

Joseph's Dreams

- Genesis 37:1-11
- I said last week that we were entering the Joseph section of Genesis, and it is the longest part. And yet, compared to the other three, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Joseph is the least mentioned in the New Testament. Why is he such an important figure? I like what David Guzik wrote about the godly men in Genesis: Enoch shows the *walk* of faith. Noah shows the *perseverance* of faith. Abraham shows the *obedience* of faith. Isaac shows the *power* of faith. Jacob shows the *discipline* of faith. Joseph shows the *triumph* of faith. He will have to overcome many trials and much suffering, but Joseph triumphs because God's hand is on him, and his faith is in God. This story has been called a masterful narrative and volumes of books have been written about it. Even Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice got excited about the story and wrote a children's oratorio first and then a musical called *Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* that was a smash hit in London and then around the world. It was one of my favorite shows I did with the Gallery Players in the 80's.
- We have talked a little about types in the Old Testament. Remember, we said that Noah's ark was a type of Christ because all who went into it were saved. Joseph is a type of Christ as well. The world will come to him during the famine to be saved. But more than that, James Boice wrote, "He was loved and hated, favored and abused, tempted and trusted, exalted and abased. Yet at no point in the one-hundred-and-ten-year life of Joseph did he ever seem to get his eyes off God or cease to trust him. Adversity did not harden his character. Prosperity did not ruin him. He was the same in private as in public. He was a truly great man." Joseph was certainly not perfect, as we see in this first passage we are studying today, but his life is a powerful picture that points to the sacrifice and suffering and ultimate triumph of the one who was and is perfect, Jesus Christ.
- Others have pointed out that the genealogy of Christ includes a Joseph, right? The earthly father of Jesus. Roland Warren wrote about the two Josephs in Jesus' life, one who was present at his birth, and the other who was present at his death. Warren wrote that both of the Josephs adopted one who was considered illegitimate. Joseph of Nazareth adopted Mary's son as his own and raised him to be a carpenter. And Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body down from the cross. In that culture, if someone was crucified and no one claimed his body, it was as if that person was illegitimate from birth.
- All that is to say, God called on three Josephs in the Bible to play very important roles. Let's begin our look at this Joseph under two main points: Jacob's favoritism and Joseph's dreams.
- **Jacob's favoritism (verses 2-4)**
- The scene opens with 17-year-old Joseph in the fields with four of his brothers, Dan and Naphtali, the sons of Bilhah, and Gad and Asher, the sons of Zilpah. These 4 may have been considered second-string sons since they were from secondary wives. If they were the least favored, could it be that putting Joseph with them, the older son of the favorite wife, was a recipe for trouble? We can't say for sure, but the four older brothers did something evil in the fields that Moses does not share with us. But Joseph made sure he shared it with Jacob! Verse 2, "Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father." This was the first strike. Moses does not tell us what the 4 did, and he did not tell us how Jacob reacted, and he did not tell us how the 4 responded to Joseph after this. There are two sides to this, or two ways of looking at it. On the one hand, when one child tells a parent about the bad behavior of another child, we have a tendency to call that child what? A tattletale. The origin of that word in the 1500's was a publication called *Tattler*, which came to mean "idle-talker or gossip." Moses doesn't comment on Joseph's motives for bringing this news to his father, so that leads to another way of looking at it. It may have been naïve for Joseph to tell on his older brothers, thinking no harm would come to him for it, but as Derek Kidner writes, "it (is) at least presumable that Joseph's first duty was to his father." Allen Ross writes, "Those who would be leaders must prove faithful in smaller responsibilities." Maybe this report gives us the first glimpse of Joseph's pure heart, his desire to live a righteous life, which does not seem to be a motivation for his brothers.

- If that was strike one for Joseph, Jacob threw strike two by openly displaying his love for Joseph above his brothers. Joseph was his favorite child, and he made that clear to the others. You have to shake your head at this, don't you? Did Jacob learn nothing from growing up with a father who favored Esau, and a mother who favored Jacob? Does he not remember the grief and suffering that favoritism brought to the whole family, resulting in Jacob running for his life from Esau, separation from his family for 20 years, and never seeing his mother again? If not, surely Jacob saw the grief that his own favoritism toward Rachel caused Leah? Here he is, just like Dad, doing it all again, committing this generational sin. We are told he loved Joseph more because he was the "son of his old age." But wait, wouldn't that be Benjamin? The only explanation I have read for this is that Joseph was the closest one to his father in his old age, or that in his old age Jacob was drawn to an exceptional maturity and leadership quality he saw in Joseph.
- Either way, when Jacob brought out the robe of many colors, the word referring to a long robe with sleeves, as royalty would wear, and placed it on Joseph with pride and kissed him on both cheeks while his 10 older brothers watched, strike two sizzled across the plate. The knife was in and twisted, now, to change the metaphor. The narrator tells us the brothers "hated him and could not speak peacefully to him." Nahum Sarna interprets this verse, "they could not abide his friendly speech." No matter how much Joseph may have tried to be friends, they rejected it and pushed him away. That leads us to strike three which happens with...
- **Joseph's dreams (verses 5-11)**
- We have seen dreams in Genesis already, haven't we? God spoke to Abimelech and Jacob and Laban in dreams. With Joseph, God speaks in pictures. Symbols. The first one was a pastoral setting, a wheatfield, and he and his brothers were binding sheaves of wheat. And Joseph excitedly told his brothers, *hey guys, listen to this! My sheaves of wheat stood upright and your sheaves of wheat bowed down to mine. Isn't that crazy? Huh?* Ok, maybe I added that last part, but again we see Joseph's naivete, and some have said "self-focus," in sharing these dreams with his brothers, not knowing how they would respond. But though Joseph didn't know it, and certainly his brothers and even Jacob didn't understand it, these dreams are prophetic. They confirm God's choice of Joseph to be the leader. A great leader. The first dream has an agricultural theme, and we know that this will be the catalyst by which Joseph will come to power in Egypt, when God gives to Pharaoh a dream about cattle and heads of grain that only Joseph can interpret.
- The brother's respond predictably: "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" The way it is written in Hebrew could be translated with emphatic language, "You cannot possibly mean that you will rule over us!" Joseph said nothing, but we know that, yes, actually, he will!
- The second dream moves from the fields to the heavens. In this celestial dream, which Joseph again eagerly tells his brothers, eleven stars, the sun and the moon bow down to him. Moses doesn't tell us how his brothers respond, but we can guess. Their anger is smoldering and about ready to burst into flames. The next time the whole family is together, maybe that night around the dinner table, Joseph tells this dream again, to everyone. Jacob drops his fork and rebukes Joseph. He is incredulous at this. Maybe he never heard the one about the sheaves of wheat. Maybe he did and thought to himself, that sounds about right. They probably will bow to Joseph one day; he *is* my favorite. But now Joseph has gone too far, and Jacob says, "What are you talking about, son? You cannot possibly mean that I and your mother and your brothers will bow ourselves to the ground before you?!" What Jacob meant by "your mother" is unclear, since Rachel died on the way to Canaan. Most believe he is referring to Leah, who would have acted as a mother to Joseph and Benjamin after Rachel's death.
- The brothers have had it, now. It may be that even before the next scene in Dothan, they have already begun to plot their brother's demise because of their hatred and jealousy toward him. Their act of revenge will certainly be starkly different from Joseph's character that is not perfect but is righteous. God will put a righteous and faithful person into a place of leadership despite the jealousy and even hatred others may feel towards that person. Allen Ross again, "The one who would be a leader must

be faithful in discharging the duties at hand, no matter what hatred that faithfulness brings. God, and those who are spiritually mature, will honor it.”

- What about Jacob? He clearly didn’t understand the dream. And he rebuked his son for it. But to his credit, he then “kept the saying in mind.” Like Mary years later, he “pondered these things” in his heart.
- What can we take away from this passage today? 1- Once again, favoritism from one parent or another toward one child over others will almost always lead to suffering. Growing up is hard enough without that added burden. 2- “One who is faithful in a little is also faithful in much.” (Luke 16:10) Jesus refers to faithfulness in how we handle money, by which faithfulness will lead us to “true riches” which have nothing to do with money, but with spiritual stewardship and responsibility in God’s kingdom. We will see God work that out in Joseph’s life.
- Prayer