizing. Agonizing things. Afflictions.

But you know, I'm not crushed down by those afflictions because I know that the Lord Jesus died on the cross and rose again to free me from **the evil of afflictions**, and therefore all things—not some things—all things are working together for my good and that's why I can be happy (Romans 8:28). That's why I can be happy. You can't be happy as long as you've got something in your craw. When you've got something in your craw, it just eats you alive. You know, when you're mad at somebody and you see their dog, you say, "That's that old Vincent dog walking across our yard." When you've got bitterness in your heart, it'll spoil even the finest meal.

So, this is my invitation to you. We're small here today because of a lot of sickness here in Texarkana. I want to invite you as a Christian to take that hurt right now and I'm going to have us pray and I'm going to have us be silent as you bow your head. I'm not going to ask you to do anything, but I want you to just in silence as I open us in prayer, think about this and pray with God:

"Lord, help me to guide us as we do this. In Jesus' name." I want you to think about the person that's really hurt you the most. Who really has hurt

you? Who, when you hear their name, makes you get a knot in your stomach? Who when you read about them makes you upset? Who when you see them upsets you? And I want you right now in the name and authority of Jesus to pray this way,

“Lord Jesus, every time I see So-and-so, it just makes me upset. I can’t even pray for them because I get so angry. Lord, would you help me today, the last Sunday in February of 2023, to give this to you? Maybe it’s one more time of giving it to you but, Lord, would you take it away? Lord, it’s like a piece of meat that didn’t get digested well and it’s sitting in my guts and it’s causing me indigestion and reflux and just a knot. Lord, would you take it away? Would you enable me to bless those people? And Lord, we thank you for the example of Joseph, a man who believed truly that no matter what people had done to him, it was part of a divine plan and therefore Joseph never experienced the evil of afflictions. Lord, would you enable us to give that to you today?”

In Jesus’ mighty name we pray.

Amen.