



# GOD BEHIND OUR STORIES

REV. IN KEE KIM

# Scripture Passage

Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to

Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

NRSV

# Sermon

## God Behind Our Stories

Today I would like to reflect upon Joseph. Joseph was a very capable man. He was smart. He had a good sense of judgment. And he was a very hard-working man. The Scripture said even physically Joseph was handsome and good-looking. He was handsome enough for Potiphar's wife to be attracted. He was trustworthy in everything he did. Even at Potiphar's house, he made Joseph overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. Falsely, he was accused and went to prison, but even when he was in prison, the chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. In everything he did, he did well and did it very faithfully. He was a man of trustworthiness. But above all, God gave him this special gift of having dreams and being able to interpret people's dreams.

When he went to Egypt, he went there as a slave. But soon, he went up to the position of second-in-command in Egypt. Last week, every front page of

North American newspapers had an article of Kamala Harris, who was chosen to be Biden's running mate as the vice-president candidate. Her parents were immigrants. The father from Jamaica. The mother from India. Her mother was a prominent cancer researcher and was at one time professor at McGill. So, she had a Canadian connection. Her father was a professor of Economics at Stanford University. To go up to the position of the Vice-president candidate in the USA as an immigrant was not easy. That was what Joseph did and he had that special ability. He was a special man.

## Joseph's Painful Past

But he had a painful past. Because of his father's preferential treatment, he was hated by his brothers. One day, his brothers went out to feed the lamb. At that time, to feed the lamb, you cannot just go near your house, because all the grass would be gone. So they had to go away for a few days, a week, even a month. Because they didn't come back early enough, their father was concerned and sent Joseph to go and see where the brothers were. When the brothers saw Joseph coming towards them from afar, their hatred rose from the depth of their heart. They hated him so much that they even planned to kill him. They were far

away from home and so that was the best opportunity for them to kill Joseph. But ultimately instead of killing him, they let him be sold to be a slave in Egypt.

Joseph was 17 years old at that time. He was aware of everything. At 17, you know what's going on. He saw everything that was going on at that time. Joseph could never forget that incident. It was deeply carved in his memory. It is not easy to be hated. Life is hard as it is even when we are loved. But when we are hated, life is unbearable sometimes. It is hard to survive. For 17 years, he had lived with this hatred, facing everyday the hatred of his brothers and finally he witnessed that they were even trying to kill him. His own brothers tried to kill him. That was hard to digest. He lived all his life with this terrible reality, painful reality. Joseph knew what it meant to be rejected and abandoned.

When he had his first son in Egypt, we can see Joseph's pain. He named him Manasseh. You know what that means? "Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, **'For', he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.'**" (Genesis 41:51) Finally, he was able to put his torment to rest. Probably, not only did he have good dreams, but he might have had

nightmares too. He was tormented because he was hated for so long. Finally, he was able to forget that pain. So now you realize how painful, how difficult that experience was like to Joseph.

## Perspective on Painful Experiences

But my friends, our pain makes us strong. Yes, Joseph was a very capable person and he was a smart and hard-working man. But it was his painful experience that made Joseph who he was. There is power hidden in our pain. It is the kind of power not known to those who live their lives comfortably without many problems. They don't know this kind of power. But people who suffer tremendous pain experience, at the same time, power that others don't know.

Of course, our painful experience itself does not automatically make us strong. Depending on how we see our painful experience, either it can destroy us or make us strong. Either it can make us a very strange person, or it can make us a person who has integrity. Joseph said this to his brothers whom he hadn't seen for 22 years, ***“And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.” (Genesis 45:5).***

He has a very, very interesting perspective of his painful experience. He was a bigger person. He was able to let go of his anger towards his brothers.

## Faith Makes You Strong

You can see that Joseph did not live as a victim of his painful past. That is not easy, a lot of people become victimized. but he refused to become a victim of his own pain. He refused to live like that. He didn't dwell on it. Only bigger people can do that, small people cannot do that. He refused to live like that because he had faith. He believed that behind everything that was happening, there was God. His brothers abandoned him, but he believed that God would never abandon him. His brothers hated him, but he believed that God would always love him. His brothers tried to harm him but he believed that God saved him and used him to save many others.

That faith made him strong, not just his painful experience. After Jacob, Joseph's father, died the brothers were scared that now that their father is gone that Joseph might take revenge on them. This was what Joseph said: ***“Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve***



***a numerous people, as he is doing today.” (Genesis 50:20).*** Amazing confession. Amazing statement. He believed that all things work for good for those who love God. That was what St. Paul also believed. All things will work together for good for those who love God. Don't be discouraged my friends. Don't give up.

## Power of Those Who Suffer

Yesterday was a very special day for Koreans. It was a day to celebrate because it is the day when Korea was liberated from Japanese occupation. It was a very happy day but at the same time we have to realize that there were 36 years of painful experiences. Women were raped. They were taken to the war zone to entertain Japanese soldiers. They destroyed the culture and the language. They took away natural resources. More than anything else, they trampled on the dignity of Korean people. It was a painful experience for those who went through it.

But we realize that it is not just Koreans though who experienced that painful experience. There are many people in North America who suffered oppression and humiliation. They are around us. Their dignity is trampled. But we should not live as victims of our

painful past. When we have faith, our painful past will make us strong. People who suffer, have power that those who rule and conquer don't know. God will use the power of those who suffer. This power is not the power to oppress and conquer but to liberate people. This power is the power to save. That is the power of the cross.

This is the power that gives us resurrection, that raises us. When this power works in us, we will be in solidarity with those who are weak and vulnerable. The rejected, the ostracized, the alienated, and the abandoned. That is the work of salvation.

## Looking at Our Stories

We all have stories. All the things that happen in our lives are not just random, unconnected events. When you carefully observe them, you will see a flow, a theme, and there is a story. This is what we reflected on a few years ago during the Happiness Seminar. Sarah Choe made a great video. She summarized a whole lecture in three minutes with animation! All of our interns are working on sermons and e-books too. I strongly recommend that you watch the video.

*([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0\\_IAq80hSA&t=12s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0_IAq80hSA&t=12s))*

Chanjoo is collecting stories of elderly people of the Korean congregation. They went through difficult times. They went through Japanese occupation and Korean war. They went through horrible realities in their lives. Chanjoo is collecting all these stories and making a book out of them. Their stories are powerful. They experienced famine and hardships, betrayal, rejection. But there are also stories of celebration and joy.

## God Is Behind Your Story

We all have our stories. But behind our stories, there is God. Behind your stories there is God. So it's not just your stories anymore, it is God's stories at the same time. Joseph saw that very clearly. God who works for good is behind his life and his stories. And God who works for good is behind our stories and works for us. Our stories become beautiful stories because God is behind them.

The Scripture is a collection of how God is behind our human stories. No matter how difficult your stories may be, if God is behind those stories, they will end with beauty. It will end in salvation. That's what I pray for. That's what I hope for. Because God is behind our stories, our stories become God's story. The Bible is full

of that. Job's story is not just Job's story. Job's story is about God's story behind his life.

I pray that the stories of your life become meaningful, beautiful, strong, and filled with hope. There may be some of you who are going through a very difficult time right now, but God is behind your life. Have hope, be strong. Trust in God.

