

# LOVED AND FAVOURED

8th April 2018

Sermon Series: The Story of Joseph

Readings: Luke 24:17-27; Genesis 37:1-11

I love to preach sermon series. Whether it's preaching through a book like Genesis, Luke or Romans or whether it's a smaller section like the passion of Christ or David's story. Today we're going to start a series on Joseph - the snappy dresser who got into heaps of trouble. But he was also used by God to save God's people. Now, this is an Old Testament story and understanding the Old Testament has its challenges. In fact, it's

all too easy to miss the point unless we have the key that unlocks God's intended message. It's a key that Jesus himself gave. So, I'm going to spend the first part of today's message showing you the key then we'll kick-on with Joseph's story.

Let's pray

Do you know, a number of Christians don't bother with the Old Testament. They love the Gospels and poke around Paul's letters. They may even dip into Revelation but the Old Testament - "we're better off staying clear". Psalms might be the exception but why bother with the Old Testament when we have the New? Why get bogged down with laws and lists. Why be appalled at the bloodshed and violence? Why read page after page of prophets proclaiming doom and gloom? It's like - why?

Maybe you're a bit like that.

However, can I say, without the Old Testament the New doesn't make sense. Not at all. Without the Old, the New Testament is like a ship without a rudder or a tramper without a map. That's what those who wrote the New Testament believed. More importantly, it's what Jesus believed. That the Old Testament's indispensable.

Not only that but on two occasions when Jesus was declaring the importance of the Old Testament he gave us the key to making sense of the Old Testament in light of the New.

The first is on the road to Emmaus. It's the afternoon of the first Easter Sunday. Two disciples left Jerusalem confused and perplexed. Confused, because Jesus, who'd promised so much, had been crucified. Perplexed, because that morning



some women claimed to have seen angels at the empty tomb declaring Christ was alive!

Anyway, as these two walk along the road Jesus joins them, though unrecognised. The disciples pour out their confused story while Jesus patiently listens and then scolds them. How slow and foolish they are not to believe the Old Testament Scriptures. And what Jesus does next is our key. Verse 27...

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:27

Remember the New Testament hadn't been written so when Jesus says "all Scriptures" he means all the Old Testament. Notice what Jesus is saying. From the start - Moses wrote the first five books - to the end - the Prophets and their prophecies - all of the Old Testament is about who? About Jesus. All of it. That's the key.

Again, in the Gospel of John, Jesus addressing the Jewish leaders says this...

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me. John 5:39-40

God's people were searching the Old Testament looking for eternal life but they'd completely missed the point. Why? Because all the Old Testament points to who? To Jesus. All of it. And he's the one with eternal life, not Old Testament. Likewise we miss the point if we don't realise that all the Old Testament points to, foreshadows and echoes Christ.

So what can we say? When we read the Old Testament we stand at the empty tomb and look back through the cross into the books of Moses and the prophets and everything in between.

Indeed, we only understand the Old Testament when we understand how it points to Jesus. We ask, "How does this story foreshadow Jesus? How does that law point to Christ's kingdom? How will this prophecy be fulfilled in Christ?" Every Old Testament passage echoes Christ and though we gain benefit from the Old Testament, without this link to Jesus we'll never understand it as God intended.

So, with this in mind we'll spend the next few weeks opening up Joseph's story. We'll see what happens to him, the implications for us but we'll also see how the story of Joseph points too, foreshadows and echoes Christ.

Let's dive right in then at Genesis 37:2

This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. Genesis 37:2

Here we're introduced to Joseph who's seventeen year old. He's the younger but not the youngest son of Jacob. Now, Jacob's a family man, in that he has twelve sons and daughter. But, unfortunately, it's a dysfunctional family, as hinted at here but will soon be made clear. You see verse 2 refers to Bilhah and Zilpah, two of Joseph's four wives. Four wives! Our 21st Century, Western minds boggle at this. The nearest in our experience is a step family where the dad has children from a previous marriage or two and also children with his new wife - all in the same house. So Joseph's siblings are a mix of full and half siblings with all sorts of dynamics mixed in. Let's see how they get on. Verse 3

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. Genesis 37:3-4

Here it is. Family life. Laid bare and ugly! Let's unpack this a bit. Jacob is referred to in the Bible by two names - mostly Jacob but also the name God gave him - Israel. His twelve sons are in fact the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel so it's all interconnected. Anyway Jacob played favourites. His favourite wife was Rachel and so he treated her special. How do you think the other three wives felt? Jacob also played favourites with Rachel's children Joseph and the much younger Benjamin. indeed, Joseph was spoiled – very spoiled. His father even spent a small fortune on an amazing coat for Joseph. Talk about rubbing your nose in it.

How do you think the other brothers felt? What went through their minds when Joseph wore his way-expensive, mega-flash coat? We don't have to imagine. "they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him (vs 4)." Imagine a normal family where a favoured younger son gets a flash-as car from Dad but no one else. Imagine what the siblings think every time little brother takes it for a spin. Or a younger daughter gets a horse and stabling and weekends away at events but no one else. Now put this in a blended family!!! There's going to be a boil over and it's not going to be pretty. So before things get worse, a quick review...

The favoured son lives in family of twelve brothers and half brothers to four different women.

The favoured son has reported to his dad the mistakes of his half brothers (vs 2)

The favoured son has an ultra special coat that highlights this favour

The brothers hate the favoured son, with a vengeance

How can it get worse? Let's find out...

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." Genesis 37:5-7

What's happening here? God's giving Joseph a dream announcing what will happen sometime in the future. Why? Well God has a plan bigger than this family and when this plan comes about people won't be able to say it was because of circumstances or an individual or even a nation. Not at all. These dreams put us on notice that what will happen will be directly from God's miraculous hand. Why? So, we can give God the glory he deserves. Unfortunately these dreams make life harder for Joseph.

What's the meaning of this dream then? Well, it's first of six dreams, given in three pairs. Two in his home, two dreams in prison, two dreams in Pharaoh's palace. This first dream shows us two things. First, his brothers will one day come to Joseph begging for wheat and second, they'll bow before him. The wheat business goes over the brothers' head for now but not the bowing down bit. They're furious. Verse 8

His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Genesis 37:8

If this isn't bad enough God gives Joseph another dream.

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." Genesis 37:9

More of the same, except this time Jacob will bow down low to his son. Now, this is too much even for Jacob. So Jacob gives his favoured son the mildest of telling offs.

"What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" Genesis 37:10

But his bothers are not so lenient.

His brothers were jealous of him. Genesis 37:11

So what do we have here? What picture of family "bliss" is painted before us? Where's this all leading too? Well, we have a favoured son whose father can see in him no wrong while his brothers are deadly jealous. More, they hate him - with a

vengeance. There's spite and a malice that runs so deep. And next week we'll see all this coming to a head.

But for now, how are we to make sense of the story so far? What are our take-homes and how does this point to Christ.

Firstly we are reminded of God's plan for marriage. A plan recorded in the very beginning, but not adhered to by Jacob. For in Genesis 2:24 we read

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24

God's plan for marriage is one husband and one wife - male and female. Anything else falls outside God's Word and God's will. It's interesting that every family with multiple wives described in the Bible is dysfunctional. Every one. Abraham, Sarah and Hagar - troubles. David, Abigail, Bathsheba and his other wives - more troubles. Solomon and his thousand wives and concubines - mega trouble. God's plan is for one man and one woman, marriage. Not defacto or same sex relationships. Let me be clear. Defacto and same sex relationships fall outside God's Word. This is the stand of the PCANZ and is reflected in the regulation that Ministers, Elders and those training for the ministry cannot be in a relationship that falls outside the Word of God. Now, today I haven't time to get into more detail and look at the vexing questions we face as we make this stand but let's be clear. God's plan for marriage is one man and one woman, united as one flesh before God.

This is the first take home for today. What's the other? Well it's the danger of playing favourites in families. Something that can even carry over to the workplace. Ask yourselves this? Am I treating my children or employees fairly - or am I playing favourites. Sometimes we don't even notice and we need help to see we're doing it. Other times we know full well and do it anyway. Yet Joseph's story gives us a clear warning of what happens when we play favourites – relationship breakdown.

And it can be generational. Jacob grew up with parents who played favourites. His father Isaac favoured his brother Esau, while Jacob's mother Rebecca favoured him. No wonder Jacob did what he did. However, even though this favouritism ruptured Jacob's relationship with his brother Jacob continues the game with his sons. But... there's hope. For though Joseph's family is about to implode, God is at work and will bring about one of the most powerful and beautiful reconciliations in the Bible. Twelve brothers and a father will be reconciled.

And God can work in your family situation too. No family is too broken, too toxic, too out of control that God cannot make a difference. This is very much a take home from Joseph's story today and over the next few weeks.

These are our two take homes but to fully understand Joseph's story we need to see how it foreshadows Christ. Like an echo traveling back through time how does Joseph's story help us understand Jesus?

Well, Jesus is also the loved and favoured son. But unlike Joseph this is fair, deserved and conferred on Jesus by his Heavenly Father, even at his baptism. For as Jesus arose out of the water a

A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17

And like Joseph Jesus was hated. Hated with vengeance. For he spoke the truth - God's truth - just as Joseph had. And on the night Jesus was betrayed he stood before his fellow Jews, his brothers, and told of a time when they would bow before him. Just as Joseph told his brothers. Yes, in Mark 14:62 Jesus told the High Priest and others gathered...

"And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Mark 14:62

How did they react? Like Joseph's brothers who would rather die than bow before their younger brother. Yes, in a similar way these Priests and Pharisees refused to bow before, this nobody from Galilee, this peasant Rabi. And they hated Jesus with a vengeance, even to death. Verse 63

The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him. Mark 14:63-65

So, Jesus is like Joseph, but in a true and a better way. The dearly loved and favoured son bore the cost of speaking God's Word. A Word that offended - even to death. But unlike the brothers who rejected this loved and favoured Son, how do we respond? How? We gladly bow our knee. We gladly humble ourselves. With joy we worship Christ - he who gave up his life so we can be reconciled and drawn into the family of God. Let's pray