



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Epiphany 7**  
February 20, 2022

## The Godly Shifting of Fate

### Genesis 45:3–15

<sup>3</sup> And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup> For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup> And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup> So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. <sup>10</sup> You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. <sup>11</sup> There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ <sup>12</sup> And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. <sup>13</sup> You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” <sup>14</sup> Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. <sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Today’s Old Testament presents one of the most beautiful Gospel applications in all of Scripture. In fact, the whole story of the life of Joseph has fascinated and captivated audiences for thousands of years.

But to get the full impact, you have to go back to the years preceding Joseph’s birth. When Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel, traveled to his homeland to choose a wife, he saw and fell in love with a young woman named Rachel. So, he went to her father, a man named Laban, who was actually his uncle, his mother’s brother, and asked for her hand in marriage. 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 that he’d been tricked, for instead of Rachel, the girl he loved, he discovered he had married her older sister, Leah. Laban made the excuse that it was not permitted in



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their culture for a younger sister to be married before her older sister – a fact he conveniently withheld prior to the wedding.

Though he was angry, Jacob was, nevertheless undeterred; he still wanted Rachel. So Laban agreed to give her to him if he would work for him another seven years, which he did. Seven years later, he finally received the woman he loved. A happy ending? not quite!

Scripture tells us that Leah was unloved by her husband, so the Lord opened her womb, but kept the womb of Rachel closed. This means that the Lord allowed Leah to conceive and bear children, while Rachel could not. In fact, she bore Jacob four sons: Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. But, oh, the treachery of the devil! Rachel became jealous that her sister had given Jacob four sons, so she gave Jacob her handmaiden, Bilhah, and from this adulterous affair, Jacob received two more sons: Dan and Naphtali.

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

And, now, finally, after Jacob had ten sons – four of them through adulterous relationships – [finally] 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. She would yet bare him a further son, Benjamin, thus making twelve sons in all, 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 the firstborn – compared to the children of the other women? You might suggest that Joseph would be spoiled. And you'd be right! He was a spoiled brat! His father lavished his love on him, and you have to know that his older brothers resented him for it. And Joseph didn't help matters any when he started telling his brothers about the dreams he was having – dreams about his brothers bowing down and worshiping him. Now, mind you, he couldn't help the dreams, but I'm not sure that telling his brothers about them 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 Daddy's little favorite, who kept telling them how they were going to worship him, and they decided to kill him. Rueben, God bless him, at least had the sense to talk them out of it. But before he could rescue him, Judah convinced the other brothers to sell him to a band of Midianite traders, which they did.

Joseph ended 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



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in prison, Joseph meets two men who had been in the employ of Pharaoh. One was the chief cupbearer and the other the chief baker.

One morning, Joseph noticed that these two fellow prisoners were troubled. He asked them why and they told him that they'd both had strange dreams. By God's grace, Joseph was able to interpret their dreams. The cupbearer, it seems, would be restored to his position in three days, while the baker – after the same three days – would be hanged. Joseph's interpretations were spot on, for the events happened exactly as he said they would.

Well, wouldn't you know, that one day Pharaoh was disturbed by a strange dream, and it just so happened that his chief cupbearer remembered the man he'd met in prison who could interpret such dreams, and Joseph was called in help. 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, but 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, eh?

This brings us to the events just prior to our text. The seven bountiful years have passed, and we're now in the throes of famine, which, by the time of our text, have raged already for two years. 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 has begun to spread that there's food in Egypt. So Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to barter for food.

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

After the arrangements for food were made, Joseph sent them home, but had his silver cup planted in Benjamin's pack. After they departed, he sent his servants after them, who then "discovered" the cup, which they presumed to be stolen. 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. And this is where today's text begins. Joseph reveals his identity. They, of course, have a little trouble comprehending what's going on. Remember, they sold him into slavery at least a dozen years before. For all they knew, he was dead. Surely, they could never conceive that he would be the Prime Minister of Egypt! But, having finally convinced them, Joseph pointed out that God had been arranging these events all along. He 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. In fact, later he would say: ". . . you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in



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order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Gen. 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 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 blood. Thanks be to God!!

But the grace and mercy of God is not content to give us a future gift with the present blessing of hope and comfort which comes from knowing that our eternal destiny lies 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, long before we even know we need them. 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 tremendous comfort this is!

But, 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” (Ps. 9:15b). This is part of the ongoing work of God in our lives. Dear friends, this is powerful! We see in today's Old Testament a vivid example of how God never leaves us on our own. God saw to our salvation long before we were born. He continues to go before us to prepare our way, constantly working to turn evil into good in our lives. 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” (Matt. 28:20b).

So, the next time it seems like 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 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