

Discovery Hour
E 100 Week 3
January 24, 2010
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The series of passages from this last week provide a beautiful example of how God's sovereignty and human choice work together. They are also interesting because of the way they demonstrate the incredible power of jealousy and how it motivates Joseph's brothers to first attempt to kill him and then sell him into slavery. Not surprisingly, this act then leads down an ugly path including the desire for revenge, but then sets the stage for us to see the incredible power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The big picture of this series of passages melds both good and evil human actions into the unfolding plan of God in subtle and complex ways. At any given moment in our own lives we commonly wonder how and why God is at work. We may have to wait years to understand and in some instances may spend our lives struggling to understand how this can be so; particularly with tragedy and pain. In this case, approximately twenty years after they sell him into slavery, Joseph is in a central position of authority in Egypt at the precise moment when a famine is threatening God's promise to Abraham. And at some point, through his understandable hurt and anger, Joseph realizes this as we see in his words in chapters 45 and 50 in particular:

I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. (45: 4-8)

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (50:20)

Clearly there are a number of questions to be asked about these verses that revolve around how these statements can be true? If all of the actions of the brothers were God's intention, then does this mean that they were not acting freely? If they were not, how can they be held responsible for their actions? What does it mean to say that God is sovereign in the first place?

And, then when we turn back to the actions of the brothers we should turn the events back on ourselves to ask where and how we may see the corrupting work of jealousy and envy at work in our own lives today. What feeds this terrible desire and how is it best managed? And what can we learn from Joseph's actions in terms of the forgiveness he extends to his brothers and the manner in which he reconciles with them?

Plan

Neighbor nudge – the meanest thing you ever did to a sibling or that a sibling did to you.