

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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The God of Providence (2)

Genesis 50:15-21

50:15 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."

50:16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died,

50:17 '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.

50:18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

50:19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"

50:20 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.

50:21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

1. Creation

The Bible teaches "the God of Creation." All of the world – visible and invisible – were created by God. Scientists have been searching the visible world and found a beautiful order there. They described it by numerical and chemical formulas. However, such formulas cannot

talk about the origin, purpose, and meaning of the world though the formulas can show the order of the world. The scientific languages can explain how things work, but they cannot explain that from where things came, and their purpose and meaning.

Therefore, the Bible were not written by the scientific languages, but in a “story-telling” form, to explain the creation of the world. The Bible teaches that the world has meaning because God made it for His purpose.

God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.” (Genesis 1:14). Theses “lights” are the sun, moon, and stars. The sun is very big. More than one million earths could fit in the sun. Unlike our planet, the sun is not made up of hard matter. Instead, it is a constantly revolving ball of erupting gas, mostly hydrogen and helium. The temperature at the sun’s core can be as much as 27,000,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

The precision of the distance between the earth and the sun is perfectly balanced to support human life. Closer, and it would be impossible to keep water on our planet from evaporating or even boiling away. Farther, and earth’s water would freeze solid. The rate of the earth’s rotation is once per 24 hour period. The speed at the equator is 1,034 mi/hr. This is faster than a jet plain. By this rotation, all area of the earth can receive the light from the sun. And the earth’s axis is tilted 23.5 degree from the plane of revolution. This brings the seasons – spring, summer, fall, and winter. God arranged planets “for seasons, and for days and years” as the Bible tells us. The Bible says, “God set them in the expanse of the heavens.” (Genesis 1:17) I think

the word, “set” means that God arranged the stars and planet in very precise balance.

An astronomer made a model of the solar system. When he turned the power switch on, the planets began to rotate around the sun. One day, one of his friends came and saw the model. The friend said, “This is very good. Who did make this?” The astronomer answered, “It became by accident.” The friend knew that the astronomer made fun of him. Then he said, “This never come out by chance. You made this, didn’t you?” The astronomer said, “Yes, I made this model. A model of the solar system never come out by chance. Then, how could the real solar system and the universe come out by chance?” The astronomer begun to talk about God. There are no other satisfying answers about the origin, purpose, and meaning of the world except the creation by God.

2. Providence

Everything has “cause” then the “result” follows. So, the philosophers call God the Creator “The Primary Cause.” They defined God like this: “God is the Being which moves everything, but never be moved by others.” But this “God” is just a theoretical God. According this thought, God created the world as the “primary cause”, but God retreated from the world after the creation. God left the world on its course on its own.” This can be illustrated that an artisan who made a mechanical clock, winds it up and then leaves the clock alone to “run out.”

“God created the universe, but He never interrupt to the world.” This theory is called “Deism.” This theory became popular in

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. “Deism” is different from the Biblical teaching. God continues to work in the world and to support the world after the creation. Moreover, God loves human who is made in the image of God, and leads the life of each person.

The sun, moon, and stars are proclaiming the glory of God. But they cannot think of God, and have self-awareness that they are God’s creatures. However, human can have the intellectual power to research the universe which is bigger than them. Moreover, Human has the ability to think of God, too know God, and to love God though God exceeds our thought. God made us very special beings. Then, God talks to us, extends His hands to our life, and guide us to live according God given purpose.

God is working in the world, in the human history, and He leads the life of each one. We call it “providence.” Like the world never came by chance, the happenings in our life never come by chance. The providence of God works in our life. If we know this, we never lose heart in any kinds of difficulties. The story of Joseph in Genesis teaches us the faith in the God of providence.

3. Faith

Joseph was the second youngest child of the twelve children of Jacob. He became an object of jealousy to his older brothers. And older brothers sold him into Egypt as a slave. Joseph became a manager of the royal officer’s household, but he was prisoned by a false accusation. But he finally became a prime minister of Egypt from a prisoner. And he saved Jacob and his family from the famine which attacked the Middle East at that time.

Joseph disclosed his identity to his brothers when they came to Egypt for purchasing grains. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:4-8)

Joseph didn't say to his brothers, “You sold me into Egypt, but I worked hard and became a ruler of Egypt.” Joseph said that he was sent not by brothers, but by God; he became a ruler not by his efforts, but by God's providence. Joseph thought and acted, making God as the center of his life. He talked, “God sent me.” God was always the subject of his conversation. This showed that Joseph believed the providence of God.

And, his faith believing the providence was not just temporally. It was his life long faith. When their father was dead, brothers was afraid of Joseph, saying, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” But Joseph had no thought of revenge. Joseph had already forgiven his brothers. Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place 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.” (Genesis 50:19) Joseph comforted his brothers and talked to hem very gently.

This words of Joseph are restated as a universal truth for the believers in the New Testament. It is Romans 8:28. “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” The story of Joseph is very moving story. We feel that we watch the last scene of a movie when we read these passages. We can learn a lot of things from Joseph’s perseverance and forgiving heart. But, please don’t forget that God is the God of providence who makes “all things work together for good,” and Joseph “knew” this God and “loved” Him. Joseph could bear the adversity and forgive his brothers who once tried to kill him because he knew and believed in the God of providence.

Let’s believe in the God of creation and find the meaning and purpose of our life. Let’s receive the power to live for the God given purpose by trusting the God of providence.

(Prayer)

Our Father, you made the sun, moon, stars and gave them purposes. You gave human more beautiful purpose that they are loved by You and love You. And You have already prepared various kinds of grace that we can live our life according the purpose. Give us the knowledge and faith of Your providence, and make us live our life led by Your providence. In Jesus’ name, Amen.