

“GOD KNOWS...”
by Rom A. Pegram (5/7/17)

On one of the last mission trips I was on, I was in charge of certain project that had to do with our worship one evening. I asked a few youth and adults to help me with this particular thing. The majority of those I asked to help were more than willing to pitch in and make this part of our worship service special. One youth, however, had a very different response. When I asked him to be involved, his response was, “So, what are you going to do for me then?” In other words, his life was not very ‘other-focused’ as we try to model and teach everyone to live on these mission trips. And it didn’t take too long to figure out that this young man had a real attitude of ‘entitlement’ that guided his life. In other words, his life was more about what he felt he was owed *by* others, than what—out of gratitude for what God had done for him—he could do *for* others...

Was I disappointed? Well, yeah. But, this ungrateful response to what was really a very simple request ... seems to me to be reflective of the world we live in today. It’s even a very prevalent attitude among many who call themselves followers of Christ. And, *isn’t it true that we find it more difficult to be obedient and faithful when we feel that God hasn’t really done anything for us lately?* Don’t you find yourself questioning God when he doesn’t show up the way *you* thought he would?

Today, we’re going to get back to the story of Joseph and let me first say that ... Joseph had a choice. He could have, in the midst of all the emotional whiplash in his life, thought that someone owed him. After all, he came from a fairly prominent and well-to-do family. But, that wasn’t his attitude at all. Joseph seems a great example of how to handle the situations we call Plan Bs—knowing that *God is with us*, and trusting God for the days ahead. Listen carefully to what happens next for Joseph (Genesis 39:6-10, NLT)...

So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn’t worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat! Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man, ⁷ and Potiphar’s wife soon began to look at him lustfully. “Come and sleep with me,” she demanded. ⁸ But Joseph refused. “Look,” he told her, “my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. ⁹ No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God.” ¹⁰ She kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible.

Joseph’s story sure seems to prove some of our thinking wrong, doesn’t it? It’s as if we have an unspoken agreement with God: “If I live a somewhat moral life, you need to keep up your end of the bargain by blessing me and not allowing anything really bad to happen to me or my family.” Isn’t that it? At some level of expectation, we persist in thinking that *if we do what we think God wants, we’re entitled to a good life!* But, *is that God’s reality?* Let me remind you about Joseph: His life was a head-turning series of reversals—from good to bad, to good, and then back again. We left him as a slave in

Egypt. Do you remember? Then comes the scripture that we read for today (vv. 7-10), where it says that “Potiphar’s wife soon began to look at him lustfully. ‘Come and sleep with me,’ she demanded. ⁸ But Joseph refused.”

Can you imagine what an incredible temptation this must have been for Joseph? *It’s been said that it’s much easier to give in to temptation in life when our needs are not being met.* Have you ever thought about that? When we feel as if God has abandoned us, why not just go ahead and abandon him? Not having our dreams and desires fulfilled leaves us hungry, and when we’re hungry we’re tempted to fill that hunger with something that isn’t good for us...

Folks, you’ve got to believe that Joseph was hungry at this point. He’s a slave. He’s miles away from family. He’s probably a bit frustrated and lonely. It would be so easy for him to think: *I know this is wrong, but what the heck? Maybe this is my way out. Maybe this could be an escape from the pain I’m feeling. Nothing else is going right, so why not?* But look what happens. Potiphar’s wife just keeps it up—keeps coming after Joseph, begging him to sleep with her, and Joseph manages to resist!

I don’t know about you, but I read this part of the story and I’m thinking, “Man, Joseph is such a man of Godly character; if ever there was a time when God would reward the faithfulness of one of his servants, *it should be now!*” But, let’s read on (vv. 11-14)...

One day, however, no one else was around when he went in to do his work. ¹² She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, “Come on, sleep with me!” Joseph tore himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he ran from the house. ¹³ When she saw that she was holding his cloak and he had fled, ¹⁴ she called out to her servants. Soon all the men came running. “Look!” she said. “My husband has brought this Hebrew slave here to make fools of us! He came into my room to rape me, but I screamed.

Are you kidding me? This has to be a horrible joke! Surely this isn’t happening to Joseph! After everything he’s been through, it just can’t be! But it is. Now, *let me show you one more thing that may really confuse you* (vv. 19a, 20-21):

Potiphar was furious ²⁰ So he took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king’s prisoners were held, and there he remained. ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love.

There it is again! Joseph’s been rejected, beat up, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and thrown into prison. How’s the old saying go? “No good deed ever goes unpunished.” It seems Joseph is living that out. However, *scripture keeps insisting that the Lord was with him...* How can that be? God is with you even when bad stuff happens? I believe the answer is ‘yes,’ but maybe not the way you want it to be. Let me ask you something: *If we truly believe—as we talked about last week—in the concept of Emmanuel (God with Us), but our lives don’t seem to change in the least little bit, what good does that do?* If knowing God is there doesn’t ease your pain, solve your problems or answer your questions, then *how does that help?* Like this...

There was a time before Jane and I were married ... that I'd been down to Indianapolis to see Jane and was driving home after the weekend with a car full of Jane's stuff ... that I was suppose to transport and watch over carefully. It was late winter and the weather was not good. As a matter of fact, I drove my old car most of the way through northern Indiana and around Chicago in 3rd gear ... and most of the time with 2 wheels on the shoulder, because it was so icy. *It was one long trip...*

I was fairly relieved to finally see the Wisconsin state line; you can just imagine. I'd planned on pulling into the welcome center south of Milwaukee, using the facilities, and then calling my parents on the pay phone (prior to cell phones). And just before I pulled off the highway into the rest stop, my car started to sputter. I was pretty sure my fuel pump was going out. And I had a car load of Jane's stuff; did I mention that? This was not a good day to be Rom at all!

To top it all off, there was a guy on the highway, right after I'd crossed into the state, who seemed like he was following me. The car running rough didn't help. When I pulled into the rest stop, sure enough ... there he was on my tail. Now, you might have thought he just wanted to help me, but trust me—his intentions were not honorable. He was prey-ing (with an 'e') ... and it was a little bit frightening, especially since I was as tired as I was from the drive. Well, I pulled over, called my dad and let him know what was going on and where I was at. I told him about the man following me and that I was going to head out and get as far as I could get and he'd just have to find me (no cell phones)...

I got about half-way around the by-pass by Milwaukee and my fuel pump went out. Now, if you've ever driven an old car before, you won't be surprised to find out that I had a spare in the trunk. While I was waiting for my folks, I tried to switch it out. But, I nearly froze on the roadside before I could get it on, so I got back in my car to get warm.

This, folks, was one of the worst days in my life—a real Plan B situation! After my car quit running, the guy following me pulled over too ... but I angrily waved him on and he left. In spite of all that had taken place, *I had two things going for me: Comfort and hope!* How's that, you say? Dad told me as soon as he could grab some tools and get Mom up, they'd be on their way. I instantly felt better knowing that. Yeah, I still had car trouble and was on the side of the road, fighting frostbite, *but just knowing my father knew my situation gave me comfort.* I also knew this: Once he got there, he'd know exactly what to do; *he'd have a plan for me! And that brought me hope...*

At the end of the day, I think that's what so many of us long for. We just want & need to know ... *that God knows*—that we haven't been forgotten or abandoned. Even if we don't yet know the outcome of our Plan B situation, there's an unbelievable peace & comfort that comes from knowing that ... *God knows!* Folks...

KNOWING 'GOD KNOWS' SHOULD GIVE US ... COMFORT! And *GOD DOES KNOW* (everything you're going through)! Isaiah 53:3a describes God's Son this way:

“He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.” God knows what it’s like to be sad and disappointed; God knows what it’s like to mourn and grieve; and while God has never promised to take the pain away, he’s promised to be right there with us in the midst of it—grieving with us, crying with us. **GOD KNOWS ... and you’re not alone.** So ... **KNOWING THAT GOD KNOWS ... SHOULD GIVE US COMFORT!**

It wasn’t just knowing my dad was aware that made me feel better about my situation; it also helped knowing he was going to help me ... and *he knew what he was doing*; that gave me HOPE; so also know this...

KNOWING ‘GOD KNOWS’ SHOULD GIVE US ... HOPE! I didn’t know exactly how long it would take; Dad said he would be on the way as soon as he could. I was at least an hour away, if not more ... but, I knew my dad. I knew his character. I knew he was both willing to help & capable of doing what needed to be done ... so, in spite of my difficult situation, I could rest assured, knowing *he would be there!*

I think Joseph had that same knowledge to comfort him while he was still in prison. He didn’t know exactly *how* things were going to work out. He had no idea *how long* it would take for God to work things out. But, Joseph knows his Dad (Heavenly Father); he knows his character and *that brings Joseph both comfort and hope*. Joseph has faith that *God is with him*, and Joseph also has faith that God’s going to work something out for him—not because he deserves it and not necessarily the way he expects. You see, God’s plan for Joseph was much bigger than Joseph could even imagine...

Now, here’s the rest of the story... Because of the butler he’d been in prison with, Joseph is soon called on to interpret a dream for the Pharaoh—which he does well. This not only gets him out of prison, but it gets Joseph the highest position in the land—*just beneath Pharaoh. This is what God had in mind all along!* It’s a story of forgiveness toward his brothers (after he plays with their emotions for awhile) and a reuniting with his father; it’s a story of God placing Joseph in a position of power in order to save his entire people from the drought that was consuming the land. And he finally sums up the whole ‘good news-bad news’ story of his life by telling his brothers what he’d believed all along (Gen. 50:20, NLT): “You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.”

But, folks, *get this*: None of this happened because Joseph was good ... or because Joseph asked and God was obliged to answer. It happened because *God knew what he was doing with Joseph’s life even when Joseph didn’t have a clue*. And *that’s something we need to realize too!* Can you trust God like Joseph did? Folks, **GOD KNOWS**. In the midst of our Plan B circumstances in life, knowing that—*just like with Joseph*—will bring us both *comfort* and *hope*, too... **GOD KNOWS...**