WHAT GOD ORDAINS IS ALWAYS GOOD

1. In Joseph’s life
2. In our lives

The Old Testament story of Joseph is familiar to us. Reading through the account of Joseph in Scripture, it seems like one bad thing after the other happens to him. Some look at Joseph’s early life and think it is a shame to have to go through all that. Why did things like that have to happen to such a nice person like Joseph, is often asked.

But how often don’t we think the same thing about ourselves or lives of others. A person is falsely accused of a crime; man loses one job after another; or all the innocent victims of crime. We shake our heads, pitying those who have to endure abuse in this life. When someone has one terrible thing after another happen to him, we speak about him being down on his luck. Or just not lucky. Perhaps we even sometimes feel person got what he deserved.

But invariably the question of Why arises. Why do bad things like that happen to some people. The question is often directed at God, not so much as a question of concern, but more in the form of a complaint about God and why he does or does not help.

Yet, we learn from Joseph this morning, God is working with and around things that happen in our lives. We learn the Scriptural truth we just sang about: WHAT GOD ORDAINS IS ALWAYS GOOD. That is seen in the life of Joseph and can be seen in your life too.

Many think Joseph’s life was one nightmare after another. Joseph was the favorite of his father, Jacob, but not of his brothers. Joseph’s brothers were jealous of all the attention lavished on their younger brother. Then later when Joseph told them about his two dreams in which his brothers bowed to him, that seemed to be the last straw for them.

So they devised a plan to get rid of their brother. At first, some wanted to just kill him, but cooler heads prevailed. Instead they threw him into a pit and then sold him into slavery. Then they went to their father Jacob and told him that a wild animal had killed Joseph, even showing him Joseph’s blood-stained, torn, coat of many colors. This devastated Jacob.

Some would say that bad luck just followed Joseph. Joseph became a slave in Egypt. He did become head servant to a man named Potiphar, but after his wife falsely accused Joseph of some crime, he was thrown into prison. In prison, he interpreted dreams for a few prisoners. The one prisoner promised Joseph he would try to get him released from prison after he got out. But he forgot.

Things did get better for Joseph. The chief cupbearer, the one who promised to remember Joseph in prison, later told Pharaoh, who was bothered by two dreams – the one of seven fat cows and seven skinny cows and other about seven heads of wheat – about Joseph who could interpret dreams. Joseph was summoned and he interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams with God’s help. He told Pharaoh that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph was then made second in command, answerable only to Pharaoh himself.

Some say it all turned out fine for Joseph, but where was God in the earlier part of his life? Why didn’t God help him out of his difficult situations? How could he let those things happen to him? God had something in mind. One think you will notice when reading through account of Joseph is how many times it says: The Lord was with Joseph. God did not leave Joseph during those times. Even though things did not always look bright for Joseph, humanly speaking, God did not forsake him. God was in control of what was happening to Joseph. Joseph himself realized this. He took could have sung the hymn: What God ordains
is always good.

But that is not always so easy to see. It was not easy for Joseph’s brothers to see 20 years after they sold him into slavery. For all they knew, Joseph was dead. During the seven years of plenty, Joseph was in charge of storing the grain. So when the seven years of famine came, the people had to go to Egypt to buy grain.

When Joseph’s brothers came for grain, he recognized them, but they did not know it was Joseph. During this time, Joseph tested his brothers, at times speaking quite severely to them, to see if they were sorry for their past sins committed against him and his father. When Joseph saw the change in their hearts, he took off the mask of a harsh foreigner who seems to do nothing except make trouble for them and revealed himself to them. We are told:

Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph! Is my father still alive? His brothers could not answer him, because they were terrified by his presence.

Joseph broke down before his brothers and wept. His brothers found it difficult to believe what they were seeing and hearing. The strangeness and sternness of Joseph’s voice was now gone. Joseph spoke in Hebrew to his brothers so they would understand him.

His brothers were terrified. Can understand why. They sinned against their own brother. What would Joseph do to them now? Seek revenge? They were afraid. He told them: Come closer to me, please. He was not bitter. He showed that with his words and actions. He let his arms do the talking. He embraced each of his brothers warmly, showing he loved them and held no anger in his heart. Four times Joseph assured them that God used their evil deed for good purpose.

Through all the things that happened, Joseph was able to see what God, the Lord of nations, had been working to achieve. Using such unlikely building materials as hateful and misguided actions of the brothers two decades earlier, God had constructed a plan to save lives. As Joseph told them: God sent me ahead of you to preserve you as survivors on the earth. Joseph and his brothers and families had escaped starvation in order to grow into a great nation.

The brothers had sold Joseph to Egypt in hatred and spite. But God had overruled their evil intent. His steady and sturdy love had used their action to preserve a remnant, a precious handful of his people, through a crisis. So Joseph assured his brothers: Now do not be upset or angry with yourselves for selling me to this place, since God sent me ahead of you to preserve life. Yes, God worked it all out for their good.

It is easy to see how What God ordained in the life of Joseph was good. He does the same thing for us in our lives, although we do not often see it that way. God often works in ways we just cannot and do not understand.

Oh, we sing: What God ordains is always good. We quote Scripture passages: WE know that all things work together for the good of those who love God. It is easy to say the words, but do we really believe that? We have a difficult time believing that when it seems like one bad thing after another happens to us. If the car does not need fixing, it is the dryer. If teacher is not getting on my case, then it is my parents. I go to the dentist for a cleaning and find out I need three fillings fixed. The list seems to go on and on. How can God make any of those things work for our good? Did God ordain all those bad things to happen to me? We want to know why and how come.

Now, God has not told the answer to everything. When these things come our way, we cannot always see the good in them, but it is there. We have God’s Word on that. We often look at the negative side of things. We judge what happens before it is done. At those time when we cannot see the good, then we just trust God and his promise of making it work for our good.
But God does not do bad things to us. He may permit some things to happen, but he promises he will make them work out for our eternal good. Paul reminds us that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

God will often use the sinful actions of others and make them work for our good. In his wisdom, God will bring good out of evil, as he did with Jesus. Look at how the hatred of the Jews led them to crucify Jesus. Yet God used his death on the cross to save us from our sins and win heaven for us.

Our own lives supply us with illustrations of the same truth we saw in Joseph’s life. Who of you cannot call to mind cases in which God brought good from evil, turned what seemed to be ruin into a blessing, making even the sins and foolishness of man declare his glory and serve the best interest of his people.

We see human causes producing effects, but God’s hand in there. Remember it is in him that we live, move and have our being. No sparrow falls to the ground without his knowledge. He knows exactly how many hairs we have on our heads. and if he knows how many came out when I combed my hair this morning, surely he is going to take care of more important things in my life.

No, we may not always understand how and why God lets some things happen in our lives. He himself tells us: My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways mine. But rest assured, he always has your best interest in mind.

Think of how true that it is with our salvation. Paul writes: For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. To sinful man, it seems like foolishness to think that someone dying on a cross can save us from hell. But that is the way God did it. It was not just anyone who died on the cross. It was God’s own son. By his death and resurrection, he destroyed sin and death and won eternal life in heaven for us. God planned it that way and carried it out that way. And you have to admit, what he ordained when it came to our salvation, is truly good.

If God loved us that much, how much more isn’t he going to make all things work together for the good of those who love him? That is a sure and certain promise of God.

As we have seen in Joseph’s life, and is just as true in our own lives, although we may not always see, it is as we sang earlier:

What God ordains is always good.
He is my friend and father
He will not let me suffer harm,
Tho’ many storms may gather.
Now I may know both joy and woe,
Someday I shall see clearly
That he has loved me dearly.

May we always cling to that blessed promise of God that what God ordains is always good – that he will make all things work together for our eternal good. Amen.

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