

Can You Trust God?

William Stuntz is a Harvard law professor and a committed follower of Jesus Christ. That's remarkable in itself. That alone borders on the miraculous! But what's even more stunning than his faith in Christ as Savior, is William Stuntz's trust in Jesus for peace and joy in life.

Nine years ago Stuntz injured his back. He said, "Ever since, my lower back and the top half of my right leg have hurt. After two operations, dozens of injections, physical therapy, psychotherapy, and thousands of pain pills they still hurt. They hurt a lot."

A few months after injuring his back one of Stuntz's children was diagnosed with a life-treating disease. The child survived but his marriage didn't.

Then last February he was diagnosed with cancer in his colon and both lungs. He had two surgeries and six months of intense chemotherapy.

William Stuntz writes in Christianity Today, "Today, my back and my right leg hurt as much as they ever have, and the odds are they're going to keep hurting. Cancer will probably kill me in the next two years. I'm 50 years old."

Stuntz is a realist. He doesn't romanticize suffering. He writes, "Illness does not beget virtue. Cancer and chronic pain make me sick; they don't make me good. I am who I was, only more diseased."

That could leave us believing that William Stuntz is a man with no hope. But then he writes, "God gives surprising gifts to those living in hard times. Three gifts are especially sweet."

"He doesn't remove life's curses, He redeems them. He changes the character of suffering, giving it dignity through the sufferings of Christ. The love of God overshadows the curses. They are at once puny and powerless."

As we're finishing up the book of Genesis we're looking at the life of one of my biblical heroes, Joseph. What we've been seeing is, that God has been at work in Joseph's life as Joseph has endured some of life's curses. God has been bringing Joseph to the place where he's able to see how God does redeem our suffering.

Just that fact that God saw fit to devote over 1/5 of the book of Genesis to Joseph's life ought to tell us that he's a significant figure in God's plan.

As we finished our last study (in the middle of chapter 45) we saw that Joseph had finally revealed his identity to his 11 brothers

Zaphnath-Paaneah, prime minister of Egypt was actually Joseph, their younger brother whom they had beaten and sold into slavery 20 years before.

The brothers were startled, to say the least, and terrified that Joseph would retaliate against them now that he had the power over their lives but much to their surprise Joseph wasn't interested in retaliation. He wanted a reunion instead.

Joseph the great Old Testament picture of Jesus Christ forgave the ones who sinned against him and blessed them and provided for their needs.

Open Bible to Genesis 45 page 44

As we pick up again in Chapter 45 I would like you to see that

I. God's Purposes Are Often Far Greater Than His People Understand

Read 45:9-13

Approximately 7 years before this Pharaoh had had a dream. In that dream he first saw 7 fat cows eaten up by 7 skinny cows. Then 7 large heads of grain were devoured by 7 thin, blighted heads.

Joseph interpreted those dreams correctly. There would be 7 years of prosperity followed by 7 years of famine.

Joseph was made prime minister of Egypt and put in a position to control the agriculture. He stock piled food for the 7 years when the harvest was exceptional and now was distributing it during the 7 years of famine.

His questions about why God allowed him to be brought into Egypt and then imprisoned on false charges were finally answered when he was put in the position of control and his own family came down from Canaan to buy food.

And yet his questions weren't all answered at that point. He just thought they were.

Finally, he was with his brothers. Soon he would see his father again. He realized that God had sent him on before to preserve his brothers lives. He was there to preserve a posterity for them through providing food and protection.

But even godly Joseph didn't understand all that God was doing. All he knew was that God was saving his family from a famine.

The famine was the thing they were experiencing at the moment. The threat of starvation and death was in their face. But that was just a side issue in the plan of God. The famine was just a peripheral. It was just a means to an end. Both Joseph and his father Jacob thought about the famine but that was as far as it went.

Follow this. God was using temporary events to bring about His own purposes for Israel. The real reason for Israel going down into Egypt was a lot more than food and shelter.

It was a definite and very significant step by which a family of 70 people would be transformed into a nation. For years now God's chosen people hadn't been any more than just a handful of people. Abraham had waited years for God's promise of a son. Isaac only had two sons.

One of these was still only the father of a comparatively small number and if the promise to Abraham about having descendants as “the stars of heaven for multitude” was to be fulfilled, something very unique and definite had to take place.

Although many years had passed since God had promised the land and the seed there wasn't much evidence of either.

Added to this was the constant danger of attack from the Canaanites and the danger of corruption from Canaanite religion and culture.

To overcome all these obstacles, and at the same time to allow the family to grow into a nation, God orchestrated the trip down to Egypt.

In Egypt Joseph and his family would have safety and they'd be isolated. Chapter 43:32 says *the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.*

So in Egypt there was no chance of assimilation and no danger of destruction. There was just the opportunity to flourish and multiply and expand.

On top of all that, these plain, pastoral, simple Hebrews would come into contact with civilization, established government and the administration of law.

God had a plan and was even able to use pagan Egypt and later the racism of the Egyptians for the Hebrews to bring that plan to pass. It was Egypt where it was going to happen, or at least humanly speaking, it just wouldn't happen.

Now there's no way Jacob and Joseph couldn't have known all this. But that really didn't matter.

Deut. 29:29 says, *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us...*

In other words, what God openly promises we can claim and understand. What God doesn't choose to tell us, we just don't know. And what God doesn't choose to tell us many times is how He's going to bring His promises to pass.

See Joseph saw his immediate situation and he saw God working in that situation. Five times in 45:5-9 he gave God the credit. "God sent me here," "God made me what I am." And that was all he needed to know at that point. The key wasn't knowing, but trusting. It wasn't understanding, but faithfulness.

That's really all that God has called us to, isn't it? Faithfulness.

We see what's going on in our life. We see God's promises in the scriptures and we keep moving ahead.

The thing we need to guard against is getting all bogged down because we don't know the over-all plan of God.

A believer in Jesus Christ as Savior is commanded to *walk by faith, not by sight*. (I Corinthians 5:7)

That doesn't mean you don't look both ways before you cross the street but it does mean to live a life of trust. It means trusting God that He's going to provide for you, that He's going to give you wise direction. It means trusting God with what we can't see and what we can't understand.

His purpose is so much greater than what we see or know.

Ed Kimball was an unheard of Christian who happened to take his Sunday School class seriously. He lived in Chicago in the 1800's.

One of his students was a young man who worked in a shoe store. One day Kimball paid him a visit and talked to him about salvation in Jesus Christ while he put away shoes. The young man's name was Dwight L. Moody, who went on to become one of the greatest preachers and evangelists of all time. Thousands of people are in the kingdom today because of Moody's preaching.

J. Wilbur Chapman was a student at Lake Forest College in the late 1870s. He went to a service where Moody was preaching and after the service cornered Moody. Moody helped Chapman really understand the gospel.

Chapman went on to become one of the most powerful evangelists of his time. When he decided to return to the pastorate he turned his ministry over to a man that he had taught and used named Bill Sunday.

In 1924 Billy Sunday held an evangelistic campaign in Charlotte NC. Out of these meetings came the Charlotte Business Men's Club.

In 1932 that same group arranged for a crusade in Charlotte and brought in an Evangelist Mordai Ham.

One evening in these meetings a lanky 16 year old boy went forward to receive Christ. His name was Billy Graham. Graham became an evangelist who traveled all over the world telling people the good news of Christ. His lifetime audience, including radio and television broadcasts, topped 2.2 billion people.

Don't ever think that what you do for God is so small that it can't have any importance.

I. God's Purposes Are Often Far Greater Than His People Understand

II. God's Purposes Never Fail

Joseph sends his brothers back to Canaan to get Jacob their father.

Read verses 23 - 24

Don't become disturbed or anxious. God is in control.

Read 45:25 - 46:1

The road from Hebron to Egypt ran right through Beersheba. And here Jacob, or Israel, stops to literally "sacrifice sacrifices."

His father Isaac had sacrificed here. And God had appeared to him and said *I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake.* (Genesis 26:24)

Why does Jacob worship God by offering a sacrifice here and not back in Hebron?

Joseph's message came so Jacob got moving. Beersheba is at the southern extremity of the land of promise and at this point Jacob needed some reassurance.

God hadn't told him to go. It wasn't like a "Jacob, this is God. Pack up and go" deal.

When Abraham traveled to Egypt he got into all kinds of trouble. Isaac had been forbidden by God to go to Egypt.

The ancient prophecy that God had given to Abraham back in Genesis 15 must have been flashing through his mind. There God had said, *Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.* (Genesis 15:13)

That didn't sound like something you wanted to rush into. I think Jacob was looking for God's OK before he took such an unusual step.

Well, here it is... **Read verses 2-4**

We've seen the significance of the name change from Jacob to Israel and it is carried through consistently in these chapters.

When he doubted God in Chapter 45 he's "Jacob." When he moved out to obey God he's "Israel."

But now when he falls asleep, God has to call him Jacob again to kind of waken him to a deeper confidence. It is a shame when God has to call us by the name of our old nature. But deep inside he was still Jacob.

The old life was ingrained but God was working to take over the control. And so God gives Jacob the assurance that he's done the right thing.

In fact He says *I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there.* Egypt was the God ordained place to bring it to pass.

Now notice God's promises to Jacob. God's promises never fail.

I will make you a great nation there. I will go with you and I will bring you up again.

The little family that hadn't become a great nation in all of these years still would. God hadn't forgotten. God hadn't failed. He just does things on His own time and in His own way.

It's in Egypt that they would be increased to a multitude and would learn the discipline of servitude and would mature through suffering.

There Moses would be born and be trained in the court of Pharaoh just like Joseph had been, in order to lead the people out forever.

But Jacob and his family wouldn't be alone. God would go down with them and He'd bring them up again.

This wasn't an emergency sidestep in God's program. This wasn't God saying, "Whoops, I didn't count on this famine." This was all part of the plan.

But, as the New Testament says *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* (Hebrews 11:39)

God's promise to Jacob that he'd be brought back to the promised land only applied to Jacob after his death. He was buried by Joseph back in the promised land. Actually the real fulfillment of God's promise will be during the millennial kingdom.

God's promises never fail. The answers might be obscured because of some unpleasant circumstances or situations we're called to go through, but God keeps His word.

When William Stuntz writes about God overshadowing life's curses he writes, "When God repeatedly tells the people of Israel to remember that He brought them out of Egypt, He is saying much more than 'Get your history right.' A better paraphrase would go like this: 'Remember that I have loved you passionately. Remember that I have acted on that love. Hold tight to that memory, and act on it too.'"

When God promises believers, "I'll never leave you or forsake you," He means it. When God says, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden" you can trust Him.

When He says, "The genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold

that perishes, though it is tested by fire” and that we should “Count it all joy when we fall into various trials” it’s true.

And the exciting thing is, Jacob believed God. He claimed the promises and believed that what God said, He would do.

Without spelling out a schedule from his own vantage point, God again reaffirmed His promise He first made to Abraham.

Here’s the question: do you believe God?

Do you say “It doesn't make sense, it doesn't all fit together, my senses and my intellect tell me that it can't be true so I’m not going to believe God” or do you say “God said it, I believe it, that is good enough for me.”

I. God's Purposes Are Often Far Greater Than His People Understand

II. God’s Purposes Never Fail

III. God’s Purposes Are Infinitely Wiser Than The Wisdom Of Men

Read verses 5 - 7

Mark this down. Imprint this into your mind and life.

We’re so arrogant that we begin to think that God's love isn't wise. Circumstances happen that we find very difficult to reconcile with the love of God.

Jacob had the promise of the land of Canaan, yet he's called to go into Egypt. Not only that but his family was out of Canaan for 400 years.

Think about it. As the days and months and years and centuries went on, how difficult it must have been for the Jews to reconcile their staying in Egypt with God's assurance that Canaan was their everlasting possession.

God was supposed to be watching over them, blessing them, bringing them back again. And yet in what seems to be a total contraction to all that, the Hebrews end up as Egyptian slaves.

The next book, the book of Exodus chapter 1 says, *Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up*

out of the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. (Exodus 1:8-11)

What a deal. Here they are God's chosen people serving as slaves.

But even that situation was designed by the wisdom of God's love. The people were comfortable in Egypt. They would have never left on their own. So God made them uncomfortable.

The people began to move away from God and get caught up in the good life of Egypt so God forced them to unify around their common bond, their worship of God.

And He took away every distraction, one after another, until they cried out to Him.

He let them see they were absolutely helpless without Him, so that they would acknowledge their dependence upon Jehovah.

Now, all of that was unpleasant to say the least. If we were running the show I'm sure that we would have tried things some other way. The people must have struggled with what was going on in their lives.

But God's purposes are infinitely wiser than the wisdom of men.

The cross of Jesus Christ with the blood and the shame is totally unappealing. The story of a suffering Savior cuts across the grain of all human wisdom. We would have tried some other way to save man. Develop some system of beautiful good works to appease God.

The problem is it wouldn't work. There's no salvation without the cross. Just like there wouldn't have been an Israel without Egypt.

What looked like just a bunch of lousy circumstances or problematic trials turned out to be a manifestation of God's love.

And in the wisdom of His love which is beyond us just like the heavens are higher than the earth, God accomplished His purpose.

If there is one main theme that we can draw out of the life of Joseph and his family it's that God is at work. He's not like the road crew guys leaning on His shovel. He's constantly at work.

Sometimes He tells us what He's doing. Sometimes we don't have the slightest idea. But what's important is how we react.

When it comes down to the bottom line, there is really only two options. There's only two alternatives. We either walk in faith, or we fall to doubt. We either move ahead believing that God is faithful or we stumble and miss the tremendous blessing that God is trying to bring our way.

Remember, God has a purpose for you. He wants to use you for His glory. You may not have a lot of talents. You may not have a lot of abilities. But there is one ability that supersedes all others and that is availability.

Be available to God. Be faithful even though you can only see your immediate circumstances.

God's purpose is often much greater than His people understand. Don't quit. Don't give up.

Make yourself available to God, but do it based on His great and precious promises. They'll see you through, every time.

And finally remember, God's love is so much wiser than your wisdom. Don't judge your life or God's love by how you perceive things.

Don't look around you and become discouraged because it doesn't all seem to fit the way you think it should.

The disciples were baffled when Jesus went to the cross. His closest followers said, "Wait a minute, that wasn't supposed to happen!"

Two of them said, *Jesus of Nazareth, was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.* (Luke 24:19-21)

Guess we had the wrong guy! Even Peter said to the other disciples, "Let's go back to fishing."

Jesus Christ died on a cross because His disciples and all of us are sinners who need a substitute to stand in our place and take the punishment for our sins. It didn't matter that His followers didn't get it. They still needed a Savior.

It's not about us figuring everything out. It's about starting by trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and then living by faith.

Can you trust God?