



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Epiphany 7

February 23, 2025

Sent Before Genesis 45:3–15

³ And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. ⁴ And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. ⁵ Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

⁹ Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: ¹⁰ And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: ¹¹ And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

¹² And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. ¹³ And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. ¹⁴ And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

To get the full impact of today's Old Testament, we have to go back to the years preceding Joseph's birth, when Jacob traveled to his homeland to choose a wife, and fell in love with a girl named Rachel. When he asked for her hand in marriage, her father, Laban, promised her to him if he would work for him for seven years. Jacob agreed, and seven years later there was a wedding. On the wedding night, his bride came in to him, wearing the traditional veil. In the morning, however, Jacob realized he had been tricked, for instead of Rachel, the girl he loved, he found he had been married to her older sister, Leah. Laban made the excuse that it was not permitted in their culture for a younger sister to be married before her older sister. "Would it have been too much to ask for you to tell me this seven years ago?" Jacob must surely have thought.

Angry as he must have been, Jacob was, nonetheless, undeterred; he still wanted Rachel. So Laban agreed to give her to him if he would work for him another seven years,



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which he did. And seven years later, he finally received the woman he loved. A happy ending? No.

The sacred Record tells us that the Lord was aware that Leah was unloved by her husband, so He opened her womb, but kept the womb of Rachel closed, meaning that the Lord allowed Leah to conceive and bear children, while Rachel could not. In fact, Leah conceived and bore Jacob four sons in a row: Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. As you might guess, however, Rachel became jealous and gave Jacob her handmaiden, Bilhah, and from this adulterous affair, Jacob received two more sons: Dan and Naphtali.

But you know how these things go, right? Leah became jealous now of Rachel, and gave Jacob *her* handmaiden, Zilpah, and from *this* adulterous affair, Jacob received two further sons: Gad and Asher. After this, Leah bore two more sons: Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter: Dinah.

Now, finally, after Jacob had ten sons and a daughter, Scripture records that God remembered Rachel and opened her womb and gave her a son. This would be the first born of the woman Jacob truly loved, and she named him Joseph. Rachel would yet bear another son, Benjamin, thus making twelve sons in all for Jacob, and these sons would be the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, for they were the twelve sons of Jacob, otherwise known as Israel.

Now, how do you suppose Jacob treated the children born of his favorite wife, especially her firstborn? To put it simply, Joseph was spoiled. His father lavished his love on this particular son, and you have to know that his older brothers resented him for it. Joseph didn't help the situation when he started having dreams about his brothers bowing down and worshiping him. Now, mind you, he couldn't help having these dreams, but I doubt whether telling them to his brothers was the smartest thing to do, because it caused him a great deal of trouble – more trouble, in fact, than anyone could have imagined.

One day, Joseph's brothers had had enough of this spoiled little brat and decided to kill him. Rueben, God bless him, had the sense to talk them out of it. But, before he could rescue him, Judah convinced the brothers to sell him to a band of Midianite traders, which they did.

Joseph wound up as a slave to a man named Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, whose wife wanted to sleep with him. But, he refused, so she accused him of it anyway and had him thrown into prison.

But now we really begin to see the Lord's hand at work in the life of Joseph. While in prison, Joseph meets a couple of men who had been in the employ of Pharaoh: the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

One morning, as Joseph greeted his fellow prisoners, he noticed these two were upset. When he asked them why, they told him that they'd both had strange dreams. After telling him their dreams, Joseph was able to interpret them. The cupbearer, it seems, would be restored to his position in three days, while in that same amount of time, the



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baker would be hanged. Joseph's interpretations were spot on, for the events happened exactly as he said they would.

Well, wouldn't you know, one day Pharaoh had a disturbing dream – in fact, he had two of them – and Joseph was called in to interpret these dreams. He explained that there were going to be seven years of prosperity in the land, followed by seven years of famine. He recommended that food be stored during the seven fruitful years, so that they would have enough to last through the seven years of drought. Pharaoh not only accepted the recommendation, he placed Joseph in charge of the operation, elevating him to the equivalent position of Prime Minister over all the land of Egypt. Not bad for a guy whose brothers wanted him dead, right?

Which brings us to the events just prior to our text. The seven years of bounty have passed, and we're now in the throes of the seven barren years. The famine has raged two years already at the point of our text. People all over the known world were starving from the lack of food. Even Joseph's family back home were suffering from the drought. But the word had begun to spread that there was food in Egypt. So Jacob sent his sons to barter for food.

When they arrived and had to stand before the man in charge of the distribution, they didn't recognize him as their brother Joseph. Of course, Joseph recognized them. He did not, however, reveal this knowledge, even going so far as to speak through an interpreter in order to keep his identity a secret.

After the arrangements were made, Joseph sent them home, but had his silver cup "planted" in Benjamin's sack. After they departed, Joseph sent his servants after them, who then "discovered" the "stolen" cup. So the servants brought the brothers back to Joseph for judgment.

Picture it now. Joseph has his brothers before him, their lives on the line. They surely must think they're done-for. That's where today's text begins. Joseph reveals his identity to them. They, of course, have a little trouble comprehending what's happening. Remember, they sold him into slavery at least a dozen years before. For all they knew, he was dead. Surely, they would never conceive that he would be the Prime Minister of Egypt! But Joseph convinces them, pointing out that God had been arranging these events all along. Joseph was able to see God's hand not only in preserving his life, but actually saving the lives of thousands, maybe even millions, of people throughout the known world. He would later say: ". . . you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." (Genesis 50:20b) Remarkable!

But this is typical of God, isn't it? He's always sending help even before we know we need it. In fact, we see in this text a beautiful depiction of the saving nature of God, who



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ultimately sent His own Son before us, to prepare the way of salvation by suffering and dying on the cross. Because Jesus came, you and I, and countless millions of people, have been saved from spiritual starvation, for He, the very Bread of Life, has purchased everlasting life for us with His own precious body and blood. Thanks be to God!!

But the grace and mercy of God is not content only to give us a future gift of eternal life with Him in heaven. No, He *continues* to send His Holy Spirit, who proceeds from Him and precedes us in our daily lives, preparing our way for us, providing the necessary things of life. As St. Paul would later write to the Philippians: ". . . my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Php. 4:19). And Luther recognized in his explanation to the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer that: "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone . . ." and that "Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body . . ." Yes, God's Spirit is always going before us – always *sent* before us – to see that all our earthly needs are met. What a great comfort this is! Amen?

And even beyond this: the Spirit of God is always working to see that the evil others intend toward us is turned into good. David would later say of his enemies: "In the net which they hid, their own foot has been caught." (Psalm 9:15b) And the Apostle Paul has written, "We know that all things work together for good, for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). This is part of the ongoing work of God in our lives.

Dear friends, this is a powerful encouragement! We see in today's text a vivid example of how God never leaves us on our own. You are *never* left alone! God established your very salvation long before you were born. He continues to go before you to prepare your way. He is constantly working to turn evil into good in your life. As Jesus Himself promised: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5b), and "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mat. 28:20b).

So, the next time it seems as though life is giving you a bad turn and you feel lost and alone, remember the story of Joseph and how God used all the evil in his life to lift him up and how He turned all that trouble into good, even to the point of saving millions of lives. What good can God bring from your troubles? God only knows. But do it He will. You have His Word on it. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen