

Reading: Genesis 37:1-11

Theme: Joseph's Home Life and Situation

Last August Bank Holiday Monday – our family came up from Leicester to see us, spend a lot of time at the Dome and we all had lunch and then a late afternoon meal in the garden. They had seen a show advertised over the Christmas and New Year period at the Dome – Joseph and His Technicolour Dream Coat. We all booked it that day as a family outing at start of 2020. The show was great and enjoyable, but the Bible's account of Joseph and his life is an amazing one in so many ways and at different levels.

On a human level we can see a really dysfunctional family, with tensions, rivalries, hatreds, jealousy and marital problems. We see life problems hit the family, a famine smash into the ancient middle east, of how people react and panic in the face of such a fearful situation and time. We see one man kept by God, used by God, who reacts in a God-like manner to save life on a grand scale having absolute power of life and death, but even showing incredible forgiveness. Yes, the life of Joseph is going to be great to look at!

We will focus on the life of Joseph which has held generations spellbound, for it is a fascinating account. It is not just about Joseph in isolation, but it is part of the ongoing forward movement of Scripture and God's purposes being worked out. We see that it is a continuation of Jacob's life story, as it concerns Jacob's 12 sons and their activities. There are a number of themes that we can note as an overview in this last section in Genesis as God's plans and purposes are worked out:

1. Promises - by the close of Genesis there is a partial fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham. The one has grown into many and yet their possession of Canaan seems further away than ever,

but the assurance, the promise is given that God would bring Israel back to the Promised Land.

2. Preparation - for the events which are recorded in Exodus. Abraham had already been told that his descendants would be strangers in a land that was not theirs and they would eventually return to Canaan. The movement from Canaan to Egypt recalls this prophecy and we are prepared for what comes ahead. What is God preparing us for through our current confusing situation?

3. Providence - God will be seen to be in control of all events. He will not be seen directly, but hidden behind His providential activity through the twists and turns of seemingly good and evil circumstances. Contrasted to this, Exodus will show God intervening directly and most visibly. Our current time is by God's providence – He knows why and what He is doing. Do we believe that? Are we ready to trust Him as He means it for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose?

4. Pattern - a pattern that runs throughout the OT is noticed here that will reach its high-water mark at Calvary - that God's chosen ones are often rejected and persecuted through the envy and unbelief of their own people. Stephen, the first martyr, traced this in the brothers' treatment of Joseph and ended his account with their opposition to Jesus (Acts 7:9, 52). We have to realise the same pattern continues - as those of the world will persecute in some way or the other God's people.

5. Preview - this final section of Genesis gives us a broad overview of how the future history of Israel will look. Reference is made to all the sons of Jacob, but the two that stand out are Joseph and Judah. These tribes become the dominant ones in Israel. We also see that Judah is the chosen tribe who will produce

the promised "royal seed". Yet in Joseph's life we will also have a preview of the kind of royal seed we are to expect. From this Genesis account we can rightly consider Joseph to be a type, a picture of Christ.

Let's now shift our focus more directly on to Joseph, as his life is an amazing story. Yet it is not to be left as just a story – however grand it is; it is there to teach us, for us to learn from as we'll see that the principles of God's dealings with Joseph are applicable to our lives. In it we'll see of the goodness of God as He helps Joseph overcome difficult circumstances; we'll see the grace of God in Joseph's life as it helps him overcome natural feelings of anger, bitterness, resentment and revenge towards his brothers and others; as well as in resisting lust and sexual temptation; allowing him to see God was in control of his confusing life and enabling him to forgive totally and not cling to any hurt or bitterness – else he would still have been a slave and in chains to those evil emotions. So, in many ways Joseph will be, at one and the same time, a challenge, a rebuke and an enormous encouragement to us.

Within the life account of Joseph there are 5 major lessons relevant for us in our lives. We will pick up on these as we look at Joseph's life and it is good to highlight them now in order that we can use them to hang our thoughts on:

1. The Principle of Vindication.

So often we want to be vindicated - clear of any blame and we strive, reason, rationalise how we will vindicate ourselves when we have been wronged. The lesson we need to learn is the great principle that God must do it. We'll see that Joseph was wronged, but God vindicated him and yet He did so in His way and His time. It is not an easy lesson for us to learn or to remember!

2. Preparation for Service.

We are all unique and God has a unique service for us as individuals. Our lives, its events, joys, tragedies, trials, successes, our personality, development are part and parcel of God's preparation for us and for our service. It is not necessarily just in our education, learning or experiences of life. Often it is the chastening of the Lord in our lives that prepares us most. This can and does include the hurting and confusing times. Joseph learned much in his sufferings and was prepared by such things for a far greater service that he could imagine.

3. Learning to Love.

We have to realise that the human heart is so deceitful, including our own hearts! We can feel we have forgiven someone something one moment and the next day we find harsh and hard thoughts, self-pity and personal hurt arising in our in us. We need to have a perpetual preparation for service, for none of us loves as we could or should. Even when Joseph was vindicated, even as his brothers were confronted by him as the all-powerful ruler of Egypt he forgives them; Joseph still needed to continue to learn to love them; for 17 years later his father died and they feared him and his malice, but he learned to love them and could see God's hand and Providence in it and so he can say *"Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good"* (50:20 AV)

4. Seeing God's Love.

Joseph and Jacob both saw this. It is not a love that isolates and keeps from difficulty, but a love that rules and directs and works all things together for good according to His sovereign will and purposes. We don't always see God's love clearly, but it is there and if we could see it, it would leave us breathless, stunned and amazed as He works in time and history for the good of His people. Look for God's love in the present confusing situations we are going through.

5. The Outline of the Gospel.

So much in the OT is a shadow, and dim picture of what was to come in the NT. We speak of these as "*types of Christ*" and we will see Joseph was a type of Christ, a picture, a shadow and his life points us on to the Lord Jesus Christ in so many ways and illustrates and illuminates the gospel for us.

As we go through Joseph's life we will enlarge, expand and develop these lessons as they arise. But this evening, before we finish, I want us to look briefly at **Joseph's Home Life and Situation** (v3 & 4)

Esau and Jacob were twins, born to Isaac and Rebekah, grew up in same family, were each favoured by a different parent. Both twins are used in the Bible to illustrate the principle of God's sovereignty in salvation. Being a child of God is not dependent on birth, genetics or what a person does, but on God's choice and calling. It is all of God's grace and if we know His salvation, we are to be those who will praise Him for such kindness and grace given to us. We should be a thankful people and never proud of our standing as if we earned or deserved it – it is all of His undeserved grace.

Jacob was a conman – conned his brother Esau out of his birthright (*that of being the first born*); then tricked his old and blind father into giving him the blessing of the first born! It does not take much imagination to realise Esau did not like this and we read he planned to kill Jacob. Their mother found out Esau's plan and had Jacob sent away to family. He found their family and there Jacob's life became even more complicated – Jacob worked seven years to earn the right and privilege to marry Rachel and then was conned, tricked into marrying her older sister Leah (*who seemed to be the girl no one wanted*). Jacob then married Rachel and had to work another seven years for Laban.

Jacob now had 2 wives and he had children by Leah, the one he didn't love, but couldn't have children by Rachel, the one he loved! Rachel gave him her servant girl to be a surrogate mother on her behalf; his first wife Leah then did the same with her servant girl – Jacob has 4 wives and through 3 of them Jacob had 10 sons and at least one daughter, but no child with wife he truly loved. Then Rachel has a child – Joseph. They all do a family flit back to Isaac – Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin in Israel. Jacob foolishly spoils those 2 sons, especially Joseph. We can see the dysfunctional family, with all its tensions and it builds up pressure like a blocked pressure cooker - something is going to blow. Joseph is in this large dysfunctional family and there was a superabundance of the normal trials and blessings of family life.

Yet we read more of a tense family situation in v3 & 4 - there was this indulgent love and in reaction to it there was hatred, resentment within the family. Joseph was his father's favourite as the firstborn son of his favourite wife. We read Jacob loved him more than any other of his sons because he was the son of his old age - probably meaning the firstborn of Rachel in his old age, although the Hebrew could mean he was the son as an old man - that he was mature above his young years, an old head on young shoulders.

Jacob, unwisely, shows his favouritism to Joseph and gave him a special robe - coat of many colours, a rich ornamented robe and it set Joseph apart. It not only showed Jacob's favouritism, but some feel it showed that Joseph would be chosen to inherit the birthright. Reuben, the firstborn son by Leah, who, because of his misdeed (35v22) had forfeited the birthright and now Jacob may have indicated by this action that Joseph would have it and with it the possessions and authority in the family.

This caused his brothers to hate him and they could not even speak to him – speak civilly to him we assume. They in their anger and bitterness refused to speak and sent him to Coventry, or Haran wherever else was such a place in their day!

For we who are parents, we need to learn from this. We must be so careful as to be impartial in our dealings with our children. One must not be overindulged, spoiled and the others suffer. It does not do the child any long-term good. Yes, they may enjoy it, but it can cause alienation and hurt in the family and among their contemporaries.

Jacob did Joseph no favour in causing him to wear the robe. True Joseph did not need to wear it, but that would have hurt his doting father and his feelings. Joseph was, in his formative years, being given high expectations, a lifestyle, a pattern of thought that could have filled him with pride and arrogance. He needed to be prepared for God's service and this was not the way. His pride and his brothers' hatred could have caused such hardening of his heart that he would have been useless to man or God.

God's man, the future governor of Egypt, the one to preserve God's people was off to a bad start. For 17 years he had been indulged and spoiled. He wasn't a lazy lad - he did work tending the flocks, he obeyed his father (v 13). To many he was a model son, but he was not ready to serve as God wanted, he was ill-prepared for the great and unique work God had destined him for.

Jacob loved Joseph above all his sons and yet this was an indulgent love. The Bible tells us that God loves the Lord Jesus above all else in the whole of creation and eternity. Yet He was not spoiled or indulged, nor was He proud or arrogant or misused any gift given to Him. He was the Father's chief delight and yet that same God loved us, who are rebels and who hate Him. God loved us so

much that He sent His beloved Son to die to save us, that He could give us things far greater than a coat of many colours! When we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we are given a coat, the robe of Jesus' righteousness, we are given eternal life and God is with us. Do we know this in our life? If we're a believer then we should be amazed at what God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He continues to do for us - that He is with us in all that we go through. God was with Joseph in all that he went through so we read Acts 7:9b & 10a *"But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles."*

What a privilege to be cared for and loved so much by God. It's a love and care that doesn't necessarily insulate us from troubles, but in the midst of such troubles we know His grace, love, care and working. He does not have to make things easy, nor reduce the pain and hurt, but He does uphold us and strengthen us in such times. One day we will look back and see that God meant it all for good and will praise Him as we've never praised Him before, even for such permitted troubles we would have passed through. Yes, there are delightful, joyful times when even we can see that God is working, caring and loving us. Yet our short-sighted, blinkered and limited understanding does not mean that God has stopped loving, caring and working all things together from good – including in this Covid-19 pandemic. Joseph's God is our God and He can be trusted for our daily lives and for our eternal well-being no matter the circumstances we go through.