

180429 LIES AND IN PRISON

29th April 2018

Readings: Genesis 39:10-21; Matthew 5:33-37; Colossians 3:9-14

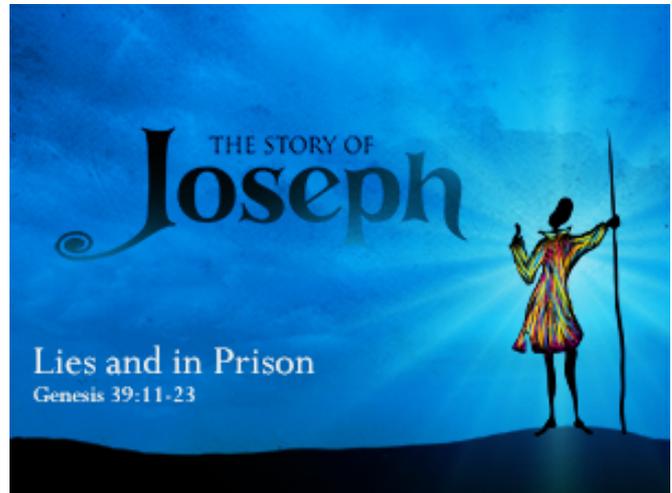
During the 1986 soccer World Cup, Argentinean player Diego Maradona scored one of the most controversial goals in sporting history. It was against England. It was just four years after the bitter Falklands War so emotions were high - feelings were intense. Tension mounted as the half-time score sat at nil-all.

And so, six minutes into the second half, Maradona scored a goal and the crowd erupted. But, he had used his hand to redirect the ball into the net - a clear breach of the rules that should have had the goal disallowed. However, it hadn't been by the ref. Thanks to a second, impressive and legitimate goal by Maradona, Argentina went on to win 2-1. To rub salt into England's wound Argentina went on to win the World Cup final.

After the match Maradona was challenged by the press. However, he simply replied "a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God". The unimpressed English coach dubbed the goal "the hand of a rascal." Still, the goal stood and is often referred to as the "Hand of God" goal. Time and time again Maradona was asked, and lied, about what really happened until eventually, many years on, he finally admitted the truth.

And in reflection we might think, Well, no harm done. Quite funny really - unless you're an English supporter". We even admire Maradona's cheek, we certainly admire his skill and with the shrug of the shoulders don't give the years of lying a second thought.

Yes - lying, deceiving, misrepresenting the truth... where does it stop? So often easily dismissed - unless we're on the wrong end of the lie. Do you know, we live in an Age of Acceptable Lies. Do you agree? Let me give you some examples. Which, well-known person said, "No one respects women more than me?"... Yet when an audio tape of degrading trash talk surfaced he dismissed it as locker room talk (*Trump*). While we're on US Presidents, which President looked the camera in the eye and said, "I did not have sex with that woman"... (*Clinton*). And which president said, "The American people are asking if their president's a crook. Let me tell you now. I am no crook!"... (*Nixon*). Yes, we live in the Age of Acceptable Lies, for at



least Nixon and Clinton got into a heap of trouble, whereas the current president seems to lie as fast as he can tweet.

So, let me ask you, “How many here have been on the wrong end of a lie? How many here have been cruelly impacted, devastated, even ruined by false accusations.” I’ll ask another question. “How many of us deeply regret the lies we’ve told and the damage we’ve caused?” Well, today in Joseph’s story we’re going to explore lies and truth telling. We’re going to look at the...

I. Destructive power of lies¹

II. Impact of lies²

III. Overcoming lies³

I. Destructive power of lies

We pick up Joseph’s story in Potiphar’s house. Now, there’ll be a bit of crossover from last week. Back then we focused on Joseph’s perspective and how he said “no” to sexual temptation. The sermon’s on our website if you’ve missed it. Today we’ll focus on the same passage but focus on the wife of Potiphar and the art of lying. So, let’s remind ourselves of the story so far. Genesis 39:6b

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he refused...

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her....

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. Genesis 39:6b-8a, 10-13

Potiphar’s wife now has some choices. She can let this incident go and continue her attempts to seduce Joseph or she can make some sport out of what’s just happened. A woman scored - and all that. She chooses the later...

When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. Genesis 39:13a-14

Let’s see how cleverly she crafts her lie.

¹ ... the example of Joseph’s life ruined

² ... on others, God, ourselves

³ ... by being people of our word, of integrity, of faith

Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house. Genesis 39:14–15

So, how did she go about her lie? She uses a two-stage strategy. Firstly she gets those she’s trying to convince – the servants – on her side. Then the out-and-out lies. So, stage one. How does she get the servants on her side? By playing the ethnic card - “this Hebrew”. It’s bit like being in the staff room at work with an Ozzie present and you reference the under arm bowling incident. Straight away the kiwis will be on your side. Or if you reference a “whinging Pom”. The kiwis band together. My apologies to all the wonderful Australians and English folk here - but you know what I mean. All cultures are similar with rivalry between nations and “us and them” camps. Let’s see how Potiphar’s wife plays this ethnic card.

“Look, this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us!” In other words, “We can’t let these Hebrew’s - or Ozzies or Poms - get one over us, can we?” Very clever! The Egyptian servants are already nodding their heads ready to swallow the lie “hook line and sinker”.

Now comes for stage two, the out and out lie. “He came in here to sleep with me”. Now... the best way to make a lie believable is to do what? Mix in some truth. Here, the truth includes, “he came into the room”, “I screamed”, “I have his cloak” and “he ran out of the building”. Four verifiable facts but now corrupted by the lie - “He came in here to sleep with me”.

This web of deceit is well spun and impossible for Joseph to counter. And she won’t stop here. No, no. She continues to spin her web, employing a similar tactic with Potiphar. But notice how she raises the stakes. Again it’s a two-fold strategy. But to get her husband on her side she plays the guilt, as well as the ethnic card. See how she introduces this guilt factor. In verse 16, to her husband, she says...

“That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house... This is how your slave treated me.” Genesis 39:17–19

She’s saying, “Husband dear, it’s your fault your slave did this. What are you going to do about it?” Potiphar reaction is predictable?

“... he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. Genesis 39:20

Lies, lies and more lies. Lies... that shatter a career - Joseph was managing an extensive home and estate. Lies... that shatter relationship - Joseph was PA to his master. Lies... that shatter a life - Joseph is thrown into prison.

So, here, in this passage, we see laid out so clearly, the destructive power of lies. And we too must be on our guard. Why? Because all of us, at some stage, have pulled off a really good lie. Haven't we? With a performance worthy of Oscar nomination we've got away with a real porkie. Now, it may not have been as dramatic as this. Or it may have been many, many years ago, but when it comes to mistruth we've all guilty as charged. Roman's 3:10 tells us

There is no one righteous, not even one Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. Romans 3:10 & 13

Not only this but remember Adam and Eve. Look at the destruction this lie caused. Satan said 'God's not really good. He's holding something back that you deserve it. Go on. Take it. And she did and of this - sin, death and Satan's iron grip entered humanity. No wonder the Bible refers to Satan as the father of lies.

When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44

So, because of this and because of the pain we've personally experienced we must not grow complacent - we must never underestimate the power of a lie. Which is why God's Word gives clear instruction. Clear guidance. Clear boundaries. Let's refresh our memory over what the Bible says about lying. Let's explore further the impact of lies.

II. Impact of lies

The Ten Commandments are a good place to stand. Number nine reads...

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. Exodus 20:16

Notice lying's impact... on our neighbours, on those around us. A lie is an attempt to advantage ourselves over others. And we do it by deception. We advance ourselves at another's expense. Or we protect ourselves at the expense of another. People hearing our lie, believing our lie, reacting to our lie are disadvantaged at best, ripped off and devastated at worst. This impact on others is also reflected in the New Testament. Colossians 3:9

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and put on a new self... Colossians 3:9

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. Ephesians 4:25

Lies and deception can, and do, destroy churches, families and friendships. Just look at how Potihar's wife's lying impacted Joseph. In short we don't lie because of how it impacts others.

Now, Proverbs gives us another angle on lying and its impact. Proverbs 6:16

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him... a lying tongue. Proverbs 6:16–17

Proverbs 12:22 gives us a stark contrast between lying and truth telling.

The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful. Proverbs 12:22

Here, God's Word is crystal clear. We've a choice. Be truth-tellers and delight our Heavenly Father, or lie - knowing the Living God detests those who do. Strong language isn't it. For, not only does our lying impact others, more importantly it impacts God. He hates it.

Why does he hate it? Why does God detest liars? It's an affront to his Holiness and because he sees the damage lying causes those he loves – you and I.

Now, given the devastation on Joseph, given what we've personally experienced; given the Bible's clear instructions – you think we'd be good at not lying. But... there are times when the benefits of a strategic lie outweigh all these restraints. There are times when the consequences of truth telling are so severe, all our checks and balances are thrown to the wind... and we lie. So, how are we to overcome this urge to deceive, to fool, to get one over? How are we to overcome lies?

III. Overcoming lies

To do so we turn to Jesus, where his teaching and example encourage us to resist lying. By encouraging us to be...

1. people of our word
2. people of integrity
3. people of faith

1. People of our Word

In the Sermon of the Mount Jesus reinforces the Ten Commandments - including truth telling. Because lying had become so common and so much could be at stake, a complex system of oaths had developed to convince people of their truthfulness. They would swear by the temple or God's throne or God's footstool. Today children in the playground may still say, "Cross my heart hope to die, stick a needle in my

eye". To all this Jesus says, "No, no, no. Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'. Be known as people as good as your word. Where a handshake - no matter what's riding on it or what changes - stands.

Secondly Jesus encourages us to be known as

2. People of integrity

Whereas being people of our word is about not lying, being people of integrity includes how we react when we are lied too. It's about how best to respond when we face lies, to our face or behind our back. Whereas being people of our word is like saying to Potiphar's wife "don't lie" - being people of integrity is about how Joseph is to react when lied about. Now, the Genesis passage doesn't tell us directly, so again we go to the teaching of Jesus. Matthew 18

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over⁴. Matthew 18:15

If you find someone has lied too you or about you Jesus is clear. Where possible, go directly to the person. The next few verses of Matthew 18 describe what to do if this initial approach fails, but Jesus is clear - approach the person involved. Now, what if this is not possible, like Joseph thrown in prison. If it's not possible to go directly or if the situation is not resolved, what we are not to do is "fight fire with fire". We are not to counter lies with more with lie. We are not to manipulate or carry out nasty tactics against those who've wronged us. Tempting though this may be, retaliation is not an option. Jesus' teaching - and example when on trial facing lie after lie - is a call to integrity. Which brings us to our last take home for today. Jesus encourages us to be people...

3. People of faith

By this I mean to know, to have confidence in, to be assured that God is working in our situation for his glory and our good. And we take hold of this by faith, not because we can see it. With Joseph, we do see his big picture. Most of us know where Joseph's story's going. How despite languishing in prison for years it was because of he was in prison he was able to meet the Pharaoh's wine taster. And through him meet the Pharaoh and then be used by God to save his family and many nations. Yet, in the moment - how bitter his thoughts, how deep his despair, how anguished his soul - at spiteful lie of Potiphar's wife. But, Joseph was a man of his word, a man of integrity and a man of faith. For years later, looking back, he was able to declare to his brothers...

⁴ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Matthew 18:16-17

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20

And this is our hope. For in faith we know that because of the cross when we're on the wrong end of a brutal lie God's justice will prevail, his mercy will come through, that we rest in the shadow of his wings. And also know by faith God's everlasting mercy for the lies we've spun and the hurt we've caused.

And so, we are encouraged by this story of Joseph. For as we look to Christ who defeated the Father of Lies we take up the challenge is to be people of our word, people of integrity and people of faith, as the Holy Spirit empowers and as our dear Lord, Jesus Christ, leads. To his glory. Amen & amen