

God Meant It For Good

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- [0:00] There's a connection between these two sentences.! One that's so ingrained in a history. So what is the connection between them? Well, if you're not already there, the connection is the whole book of Genesis.
- It's the first and last words of this one single book. And I want to say that because often I think Bible stories kind of stand alone in our heads.
- We kind of pick it up in bits and pieces. And we don't always see them as parts of a bigger story. But this is the storyline of Genesis from creation to a coffin in Egypt.
- And what we read tonight is where Genesis has been going since the very first page. In a sense, I think we could say that this is why God created the heavens and the earth.
- [1:29] To fulfill his eternal purposes for his people in the unfolding of time and space and history. And so that is what Genesis has been, hasn't it?
- A big catch-up on God's eternal purposes unfolding in history up to this point. Remember the first heroes of Genesis. Who were they?
- Well, we're at a point now where you can see them on the very next page. The distant descendants of Joseph and his brothers in the book of Exodus, chapter 1, verse 7.
- The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly. They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong. So the land was filled with them. And there they are, the people for whom this book was first written.
- And what has Genesis shown them? Well, where they come from, who they are, but most importantly, of course, whose they are.
- [2:29] These are our fathers, they say. Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Noah, Adam. And this is the God of our fathers.
- This is our God, the almighty creator of heaven and earth. The one who sustains it by his powerful providence. The one who makes glorious promises.
- The one who is gracious and merciful to us. The never-endingly faithful God. He is our God. And if we're in Jesus Christ tonight, that is the message of this book for us too, isn't it?
- We are his people. He, this God, is our God. 50 chapters, three and a half years. 45 sermons.
- We've covered almost every verse. And tonight we're finishing this epic of a series in the book of Genesis. I was trying to think, actually. There's probably not that many people who were here all the way through from the beginning.
- [3:32] If you've been here, I hope that you have gained from it. And if you've not been here, I hope that what you've heard has given you a hunger to go back and see what more Genesis has to say in earlier chapters.
- But tonight, as we close, I want to preach these verses in a way as usual, but also step back a bit and give us one last glorious look back at where we've been.

I don't know about you. For me, that's the best part of the hike, isn't it? Where you get to a point where you can look back the miles of path that you've just trodden and see where it's brought you.

And in the book of Genesis, I think it's this. Where have we come to? Well, the God who created the heavens and the earth is the faithful God of his fallen family.

As some of you have been working on theme sentences in life group, for what it's worth, this is my theme sentence for the book of Genesis. The God who created the heavens and the earth is the faithful God of his fallen family.

[4:40] And all we're going to do tonight is work kind of backwards through that wonderful truth, seeing it in our text, and then consider one last time the response that Genesis calls for from us.

So firstly, let's see here, a fallen family. To nearly the very last word of this book, we've had so many painful reminders along the way that sin has infected every part of human life and that God's people, God's family, are not immune from that.

Isn't it incredible? After everything that Joseph has forgiven these brothers, their hatred, the pit, selling him into slavery, after everything he's given to them, food, a place to live, a place of honor, his brothers still feel the stain of their sin on their hearts.

Their dad dies, and their first thought after the funeral is, maybe Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him. I think that's such a jarring word to hear at the end, the close of this majestic story, isn't it?

It's a bit like going through security at an airport and saying, suicide bomber. Or going on to a maternity ward in a hospital and saying, stillbirth. The family's reunited, all the loose threads are being tied up, we're ready for them all to live happily ever after.

[6:14] But there's a sleeping dragon in the room. And once they have pointed it out, they can't stop. Just look at verse 17. This is the message that they send.

Say to Joseph, please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you. Now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God your father.

See to the end, right under the surface of this would-be happy family, they know themselves, lies the very, very worst in us.

The evil of the human heart. I wonder, did you pick up, even in saying it, they sin, don't they? Think about it.

Did Jacob give them this message to send to Joseph? It would seem very strange, wouldn't it? After all the time that Jacob spent with Joseph on his deathbed, it might have been the kind of thing to say man to man.

[7:13] It reads more like they come up with this message, don't they, out of their fear, as a way of kind of stretching what they thought might have been their father's protection over them.

Now he's no longer here. We were sorting out the house, Joseph, and we found this note. Dad must have written it before he died. It says, please don't hurt us.

Friends, the story of God's fallen family in Genesis began with a lie, and it ends with a lie. Even as, even as they do the right thing, what do they do, verse 18?

His brothers also came and fell down before him. The very thing, the very thing that they hated him for saying at the beginning, shall we come and bow ourselves to the ground to you?

Isn't that the heady cocktail that we've seen all the way through this book in God's family? Faith mixed with fear and a bit of fibbing.

- [8 : 21] Faced with it all, sin, past and present, fear and faith. One last time, is it any wonder Joseph wept as they spoke to him? We cry, don't we, for all kinds of reasons.
- Sadness, love, joy, pity. I think probably Joseph's feeling all of it at this point in the story.
- But, but why ever he's crying, here's what it doesn't say as they spoke to him. Joseph smiled. Joseph laughed it off. Joseph shrugged and said, it doesn't matter as they spoke to him.
- No, friends, the fallenness of God's family is overwhelming. It is very, very real. When we are confronted head on, we're there.
- Tears are the right response, aren't they? Our sin is sinister. It's deceptive. It's unshakable. It's always there. On every page of this book of Genesis, there has been somebody there who we haven't seen.
- [9 : 30] Somebody standing in the corner who, now we know he's there, we could go back and see him there in every page. Haven't we heard his hiss in every scene of the story?
- Adam's rebellion, Eve's betrayal, Cain's murder, humanity's corruption that needed a flood to wash it away.
- Noah's drunkenness, Babel's tower, Abraham's lies, Sarah's laugh, Lot's compromise, Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaac's favoritism, Jacob's deception, Esau's appetite, Laban's cruelty, Reuben's incest, Simeon and Levi's vengefulness, Judah's adultery, the rest of the brothers' hatred, even Joseph's momentary anger.
- Some of you know the poem that we sometimes bring out this time of year, there's a dragon in my nativity, dreadful and immense.
- Well, friends, Genesis tells us that there is a dragon in our family. His ancient lie has its claws deep into our hearts, and even as God's people, with our faith resting in him, and bowing ourselves down to his one true king, we prove it every day, that we are fallen people.
- [11 : 02] The breadth of our sin is incredible. Think of all the different ways we've seen it in this one book. Think we could count every one of the ten commandments being broken, and they haven't even been given yet.
- Brothers and sisters, count up, even hypothetically, if you were to count up, all your sins of just the past week, let alone your whole life, sins of thought and feeling and word, as well as deed in our relationships, I reckon most of us would be shocked by our own creativity.
- And if you're not shocked, maybe get someone to help you drag back out those sins that have been tucked under the rug. Here in our room like this, our combined lists would go on, and on, and on, wouldn't they?
- Would there be any stone left unturned in our search for fresh ways to sin against God? And its depth is unspeakable. Joseph is the fourth generation of God's chosen family in Genesis, and far from breaking the cycle, each generation has only replayed the sins of the last.
- They are well and truly stuck on repeats. Friends, like the rest of the Bible, Genesis is not a book about self-improvement or breaking past habits or escaping generational trauma.
- [12 : 30] It's a book that says sin is here to stay in our family, and on our own, there is nothing we can do about it. If tonight you're struggling with temptation, or maybe you're battling with a particular sin or a pattern of sin in your life, maybe something that's dogged you for years, with all the tenderness in the world, friend, let me tell you that by yourself you will not shake free of it.

You are not strong enough. Time is not a healer when it comes to our hearts. We don't grow out of our sin. Friends, the sobering reality of our condition is even that it's not contained in your life, but even the best of parents will pass on some of those issues to our children and their children, even as we inherited them from our parents and their parents before us.

Brothers and sisters, God's people are a deeply fallen family. Genesis strips us of any pretense that we have that as Christians or as a church or because we come to church that we're not as fallen as the rest of humanity or we have some special immunity from sin.

No, our need is not less. It is the same. It is the same. So then, what is it that we need? Well, the second thing Genesis has shown us is a faithful God.

A faithful God. You know, really the fact that Genesis is as many as 50 chapters long rather than three is testament to that. It only took a matter of verses before our first parents rebelled against God, but at that moment God made promises.

[14:24] He promised that life would go on, but now under a curse. When he created Adam and Eve, he made them in his image and blessed them and he said, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over all the creatures.

But from that point onwards, fulfilling our created purpose would be hard, if not impossible, because we were going it alone. Now God said, getting married and having children would be painful and costly, filling the earth would be hard.

And he said that work would be an uphill battle ruling the world, would be a constant struggle. And he said that the ultimate price of our rebellion was death.

Again, isn't it so jarring to get to the end of Genesis, everything we've been through and the last words to be a coffin in Egypt. The last chapter of this book is basically a record of two funerals.

The very last thing that happens is someone dies. And that might pass us by. Of course he died, he's 110 years old. But if we've read from the beginning, which we have, that's a dagger to the heart.

[15:46] So Joseph died. I point out these hard promises not to try to rub it in any harder, but because isn't it so true?

Lots of Genesis feels very far from our lives if we're honest. It feels a bit weird and a bit strange at times, but doesn't this feel all too familiar?

Because what God said to Adam and Eve is still true. In pain you shall bring forth children. In pain you shall eat all the days of your life.

You are dust and to dust you shall return. Why is life so difficult? Why is death so hard? Brothers and sisters, ultimately it's because God's words spoken at the dawn of creation to our fallen first parents are still living and active.

He is still God over this world and our lives. and we still live with that curse. But so too, living and active is his promise of ultimate victory.

[16:54] Now really, it's a promise of crushing defeat because it's a promise to the serpent that his lie would not get the last word. God said, I will put enmity or conflict between you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head. You shall bruise his heel. God promised the serpent, you will not win. And friends, he has been faithful to that promise too.

He formed a family from the woman. Genesis traces it from Adam to Noah to Abraham. Then we get more promises, more children, a land and a blessing for this family and through them every family of the world.

God has kept that promise. Despite Sarah's infertility, God gave them a son, Isaac. Despite Rebecca's infertility, God gave them two sons, Jacob and Esau.

Despite Jacob's living situation, two wives and two concubines, he gave them twelve sons and a daughter. And above all, despite the fact that so often this family has looked and sounded like serpent children, lying, cheating, stealing, killing, sleeping with the wrong people.

[18:15] Yet God has never broken his promises to them, but has handed them down to each new generation of this family. Jacob and Joseph's last words testify to that faithfulness of God when they say their bodies should be buried back in Canaan.

Notice how much airtime that got in our reading. The one piece of real estate that they own in the promised land is a tomb. But so sure is Jacob that they will inherit the whole land of Canaan that he has everyone trek all the way back there to bury him because God has promised and that's where I'll be.

And Joseph wants the same, didn't he? We read from Hebrews in faith, Joseph at the end of his life made mention of the Exodus and gave directions concerning his bones. What?

Take them with you. When God visits you and brings you out to the promised land, lay my bones to rest there because God's promise in his mind is as good as done.

It will happen. We'll come back to Joseph's famous words in verse 20 shortly, but just notice in passing saying that they also point, don't they, to God's faithfulness, to his promise of worldwide blessing.

[19:39] As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today. He's saying through the grievous sin of his family, God brought blessing and life and fullness to all the earth who came to buy grain from Joseph, which of course is just a drop in the ocean compared to the blessing God would one day bring through the woman's offspring, Jesus Christ.

The forgiveness of sins, eternal life, resurrection in a world made new where there is no more crying or pain or dying anymore for those who put their trust in him.

Friends, the assurance of Genesis is that there is no amount of sin that can cut short God's faithfulness. I heard a preacher say recently, God, the God of the Bible is a God who sticks with the stuck.

He sticks with the stuck. If you're stuck tonight, no matter how deeply, Genesis says the God of the Bible will stick with you through it, perhaps you're stuck in sin, habits, ways of living that you know are not right.

Some of us will feel trapped tonight under the heaviness of life, under the curse, the pain of work, or the pain of family, of marriage, of parenthood, or singleness.

[21:20] Perhaps some of us hear of people dying or we go to funerals and we are paralyzed by fear. Friends, however you are stuck, trapped, paralyzed, the God of Genesis sticks with you.

He will never, ever break a promise to you if you love him. He will never let you down. He will never leave you or forsake you. And wonderfully, not only personally, me and you in our lives, but us together, no amount of sin between us can stop him carrying out his good purposes in Christ.

One of the things that never stops amazingly about church life is that running alongside and in parallel with all the really hard things are really, really incredible things.

You live together in Jesus, it often feels like suffering and death, but do you know there is always resurrection happening too. People coming into church for the first time, maybe in their life, maybe for years.

People coming to faith in Jesus Christ, having eternal life in him. A group of you coming together to plant a new church. People growing in their faith and being disciplined.

[22 : 40] People being cared for in maybe unseen but really significant ways. Friendships being formed. that point one another to Jesus, encourage each other to keep going in him.

I could go on. Friends, whatever mess and pain and sin there is among us, and it is among us, praise our faithful God that nothing can stop him from fulfilling his purposes in us and through us and for us in Jesus.

The Lord is at work in us, God is at the He is the faithful God of our fallen family. He is the faithful God of our fallen family. Because he always keeps his promises even though we break ours.

He is the faithful God of our fallen family. And even more amazingly, Genesis says our faithful God is no less than the God who created the heavens and the earth.

God is the God of our God of our He is the faithful God of our God. He brought all things into existence with a word. He is completely unchallenged, unimpeded.

[23 : 56] He is completely sovereign. And he is entirely good. Think of it. The world turns against him. What does he say? Summer and winter, springtime and harvest will continue to the end of the world.

He sustains the universe with a word of power. He blesses his people in every way, every day. Even the unkind, even the wicked.

He gives sun and rain to you. But he blesses us so that we would bless others. He does not depend on anyone or anything to do what he does.

Doesn't look to anyone for permission. He is not held up by unforeseen difficulties. He is not confounded as we are by uncertainties.

What ifs? All things are certain to him. Friends, if the God who created the heavens and the earth, this God is our God, then what do we have to fear?

[24 : 58] Why should we be anxious? Why should we doubt? He is in full control of all that happens and works everything for the good of those who love him.

The God he made the heavens and the earth is the faithful God of his fallen family. So how do we respond to the message of Genesis?

There could be lots of answers to that question. I'm not saying I've got the only one. but a big response, a big response is in faith. To our last point tonight, we respond in faith.

Firstly, to his promises. We've seen already how Jacob and Joseph, to the last, they hold firm to God's promises. So how do we sitting here tonight grasp hold of these promises today in Christ?

Christ. Well, I think before anything else, we have to grasp hold of Christ himself. He is the yes and amen to all of God's promises.

[26 : 09] He is our promised land, our place of rest, security, freedom, protection of life. He is our home for us.

He is our dwelling place. He is where God himself comes to live with us. back then, God destined his people for a physical territory where they would taste those blessings, but where did he destined them to live ultimately?

In his son. The most common way the New Testament describes Christians as is being in Christ, which means that if I had a kind of spiritual GPS tracker tonight and I wanted to locate you in the universe as a Christian, that is where I need to go.

That's where I would find you, in Christ, united with him. Our lives, says Paul, are hidden with Christ in God. God has raised us up with him and seated us in Christ, in heavenly places with him.

He is our promised land, our place of rest. He is also the promised child, the offspring of the woman, to crush the serpent's head and end his deadly lie and its consequences.

[27:31] On the cross, his heel was bruised. He was made to suffer for his victory, but through his death, we are told, he destroyed the one who has the power of death and delivered all those who, through fear of death, were subject to lifelong slavery.

He's done it. all through Genesis, we've wondered, could this be the promised one? Noah, Abraham or Joseph even, but they all sinned and importantly, they all died and they stayed dead.

But here is one who knew no sin, but became sin for us, took our death and rose to life again victory. And in him is the fullness of God's promised blessing.

The life that we lost in the garden, our oneness with God, to be able to live in his presence without being thrown out, that is the life he's given us back now in Jesus.

Through the forgiveness of our many sins, the person of the Holy Spirit coming to dwell within us, the promise of everlasting life with him and a new world. Remember, when God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden, he stationed angels at the entrance to the way back to the tree of life and in their hands were flaming swords.

[29:03] But Genesis invites us to picture our Lord Jesus Christ walking the long road back to the garden. Adam, the last Adam, the second Adam, to obey where the first Adam failed and to carry our sins there so as to fall under the judgment of those swords for us so that if we follow him, if we are in him, we might walk past those swords back into that garden to eat of the tree of life.

And now, not only the garden, but to find something even better than what our first parents forfeited, not only a garden, but the promise of a new heavens and a new earth where there will be no more sin, no more temptation, no more lies, no more crying, no more dying, and God himself will walk with us once again and we will never ever leave.

Friends, when we take hold of Christ by faith, we lay claim to all of God's promises and they find their yes in him. And perhaps the night you're not sure as you listen, can I do that?

You feel a long way from God and maybe you feel the stain of your past on you. Will he forgive me? Can I come back?

Will God be faithful to me? Will he keep his promises even to me? But friends, don't we see so much of the heart of Jesus in Joseph's words to his brothers?

[30:51] They are desperate. They fall down before him. They call themselves servants. They plead for his forgiveness. What does he say through his tears? Do not fear.

He says it again, verse 21. Do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones.

Friends, if you've not yet put your trust in Jesus, hear his comfort and kindness as he says to you, do not be afraid. I will give you everything you need paid for by my blood.

Come and lay down your life at the feet of King Jesus tonight. Ask his forgiveness and with open hands receive every blessing in heavenly places in him.

And finally, we respond in faith to his purposes. His purposes. Joseph's words in verse 20 is surely one of the greatest statements of faith in the whole Bible.

[31:56] Looking back on the wickedness his brothers have done to him, what does he see there? The good hand of God. As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today. Did Joseph always know that that's where the story was going?

I don't think so. But did he ever lose sight of God's purposes in his pain? No. It's one of the hardest things for us, isn't it?

When we're being put through the ringer to see God's hand on the steering wheel, but we see that as plain as day here in Genesis, don't we? Not only that bad things happen, that God kind of takes and uses for good, but actually he says what was deliberately planned for evil by his brothers had been planned by God for good.

That's something profoundly mysterious there, isn't it? How does their responsibility kind of mesh with God's sovereignty? sovereignty? Well, that is a question way above our pay grade.

[33:13] But whatever we don't know, this we do know, that even the very, very worst that people can do, and they do do, it's in the mighty hands of God, as he works all things for the good of those who love him and accord according to his purpose.

And we see that even more clearly at the cross, don't we? Deep sin, deeper sovereignty. Peter says, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and for knowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men, and God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Did it ever look more like evil had won the day? But the Bible is so clear that what was unfolding on the cross was the eternal plan of God for his son to die and rise again to save us.

And so, brothers and sisters, when it feels to you like sin has the upper hand and darkness reigns and wrong is going to get the last word.

And where is God and what is he doing? And you are being ground into a fine powder. Come back here to God's word and cling by faith to his good purposes.

[34:43] Notice that Joseph doesn't say God's purposes in his suffering were good for him, though they were, but for others to keep all the earth fed and alive.

God's purposes in Jesus' suffering were not only for his good but for ours. Remember, in our pain we often withdraw, don't we, into ourselves and we wonder, what good is God doing for me in all this?

When the good that he is working through your suffering is almost definitely going to be for others too. Because that is the gospel pattern, isn't it?

Death at work in us but life in you. Friends, clinging to God's purposes in our pain helps us, doesn't it, to keep looking outwards and loving one another as we seek each other's good through our pain and suffering, whatever that looks like.

So in that situation, look upwards to him, look outwards to others and look down at your Bible. Put the story of your life back into the big story of scripture because it's here, isn't it, that we see in the biggest way of all that what the serpent meant for evil and all the sin and suffering and sadness that's brought into our lives, God has meant for good, to bring it about that many people, more than the stars in the sky or sand on the seashore, should be saved as they are today and will be on the day of Christ.

[36:21] Friend, if your trust is in him, you are among them. Your story, the story of your life, it is not being written by chance or by other people in your life.

It's not even being written by you, but it has been written by a faithful creator, God, and the epic of his story, what he is doing in the world, what he is doing with you in saving a people for himself.

That is where you find your true story, is in this great story, his story. We end this book with a coffin in Egypt, but we look forward to a cross on a hill and an empty grave and a new world, a garden city that fills the earth.

As we do that, let's put all our faith and hope in the God of Genesis, who has promised and is faithful, who is good in all that he does, and whose every word is yes and amen in Christ.

And let's pray together as we do that. Faithful God and loving Heavenly Father, we cannot thank you enough for your power, your sovereignty, how we thank you that you are in control of our lives.

[37 : 58] And Lord, forgive us when we repeat that same sin of wanting to claim back control and claw back the reins of our own life when truly, Lord, truly they belong in your hands.

Help us, Lord, by faith to give you back what is yours. Lord, to be restored in the image in which you first created us, to be conformed to the image of your Son, to give you the glory that you truly deserve, the place in our lives that you should always have had.

How we thank you, Father, that we're so undeserving, but you forgive us all our sins in Jesus. So, Lord, lead us again and again to him, we pray.

Help us to rest our faith in you, the God of creation, the God of providence and of promises. Help us, Lord, to know you as our God and ourselves as your people and help us, Lord, to walk together as a family, a fallen family, but worshipping and following a faithful God.

This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.