

*If God
is
so good...*

A Tsunami takes hundreds of thousands of lives as one of the biggest earthquakes in history drives the ocean into people's homes. The ruthless beheading of an innocent man is broadcast on the Internet, while a helpless world watches in horror. Four bombs are detonated on the London public transportation system, leaving more

than 50 people dead.

The important question, on people's lips or in their minds, is this: If God is so good, where is He when evil seems to triumph?

I want to share with you the story of a family that had more than its share of problems. In fact, I would guess that the storyline of many daytime soap operas wouldn't be able to compete.

Let's start with the father, who was a conniving sneak. He had conned his brother out of his inheritance, and because of it, he had been forced to leave the country. His marriage was a mess. There were thirteen children born to four different women. And he didn't treat his children fairly. One of those thirteen children was clearly his favourite.

This child was called Joseph. He was nobler and smarter than the rest of his siblings; perhaps he was even better looking. One day, his father, whose name was Jacob (later called Israel), made a point of letting the whole family know just how special he thought Joseph was. The Bible tells us about it:

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also, he made him a tunic of many colours. and he made him a coat of many colours. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him (Genesis 37:3,4).

You probably remember this story. The Bible says that old Jacob made Joseph a coat of many colours, something he never

did for the other boys. Now, that coat was more than just a fancy jacket; it made a significant statement that his brothers couldn't live with.

There is an important reason for their unhappiness and jealousy. It can be explained when we consider what archeological finds have taught us about the culture of the time. At Beni-Hasan, an archeological site in Egypt, there is a tomb with an interesting painting. It shows a group of Jebusite captives, and everybody is wearing some kind of coat, but one person has a very colourful coat, and the painting identifies him as a chief. So, when Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colours, he may have been telling the whole family that little brother was chief.

Now, if I were an older brother, I don't

think I would have taken that news very well, and according to the Bible, Joseph's brothers certainly didn't. It says they hated Joseph so much they couldn't even talk to him.

To make matters worse, Joseph then had a dream, and now it seemed as if he wasn't just Daddy's favourite; he was heaven's favourite, too.

“Guess what, fellows? I had a dream last night. All of us were out in the field tying up bundles of wheat, when all of a sudden, my sheaf stood upright, and yours bowed down to it.”

As far as public relations go, that was a disaster. In today's terms, you'd say that Joseph had never read *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, because almost

everybody knows you shouldn't talk about how important you are. It makes people hate you, and the Bible says that's exactly what happened.

However, Joseph was clearly so excited, he couldn't help it. Who wouldn't be excited? If heaven told you that everyone was going to bow down to you, do you really think you could keep it to yourself? To make matters worse, there was a second dream, and this time the whole family was involved. Joseph dreamed that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. This time he told not only his brothers, but his father as well. The Bible tells us, that even the old man found this difficult to take:

So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have

dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” (Genesis 37:10).

Joseph might have been the apple of Jacob’s eye, but this was too much even for a doting father. Why should he bow down to his son? “Joseph, you’ve got to quit bragging like this. I don’t want to hear it anymore.”

But then the Bible adds a very important detail, and this is something to keep in mind as the story progresses:

And his brothers envied him, and his father kept the matter in mind (Genesis 37:11).

Jacob might not have liked the dream, but he made a point of remembering it. The reason is that in his own life, Jacob had

learned a very hard, but important, lesson. When God lays plans, you can count on them. When He says something is going to happen, it always does.

God told Joseph that his whole family was going to bow down to him, so Jacob knew it would happen. God never makes a mistake, not even when He appears to promise the impossible.

This is a lesson we all learn at some point. Eventually, we figure out that God never makes a mistake. Sometimes, however, we have to learn the hard way.

This is a famous story, and you may remember the rest of it. The brothers wanted Joseph dead, and the only reason they didn't kill him on the spot was because Reuben, one of the older brothers,

got a little nervous and talked them out of it. Instead, they threw him into a dry water pit, then later hauled him up and sold him to some Midianite merchants who were passing by.

I would like you to put your imagination to work and consider what it must have been like for Joseph at the bottom of that dry water pit. Did he think it was a practical joke? Was he afraid that he might die there? Most siblings are mean to each other at times. I have an older sister myself, and sometimes I would play some mean tricks on her. One time, as my family was moving into a new house, I took my sister to the shed out back, had her walk inside, then slammed the door shut, locking it. Two seconds later my mother came around the corner and said, “whatever you do, don’t lock that shed, because we don’t have a

key for it.” At that moment, I started to sweat, and my sister started to cry.

Brothers can be very cruel, and I’m sure Joseph knew all about it. Maybe the water pit wasn’t the first stunt they’d pulled, and I sometimes wonder at what point Joseph recognised that something was wrong.

“Hey fellows! You really got me this time! But it’s getting late, and we should go home.” Then the sun started to set, the air began to get cold, and the next thing Joseph knew he was a slave tied behind a Midianite camel. At that point, it probably dawned on him that he would never see his family again.

I would like to ask you an important question. What would you be thinking if it happened to you? You have just been sold into slavery. You’re tied to a camel,

you're being dragged through the desert to an unknown destination. What would you think then about God's message that you were destined for greatness?

Would you be tempted to doubt? Maybe God's promises aren't any good. Maybe He didn't see what just happened to you. Or maybe He just doesn't care.

If you're like most people, you would probably be saying something like this to God:

"God, I thought we had it all worked out! We had a plan, remember? It was all in that dream. You said that my brothers were going to bow down to me, but instead they beat me up and got rid of me! I don't understand!" "Where are you, Lord?"
Be honest with yourself. Have you ever

felt that way? The promises of the Bible seem so good, and we get excited because of the possibilities God lays out in front of us, but then something happens.

The whole world comes apart. You lose your job. The roof on your house starts to leak, and then your car breaks down. The bank refuses you that loan you need so badly, and somebody starts an ugly rumour about you.

It could be infinitely worse. A madman might march into your daughter's classroom and murder her and her classmates in cold blood. A tornado might rip through a campground and take your family's life. It doesn't take any time at all for your whole world to fall into pieces; it can happen in a heartbeat.

And when those moments come, as they do for so many people, we're tempted to forget what Jacob knew: God's promises are always good, even when we can't see how. God always does what's best, even when we don't understand it.

When you're tied to the back of a camel or rotting in an Egyptian prison, it's hard to see how anyone is ever going to bow down to you. When you live on planet earth in the 21st Century, you're unlikely to be tied to a camel or thrown into an Egyptian prison, but there will always be problems. You may find it impossible to figure out how in the world God is going to keep His promises. Circumstances at times can even make you wonder if God still exists.

The Bible is full of examples of great people who started to doubt. Consider

Job, for example. Here was a man who lost everything: his family, his house, his money, and eventually even his health. None of it made any sense. He had been faithful to God all his life, so when he lost everything, he came to God with questions. “Why, God? Where are you when all this bad stuff happens?”

Then there was John the Baptist. He preached about the kingdom of God for years. He even baptised the Messiah, but then he ended up in Herod’s jail. Think about that for a moment. John had lived his life in the wide-open spaces of the desert, sleeping under the stars, and suddenly he found himself in a tiny jail cell where he would be forced to live out the rest of his life.

The Bible says that at one point, he became

really frustrated, and he sent a message to Jesus: “Are you really the Messiah? Or should we be waiting for someone else?” If you were in John’s shoes, don’t you think you’d feel the same way? He had been preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand, but now it looked like not much was going to happen – at least not much that included him! If the kingdom was coming, it was hard to tell.

These stories happened a long time ago, but the same things happen to everybody, including to you and me. Your whole world falls apart, and you’re tempted to give up on God. And in the mess, confusion and misery, sometimes it is difficult to hear His voice.

That appears to be what happened to the prophet Ezekiel. All his life, he had

believed that the Israelites were God's special people. That's what his parents taught him. That's what they taught him in Sabbath School, and that's what every red-blooded Israelite boy knew. But if they were really God's special people, then why were they slaves in Babylon for so long?

Then God spoke in an unusual way. One day, the Bible says, Ezekiel was standing by the river when he looked up and saw something very strange. Four living creatures and a mysterious "wheel within a wheel" were moving across the countryside. Ezekiel could make no sense of it, but the longer he watched, the more clearly he could see that Somebody was deliberately steering those wheels.

Hundreds of books have been written about the mysterious wheels of Ezekiel. Around about the late 1960s, some people

came to the implausible conclusion that what Ezekiel saw was some sort of alien spacecraft.

But if you take a close look at what the Bible says, you'll see that it says nothing about aliens or flying saucers. When you take the time to compare Ezekiel 1 with other chapters of the Bible like Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 and 5, you quickly discover that what Ezekiel saw was a graphic representation of the throne of God. In fact, there's a verse at the end of the chapter that makes it obvious:

And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne...
(Ezekiel 1:26).

What Ezekiel saw was meant to teach a very specific lesson. Even when things

don't look good, God is still in control, and He still has a plan. It might not make sense to us, just as the movement of the wheels didn't make sense to Ezekiel, but there's still a plan nonetheless.

Let us take a moment to consider the wheel. This is a very important symbol in Bible prophecy. It represents God working out His plan in human history. In fact, in James 3:6, James makes reference to the "course of nature", and the original Greek word he uses is "wheel". A wheel represents the course of nature. It represents God's guiding hand in our world.

God was telling Ezekiel that He had a plan. Things didn't look good, but the wheels were still turning. God was still in control. So, when your world comes apart, don't give up, because the wheels are still

turning, and God has a plan that includes you:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

The Bible says that God will take all the ingredients of your life and work them together for good. He never says that everything is good, because it's obvious that's not true; but God still promises to take the pieces of your life and work them together for good.

What we need to learn to do is just to let God take control. That's what Jacob found out the hard way: things always run better in God's hands.

Ask yourself this: when life disappoints you, what is God trying to accomplish? Do you trust Him? I know that sometimes it's difficult, but He still asks you to do it. And He promises that, one day, you will understand and approve of what He allowed to happen.

Remember Joseph. As a relatively young man, he found himself tied to the back of a camel; it appeared that God had made a serious mistake, because nobody ever bows down to slaves or prisoners. The dreams must have been wrong.

But then, as Joseph sat in prison, there was another dream. This time, the dream came to the Pharaoh of Egypt. And through a miraculous set of circumstances, Joseph was called upon to interpret it. Suddenly, he found himself, not just freed from

prison, but living in the palace of a king. In the blink of an eye, there was a complete reversal of circumstances. Just as quickly as his future had evaporated, it was restored to him.

The Bible tells us that one day a group of strangers showed up, and Joseph could hardly believe his eyes. There were his brothers, and they bowed to the floor in front of him, just as God had said would happen.

You see, God never makes a mistake. If He makes a promise, He keeps it. If He says you can count on it, then count on it. As we unravel the story of Joseph, we discover that God had a much bigger plan than anyone could have imagined. God used Joseph to ward off a massive famine that would have destroyed an entire nation.

As his brothers were shaking in their sandals, worried about what kind of revenge Joseph might be plotting, with unshakeable faith, and the clarity of hindsight, Joseph says this:

But as for you, you 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 alive (Genesis 50:20).

If, for just a moment, we could look into heaven and see how God works, I know we would rest easy. We would see that He's trying to save many people—as many as He can. And the question is this: are you willing to wait and see how He's going to work things out? Remember that He might just be using your experience to save a lot of other people you will never meet until you finally stand in the kingdom of heaven.

And on that day, as you review the history of this planet with God, I know you'll be entirely satisfied with what He shows you. Like any good mother, when Esther found out that she was going to have another baby, she did everything she could to prepare her little son Stevie for the arrival. They knew it was going to be a little girl, and so she taught Stevie to sing a little song to the baby in Mommy's tummy. "Stevie", she said, "would you like to sing for your sister?"

"Oh, yes mummy, that would be fun!"

So, he got up close to his mother and began to sing.

"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.
You make me happy, when skies are grey."
The pregnancy was normal, and one day,

right on time, the labour pains started. It was almost time for the baby to arrive, but then suddenly, there were serious complications.

The doctors were just about to recommend a C-section when, mercifully, the little girl was born. But it wasn't good. She was in a very serious condition, so with sirens howling in the night, they rushed her to another hospital.

Finally, the doctor came to Esther and told her to prepare for the worst.

Esther and her husband felt their whole world disintegrating as they found themselves contacting the cemetery, when they should have been sprucing up the nursery. They sat at the kitchen table planning for an inevitable funeral, when

Stevie walked in.

“Mommy, I want to go and sing for my sister.”

“It’s not a good time right now, honey.”

“But it’s not fair, Mommy! I want to sing my song for my sister!”

Esther knew that if Stevie didn’t go and sing that day, he might never sing for her. She decided to take him. She dressed him up in an oversized hospital gown and marched him into the ICU. The head nurse saw him, and yelled at them, “No children allowed!”

That’s when Esther got bold. “He’s not going anywhere until he sings for his sister!”

And she dragged Stevie to the humidicrib, where she held him on tip-toe to look inside. It was a little bit scary at first, but then little Stevie started to sing.

“You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.” All of a sudden, the monitors started to change, and the little girl’s pulse became steady. “Keep singing, Stevie!”

The head nurse couldn’t believe it. Tears were running down her cheeks. She had almost made a fatal mistake by trying to keep Stevie out of the ICU. The baby’s breathing became regular, it stayed regular, and she went home that very day. *Woman’s Day* magazine called it a miracle.

You know, the Bible calls Jesus our older brother, and maybe today you can hear the

song He's singing for you. He sees where you are, and He understands how big your problems really are. And I know He's going to save you, so hang on.

One day, says the Bible, every knee will bow and confess that Jesus is Lord. That would have been hard to believe when He was nailed to a Roman cross and the whole world was making fun of Him. It would have been even harder to believe when He was laid in a tomb. But when God makes a plan, it always comes to pass. He will never forget you as He works hard to save as many people as He can.

Do we understand everything right now? Of course not. Some things defy human explanation. But the wheels of God's divine guidance are still turning, and one

day soon, Jesus will come, and you will understand. So, for now, are you willing to let God take the wheel of your life?