

Misery and Mystery; Genesis 50:15-21

Developed from Kurt Strassner's "Opening Up Genesis"

I. Unparalleled mercy

A. Promises

1. Genesis 12:3; I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
2. Genesis 25:23; ²³ And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."

B. Undeserved

1. Abraham put his wife in a compromising position not once, but twice
 - a) Genesis 12:10–13; ¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."
2. Isaac did the same
 - a) Genesis 26:6–7; ⁶ So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance.
3. Isaac played favorites with his children
 - a) Genesis 25:28; Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob
4. Jacob was dishonest and greedy, buying his brother's birthright, then tricking his father into the blessing
 - a) Genesis 27:15–24; ¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. ¹⁶ And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. ¹⁸ So he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." ²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the Lord your God granted me success." ²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." ²² So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³ And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him. ²⁴ He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am."

II. The Misery of Sin

A. "So, as much as God shows mercy to sinners, he also often (because he loves us) makes us absolutely miserable in our sins! ... God has designed it this way, attaching earthly consequences to our sins, so that the pain might urge us to repent!" Kurt Strassner

B. Slavery

1. Genesis 37:5-11; ⁵ Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. ⁹ Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" ¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.
2. How should Joseph responded to those dreams?
3. Instead of using the dreams to cultivate humility, concern, wisdom and compassion that is needed in leadership, he used them for self-promotion
4. Joseph's coat was not work clothes, yet Joseph shows up for work in his dress clothes
 - a) Genesis 37:23–24; ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.
5. Joseph ended up in a pit, in a slave caravan, and in slavery because he abused the good gifts God gave him
6. If Joseph was to be a good leader, he would have to learn humility somehow
7. Hebrews 12:6; For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

C. Guilt

1. We can see guilt at work in the lives of Joseph's brothers
2. The brothers' plan did not seem to bother them, they sat down to eat
 - a) Genesis 37:25; Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.
3. But Reuben offered them a way out (as God always does)
 - a) Genesis 37:21–22; ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.
4. but the brother's in Reuben's absence, sold him off into slavery

5. The brother's guilt haunted them for the rest of their lives
 - a) Genesis 42:21–22; ²¹ Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us." ²² And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood."
 - b) Genesis 50:15–18; ¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." ' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."
 - c) Somewhere, amid all the temptations, God has given us a way of escape
 - (1) 1 Corinthians 10:13; ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.
 - d) What misery awaits us if we don't take it!

D. Regret

1. Reuben, the first born with all the authority that comes with it, attempts to stop his brothers as they decide to kill Joseph
 - a) Genesis 37:21–22; ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.
2. But notice Reuben does not put an end to it, he just went half-way
3. "Reuben had good intentions. But, presumably out of fear of what his brothers might say, he did not fully carry them out. So he stayed in the land of good intentions while his brother was carted off to the land of slavery."

Strassner

 - a) Genesis 37:29; ²⁹ When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes
4. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions"
 - a) "Hell is full of good wishes and desires" Saint Bernard of Clairvaux 1150
 - b) "It is easy to go to hell" Virgil's *Aeneid* 29-19 BC
 - c) "Hell is full of good meaning, but Heaven is full of good works" a book titled *Proverbs*
5. God will not allow us to stay content in sin, and the difficulty of His discipline ought to motivate us to obey!

III. Providence

A. The right time

1. God's timing is everything. God will not put His plan into action unless it is the right time
 - a) Romans 5:6; For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
 - b) Genesis 15:15–16; ¹⁵As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."
 - B. "A man found him"
 1. Who was the "man" that found Joseph wandering?
 - a) Genesis 37:15-17; ¹⁵And a man found him wandering in the fields. And 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." ¹⁷And 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.
 2. Could it have been the same man that wrestled with Jacob and changed his name to Israel?
 - a) Genesis 32:24; ²⁴And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.
 3. Whether it was God, or just a man, it was no accident in Joseph's life that "a man found him."
 4. Just as it was no accident that an Ishmaelite caravan came down the road as Joseph's brothers were eating
 - C. God's plan all along was to bring Joseph to power in Egypt so He could rescue His people from famine years later
 1. Jacob's sons were trying to kill their baby brother. But God was turning their actions into a chain of events that would save their own lives! What mercy!
 2. Romans 8:28; ²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
 - IV. Do We Believe This?
 - A. Then we won't throw people into the pit when they hurt us
 - B. We will have hope in the midst of guilt and regret over our own sins
 - C. No excuses for our disobedience and sin
 - D. "But the sovereignty of God over the sins of Joseph and his brothers does teach us that God is bigger than our sins. He is big enough to forgive our sins through Jesus Christ. He is big enough to help us overcome our sins. And he is even big enough to re-work our sins as part of his larger plan to do us, and the rest of his people, good! We may have meant it for evil, but God will work it for good!"
- Strassner