

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH
Bible Studies

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THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

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INTRODUCTION

These studies are not in depth. They are simply tasters bringing out important principles in the life of Joseph.

1. JOSEPH – A YOUTH

Genesis 37.1-11

Principle – a young man set apart by God

We are studying the life of a man set apart by God, a young man chosen by God. It is good that we look at the life of Joseph bearing this principle in mind.

Joseph was chosen by God to serve Him in a particular way. As a young man he was walking with God. Joseph was a God-fearing young man who stood out when compared to the evil behaviour of his brethren.

We can either look at Joseph as a tale bearer and arrogant boaster before his father and brethren, or as a young man set apart by God who was simply living his life in an open and honest manner. While Joseph may have been a little immature in the manner in which he told his brethren and father of his dreams, it is not recorded in Scripture that he did so in a proud manner but openly, revealing the facts of the dreams.

The Bible only says positive things about Joseph. When speaking of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David – great men of God – we are told the good and the bad. With Joseph we are only told the good things about his life. In this way, among others, Joseph is a type of Christ. Joseph was not perfect like Christ; difficult things could have been revealed about Joseph's life. Nevertheless the inspired Word of God has revealed only positive things about the ongoing life of Joseph. The account we are given of him suggests to us he lived a consistently godly life. It is therefore important that we keep this principle in mind when considering the life of Joseph:

- a man set apart by God, a type of Christ

‘The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my

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ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers' Genesis 49.26.

- God was with Joseph wherever he went, wherever he was.

'The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian' Genesis 39.2.

'But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison' Genesis 39.21.

Why was Joseph special in his father's sight?

We need to go right back to the earlier years of Jacob. Jacob had fallen deeply in love with Rachel, the younger daughter of Laban. He agreed to serve seven years for Rachel, but at the end of the term Laban gave him Leah instead. But it was Rachel whom Jacob really loved, and he served another seven years for Rachel.

For many years Rachel had no children, but when Jacob was old Rachel conceived and Joseph was born. As far as Jacob was concerned, Joseph was his firstborn son because he considered Rachel to be his real wife. As Joseph grew up Jacob showed his special love to Joseph.

To demonstrate this love and his desire for Joseph, Jacob gave him a special coat. This coat was beautifully woven in many colours which covered his whole body with long sleeves for his arms. It signified that Joseph was his favourite son. The coat signified authority over his brethren, that Joseph was the leader, the prince – he was destined not to serve but to lead – and that Joseph was the heir to the birthright. The long sleeves signified Jacob's intentions for Joseph. Jacob was not intending Joseph to be involved in the physical activity of shepherding and farming. He intended that Joseph be the overseer, the manager of the family business.

Jacob may well have been protective of Joseph as well as Benjamin,

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his younger brother, because Rachel had died. Joseph and Benjamin no doubt reminded Jacob of his wife. Remember, Joseph's teenage years were without the comfort of his mother.

Why was Joseph hated by his brethren?

The Word of God tells us Joseph was hated because their father loved him more than all of his children.

'Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colours' Genesis 37.3.

Jacob showed his love and favouritism in a very open manner, placing Joseph in a very vulnerable position.

His brethren, without the grace of God in their hearts, allowed their jealousy to ferment and grow. When hatred ferments and grows its ultimate end is to destroy.

Joseph was hated also because of the two dreams that he related to his family. These dreams foretold that his brethren would bow down to him. Even his ungodly brethren were able to see the meaning of the dreams.

Joseph was an open, honest and godly young man and his testimony and position caused resentment. When a person lives a godly life then it is going to make those living ungodly lives uncomfortable. His coat, his words and his manner of living raised their hackles. The fact that Joseph was not going to join in with their ungodly behaviour no doubt made them angry. They envied Joseph and this envy fermented and grew.

Dear brethren, let us remember, if we live godly lives we will endure persecution.

'Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' 2 Timothy 3.12.

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'Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you'
1 Peter 4.12.

We are given then this testimony of a young man, separate from his brethren because of his godly life and because of his father's feelings for him. He was a prime target for sinful opposition.

See *Genesis 42.2-23*.

Conclusion

What we learn in family life as children we tend to pass on as parents. Jacob and Esau had grown up under the influence of favouritism. Isaac loved Esau because he was a hunter and he enjoyed the meat. Rebekah loved Jacob as one who stayed at home. It was this favouritism that caused Rebekah to promote Jacob in front of Isaac.

So favouritism in the family was something Jacob grew up with. Jacob was passing on something he had experienced as a boy. But Jacob failed to remember, as he promoted Joseph in the family, the bitterness favouritism caused previously. The important point here is not that Jacob had chosen Joseph but that God had chosen Joseph for a special work, while Jacob planned to promote Joseph within the limited confines of the family.

But when Joseph revealed his dreams, showing the extent of his forthcoming authority, Jacob was offended. But as we have seen he did have the wisdom to consider the matter carefully. God had an altogether greater plan for Joseph. In his last days Jacob came to realise this and submitted to it.

Practically we need to remember the vulnerable position that family favouritism places upon the recipient. We need much wisdom as parents.

Spiritually as a church we need much wisdom and grace when it is evident God is preparing someone in a very special way. So

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often jealousy can creep in on the one hand, and favouritism on the other. What are we to do when it is evident that God is working in a remarkable way in a young person? Be careful not to promote the person before God does. Beware of jealousy that develops into hatred and envy. What to do? Consider and pray!

‘And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind’ Genesis 37.11.

‘But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart...Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men’ Luke 2.19, 51-52.

2. JOSEPH – ATTACKED BY HIS BRETHREN

Genesis 37.12-36

This passage is a vivid illustration of what happens when envy grows unchecked in the mind. Joseph's brethren envied Joseph, their envy grew into hatred and hatred grew into murder. It is also a vivid illustration of the power of darkness reigning in the unregenerate heart and of the way that a young believer walking a godly life is subject to attack.

Joseph was a man separate from his brethren, set apart by God, made different by His grace.

Joseph sent

Jacob was concerned for the welfare of his sons and his flock, so Joseph was sent to check on the situation on behalf of his father. Joseph went with his coat on as a person of authority over his brethren, loved by his father. He went willingly, obediently and promptly: '*Here I am*' (verse 13).

Joseph went out from the vale of Hebron. Hebron was place of peace and quietness – the name 'Hebron' means 'fellowship'. Here Joseph dwelt in happy fellowship with his father. It was here that Abraham had built an altar to the Lord following the renewal of the promise given to him (*Genesis 13.14-18*).

From this place of fellowship Joseph is sent into the hostile environment of those who hated him. In a way this is a picture of Christ Who was sent by His Father. He willingly went from the perfect peace of His Father's presence into the hostile environment of this world.

No doubt Joseph was fearful of meeting his brethren, knowing their attitude towards him was hostile, but he remained diligent in

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his search for his brethren. Naturally speaking, when he did not find his brethren at Shechem it would have been easier for him to go back to his father and report that his brethren had moved on. But this action would not have accomplished the mission that Joseph had taken on. He was willing to go a step further in obedience! He understood his responsibility was to fulfil his command to seek out his brethren's welfare. Joseph went out on a peace mission; they received Joseph as an enemy, having no regard for his motives.

Joseph attacked

As they saw Joseph in his distinctive coat coming towards them, they conspired together in their hatred to kill him. Not only that but they were ready to deceive their father. Reuben intervened, saving Joseph's life and proposed throwing in him a pit in the wilderness.

‘And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not speak to you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us”’ Genesis 42.22.

Reuben meant well but was not really totally committed to Joseph's safety. He wandered off leaving Joseph in the pit, and while he was away Joseph was sold off to the Ishmaelites.

When we look at the action and natural feelings of Joseph's brethren we can see Reuben's care for Joseph was not matched with responsible commitment to the situation.

‘If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?’ James 2.15-16.

We can see incredible hardness in the hearts of the remaining brethren. While Joseph was down in the pit, they sat down callously to eat bread: *‘And they sat down to eat a meal’* (verse 25). Compare this with

Joseph – Attacked by His Brethren

the situation in Shushan during the exile after the decree had been sent out to annihilate the Jews:

‘The couriers went out, hastened by the king’s command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed’
Esther 3.15.

‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?’ *Jeremiah 17.9.*

Joseph trapped

Joseph had obeyed his father in seeking out his brethren and now his obedience had cost him his freedom. Joseph was trapped. The pit would have been one of the hewn out cisterns cut in the shape of a bottle. Its shape meant there was no way Joseph could climb out; Joseph was trapped.

It is important for us to realise that Joseph was not superhuman with no fear.

‘Then they said to one another, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us”’ *Genesis 42.21.*

Joseph would have been weeping in the pit, terrified, wondering if he would starve to death, still fearful of his life in the hands of his brethren who hated him. It was an impossible situation. He was unable to get out, unable to get help, but able to pray to God. I am sure Joseph would have prayed to God.

Joseph had been stripped of his coat, and had been humiliated by his brethren. So again we can see a picture of Christ in Joseph. *‘He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him’* (*John 1.11*). The robe of Jesus without a seam was stripped from Him (*John 19.23*). He was humiliated and insulted.

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There are times when it seems that Satan has got the upper hand, when it seems that circumstances are so against us and impossible, there seems no way out. *'But God...'* (*Ephesians 2.4*). This is where Satan has a problem. He can attack, he can make inroads, but he has no answer to the *'But God...'*

When we are like Joseph in the pit let us remember the *'But God'* in the situation!

Joseph sold

Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites. How Satan must have thought he had a glorious victory! Here Joseph, the great-grandson of Abraham through Isaac, the son of the freewoman, is sold to the Ishmaelites. The Ishmaelites were the family of the son Ishmael, born of the slave woman Hagar to Abraham. Again we can see a similarity in the experience of Joseph to that of Christ; both were sold for money.

Jacob deceived

Before his conversion Jacob was a deceiver. Now Jacob suffered deeply under deception. We live in a world of deception, cover up and lies. Joseph's brethren united together in deceiving their father into believing Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Remember Joseph's brethren had to put on a show of mourning for many days. Each day they put up a front of deception, and each day they added sin upon sin. Each day they allowed their father to weep rather than tell him the truth.

We see again here the incredible hardness brought about by hatred and envy. Deception weaves a very tangled web which can only be unravelled by the grace of God.

3. JOSEPH - TEMPTED YET TRIUMPHANT

Genesis 39

As we continue our study into the life of Joseph the man of God, we find him in the house of Potiphar who had purchased him as a slave from the Ishamaelites.

Potiphar did not know at first the extent of the value of his purchase. However, it soon became apparent there was something different about Joseph. Whatever Potiphar gave Joseph to do prospered. A Christian employee should be the best employee! Whether it was a problem to resolve, an action to be taken, a decision to be made, a particular responsibility to be carried out, when Joseph was in charge it prospered and turned out well.

The secret behind Joseph's success was the sovereign will and purpose of the Lord. *'The Lord was with Joseph'* (verse 2). Finally Joseph was promoted to be manager of all Potiphar's house and belongings.

Now at the age of around twenty-six years Joseph may have felt his dreams in some way were well on their way to fulfilment. But we can learn first of all that our greatest tests are not only when we are in trouble, but in a time of prosperity. It is at these times we can easily be lifted up with pride or caught off our guard. We may be feeling confident of the present and the future. It was at a time of great prosperity that Satan made his attack upon Joseph. Let us pray that we may be truly kept by the power of God whatever our situation in life.

Joseph tempted

Joseph was evidently a handsome young man, who at that time remained single. So it was on this point that Satan made his attack.

Potiphar's wife lusted after Joseph. Her attack started with her eyes.

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She looked upon Joseph, she desired to have Joseph for herself, without restraint or resistance, and she allowed her selfish desires to grow.

Joseph would no doubt have been aware of the way Potiphar's wife was looking at him. If this lady had any real concern for Joseph she would have left him alone. She must have known what the final outcome of such a relationship would be. After she had finished with Joseph he would be put to death having violated the trust of his master. In this we can be reminded of the way that Satan has no regard for the real wellbeing of those being tempted.

We can notice here how the temptation started – the danger of losing the control of our eyes. It is said that a look can speak a thousand words. We need to be careful how we use our eyes. Job said:

'I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?' Job 31.1.

So in this day and age the same discipline applies. We must be careful how we look and what we watch!

Note here this was a woman looking and lusting after a man. We normally view it the opposite way round. Remember the words of Jesus.

'You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart' Matthew 5.27-28.

The looks then became words and she expressed the desires of her heart; *'Lie with me'* (verse 7). Now this same temptation came to Joseph day by day. It was like having a married lady in the office who sees a handsome young Christian man. She knows he is single and desirable physically, and is determined to fulfil her own desire with that young man. Day by day the temptation came; day by day Satan tried to wear down the resistance of Joseph.

Joseph – Tempted Yet Triumphant

Finally Potiphar's wife grabbed what seemed a golden opportunity to force Joseph's hand. The timing was convenient, her husband was away and the menservants were out of the house. Now was the great opportunity for them both. Beware of circumstances! Satan not only tempts us with looks, whether it be you who is the one looking or whether you are the one being looked at. Satan can also tempt us with words and arrange the circumstances to fit the temptation. He can arrange that the two people find themselves alone together. It may just happen and suddenly, like Joseph, you find yourselves in a very vulnerable situation. Beware then not only of the looks and the words, but also the circumstances.

Then we need to remember when Satan is using a person to tempt, that same person can change totally when rejected. This type of temptation has a nasty sting in its tail. When Potiphar's wife failed in her attempt to lure Joseph, supposed love turned into vehement hatred, lies and racism. Now she portrayed Joseph as a person who had attempted to rape her, and had run off in fright after she had screamed. He was now just a slave again in her eyes, and a Hebrew slave at that. He was also now her husband's slave and his responsibility.

As Jesus our Lord and Master was falsely accused, so Joseph centuries before had to walk this pathway. As Joseph was unjustly treated, his experience was just a foretaste of the terrible way in which the Son of God was misunderstood, rejected and reviled.

Joseph triumphant

Joseph was triumphant in his resistance and rejection of the temptation with words of wisdom and understanding.

‘But he refused and said to his master's wife, “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because

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you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Genesis 39.8-9.

‘Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge’ Psalm 51.4.

He resisted with discipline of body and mind, with determined and definite action, and with submission to the unjust outcome.

‘...who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously’ 1 Peter 2.23.

Conclusion

The key to Joseph’s strength lay not in the circumstances but in his relationship with God. The Lord was with Joseph. Here is the secret of the triumph of God’s people. God can use them anywhere and everywhere. He can bless them and use them in prosperity and persecution. Whatever our station in life, God can use us for His glory.

Temptation has come in the past, is present now and will come continually in the future, but we can resist and reject as we attend first to our personal relationship with God.

Now when Joseph was torn away from his father he proved that he was indeed a godly young man who understood the need to resist temptation. He understood that his best pathway and strength lay in his relationship first and foremost with God.

4. JOSEPH – FAITHFUL WHEREVER, WHATEVER

Genesis 40

We read in the last verse of the previous chapter, ‘*Whatever [Joseph] did, the Lord made it prosper*’ (Genesis 39.23). But was not Joseph in prison? Had he not lost his freedom? Had he not lost his material prosperity?

Prosperity in God’s sight is not measured simply in terms of material gain, and physical freedom; it is a mistake to measure God’s favour to us simply in these terms. This prosperity was not measured simply in terms of material gain but in terms of faithfulness, trustworthiness, authority and responsibility.

The secret of Joseph’s prosperity in God’s sight is found in *Genesis 39.21, 23*:

‘But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison...The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.’

God was able to use and prosper Joseph in the restricted situation of the prison because Joseph was faithful to God wherever, whatever. Joseph had already lived as a man of God in the luxury of Potiphar’s house. Now Joseph still lived as a man of God in the restricted confines of the prison. Joseph was faithful in a posh place and in a rough place.

Vance Havner said: ‘A man who thinks he is too big for a little place, is too little for a big place.’

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God could promote Joseph wherever, whatever because he understood his responsibility was to be faithful.

C H Spurgeon said: 'Our responsibility is to be faithful, consequences of that faithfulness are God's responsibility.'

Joseph could smile in prison and out of prison.

Joseph faithful wherever, whatever

'And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while' Genesis 40.2-4.

Joseph was confined in the prison attached to the house of the captain of the guard. One day two very important men were thrown into the prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard entrusted them to the care of Joseph. He was to care for them and to serve them. Their security and their well-being were Joseph's responsibility.

These prisoners were high profile; they had held extremely important positions. They had been ultimately responsible for the quality and service of the wine and food in the king's house. The butler, in the culture of the day, had the king's ear. He knew everything there was to know going on behind the scenes, such was the butler's role. The baker had also great responsibility. Historians tell us that at any one time there could be in the king's storehouse above one hundred thousand loaves.

Both the butler and the baker were responsible to ensure the wine and food were not poisoned. Both were to ensure the wine and food were of the best quality. Tradition has it that the king had a bout of

Joseph – Faithful Wherever, Whatever

sickness and blamed his butler and baker for trying to kill him. So these two men were thrown into prison and entrusted to Joseph's care.

One night they both had dreams, and they were deeply burdened. The dreams had a dramatic effect upon them. Joseph's attitude is clearly seen here in that he was concerned for their welfare (verses 5-6). He saw the sadness on their faces and asked the reason.

The character of Joseph's faithfulness is seen in his concern for those under his care. He was not totally taken up with his own concerns; he was concerned for the welfare of others. Joseph saw the sadness on their faces and asked the reason.

If anyone had reason to be sad Joseph did. No one asked Joseph how he felt, nobody enquired as to his welfare, yet Joseph was still concerned for others. In this way Joseph showed his faithfulness in his care.

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn said that while held captive in the Russian prisons upholding his rights as a writer, the only people in prison who had any peace and inner freedom were believers. Do we take the trouble to see how someone is looking?

So these two men had a dream and they wanted the dream interpreted.

The next characteristic of Joseph's faithfulness is seen in his reply: *'Do not interpretations belong to God?'* verse 8.

Here is a remarkable statement of faith coming from a man whose own dream was not yet fulfilled by God. In fact, it seemed to have taken a reversal and circumstances made its fulfilment unlikely by human standards. Here he was in prison, everything seemed against the fulfilment of the promise, yet Joseph still says the interpretation belongs to God.

Here we can learn another lesson from Joseph. Even when we do not understand, faith says interpretation and fulfilment belongs to God.

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Here Joseph interpreted the dreams with the enabling of the Holy Spirit of God. Faithful revelation brought hope to one man and doom to another. (See verses 12-14 and 18-19).

Joseph was a messenger of hope and judgment. In this we can see a picture of Christ on the cross. On one side was a person who received mercy and on the other one who received judgment.

After Joseph interpreted the butler's dream he took the opportunity to ask him to speak for him before the king. He showed by this statement his great desire to get out of that place. He pleaded with the butler to speak for him, for he had done nothing to deserve such punishment (verse 15).

Here we see Joseph looking to man for help and subsequently he had to experience the hurt of being forgotten. His very human desire to get out of prison was made to be subservient to God's timing. There was still more preparation work in the trial to be done before Joseph could lead.

For two more years Joseph suffered the pain of being forgotten, each day wondering whether he would be remembered by the butler.

'Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him'
Genesis 40.23.

Joseph had to endure the pain of being forsaken – forgotten by man. How often we have to learn the reality that while man changes, only God is unchangeable. Only God's promises remain sure.

During that period of time before his deliverance Joseph remained faithful in the dungeon. Amidst the tears, amidst the hurt of rejection, amidst the sorrow of dashed hope, Joseph remained faithful. He did not wait for some occasion to become great, but made each occasion great in its purpose. Joseph was faithful wherever, whatever.

5. JOSEPH – EXALTED BY GOD

Genesis 41.1-36

The life of Joseph reminds us in an emphatic way that God certainly has all things under His divine control. Joseph, naturally speaking, must have felt forgotten in the prison after the butler had failed to remember him. But here again we see the marvellous timing of God; his deliverance was for an appointed time.

‘He sent a man before them—Joseph—who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him. The king sent and released him, the ruler of the people let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, to bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom’
Psalm 105.17-22.

If Joseph had been delivered before he would have not risen to become the leader of Egypt. Here we bow before the sovereign timing of God Who is working all things together for the good of His people (*Romans 8.28*). So now we come to an amazing example of a person living under the divine care of God lifted from a dungeon to a palace, from social depravity to social dignity!

The future life of Joseph in God’s hands – Pharaoh the king under the divine influence of God

Two years had now passed since Joseph interpreted the dream in the prison. During those two long years Joseph had to learn to wait upon the Lord; to realise that relying on a man to be true to his word can prove painful; and to serve the Lord in prison.

Joseph teaches how important it is to do what God has planned for us at the present properly as unto the Lord. Joseph no doubt

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continued to serve the Lord in the prison. He had to wait upon the Lord alone for deliverance. Deliverance came in a manner totally unplanned by man, totally free from any manipulation or further action on Joseph's part.

God, without the help of man, caused the king to dream two dreams. For all his pride man remains powerless to stop a dream that God causes according to His sovereign purpose. The king, for all his evil power and idolatrous worship, was not beyond the divine influence of God. Pharaoh, like Nebuchadnezzar hundreds of years later, was subject to the divine influence of God upon the mind. Man could not give or stop these dreams; Satan could not give or stop these dreams. God works and no one can stop Him.

Let us take encouragement from this fact. Even now God can influence our leaders in such a way which brings them to acknowledge God.

But let us now consider some of the lessons that Joseph learned in prison.

1. God was with him wherever, whatever.
2. God was able to use him and work through him wherever, whatever.
3. God's ways are not our ways but God's ways are the best.
4. God's timing is absolutely perfect.
5. God prepared Joseph on the right foundation to give him the right stability.

A helpful illustration is of an architect who was called to an office block to investigate some cracks on the fifth floor. When he arrived at reception he met the site manager and asked to go straightaway to inspect the foundations. This was where the seat of the problem was to be found.

Here in the prison God was preparing Joseph to ensure that the

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foundation of his faith was truly strengthened. This is God’s mysterious way of working.

The testimony of Joseph – giving honour to God

In two ways Joseph brought honour to God when called out of the prison.

1. He understood the place of etiquette and respect for the king. In that day it was only socially acceptable to be clean shaven. When Joseph was in the prison he looked just like another prisoner. He was unshaven and wearing the prison garments just like another prisoner. Joseph identified with his situation in prison. But now a totally different situation had come to pass. Joseph was taken out of prison to stand before Pharaoh. Now Joseph understood etiquette and respect for leaders. He was taken quickly out of prison, but he did not rush into the king’s presence without preparation.
2. As Joseph stands before Pharaoh the most powerful man in the world, he acknowledges his God! He said, *‘It is not in me’* (verse 16). We see the same principle in the life of Daniel.

‘But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these...’ Daniel 2.28.

‘Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honour”’ Daniel 5.17-18.

In his day the Reformer John Knox stood resolute and firm for God’s honour. Mary Queen of Scots considered him to be the most

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dangerous man in Europe as a praying, godly, protestant preacher. She feared his prayers more than an army of ten thousand men!

The wisdom of Joseph – having the practical answer

Joseph was accused by his brethren years before of being a dreamer, someone with his head in the clouds. However we will see here a man prepared by God, matured spiritually and practically. But here we are also shown a man of God, having revealed a dream of another man, having his own dream come to fruition.

Joseph under God not only understood the dream; he had the answer to its revelation. Here is another way in which we bring honour and glory to God. Joseph was a man of God spiritually and practically. The two were woven together, serving each other in a way which brought honour and glory to God.

Joseph was absolutely certain that God would fulfil this revelation, and steps must be taken to respond to it. In this way he showed faith and wisdom, and respect to God.

In this example we can also see that God not only works through His spiritual ministers, but through his providential ministers. Joseph was not a preacher but he was a man in whom Pharaoh recognised the Spirit of God working!

Conclusion

Once again we can see in the life of Joseph pictures of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

1. As Joseph was exalted from the dungeon of death to the throne of the king, so Jesus was exalted from His humiliation here on earth to the glory of Heaven.
2. Joseph was given a new name – Zaphnath Paaneah – meaning the saviour of the world.
3. Joseph was thirty years of age when he stood before Pharaoh

Joseph – Exalted by God

and his great work began. So Jesus was thirty years of age when His public ministry began.

4. It was to Joseph that the people came for bread.

‘So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.”’ Genesis 41.55.

6. JOSEPH – THE RULER APPOINTED BY GOD

Genesis 42

A ruler appointed by God

‘Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth’ Genesis 42.6.

In this chapter we have the fulfilment of the dream originally given to Joseph by God. The providence of God was perfectly working together, so now Joseph stood before his brethren as their ruler. God’s promise had come to fruition.

In one simple statement of fact God’s sovereign pleasure is accomplished. Sometimes God’s promises are fulfilled and yet we do not recognise them as such. This is because the way God has brought them to fruition has not been as we expected. The answer is before us: it just remains for us to see the answer.

However in this case, despite the pathway to its fulfilment being totally different from what Joseph had imagined, the fulfilment was before his eyes. As he recognised his brothers so he recognised the fulfilment of the dream.

A wise ruler under God

‘Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, “Where do you come from?” And they said, “From the land of Canaan to buy food”’ Genesis 42.7.

Joseph as a ruler did not jump in as his brethren knelt before him, with a triumphant ‘told-you-so’ attitude. He took this opportunity to make his brethren face up to their past sin. Although he was rough in

The Life of Joseph

his first attitude to them, his purpose was to save and unite. It would have been much easier for Joseph to have revealed himself at the first, but in his wisdom Joseph understood this opportunity of testing his brethren.

In a way the treatment of Joseph of his brethren symbolises the way that God brings about conviction of sin. God wounds before He heals, God brings down before He lifts up. Before long they will know the comfort and love of the ruler, but first of all they must face up to their wrongdoing. The way Joseph handled his brethren was not getting his own back. Joseph was actually, under God, bringing about the true restoration of his brethren.

A godly ruler

‘Then Joseph said to them the third day, “Do this and live, for I fear God”’ Genesis 42.18.

Joseph also testified to his brethren. This in itself was something remarkable for a ruler in Egypt.

A ruler with compassion

‘And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes’ Genesis 42.24.

This is a ‘cruel-to-be-kind’ example. The brothers needed some firm treatment to bring them to their true position. Joseph was not being vindictive; this is proved by verse 24. The real heart of Joseph in this situation is seen in this verse.

A generous ruler

‘Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man’s money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them’ Genesis 42.25.

Joseph – The Ruler Appointed by God

Notice how Joseph puts the money back in the sacks. In this we can see a picture of God's free grace. Why should they have free corn? How was it their money had not been taken as payment? The whole situation was something the brethren had not come across before. The product of greatest value at that time in a starving world was corn, yet they had received a generous amount of corn free of charge.

The second thing that filled them with awe and wonder was that they were Hebrews. Hebrews were despised by the Egyptians, and yet the Egyptian ruler had shown such generosity. This reminds us of God's free and sovereign grace.

The brethren – the pathway to restoration

Helpless

'When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?"' Genesis 42.1.

The chapter commences with the elderly father Jacob taking control of the situation. As the brethren wring their hands together helplessly and bemoan their situation, Jacob tells them to get up and do those practical things which are needful to save their lives. They must go to the country where food is available.

So we are reminded in a spiritual way our need can only be met by going to the provider of spiritual food. *'Go to Joseph'* (Genesis 41.55).

Defensive

'We are all one man's sons; we are honest men; your servants are not spies' Genesis 42.11.

When Joseph accused them of being spies, their first reaction is to cry with united voice, 'We are true men!' Yet their answer was not exactly truthful – one is no more! I wonder what would have happened if they had told Joseph the whole truth and not part of the truth?

Notice *Genesis 44.16*:

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‘Then Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord’s slaves, both we and he also with whom the cup was found.”’

So often we react in the same way as the brothers. We defend our reputation, we maintain our innocence. We react boldly in self-defence especially among people who we think do not really know us!

Convicted

‘Then they said to one another, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us”’ Genesis 42.21.

The treatment of Joseph to his brethren for their good was beginning to have its effect. They began to face up to the past, they realised their guilt. Joseph stood before them as a man who worshipped and feared God. When the Lord was mentioned before the brothers it had the effect of bringing home to them their guilt.

When it is man defending himself before man it is one matter, but it is a totally different matter when the fear of God comes into the situation.

Fearful

‘So he said to his brothers, “My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!” Then their hearts failed them and they were afraid, saying to one another, “What is this that God has done to us?”’ Genesis 42.28.

God’s providence astounded the brothers; they were in a state of shock. They had gone down to Canaan simply to buy corn. Their lives and their consciences had been turned upside down. Now they were in receipt of something for nothing! ‘Whatever has God done to us?’

Joseph – The Ruler Appointed by God

This question is one of the most common we ask when providence surprises us for better or worse. If we ask this question that we might learn from God it can be healthy, but if we ask the question by way of angry accusation it becomes an unhealthy drain upon our attitude.

It is not God Who is on trial – it is our reaction which is on trial!

Jacob – when providence overwhelms us

‘And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me”’ Genesis 42.36.

We can look on with the benefit of having the whole picture and knowing the end of this matter. But Jacob cried out, *‘All these things are against me!’* Actually all things in God’s hands were working together for good, yet to Jacob everything seemed against him. This was the cry of a grief-stricken, frightened and fearful man, but it was not a cry of faith. Jacob had still more to learn about the marvellous ways of God. When Jacob came towards the end of his life he had more fully understood how God was working for good.

‘And Israel said to Joseph, “I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!”’ Genesis 48.11.

‘And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth”’ Genesis 48.15-16.

7. JOSEPH – ZAPHNATH- PAANEAH: SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD

Genesis 43

These verses reveal the challenge that faced Joseph's brethren and father in returning to him in Egypt.

The first point I would like to make is that they had no alternative but to go back to Joseph; their providential need required it. God so hedged up their way that there was no alternative but to go back to Egypt. It was all part of God's plan and purpose that it be so.

The brethren had been brought to their knees before Joseph. More importantly, they had been brought on their knees before God spiritually. We need to remind ourselves that Joseph was not playing games with his brethren – he was not 'getting his own back'. Joseph was simply using the situation to bring about the proper restoration of his brethren. So the brethren had no alternative in providence but to return to Joseph to obtain some more grain. Only Joseph, Zaphnath-Paaneah, could answer their providential need.

God did and still does use providential circumstances to teach spiritual lessons. Joseph is a picture of Christ – the Saviour of the world. 'Go to Joseph' – Go to Christ!

I would like us to consider some of the lessons we can learn from this family in the challenge they were facing.

Reuben – a rash promise

"Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you" Genesis 42.37.

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The promise Reuben gave to Jacob only served to harden Jacob's resolve to keep Benjamin. Why was this? Jacob knew this promise was rash. Killing two more people as a sacrifice for Benjamin in such a manner did nothing to comfort and assure Jacob. Reuben had been the one to plead for the life of Joseph at the very beginning, but now, in desperation and frustration with his father, he makes this rash promise which affected other people.

The second problem with Reuben's promise was the pride in which he made it. We can learn from Reuben's testimony the danger of making rash promises, the danger of making promises which affect other people, and the danger of pride creeping in to our promises. This type of promise does not assure: it just pushes the person we are trying to help further into their shell because it does not speak to the heart.

Judah – a real promise

'Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever'
Genesis 43.8-9.

The promise Judah gave to Jacob was a real promise from the heart which served to touch the heart of Jacob. First Judah united the family together in his promise. Judah spoke about saving, not slaying, the little ones. Secondly, Judah willingly offered himself as the surety; he did not offer other people but himself. He would take the guilt upon his shoulders if anything happened to Benjamin.

As Judah stood before Jacob his promise touched his heart. We can learn from this promise how it needs to come from the heart. We need to take personal responsibility for the promises which we make.

Jacob – a rash statement

'But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother

Joseph – Zaphnath-Paaneah: Saviour of the World

is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave” Genesis 42.38.

Jacob spoke as all things being against him, but actually God was working all things for him. We can learn from this the danger of speaking out rashly against God. Jacob would have known that his outburst in despondency was ultimately directed at God.

Jacob – real faith

“Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man. And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!” Genesis 43.13-14.

This statement by Jacob demonstrates for us the character of faith. It is a focused faith, and a submissive faith. The answer to Jacob's fear was to bring God into the situation by faith. He focused on and took comfort in God's power, God's mercy and God's sovereignty.

The brethren – irrational fear

“Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, “It is because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and seize us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys” Genesis 43.18.

When we are caught up in the grip of fear, we fail to recognise God's hand. We often mistake God's kindness in providence as having some other meaning. Fear can become irrational in its view of providence, and can make us terribly self-centred.

Notice here the statement regarding Joseph seizing the donkeys. Joseph was second only to Pharaoh a wealthy man in his own right. Would Joseph be really interested in their donkeys? Why should Joseph take customers as slaves?

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Secondly, fear is often deaf to truth. Notice verse 23:

‘But he said, “Peace be with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.’

The steward knew exactly what to say to the brethren. He spoke kindly to them and assured them, and spoke of God giving them treasure in their sacks. The steward had to remind them that their God had the situation under control. The money returned in the sacks was to be considered as a gift from God!

Note here how Joseph’s testimony must have had an impact upon the steward.

The brethren – learning how to receive

‘Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin’s serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him’ Genesis 43.34.

The brethren were in a new world. They had been used to buying and getting. Here they were receiving something for nothing.

This reminds us of one of the great lessons of salvation, learning to receive something for nothing, learning that we cannot buy and we cannot earn our salvation, but simply receive it by faith as God’s free gift. There is no hidden agenda.

The brethren – amazed by Joseph’s actions

The brethren were amazed at the knowledge of the ruler who knew exactly how to place them in order. Joseph obviously knew about the brethren because he was their brother.

Joseph can be viewed here again as a picture of Christ Who knows all about His children. *Psalm 139* describes His knowledge. Have you ever been amazed by the thought that Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves?

8. TRUE CONFESSION AND COMPASSION

Genesis 44

At this stage in our study of the life of Joseph we see another great step in the brothers' restoration in their relationship with God and with Joseph.

True confession

Joseph's purpose and objective for his brethren was to test them, to bring them onto their knees before God. As far as the brethren were concerned Joseph, up until this point, remained an Egyptian leader who had shown both severity and kindness to them.

It appears that at this point (verse 5) that Joseph had aligned himself with the pagan practice of divination – the pagan equivalent of prophecy (see verse 15). Calvin comments helpfully on this:

'This clause is variously expounded. For some take it as if Joseph pretended that he consulted soothsayers in order to find out the thief. Others translate it, "by which he has tried you, or searched you out;" others, that the stolen cup had given Joseph an unfavorable omen. The genuine sense seems to me to be this: that he had used the cup for divinations and for magical arts; which, however, we have said, he feigned, for the sake of aggravating the charge brought against them. But the question arises, how does Joseph allow himself to resort to such an expedient? For besides that it was sinful for him to profess augury; he vainly and unworthily transfers to imaginary deities the honour due only to divine grace. On a former occasion, he had declared that he was unable to interpret dreams, except so far as God should suggest the truth to him; now he obscures this

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entire ascription of praise to divine grace; and what is worse, by boasting that he is a magician rather than proclaiming himself a prophet of God, he impiously profanes the gift of the Holy Spirit. Doubtless, in this dissimulation, it is not to be denied, that he sinned grievously.

Whence we gather, that when anyone swerves from the right line, he is prone to fall into various sins. Wherefore, being warned by this example, let us learn to allow ourselves in nothing except what we know is approved by God.' (Calvin's Commentaries)

Joseph before Pharaoh acknowledged that it was not in him to foretell the future but in God, so we know where Joseph's heart really lay. As to whether Joseph was right to speak in this manner regarding divination is very questionable. Remember Joseph was a gracious man but not a perfect man.

True compassion

Now Joseph had commanded that his steward put each man's money back in his sack, and his personal drinking cup in the sack of the youngest, together with his money. Early in the morning they set off, only to be overtaken by the steward and accused of stealing Joseph's cup. So confident were they of their innocence they staked their lives upon it!

When the cup was found in Benjamin's sack they were filled with sorrow and returned to Joseph as broken men. Finally the brethren acknowledged the unseen hand of God working through the circumstances so that they understood that their sin was before God.

'Then Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and he also with whom the cup was found"' Genesis 44.16.

True Confession and Compassion

There was no more self-justification or self-defence as before:

‘We are all one man’s sons; we are honest men; your servants are not spies’ Genesis 42.11.

Our sin is not hidden from God; we have no way to clear ourselves. God has different ways in which He brings us to our knees. It may be through loss, through bereavement, through sickness or as here through famine. Here and now the brethren were facing a crisis of conscience. If they hardened their hearts they could say to Joseph, ‘Keep Benjamin; we will go back to father with just food.’ Or they could, with changed hearts, intercede on behalf of Benjamin and their father. Joseph wanted to see if they would react selfishly or selflessly; they were being tested without realising it.

Finally, through this long road to restoration, the brothers demonstrated that their hearts had been changed. Hardness had been removed and replaced by confession as they realised the hand of God in the situation. Circumstances can serve either to harden or to soften our hearts.

In this chapter we have before us the character of true confession. ‘How shall we speak? How shall we clear ourselves? God sees us as we are.’

Judah’s speech of intercession is one of the most beautiful statements in all Scripture. It abounds with love and sympathy for his father and younger brother. Gone is the Judah who was prepared to stand before his father and deceive him years ago about Joseph. Now Judah could not bear the thought of seeing his father suffer:

‘For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?’ Genesis 44.34.

He acknowledged Joseph’s authority:

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‘Then Judah came near to him and said: “O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord’s hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you are even like Pharaoh”’ Genesis 44.18.

He appealed to Joseph’s heart:

‘My lord asked his servants, saying, “Have you a father or a brother?”’ Genesis 44.19.

He testified how his father loved the son of his old age. He reminded Joseph of how he had commanded them to bring Benjamin to Egypt and told of the heartache this had caused their father. He told Joseph that if they went back to Canaan without Benjamin then they would be responsible for bringing down their father with sorrow to the grave.

Judah testified to Joseph that he had agreed to become a surety for the lad and would bear the blame forever. He pleaded with Joseph that he may take the place of Benjamin as a slave.

True compassion understands the needs of others. It speaks on behalf of others and is sacrificial. True compassion gives the ability to imagine yourself in the sufferer’s shoes, to see life from their point of view. True compassion is mercy with action.

Here Judah, as a type of Christ, stood forward in place of his younger brother. So Christ has taken our place and ever is interceding for us, taking our place before God the Father.

Conclusion

Christ our High Priest perfectly intercedes for us.

‘But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren’ Luke 22.32.

‘For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless,

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undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens' Hebrews 7.26.

We can see here how Joseph does not reveal himself fully until the work of conviction is truly accomplished. Notice though the heart of Joseph during this convicting work!

'Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep. And he went into his chamber and wept there' Genesis 43.30.

Also notice how Judah made confession and cast himself on the mercy of Joseph.

9. JOSEPH MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO HIS BROTHERS

Genesis 45

Finally, in the providence of God working through the leadership and actions of Joseph, the brethren had a different attitude. Their hardness was replaced with compassion and care evidenced in their concerned attitude for their youngest brother and aged father. Their self-defence and self-righteousness were replaced with confession, humility and repentance. Now in all the mysterious ways of God's providence it was time for Joseph to reveal himself to them.

So it is with conversion and communion with God. Sometimes God brings this about suddenly in a dramatic way, like the Apostle Paul's conversion. Other times God works to bring about His purposes over a period of time. The objective is the same – that God may reveal Himself in a saving way to His people.

The first point is to remember the overall mercy and love of God. There is love at the heart of God's rod, even when He seems distant. God hurts that He might heal. He cuts that He might bring forth more fruit. There is love when we experience conviction, and there is the same love when we experience communion. In all His dealings with His people God's ways are just and perfect. God's objective is pure.

So we come to Joseph revealing himself to his brethren.

The characteristics of grace: Joseph makes himself known to his brethren

Joseph could no longer restrain himself.

“Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers’ Genesis 45.1.

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Joseph was longing to reveal himself to his brethren. His heart was well nigh bursting, but he waited to be gracious for the long term benefit. God is more willing to forgive than we are to repent. Joseph, in his desire to reveal himself, is a picture of how God longs to reveal Himself to His people. God is not a begrudging God Who only reveals Himself when He is forced to; rather God is the One Who is willing and ready to forgive.

‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!’ Luke 13.34.

‘For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” But you would not’ Isaiah 30.15.

Joseph made himself known personally

‘Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence’ Genesis 45.3.

The brethren had only been in the presence of Joseph knowing him as the leader with authority before them. Now Joseph revealed himself personally.

There were no other persons allowed in the room, only Joseph and his brethren. So it is when Jesus reveals Himself to us personally. That particular moment is for us and us alone, between Him and us alone.

Joseph had always been their brother before them in their interviews but it was not until Joseph revealed himself that communion was truly restored.

Joseph encouraged his brethren to come to him

‘And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So

Joseph Makes Himself Known to His Brothers

they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt" Genesis 45.4.

At first the brethren were dismayed in his presence. Surely Joseph would destroy them because of His authority and power. Surely Joseph would take his revenge because of their sin. So it is when we first come to understand the glory of Christ's presence.

'So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts"' Isaiah 6.5.

Joseph believed in the overruling providence of God

'But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt' Genesis 45.5-8.

In the way God provided Joseph to preserve life, so God sent His Son to save.

'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life' John 3.16.

Joseph gave God the honour for his prosperity

'Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph: 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry"' Genesis 45.9.

Here we are challenged by a tremendous statement. Joseph did not

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remind the brothers of his dream; he did not in any way fall into the trap of the 'I-told-you-so' mentality. Joseph simply dealt with his situation in a way that brought all the honour and glory to God. His prosperity and his position came from God; he was simply a piece in the jigsaw of God's providence.

Joseph remained loyal to his family

See verse 9 again. Here we are once more challenged by Joseph's attitude, his loyalty to his family. I want us to consider this point for a moment. Whether our parents are believers or unbelievers they are still our parents. Our first loyalty is to God, but this does not allow us to discard our parents. If they reject us for our belief that is their responsibility, but ours is to love our parents.

Joseph was the 'big boss', but he was not ashamed to receive his aged father. His father was a shepherd, and so were his brothers. In the culture of Egypt shepherds were despised, they were the dregs of society. They were considered nothing more than ignorant, feuding men who lived for much of their life in the open air.

Joseph was not too proud to make the first move or to show his emotions

British culture historically does not allow much room for emotion. Those of us who are older have grown up in a society which has taught us that it is a sign of weakness to weep. When Joseph wept on Benjamin's shoulder and over his brothers he made the first move at reconciliation. By weeping he demonstrated how much he loved them, how glad he was to be able to treat them as brothers again. It was after Joseph, as it were, had 'let himself go', had laid aside his public image of the big ruler, and had gone and put his arms around his brothers, that finally they began to talk to him.

Here we see another important truth. The grace Joseph showed was one of the great keys to the reconciliation. Repentance was evident, but the terms of the reconciliation were governed by love

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and humility. We see the same attitude in the parable that Jesus told us about the prodigal son (*Luke 15.11-32*). His father looked out for him; the son returned and demonstrated repentance, but love and humility governed all the following events. The father was not afraid to show his emotions or his love.

Joseph warned against the danger of falling out

‘So he sent his brothers away, and they departed; and he said to them, “See that you do not become troubled along the way”’
Genesis 45.24.

As we grow up we must not think that because we may be young, maybe even the youngest member of our family, that we have no responsibility to give correct caution, or advise older members of the family. While we were small and growing up our influence may have been small, or not even considered. But like Joseph or David, when we have grown up into adulthood we cannot hide behind our age as an excuse for not using gifts and grace given to us by God to help the family situation.

God raised up Joseph, one of the younger members of the family, to guide, direct and deliver. Joseph, knowing the tendencies of his brothers to argue, warns them against doing that on their return journey. They must make haste to get home to Jacob; nothing must hinder.

Conclusion

Words from his wayward sons were not enough for Jacob to believe. Although their attitude had been transformed, their past affected the power of their words. Words must be accompanied by actions. When Jacob saw the carts and the provisions provided by Pharaoh, his spirit revived (*Genesis 45.27*). Pharaoh showed his respect, and Joseph demonstrated his love with his actions. He did not just say, ‘Come and see me Father.’

But here is the means to enable you to come. There are times in the

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tender love of God that He helps us to believe not only with words but with actions. Jesus Christ says, 'Come!' It does not seem possible that such a miracle should happen, that Jesus Christ, '*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*' (Colossians 2.3) should call us, but He does so that spiritual blessings flow to us.

10. JACOB AND JOSEPH MEET AGAIN

Genesis 46.1-5, 28-34

When we consider the dealings of God with Joseph we see the amazing mystery of God's providence. The sovereign power of God is supreme and He works according to His good pleasure. God works with a perfect knowledge of the beginning, continuation and end of the matter.

I would like us to consider together from this chapter the wisdom in God's providence.

God allows us certain places on this earth of special blessing

'So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac' Genesis 46.1.

Beersheba was a special place for the family of Abraham. It was here that God had been pleased to bless Abraham and Isaac, and now Jacob.

'And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac' Genesis 21.3.

'And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." Then he went up from there to Beersheba. And the Lord appeared to him the same night 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." So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's

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servants dug a well...It came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." Genesis 26.22-25, 32.

The places in and of themselves are not the cause of the blessing, but returning to them often reminds us of God's past blessing. God often is pleased to appear again to us at such places.

'And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord' Genesis 12.8.

'Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord' Genesis 13.1-4.

Sometimes we need to remember our roots!

God has a divine right to send us wherever His wisdom dictates

'So He said, "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. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes"' Genesis 46.3-4.

Now here we face a challenge. Had not Abraham and Isaac both displeased God by going down into Egypt? Historically Jacob would have known that going down into Egypt was seen as a backward step.

Up until this point in time Jacob had just sent his sons into Egypt to get corn; he had not moved to Egypt. No doubt Jacob had reservations about this trip. He longed to see his son, but his son was in Egypt. The

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journey meant a permanent move. They were, as a family, uprooting and going to Egypt.

Secondly, this move meant him leaving the land of promise. However could God be working in this situation? The whole family of Abraham and Isaac were leaving the very land that God had promised to them. On the one hand Jacob was pleased that Joseph had sent for him. On the other hand the old man had reservations about uprooting and moving in this manner.

It is important for us to be careful that we do not dictate to God. Sometimes God's ways are mysterious and, for our own minds at the time, past finding out. But God has a divine right to send us wherever His wisdom and will dictate.

God uses modern inventions for our comfort

'Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him' Genesis 46.5.

Historians record that probably Jacob had never seen covered wagons before. This modern mode of transport sent for his comfort was new to him. The kindness of Pharaoh and the evidence of Joseph's loving care encouraged him (*Genesis 45.19-20*). Everything was done to make the journey as comfortable as possible. There is nothing wrong with availing ourselves of inventions for our comfort as God's providence allows.

God does not allow providential circumstances to stand as a barrier to family love

'So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while' Genesis 46.29.

Joseph came to his father as a providential prince. Jacob came into the land to meet his son and in dependence upon him. Joseph had

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no airs and graces before his Dad – he simply fell on his neck and kissed him. Whatever our providential circumstances may be, our parents are still our parents. We are reminded our first love must be for Christ. As long as Christ is first, our love for one another in its right place will be stronger for it. Joseph loved God first and this love ensured his providential greatness did not allow him to despise his father. He was willing to intercede on their behalf.

God demonstrated a providential care over His people even though they were an abomination to society

Joseph gave advice to his brethren as to how to approach Pharaoh when presented to him (*Genesis 46.31-33*). They had to understand that shepherds were an abomination in the land of Egypt, but their occupation was no barrier to Joseph's care. Egyptian humanistic and idolatrous society had little respect for those on the lower rungs of society's ladder. However, in the mysterious providence of God their Saviour, Joseph their Prime Minister over them came from a family of shepherds. Joseph was not ashamed to own his brethren.

'For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren' Hebrews 2.11.

Conclusion

- We have considered in the life of Joseph the amazing sovereignty of God overruling events;
- What Satan means for evil God overrules for good;
- Joseph is a type of Christ, and we have considered a number of pictures pointing to Christ;
- The life of Joseph reminds us that God is the God of the past, present and future.

'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose' Romans 8.28.

11. JOSEPH – A DYING MAN’S TESTIMONY OF FAITH

Genesis 49.22-26; 50.22-26;

Hebrews 11.22

We have come to our final study in the life of Joseph. The man of God who was thus described by his father in his last days:

‘a fruitful bough by a well’ Genesis 49.22: placed by God;

‘The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him’ Genesis 49.23: persecution allowed under the sovereign will of God;

‘his bow remained in strength’ Genesis 49.24: persevering under the strength of God.

‘...by the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you’ Genesis 49.25: helped and blessed by God.

Now, sixty years after the death of his father, it is Joseph’s time to speak his final words before passing into Glory. The final statement of Joseph is one of great faith. In it he revealed some of the qualities of the living faith given to him by Almighty God.

Dependence upon the promise of God

This promise was given first to great-grandfather Abraham, then his grandfather Isaac, and then to his father Jacob, the promise that the land of Canaan would become their inheritance. Now at this time the Children of Israel were greatly prospering in the land of Goshen. To many this promise was way back in the priorities of life, but not for Joseph. He knew from the revelation given to Abraham that suffering was going to come upon the Children of Israel. They must learn to depend upon the promises of God.

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So Joseph's confidence in God remained. It remained steadfast when he stood before Pharaoh for the first time, and now as he was being prepared to meet his Maker.

Joseph never lived to see the fulfilment of the promise on earth, but Joseph knew according to God's Word that the period of time the Children of Israel would be in Egypt would be four hundred years. This was first revealed to Abraham:

'Then He said to Abram: "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.

Joseph, like Abraham before him, died in the certain belief by faith of its fulfilment. Remember how the prophets died knowing that they were prophesying for a future generation. So the promise is the important thing to believe in; the timing and the way must be left in the Lord's hands.

Twice Joseph said, *'God will surely visit you'* (Genesis 50.24, 25). For Joseph, like Abraham, it was not a question of whether but when. Joseph's father spoke with the same faith:

'Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers"' Genesis 48.21.

Moses acted and spoke with the same faith.

'And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you"' Exodus 13.19.

'Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments' Deuteronomy 7.9.

Joseph – A Dying Man’s Testimony of Faith

Solomon too spoke with the same faith.

‘Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses’ 1 Kings 8.56.

These all showed dependence upon the promises of God, the perfect timing of God and upon the complete fulfilment of the promises. This was the faith which was commended by God in *Hebrews 11*.

If God has given you a promise it will be fulfilled, but you may not live to see it.

Determination to be numbered among the people of God

Joseph in his last days clearly shows where his loyalties lay. He was not interested in being honoured as a great leader by the Egyptians. He was not going to be buried under a great monument, in an impressive tomb. His body was going to be under the care of the Children of Israel.

Joseph commanded that his bones be carried up to the land of Canaan. This came to pass when the Children of Israel eventually departed from Egypt. Why was Joseph so clear about this command? Why was it important not to be laid to rest in an impressive Egyptian tomb? Why be embalmed and laid in a coffin? The keeping of his bones would be a continual and visual witness and reminder to the Children of Israel that Egypt was not their home! When they entered persecution how comforting this must have been to them.

We see the faith of Joseph in his command to them to carry him with them when they left Egypt to the land of Canaan. He understood that his body was God’s property. His command was simply an act of faith in the sovereign will of God. His embalmed body reminded them, when tempted to settle down in the prosperity of Egypt, that this land was not their home. Later when persecuted it comforted them to look

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forward to a better day. When marching through the wilderness for forty years Joseph's coffin reminded and reassured them: their great forefather Joseph really believed they would get to Canaan. What is put on a Christian tombstone is important. It has a testimony.

'I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling'
1 Corinthians 2.3.

Conclusion

The fact that Joseph was buried in Canaan in and of itself had no saving qualities whatsoever. It made no difference to his acceptance with God in Christ. It was what his command symbolised which was important. His command symbolised faith in God's sovereign will and loving purposes for His people.

Joseph had no further use for his bones here on earth until the resurrection. He was in Heaven but his bones could still preach a message to the Children of Israel regarding faith.

'The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph' Joshua 24.32.

'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 11.13.

Joseph the Prime Minister in death still considered himself a stranger and pilgrim in Egypt.