

Reading: Genesis 37:1-20

Theme: Joseph's dreams.

In the book "Band of Brothers" - an account of Easy Company of the 101st airborne division (1941-45) - we not only have an account of incredibly brave men in battles, but an account of their being bound together as a band of brothers. We read the accounts of ordinary men who go into basic parachute training as volunteers, they are trained to become an effective fighting force that will bear the brunt of many a battle. Many of these men, as they went home after their basic training, spoke of how people marvelled at not only their fitness, but their new-found confidence and abilities. Their training and preparation had affected them in their everyday lives and this continued on after the end of the war and the book traces what became of some of them.

As we saw last week, Joseph could so easily have been spoiled for any use by man or God as he was indulged by his father, was hated, despised by his brothers. Yet God had plans and purposes for Joseph and God's training and preparation was about to begin in earnest – a tough boot camp. Some of it would be heady, some of it would be very painful indeed and yet God knew what He was doing. This evening we'll look at: **Joseph's Dreams.** (v5-11)

1. Joseph's Blessings:

Joseph had been blessed by God in many ways. One way was a godly father. Perhaps he had asked his dad how he had come to hurt his hip and have such a limp. Jacob would have spoken of his wrestling contest and meeting with God at Peniel. Jacob had probably told the family and Joseph of his fleeing from Uncle Esau and his dream at Bethel, also all the adventures he had had, how God had kept him and brought him back to where they were. I suspect Joseph had been told of his great-grandfather Abraham

and his grandfather Isaac and God's dealings with them and the promises that has been made.

Joseph had a godly upbringing and this was a great privilege. It is good to remind children and young people that they have a great privilege if their parents are Christians, who bring them up teaching them of the Lord Jesus, bringing them to church, to Sunday school. Sadly, children of Christian parents can just see the things that they lack or see the things they would want to do, but cannot because their family is religious, boring, old fashioned... Yet such young people and children should be thankful to God for Christian parents and ask God to help appreciate this blessing more than they do!

Joseph had the blessing and privilege of a godly family life, as well as having a dad who was a wealthy man. We noted last week that Joseph was spoiled in some ways, but Jacob had also given Joseph work to do, so that he learned to be useful and not waste his time on useless things; Joseph was tending the flocks - he learned a profession, how to earn a living, learned how to work and maintain a standard of work and be diligent and trustworthy in his work and this would prove useful in his future – in both slavery and in authority!

Joseph, no doubt had much going for him, but God blessed Joseph in other ways too. One such way was with two specific God given dreams. God often spoke in dreams to people in time past, before scripture was complete and Joseph had dreams that made quite an impression on him and others v7 & 9.

Here God was, in a remarkable way, telling Joseph something of what his future held - not in detail, but broad brushstrokes, insights. This 17-year-old lad is given these amazing dreams, but

he still had so much to learn. We are to realise that Joseph was not perfect. He was of the same stuff as you and me. Joseph abused the blessing, the gift of these dreams that God gave him and he blabs his dreams to his brothers and also again to them and also his father. Joseph probably did it out of pride - so that his brothers would realise that he was destined to be important and therefore it was a form of self-vindication, showing off for the ornamental coat that he been given and wore.

Joseph didn't have the wisdom of common sense to use the gift God had given him. His brothers may not have been experts in interpreting dreams, but they knew enough to see what Joseph was getting at! His father did too, especially with regard to his second dream. These two special dreams of Joseph made them important and certain of fulfilment - as Joseph explained years later when he interpreted Pharaoh's 2 dreams (41:32) - that is why he shared his dreams with his brothers. Although God did not directly speak to Joseph, we have to recognise that these dreams were a revelation from God.

The gift was functioning fine; but Joseph was not! The wisdom, the gifts God had given him were as raw materials that needed to be worked on. To be fully useful Joseph needed preparation for God's service, he needed his surplus pride and arrogance chipped away, needed his life shaped by God. In the process, it would seem big chunks would come off, other times deep lines would be cut as God shaped and fashioned Joseph for His service.

As we look at Joseph, we may think he has little relevance to our lives, but what we learn from him and his life is bang up to date and relevant for us all. We need to realise our backgrounds are no handicap to God dealing with us or using us. Psychologists and sociologists may write people off due to their backgrounds, their

early influences, their personalities, the tragic happenings in their life. Yet we can be thankful that God doesn't - there is always hope with Him for you and me. Yes those scars and problems may dog our heels throughout life, but they don't stop us being loved or cared for by this great big God; it doesn't prevent Him preparing us and using us in ways that would surprise and shock us if we were to see such at this point in our lives and even shock us as we look back on our preparation for such service and usefulness.

I don't know your childhoods, or what you may have suffered physically, emotionally, mentally in childhood or as you grew older, neither do I know all the testing, trying and hurting times you have been through, or are going through. You may be an outgoing person who hasn't a care in the world; or you may feel that you have the world's cares on your shoulders. I can stand before you and say confidently that God can do great things in you, through you and do such despite all of your background. God has never had a hopeless case. He begins by giving you a new life and bringing you into a loving relationship with Himself when you trust the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. When that is done, you not only have a new life, but a new purpose and new principles for living. Yes, the old scars and memories will be there, but, by God's help, these can be overcome and may seem at times like a bad dream, but they are not going to enslave you and keep you in captivity throughout your life. In fact, God can even use such experiences to His glory and can use you to help, challenge and encourage others because you have been through and experienced such.

That said we have to realise that even as Christians events will occur in our lives that we do not want, we wish had never occurred and that really and truly hurt. We will learn from Joseph that God does work all things together for good. God is using such

experiences to chip away at our granite hard hearts, at our lives, to remove all that doesn't look like His Son the Lord Jesus; He is refining our faith, to prepare us for His service and does so in the way He chooses. It is difficult to see our trials, problems and hurts like this as we can so easily and readily grumble and bellyache to God. We should be thanking Him for His love, that He does not leave us alone, but seeks to work in, through and on us - even though we do not understand what His plans and purposes ultimately are for us in this life.

2. What about Joseph's dreams?

Perhaps the question we need to ask at this point is "*Does God speak through dreams today?*" In both OT and NT there are a number of references to people having dreams and we see God frequently made use of dreams in communicating His will to people. The most remarkable instances of this are recorded in the history of:

1. Jacob #Ge 28:12 & 31:10
2. Laban #Ge 31:24
3. Joseph #Ge 37:9-11
4. Solomon #1Ki 3:5

Other significant dreams are also recorded, such as those of:

1. Abimelech #Ge 20:3-7
2. Pharaoh's chief butler and baker #Ge 40:5
3. Pharaoh #Ge 41:1-8
4. The Midianites #Jud 7:13
5. Nebuchadnezzar #Da 2:1 4:10,18
6. The wise men from the east #Mt 2:12
7. Pilate's wife #Mt 27:19

8. To Joseph (*Mary's husband*) "*the Lord appeared in a dream,*" and gave him instructions regarding the infant Jesus #Mt 1:20 2:12, 13 and 19

9. In a vision of the night a "*man of Macedonia*" stood before Paul and said, "*Come over into Macedonia and help us*" #Ac 16:9 see also #Ac 18:9 27:23.

The Bible declares, not as any strange thing, but as a thing of course, that the influence of the Spirit of God upon the soul extends to our sleeping as well as our waking thoughts. It declares that God communicates with the spirit of man directly in dreams. The book of Job contains much talk about dreams and night visions, but their occurrences are based on natural religious notions where dreams and night visions were expected occurrences. Yet the Bible does say those dreams in Job were from God, which most times need interpretation to understand and when they come to God's people it is often when they are young in the faith or in very exceptional circumstances. These dreams were used in God's direct providence to deal with situations at that time. As we see God's most clear revelation in His Son the Lord recorded in the NT, so we are to expect that as its influence and understanding grows, so there would be a diminishing the need of revelatory dreams.

That means that we would do very well not to place any undue importance or weight on any dream that we or others have had. Dreams can be triggered by so many things in our lives - as Scrooge said in Christmas Carol when he's arguing with Marley's ghost who asked "*What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?*" "*I don't know,*" said Scrooge. "*Why do you doubt your senses?*" "*Because,*" said Scrooge, "*a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a*

crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"”

For myself, I know if I have cheese too close to bedtime, I have the weirdest dreams that are interwoven with situations I am facing. For you it may be something else that you've eaten that may trigger strange dreams.

Psychologists have shown that when people are asleep you can whisper something in their ear and their subconscious can be prompted to dream about it. People can dream about situations that they are fearing or anticipating. There are so many things that can affect our dreams. That said, there may be exceptional circumstances and times when God may prompt or direct us through a dream, but these dreams and any guidance we feel we have through them have to be tested by the standard of the word of God – it is always the word of God which is to be our rule. God will never guide us in dreams, providences, by people's advice to do that which is contrary to God's revealed will in word of God. We do not need more **revelation**, but more **clarification** and **application** of God's word to and in our lives. It is always what God's word says and not our feelings etc.

3. Back to the Bible:

We have the God who is great and can guide us. He will guide us through and in line with His word. The Bible is not a "*magic book*" and there are many areas of our lives where the specifics are not given to us - what jobs we should do, who we should marry, what colour clothes we put on today, how we sort out our computer, what political party or candidate we should vote for... Yet in the big and moral areas of life God does guide us and give us clear pathways in which we are to walk and go. The word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, but it is so much more than that. We need to read the word of God as the word of

God and not as some almanac, a mystic book to tell us everything we must do and say in every minute area of our lives.

There is so much written for us to learn of and from in the Bible for our lives in these modern days and it is profitable for us to look at the accounts of lives even from the first book of the Bible. This is because it is God's word and there are unchanging principles, examples and warnings for us to note and if needs be, things to avoid. That is why the word of God is always relevant for every generation, for that which is recorded for us in the Bible is profitable as we look at it and learn from it for our lives. So, as we read our Bibles, we should be asking God to teach us from what we read to help us apply these truths, principles, promises and warnings to our own life. Pray for me and others as we prepare to preach that we would not only tell you what God's word says, but we rightly apply it to and live it out in our own lives first of all as well as teach how it applies to all our lives to live as God's people.

God's word is a sure foundation for our lives, it's a solid rock foundation on which we, as wise people, can build our lives and we are to be those who hear God's word and so live in the way that pleases Him. We are not to build our lives on dreams, feelings, notions, impulses, but on the firm foundation of God's word. We are to sit under God's word and not be sitting in judgement on it; we are not to be sermon samplers – like some food expert or critic who visits restaurants to sample and give critiques of the place and its food, but we are to come as those who are hungry, starving to be fed and have been praying that God would fill the preacher with good things to give them and do their souls good as he tells out and proclaims the word of the living God.