

# ***IS GOD BIGGER THAN MY BAD?, GEN.37***

You'll Get Through This #1

◆Intro: I know how you think. You think, at least at times, that you're life is too far gone for things to look up. You think that you and your spouse are too different to ever get along. Might as well call it quits. You think your addiction is destined to run your life into your old and grey years. There's no conquering this. You think that since your body just doesn't have the mass or make up to make you the athletic star you dream about being, that you are destined to nothingness, digging ditches maybe. I know these things because I've heard the evil one whisper the same things in my ears down through the years. I also know that these things carry the voice print of the Dark Lord. They are not the kind of things that God says. God is a rescuer, a redeemer, a savior.

◆**1. Because God *specializes* in recovery, that makes my life a miraculous possibility!**

◆This series is going to tackle the thoughts and feelings we have that make us want to give up, the troubles, the tragedies, and tortures that life brings that cause us to lose our breath. We'll be following the life of Joseph in the book of Genesis. Joseph's story is the astonishing tale of rags to riches, so to speak, but he is vastly different from the Vanderbuilts, and Carnegies of the Industrial Age or the Steve Jobs and Bill Gateses of the Silicon Age. Joseph's story goes back further. It has dark roots. There are a whole lot of problems in Jacob's account.

◆**A.** First of all, its Jacob's tale. The Book of Genesis is divided into 10 parts or "accounts". Our text begins the tenth account and it bears Jacob's name. Jacob's name means "deceiver" or "trickster". He was a swindler in his human nature. He hoodwinked his dad for the

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blessing meant for his brother. He fleeced his brother of his inheritance. This is the kind of relative you don't call on the phone much. The kind you hope doesn't come to the reunion. This is Jacob. This is the father of God's chosen family! He's the one who would become known as Israel. This, verse 2 tells us, is the account of the Trickster.

◆ On top of what we've already seen, Jacob harbored favoritism. He had two wives but really only loved one. He had 12 sons but only really only loved two. He showered Joe with fancy clothes, the North Face jackets, the Under Armor shirts, the Buckle Jeans. Meanwhile the sons of Leah got each other's hand-me-downs, the bell-bottoms when skinny legs were "in", the stripes when checks were in, whatever was on sale at The Dollar Store.

◆ How many stories haven't been told of the unfavored child who became a super villain for want of Dad's love and approval? One could sympathize with Joseph's brothers!

◆ And the apples don't fall far from the tree. So in our story of Joseph's selling, the Deceiver gets deceived by his own boys. Joseph's brothers let their pain turn into hatred and evil. These are the guys whose names will be remembered into the eternity of Heaven, the 12 tribes of Israel, God's chosen –with mob stories in their closets.

◆ **B.** And then there's Joseph, as part of Jacob's account. He's no peach at this point. He's 17. The perfect age to solve all the world's problems because everyone knows you know everything when you're

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a teenager! And if you had a dream that explicitly made it out that you were the hot shot of the whole family –don't you think that's the kind of thing you keep quiet, or at least share with as much tact as possible? Not Joseph.

◆ So Joe was a braggard, or at least a tacky story-teller. On top of that he was a narc! Verse 2 tells us that Joe tattled on his brothers. He's not the sweet little angle you might have conjured up in your expectations of biblical characters. Maybe Reuben does a slow-and-go with the camel at a stop sign, and Joseph tells dad about it. Judah gets a DUI and Joseph brings it up at the dinner table. Trying to be truthful, no doubt. The family has it's issues for sure.

◆ **C.** Here's another pause: Chapter 38 seems out of place. In the middle of the Joseph bio, which will conclude the book of Genesis, as he rises to the second most powerful position in the then-known world, we get a chapter seemingly totally unrelated. It's about Judah, who by his own admission was worse than a whore. It's about his unfairness, and his jumping in bed with a prostitute. His failure as a father as seen in his sons so wicked that God takes them out. Add to that the fact that Judah is the one who comes up with the idea of selling their brother (v26). It's not exactly a portrait you want hung in a museum! But remember, this is technically *Jacob's* account. Judah, the father of the Messiah's line, and Joseph, the rescuer from famine -start out as pretty sordid characters, like their father, Jacob, "Ol' Tricky Dicky".

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- ◆D. And finally, it's clear in the narrative that the whole crew of brothers have an obvious disdain for dad. Verse 32 records them saying, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." "Your son's robe"? Not "Joseph's" robe. "Your son's". They use the term like parents use it when they want to distance themselves from a child: "Honey, let me tell you what *your son* did today!"
  - ◆"Your son tried to dry his muddy boots in the microwave!"
  - ◆"Your daughter got fingernail polish on my laptop keyboard!"
  - ◆"Your son played catch with the goldfish!"
- ◆What's going on here? One person is distancing themselves from the bad, and pointing fingers at another. Jacob's sons had open disdain for their dad, and his other kid.
- ◆And here's the point friends. You think that your troubles signify your hopeless future. You think that everything works out great in Bible stories because those were such holy people. You live in the real world and therefore you think that your story cannot work out in the end, because you've messed up. But you're wrong. The people God used down through history had just as much need for salvation as we do!
  - ◆Jacob had his issues. Judah had his sins. Joseph needed to grow up and mature. The leaders of the Holy People were the bickering, jealous brothers!
- ◆This all tells us that we are all candidates for renewal! No one is too far gone. Your stains are not stronger than your savior's passion for you. And everybody is a mess, truth be known. Everybody. But God specialized in

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making messy things beautiful, and dirty things clean, and weak things strong.

◆ *“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” 2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV.*

◆ So, as we will see in this series, and in Joseph’s story, it is not our strength, our talent, our ingenuity, and our impenetrable shield of self-determination that tells us “You’ll Get Thru This” The Bible is not here to urge you with the words, “Go on, you can do it.” No, that’s because you can’t do it. And neither can I. The Gospel message is not “You can do this.” It is “God can get you through this.”

◆ God is not turned off by stains and smells.

◆ God is not repulsed by failure or lack of talent.

◆ God is attracted to the suffering and needy.

◆ God is the seeker of the lost and chaser of those running away from him! If God is with you, then we can say, “You’ll Get Through This.”

◆ **2. There is nothing and no one that God can’t overcome. That includes me.**

◆ God’s sovereign power is not isolated to Jacobs account. In fact, this theme runs through the whole of Scripture.

◆ Adam and Eve disobey God. God comes looking for them.

◆ Cain kills his brother Abel. God comes looking for him.

◆ Moses murders a man and runs away. God brings him back to deliver his people.

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- ◆ Samson can't keep his hands off the pagan women, and breaks all his vows, but God uses him to save Israel.
- ◆ King David invites the neighbor lady over for drinks and "we'll see what else." When she gets pregnant, he has her husband murdered and marries her! Yet God uses him to as the greatest King of Israel.
- ◆ Peter denies Jesus, but Jesus uses him to start the Christian church.
- ◆ Paul murders fellow Jews for becoming Christ-followers, but God turns him into a missionary and writer of most of the NT.
- ◆ Put your name on the list. You are no exception!
- ◆ **A.** Among other things, Joseph's story is in the Bible to tell you that God is bigger than your bad.

◆ *"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."'" 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, NIV.*

- ◆ You will notice from this text that God didn't come looking for people who were good and had it all together. There are none of those anyway. He

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came looking for people who were bad and needed him to put it all together. People like you and me. God comes looking for us in our badness.

◆ *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” Romans 5:8-10, NIV.*

◆ **B.** Keep in mind there are two kinds of badness, or shall we say two kinds of cisterns, to use Josephs predicament.

◆ 1) The bad cisterns of our own doing: these are the troubles we bring on ourselves through our own sin. Shoot up heroin; you get addicted and then spend your last cent on buying more. Or you let your mouth fly off, and people on the job resent you and don’t cooperate with you.

◆ 2) Then there are the bad cisterns of other people’s doing, or of unknown cause: these are the evils others do to us regardless of our behavior. The Bible is pretty clear that all that is not good and beautiful is in some way related to the sin of mankind specifically or in general.

◆ *“To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through*

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*painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.” Genesis 3:17, NIV.*

◆“The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth’s inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.” Isaiah 24:5, 6, NIV.

◆ In a sense, Joseph’s cistern was a result of multiple badness: his own tacky arrogance, his fathers dysfunctional love, and his brother’s hurt turned to hate.

◆Whatever you bad is, of your own making, or of another’s it doesn’t slow down the grace of God! He doesn’t love or want you less than he does the person next to you, whose sins or troubles you think are less than yours. If we learn anything from Joseph’s story, as Max Lucado puts it, it’s that “God can trump anything.”

◆Philip Griffin, in "A God Who Redeems writes,

◆“During the early days of our church plant in Texas we were baptizing lots of people so we brought in a small indoor swimming pool. There were about 30 people who were planning to be baptized. But just before the service we realized that we didn't have a hose. We had a leaky one at home, so I asked other staff members, but no one had a hose. So I decided to go buy one.

◆As I was leaving to get the hose, a guy named John stopped me and said, "I'm glad I caught you, pastor. I need to talk to you." I tried to have a conversation with him as I kept aiming for my car, but he



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said, "No, I need to talk in private." So when we got to my office, he said, "I want to know if you're for real." I had been talking about how God says to each and every one of us that there is nothing we can do or say to make him not love us. He doesn't always love our behavior, but he loves us. So I told John, "Absolutely, it's for real." He said, "Well, I'm struggling with homosexual desires and behavior. I'm in and out of gay relationships. I understand what the Bible says, and I want to do what God wants me to do—but I'm losing this battle. Several months ago, I tried to go to another church, but when I came clean with my struggles, they told me never to come back again. So I want to know if you're for real."

◆We stayed and talked, and I connected him with a ministry that helps people battling same-sex attraction. I also connected him with one of our church's small groups, which ended up embracing him. Before he left my office, he said, "Now I want to tell you one more thing." At this point I'm thinking, I'm not going to have time to get the hose. "When I pulled into the parking lot today, I wasn't aiming my car in this direction. I was going to kill myself." When I asked John if he had a plan for ending his life, he said, "Yes, I did. It was already in motion. I went to the hardware store and bought a garden hose earlier today, and I bought some duct tape. My plan was to drive down this little rural road and tape the hose to my muffler and feed it into my car window." I said, "John, for real, you bought a hose?"

◆I got a glimpse of redemption that day. I saw John cross the line of faith and let Christ put his feet on a different path. And I saw God take

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something that was intended for death—that hose—and use it to fill up something that means life—the baptismal pool. From then on we told that story every time we did baptisms in that church.

### **◆Conclusion:**

◆God can trump diseases. He can trump disasters. He can trump sin. He can trump midnight evils. He can trump those running from him. He can trump brokenness. He can trump pain and loss. He can trump accidents. He can even bring the dead to life again. God can trump anything. That means, friends, that God can lick the badness in your life too, either now, or in eternity.

◆What seems at this point in Joseph's life like a downhill story is only part of the story. Wait till you see what God can do with it!