

God Moves in Mysterious Ways

- I. We have here a lesson on divine providence.
- II. We have here a lesson on divine love.

Dear Christian friends,

We're not singing it today but there's the hymn, "GOD MOVES in a **mysterious way**, HIS WONDERS to perform." The longer we live the **more we learn** HOW TRUE that is. But that truth often leaves us SCRATCHING our heads and wondering what is **going on**.

**These verses** are a classic example of this truth. God does "MOVE IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS" and we **have here** 1)a lesson on divine providence and 2)a lesson on divine love.

**I. A lesson on divine providence.**

Divine providence. **Divine providence** is the FACT that God is watching over and taking care of us. That's a clear, basic teaching of the Bible. Paul summed it up when he wrote, "***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.***" That's what Joseph was TRYING TO TEACH his brothers here.

**"I am Joseph."** What a THUNDERBOLT that had to be for them! Here they were in the presence of the second most powerful person in all of Egypt. Joseph hadn't been on their LIST OF FAVORITE people nor **did it seem like they were** on his list of favorites. This man has been anything but nice to them. He's accused them of being SPIES and of STEALING from his house. He's held their brother Simeon as a HOSTAGE. He's threatened to make their **youngest brother Benjamin** a SLAVE. This man hasn't exactly come across as a NICE GUY. He's been mean – cold – cruel to them. And now he says, "***I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.***"

Put yourself in JOSEPH'S sandals. Before Joseph could teach his brothers about DIVINE PROVIDENCE he had to learn that truth **himself**. Remember that as a boy Joseph had had dreams of COMING GREATNESS. **Unfortunately** that – together with being DADDY'S FAVORITE – that went to Joseph's head. Joseph had to RUB IT IN to his brothers. There's no excusing their **selling Joseph** into slavery but **in a sense** he was ASKING FOR it. Joseph needed to learn some lessons on HUMILITY. He **needed to learn** that with greatness and authority COMES RESPONSIBILITY and HUMILITY. **Greatness in God's eyes** is in SERVING others not in BEING SERVED by others. DIVINE PROVIDENCE was going to teach that to Joseph.

Joseph was sold into slavery. He was bought by **Potiphar** – "***one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.***" Joseph rose through the RANKS of Potiphar's slaves. He was put in charge of **all** of Potiphar's possessions. He was still a **slave** but life wasn't TOO BAD for him.

Then came that incident with Potiphar's wife. She tried "day after day" to seduce him. **For Joseph** that was a REAL TEMPTATION. Yes, he was a believer – a believer who just like us had to STRUGGLE WITH a **sinful nature**. By the **grace of God** Joseph didn't give in to **lust** and **adultery**. His answer of "***How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?***" is one that needs to be learned well today. That answer also COST Joseph. For STICKING TO his **God-given morals** Joseph had to pay a STEEP PRICE. He was falsely accused of **attempted rape** and thrown into prison. I can easily picture Joseph sitting in prison and asking, "WHY, God? Why is this happening to me?" He STILL DIDN'T KNOW!

**Eventually** it LOOKED like Joseph might get out of prison. **With God's help** he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's **baker** and **cupbearer**. The cupbearer promised to **tell Pharaoh** about Joseph.

It would take two more years before that happened. **Two more years** of wondering why this was **all happening** to him.

God gave Pharaoh two dreams about a **seven-year famine** that was coming. **You know how Joseph** interpreted those dreams for Pharaoh. God used Joseph to **get things** READY for the **coming** famine. Now Joseph knew WHY all these things had happened to him. **Now Joseph could see** that God had BEEN IN CHARGE **all along**. This was no RAGS TO RICHES story about a guy down on his luck who MAKES IT BIG. Three times Joseph tells his brothers, **“God sent me ahead of you.”**

HOW did Joseph know that? He DIDN'T KNOW it as he went through it. He only knew by LOOKING BACK over all that had happened. Here was must be so careful. When things are GOING FINE it's easy to talk about DIVINE PROVIDENCE – how God's taking care of us. **In fact** people then often forget God and fall in love with His blessings instead. But when life turns sour – when things DON'T GO the way we want or **expect** – then people are quick to BLAME God – to QUESTION God. “WHY, God? How could You, God?”

Here's where we can HAVE A PROBLEM with **divine providence**. God sees the **whole matter** FROM BEGINNING to end. We don't. We see WHERE we **came from** and WHAT'S **going on**. But we're not exactly sure WHERE God is **leading us** or WHAT He's trying to accomplish. That CALLS FOR patience and trust – but it can be awfully frustrating and **aggravating**.

God does move “IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS.” That's why He gave us **this lesson** on DIVINE PROVIDENCE. We're not always IN CHARGE. Things happen to us that we HAVE NO CONTROL over. I can be careful to **not drive drunk** but that won't keep me from **getting hit by** a drunk driver. THOUGHTS **like that** can be very scary and upsetting. But there's NO NEED to be. DIVINE PROVIDENCE reminds us that **our God** is IN CONTROL working all things for our **eternal good** even if it is “IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS.”

This lesson on **divine providence** is SO FULL of comfort for us. But there's another lesson – JUST AS COMFORTING – on God's **mysterious ways**. That's...

## II. A lesson on divine love.

**“I am Joseph.”** It had been over 20 years since they had **sold Joseph** into slavery. They had first run into Joseph about a **year earlier** when they had come to buy some grain in Egypt. Joseph had been “MEAN” to them but there was a reason for that. **Joseph had been wrong** to BRAG about his dreams. They had been wrong **selling Joseph** into slavery and then telling their dad that Joseph **had been killed** by a wild animal. Joseph realized how wrong he had been. But did they realize their sin? One person's sin CAN'T BE USED as **excuse** for **our own** sin.

Right here we have an important lesson on DIVINE LOVE. **Divine love** deals with sinners and sin. **Divine love** doesn't overlook or make excuses for sin. Sin is TOO SERIOUS for that. Ignoring and defying God can't be SHRUGGED OFF as **no big deal**. God hates sin. UNREPENTANT sin condemns a person to hell's eternal banishment and punishment. To IGNORE or EXCUSE sin is not acting in love. It's LYING. It's actually helping a person go to hell. That's NOT showing love!

Joseph dealt with his brothers to get them to realize that. **The way** they had treated Joseph had **not only affected their relationship** WITH JOSEPH but also their relationship with their GOD. The brothers finally understood that. With their WORDS AND ACTIONS they show they have **finally repented** of their sin. They take responsibility for what they did. They're not making any excuses. They're SORRY for what they did.

**None of that**, however, could change the fact of what they HAD DONE. Now here's this man telling them, **“I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.”** Just imagine HOW GUILTY –

AWKWARD – UNCOMFORTABLE they must have felt. **More to the point, what would Joseph NOW DO to them?**

With his own WORDS AND ACTIONS Joseph assures and then reassures them some more of his **love** and **forgiveness**. He wasn't going to GET EVEN with them. He wasn't going to HOLD A GRUDGE against them. He loved them. He forgave them. The case was closed as far as he was concerned. **HOW in the world could Joseph do that?**

**Joseph himself** had learned an important lesson on love - DIVINE love. His brothers had DONE HIM WRONG. But that was nothing compared to the **wrongs** Joseph had all done to God. Just put in ONE PILE all the wrongs people have done to you. Put in ANOTHER PILE all the wrongs you have done to other people – which don't forget you've then also done AGAINST GOD. ADD to that pile all your other sins against God – **all your sinful thoughts**, words, actions. **All those times** you ignored and defied God with an “I KNOW, BUT...” or “YES, BUT...” Get the picture? IF ANYONE ever had the right to be **angry** IT'S GOD with you – **God with me**. Just think how many times God **could have** told you and me, “I've HAD IT! I'm fed up with you and your excuses. Just GET AWAY from me and leave Me alone. I don't want ANYTHING MORE to do with you. GO TO HELL for **all I care!**”

But God does “MOVE IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS” and nothing is more mysterious than His **love for us**. If you were God would YOU HAVE DONE exactly what God has **done for us?** God didn't give up on us and WALK AWAY from us in **total disgust**. God didn't give us THE HELL we had coming. He gave us Jesus instead – He gave us His own eternal Son to be our **perfect Savior**. MARVEL at this – CLING to this – Jesus lived the **absolutely perfect** life and we get all the credit for it. We've sinned but Jesus TOOK THE BLAME for the sins of the **whole world** and was punished in our place. **On the cross** Jesus endured the death and hell **we had coming** and so personally paid for all our sins in full. Jesus rose triumphant from the dead on Easter morning and He shares His victory with us – promises us eternal life in heaven the **very moment** we die. Just try and FIGURE OUT **divine love!** **In Jesus** WE HAVE God's forgiveness of all our sins – a whole new relationship with God – eternal life in heaven. WHY did God do all that for us? BECAUSE He loves us – loves us with His DIVINE love – His AMAZING GRACE. **“Be kind and compassionate to one another,”** Paul wrote, **“forgiving each other, JUST AS in Christ God forgave you.”** That's what Jesus told us to do in the gospel reading. That's what Joseph did here.

God does move “IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS.” So be it! BE GRATEFUL for His divine providence – be THANKFUL for His divine love and IMITATE it in **your relationships** with others. Amen.

HYMN #490