

Joseph 1-30-08  
Cornerstone Christian Academy

The story of Joseph is one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible. I'm preaching on it right now, and will probably end up with about a dozen sermons on his life. There have been books and movies made about the ten chapters in Genesis. This morning I'd like to take you through a few highlights of his life and draw a few lessons we can apply to our life.

Joseph was his father Jacob's favorite. That is because he was the firstborn of his favorite wife, Rachel. After Rachel died giving birth to Joseph's brother Benjamin, his father favored him all the more. His father had him check on the other brothers and give reports on how they were managing the flocks. He made him a special robe. Now, I know you all think of it as a multicolored coat, but it is more likely it was like a long sleeve full-length robe. The one who was the oldest boy and to inherit double that of the other brothers would have such a cloak. There is one problem. Joseph wasn't the oldest.

How do you think that made the brothers feel? Well, to add to that, Joseph gave a bad report about them. Daddy's favorite was now a snitch in their eyes. But that wasn't all. Then he had a dream about how the whole family would bow down to him. That would have been fine, but he went and told them about it! Did he have a death wish? Maybe he just got so excited he had to talk about it. Or maybe he was so sure it was of God that there was nothing they could do about it. It sure seems kind of boastful to share it, don't you think?

There was a dry spell in the land, and the brothers had to take the herds some distance away to find pasture. They were in a dangerous area so Jacob hesitated to send 17 year old Joseph, but finally he felt he had to. So there went Joseph, packing some food for his brothers and wearing his top dog robe.

When they saw him coming, they joked about seeing if his dreams would come to pass if they killed him. Then they started to think the joke was a pretty good idea. No more nosey little brother. They'd all get a bigger inheritance and maybe a little more love from Dad. It started to sound better and better. Here is the first lesson I want you to take home. Sin always sounds good and captures your imagination. It's a lie.

It's easy to get sucked into doing something with others that you would never do alone. We call it peer pressure. It's really a desire to be accepted by others. It shows that you are too weak to stand up for what you claim to believe. You have a choice to lead others in a different direction, stand up for your convictions and walk away regardless of what others will say, or cave in and go along. Which of those responses will be most respected in the long run?

I had a friend who had a black Lab. It was the best dog you could imagine. One day she had to go somewhere so she left the dog with her friend's German Shepherd. That lady also had to leave, so the two dogs were alone. Together they did what they would never do alone. They worked open the door to the big 40lb bag of dog food. Then each tried to out eat the other. They pretty much finished the bag. When the lady came home, the house was a mess! All that food didn't stay in the dogs if you know what I mean. We can be just like those dogs. When we do, we will get caught and it will be just as ugly.

What the enemy of your soul is trying to convince you of is nothing like what will actually happen. The brothers are thinking how great it will be to get rid of this little pest. But we'll see in a moment what really happened. It's kind of like those dogs thought how great it would be to eat all they wanted.

Rueben was the oldest and already in trouble with his dad, so he convinced them to drop him in a dry cistern. He planned to come rescue him later and use that to get back in good with Dad. But while Rueben was away with the flocks, a caravan came by. Judah suggested they could all make a couple shekels if they'd just sell him to the caravan and be done with him. They all liked the idea. Joseph was pleading with them, crying out for mercy, but they just laughed and enjoyed the meal he had brought. As Joseph was led away, hands bound and tied behind a camel, his brothers mocked him about his dreams. Joseph pleaded with them but they just laughed all the more. Rueben returned to find his brother was gone, and all he could think of was getting in more trouble with his Dad. He ripped his clothes in anguish.

They had a plan. They took the robe that they had stripped off Joseph, tore it, and dipped it goat's blood. Then they took it back to their father and asked if he recognized it. Well, that sent him in to a fit of depression that he never seemed to come out of. Now they had to face what they had really done. They didn't imagine it would cause such grief in their house. Instead of getting more of Dad's love, it was like he wasn't even there. No one could cheer him up. The whole home seemed dark and depressing.

Meanwhile, Joseph was being purchased by Potiphar, the bodyguard of the Pharaoh. It might be a bit rough to be the slave of a bodyguard. I want you to put yourself in Joseph's sandals for a minute. Imagine walking behind a camel a few hundred miles, part of which would have been hot sand, to a foreign country. You can't speak the language. You don't know what people are saying. They make you stand on rock and everyone is staring at you. Some big guy hands over some money to the people that brought you there and he starts to lead you away like goat on a rope. You have a few choices. You can try to wait for a chance to run, until you see someone's toes chopped off when they were caught. You can get really mad at your brothers, and God, and life in general, and do as little as you can get away with. Or you can put yourself into this new

life and try to look forward and not backward. Amazingly enough, Joseph did the latter.

This is the second big lesson I want you to think about. You can look backward and get bitter, or forward and have hope. Why do you think Joseph looked forward? He recognized that the Lord was with him. He still believed his dreams, the promises of God. Now ask yourself this, "Is the Lord with me?" How do I know? How have I experienced his presence? And has the Lord given you promises? Tell me some of them. Does that make you hopeful? Does it give you a reason to look forward?

Things go pretty well in Potiphar's house. Joseph gets promoted to General Manager. But Potiphar's wife is a problem. She thinks Joseph is pretty hot. She wants him for her own selfish pleasure, but Joseph avoids her. Finally she catches him alone and he tells her he can't sin against her husband who has placed such trust in him, nor can he sin against God.

You know, it would have been really easy for Joseph to justify in his mind giving in to temptation. He was a young man, lonely, forsaken by his family, and who would find out? Wasn't Mrs. Potiphar neglected and lonely? But Joseph wouldn't play the justification game. Justifying sin is like trying to tell yourself why it's OK to rebel against Almighty God who loves you. You can come up with some great reasons in your mind but how do they sound to God? Hmmm?

He ran! He left his cloak behind. Mrs. P. felt snubbed, so she called the other servants and claimed he tried to rape her. That false accusation landed Joseph in the Pharaoh's pit with all the enemies of the state.

Now Joseph has the same choice he had before. He can get bitter and mad at the world, or he can look forward and start again. He can say life is out of control or he can believe that somehow God is keeping his Word. What would you do? I think I'd cry for a few days, but I hope I'd do what Joseph did. He put himself right into the work and soon became the overseer of the prison. Do you think he would have been promoted in Potiphar's house or in prison if he had moped around like an angry brat?

Eventually, two of the king's servants were thrown in the pit. They both had a dream that bothered them. Joseph could see on their faces something was wrong so he asked them. He told them God could interpret their dreams. They relayed them and Joseph gave the interpretation. One of them would get his job back, the other would lose his head and be put on a pole for birds to dine on. Joseph pleaded with the one that was going back to work to tell Pharaoh that he was there unjustly.

Joseph was probably sure that everything was about to change any day. But day after day passed. Days turned into months, and months into years. The man had

promised to tell Pharaoh but then promptly forgot. Joseph has the same choice he has had before. It has been 11 years! Is it time to give up on God? Why should he go on trusting? God is with him, and the promises of God can't fail!

After two years, Pharaoh had a dream. No one can interpret it. Finally the cup bearer remembered Joseph. What if he had remembered to tell Pharaoh two years earlier? Where would Joseph be? Probably back in Canaan with his family. All the good that he would do in the future couldn't be accomplished. So while what the cupbearer did was mean and wrong, it all worked into God's plan and timing. Only God can take our failures and make something good. God takes the manure of human behavior and grows roses.

Joseph is cleaned up and brought before Pharaoh. Pharaoh says, "I hear you are pretty good at dream interpretation." Joseph says, "Not me!" but there is the God who can interpret your dreams. He goes on to interpret the dreams and becomes second in charge of the most powerful nation in the world overnight. One night he is on the prison floor, and the next he's in a palace. I don't think even Joseph thought God could turn things around so quickly.

It was a total of 13 years in the school of tough times. Could you have done it? Only if you did what Joseph did. Only if you trusted in the Lord's presence and in His word. Maybe you think you've been going through something really hard. Has it been a long time? Are you ready for the trial to be over? Has your attitude been like Joseph's? You see, if you want to get blessed, you have to be blessable! God isn't going to pour out his blessings on a whining bitter brat. He looks for someone like Joseph. Someone who believes him. Someone who is thankful for His presence.

Those 13 years of difficulty were God's school to prepare Joseph to face the pressures of ruling Egypt. If you thought he was done with the hard stuff, you are wrong. Now the real temptations begin. If you have that much power, what do you do? You could throw Mrs. P. in jail for being a liar and then go after your brothers. You could get a bunch of servants to do your work for you. You could party nonstop until you die. You can do what ever you want. But 13 years of hardship humbled Joseph so that he could face all those temptations and resist them. He knew he was there by God's appointment, and he had to be faithful to God. Do you know you are here by God's appointment and He expects you to be faithful?

The greatest work is not even really clearly mentioned on the surface of the story. It lies deep within. Do you remember what a cocky little pride trip Joseph was as a teenager? What happened to him? Hardship humbled him. Difficulty broke him. He became a man dependent on God. He became compassionate. Remember when he saw the faces of Pharaoh's servants, he knew something was wrong and wanted to help? He certainly wasn't that way when he was 17. The years of difficulty changed him. Even two years before his ascension, he was

trying to talk his way out of difficulty, getting the cupbearer to promise to help him. But when he was before Pharaoh two years later, he didn't care any more. He was as bold as a lion. He said he couldn't interpret the dream but **the** God could.

Pharaoh claimed to be a god, but the language Joseph used over and over and over was "The God". Those 13 years of difficulty had drawn him close to God and made him uncompromising with the world. Now he was ready to face all the temptations the world could throw at him.

How old are you? What have you learned? Do you really know that God is with you? Do you really look to His promises and not your situation? Is your attitude blessable? Well, we all probably have a few more years of hardship to go, but you can be sure it is for God's wonderful purposes.

In the last chapter of Genesis, the brothers get scared because their Dad has died and now they think Joseph is going to get even. So they concoct a story that their Dad asked Joseph to forgive them. Joseph gives them an amazing answer. He says, "Am I in the place of God? What you did was evil, but God used it for good to save many lives." Joseph could see that God works amidst all the evil of men and brings His wonderful will to pass.

Joseph is a beautiful parallel to Jesus that was to come. Listen to this list of all the expressions that can be equally applied to either one:

Loved by His Father.  
Betrayed by his brothers.  
Sold for the price of a slave.  
Father's heart was broken.  
30 years old when he began ministry  
Brothers meant it for evil, God meant it for our good.  
World had to come to him to live.  
No other place to go for bread of life.  
Falsely judged.  
Lied about.  
Judged with two others.  
One ascended with him and the other was judged.  
Rose to the right hand of the ruling authority.  
Victorious in the end

Will you be a Joseph regardless of the cost? Know that God is with you. Stand on God's promises! Look forward and not back. Don't go along with the crowd. Keep a blessable attitude. Let God shape your character. Give God all the glory!