

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 8th January 2012 – 11:00am

‘Joseph: Prince of Egypt’

1. Joseph – the Man

Genesis ch.37:1-14

Introduction

Before Christmas I completed a series from Gen.12-35 called ‘**The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**’. During the course of that series we learned a lot about God himself. He is a Covenant making and a Covenant keeping God. He is a God who makes promises and a God who keeps promises - even across many generations, as he did for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is a God of **grace**, showering these people and their families with blessings, even though none of them actually deserved those blessings. So we have learned, even from the very first book in the Bible, that our God is a God of great grace.

Genesis 36 then is a chapter full of names, all to do with Esau, Jacob’s twin brother. I said you could read that chapter over Christmas if you wanted to, but I wasn’t going to actually preach on it. Genesis 36 is like a line drawn in the sand, between the account of God’s dealings with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the story that takes up the rest of the Book of Genesis: the story of Joseph which runs from Gen.37-50 – it’s all about ‘**Joseph: Prince of Egypt!**’

The Story of Joseph has fascinated all kinds of people over the years, including Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, when he wrote his first West End Musical: ‘*Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*’ in 1968. I remember it as a school production in Wallace High School Lisburn back in the early 80s when I was in First or Second Form. No, I didn’t play the leading role of Joseph, but I was a small voice in the chorus! I still remember many of the song lyrics!

We’re going to take some time to look at this wonderful story of Joseph. We will come across all kinds of pictures or shadows of Christ as we make our way through these chapters. I want you to try to pick them out as we go along. Remember God’s promises in Genesis: right from Genesis 3:15 God has been promising that one day a Messiah would come, who will crush Satan’s head. God chose Abram, out of all the people alive in the world of the 21st Century B.C. (the time of Gen.12). He called Abram out to follow him, and to walk with him throughout his lifetime. God made Covenant promises to Abraham, which were passed on to his son Isaac, that were later passed onto his son Jacob. As we start Genesis ch.37 this morning, Jacob has 12 sons and 1 daughter. The question we are left wondering about at this point in the story is which one of these 13 children is going to produce the Messiah, or at least the line of descendants who will bring us to the Messiah. **Q. Could it be Joseph?** ...Because that’s the child of Jacob, that the storyline of Genesis begins to focus our attention on – Joseph: Jacob’s favourite son. Let’s see how that came about...

In Gen.37:1 we’re told that Jacob’s family are now **living** in Canaan, not just **staying temporarily** in the Promised Land, as Isaac his father had done. So Jacob has become a settler, not a nomad – he’s not a pilgrim, but a settler.

‘Jacob **lived** in the land where his father had **stayed**, the land of Canaan’ (v.1)

The story of Joseph begins in Genesis 37 with Joseph at the age of 17 (v.2). What can we say about Joseph, as a young man, from these verses?

1. **He was a Man of Integrity (v.2)**

We’re introduced to Joseph, as a young man of 17, while he’s out tending the flocks with some of his brothers – the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, two of his father’s wives. These half-brothers of Joseph would have been: **Dan & Naphtali, Gad & Asher**, if you check back to Genesis 35:25-26. These would probably have been the least favoured sons of Jacob, since they had been born to the two maidservants: Bilhah and Zilpah, not Rachel or Leah.

But for some reason, Joseph brought home a bad report about these four brothers to his father Jacob, at the end of their day’s work out in the fields.

Did this mean that Joseph was a tell-tale, or was there something more to it than that?

Well, the Genesis record leads us to believe that **Joseph was a righteous man; but his brothers weren’t**.

For example: we have seen **Reuben**, Jacob’s firstborn, blatantly committing adultery with one of his father’s wives, Bilhah, in ch.35:22. So he wasn’t righteous, and he forfeited his father’s blessing from that point onwards.

We have seen the next two sons, **Simeon & Levi** taking their murderous revenge against the Shechemites, whenever their sister **Dinah** was raped and defiled back in ch.34. So they forfeited their father’s blessing at that point too. They weren’t righteous either.

And in the next chapter, Genesis ch.38, **Judah**, the fourth son, will sleep with a prostitute, who turns out to be his own daughter-in-law, Tamar! This brings Judah to the point where he says that *‘She is more righteous than I’* (v.26). So Judah was far from perfect too.

As for Leah’s other two sons, **Issachar and Zebulun**, we haven’t heard a lot about them so far, but now, here we have Joseph out in the fields with Jacob’s other four sons, **Dan & Naphtali, Gad & Asher**, and he has cause to bring back to his father a bad report about them too! And so we are led to believe, as Psalm 14, and Psalm 53, and Romans 3:10 tell us, that...

‘There is no-one righteous, not even one!’

...except that is, for Joseph.

It is interesting to note, that no sin or fault is ever recorded of Joseph in the whole of the Bible. He might only be 17, but he is already leading a righteous life, an upright life – a life that is pleasing to his father, Jacob.

Here we have the first similarity between Joseph and Jesus.

No sin or fault is ever recorded of Joseph in the Bible. That's not to say that Joseph was sinless or perfect. It's just that nothing was recorded against him.

Jesus, **in actual fact**, was absolutely sinless and holy. He never did, or said, or even thought anything that was wrong or sinful. Jesus was perfectly sinless.

But just as we can say that Joseph was living a life that was pleasing to his father at the age of 17, we can say that the life that Jesus lived was **always** pleasing to His Father in heaven. So much so, that on at least two separate occasions, God the Father broke through the clouds of heaven to say in an audible voice, while His Son was here on earth:

'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased!' (Matt 3:17, 17:5)

This was important for Jesus, because unless he was sinless, he could not accomplish the ministry that God had sent him to earth to fulfil. He had to be sinless, if he was going to go to the cross at Calvary and there deal with our sin. Joseph wasn't absolutely sinless or perfect, but the Bible records no sin that he ever committed, because God had a ministry for Joseph to fulfil in the years that would follow. Little did he know at this point in the story, but that he was going to be the Prince of Egypt – and more than that, the Saviour of Egypt, and not only of Egypt, but the Saviour of many lives, from many nations of the world, in a way that would foreshadow the wonderful work of salvation that Jesus, his descendant, would one day fulfil for all of us who trust in Him.

But there is a lesson here for each one of us. None of us are 'saviours' in the sense that Joseph or especially Jesus was, but we do have a ministry in this world of being 'salt and light' - of living differently and distinctly from those around us, so that they can see the benefits of living upright and godly lives – we are called to be people of integrity.

If we are to be in a place to expose and to deal with the sins of others, then our own lives must be '*above reproach*'. That is the first qualification for an elder, (according to 1 Timothy 3:2) - '*the overseer must be **above reproach***.' Unless we are living upright lives, then every time we point a finger to accuse others, 3 more are pointing back at us to condemn us for our own sins and failures. We need to be Men of Integrity.

But there were never 3 fingers pointing back at Jesus, or at Joseph, because they were above all: 'Men of Integrity'. – Even at 17 that could be said of Joseph. Young men, in your teens here this morning, can that be said of you? That you are a man of integrity? It's something that you should strive for.

Psalms 45:7 could be said of Joseph, and of Jesus:

'You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.'

Before too long, Joseph would be exalted above his brothers, because he was more than all of them, a Man of Integrity. But as well as that, he was also...

2. A Man of Privilege (vs.3-4)

(v.3) *'Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age.'*

We're told here, that Joseph had been born to Israel in his old age. Well, Joseph was the last son to be born before they left Laban's house in Haran to go back to the Promised Land. But remember it was Benjamin who was the last son to be born to Jacob in his old age. Joseph *and* Benjamin had been born to Rachel, the most loved wife of Jacob.

Perhaps it was because Joseph was the *firstborn* son of Rachel, (Jacob's favourite wife) that he became the favourite son in the whole family?

But in order to set Joseph apart as special, his father made *'a richly ornamented robe'* for him. The famous coat of many colours!

Now it's probably more Andrew Lloyd Webber's influence that has made us think of this as *'an amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat'* – full of multicoloured stripes. That's probably not what it looked like at all. It was probably a long white robe, the kind that a prince would wear, with multi-coloured braiding around the sleeves and around the hem on the body of the cloak. But whatever it looked like, its significance was quite clear: Joseph was the prince! Joseph was the favourite son of the family. Joseph was special - he was a Man of Privilege!

This robe was symbolic of the fact that Joseph was like the King's son. He was the Prince of the family, the heir to Jacob's inheritance. He had been set apart from the rest. He had been exalted over his brothers, and it also meant most importantly of all, that there was to be no more manual labour for Joseph. The rest of the brothers would wear rough hessian short garments, because they would be out in the fields looking after the sheep and the cattle, but Joseph's robe was long and flowing and white – it wasn't work-wear, it was 'white collar' wear – it was fit for a Man of Privilege – a man who would be expected to be about home, attending to the official business of his father.

But that's what set Joseph up to be the object of hatred to his brothers:
'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.' (v.4)

Joseph might have been the object of his father's love, but he was now the object of his brothers' hatred. This led to a breakdown in communication between him and his brothers, as favouritism usually does!

Remember Jacob & Esau's childhood? Isaac loved Esau more, because he was the firstborn, and the one who was the outdoor type, but Rebekah loved Jacob more, because he was the man about the house, the one that Rebekah became attached to. But the favouritism that wrecked Jacob's home, growing

up, was about to wreck his own home now, as he made the exact same mistakes as his parents had made – putting one son before the others.

History was repeating itself - as it so often does in so many families. But history doesn't have to repeat itself in our families. You can break the mould. You can bring your children up differently. You can break free from the mistakes of the past. Parenting is never easy, but with God's help it can be different, if only we as parents will allow God into our homes, and seek his help to raise our children in a way that is glorifying and honouring to Him.

But there's another way of looking at this episode: **from the brothers' point of view**. How do you react when someone else is promoted over you? Or in a situation of favouritism where you come off the worst? How do you react? What about that time in work, when you expected to get promotion to that top job, or the next step up the ladder? But you were passed over – and someone else got the job. How did you react?

Well, the brothers just couldn't cope with Joseph's promotion at all. We're told: *'They hated him – and could not speak a kind word to him.'* (v.4) They cut him off, and isolated him. Even though *he* had done nothing wrong! It was their father Jacob, who had decided to treat him differently, not Joseph.

But here we have a picture of what God the Father did for his Son, Jesus. God the Father loved his Son so much, that he exalted him above his brothers (us) and made him a Prince and a Saviour – one that we should love and worship. And yet for many people, Jesus has become an object of hatred instead of love and devotion. God the Father said,

'This is my beloved Son – listen to him!'

But instead, many people have rejected him. Which is it for you?

Joseph was a Man of Integrity, and a Man of Privilege, but also...

3. He was a Man of Destiny (vs.5-11)

We're told in vs.5-11 that Joseph was a dreamer. In fact he has 2 dreams here. And when he tells these dreams to his brothers, they hated him all the more! (v.5)

I wonder do you dream? Our minds play some funny tricks during the hours of darkness, don't they? Over Christmas I dreamt that Geoffrey Donaldson (MP) had a full blown argument with me about Bible Translations! I also woke up with a cat gripping tightly to my thumb with its teeth and claws dug deep into it! Maybe those are more nightmares than dreams, but we all dream, don't we? But Joseph's dreams were special. They were God-given. At the time that Joseph lived, there was no Bible. Moses hadn't yet been born, and it was Moses who wrote the first 5 books of the Bible, so God had not given any written revelation at this time. So God, from time to time, used dreams to speak to individuals, about things that would happen in the future.

In Joseph's first dream (vs.6-7) – he and his brothers were all out in the fields binding sheaves of corn. When suddenly Joseph's sheaf rose and stood upright. And then all the brothers' sheaves of corn gathered around his and bowed down to it.

Now the brothers didn't need anyone to interpret this dream for them, they knew what it meant straight away! (v.8)

'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?'

Of course, none of them would have known the significance of that dream at that time. It was only later that it all came true. His brothers would one day bow down to Joseph, when Joseph was in charge of all of Egypt, they would come and bow down to him, when they went to buy corn because of a famine.

But *'they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.'*

Then, to make matters worse, Joseph had another dream around this time.

In his second dream (vs.9-11) – Joseph could see the sun, the moon and eleven stars all bowing down to him!

Now Joseph's mother, Rachel, had already died before this point in the story, but could it be that Jacob and Leah, and the 11 brothers would one day come and bow down to him in Egypt too? Would the whole family end up in Egypt?

Well, this time, Joseph told his father, as well as his brothers about his dream. And this time, even though his father loved him deeply, Jacob rebuked Joseph and said, *'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?'*

Jacob had got the message loud and clear! These dreams were obvious! But now his brothers' hatred had turned to jealousy (v.11), but his father *'kept all these matters in mind'* – That's a phrase that reminds me of Mary in the Christmas story. When she heard any prophecies about Jesus, we read that: *'Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.'* (e.g. Luke 2:19).

Could all these things be true? Would **Joseph** one day be exalted? Would all his brothers, and his whole family, come and bow down before him?

Could all the prophecies about **Jesus** come true? Well many of them did. But there's one that still has to be fulfilled:

'God [has] exalted him to the highest place and [has given] him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee [shall] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' (Philippians 2:9-11).

Do you believe that? Are you ready to bow the knee before King Jesus? Or are you like these brothers, going to hate Jesus all the more, because of such a prophecy, that one day you will **have** to bow the knee before **Him**? Joseph was a Man of Destiny, and God revealed this to him in dreams.

Jesus too is a Man of Destiny, and God has revealed that to us in His Word. It's up to us whether we believe God's Word or not, but one day God will call us to account, for what we have done with Jesus.

But as we start out into another year as a Church: *Are we people of Destiny?* What dreams do we have for this church, and this locality, in the year that lies ahead? What dreams are we dreaming for Armagh in 2012? Are we People of Vision, of Purpose, of Destiny - a people with dreams for this City in the year that lies ahead?

God's Word says, ***'Where there is no vision, the people perish!'***

We need to move forward with Vision into this year that lies before us, for the sake of the lost all around us. Let's dream great dreams for God this year. Let's be people of Vision and Destiny in Armagh in the year ahead.

Joseph, was a Man of Integrity, a Man of Privilege, a Man of Destiny, but also:

4. He was a Man of Obedience (vs.12-13)

Here in v.12, his father sends him on a mission to where his brothers were.

Notice first of all, that they were shepherds – they *'had gone to graze their father's flocks.'* (v.12) - We can trace this theme throughout the Bible:

The Israelites were still shepherds by the time they got to Egypt.

In Ezekiel ch.34 God would refer to the false shepherds of Israel – the religious leaders of Israel who weren't looking after the flock or caring for the flock, but who were abusing and fleecing the flock instead.

And when Jesus came to Israel, on a mission from His Father, to seek and to save the lost sheep of Israel, he referred to the shepherds of Israel as the *'Blind leaders of the blind'* – the Pharisees of his day were false shepherds. Jesus said: *'I am the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep.'*

Notice also where they had taken the sheep – they had gone to *'Shechem.'*

Shechem was the place of backsliding for Jacob, the place where he had stopped short of complete obedience to God, when he should have gone to Bethel. Shechem was the place of previous sin for the family: where Dinah had been raped, and where Simeon and Levi had taken revenge by murdering all the men of that place. The brothers were in a place they shouldn't be. Just like, when Jesus came to Israel, they were in a sorry backslidden state too. They were practicing all kinds of sin. Jesus came to inspect Israel for spiritual fruit (you remember when he examined the fig tree) but He found nothing but leaves. They were in a place they shouldn't have been.

Notice thirdly Joseph's commission from his father –

***'Come, I am going to send you to them.'* (v.13)**

And immediately Joseph agreed to go: ***'Very well'*** he replied. Or ***'Here I am'***. Here we have echoes of Isaiah ch.6, when God says in heaven:

'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'

Isaiah, the Servant of God, said: *'Here am I, send me!'*

When God the Father needed someone to go to seek and to save the lost, His only Son said, *'Here am I, send me!'*

In John 20:21, Jesus said, *'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you!'*

Jesus was calling his disciples to go and make disciples, just as he had gone at the Father's bidding, into this world, to make disciples.

The Great Commission still stands for us today: *'Go and make disciples of all nations'* – wherever we find ourselves, is the idea.

What is our response to the Father's Great Commission?

Are we as willing and ready to go as Joseph was? – *'Here am I'*

Are we as ready and willing to go as Isaiah was? – *'Here am I, send me'*

Are we as ready and willing to go into the world as Jesus was?

Are we as keen to make disciples as those early believers were?

Joseph was a Man of Obedience, just as Jesus was a Man of Obedience.

Jesus was willing to leave the glories of heaven to go into this sin cursed world, seeking to save that which was lost.

Because Jesus was obedient, even to the point of death on the cross, many of us are now right with God.

Others, in this world, still depend on our obedience:

Are we willing, obedient, listening for His call, ready to go at a moment's notice wherever He would send us, ready to do whatever he asks us to do?

Conclusion

Joseph was a Man of Integrity – no sin ever recorded of him in the Bible.

Joseph was a Man of Privilege – exalted above his brothers for a reason.

Joseph was a Man of Destiny – God had a plan for his life – to save many.

Joseph was a Man of Obedience – He was willing and ready to go,
to do exactly what his Father asked him to do.

Jesus was a Man of Integrity – the perfect son of God, absolutely sinless.

Jesus was a Man of Privilege – He's exalted to the highest place in heaven.

Jesus was a Man of Destiny – He came to seek and save what was lost.

Jesus was a Man of Obedience – God the Father sent him on a mission into this sin-cursed world. He fulfilled that mission by dying on the cross. He is now ready and willing to save to the uttermost, all who come to God through Him.

What about you?

A Man or Woman of Integrity? – Do you seek to live an upright, godly life?

A Man or Woman of Privilege? – Have you been made rich through Christ?

A Man or Woman of Destiny? – Are you following God's plan for your life?

A Man or Woman of Obedience? – Are you willing and ready to do whatever God asks you to do, and go wherever God asks you to go?

May it be so, for His name's sake... Amen.