

Joseph – Living the Dream: Genesis 37 1-11

Portions adapted from "God Can Make You A "Could-Be"" by Jeff Strite @ SermonCentral.Com

When a cowboy applied for an insurance policy, the agent asked, "Have you ever had any accidents?" After a moment's reflection, the applicant responded, "Nope, but a bronc did kick in two of my ribs last summer, and a couple of years ago a rattlesnake bit me on the ankle."

"Wouldn't you call those accidents?" replied the puzzled agent. "Naw," the cowboy said, "they did it on purpose!"

This story once again reminds me that **there are no accidents in the lives of God's children ...** which is a Biblical truth best exemplified by Jacob's son Joseph, whose life we will be looking into for the next three weeks. The story of Joseph's adventures takes up the whole back quarter of the Book of Genesis. In fact, there is more written about him in Genesis than about his Great Grandfather Abraham. Why?

- Perhaps because it was through Joseph that God moved forward His promise to make a nation out of Abraham; bringing Joseph's eleven brothers and families down to dwell on some of the most fertile land in Egypt where in 400 years time they could grow into the nation of Israel.
- Or because it was through Joseph that God showed His compassion for all people by saving the lives of millions of both Egyptians and in the surrounding nations who would have otherwise died from famine.
- But most importantly I think, that unlike even Abraham, Joseph's adventures best illustrate for us **that God can and does work to bring good out of ALL circumstances for those who love him and are called according to His purposes**, even in times of betrayal by one's family, enslavement, or false imprisonment (Romans 8:28).

Joseph spent the first 17 years growing up as a pampered child, the next 13 years as a slave and a falsely accused prisoner, and then beginning at the age of 30, somewhere



between 60-80 years as the defacto ruler over all of Egypt. After the death of his father and having safely brought his entire extended family down to dwell in Egypt, Joseph again assured his still fearful brothers of both God's and his own love and forgiveness, saying to them....

*'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? **Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good**, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.'* In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them (Genesis 50:19-21)

As we will come to find out, this is quite a testimony -- summarizing the many years of hardship Joseph. Why Joseph had to first undergo this period of trial before triumph only God knows But as promised God did bring good out of all his evil circumstances for this man who honored and faithfully followed after the God of his fathers.

Perhaps you are passing through the deep waters of trial and disappointment? Does everything seem to be going against you? Take heart! *What looks like just an accident when viewed through human eyes, is really God at work in us -- His blessing in disguise.* These apparent misfortunes are not accidents. The Lord allows such things for a higher purpose; a higher good. Joseph's story can teach us to patiently trust God – even in the worst of circumstances – if you know the Lord, someday you will praise Him for it all! So let's begin.

Joseph was the eleventh son born to Jacob by his four wives, but he was the first born of Rachel, Jacob's most beloved wife who would soon after die in childbirth with Jacob's twelfth and last son, Benjamin.

You would think that having grown up in a family that played favorites – Jacob's father preferring his twin brother Esau over him – that Jacob would have learned to do better with his own children.... but he hadn't. Blame it on his blinding love for Rachel, or the dysfunctional family that grew out of four wives competing for his affection, or the privileging of his last two sons -- born in his old age – over the rest, **but all of Joseph's problems with his siblings were apparently of his father Jacob's making.**

From the start, we know only four things about Joseph before his jealous brothers tossed him into that pit to be sold into slavery.

1. Joseph did know how to work. As a young teen he had been a shepherd helping his brothers out in the field.
2. Apparently he was honest and could be counted on to speak truthfully, having brought a bad report back to Jacob of how the brothers were managing his flocks. Was Joseph a "tattle-tale" or had his father directly asked him to report on his brothers – we don't know – either way this did not endear him to them.
3. Jacob then made a special cloak for Joseph – we traditionally know it as the "**coat of many colors,**" but in reality the Hebrew is too vague for us to identify what made it distinct. What we do know is that this cloak in some way it signaled a status given to Joseph over all his older brothers.
 - Was he now their overseer?
 - Was he, being Rachel's firstborn, thus singled out ahead of his ten older siblings as destined to receive the first-born's blessing? Again neither of these circumstances would have endeared him to them.
4. Then there were the two dreams: one that had all his brothers bowing down to him and a second that had the whole world bowing down to him. Dreams were taken very seriously in the ancient world. Surely the family had heard stories of

Great Grandfather Abraham's and father Jacob's guidance and blessings through their various God given dreams.



Note that it was Joseph's dreams which finally pushed his brothers into considering murder as a way of thwarting his future. *They said to one another, here comes that dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits... and we will see what will become of his dreams (37:19-20).*

Had they killed Joseph, they truly would have thwarted God's plans, but at the last minute greed triumphed over murder. So, by selling Joseph into slavery, the brothers actually put him on the path to fulfilling those future plans which God had long ago revealed to Abraham .

Some 16 years after this event these brothers will gladly join with the rest of the starving world in bowing down to Joseph the dreamer during the seven years of famine that he had both prophesied and prepared for. But that's a story for another day. Next week we will learn how, with only his dreams to assure him, Joseph the slave and falsely accused prisoner kept himself on the path by honoring God in his life no matter the circumstances.

What then should we learn from today's portion of Joseph's story?

Some years ago, comedian Milton Berle wrote a poem that went like this:

I'd rather be a **could-be** if I cannot be an **are**;
because a could-be is a maybe who is reaching for a star.
I'd rather be a **has-been** than a **might-have-been**, by far;
for a might-have-been has never been, but a **has** was once an **are**."

Did you realize that like Joseph, God also has plans for your life. He intends for you to be a "could-be." As Milton Berle said: "A could-be is a maybe who is reaching for star."

One of my favorite passages of Scripture is Ephesians 2:10 which says

For we are what [God] has made us,
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand
to be our way of life.
Eph. 2:10

God is saying that once you became a Christian you became a “could-be.” God said you COULD BE capable of doing mighty things, because God had prepared good works just for you. These were things He’d prepared for you long before you ever decided to be His child.

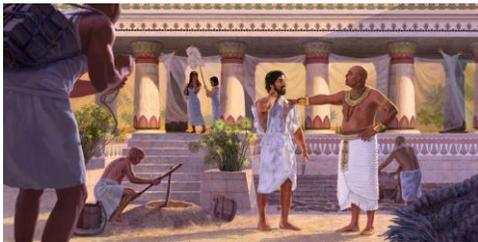
In other words – God has plans for your life. He had a dream of what you “could be.” This echoes the same promise God made to His people in Jeremiah “*I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*” (29:11).

So the first lesson you should learn from Joseph, whether great or small, GOD ALSO HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE!

God had a plan for Joseph’s life. He need not have told Joseph any of it in advance, but I am guessing that God gave Joseph a couple of dreams to help him realize – especially during his days of hardship that God planned to one day make him into a great person. Joseph had no clue what those dreams meant exactly, but I am sure that while sitting down there in that pit, it helped him to know that God had other purposes for his life.

AND THAT’S THE GOOD NEWS.

Now, for the bad news. Sometimes, in order for you and I to be useful to God, God might have to take us through a time of “training.” A time to shave off the rough edges and hone our attitudes to His purposes. Some might call this training, “*the school of hard knocks.*” The military does this to every person who signs up. Basic Training is actually designed to completely break you down as an individual so that they can remake you as a team member. Like it or not I am sure that during his years of slavery and imprisonment Joseph learned a lot more about listening for God’s direction.



And where was God while all these bad things were happening to Joseph? God was right there helping Joseph make the best out of his situations; even slavery, even imprisonment. Not once but three times, Scripture tells us that God was right there with Joseph at all times.

“The LORD was with Joseph and he became a successful man...” The LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake” (Genesis 39:2,5.)



"But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Genesis 39:21)

All that time when Joseph was in slavery/prison – God was right there with him. God's hand was guiding him. Everything that Joseph had to endure was all part of God's plan, because God was training this young boy to become a great leader. God tells us that that's what He does with us as well. Many years later, Paul would write to the Roman church *"...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that*

suffering produces endurance,
and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope,
and hope does not put us to shame
Romans 5:3-5

Does that mean that EVERY TIME we suffer, that God brought it to pass? That God has caused us to suffer? Well... sometimes. But not always. What Paul was telling us in Romans was that that WHEN we have suffered (whether God brought it in to our lives or not) God could use that suffering to shape and mold us.

a little boy visiting with his grandma. He prattled on as little boys are prone to do, telling Grandma how "everything" is going wrong in his life. Difficulties at school, family problems, bullies, etc. Meanwhile, Grandma was baking a cake. In the midst of his narration, she asked the child if he would like a snack, which of course he did.

"Here. Have some cooking oil." "Yuck," says the boy. "How about a couple of raw eggs?" "That's GROSS, Grandma." "Would you like some flour then? Or maybe baking soda?" "Grandma, those are all yucky!"

To which the Grandma replies: "Yes, I guess they are. In fact, all those things seem bad all by themselves. But when you mix them all together in the right way, they make a wonderfully delicious cake like the one I'm baking now! And you know, God works in our lives in the same way.

So, God gave Joseph an exciting dream, and then God guided Joseph through years of hardship and difficulty in fulfillment of that dream. **Do you suppose Joseph was OK with that?** That he simply sat back and took it all in stride? Oh no. those were still very painful, lonely years for Joseph as evidenced by the names he gave his two sons ...

Joseph named the firstborn **Manasseh**, 'For', he said, '**God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.**' The second he named **Ephraim**, '**For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.**' (Genesis 41:51-52.)

So, the years Joseph spent in slavery, and prison, isolated from his family and friends of his youth were not easy or pleasant in the least – **how then did Joseph handle it?**

He determined to face every situation in the same way: He determined to always be God's man no matter what he had to endure. He made himself useful to those in authority over him, and in every situation in which he found himself, Joseph was the best of man of God he could possibly be.

Which is exactly what Scripture urges us to do. The letter to Colossian Christians instructs us.... *servants, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.* (3:21-22)

*Whatever your task,
put yourselves into it,
as done for the Lord
and not for your masters,
Colossians 3:23*

Have you ever had a job where the boss was a jerk and your fellow workers were nearly impossible to get along with? How would you as a Christian deal with that? Well, if you were like Joseph you would try to be the best possible man/woman of God as you could be in that situation. You would try to obey Jesus' words to "*let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16). **How could you do that?** You would do it for the same reason that Joseph honored God in his situations as a slave and as a prisoner... because you TRUST God to bring good out of whatever situation you are currently in.

A lot of people look at this story of Joseph and think what a great bed time story it is for kids. And that's OK... but that was not why it was written. His story was written for you and me because God wanted Joseph to be a poster child for Godly men and women to follow.

In his letter to the Romans Paul writes "... **whatever was written in former days (like this story in Genesis) was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**" (15:4).

Hope is certainly what Joseph needed to bring him through his darkest days. But out of those days God shaped a wise and compassionate leader who could also initiate and follow through with plans and is so doing save not only his family but everyone else in the nations surrounding Egypt while also moving forward God's promise to build the descendants of Abraham into a mighty nation.

So if you are now going through hard times, Cheer up Yes things may even get worse, but God will be right there with you in the midst of your troubles helping you make something better out of it all.... That is the lesson and the hope that we should get from the life of Joseph today.

Let's pray about this.