

“God’s Bigger Purpose”

Genesis 45:1-15; 50:19-21

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C. S. Lewis was the author of the great children’s story, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In the story, four children are taken into Narnia, a magical world where animals talk, but a world ruled by an evil queen, the White Witch. She has cast a spell so that it is always winter, but never Christmas.

The children make friends with the good animals of Narnia, and they look forward to meeting Aslan, the great lion. But one of the children, Edmond, comes under the power of the witch, and betrays his own brother and sisters. The law of the land says that a traitor belongs to the witch. The only hope for him is Aslan, the true ruler of Narnia who has come back. The Lion goes to the witch and holds a council with her. He’s made an agreement to make for the release of Edmond. He walks mournfully toward the witch’s camp; all sorts of horrible demons and monsters take hold of him; Aslan has given his life into their hands, to be abused and killed on the stone table. The next morning, the shattered children go to the table to look for his body, but he’s not there anymore.

“Oh it’s too bad,” sobbed Lucy, “they might have at least left the body alone.”

“Who’s done it?” cried Susan, “What does it mean? Is it more magic?”

“Yes,” said a great voice behind their backs, “it is more magic!” they looked around, and there shining in the sunrise, larger than he had been before, shaking his mane, for it had apparently grown again after the witch had shorn it off, stood Aslan himself.

“Oh Aslan,” staring up at him, almost as frightened as they were glad. “Aren’t you dead, then, dear Aslan,” said Lucy. “Not now,” said Aslan. “You’re not a, not a…” said Susan. She couldn’t bring herself to say the word ghost. Aslan stooped his golden head and licked her forehead. The warmth of his breath and a rich sort of smell that seemed to hang about his hair came all over her. “Do I look it?” he said.

“Oh you’re real, you’re real, Oh Aslan,” said Lucy, and both girls flung themselves on him and covered him with kisses.

“But what does it all mean?” asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer. “It means,” said Aslan, “that though the witch knew the deep magic, there is a deeper magic still that the witch did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time, but if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness before time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim that had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the table would crack and death itself would start working backward. And now…”

“Oh yes, now?” said Lucy, jumping up and clapping her hands.

“Oh children,” said the lion, “I feel my strength coming back to me. Oh children, catch me if you can!”

He stood for a second, his eyes very bright, his limbs quivering, lashing himself with his tail, and then he made a high leap over their heads, and landed at the other side of the table.

That’s a picture of the deep work of God and his Spirit that works somehow through human catastrophe and evil. It’s the deeper magic of Aslan.

Today, we finish our series on the book of Genesis. The word Genesis means “beginnings,” because the book tells the beginnings of creation, humanity, sin, salvation, and faith in God. The book is important for our faith, because it builds the foundations. A lot of people think the New Testament is about grace and the Old Testament is about law. They think the Old Testament shows an angry, judgmental God, and in the New Testament he’s nice. But Genesis shows how the God who is holy and just is also the God of grace. It shows how God reaches out to save us even when we’re running away from him.

It’s hard to fully understand the work of Jesus without understanding Genesis. It’s hard to fully understand God’s heart for missions unless we understand Genesis. It’s hard to understand the struggle against sin, death, and the devil unless we understand Genesis.

There’s another thing about the book: it’s the story of this great character of Joseph, one of the most important characters in the Old Testament. I put him in my top five.

Joseph is a living picture of God’s promise that “all things work for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes” (Romans 8:28).

Joseph’s brothers hate him because their father favors him and gave him a special robe. Joseph doesn’t help matters when tells them about a dream that one day he will rule over them. So they throw him into a pit, and then sell him into slavery in Egypt. They dip his robe in an animal’s blood, and then lie about it to their father so that he will believe Joseph was killed by a wild animal. Joseph finds success in Potiphar’s house until Potiphar’s wife falsely accuses him of attempted rape.

Joseph is put in prison, and things seem to go well when the jailor trusts him. But Joseph’s hopes that Pharaoh’s man will get him out come to nothing. He’s forgotten for two more years.

Finally, after 17 years of nothing seeming to work out for Joseph, he interprets a dream for Pharaoh. Pharaoh rewards him by making him the second-in-command for all of Egypt, in charge of the country’s food supplies to prepare for a seven-year famine.

The famine threatens Joseph’s own family back in Canaan, so the same brothers who hated him and tried to get rid of him come down to Egypt. The very one who can help them is Joseph, and they don’t recognize him. When Joseph reveals himself as the brother they betrayed years before, they’re afraid. I’d be afraid in their shoes, too. But he has a different take on it.

He says,

“But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors” (Genesis 45:7).

What happened to him is no random accident—he was *sent*. His brothers thought they were in charge, but God was working in the events. God sent Joseph, just like David says in Psalm 105,

"[God] called for a famine on the land of Canaan, cutting off its food supply; he *sent* a man to Egypt ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave" (Psalm 105:16-17).

The word "sent" is important. It gives the theological meaning of the events of Joseph's life, that it wasn't by accident; God was at work even in human decisions.

See how that ties into Paul's great promise in Romans 8:28, that all things work together for good for God's people? All things—even the evil done to Joseph. God worked evil for good. He didn't just watch evil events unfold. God's not just a passive observer of the human scene. He doesn't want evil or cause it, but he uses our junk and our bad decisions to bring about good. Just like Joseph's brothers meant harm, God means the same things for good. So, when the brothers sold Joseph into slavery, that same selling was God's sending for salvation.

People choose evil, but God uses it for good. That's he did for us when he sent his Son Jesus to the cross to bleed and die for our sins. In Acts, the apostles pray,

"In this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 4:27-28).

That means that evildoers conspired to kill Jesus, but in the very same event, it was still God sending. He's in control, and he's God. People meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Just like Aslan, what others intend for evil, God is transforming for good by a deeper magic. And when God brings good out of the pain of the cross, or out of Joseph's slavery, in some abstract way. It's not like his plan didn't work, so he says, "Now, it's plan B." God plans and works all things together for our good.

God's sovereign mercy shines through brightest in human darkness. Joseph's brothers were afraid Joseph would have them killed once their father died, so they sent a message to Joseph saying:

"Your father gave this command before he died, 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" (Genesis 50:16-17)

What does Joseph do? He weeps before his brothers. They come and fall down before him, fulfilling the prophecy, just like he dreamed and say, "We are your servants." But Joseph tells them,

"Do not be afraid. Am I God, to judge and punish you? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, so I could save the lives of many people. So don't be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them (Genesis 50:17-21).

Isn't that amazing? "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Genesis 6:5 says the inclinations of the human heart are evil, but God takes that and uses it for our good and for his glory. Genesis, after the story of the flood, says that the inclinations of the human heart are

only evil all the time. But transforms it! And so God uses the evil Joseph's sons do to Joseph in order to save them and their children.

That's why Joseph is free from anger. He doesn't have to drown in bitterness over half his life spent in slavery. He can forgive, because he knows that God has lifted him up and showed him mercy through their evil actions. Is it any wonder Paul writes,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

Isn't God amazing? He shows his sovereignty, that he's God over everything that happens, even the wrong and harm that people do. He is king over all.

Remember how God chose Abraham back in Genesis 12? We don't know why God chose him. Nothing special about Abraham. It was all about God's undeserved favor, about his amazing grace in Abraham's life—nothing special about him that God should choose him. It was the same in choosing Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau. Not on account of anything in them, but it was just to accomplish God's secret purpose and to show it was all about his mercy, not human merit. That's his plan for saving the world.

God saves individuals, and he does it by using everything to bring them to himself. It's why Genesis is so big on those boring lists of names. It shows God cares deeply, not just for tribes and nations and categories of people, but for individuals, for you, and he knows you by name.

How should we respond? I think God's calling us to trust him to work out his purposes for our good and his glory.

That's what Genesis is all about. It shows us that the God who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, the God who upholds them and rules them by his good will, is our God and Father because of Christ his Son. It tells us we can trust that he'll provide whatever we need for body and soul, and that he'll turn to our good whatever adversity he send us in this sad old world. He's able to do it because he's Almighty God, and he wants to do it because he's our faithful Father.

When we don't trust him, that's when we run into trouble. It's what happened when Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit and ran away from God. That's why he promised he'd send a Redeemer, and ever since then, he's loved us and pursued us in order to save us, and he loved us so much he died so he wouldn't have to lose us.

Joseph's very last request shows he trusted God. On his deathbed, he makes his brothers promise that one day in the future, they'll take his bone with them when they leave Egypt to return to Canaan. He trusts in God's future grace, that God will fulfill all his promises. Future generations of Israelite children would be told the story of how God fulfilled the promise and brought his people back to the land, and when God fulfilled it, the people would take Joseph's bones with them. That's what happened when God rescued his people out of Egypt with a

mighty arm when it had become a house of bondage, and Moses took Joseph's bones with him when the people left.

So Joseph is a picture or a symbol of Jesus, the Savior:

Joseph was loved by his father, and Jesus is the Beloved Son in who the Father is well pleased.

Joseph was a shepherd who cared for his father's sheep, and Jesus is the Good Shepherd who takes compassion on people who are like lost sheep.

Joseph was sent by his father to his brothers, who hate him and try to kill him, and Jesus is sent by his Father in heaven to his own, "but his own did not receive him" (John 1:8).

Joseph had his robe taken from him, and Jesus was stripped and beaten, and they gambled for his clothes.

Joseph was brought into Egypt, and Jesus was taken down to Egypt by his parents to escape King Herod.

They were both tempted, and falsely accused.

They were both sold for the price of a slave, both were put in chains.

They were both placed between two criminals, one saved and the other lost.

They both suffered humiliation, and were both exalted by God.

They were both sent by God to save many, and they both forgave the ones who hurt them.

Joseph is a sign, then, of the Redeemer God would send, not just to save his family or to make a future for the, but to save the whole world. Do you see what a treasure we have in Jesus? Joseph helps us to see that. Trust in Jesus, and make him your delight.

Genesis says God promised the people a Savior, and he promised them land, and he promised good would come out of evil. He has a deeper magic than all the world's treachery. Our job is to trust God for his promises.