When Things Go Wrong

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Y. Joe Kim

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13 And
Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at
Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." 14 So
he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the
flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of
Hebron. He came to Shechem, 15 and a man found him wandering in the
fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" 16 "I am seeking my
brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the
flock." 17 The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let
us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at
Dothan. 18 They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to
them, they conspired to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes
this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits;
then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see
what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard it, he delivered
him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 22 Reuben said to
them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay
no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore
him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped
him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves[a] that he wore; 24 and they took
him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.
25 Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of
Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and
resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his
brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his
blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on
him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. 28 When
some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of
the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they
took Joseph to Egypt." *(Genesis 37:12-28).*

1. I Got Lost

When I was growing up in Korea, I enjoyed hiking. One day I went hiking with a friend. My younger sister wanted to join us with her friend as well. She said that she and her friend would meet us in the middle at a cabin on the mountain at 6 p.m. On our way to the cabin, my friend and I

got lost. It was dark and too late for us to turn around. We decided to stop by a nearby village and find a place to sleep.

The next day, we found a young boy who could help us find the cabin. After a few hours, we found my sister. I learned in that experience not to be anxious when things go wrong. I just need to wait for God's guidance. I would like to explore the story of Jacob and Joseph with you and see what we can learn from them.

2. Joseph Sold into Slavery

Genesis 37 tells us about Jacob's family. Jacob had 12 sons from 4 wives. Joseph was Jacob's favorite son because Joseph was born in Jacob's old age. Joseph was born from Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. Joseph was 17 years old and wore a long robe with sleeves because he was favored by Jacob. Jacob's favoritism made Joseph's brothers hate Joseph. Joseph often brought a bad report about his brothers to his father. His bad reports made his brothers hate Joseph more.

In verses 5-11, we learn that Joseph told his brothers and parents about two dreams where they all would bow down to him. His brothers interpreted Joseph's dreams as evidence of his arrogance.

One day when Joseph's brothers were grazing Jacob's flocks near Shechem, Jacob sent Joseph to check on the brothers. Jacob said to Joseph, "***Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me***" (verse 14).

Shechem was located about 50 miles from the Valley of Hebron. Joseph's brothers were at Dothan, which was another 15 miles north. When the angry brothers saw Joseph coming toward them, they plotted to kill him. Reuben, the oldest brother, stepped in to appease the anger of the siblings. Reuben suggested throwing Joseph into a pit, planning to rescue Joseph later. Joseph's brothers threw him into a dry cistern. Later, Judah suggested to sell Joseph to the passing Ishmaelites on their way from Gilead to Egypt. The brothers agreed to sell Joseph for twenty shekels of silver and Joseph was taken to Egypt as a slave.

Verses 29 and the following tell us what happened to Jacob. Joseph's brothers brought back the long robe dipped in goat's blood. Jacob believed that Joseph was devoured by a wild animal in the field. Jacob mourned and refused to be comforted.

What do we see in the story of Jacob? We find a dysfunctional family. Jacob's family had issues of favoritism, arrogance of a younger brother, hatred and jealousy of older brothers, a plot to kill and sell a brother, and deception about what happened to Joseph. The relationship between the

brothers and between father and sons was so bad that there didn't seem to be a future for this family.

3. The Providence of God

Why is there such an unpleasant story here in the Bible? Did you notice that in this narrative, the term "God" or "the Lord" is not found at all? Does this mean that God was not with this family? If that were the case, we probably wouldn't see the story of Jacob at all.

Jacob is the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. At Bethel, God revealed to Jacob in a dream and promised. ***"Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants"*** (Genesis 28:14).

Jacob heard the same covenant promised to his father and grandfather while on the run from his angry brother Esau. At the time, Jacob was in the wilderness by himself. He was scared, lonely and uncertain of the future. At this moment, God appears to Jacob and promises that God will never leave him.

What about Joseph? As a 17-year old boy, Joseph did not have a deep revelation experience with the Lord. However, verses 5 through 11 tell us that God would later use Joseph to rule in the future through the two dreams. These dreams got Joseph into trouble, but also helped him to not be shaken while he was going through his many trials.

4. When Jesus was Crucified

When Jesus was crucified, no one could believe that Jesus would be the Messiah. But through the resurrection of Jesus, God showed the disciples that the death of Jesus was not the end. Jesus was risen and will return and reign forever as the Son of God.

Christians believe in Jesus because of his resurrection. However, is it possible to believe in Jesus as the son of God even when he was crucified on the cross? Mark 15:39 talks about a centurion who was there in front of Jesus when Jesus was crucified. He said, "***Surely this man was the Son of God***" (Mark 15:39). He was a Gentile Roman officer in charge of the execution squad. He was a commander of 100 Roman soldiers. Even at the crucifixion of Jesus, he recognized the identity of Jesus and his mission. He saw the presence of God when Jesus was crucified. He realized that God had not forsaken Jesus, the Son of God, at all.

5. Conclusion

What do we learn from the story of Jacob and Joseph? We will take a look into the whole story of Jacob and Joseph next Sunday. Yet from today's passage we can learn that the worst situations are not the end of our story. We would not expect anything from a dysfunctional family. But God had a plan and used Jacob and Joseph for His purpose. Even when things go wrong, we do not have to give up on people or the future. God is present in the midst of crisis and will fulfill His plans through His people.

6. Application

Paul says in Romans 8:28, "***We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose***." These days people would feel many things go wrong. We may not always recognize God's presence, but the Bible tells us that God works in all things for our good behind the scenes. God is able to turn every suffering and difficult circumstance around for our good.

In our current situation, we don't know the exact details of God's plan. But we believe that God will turn around any difficulty or problem ahead of us to make this world better than before. We don't have to be anxious but wait for God's timing. We give thanks to the Lord for taking care of us. Amen.