

Introduction

- We are drawn to stories where individuals grow up in poor and difficult situations yet rise to great heights because of persistence and diligence. The story of Joseph in the book of Genesis is one such story. He grew up in a difficult home. His parents were loving and nurturing enough but his many brothers disliked him greatly. Today we are going to look at some of the early challenges that Joseph faced and how he reacted to them and in doing so hopefully learn some lessons for our own life.

- Some background information

- The Patriarchs were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

- Jacob had four wives who gave him 12 sons

- The Sons of Jacob were:

- To Leah, Jacobs first wife, was born

- Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun*

- To Bilhah, the maidservant of Rachel, was born

- Dan, Naphtali*

- To Zilpah, the maidservant of Leah, was born

- Gad, Asher*

- To Rachel, Jacobs first love, was born

- JOSHEPH, Benjamin*

The Story of Joseph

We are first introduced to Joseph in cp 37 where it says this “Joseph, a young man of 17, 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. The scriptures do not say he brought a false report, but a bad report. One gets the idea that he was communicating the truth to his father about bad behavior on the part of his brothers.

It seems to me that Joseph had three options

- He could have said nothing to his father

- He could have threatened to say something to his father “I’m gonna tell”

- He could have said something to his father - which is what he did

- When I look at the whole life of Joseph I find someone who was committed to his family and his family’s wellbeing. I give him the benefit of the doubt and believe he said something to his father not to get his brothers in trouble but to give his father an opportunity to address behavior which was not in the best interest of the family.

- I think when we are inclined to “tell”, we should always examine our motives and if after wrestling with the options we feel certain that to tell is in the best interest of everyone, and then tell we should.

- You know that gossip is “telling” and we should always examine our motives before we pass on the latest inside scoop.

- Joseph as dearly loved by his father Jacob, being the baby, and his father showed it by making him a richly ornamented robe. His brothers, however, rather than rejoicing with those who rejoice, chose resentment instead. It says in chapter 37 that 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. If a functioning family is one where all its members find love and acceptance then this was a dysfunctional family that Joseph was growing up in.

- I personally believe it is the task of every teenager up through our seniors to have a good biblical working definition of what a functional family is.

 - Teenagers so that when you approach marriage, you will have firmly fixed in your mind what kind of family you want to establish

 - Adults so that we can every be challenging one another and shoring up the most important institution in our society - the family

- As if having a robe which said “Dad loves me more than you” wasn’t enough Joseph also had a heavenly Father who chose him above his brothers. God chose Joseph to communicate a truth none of them would understand at the time but a truth that would be realized in the future in the salvation of their family. He communicated his dream this way:

 - *“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.”*

- 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 said.

- It is hard to imagine that this was the first dream Joseph ever had. Most people dream regularly. But there was something about this dream that had to be communicated. He no doubt knew what their reaction would be but he obviously felt led to communicate it regardless.

- We, the church, have been given a revelation to pass on to others. Our revelation is the gospel concerning Jesus Christ. There will always be those who react negatively toward us as we share it. But the lesson we learn from Joseph is that when God gives us a message for others we are obligated to communicate that message. Joseph did not find it optional; neither should we

- By the way if Joseph had known then what he would know in time he could have answered them like this:

 - Do you intend to rule over us? He could have responded no, God intends for me to rule over you.

-Will you actually rule us? He could have responded "Yes, I will order one of you be bond and the rest I will send miles away, only to return on my terms, and return you will."

- The next scene in Joseph's life is his being sent by his father to check on his brothers who were far from home herding the flocks. They see him coming in the distance and before he reaches them, they plotted to kill him. Joseph clearly knew his brothers hated him. Yet he was given a task to do and he felt obligated to do it. He did not expect anything to be different this time around. They always spoke nasty to him; this time would be no different. It is doubtful he expected them to be plotting against his life.

- We all have individuals in our lives who we sense really don't like us. We choose to avoid them at all cost rather than experience the awkwardness of being in their presence. But Joseph place duty above feelings and all who read his story are inspired by his diligence. One of the greatest restrictive forces in the advancement of the Kingdom of God is the people of God placing their feelings above duty. They are uncomfortable talking to others about the Lord. They find it unpleasant to work in the soup kitchens where the hungry are fed. They comfort trumps the work of God. Not that they refuse to be involved in the work of God but only that work that falls within their comfort zone. I personally believe Joseph was way out of his comfort zone on this trip.

- Joseph's plan was to check on the status of his brothers and the flocks and then to bring word back to his father Jacob. His brother's plan was to kill him and throw him into a cistern and say a ferocious animal devoured him. Fortunately, there was a conscience among the ten brothers and Reuben said, in an attempt to rescue him, "Let's not take his life ... throw him into one of these cisterns" - hoping that they would come to their senses and allow him to return to their father. So as he arrived before them they grabbed him, stripped off his richly ornamented robe, and threw him in the cistern. It isn't recorded here in this chapter but they would later reflect back on this moment and say "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen..."

- We all are exposed to the distress and pleas for help by others from time to time. We all from time to time encounter others who are desperate for help. People who don't know where to turn. People who are dangerously close to giving up. Others whose problems are not so big but big enough that they feel as though they have been thrown in a cistern and there is none to help. If these people are few and far between it probably suggests that we have done a very good job of isolating ourselves from the woes of mankind. The very woes Jesus can to address and the very woes He has commissioned us to address in his absence.

- Then before they had a chance to repent and come to their senses, they look up and saw a Midianite caravan passing by. Acting more like businessmen than brothers, they raised the question "What will we gain if we kill our brother ... let us sell him to these merchants...and they all agreed (except for Reuben who was away from the scene for

some reason). So for twenty shekels of silver (\$88.00 today), Joseph is sold into slavery. \$88.00 divided by ten brothers equals \$8.80. So what could you do with \$8.80? Well they could stop at MacDonal'd's and buy a Big Mac Value meal and have enough left over to get some flip flops from Old Navy. So I read this account and I envision them having eaten their Big Mac and burping and looking down at their new flip flops and thinking "that wasn't such a bad deal".

- We of course are appalled by such devaluing of human life. But in a culture where the dollar is increasingly elevated and valued, human life simultaneously finds itself decreasing in value. For many corporations the dollar is more important than the worker. For many insurance companies the cost of the procedure trumps the patient's well being. And for the affluent all around the world the dollar held in reserve is more important than the starving child some continent away.

- Well you are familiar with the story, the brothers took Joseph's robe that they had stripped from him, splashed it with animal blood, took it back to their father and lied through their teeth by saying "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." Jacob of course recognizes it immediately and concludes just what they had hoped he would; that some ferocious animal had devoured his son and Joseph was surely torn to pieces."

- We live in a culture of spin. The marketplace spins with advertisements that are meant to throw us off balance and make the purchase before we come to our better senses. Politicians put a spin on things to advance their agenda. TV talking heads spin the news in a way that reflects the stations prejudices. There is so much spinning that one program's spin is that the spin stops here. If ever there was a need for a people to rise up and speak the truth it is now. The Kingdom of God is founded upon truth and we do it great justice when we settle for nothing less than truth. When we live truthful lives. Lives of integrity. Lives that others find solid and trustworthy.

- The brothers of Joseph were dishonest men. Their false ways moved their baby brother from the security of a home where his father loved him to a life of slavery. Their false ways took a father's heart that rejoiced the child of his latter years and moved it to mourning that in Jacob's words "in mourning will I go down to the grave..." Nothing good ever comes from falsehood.

- The chapter closes with this verse: Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

- While the scheme of the brothers was playing itself out in Canaan with Jacob and Rachel broken hearted over the loss of their son the scheme of God was unfolding in Egypt where He was preparing to systematically move Joseph from a servant of Potiphar to the head over all of Potiphar's house to imprisonment to head over all the prison duties, to interpreter of dreams, to architect of a grain harvesting and storing program the likes of

which the world has never seen and subsequently to become the second highest man in Egypt. A position which will mean salvation to his starving family in couple decades.

- Life is full of “meanwhiles”. As we are struggling through some trial or obstacle, behind the scenes God is at work putting in place those things which will bring about an eventual blessing. Most of have can look back at various moments in our lives when what was at hand was a trial that consumed us but we know now that “meanwhile” God was

- Even now as we struggle along in this present life we know there is one really big, big “meanwhile” occurring. For as we make our way across this sometimes barren and heartbreaking landscape, **meanwhile**, He is preparing a place for us so that where He is we may be also.