

The Economy of God

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I) Genesis 41

II) Introduction

A) Sermon title

- 1) I'm sure many of you looked at the sermon title, The Economy of God and thought, "Wow, this one will make for a good nap."
- 2) Listen, I know what a boring sermon is like. I've sat through thousands of them in my lifetime. And I'm sure that I've given my fair share. Do I hear an "Amen!"
- 3) But let me tell you something, just because your eyes get heavy and your body feels like it is resting in warm sand, the things we are going to talk about today are important so do your best to stay awake in spite of the deadly title.
- 4) My mother is a very wise woman. As the wife of a pastor and having observed people in church all of her life she gave me these words of wisdom when I accepted the call to become a preacher.
(a) She said, "If all the people in the world who sleep in church were laid end to end, they would be a lot more comfortable."
- 5) So, if my sermon title is already making you suppress a good yawn, then perhaps I should change it to something like this, "**The worst things God will allow to happen to you in order to get your attention!**" How's that for a splash of cold water in the face?

B) So, first let's define "Economy of God."

- 1) It is simply this, The forces that contribute to saving the world.
- 2) You may ask, "Isn't God saving the world?" Yes, absolutely, God is the one saving the world one person at a time. And as you will see, God uses many positive and negative forces in your life to
(a) get your attention,
(b) reveal the destruction of your sin,
(c) convince you to turn from your current life path and then
(d) direct you to follow Jesus.
- 3) Just as there are many, many contributing forces that go into the United States economy, like gross national product, unemployment, inflation, debt, trade, dollar value and on and on, the Economy of God, as you can imagine, is beyond our understanding. But it may help to at least identify some of the forces that God has at work in your life to save you.

c) Diagram

- 1) I'd like for you to work on a simple diagram. If you don't have a pen, don't worry. You can probably do this in your head. On the back of your bulletin is a blank page. Draw a line down the middle of the page. On the left side, title the column, "**Life Events**". Over the right column write, "**Forces**."
- 2) Now draw a horizontal line in the middle. Label the top section, "**Positive**" and the bottom section, "**Negative**."

- 3) Now make a list of the major positive events in your life and put them in the upper left hand square - the good, the fantastic, the successes. Include the events that shaped your life in a positive way because something or someone had integrity, showed foresight, willingly sacrificed.
- 4) In the lower lower left square write the negative events that impacted your life - loss, death, failure, injustice, a bad accident, a destructive sin - you name it. Obviously, these lists could be very long but I recommend that you try and limit them to just a handful.
- 5) Now in the top right square try and identify the forces that caused the positive life events to make the list in the upper left box.
- 6) For most of us, when we start to fill out the bottom left square of negative forces a big question begins to emerge. We know that these positive and negative forces all play a part in shaping our life events but the negative ones seem so often to be without purpose and meaning. No matter what we may have done to avoid them or their impact on our life negative events often leave us with a giant question...

D) WHY?

- 1) Unfortunately, too often, we don't know why because we don't understand the Economy of God. We ask God, why did these bad things have to happen to me? Why are you allowing me to suffer? Why?
- 2) The truth is, our perspective is always limited. We just can't see what God is doing in the big picture.
- 3) One of the best examples of the forces of the economy of God at work is in the story of Joseph.

(a) Please open your Bibles to Genesis 41. We only read the first half of the chapter earlier. I intentionally saved the last half for later.

E) Joseph history

- 1) Joseph's life before chapter 41 started out with great expectations. After all, he was Jacob's favorite son. True, parents are not supposed to have favorite children, especially when you have 11 older brothers. None the less, Joseph was the favorite.
- 2) The jealousy of the older brothers led to them kidnapping Joseph. He would have been killed had the opportunity not come up for him to be sold to Egyptian slave traders. He eventually became a valued servant of a powerful man named Potiphar. But after being falsely accused of raping Potiphar's wife, Joseph was thrown in prison.
- 3) While in prison a possible ticket out came when he correctly interpreted two different dreams of Pharaoh's Cup Bearer and Baker. The fulfillment of the dream ended with the Baker being put to death and the Cup Bearer going back to work for Pharaoh. Joseph pleaded with his friend the Cup Bearer to remember him before Pharaoh but the Cup Bearer quickly forgot.

(a) For another two years, Joseph sat in Potiphar's dungeon. Can you imagine, every time someone came through the door he would have thought, maybe the Cup Bearer remembered me and they're coming to take me out of here.

- 4) Life for Joseph started with lots of promise but then everything went downhill from there. Nothing that he did made things better – the favor with his father, his virtue with the lecherous wife of Potiphar, his God given ability to interpret dreams, nothing.
- 5) Maybe you have asked God the same kinds of questions Joseph might have asked.
 - (a) *Why God? Why did you allow these bad things to happen to me to squash my dreams?*
 - (b) *Why is it, if you own the cattle on a thousand hills you can't spare a few for me?*
 - (c) *Why in your great economy, am I left behind from the good opportunities to get ahead and have been forgotten by people who have the power to change my life?*
- 6) Enough time had passed that Joseph probably didn't perk up every time someone new came into the dungeon. He just went about his business.
 - (a) *Then one night Pharaoh had two dreams – nightmares really. They had to do with cows. He was so troubled by them that he called together Egypt's smartest, wisest and best trained interpreters of dreams.*
- 7) Only after these Royal magicians admitted that they were stumped did the Cup Bearer remember Joseph and his amazing ability to interpret dreams. Joseph was taken to Egypt as a teenager and was now 30. Now after 13 years of long waiting for something good to happen, all at once, Joseph was rushed from the dungeon, cleaned up and shaved.

III) God's Economy

A) God's plan

- 1) The first contributing force I want you to remember in the Economy of God is **God's perfect plan**.
- 2) We may not understand what God is doing, see the resources he has invested or like the timing he has initiated but we can be sure that the God who created the universe has a perfect plan to re-create a right relationship with you.
- 3) There may be long periods of time in your life when God is silent. You may feel like you are stuck or stranded, and everything you do does nothing to change your situation.
- 4) But God is always at work. You see, during the times when we think that God is silent and doesn't seem to be doing anything, that is when he is doing his most important work - building your character and faith – transforming you to be more like Christ.
- 5) Consider the transformation that took place in Joseph's life.
 - (a) *He started out as the best loved of all of his brothers and showed no shame in flaunting that fact in front of them. His apparent arrogance made his brothers hate him.*
 - (b) *But after sitting and waiting for years in Potiphar's dungeon, Joseph emerged as a very different man. He was respectful, wise, and content with God's plan for his life.*

B) Pharaoh's dreams (Genesis 41:15,16)

- 1) Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."
- 2) "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."
- 3) Look at that, after all that Joseph had been through, after all the waiting, Joseph did not capitalize on the opportunity for his own advantage.
 - (a) *He could have said to Pharaoh, "Yes, I can interpret your dreams but I will only do it if you promise me freedom."*
 - (b) *Instead, Joseph put the responsibility for interpreting the dreams on God and then gave God all the credit and glory.*
- 4) At first, prison for Joseph, was an awful force in God's economy but God used it powerfully for good.
- 5) How does this make you look differently at the negative events or difficulties in your life? You see, **God's plan is always perfect.**
- 6) Then Pharaoh told Joseph the two nightmares about the 7 fat cows being eaten by the 7 ugly, skinny cows and the 7 good, plump wheat being swallowed up by the 7 thin, worthless wheat.
 - (a) *²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. ²⁷ The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.*
 - (b) *"It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹ Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. ³² The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.*

C) God's economy

- 1) Throughout the Bible God's economy is seen both in abundance and scarcity – in feast and famine, in plenty and in want. God allows both to happen for his own will and purpose.
- 2) How quickly we jump to the conclusion that God's blessing is only with us in times of a plentiful harvest, when we are in good health, have good jobs and lots of options. Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't support that.
 - (a) *A Biblical understanding of the economy of God has to embrace that both the blessing of abundance and the difficulties of scarcity are both from God.*

- 3) The Prophet Job, in his most desperate time of loss proclaimed, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

D) Genesis 41:33-43

- 1) After interpreting the dreams, Joseph gave Pharaoh counsel about how to prepare for the famine by putting someone in charge of storing a fifth of every crop during the 7 good years.
- 2) Pharaoh not only thought that was a great idea, he picked Joseph to be the guy! Not only was Joseph to be the organizer of the food storage program, he was put in charge of the whole palace and all of Egypt. The only person with more authority would be Pharaoh himself.
- 3) Then Pharaoh had Joseph dressed in the finest clothes, put the royal ring on his finger and let him ride in the royal chariot. Wow, talk about a turn around.

E) Reward

- 1) The second contributing force in the economy of God is **Your complete trust**. God is trustworthy but unless we completely trust that he will do what he says he will do, we will miss out. God uses faithful people who completely trust him – young, old, rich, poor, from anyplace at anytime to accomplish his will. People who put their complete trust in God are not perfect people but like Joseph, people who trust God don't give up on him when things don't seem to go their way. People who trust God believe the truth of Romans 8:28,
 - (a) *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*
- 2) I don't think in his wildest dreams Joseph imagined such a day. One morning he was going through another predictable day in Potiphar's dungeon. A few hours later he is the second most powerful ruler in the world.
- 3) The time in the dungeon was not wasted, however. God developed in him a wise and discerning mind. Not only did he interpret the Pharaoh's dreams, he was able to analyze the situation and articulate the right strategy for Pharaoh to take.
- 4) Joseph's plan was implemented and he used his authority to collect grain in every city throughout Egypt creating huge stockpiles. There was so much grain, the Bible says it was immeasurable.

F) Economics of God

- 1) It was only after Joseph was reunited with his brothers, the same ones who kidnapped him and sold him to the Egyptian slave traders, that he made this amazing revelation about the Economy of God.
 - (a) *Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

- 2) As we read on further in Genesis, because Joseph had complete trust in God not only was he saved but so were the people of Egypt, his family and ultimately the Hebrew people. And as we see throughout the rest of scripture, we see that in the economy of God, Joseph's faithfulness points to the coming of Jesus who God sent to save the whole world.

IV) Conclusion

A) Economics of God for you

- 1) If you make a list of the events in your life, the good and the bad, the fantastic and the traumatic, your successes and failures, the impact of your faithfulness and the consequences of your sin, you will begin to see the uncountable forces that God has used and is using in your life to save you.

B) Bow your heads

- 1) Please bow your heads with me. Let me ask you, are you tired of asking the question, "Why" and not getting an answer? Why did God allow for these negative life events to happen to me? Or why are they happening to me now? Why?
- 2) If this morning, you are tired of asking, "why?" and you are ready to put your trust in God's perfect plan I want to ask you to simply raise your hand.
- 3) Raise your hand if you sense God is trying to get your attention.
- 4) Raise your hand if God is revealing that your sin is destroying you.
- 5) Raise your hand if you are convinced that you need to take a different path in life, that you need a whole new start.
- 6) Raise your hand if you are ready to follow Jesus.

C) Prayer

- 1) Heavenly Father, your plan to save us is perfect. We may have our lists of events both good and bad that have happened in our lives, the forces that all contribute to get our attention. We need you to help us to learn to trust you completely.
- 2) I pray for each person here that you would reveal to them their part in your great economy. Help them to put their trust in you no matter what forces you use to shape their lives. We pray this in the name of the savior of the world, Amen.

D) Prayer Companions

- 1) As we sing our last hymn I want to encourage you to pray with one of our prayer companions. Let them come along side you and pray for you and whatever God has laid on your heart today. Please stand.

v) Hymn: Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus

vi) Benediction Unison

- 1) **We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**
- 2) Go as beloved children of God in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.