

Joseph- Gen 37:1-11

- That cheerful prophet of happy thoughts,
- Job, announced;

"Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble." Job 14:1

- Job may have been overly pessimistic given the rugged circumstances of his life,
- But all of us are going to know the reality of those words at some time in our lives.
- Job was a righteous man who feared God and shunned evil we're told.
- But he faced the severest of trials.
- In this week's story from Genesis,
- We meet a man who you could rightly argue got what he deserved.
- And yet as we heard from Psalm 105:19

"Till the time that his words proved true; he was tested by the Lord's command." Psalm 105:19

- Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob,
- Whom we learnt about last week.
- And as our story opens,
- We see that Jacob has committed the cardinal sin of parenting,
- He has a favourite.
- And just as Jacob's family was divided because of parental favouritism so will his.
- Joseph, we're told, was loved more than any of the other sons.
- Now it's one thing to have a favourite,
- And another thing altogether to make it obvious to everyone else.
- Jacob did that by making Joseph a richly ornamented robe,
- And the result was that his brothers hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.
- Jacob's favouritism elevated normal sibling rivalry to a toxic level.

- Now being daddy's golden haired boy was not helpful to Joseph either.
- As our story unfolds we'll get to see that Joseph was obviously a very smart fellow,
- He had incredible skills that would be the salvation of a whole nation.
- But at 17,
- He may have been clever but he lacked wisdom.
- Joseph clearly revels in his most favoured status,
- And while he's out tending the sheep with his brothers he acts as a spy for his father,
- Bringing back to him negative reports about the rest of the boys.
- Well all this is bad enough
- But Joseph overlays his dobber status with arrogant pride.
- Clearly Joseph has no personal insight,
- Why else would you tell the story he does if you knew how much you were hated.
- Joseph has a dream and rather than keeping it to himself,
- He shares it with his brothers and rubs their noses in it.

"Listen to this dream I had: ⁷ 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." Gen 37:6-7

- His brothers are not fools,
- They get it straight away and challenge 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'd said.
- But he doesn't leave it there.
- Joseph's pride and his lack of insight goes even further when he has another dream.

"Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." Gen 37:9

- Not content with rubbing his brothers's nose in his dream,
- Joseph goes and repeats the dream to his father as well.
- Well this is too much even for Jacob and he confronts Joseph;
 - "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"
 - Gen 37:10
- And another ugly emotion hits Jacob's family,
- As jealousy is added to hatred.
- Joseph's foolish pride is spawning a host of animosity,
- That comes to a nasty head on the fields outside Dothan.
- All the boys are out herding sheep so Jacob sends Joseph to see if all is well.
- But before Joseph can find them,
- They spot him coming towards their camp and start a plot.
 - "Here comes that dreamer! Let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." Gen 37:20-21
- Lucky for Joseph however his eldest brother Reuben makes a counter plot;
 - "Let's not take his life, don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.
 - Gen 37:22
- So Joseph gets stripped down,
- Probably roughed up a bit,
- Tossed into the well,
- And given an opportunity to ponder his fate,
- Which was going to take a nasty turn.

- While the heartless brothers are sitting around the fire eating their dinner,
- A caravan of Ishmaelites comes along and Judah gets a bright idea.
- 'Hey why don't we make a few bucks out of this situation by flogging Joseph off to these slave traders?
- 'Then we won't have to kill him and have to try and cover it up.
- 'After all, he is our brother.'
- So for 20 shekels of silver Joseph is sold into slavery.
- So much for everyone bowing down to his sheaf,
- Not much chance of the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him now.
- Joseph is sailing on a ship of the desert to servitude in Egypt.

- Quick recap of the story you know so well.
- Joseph becomes the servant of Potiphar a high ranking Egyptian official.
- He does a great job of managing Potiphar's household,
- But falls foul of Potiphar's wife when he spurns her amorous attentions.
- And now comes a further twist,
- Because between us learning that God blessed Joseph through his servitude to Potiphar,
- And that God was with Joseph and gave him further success,
- We see that Joseph is going to get dragged down again into another pit.
- This time it's in Pharaoh's prison.

- Now think about this.
- None of us would consider false imprisonment a sign of God's presence with us would we?
- None of us would think that being framed shows that God is blessing us.
- In fact there's this huge incongruity isn't there?
- On the one hand we know that God is blessing Joseph,
- God is giving Joseph success with everything he puts his hands to.
- And then all of a sudden his world comes tumbling down,

- And none of it's because of him.
- In fact it's because he's upright,
- Because he's doing the right thing by his master and his God,
- That Joseph's life is once again shattered.
- Joseph could have taken advantage of Potiphar's wife's advances,
- But he doesn't.
- Why doesn't God bless him for his integrity?
- Why doesn't God intervene for his righteousness?
- Why doesn't God rescue Joseph from this unjust situation?
- It's because God has a bigger plan for Joseph's life.

- But Joseph doesn't know that.
- And neither will you or I.
- In our lives there are going to be times when the most unjust,
- Unfair,
- Unmerited wrongs are going to come our way.
- We're going to flounder wondering 'where is God in all of this?',
- And God is going to seem far off and distant,
- The darkness of our circumstance will obscure God's presence.
- Those will be the darkest and hardest moments of your life,
- And like Jesus on the Cross you may cry,
- 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me.'

- I'm sure that's what Joseph was going through,
- But just listen carefully to what the bible writer tells us;

"But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden." Genesis 39:20-21

- Whether Joseph realised it or not,
- The Lord **was** with him.
- The Lord was there.
- I wonder if Joseph's pride popped to the surface again and he cried out,
- 'What have I done to deserve this?'
- That's an arrogant thing to say though isn't it?
- If I ask 'what have I done to deserve this trouble or that?'
- It implies that I'm above these things doesn't it?
- 'If I have done bad things like that lazy family down the road,
- 'I could understand why unemployment would strike me',
- 'If I was dishonest like that disreputable accountant in town,
- 'I could understand why I would be arrested and put in gaol,
- 'But I'm honest,
- 'I'm upright,
- 'So why am I suffering like this?'
- That's pride speaking isn't it?

- Well we really don't know if Joseph's pride was or wasn't under control at this stage,
- What we do know is that God was with him,
- And God had a plan,
- A plan that Joseph would have to wait at least another two years to discover.
- Because joining him in gaol were the king's baker and cup bearer.
- Let me cut a long story short again,
- By saying that Joseph interprets two dreams these other servants have,
- And they come true.
- Which for one servant meant that he got back into royal service,
- And the other that he got hung.

- But it was this interpretive gift of Joseph that gets him rescued from gaol,
- And brought before the Pharaoh,
- Where he interprets his dream,
- Gets promoted to Prime Minister,
- Takes control of all the agricultural resources of Egypt,
- And rescues that nation from a seven year famine.
- And I'll leave the rest of that story for Paul next week.

- Tough times will test our faith.
- That's what the Psalmist acknowledges,
- But for many of us,
- Especially in the affluent West,
- It's the good times that will test our faith.
- Often it's easier trusting God when all the props have been knocked out from under us,
- When desperation forces us to rely on the Lord,
- Because there's nothing left for us to rely on but him.
- When everything is going well,
- When life is smooth,
- When we're rich and comfortable,
- That's the time when trusting God is actually more difficult,
- Because we can forget from whom everything has come,
- We slide back into our old pride filled ways that assert,
- 'I am the source of all my well being',
- 'I am the master of my universe.'
- It's what's described in the Parable of the Soils about the thorny ground,
- Which Jesus explains as;

“. . . someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.”
Matthew 13:22

- Even though Joseph was seriously flawed,
- God was faithful.
- God was with Joseph in all his trials.
- Just as Paul will reveal next Sunday,
- God turned the brother's evil into good,
- Just as he turned Joseph's pride into compassion and wisdom.
- All those trials that came Joseph's way,
- Were shaping him for the greater plan that God has in mind for him.

- And God's dealings with his servants has not changed.
- There are numerous texts in the Bible,
- That remind us not to let the struggles we face overwhelm us,
- But rather have a perspective on these trials that will deepen and strengthen our trust in God.
- The writer to the Hebrews warns;

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” Hebrews 12:11

- To the Romans Paul wrote;

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,” Romans 8:28-29

- We need to take those words 'all things' seriously.
- Everything that crosses our path in this world,
- Holds within it the potential to change us to be more like Jesus,

- To be the person God created us to be.
- Whether the good or the bad,
- The trial or the blessing,
- How we respond in faith to all those circumstances of life,
- Will determine how fruitful our lives will be in the service of our Lord and Saviour.