**Behind Closed Doors “God meant it for good” Genesis. 50;20** 26th April 2020

Welcome to our service on the last Sunday of April in 2020, Shall we begin with a word of prayer.

*“Loving and Eternal God in heaven we bow in your presence. We still our hearts before you. It is our desire Heavenly Father to contemplate Your glory and Your Majesty. We longed to see more of our Lord Jesus in all of his beauty. We remember his humiliation upon this earth, how he suffered so much for us, how he was beaten and taken to a cruel death upon the cross. Father, we bless you that you have exalted Him, and given him the name that is above every name. And so Father we thank you that this day we worship You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You are a glorious God reigning in majesty. It staggers us that you should dwell with men and that you should make your home with men; that you should dwell in our hearts and that we should be in Christ, and in the Father. We just bless you and thank you for our salvation. And Lord as we turn to the Bible again today we ask, Lord, that you will give us fresh understanding. We pray heavenly Father that not only our minds will be informed. but our wills, and our hearts will be moved tin worship and adoration of you. Father, we thank you for this time of lockdown and though it's not easy for many people, we know that you're working out your purposes. And Father we pray that this time when the world by and large is locked down that the voice of God will be heard as the church announces the good news of Jesus Christ. Father, we pray this day for missionaries. We pray for those who are in far off countries and may be feeling isolated and feeling it difficult to continue their ministry. We ask Father that you will be with them and that you draw near to them. We also pray for those Christians who are persecuted for their faith, those were shut up in prison, and those who are tortured or beaten. Father we pray that you give them much grace and you that stand with them…. And that great good will come even from evil situations. And Father we want to pray for our own government at this time. Father we thank you for so much grace and so much help that has been given. We pray for our leaders as they seek to, to provide all the PPE that's necessary for the frontline workers, and for all who are involved in this Corona crisis. We pray for them Lord as they need to know wisdom in decisions regarding lockdown and the timing of lifting it. We just pray that they would make wise decisions. But we're not just concerned for our own country we pray for the nations of the world. Lord have mercy. At this time we pray, particularly for those poor nations. Father, we pray that in your mercy, look favourably upon them. We pray now Lord as we are in the quietness of our homes, that you speak to each one of us, and may we be dealt with by the Holy Spirit, and may we be drawn out in Praise to you, and adore You, in Jesus name we pray asking for the forgiveness of all of our sins. Amen.”*

 Brothers and sisters, shall we say the prayer that our Saviour taught us to pray. **“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

**Sermon**

Well this morning we're looking at the story of Joseph. It's been popularised by the film “Prince of Egypt” produced by Dreamworks. They and others like Disney understand that we love stories about the downtrodden and the unloved rising to positions of honour and acceptance. Many of us have been touched by films where we've seen somebody going from rags to riches. That’s not the whole storyline of Joseph but it’s part of it. Now the story of Joseph is an incredible one and is not fictional; it’s historical. As you know it begins with his brothers hating him. They hate him with such hatred that they throw him into a pit, and desire his blood. But in His mercy God doesn’t permit his death and instead he’s sold to midianite traders. He finds himself in Egypt. On the slave market he is gain sold, this time to Potiphar. But there in Potiphar’s house he is treated unjustly, and as a result finds himself in prison for years. It's a life of suffering. It’s a life of humiliation. But in the goodness of God this young man who's been hated and terribly treated is brought into such a position of favour and honour. Through extraordinary circumstances he is exalted to be at the right hand of Pharaoh, as his Prince, and ruler over all Egypt. This is the story of Joseph – from rages to riches, from dishonour to honour. Though he was for many year “Behind closed doors” in prison – God meant it for good…

Our reading is taken from Genesis 45:1-9 which are Joseph’s words to his brothers when he declares his forgiveness to them:

*Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers.****2****And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.*

***3****Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence.****4****And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.****5****But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.****6****For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.****7****And God sent me before you to preserve a [*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+45%3A1-8&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-1366a)*]posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.****8****So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.*

Now we read in Genesis chapter 50 verse 20 the following words spoken by Joseph to his brothers. He says this, **“But as for you. You meant evil against me. But God meant it for good.”**

Imagine what it was like to be thrown down a pit. Can you imagine the fear? Perhaps, wondering if you're going to be left for dead. And what’s it like to be years and years in prison? Joseph did not know the future and did not understand what God was doing. It was only afterwards that he saw that “God meant it for good.” As we think of lockdown it's very small in comparison to what Joseph suffered but we do acknowledge that for some being behind closed doors is very difficult. For some it's long work hours from home, and little escape. For others it's flats with children cooped up in a tiny space. For others, it’s elderly parents living at home with you and the concern of going shopping and possibly bringing back coronavirus to those elderly parents. It’s not easy. But I want to say to you that if you're God's child. this situation of being behind closed doors, is actually for good. We might feel that coronavirus is just evil. But God means it for good. We will see in the end why it has happened. Now there are many people suffering at this time. We think of pastors in China, who have been taken away by police and imprisoned. Just a couple of weeks ago on Easter Sunday, six pastors were in their homes, watching live streamed services, and the secret police came in and have taken them into custody. And we've heard in recent years of Christians being locked up in metal containers in Eritrea. How awful is that? How can we say that God means such things for good? Only afterwards. Only in time, we will understand God's purposes. Maybe only in glory we’ll know. And for Joseph only after many many years did he understand that God meant his suffering for good.

So this morning we're going to look at two things.

**1)Joseph**

**2) Jesus**

The life of Joseph points us to Jesus. Joseph is a type of Christ. As much as God meant all the evil and suffering in the life of Joseph for good so God meant the evil that was directed at our Lord Jesus Christ for great good. So let's first of all consider Joseph.

**1. JOSEPH.** Think of the hatred of his brothers. Joseph was his father's favourite. And because of that, his brothers were jealous. His father Jacob had given him a coat of many colours and that had caused envy in the hearts of his brothers. And then Joseph had dreams given to him by God. And when he revealed these dreams, his brothers despised him even more. Why? Because Joseph revealed that one day his brothers would bow down before him. And so, because of this hatred that grew in their hearts towards Joseph they began to plot to kill him. You know the story well how Joseph was sent out by his father into the fields to provide bread for his brothers who were working looking after the sheep. Initially he couldn't find them, but coming across a man he discovers that his brothers have gone to Dothan. They see him coming and prepare to kill him. This is pure evil isn't it? When men get to the stage of wanting to kill their own flesh and blood it is nothing but pure evil. Yet, staggeringly years later Joseph will say to them; *“You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good”* There's a great mystery here… the mystery of how God overalls events; how he overturns events, and how he uses even the wrath of man for his purposes, even to praise him. Some of us may have been bullied at school. Some of us may have faced work colleagues that have made our life very difficult. Some of us may have had a neighbour, that's been so awkward, or a family member that's caused us so much trouble and grief. We've all received “that phone call”. We've all heard “those words” spoken against us that have troubled our hearts. Some have received an email or letter that's caused us pain at night and we've not slept. We've all faced the evil of men in various forms. How can God use such things as a spiteful word from that member of the family, or the nastiness of a bully, or the crippling remarks of a work colleague for good, even for our good?. Well first of all if we're Christians, God can use these times to form characterin us. Have you thought about that?We read in the Bible that Joseph was only 17 years old when these things came upon him… only a young lad, but not once do we read of bitterness in his heart towards his brothers, nor do we read of resentment that grew in his heart towards his brothers. Rather we see him trusting God, and God being with him…and God prospering him. We do not see a person who's going from bitterness to anger and to the desire for revenge. Quite the contrary, we see somebody of upright character always doing what is right.. This young 17 year old had learnt to trust God, and God had formed character within him. So brothers and sisters, the first thing that we can say is this. When we face the spite and the hatredand the wickedness of men God may just be us in this, that we may grow in godliness and that Christ’s character might be formed in us.

But then secondly, think of what befell Joseph…all of the injustice that he faced.He was soldinto Egypt as a slave and became a slave to Potiphar who was captain of the guard. There he prospered in all that he did. He was good and upright and Potiphar entrusted all his affairs into Joseph's hand. And Potiphar increased financially. Yes he increased in terms of the prosperity of his household… All because Joseph looked after his affairs. But Joseph was to face a terrible provocation. Day after day the wife of Potiphar tried to seduce him. “Come and sleep with me,” she insisted. But Joseph feared God, and he would not do this wickedness. Every time he ran from her. But one on one fateful day when he was found alone with her she again tempted him. And on that day he ran from her, but she grabbed him and a piece of his clothing was left in her hands. He escaped but she hated him for his refusal. So she made up lies about him. She called in the servants and cried out to them saying that Joesph had come in to defile her by trying to sleep with her. When Potiphar, the master of the house, heard this, he believed his wife, and Joseph was put in prison. What injustice !

Now in Genesis chapter 41 verse 46 we learn that Joseph was eventually released from prison when he was 30 years old. That tells us that 13 years has passed from when he was 17. In other words Joseph had spent 13 years of suffering from first being thrown down a pit, then sold as a slave, and then unjustly made a prisoner. 13 long years. How could God use even this for good? Well, during those years of difficulty, probably the larger part of which would have been in prison, God prospered him. Not only God prospered him when he was in Potiphar’s house but also whilst he was in prison. The prison guard, look favourably upon Joseph and special privileges were his. In fact Joseph was never more free during those years! Though first a physical slave and then a prisoner Joseph was never more free for he knew that God was with him. He knew the witness of a good conscience. He knew love for God. He knew joy and peace in his heart. God had not forsaken him. Although he had faced a terrible injustice God had meant the whole thing for his good. God proved to him that in the darkest and deepest times of their afflictions He was with his servant. There were great times of trial when hopes were dashed. Think of when the butler forgot about him, after he had promised to remember him to Pharaoh. Two years passed before he eventually remembered his promise and Joseph was be released from prison. The butler had said to Joseph, “I'll make sure that you're not forgotten” but two whole years passed, before he remembered. How could that be for his good? Well brothers and sisters God has a perfect time for everything. When Joseph was eventually released from prison, it was the time when he was most needed. He revealed the meaning of Pharaoh’s dream and warned of 7 years of famine after 7 years of plenty. Joseph was released at just the right time to instruct Pharaohs exactly how they were to provide for the needs of the world during those famine years by storing up grain. Joseph was appointed as governor to direct the affairs of Egypt. You see it was God's perfect time for him to be released to solve the dilemma of Pharoah. He had not been forgotten. And all the while God was using his prison time for good. There God gave Joseph an ability to interpret dreams. In prison God made this young man wise. He not only interpreted the dreams of the Butler and the Baker, but he was to interpret the dream of Pharaoh and give him wise counsel. This in turn led him to becoming the Prime Minister and Prince in Egypt. You see those who honour God, God will honour.

We also learned from the story of Joseph, the wonderful blessing of forgiveness. When those 10 brothers who sold him into slavery come to Egypt to buy grain it gives Joseph the possibility of forgiving them. But first, Joseph tests them to see if they are truly sorry. He had held no grudges against them and as we've seen, he'd never had bitterness in his heart towards them. But he wants to see if they’ve changed and wants to test the sincerity of their repentance, before he declares forgiveness to them. In Genesis chapter 42 verses 21 to 24, we see that God has done a humbling work in the hearts of his brothers. You see, when they come before. Joseph a second time to return the money they found in their sacks along with the grain they are fearful. They feel that everything has gone against them, This is what we read: “*Then they said to one another. We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear. Therefore this distress has come upon.”* and Ruben answered them saying *“Did I not speak to you saying, Do not sin against the boy, and you would not listen. Therefore, behold His blood is now required of us”*… but they did not know that Joseph understood them. He spoke to them through an interpreter, pretending that he did not understand Hebrew. So when Joseph heard this confession he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again and talked with them. Isn’t that wonderful? God has been working in their hearts. They're repentant, and Joseph is now seeing it… but he wants one final proof. He wants to know if this is more than a temporary remorse due to bad circumstances befalling them. And so he manages to get them to bring Benjamin his younger brother to see him. And remember the story how Joseph placed a silver goblet in Benjamin sack, and then accuses him of guilt, saying that Benjamin must suffer the penalty of slavery. How will they respond to this test? Well, here's the final proof of their repentance. Genesis chapter 44 verses, 33, and 34. Here we read the words of Judah. *“Now therefore please let your servant remain instead of the buy as a slave to my Lord, and let the boy go up with his brothers. For how should I go to my father if the boy is not with me less perhaps I see the evil that will come upon my father.”* Judah says, “Take me as a slave. I'm prepared to be a slave for the rest of my life, so that my brother Benjamin will be free and my father will not go down to the grave in sorrow.” When Joseph hears this, he can no longer restrain himself. And as we read in Genesis chapter 45 he reveals Himself to his brothers. He weeps aloud. He cries out loud. He expresses forgiveness to them. And then he says to them “It's not you that sold me into slavery…It was God that did this. God did it to save your lives. And so Joseph released forgiveness to them. He declared forgiveness, and showed his love for them….And there's nothing more touching than when a family is brought back together…united… the relationship that had been ruptured is now restored. Despite all that had happened between them, **God meant it for good**… Now brother or sister maybe this is for you…maybe you're in a ruptured relationship. Maybe there's something in your family that has happened years ago, maybe there's a ruptured relationship with somebody at church. Maybe it's a colleague, maybe there's been grief. And maybe you have been the victim of injustice. Maybe you've not been the one who's been the cause of this situation for years or can’t bring yourself to see that person now as you are so hurt. I would say to you to be careful not to harbour bitterness or resentment. Rather go to God with the pain. Pray to him about it, look to Him, and seek for an opportunity to see the offender. Forgive him from the heart and look to be able to declare that forgiveness when you see him repentant. Only the God of all grace can enable you to act in this way. Who knows but that your broken relationship will be healed and you will be on day be able to say *“You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.”* The story of Joseph gives us a wonderful lesson of forgiveness.

As well as this lesson of forgiveness chapter 50 verse 20 reminds us that all the evil that had happened to Joseph God would use for the good of many people, and not just for the good of Joseph and his family.. Every set of trying circumstances Joseph faced God would use to fulfil His overall purpose. Through all that happened God was going to save, not only Joseph's family from starvation, but many others also. So Joseph said*, “But as for you, you meant it meant evil against me, but God meant it for good* ***in order to bring it about as it is this day to save many people****.”* And remember too that by God preserving Joseph’s family he was also preserving the line of the Messiah. For from the 12 brothers would come the 12 tribes of Israel and from Judah the Messiah would come. God had higher purpose that Joseph could not see. So God indeed meant it for good! My believing friend when you are in a fix and cannot understand what is happening to you wait upon God. He has a plan in all things. Who knows what higher purposes He has and what link in the chain your circumstances might be !!

But finally this morning let us consider Jesus. You see there are parallels between Jesus and Joseph, and I want to look at some of them.

**2) JESUS** Jesus Himself tells us that the scriptures testify of him. Who would have thought that Jonah's descent into the belly of the fish spending three days and three nights there is be a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus? If it hadn’t been for Jesus telling us this we would have missed it. You see there are marvellous pictures of Jesus in the Old Testament, and all the scriptures point to him. Yes, those pictures in the Old Testament are shadowy, and do not give full light, but they're marvellous none the less. Now one of the pictures that we have of Jesus is found in the story of Joseph. In fact the story of Joseph perhaps gives a clearer picture of Jesus than many other parts of the Old Testament….

Think about it. Joseph is the shepherd boy especially loved by his father and favoured by him. But he’s hated by his own brothers who reject him. They do not believe Him, nor his dreams. They hate him. They conspire against him and sell him as a slave into Egypt. There he's unjustly accused. And so he goes from a pit to a prison. But in God's time, after years of rejection and humiliation and injustice he's exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh. He becomes a saviour to his own people and brings blessing to the world in providing bread for them. God has been with him throughout his life and prospered him. God has revealed mysteries to him, and all the promises of the dream were fulfilled. He's gone from humiliation to exaltation. He’s gone from being the victim to being the victor. Can you not see the Lord Jesus in this? Can you not see the parallels? Jesus is the Good Shepherd loved by his father. He came to a world that would reject Him, that would despise him. But He came in order to save them and to rescue them. His path was one of suffering and injustice. Jesus came to his own Jewish people but they did not receive Him, and even his own family rejected him. The Jews conspired against him and eventually He was sold by Judas to his enemies. The New Testament vividly portrays the humiliation of Jesus. It was so deep and profound, so much deeper and lower than Joseph's. Yes Joseph had faced a lot. He had faced the bitterness of his brothers, the temptation from Potiphar’s wife and the suffering of prison, But Christ was to face the rejection of the world. He would face the onslaught of Satan. For 40 days and 40 nights the devil came to Him and tempted him with strong temptations. And then, throughout his life, as the devil had opportunity, Jesus suffered intense satanic opposition. Yet through it all he never succumbed to temptation, He never sinned …for He was without sin. Joseph may have suffered the pain of imprisonment where he felt totally abandoned. But think of our Lord Jesus Christ, think of his sufferings, the continual rejection of men and the plotting for his blood. There were attempts to stone him, there was mockery and slander. And eventually He was led to a cross. And on that cross He suffered so… He suffered total abandonment. He was not only forsaken by his disciples, and hated by this world, but his loving Heavenly Father also turned his face away. You see Jesus took the sins of the world and the Father could not look on Him.. Nothing, Nothing, Nothing, can compare with the love of Christ. Nothing can compare with the cost that he suffered. Joseph yes he was brought very low and God exalted Him to be Prince in Egypt. But to what depths did Jesus our Saviour go to upon the cross… so low, so low, so much such physical and spiritual suffering. We will never understand it…. But what honour! What heights! What exaltation ! Jesus was raised from the depths and exalted to the right hand of the Father in heaven to reign in glory. Nothing can compare to the splendour and majesty of our Saviour.

Yes Joseph was a saviour to his people and in some senses a saviour of the world. But Jesus Christ is the only saviour of sinners, and the only true saviour of this world. Men may planned His death with evil intention, but God meant it for good. Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners. He came to shed his blood. He came to go into the pit of hell for us by dying on the cross, and God raised Him to the heights of heaven. He came to be buried in a tomb for us, and God raised Him to glory. He came to take his people from the depths of sin and renew them and bring them into a position of acceptance with God, to one day reign with Him in glory. Men may have meant his death for evil, but God meant it for good. The mystery of God is such that God's sovereign purposes, which are wise and good and right, went hand in hand with the human free choices of man, which were evil. Therefor Peter on the day of Pentecost preached and said *“This Jesus, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands have crucified him. You put Him to death, who God raised up”* Isn't that glorious!It was God's

determined purpose and foreknowledge that planned His death. Yet all along men were responsible. It was their evil deeds that did it. And then in Acts 4 we have a prayer of God's people. Listen to this. They pray in this way: *“Lord for truly against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed both Herod, and Pontious pilot, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatever your hand and purpose determined before to be done.”* It was God’s will and purpose. All the prophesies were fulfilled and all the plans of God when Jesus died. Now remember Joseph’s dreams. They were fulfilled too. God had a plan in it all. Even his brother’s evil acts were part of the means God was going to use to move his family to Egypt and to be saved. The counsel of the Lord stands. And so the story of Joseph points us to the bigger story of Jesus. All that was decreed about Christ from all eternity, all that was prophesied about His suffering and death came to pass. In order to save us from our sins God used the wicked hands of men. And *“He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand”*

Brothers and sisters, at this time of lockdown behind closed doors; let's remember that God uses all things for the good of his people. And everything is part of His sovereign purpose. But perhaps you're listening into this message and you're not a Christian. And so I would say to you: Look to Jesus Christ. Find Him in the Scriptures. All that is written of Christ, in His sufferings and death, has been fulfilled fulfilled. He is God's beloved Son. And if you look to Him as your Saviour; if you repent of your sins; and if you're sincere in your repentance you will be reconciled to God. You will find the God of Joseph to be your God. Maybe these closed doors will be for you “open doors of salvation.” May the story of Joseph lead you to the story of Jesus and lead you in turn to worship Him. And may you say, “If ever I loved Thee my Jesus tis now”.

Amen.