

Through the Storm

“God’s Invisible Hand”

Genesis 45:1-8

Delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic via Livestream
at Central Baptist Church on June 6, 2021

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 01)** We are in a series that I am calling “Through the Storm.” The basic idea is that we will all face storms as we sail through this life. We cannot wish them away. We cannot go around them. We cannot avoid them. We simply must go through them.
 - This series is designed to help equip you on how to do that. Today I want us to think really big picture about how life works.
- For instance, some people believe in fate. Fate is the idea that some force or power has determined the path of your life. Everything that happens is simply inevitable. You can’t control it.
 - So, when a storm comes into your life all you can do is accept it and hope your fate is different in the future. But fate is cold and impersonal. There is no comfort in fate. There is no kindness in fate. You simply must accept the storm.
- Others say, ***“There is no such thing as fate. There is only random chance.”***
 - Again, this provides no comfort; you’re just unlucky. The best you can do is hang on and hope your luck changes.
- Still others believe there are higher powers that guide our lives. Here on the west coast many believe in horoscopes, tarot card readings, or put crystals around their house in hope that powers greater than themselves will guide them through the storm.
 - But are we really supposed to believe that stars—flaming balls of gas billions of light years away—can help us navigate the hardships of life or care about us?
- Others believe that life works on the law of attraction: if you put negative thoughts out the universe you will attract negative things, but if you put out positive thoughts you will attract positive things.
 - In this case, you brought the storm into your life because you attracted it through negative thinking.
- Finally, and probably the most common view, is that life is up to you. You determine your own destiny. It’s not the stars or fate or chance. You control it.
 - This always sounds so empowering when you’re sailing through calm waters and you can control exactly where the boat of your life goes, but when a violent storm overtakes your life you lose all control.
 - All the big statements like “believe in yourself” and “you can do anything you set your mind to” sure don’t help when you get cancer, when your child dies, or when your spouse leaves you.
- So, what is your view of how life works? Do you believe in fate, in chance, in horoscopes, in the law of attraction, or in your own ability to shape destiny?

- It is such a practical question because when the storms come—and they will surely come!—your beliefs about how the universe works will make or break you.
- This morning I want us to approach this question by looking at one of the greatest stories in the Bible, the story of Joseph.
 - Here we discover that the God who rules our lives is a personal God, not a force, that even when the storm rages so much that we cannot possibly see any reason for what is happening to us, the invisible hand of God is guiding all things and will finally bring us safely to the eternal shores of heaven.
 - Here is hope. Here is comfort. Here is strength to get through the storm.
- So, this morning let's experience God invisible hand through the story of Joseph. Then let's seek to understand God's invisible hand by asking some big questions. Then finally, let's learn how to trust God's invisible hand.

EXPERIENCING GOD'S INVISIBLE HAND

- Let's begin then by **(SHOW SLIDE 02) Experiencing God's invisible hand.**
 - Joseph's life, like so many of ours, had great moments when there was smooth sailing, but then he faced one storm after another.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 03)** On the whole Joseph had a good childhood, but his parents, like so many parents, foolishly showed favouritism to him over his brothers. This provoked his older brothers to jealousy. A terrible storm came into Joseph's life when he was 17 years old. His brothers grabbed him, threw him in a pit, and then sold him as a slave where he was taken to another country, Egypt. Joseph became a victim of human trafficking for the purpose of forced labour.
 - Do you know what it means to have your whole life fall apart in just one moment? Do you know what it means to face injustice at the hands of other people?
- Well, Joseph was taken to another country and made a slave in the house of rich man named Potiphar. For 10 years he never saw his parents and was not free. Despite this, his life gradually got better as he earned favour with his master. Just when things were going well, Potiphar's wife tried to have an affair with him. He refused, and so she falsely accused him of sexual assault. In rage, Potiphar had him thrown in prison.
 - Joseph did the right and God-honouring thing, but it made his life worse. Do you know what it means to face a storm because you did the right and God-honouring thing?
- Despite being in prison, things started to get bit better. He helped another prisoner earn his freedom and the man promised to remember Joseph and to talk to Pharaoh about getting Joseph out.
 - We can imagine Joseph waking up each day thinking, "The storm is almost over! I'm 28 years old. I've been betrayed by my brothers, the victim of human trafficking, lived 10 years as a slave, falsely accused of sexual assault, and rotted in prison. This 11-year storm is almost over!"

- But then another day passed and no word came. And then another day. And then a month. And then a year. Two years passed. The man had forgotten about Joseph and so Joseph rotted in prison.
- Finally, at around 30 years of age, the man remembered Joseph. Through an incredible series of events Joseph is not only set free but made second in command in the entire country, second only to Pharaoh. He is basically a Prime Minister.
 - Joseph oversees a massive food storing and distribution operation that saves the lives of the nation during 7 years of famine.
- And then the big moment happens. One day a group of middle aged and older men come and kneel before Joseph. They are foreigners and they are asking for food during the famine. Joseph suddenly recognizes that they are his brothers. The ones who had betrayed him and ruined his life, but they do not recognize him.
 - What will Joseph do? Because of their actions Joseph has been a victim of human trafficking, has been separated from his parents for over a decade, has been falsely accused of sexual assault, and spent a few years in prison. Yet, he has also been exalted to the second most powerful man in Egypt.
 - Like many of us, Joseph is now old enough to reflect back on his life. He's around 40 at this point. And we see that he has gained some very important perspective. He is not angry at his brothers. He is not cynical against God.
- We see his perspective in the moment when he reveals himself to his brothers. They are shocked and terrified when they realize that the powerful man they are kneeling before is their brother whom they sold into slavery. Yet listen to what Joseph says:
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 04)** ⁵ **And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. . . . ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God.**
- We will have much more to say on this, but Joseph's words are clear: God is in control. Even when he did not see it, God was in control. God's invisible hand is always at work guiding and directing the events in our lives.
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 05)** Here is hope in the storm: whatever happens in this world we are not the victims of blind fate; we are beloved characters in the story of God.
 - We do not live in an empty universe ruled by chance; the universe is ruled by God who directs and guides as he sees fit.
 - The universe does not work on an impersonal law of attraction; it is run by a personal God who cares about the details of our lives.
 - We are not alone in the universe so that everything depends on us creating our own destiny; we live in a universe ruled by a God who shapes our destinies with his wise and caring hands.
 - No matter how dark the storm, no matter how high the waves, no matter if our boat is taking on water and we feel all hope is lost, we are hidden in the palm of his hand. As James Stewart writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 06)** "there

are no thorns so sharp that God’s fingers cannot weave them into a crown of glory.”

- It is this view of life—and this view alone!—that will sustain you, comfort you, bring you joy, victory, and peace.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 07)** The older you get the clearer this becomes. You may not be able to see everything in your life clearly, but you begin to see how one seemingly small event led to another that led to another and shaped everything that was to come.
 - One night my college room-mate suggested we switch colleges. I could never have known that switching colleges in my second year would introduce me to my wife. I could never have known that volunteering at a church would introduce me to a deacon named Stephen Pomeroy. Stephen Pomeroy grew up in a church in Vancouver called Dunbar Heights Baptist Church. When that church was looking for a pastor, Stephen connected me to them and basically got me the job. Had not I not become the pastor of Dunbar Heights, I would never have become the pastor of Central. It all goes back to a simple conversation in a dorm room.
 - Can you look back at your life and see traces of the invisible hand of God? Can you see how one event led to another that led to another? Can you say with Joseph about all those events and people, ***“it was not you who sent me here, but God”***?

UNDERSTANDING GOD’S INVISIBLE HAND

- It is one thing to talk about experiencing God’s invisible hand, but we must move quickly to talk about a second thing, because a lot of questions arise at this point. If we don’t answer these questions then we will not benefit from this great truth like Joseph did. So, let’s take a few minutes now on **(SHOW SLIDE 08) understanding God’s invisible hand.**
 - As soon as we say that God’s invisible hand is the ultimate determiner of all things we immediately ask questions like, ***“Does that mean God brings evil into my life? And what about human actions and responsibility? If God determines what happens, doesn’t that just make us into puppets? Do our choices even mean anything?”***
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 09)** We have to be able to answer these, not just because we can get a lot of things very wrong, but because we only when we get it right can we enjoy the courage and strength that Joseph had to get through the storm.
- Think of this like a juggling. A juggler has to keep many objects up in the air at the same time. So too we must do this. To drop even one ball is to get it all wrong.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** First, **God decides what will come to pass.**
 - This is what Joseph is saying. Despite the actions of his brothers, Potiphar’s wife, and others, it was ultimately God who led him to where he is. God was not taken by surprise when Joseph’s brothers threw him in the pit. As Joseph says, ***“it was not you who sent me here, but God.”***

- Everywhere the Bible teaches that God rules history and is working out his plan. One event leads to another. You've heard the saying, 'the devil is in the details.' In reality it is God who is in the details. **(SHOW SLIDE 11) God's invisible hand is not just directing the destiny of nations; it is directing the smallest and most random details of your life.**
 - And never underestimate the impact of small and seemingly random events. The smallest events have major consequences for they create a domino effect of events. As the old folk tale about the nail from horseshoe says, **(SHOW SLIDE 12)**
 - *For want a nail the shoe was lost
For want of a shoe a horse was lost
For want of a horse a rider was lost
For want of a rider the battle was lost
For want of the battle a kingdom was lost
All for the want of a nail.*
 - One nail caused the loss of a kingdom.
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 13)** It is the same with Joseph's life. The one seemingly insignificant act of Joseph receiving his many-coloured coat from his parents, set off a chain of event.
 - If there had been no coat there would have been no jealousy, no conspiracy, no sale of Joseph to Midianites, no Potiphar, no Potiphar's wife, no jail, no dreams, and no prime minister, which also means no saving the people from famine, no bringing Jacob and his 12 sons down to the land of Egypt, no nation of Israel being formed out of the 12 sons, no becoming Egyptian slaves, no Moses to lead them out of Egypt, no law at Sinai, no prophets, no messiah, no cross, no resurrection, no salvation...all because of the coat. Now you may say, "God could have done it another way." Of course, but that would have involved a different series of events. The point remains. Each event leads to another, and all our guided by the invisible hand of God so that God brings all his plans to pass.
 - So the first truth we must is God's total sovereignty over all things. But we must juggle this ball with another.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** Second, **God is not the author of evil.**
 - God did not throw Joseph in the pit. God does not cause evil to come to pass. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. We must juggle this ball along with the first.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** Third, **we are not puppets. Our actions matter and we are held morally responsible for them.**
 - Notice that Joseph does not say we are all puppets and God just made all this happen. **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** ⁵ **And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.**

- The brothers are morally responsible for their actions. In the same way, our actions and choices matter and we are morally responsible for them.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 17)** The best way to understand all of this is to look at the death of Jesus? So, let me ask you this question: who put Jesus on the cross?
 - Was it Judas? Yes, his choices led to Jesus' betrayal and Jesus holds him morally responsible.
 - Was it the crowds? Yes, they called for his crucifixion.
 - Was the devil working behind the scenes in it all? Yes, the devil entered Judas.
 - Was it Pilate? Yes, he is the one who gave Jesus over to be crucified.
 - Was it the soldiers? Yes, they beat him and flogged him and drove the actual nails into his wrists. God did not do that.
 - So who is morally responsible for the murder of Jesus? All these people. Were they puppets who were forced to do it? No.
- And yet the Bible declares that it was the invisible hand of God that ultimately put Jesus on the cross. In Acts 2:23 Peter says to the people of Jerusalem: **(SHOW SLIDE 18) this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.**
 - Here we see moral responsibility and sovereignty. Acts 4:27 says the same thing: **(SHOW SLIDE 19) in this city there 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.**
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 20)** So you see, we must uphold at least three truths at once. God is sovereign over all events. God is not the author of evil. Human beings are not puppets. Our actions matter and we are held morally responsible for our actions. We get off track when we emphasize just one of these.
 - Joseph had come to see, and this is what we must see, that even when it seems that evil is dominating the game of life, God is still master of every situation. ***"It was not you who sent me here, but God."***

TRUSTING GOD'S INVISIBLE HAND

- We then come finally to bring this all together. Let's reflect on all of this as we talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 21) trusting God's invisible hand.**
 - This is what we need in the storms. Joseph got through his storms and Jesus got through his storms because they had saw the mighty hand of God behind all events. This was the secret to Jesus' hardest hours. He knew that His Father was with him and guiding him. Even when everything was falling apart, he knew he could trust His Father.
 - This is the key to getting through the storms in your life as well.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 22)** Your life is not happening all by chance. Your life is not controlled by stars and planets so that you should read a horoscope to find guidance and hope. Stars are just flaming balls of gas.

- Your life is not controlled by spiritual powers. The universe is not an even battle between God and Satan. There is only one God and Satan is a pawn on God's chessboard.
 - Furthermore, your life is not dictated by an impersonal force called fate. It is bound by the loving hands of a God who is intimately involved in the life of his creation.
- Stand in awe of this! Find strength in this! The Almighty God created the universe. It is so vast that we cannot comprehend it. How do you even comprehend our own galaxy with its 100 billion stars? Can you comprehend 100 billion galaxies? Think about the power that it would take to make all the life in this world. So much power. This power is at work in your life.
 - And more than that, this power is a person who is full of love. Here is the glory of the good news: God is for you and not against you.
 - How can you know that God is for you and not against you? God did not spare His only Son but gave him up for us all. If he did that, if he would love us that much, then we can be sure that he will graciously give us all things.
- Oh yes, like Joseph you may feel that he has abandoned you, but take courage in the story of Joseph, take courage in the story of Christ. The invisible hand of God is at work to accomplish more than you can imagine.
 - This will transform all those storms. The waves may not die down. The winds may keep raging. You may think the little boat of your life is going to sink. But through the mighty power of Christ, God will shape all these things in your life. He will teach you of himself. He will teach you how to serve others.
 - And even if the storm lasts all your life, a day is coming when you will stand on the shore of heaven and look back and say with Joseph, ***"it was not you who sent me here, but God."***