

Joseph - All things work together for good.

Genesis 50:15-21

Isn't it great when a Bible story gets made into a musical - we can all understand it then can't we and enjoy a great show at the same time? Or can we? Even though I agree that Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat is a fantastic show and I love the music - we don't have to be Christians to enjoy it do we - I mean it's just a good story with a happy ending isn't it? So, what I am trying to say is that if we've seen the show or heard the songs, we may have become a little more familiar with the story of Joseph and his brothers and that coat of course, but have we really understood what God is saying to us? I think in order to really hear God's message we need to peel back a few layers of the familiar part of the story and look deeper to gain a real insight as to the message that God wants us to understand and what it means to us as Christians today.

We first meet Joseph as the 17-year-old son of Jacob in Chapter 37 of Genesis and his story takes us right through to Chapter 50. So just think, the whole creation story and the fall were dealt with in just three chapters, but we need 13 chapters to have the whole of Joseph's story revealed to us. We can't possibly look at all 13 chapters this morning and don't worry, I'm not going to try! So, let's just look at a summary of the early part of Joseph's story. Oh, before we start digging into that story, I'd just like to read a verse from Romans chapter 8 which says, "And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good". We'll be reminded of this message as we look at Joseph and what happened to him.

So, a recap of the more familiar part of the story of Joseph. He was Jacob's favourite son of twelve. This favouritism led to his brothers being extremely jealous and hating Joseph, especially when he related his dreams which put him above his brothers. As a result, they planned to kill their brother but instead sold him into Egyptian slavery but told Jacob that his precious son had been killed. Joseph was then falsely accused of seduction by Potiphar's wife and slung into jail. Joseph had opportunity to interpret more dreams in prison and this ultimately led to him being freed in order to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. These dreams predicted seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine and Joseph is elevated to a position of greatness as second in command to Pharaoh. Joseph is now 30 years old. The seven years of plenty then take place followed by the start of the years of famine, making it about 20 years since he saw his brothers and his father. During all of that time, Jacob assuming his son to be dead had continued to mourn him. But now the years of famine were affecting those living in Canaan and Jacob sent his sons to plead with Pharaoh's second to sell them some food. They were, of course, completely unaware of Joseph's identity. Joseph finally reveals himself, provides for them and tells them to bring Jacob to Egypt. This finally happens and the whole family settle in Goshen and are well provided for. The brothers were afraid when Joseph first revealed himself to them as they

assumed that knowing what they had done to him, he would want to seek vengeance but in Chapter 45 we read that Joseph said to them “do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” he goes on to say “And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So, it was not you who sent me here but God”. So, we’re given a glimpse here of the truth of that verse in Romans 8 about God using bad situations for good, aren’t we?

Martin Luther says that the story of Joseph is very much a foreshadowing of the story of Christ and there are many details within this story that really do compare. Some examples are that Joseph was sold by his brothers for pieces of silver just as Jesus was betrayed by Judas for pieces of silver; Joseph was beaten, sold into slavery, imprisoned, rose to an exalted position at the right hand of Pharaoh just as Jesus was humiliated, tortured, sent to his death, and then rose again and is seated at the right hand of God. We are also told of times when Joseph showed his distress with tears, just as Jesus in his humanity wept after the death of his dear friend Lazarus. Chad Bird describes the life of Joseph to be a black and white version of the full and glorious colour version of the life of Jesus and this is backed up by Tim Keller when he says, “Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the King, forgives those who betrayed him and uses his new power to save them”.

Only now are we coming to our passage this morning - that must be one of the longest prologues you’ve heard!

And so, we come to Chapter 50, the last chapter of Genesis - 17 years after Jacob and his sons arrived in Egypt. Jacob has died after blessing his sons and prophesying on the coming of Christ from the tribe of Judah. Jacob had requested that he be buried back in the land of Canaan and this was done.

Chad Bird reminds us that “for the first 17 years of Joseph’s life, he was with his father, Jacob. And for the last 17 years of Jacob’s life, he was with his son, Joseph. Our Lord has his ways of restoring joy, even after years of separation and suffering. There is no hope so dry, no soul so withered, that he cannot from that nothingness bring forth light and life”.

Now, Joseph’s brothers are really worried!

Now that their father is dead, they begin to remember the terrible things they did to Joseph and imagine that now Joseph is bound to seek his revenge and punish them in some way. So, in true form they make a plan. In verse 17 we see what they say to Joseph: “your father gave this command before he died: Say to Joseph Please forgive the transgressions of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you”. The brothers then said to Joseph “behold, we are your servants”.

Now Joseph’s reply to his brothers must be one of the most important things we read in Genesis. Listen to what he says in verses 19,20 and 21 “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

So do not fear, I will provide for you and your little ones”. So here we are again being reminded that through difficult times, times when bad things are happening often at the hands of man against man, God is working in the background using these things for good. You see, Joseph never lost his faith in God, even when he was hated by his brothers, slung into a pit, sold into slavery, lied about by Potiphar’s wife, thrown into jail. Through all of these things his faith remained solid. Quite simply, if Joseph hadn’t been hated and sold by his brothers and ended up in Egypt, he wouldn’t have been put in the high and powerful position of being second in command to Pharaoh and in turn wouldn’t have been able to see Egypt through the years of famine. Because these things had happened to him, he was able to provide for his family and the people of Egypt who would otherwise have succumbed to the famine. This all means that God’s promises and Jacob’s prophecies to bring about a nation of people, the line of which would lead to the Messiah, are fulfilled. Joseph believed in God’s promises and knew through faith that God would use the negative times to bring about a positive outcome. We know, especially as we live through this current pandemic, how difficult it is to know that everything will be ok again, that God is at work in the background making good out of bad, but it is my prayer that we too can share Joseph’s faith, knowing that God has fulfilled all of his lifesaving promises in the life, death, and resurrection of our living Lord Jesus.

And so, this brings us to the end of our series on Genesis where we have seen the creation of the world, the fall of humanity into sin, the promises of God to Noah, Abraham, and Jacob and now the birth of a nation which leads us to that promised seed, our own saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. In conclusion then, we can say that a good summary of the book of Genesis is that we see that God who loves and cares for his people brings history round to the promise of the eventual fulfilment in the one who will pay the price for all sinful acts, past, present, and future. We have already seen that, as we read in Romans 8 “that for those who love God, all things work together for good” or as John Murray wrote “The providence of God is often a dark and impenetrable abyss to us. Clouds and darkness are round about him. His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters. His footsteps are not known.” And a further note on this reads “God’s path to accomplish his plan of redemption is beyond our human eyes to see and minds to understand. But Scripture affirms that God will accomplish his plan; let our lack of understanding give way to faith in the eternal God who will never fail”.

Can we, as Christians today, remain faithful to God, trust in his promises and love Him even when things aren’t going well? Well let’s end with a reminder of Paul’s words to the Romans Chap 8, verse 28, whilst thinking of the life of Joseph and our own Christian journeys: “And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good”.

Amen