

Viewing Evil Through the Lens of Providence (15)

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The Life of Joseph

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Bible Text: Genesis 50:19-21
Preached on: Sunday, September 21, 2014

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We turn in God's word this morning to Genesis 50. Genesis 50. We come this morning to the last sermon in our series on the life of Joseph. The text this morning will be verses 19 through 21 and we'll read the entire chapter. We have here in the beginning of chapter 50 is what happens when Jacob dies and they return to the land of Canaan to bury his body there. Genesis 50. This is the word of God,

1 And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days. 4 And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 5 My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again. 6 And Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear. 7 And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. 9 And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company. 10 And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days. 11 And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abelmizraim, which is beyond Jordan. 12 And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them: 13 For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre. 14 And

Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father. 15 And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. 16 And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, 17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. 18 And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. 19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. 21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. 22 And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. 23 And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees. 24 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 25 And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. 26 So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Thus far we read God's word.

The text is verses 19 through 21,

19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. 21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Let's now pray and ask God's blessing on the preaching.

Father in heaven, as we learn from this passage about thy providence and of a man of thee, our God, who had the perspective in his life of viewing what happened to him according to providence, we pray, Father, that thou wilt use this word to give us the strength to view life from that same perspective. There are hurts that we have, we've been hurt by other people, but may we learn to see those hurts in a right way, seeing it according to this truth. We pray, Father, that thou wilt give us hearts that are open to receive it and grant strength to thy servant to proclaim this word for the glory of thy

great name so that we may leave here praising thee as the sovereign God who rules over all things in our lives. In Jesus' name alone do we pray. Amen.

As we come now to the end of our series on the life of Joseph, we have through much of this series kept our eyes on this passage. I've referred to it many times because Joseph was learning to take this viewpoint in his life, he was learning to see his life through the lens of God's providence. And I say that purposely that he was learning it. Joseph, when he makes this confession now, is probably in his 50's. His brothers are much older. His father has just died. He's learned to look at the hurts that he experienced in his life from this perspective. He'd done that before. We've seen that, for example, in Genesis 45, where Joseph confessed to sovereignty of God there, but no doubt when he was a young man in Egypt, that was a struggle for him to see this all rightly, but Joseph was learning it so that now as he's an older man, he's able to make the beautiful confession that he does here in this text. And we're reminded of what we've been saying all along through our series in the life of Joseph, that the life of Joseph is not about Joseph, it's not about a man, but instead it's about the God of Joseph. It's about his sovereignty, his providential rule over all things that governs all things for a purpose and that purpose is the salvation of his people in Jesus Christ. And that's what we are reminded of again today at the end of this series as we look at this passage, that God is the one who rules and he's doing all things for the salvation of his church.

The doctrine that is before us, then, this morning is the doctrine of providence. Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism defines providence so nicely for us. We probably remember the words of Lord's Day 10, "The almighty and everywhere present power of God whereby, as it were with his own hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth and all creatures." That's providence, God's work, his powerful sovereign work of upholding and governing all things. But what we see about the truth of providence in the passage this morning is that providence is not simply a doctrine that we learn but it's a truth that we live. It's a truth that we live. You see, Joseph made decisions, conscious decisions in his own life based on the truth of providence. He made the decision to view life, yes, led by God, by the grace of God, but yet a conscious decision on his part to view his life from the perspective of providence. That tells us that providence is not simply a blind fatalism. It's not just, "Well, God did this and there's nothing I can do about it anyway, so I just go on." No, that's not how we see providence here in the text, instead we see that this providence is lived by Joseph, it governs the decisions that he makes, it governs how he treats his brothers, it governs what he must do and that he forgives his brothers and does not hold a grudge against them, is not holding on to bitterness against his brothers, and it's the truth that comforts him now towards the end of his life.

It's a beautiful passage when we read and we know the words, "Ye thought evil against me but God meant it for good." Really, we can say that Genesis 50:20 is the Old Testament Romans 8:28, that beautiful, comforting verse that we read there in Romans 8 which says that "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Genesis 50:20 is the Old Testament version of that, the Old Testament verse of that and it's a beautiful verse that we look at this morning. But as we look at it this morning and see the comfort that it gives and see

how we are to live our lives through this truth, we must understand the context which brings out this beautiful confession of Joseph in the text. Joseph's father, Jacob, had just died. They had gone to the land of Canaan, buried their father, and it must have happened, I would guess, that on the way back home the brothers were talking without Joseph being around wondering what Joseph now is going to do that Jacob is gone and out of the way, that now that he is dead, and they wonder if Joseph is going to see paybacks now, if Joseph really is filled with hatred and anger towards them and he's just been holding that down while Jacob was alive. But now that Jacob is dead, is he going to act on that? That's what we find in verse 15. We have an insight into their conversations together, and they say there, "Joseph will peradventure hate us and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him."

Now we've noticed that Jacob's brothers were changed but they still hold on to some of their own wrong thinking. They're looking at Joseph right now from the perspective of the way in which they would have handled such hurt, and that's why they're thinking this way. So thinking that way, they now send a messenger to Joseph and they don't dare go by themselves, they send a messenger and say, "Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin." So they're reminding Joseph of something their father Jacob said. Now we have no record of that anywhere else that Jacob had actually said these words. We don't know for sure that Jacob had said them, but I would believe that because these men are changed there would be no reason to doubt that Jacob would have said that and would have given this instruction. Now on the basis of that, they're requesting that Joseph would forgive them for what they have done.

When that messenger comes to Joseph, he weeps. He weeps because they don't really believe what he said to them earlier. He weeps because they think that he might be out to get them. There's so much weeping here. Joseph was a man who wept often, showing his tender heart, and here he weeps again. And his brothers go down and fall before his face and then Joseph now makes this beautiful confession and says, "I'm not out to get you. I'm not going to hurt you. I don't hate you. I'm not going to get paybacks and here's the reason, I believe in the providence of God. Ye meant it for evil against me but God meant it for good." Joseph was viewing life and these evils his brothers had committed against him through the lens of providence.

That's what we consider this morning, "Viewing Evil Through the Lens of Providence." We notice, first of all, the amazing viewpoint that Joseph expresses here by the grace of God. Secondly, the godly response, so here are the actions that follow from that right viewpoint. And then finally, the great comfort, the way of comfort that is found in that viewpoint.

There's a parallel here in the passage and the parallel is between the brothers of Joseph and what they have done and what God is doing. We read there in the text, "Ye thought evil against me but God meant it unto good." What doesn't come out here in this translation of the text is that the verbs "thought" and "meant" are the same words in the Hebrew so that it could literally read this way, "Ye planned evil against me but God

planned it unto good." That's a literal idea there of the passage, "Ye planned evil against me, and you acted on it, but God planned it unto or for good." The text explains then here the relationship between real hurt and pain that Joseph experienced because of the sins of his brothers and the relationship of that to God's providence and sovereignty. So those two things are brought together here in the text, but let's break it down for a moment. We notice, first, that Joseph says to his brothers, "You planned evil against me." When Joseph says that he's not trying to make his brothers feel bad. He's not laying it on them so that they're overcome with guilt for what they have done. But on the other hand, we have to take notice of the fact that Joseph speaks truth about what his brothers had done. He's not saying to them, "You know, guys, it's no big deal. It's really not a big deal." He doesn't minimize their sin. He doesn't sugarcoat their sin in any way. He speaks the truth, and I believe the truth in love about the sins that his brothers had committed. He speaks truth about their abuse, the way in which they had hurt him.

You might even wonder what it was that Joseph had said to his brothers over time about what they had done as they were living in the in the land of Egypt and no doubt had opportunity to talk. How did those conversations go? And certainly Joseph must have explained to them the ways in which he was hurt over the years. And we don't have to go back through all of that history since we've been looking at that in the life of Joseph, but remember the way, just briefly, in which his brothers hurt him. When he was living at home yet because of his godliness and because of the favoritism that his father had shown to him, they hated him. They envied him. They wanted him out of the way in their own hearts, and then finally the opportunity presented itself and the first plan was to kill him, which we've seen was not out of character for these boys at that time in their lives. But instead they went with Plan B and they sold him and he was sold, then, as a slave into Egypt and the great hurt of that is that Joseph was separated from his family and from the church. Imagine that, 17 years old being separated from family and church for 22 years. In addition to that, he went through great hardship in the land of Egypt. Although he served Potiphar faithfully, his wife lied about him and he ended up in jail and he spent much time in jail, even though he lived godly and obedient there as well until he rose to a position of prominence in the land of Egypt. And even that, as we saw, was not so great because then he had to deal with power and wealth and prosperity in a wicked land and culture. It was hard and difficult for Joseph to remain a faithful child of God.

You can be assured that as the brothers are thinking this way about Joseph, this brings to the surface for Joseph all of that hurt that he had experienced for all of those years. He's expressing that here. These things hurt him. They hurt. We shouldn't think that Joseph was simply numb to this hurt, that that hurt didn't affect him in any way that he could just say, "Oh, not a big deal, guys. Don't worry about what you have done." The pain and the hurt were real and certainly it was a struggle for him, and that's what we ought to understand, too, the pain and hurt that we have is real. It's a very real pain and hurt. Some of us know this pain, this kind of pain and hurt. We know it in different ways. Those who know it from children that are rebellious and say awful things to their parents. Some of us know that from the perspective of a spouse that has abandoned the family and rejected the family. There's great hurt in that. Of course there's hurt in that. We've all been hurt by some person or people that are close to us, family members, members of the church.

Maybe it goes back to school days in grade school being hurt by the things that people said there, maybe even most of us have memories at one time or another of being hurt by the things that others said to us. There's awful hurts that have come. Not only that, but there are people who are abused, abused by family members, abused by church members, abused verbally, physically and even sexually. We ought not to think that those are the things that only happen out in the world, those things can and do happen in the church too, and they hurt. The hurt of that is unimaginable for those of us who don't know that and haven't gone through that. The hurt and the pain is awful and those who are hurt, we should not expect them to say, "Well, that's no big deal. That happened a long time ago. That really doesn't affect me." We shouldn't expect you should just get over it now. No, it's a great struggle.

This evil and hurt causes great pain in life and it's difficult to view this from the right perspective, but it happens by the grace of God over time, as we see that here in the life of Joseph. That means for those who have been hurt too in these ways, it's okay to speak about that hurt in real ways. Not to hurt someone but to acknowledge the hurt that we have gone through, just as Joseph did that with his brothers. He didn't change it. He didn't sugarcoat it. It was real. That's what he says when he says, "You planned evil against me, but now," he says, in addition to that, there's not a period there, "but God planned it for good." Joseph sees this hurt, this suffering from the perspective of God's sovereign providence. He sees it from the perspective that God had planned this. It wasn't just that God had done it, but God had planned this. This was part of his eternal counsel, and the plan for his life, but that also means that the things that his brothers had done to him were subservient to the plan of God. God did not simply permit this evil and hurt to take place and God does not simply permit things to happen. But their evil and their hurt against Joseph was part of God's plan. The text here explains that God is sovereign over everything, of course, but he's sovereign as well over evil and sin that takes place in our lives. That's Joseph's perspective. God planned this this. This is part of what God had done.

Now understand what that means. That does not mean the relationship between God's sovereignty and this evil and the sin that they committed is that God approved it. The word "good" there doesn't mean that, that ethically what they did was good before God. No, the sovereignty of God does not excuse the sins of these brothers. It does not make it okay, and that therefore, then, they don't need to repent of it. "Oh, God was sovereign over it." No, we see and understand man is still responsible for sin and yet God is sovereign over it. God hates sin. His unchanging attitude towards sin is that it's an abomination before him. This sin of Joseph's brothers was an abomination to God. He hated it. He hates that abuse. He hates that sin that they committed.

We should understand that, too, that the sins that others commit against us, God's perspective is not, "Well, it's okay." God hates that. He does. But we understand, as well, that God is sovereign over that sin, and that sovereignty and that it was good means that God planned it with a good purpose in mind. There's a purpose that God had with the sin of Joseph's brothers, and that's what we read of Joseph confessing as well in the text, "to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." God's purpose was what was

happening right now, at that time, I mean, that Joseph and his family were in the land of Egypt and they were kept alive, kept alive in a horrible time of famine that would last for seven years. But that's not all. It's not just, well, Jacob and his family now had food, but there was a purpose for that, there's still a bigger picture which we've seen all along in the series, haven't we, and that bigger picture is to keep the line of Christ alive. It's Judah. Judah, from which will come the Messiah that God had promised through David and Solomon, all the kings of Judah, that line of Christ was preserved and kept alive by God here even through the sins of Joseph's brothers. That's God's purpose, the salvation of his church, his people, and it's not just about that line of Christ but here's the significance of the history for us: we have great interest in this history because it shows the faithfulness of God to save us. He did this for the salvation of the entire church, the people God chose from eternity and that he has now redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Beloved, we have set before us here the beautiful truth of God's providence that he uses sin and all things to accomplish salvation. That's how we are to have a perspective of the scriptures. Genesis 50, of course, is at the end of the book of Genesis, but remember what happens at the beginning of the book of Genesis, where did this sin come from? Well, it came from the sin of Adam and Eve, and we have to look at that sin of Adam and Eve from the perspective of God's providence and sovereignty. We know that. We've been taught to do that. So we see and understand that Adam's fall into sin was not something that happened by chance, it was not simply something God knew would happen in the future from all eternity, but it's something that God himself planned for the glory of his name and the salvation of Jesus Christ. And this is the beautiful truth you find throughout scripture, God's sovereignty over sin for our salvation. You go to the New Testament, Acts 2:23 when Peter there is preaching at the time of Pentecost and preaching to the Jews there in Jerusalem, and he said to those Jews, "You crucified the Christ. You crucified him." But before he said that, he said that this was determined by God, that this is part of the foreknowledge of God. So their sin of crucifying Christ, that it was sin, was determined by God. Why? For the salvation of the church and then that's the beauty of Romans 8:28, the "all things that work together for good." It's not just the suffering, it's not just sickness, it's not just death, it's those times when we have been hurt as well by others, and we still carry those wounds and those scars.

All of that is working for our salvation. That's what we see here. That's the good. That's the good of which Joseph confesses. What we see here, then, is that by the grace of God Joseph views the awful hurts in his life from the perspective of God's providence. He looking through that lens, as it were, like when we have glasses and you have to look through those lenses. Well, this is the lens, the spiritual lens through which Joseph looks at the events of his life. "You planned it for evil but God meant it for good." What Joseph is saying here, then, is, "I will not dwell on the hurt that you have caused. For 22 years, I wasn't with my father and my family and the church. I grieve that." Joseph is saying that, too, it hurts, but he's not going to dwell on that. He's not going to think on that only, but instead he's saying, "I've learned to see this from the perspective of God's sovereignty and providence," and he's saying here, too, that, "If I don't view it from that perspective, it's going to destroy me." And that's what happens. It destroys us if we don't look at what happens to us from the perspective of God's providence.

Joseph learned that in his life. That was the conscious decision that Joseph makes. That's what we have to learn to do in the hurts that we go through, to make this same conscious decision to not dwell on the hurt, to not dwell on the grief, not dwell on all of those things that have been done to us in the past, not focused on those, and maybe if we remember a long time ago and the hurts that we've experienced from others, maybe that's an indication that we're too focused on those things. We're too focused on them. But we must make the conscious decision by the grace of God to view the hearts of our lives from the perspective of God's providence. Now it takes time to do that. It's not just all at once. It's not a light switch that gets turned on and turned off. It takes time to do that. A struggle often to do that, as well. But yet that's the perspective that we must have.

Joseph's perspective on the providence and sovereignty of God led to him making right decisions. It led to godly actions, and that's why verses 19 and 21 are important here in the passage, as well. Joseph responds to the irrational fear of his brothers with forgiveness, and he responds with forgiveness because he's taking the right viewpoint of what they've done to him. If he takes the wrong viewpoint, he's not going to respond in the same way. So that's where you see that viewpoint and where your heart is at determines actions, determines what happens outwardly. So we see here in the text that very truth that your viewpoint, what you believe, and as it lives in your heart, that is what determines action. Or to put it another way, theology, how you see God and your life, that determines how we live.

The right perspective results in a right response to hurt. The wrong perspective to hurt leads to disobedience. What's that wrong perspective? Well, if Joseph had a wrong perspective, that would have led to this: he would have been angry. He would have been looking for the right opportunity for payback as his brothers thought. He maybe would have been waiting for his father Jacob to die and, "Now here is the opportunity without dad talking to me about it, of doing what I want to do." Maybe it could have been that he was pretending to be kind for a long time, but at the same time his mind was plotting on how he could get even with his brothers, wanting them to hurt in the way that he had been hurt.

The other wrong response is if his perspective was wrong, if he's only focusing on his own grief and his own hurt and his own loss, the other possibility is that he just keeps it inside, keeps that hurt all internal, tries to push it down, but the result of that is that he becomes inside full of bitterness and anger as well, but he just keeps trying to hold it in and that's what destroys the person from the inside out. So maybe there's not plotting for revenge but because the perspective is wrong, that sin that's been committed against one is never truly dealt with. They keep pushing it down, not giving expression to it, but not looking at it from a right perspective either, and that can destroy one. But we find here in the text that Joseph does not look at his hurt and his grief from that perspective.

The right perspective makes all the difference. There's not revenge on his mind. There's no bitterness in his heart but he forgives. Now we don't find that word directly here in the passage that he forgives, but we see that he does because notice, first of all, that that's the

request of his brothers. They're requesting that he would forgive them and that he would continue to forgive them as well, and then the actions of Joseph, what he says indicate, as well, that he is continuing to forgive his brothers. I say it that way on purpose, continuing. We've seen already that Joseph forgave his brothers but remember when we considered that, that one of the things we said is that forgiveness is an ongoing promise. It's an ongoing promise. We see that demonstrated beautifully here in the life of Joseph, an ongoing promise. Remember those promises? The promise that, "I will not think on this and see you in the light of the sin you've committed. I will not bring this up and use this sin against you. I will not bring the sin up with others and destroy your reputation. And in addition to that, I will not allow this sin to stand in the way of our having fellowship together."

Joseph continues to keep these promises. That's what we see here by his actions in the text. His forgiveness was not pretend. It was not put on for a little while, while Jacob, his father, was alive. It was not there to appease his father until he died. But he forgave because he desired to serve the God who forgave him so much. Knowing forgiveness for his own sins, he forgave his brothers as well, and that's what we want to see here. What we see here is that the truth of providence leads to forgiveness when hurt has been done to us. We see that from two perspectives. The first is what Joseph says in verse 19 when he says, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" That's a beautiful statement that Joseph makes to his brothers that indicates that he forgives his brothers. He says here, "I'm not in the place of God." Now Joseph could have taken it upon himself to be "in the place of God." He could have because of his position. He had the opportunity to get even with his brothers, to think, "I want them to hurt like I hurt," and then to actually carry that out.

He had the opportunity to do that but Jacob now being dead, but also being a ruler in Egypt. He was the second most powerful man in all the world of that time. He governed the finances of the world at that time. Egypt was rich because of the instruction that Joseph gave at the time when Pharaoh had his dreams. All Joseph had to do was give the command to the soldiers there in the land of Egypt and he could have had his brothers put in jail just like he was in jail. All he had to do was give the command and say, "When my brothers come for food, don't give them any. Don't give them one little bit." Joseph had the power to do that.

Joseph could have ruined their reputations. He could have gone to the media of Egypt in that day and spread not lies but the truth about what his brothers had done, and the whole country would have been outraged and they would have been at the doors of the judges of the land of Egypt, maybe at the door of the palace itself, crying out for justice, or maybe taking matters into their own hands and going and taking care of Joseph's brothers for him. The people would have been outraged. They loved Joseph.

But Joseph doesn't do any of that. He doesn't do any of that because of his clear view of God. He's seeing God clearly right now. You see, it's not about himself in relationship to others, it's about his relationship with God, and part of the sovereignty of God that's revealed here is that God is judge, to confess that God is sovereign means to confess that he is judge. As the one who is king and ruler of the world who rules over all things, he

also is the judge of all men, and that's what Joseph understands. Again, the theology, the theology of providence is right understanding of providence means as well that he understands that God is judge. He's living by what we read in Romans 12. Romans 12:19, we'll read Paul saying, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Joseph, as he believed the sovereignty of God, believes too that God will take care of these brothers and do whatever he wants to do to these brothers, but it's not his place to take the place of God and bring hurt in their lives because of what they've done to him. That's part of understanding the providence of God when it comes to our hurts. It's not my place to repay. "Vengeance is mine saith not me, vengeance is mine saith the Lord."

That's what we must remember when we are wronged. Is not our first inclination when we've been wronged, when we've been hurt by others, is to do something in return? Kids know that, and as parents we see it in our kids. One child hits another and what's the first response? Usually a poke back. Usually it's worse. It hurts more. We have that same response in us as adults. Those responses are usually much more refined, aren't they? But that often is our first inclination, is it not? Paybacks. Get even. "I want him, I want her to hurt as much as I've been hurt. I want him or her to understand how much they've hurt me. They don't really get it. I want that for them." That's how we can begin to think. We want that to be carried out in our lives as well.

We must live by the truth that we read in 1 Thessalonians 5. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 we read there, "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." That means that when evil is done to us, we don't return evil to the person who's done evil to us, but instead we return good for the evil that is done to us. That means we must live with the desire to love as we have been loved, even when we've been hurt. We ought not to have an eagerness to get someone back and that means, too, that when we look at God, we must not be, as it were, cheering God on, "Yeah, God, get him back. I won't. I'll step back but, God, you do it." No, that's not what that means we read in Romans 12 and 1 Thessalonians 5 about God getting vengeance. Vengeance is his. We're not cheering him on here, "God, do it. Get him back." No, it's about our attitude towards God and to others, having that forgiving attitude. That's what Joseph has here in the text.

The second thing we see is that this view of providence leads to love. It leads to love. So Joseph forgives his brothers because of providence, the truth of providence that he sees clearly, and then he says in verse 21, "Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." Seeing the truth of providence leads to loving even those who have hurt us. That's what Joseph does, he speaks kindly to them, and he promises, "I'm going to take care of you and your children and your grandchildren. I'll give you all the food that you need." He shows his love for his brothers. How amazing that is. Just put yourself in his shoes and imagine being hurt like Joseph was hurt. And maybe it's not so hard for some of you to imagine that hurt because you've been hurt in similar ways, and then you know how difficult it is to respond in love to those who have hurt you. But we see that in Joseph. He reflects the love of God.

He does that in his life and that's the example of our Savior Jesus Christ, is it not? Thinking of him praying from the cross, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." Now we know he wasn't praying for everyone there, he's praying for his people who right then some of whom were hurting him and nailing him to that cross and shouting insults at him, and the words out of his mouth are, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." That's how we are called to treat those who hurt us because we see life and the evils that are committed against us through the lens of God's sovereignty. If we're not seeing life through that lens, our actions will be all off and they will be sinful. But God's sovereign providence when viewed rightly leads to loving those who have deeply, deeply hurt us.

So that's the question for us, to those that deeply hurt you, what's your attitude towards them? More importantly, are you seeing God rightly? Are you only seeing that hurt or are you seeing the providence of God? The hurt can blind us to the providence of God. We must keep the providence of God in view. And what a great comfort that is, the, for us when we see the providence of God. The comfort is this: we know that God is in control of all things. He's in control of the awful things that have happened to us in the past. He's in control of whatever hurts we may have in the future. He's in control of what's going to happen in this world. We know that some of the hurts we're going to experience are the hurts of persecution. Maybe there's been some persecution we've experienced, not severe, not being imprisoned for what we believe, that it's going to become more severe, but we know that no matter what it is God is sovereign. He is in control of these things and because of that I have nothing to fear.

That's what Joseph says, "Fear not. Fear not." That's the word of God to us, too, when we see the providence of God, "Fear not. Don't be afraid of what's going to happen." Because of the truth of God's sovereignty we can lay our heads down on our pillows at night and have peace because our lives are held in the hands of the Almighty God. What a great God he is. And this comfort is experienced in the way of living out of the truth of God's providence. We're reminded here where we started: providence is not simply a truth that lives in our heads, it's a truth that must live in our hearts, and when we understand providence, it speaks to all the situations of our life. It really does. We must be learning in our lives day by day to live out of this truth of providence as Joseph learned in his life to live by the truth of providence. That shows that we know God. May we then view our lives through the lens of providence as Joseph learned.

What a series this has been, a series in which we've learned more about not just Joseph and that history, but learned some things about that, too, but we've learned about God, his greatness, his providence, what he has done to save us from our sins and what he continues to do to save us from our sins. And now this morning we've seen specifically that truth of providence. May we, through the working of the Holy Spirit, live out of this truth in our lives on a daily basis. Amen.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we are thankful not only for this sermon this morning but we are thankful as well for thy word to us out of the life of Joseph. We're thankful for making thyself clear to us so that we see thee in thy sovereignty and thy providential rule over all. We are thankful also that we've learned in this series how we are to live out of that truth. Bless us, Father, give us strength that we would forgive as we see this truth of providence, that we would love as we see this truth of providence, and that we would be focused on giving glory and honor to thy name. May we know that part of that truth is that vengeance is thine and not our own. May we not seek to give back at those who hurt us, but instead may we love, may we serve, may we forgive for the glory of thy great name. Forgive graciously our sins, dismiss us with thy blessing this morning. In Jesus' name do we pray. Amen.

Introduction

- I. Joseph saw his life through the lens of God's providence.
- II. We must understand what brings this beautiful confession out of Joseph's mouth - after Jacob died Joseph's brothers wondered if Joseph would hate them and get paybacks.

The Life of Joseph

15. Viewing Evil through the Lens of Providence

I. The Amazing Viewpoint

- A. Joseph says to his brothers, "You planned evil against me." Although Joseph is not trying to make them feel guilty or bad, he does speak truth about their abuse and sin.

- B. God planned this for good. Joseph sees this suffering in his life from the perspective of God's sovereign providence (LD 10).

II. The Godly Response

- A. Joseph responds to the irrational fear of his brothers with forgiveness because he sees what they did through the lens of God's providence.

- B. Fear not, for am I in the place of God?

- C. Notice, that this view of providence and decision to forgive leads to love.

III. The Way of Comfort

- A. When I see suffering in my life through the lens of providence there is great comfort in my life.

- B. This comfort is experienced in the way of living out of this providence.