

The Joseph Series: Providence

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[0 : 00] perfect savior, strong defender, we will trust in you. God, thank you that you are sovereign, that you are provident in all of life, and that you are sovereign and provident in saving us, and you're sovereign and provident now.

Lord, would you please open our eyes, help us now to understand your word as we bring it forth. Praise in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. For the kids, if you want to head out to the children's ministry, I'm sure this is a great class plan for you guys today.

All right, well, for this morning, we're going to be looking at Genesis 50, 19 to 21. Genesis 50, 19 to 21.

So if you want to open up your Bibles, open up your phones to Genesis 50, 19 to 21, that'd be great. We're going to be starting a three-part, three-message series on the life of Joseph before we head into our trek through Exodus.

So today we're going to be looking at our first sermon about the life of Joseph, entitled, Learning to Trust the Hidden Smile of God.

[1 : 19] Learning to Trust the Hidden Smile of God. from Genesis 50, 19 to 21. So let's get started. God moves in a mysterious way.

His wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable minds of never-failing skill, he treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds ye so much dread are big, are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a founding providence, he hides a smiling face.

[2 : 31] His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain. God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.

In 1773, William Cooper wrote this powerful poem, Light Shining Out of Darkness, beautifully capturing a stalwart faith in the providence of God.

Portraying a language of faith won through the deepest of trials, Cooper himself struggled deeply with depression. He penned words that have given comfort and hope, have provided a spark of faith to many passing through valleys of sadness and trial.

Have you ever been there, in a valley of sadness and trial, fighting for light and faith? I don't doubt that in a congregation this large and this size, we as a collective family have fought through depressions, losses, and beyond.

[3 : 53] The experience is too painful to even name. And in a separate class, don't we all? Every day, suffer through heartaches, large and small.

The unkind words said or received, the car that won't start, the slip and fall, and broken bone. Why? Why does God allow these trials into our lives? And really, are they truly from the Lord? Like I mentioned, today we start a three-part series on the life of Joseph, a man who himself could have written the poem, Light Shining Out of Darkness.

And today we will specifically be looking at Joseph's story through the lens of God's providence. We will observe many things about God, about Joseph, about ourselves.

And my prayer for this message is that the content of it will strengthen all of us to honor God in the large and small trials of life. That we will see all of life more and more as being from God's hand.

[5 : 03] And we will see his providence as coming from the heart of a God and Father that we know and love so dearly. So we can honor him through whatever he has chosen for us to receive.

So to start, let's read our anchor verses for this morning, Genesis 50, 19-21. Genesis 50. But Joseph said to them, Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?

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.

So do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones. Thus, he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

May God bless the preaching of his word. All right, so let's begin this morning by reviewing the storyline of Genesis up to the point of Joseph's introduction.

[6 : 17] I know that Sunday School has been going through this, so hopefully this is a good review. But in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And with the creation of man as God's pinnacle work, things were very good.

Then came the fall and sin and the curse. Mankind, while not living without a promise of redemption, continued to fall into deeper sin. And by the time of Noah, God had observed, Genesis 6, that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention to the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth and had grieved him to his heart. Then came the flood, judgment mixed with mercy, as God allowed mankind to continue through the line of Noah.

Then the Tower of Babel. Finally, by Genesis 12, Abraham, Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob. Men gifted by God with faith.

Imperfect men, sinners. But men, God, covenant himself to, each generation, God revealing himself to, and promising his faithfulness and steadfast love.

[7 : 36] By the time we meet Joseph, God had promised Abraham and his lineage, land and seed, and ultimately covenant faithfulness. And it's at this point in Genesis 37 that Joseph steps onto the scene.

Now, as many of us are probably familiar with, Joseph's life is one of promise, followed by extraordinary lows and even more extraordinary highs.

Experiences we might deem as blessings and curses. But ultimately, as we examine Joseph's life, we see one that clearly traces out the providence of God.

So, three points I'd like us to trace out for today from Genesis 37 to 50. We're going to cover the whole story, but ultimately we're going to, we're going to look at first, providence displayed, second, providence unbounded, and third, providence's ends.

Providence displayed, providence unbounded, providence's ends. So, first point, providence displayed. Before we can make any headway in observing providence is outplaying in Joseph's life, we should define our terms.

[8 : 52] What is providence? So many theologians have sought to define providence. I particularly like Charles Hodge's definition. God's works of providence, according to Charles Hodge, are his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving, and governing.

All his creatures and all their actions. Providence, therefore, includes preservation and government. By preservation, it's meant that all things out of God owe the continuous of their existence with all their properties and powers to the will of God.

This is clearly the doctrine of the scriptures, and I'll show some verses to highlight that. But providence includes not only preservation, but government.

The latter includes the ideas, so government includes the ideas of design and control. It supposes an end to be attained and disposition and direction of means for its accomplishment.

if God governs the universe, he has some great end, including an indefinite number of subordinate ends towards which it is directed, and he must control the sequence of all events so as to render certain the accomplishment of all his purposes.

[10 : 19] So, that's a mouthful. In short, God is sovereign over everything, and he's not only sovereign or in control, but he is directing everything toward the accomplishment of his purposes.

So, some key verses to consider when thinking about God's providence. Daniel 4. For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can say his hand or say to him, what have you done?

Consider also Psalm 33, 11. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. truly, God is in control, and not just in control, but guiding all things both small and large according to his plan.

If that is providence defined, how can we observe God's providence over the life of Joseph? Where do we see God's controlling and his governing initiative? Well, let's look at his life.

[11 : 40] Starting out as a favored son, symbolized by Jacob's gift to him, the coat or robe of many colors, Joseph then has his dreams featuring sheaves of the field, bound down to Joseph's sheaf, as well as the sun, moon, and stars bound down to him.

These dreams, presumably, foretell Joseph's preeminence over the rest of his family. This clearly does not sit well with his brothers. We then throw him in a pit and sell him to Ishmaelite traders headed to Egypt, which ultimately was a merciful turn of events for Joseph because he was surely, he was good as dead if it weren't for Reuben's lobbying on his behalf not to kill him.

So Joseph then lands with Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard, and the Lord is with Joseph. Joseph is faithful in Potiphar's house.

All he does succeeds while he is there. So Potiphar puts Joseph in charge of his entire household, implicit trust, and reliance. But then, Potiphar's wife.

She sees Joseph and she wants to lie with him and as we all know, Joseph, in his integrity and fear of the Lord, he gets out of there. He flees from Potiphar's wife. And in response, she lies about the whole affair and gets Potiphar to throw Joseph in prison.

[13 : 05] So through the seemingly bleak circumstance, the Lord continues to be with Joseph. And Joseph continues to be faithful to the Lord.

He ends up getting put in charge of the whole prison, Genesis 39, 23. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him.

And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. Enter Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. These guys get thrown into Joseph's prison, have some dreams, and we all know who interprets them.

It's Joseph. Well, along with Joseph's interpretation of the dreams, the baker, he's killed. But the cupbearer, he gets restored to Pharaoh. Does he pay Joseph back for interpreting his dream?

He does. Two years later, two years later, only when Pharaoh has a dream that needs interpretation does the cupbearer remember Joseph.

[14 : 11] So Joseph hears Pharaoh's dream, interprets it, and even provides Pharaoh with a plan to solve the problem of oncoming famine predicted by the dream. Joseph basically writes his own job description.

Pharaoh brings him on board, and Joseph as usual, serves faithfully as God is with him. in the end, when famine strikes the region, Egypt has food, Pharaoh is pleased, and Joseph has the privilege of saving his family and moving them to Egypt, where we read in our anchor verse, he forgives and provides graciously for them.

What a story. What an illustration of God's providence. And as we celebrate God's providence taking Joseph from the pits of the palace, let's remember our definition of God's providence.

God is sovereign over everything. He's not only sovereign or in control, but he's directing everything toward the accomplishment of his purposes. So underline and bold the word everything in that definition.

was God provident over Joseph rising up in Potiphar's household, the Egyptian jail, and ultimately all of Egypt? Absolutely.

[15 : 37] But consider also the implications of Lamentations 3, 31-33. For the Lord will not cast off forever, but though he cause grief.

though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men.

So pay particular attention to verse 32. Though he cause grief, God causes grief. God is not an easy word to preach, let alone to hear.

I understand that in speaking about such a subject, I am standing within sensitive and sacred space. Space that Joseph himself must have wrestled and fought for faith within.

But before we are tempted to waver or abandon the doctrine of God's sovereignty, let's consider the words of Charles Spurgeon. There is no attribute of God more comforting to his children than the doctrine of divine sovereignty.

[17:02] Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe troubles, they believe that sovereignty hath ordained their afflictions. That sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all.

There is nothing for which the children of God are more earnestly to contend than the dominion of their master over all creation, the kingship of God over all the works of his own hands, the throne of God and his right to sit upon that throne.

Joseph was in that Ishmaelic caravan, that first night of travel to Egypt, how could he get any rest? How could he comfort himself?

When Joseph was in the Egyptian jail that first night, how could he sleep? And for those two years, just waiting for the cupbearer to remember him, how could he get any rest?

Well, I don't know this for sure, but based on his ultimate response to his brothers that we read about in our anchor verse, I suspect that Joseph rested his head on the pillow of God's sovereignty.

[18:26] Is God sovereign when I forget my lunch in the morning? How about when the traffic jam makes me late to work? How about that nail in the tire that costs an afternoon of repairs and a solid amount of cash?

Is God sovereign? Or does he blink? Or worse, wring his hands at what's going on? I went to a Super Bowl party this year, and I'm a solid Chiefs fan.

You know, like, I watch most of the games, I generally cheer for them unless they're playing the Eagles. But think back to that fourth quarter when the Chiefs were going at it, and it was a close game, and I just remember looking over to some of my friends who were there who are really Chiefs fans.

I remember seeing one kind of standing there like this, like, what's going to happen? I remember one, fourth quarter, are they going to do it? Are they going to do it? Wring in their hands.

is that what God's like? Is God uncertain? Is God unsure? No.

[19:46] He looks at everything, and he doesn't wring his hands. He doesn't bite his thumb. God is provident. God is sovereign.

Isaiah 45.7. I form light and create darkness. I make well-being and create calamity.

I am the Lord who does all these things. Sure, Joseph experienced God's providence in his ascent from the pit to the palace.

But let's not rob God of his sovereignty by saying that only the good things for Joseph were God's providence. Every wobble of that cart carrying Joseph to Egypt, every tempting touch of Potiphar's adulterous wife, every vile smell of the Egyptian jail, all were under the sovereign providential purposes of the Lord.

In addition, Joseph succeeding in Potiphar's house, succeeding in jail, succeeding with Pharaoh, that too was part of God's providence. Psalm 115.3, our God is in the heavens.

[21:09] He does all that he pleases. Amongst so many other lessons, Joseph's life was surely one of providence displayed.

And we've spoken a bit about Joseph. But there's another character in Genesis 37 to 50 that I think would serve us to consider especially as we reflect upon God's providence. So I'd like to introduce you to Judah.

In the end, the scepter will not depart from Judah's descendants. Both Jacob and God bless Judah. However, Judah did not start out his life in a way that would pretend God's blessing.

for Judah especially was a rascal. In Genesis 37, it is Judah who rather than advocating for his brother's freedom and salvation, he advocates for and convinces his brothers to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders.

Then there's the story of Genesis 38. first, Judah conceives three boys with a Canaanite woman.

Then years later, after Judah's firstborn son named Air, after he dies, Judah impregnates Air's wife, Tamar, with twins thinking Tamar to be a prostitute.

[22:38] Judah truly was a nasty guy. And frankly, God just kills other people in the Bible for a whole lot less than what Judah does.

But as we've seen earlier, God is sovereign. And he has sovereign providential purposes. And as we've all read in the Bible elsewhere, God is merciful and compassionate.

God gives Judah multiple sons, children. And more significantly, God gives Judah time an opportunity to repent.

Consider, years later after Judah had essentially sold Joseph into slavery, their paths cross again. This time, we're now in Genesis 42. Joseph is governor over Egypt.

And Judah, well he and his brothers are desperate for food as Cain is suffering, like the rest of the region Cain is suffering from a famine. and we all know who has food to share in Joseph, in Egypt, Joseph.

[23 : 50] So Judah and his brothers head to Egypt desperate for food. And they meet Joseph, but they do not know that it is Joseph they are speaking with. And Joseph tests them in a number of ways.

And one of these tests is that he requires their brother Simeon to stay with him in Egypt. and the way Joseph will release Simeon is that if these sons of Jacob bring their youngest brother Benjamin with them to Egypt to see Joseph.

Now this request was the hardest of all of Joseph's tests that he gave to his brothers. As Jacob, Jacob loved Benjamin. He treasured him.

For he was the last surviving son of his favorite wife Rachel, as well as his youngest son. The brothers didn't want to rob Jacob of Benjamin, but they also knew that they left Simeon in Egypt, left behind in Egyptian jail.

At this point, so many years after selling his brother Joseph into slavery, hear the words of a changed man. Hear the words of Judah.

[24 : 58] Genesis 43, 8-9. And Judah said to Israel, his father, send the boy with me, and we will rise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones.

I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and send him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.

Judah the rascal, Judah the immoral, has become Judah the pledge, Judah the blame taker.

Then as Jacob's sons, including Judah, reencounter Joseph in Egypt, hear the words of Judah again, after Joseph has insisted that Benjamin stay with him in Egypt. Genesis 44, 33-34.

This is Judah speaking. Now therefore, please let your servant Judah remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me?

[26 : 13] I fear to see the evil that would find my father. Judah is no longer the man who would sell his brother to slavery.

No matter the effect it would have on his father, he is now the substitute, the one who would take Benjamin's place so that Benjamin and Jacob would not have to suffer.

Judah has repented, and Joseph sees it. What were you before your conversion?

Were you a rascal, perhaps a liar, perhaps immoral, perhaps simply dishonoring or disregarding of your parents? In a sense, we were all Judas.

Ephesians 2. We were all dead in the trespasses and sins in which we 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.

[27 : 18] thank God he did not just wipe us out at the first sign of sin. Thank God the Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Thank God he is patient and long suffering, extending kindness as a means to bring about repentance. God's providence in the case of Judah, one of his purposes, one of his purposes, in it was to see that Judah would come to repentance, that Judah would be changed, that ultimately Judah would be saved.

And we all know why. God had a plan for Judah. And not just for Judah, but for us as well, through Judah, our Savior is the son of the tribe of Judah.

That guy who was immoral, that guy who would have killed Joseph, Jesus comes from that line, that lineage. What grace, what free providence.

Surely, that is providence unbounded. All right, clearly the providence of God is mysterious and free and gracious and ultimately for God's glory.

[28 : 39] There are so many purposes of God's providence, we can barely scratch the surface in our lives, let alone this sermon, to mine the depths of God's wisdom. Well, let's not let that stop us from seeing what we can.

So, providence's ends, the goals of God's providence. So, let's start with Joseph. One of the ends of God's providence in the life of Joseph is simply a reverent fear of God.

When Joseph's brothers grew scared of Joseph after the death of Jacob, what did he say to them? Remember Genesis 50, 19, but Joseph said to them, do not fear from I in the place of God. This reverent fear not only exalted Christ, but it also allowed Joseph to freely forgive and provide kindly for his brothers. Joseph, through all his trials and prosperity, he learned his place in the universe.

And he knew that it wasn't on the throne. It was bowed for the great almighty God of the universe. [29 : 54] So he was able to push past any grudge he may have carried and forgive. Again, out of a great fear of God, an acknowledgement of his creatureliness before this great God.

And for Judah, what was one of God's purposes with him? One end of God's providence? Well, as we've already seen, God's providential kindness, his patience, led Judah to repentance.

So what about for us? What about for us? Why does God bring about good things into our lives? And why does God bring about heartache?

Let me first be sensitive. Like I said earlier, I know we're talking about this topic, and I'm standing on holy ground. As some of us have shared, or some of us have suffered tremendously, lost tremendously, so please don't hear me share this as some glib, flippant assertions.

But also, please know that I've tasted my share of God's providence. the sweet, the sweet, and the bitter. So a lot of this comes from experience as well as through the scriptures.

[31 : 14] But hear this, if there is one thing God's providence from the life of Joseph can teach us, it is that we can trust God.

We can trust God. God. Consider the words of Spurgeon who said, God is too good to be unkind, and he's too wise to be mistaken.

And when we cannot trace his hand, we must trust his heart. God is sovereign over everything. Every detail of our lives, he's working to bring about his glory and our good. Every time I forget my keys in the morning, every time the car doesn't start, every time something more serious happens, God is sovereign.

Yes, God is still sovereign. It is at those times we must stop ourselves, catch ourselves, catch our mouths, catch our hearts, and acknowledge that we just don't know the end of the story in totality.

[32 : 36] That we just don't honor the Lord to complain, to grumble, to accuse. We know the heart of the God who is writing our stories and we know that it is good, that it is wise, that it is powerful, and in that truth we can find so much good hope.

It's not only that, but in a very real way, we actually do know the end of the story. We actually do. 2 Corinthians 4, 17, 18, 18, for this light, momentary affliction, is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. The things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

It is scripture, and scriptural truths like this, that we can hold on to when the providence of God tastes bitter, when the clouds are dark, when it just seems that God is frowning.

We can know and process calamity with the knowledge that God is compassionate. He does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men, and that this trial, whatever it has sent our way, is preparing for us for so much, for loosening our heart from this world, for drawing us closer to God, for preparing us for God's personal comfort, for weakening sin in our lives, and ultimately for preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond, beyond all comparison.

[34 : 37] We may not always feel this, especially the moment calamity strikes. We may struggle to believe this. We may have to fight for belief, but by God's grace, empowered by his spirit, we can be like Job, who in losing just about everything, in faith, said, naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return.

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. For certainly providence has redemptive ends.

So, in conclusion, God, by the testimony of scripture, God is surely sovereign. Not only sovereign, but provident in all of life.

He was provident in the life of Joseph, he was provident in the life of Judah, and he's provident in the life of each and every one of us. God's providence extends to every moment, every detail, every mountain, and every valley of our lives.

God's mysterious ways, they have a purpose for everything that happens to us. May we search the scriptures for God's providence, bathe ourselves in the promises related to it, and grow in our faith

in his good, kind, compassionate, merciful heart.

[36 : 27] ultimately, then when we rest our heads and our hearts down at night, we can rest them on the pillow of God's good providence.

It is in that faith that we receive whatever the Lord has for us, and it is in that faith that we honor the Lord, comfort our hearts, and can then go out and love others.

let's pray. Dear God, we praise you because you are sovereign, you are provident, you are good and wise and powerful.

God, we thank you. We thank you that we are not left in the dark about this. Lord, there are things that we don't know. Lord, we thank you that when we cannot understand, when we cannot trace out your hand, we can trust your heart.

So thank you for that. Thank you that ultimately we can look to the cross, where you showed your heart for us, where you sacrificed your son, so that we could be forgiven, so that we could be saved.

[37 : 48] So I pray that the seeds from this message would go deep into our hearts, and you'd help us this afternoon, you'd help us tomorrow morning, you'd help us Thursday at three o'clock to trust, that when things are going great, you are provident, and when things may be cloudy, you are still shining above those clouds and provident.

Thank you, Lord, that we know you and that we can know these truths. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Now, for communion, there is one piece of the story that we must put in place in order to truly understand the story of Joseph rightly.

In order to know God rightly, we must see Joseph's story as a great foreshadowing of the story of God, Moses, Israel, and ultimately, Jesus.

for certainly Jacob's sons were undeserving, yet God raised up a deliverer for them to open up all the blessings of the granaries of Egypt for them, to keep them alive in famine.

Certainly, for the sons of Jacob, God's providence was infinitely far and away better than what they deserved. And certainly, as we will see in the Exodus story, God's providence to the nation of Israel will be far and away better than what they deserve.

[39 : 19] Yes, they will endure 400 years of slavery, but God will also provide for them a deliverer, a savior in Moses, who will rescue, redeem, provide for, instruct, and ultimately guide them to a promised land.

But even that connection is not the height of the foreshadowing of Joseph. There is more. For Jesus, Jesus certainly is the ultimate Joseph.

Jesus is the leader who was raised up and betrayed by his brothers. But for Jesus, well this time, this brother would be killed.

This brother would not just be sold into slavery, but he would suffer and bleed and die on the wooden cross with a crown of thorns upon his head and a sign above him stating King of the Jews. It is with hope in this savior that we can come to the table with the words of Peter ringing in our ears. First Peter two. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so you might follow in his steps.

[40 : 42] He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. So come now to the table with a fresh faith in God's providence over all of life.

With a fresh gratitude for God's providence in Jesus' life, which is what won us salvation. And a providence that has secured for us forgiveness, acceptance, adoption, and even the hope that because of Jesus, God is working out all things for our everlasting eternal good.

1 Corinthians 11, 23-26. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread.

[42 : 08] And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, also, he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
Come, let us proclaim the Lord's death together.
Amen. Amen. Thank you.