

Joseph and his Brothers

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[0 : 00] I'm going to start with a question which was on the screen during that two-minute break. What effect do you think the virus will have on the church? I wonder what you said. What effect have you seen the virus take on our church?

Here are some effects that I have seen. A friend of mine, he's a minister in Sunbury. This week he told me that he probably won't get a paycheck for April because they're not physically taking collection anymore.

In every church, there's always a percentage of what we might politely call flaky Christians. At least a physical gathering kept them connected to God.

But now, when they're able to switch us off in the comfort of their own home, what will be the effect on them? Will they fall away? Lots of our older congregation don't have the internet, and that means they haven't experienced a church service.

They haven't heard Bible teaching for nearly two months. What will be the effect in six months' time? And of course, I've seen people in our church who have been stood down from work, whose businesses have really suffered.

[1 : 08] Might they be angry at God? Where is he in all of this? We have yet to count the psychological and spiritual effect of the virus. It has done a lot of harm to the church, but God is able to use all of that for his good.

In fact, he intended it for good. That is the punchline of our series. You can see it on the screen there. It's at the very end of Genesis. Joseph says to his brothers, You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

You see, Genesis is the book of God's promises, and to Abraham he pledges land and offspring and blessings, the love promises. But in this series, lots of harmful things will get in the way.

We'll see terrible things happen to Joseph. He's enslaved in Egypt. The family, they move further away from the promised land. The brothers, they are rotten, raw materials.

There's even a global pandemic for them to deal with as well. And many times we will wonder where God is in all of this. But throughout this series, we'll see that he uses these harmful things for his good.

[2 : 28] We didn't plan on doing the Genesis series during this stage, during the virus, but I think it's the perfect series to get us through a time like ours.

We need to see that God is able to take a harmful situation and flip it and turn it and manipulate it for our good, for his good.

You see, that way we can trust him more. We say, trust God, don't we? Almost every single week here. And we have to be careful not to be too glib and to cheapen it.

This series will give us concrete, tangible and meaningful reasons why we can stare the virus in the face and say, I don't know how, but I trust that God is using even this for his good, to further his promises of blessings, using it for the saving of many souls.

And so, as Andrew said, there's a link to the handout. If you scroll above my head, please keep your Genesis passages open. We're going to go through it now. Just to say, I thought that preaching about Joseph and his Technicolor dream coat would be easy, but I'm not sure that Andrew Lloyd Webber has been any help to me whatsoever this week.

[3 : 50] Look at verse 2. It's on your screen now. This is the account of Jacob's family line. You see, this is not only about Joseph and his dream coat, but about all the sons of Jacob.

You can see on your screen it says, Jacob's name is changed to Israel. His sons become the 12 tribes. And that means this is a foundational story about all of God's people.

It's a story about you and about me. And so let's meet Jacob's family line. Firstly, the main character is Joseph. And I always thought that Joseph was an arrogant little twerp, a real upstart who needs God to bring him down a peg.

But the text never casts a shadow over his character. Actually, it's the brothers who are the rotten ones. So Reuben, the eldest, in chapter 35, he sleeps with his father's concubine, his father's girlfriend.

In chapter 34, Simeon and Levi, they're the next eldest. They're men of violence. They started a civil war by murdering the neighboring family's sons.

[4 : 58] In verse 2, Joseph brought their father a bad report about the sons of Bila, that is Dan and Naphtali, and the sons of Zilpah, Gad and Asher. And this sounds very un-Australian.

It sounds like he's dobbing on them or telling tales. But there's no indication that he's doing anything wrong. What is more likely is that at last, Jacob has a son who he can trust.

Someone who will tell the truth, who will act righteously when all the other brothers won't. Could this be why Jacob favored Joseph? Why he gave him the ornate robe?

The text says it's because he's the son of his old age, which is definitely true. But actually, Benjamin is also the son of his old age. Benjamin never gets a coat.

On your screen, there's an artist's impression of the dream coat. I think I prefer the Andrew Lloyd Webber version on the next slide. You can see it's slightly more fabulous.

[5 : 57] But I think the ornate clothing is like a royal robe for one who will be like a prince over his brothers. If you're not persuaded by that, the dreams themselves, they present Joseph as a ruler or as royalty.

Verse 6, Joseph said to them, Listen to this dream I had. We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose up and stood upright while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.

So far in Genesis, God has spoken to this family through dreams. And here, Joseph is the exalted one. A second dream straight away seems to be God's way of underlining the point.

Verse 9, Then he had another dream and he told it to his brothers. Listen, I had another dream and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.

Not just God's people but all of creation, sun, moon and stars, the whole family. And these two dreams appearing together at the beginning of our series is the Bible's way of saying Joseph is God's man.

[7 : 09] chosen from among all the other children of Israel, a righteous man whose royal rule will cause them all to one day bow the knee. In fact, every week when we see Joseph from his highest highs ruling with Pharaoh, it's because God is with him.

To his lowest lows, rejected, accused, enslaved, God is still with him. Joseph is God's man. So that's the first character.

Let's take a look at the other sons and they seem to be nothing but sinful. Verse 4, 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.

Verse 8, 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 had said.

You see, if God is speaking through dreams, wasn't Joseph right to tell everyone? Ought not the brothers take the dream seriously as a word from God?

[8 : 14] But instead, verse 11, his brothers were jealous of him. Sibling rivalry, jostling for position instead of listening to God.

And so far, I wonder how you think this family compares to your family. My wife, Rachel, she comes from a terrific family. Surely, if God was going to work through one household, it should be the horns of Tasmania and not the Jacobses or the Israelites of Canaan.

Well, let's see what happens in the story. I can't go through all the verses line by line because of time, so I'll just pick up the main idea. So in verse 12 to 13, Jacob sends Joseph to his brothers in the fields.

Verse 14, go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks and bring back word to me. Perhaps Jacob was worried that his brothers were up to their old tricks again and so he sends trustworthy Joseph to get a report.

Verse 14, when Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around the fields and asked him, what are you looking for? I think we're meant to understand that Joseph wandering around spells danger.

[9 : 30] Yes, because he's alone, but also because he keeps moving further away from his father's protection. In verse 16 to 17, he finds his brothers farther away in Dothan.

Verse 18, but they saw him in the distance and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. It's 11 against one. There is no one to protect Joseph.

Verse 19, here comes that dreamer they said to each other, come now, 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. You see, one way to stop God's man ruling over you is to try and kill him off before his time.

But in verse 21 to 23, Reuben, the eldest son, he tries to protect Joseph. He puts him in an empty cistern on your screen.

Now, there's some, I guess, images of ancient cisterns. You can see they're huge water holes dug into the ground, into the rock and they used a huge stone to cover them to protect them.

[10 : 38] Reuben wants to hide Joseph. So, verse 22, he can rescue him from them and take him back to his father. However, by the time we get to verse 25 to 27, it's brother Judah who's calling the shots.

He's in control. He wants to sell Joseph into slavery rather than kill him. Verse 28, So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for 20 shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt.

The brothers have done a terrible thing to Joseph. He's alone, he's enslaved, he's far away from his father's protection, but what they do next is shocking.

Verse 31, Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, We found this, examine it to see whether it is your son's robe.

I reckon making parents believe that their beloved child is dead is about the cruelest thing they did. They didn't even let their father believe he died peacefully.

[11 : 50] They made him believe he was torn to pieces by a ferocious animal. You see, the sons of Israel thought that with Joseph out of the way they could finally win their father's favour.

But their plot backfired because in verse 34 to 35, Jacob missed his beloved Joseph all the more. He says, I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.

And so far, this is verse 2. This is the account of the family line of Jacob. And we said at the start that Israel's family is God's people and it's a story about you and me and so it's worth asking who in the family do you most identify with?

Because thanks to the way we tell stories these days and perhaps to Andrew Lloyd Webber, we're tempted to associate and see ourselves in Joseph. Maybe we think we're misunderstood like he was.

Maybe we have dreams that our family will bow down to us. But the truth is we could never be Joseph. He is God's chosen one. A man in royal ornate clothing with whom God speaks to directly who is rejected by those closest to him, betrayed for pieces of silver, thought dead by those who love him, who was put in an empty cistern with a stone to cover it, but whose future involves all of God's people bowing down to him.

[13 : 24] You see, it's clear from the details of this story that Joseph's life resembles the Lord Jesus. And actually, if we are anyone in the story, we have much more in common with the brothers.

Violence, sexual immorality, bad behavior, intense hatred, anger, jealousy, weakness, callousness, deception, and in all of us, at least the seeds of what will one day become murder.

I like to think of my family as a good one, my wife's family as a great one. I know lots of your families and they're really good too. But in all of them, and in me too, these traits, or at least the seeds of what will become these sins.

In our New Testament passage, which is on the screen, Jesus says this, for it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come.

Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.

[14 : 38] And we see almost all of these traits in Jacob's family, and at least the seeds of them in ours.

What is striking, however, is that just the mere presence of God's man seems to bring these sins out in the sons of Israel.

So verse four, Joseph when his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than any of them, they hated and could not speak a kind word to him. Verse five, Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, then they hated him all the more.

Verse eight, his brothers said to him, do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us? And they hated him all the more. Why? Because of his dream and what he had said.

Just the mere presence of God's man exposes the sins in the sons of Israel. And actually that is a pattern we see throughout the Bible.

[15 : 38] Whether it's the prophets rejected as they speak God's word or the Hebrews opposing Moses. They said to him, who made you ruler over us?

Whether it's David opposed by Saul as the true king of Israel and especially in the Lord Jesus. whose mere presence was a light that exposes our darkness.

But we will not have him. We will not have him. The presence of God's man provokes the sin in God's people. It exposes it to full expression.

And today Joseph's brothers are exposed. They will not bow the knee. And all of this I guess is the introduction to this Genesis series.

It's not a promising start. We're scratching our heads when we see such rotten raw materials. It's going to be hard to believe that God is able to work even this for his good.

[16 : 40] But I think verse 11 gives us some help. In the verse 11 after Joseph's dreams it says his father kept the matter in mind.

You see when Jacob sees evidence of his son's death the torn and the bloodied robe he found it hard to believe that God was still in control. But he was supposed to do verse 11 keep the matter in mind.

God's man will one day rule. Don't worry. But instead what he did was verse 34 to 35 he tore his clothes he put on sackcloth he mourned his son for many days he refused to be comforted no he said I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave he wept for him it says but how can Joseph be dead when God wants him to rule if Jacob had kept the dreams in mind it would have carried him through what appeared to be you see like our passage we look outside and see a hopeless and harmful situation the virus is having a harmful effect on the economy on households and people's lives but we're to keep in mind that God is still sovereign this week when you turn on the news and again see nothing but hopeless situations keep in mind that none of

God's promises have failed that nothing out there will upset his plans to bless and save many souls and especially for us Christians because at this stage in time our church looks a little bit like the robe a bit torn and bloodied I mean just look at how we are meeting these days but we're to keep in mind that God's man still rules that is we are free to carry on with ministry to keep building the church to keep loving God and his people because even in this situation outside Jesus is still Lord God's man is still ruling because God will use this virus or this family full of sinners or this family full of sinners and even the death of his own son for his good for the saving of many souls we began this sermon today talking about the negative effects of the virus and to be honest

I'm a little bit sick of talking about it I think you understand what I mean when I say that I'm tired of all the negativity and so this week what I asked you to do I asked some of you to show me evidence of God using this harmful thing for his good and this is what some of you said some people said because people at work are talking less about trivial things there's an open invitation or expectation to check how people are really going as such I'm having meaningful conversations with clients about the foundation for my hope other people said having extra family time has built stronger bonds between us one family said my family wasn't able to make it every Sunday and now we're all sitting down together and tuning in each week Michelle our children's worker she told me that some children are memorizing their online lessons and going around the house reciting memory verses she said that one child has begun evangelizing their non

[20 : 28] Christian dad isn't that fantastic one person said our fortnightly Bible study is now again and another person said that their small groups are full again because people are easily attending from their homes here is a big one people are sharing the link to this online service with other Christians and other friends and family that they know and that means people in America and India and Malaysia and Singapore all around Australia Sydney Tasmania Western Australia Christians everywhere whose churches perhaps don't have the resources that we have are able to still grow to be nurtured and nourished and matured in their faith even though there is a terrible situation these are the things we need to keep in mind that God is able to use harmful things for good and why because his man

Jesus is still Lord on the handout I put two questions for your homework great for discussion after this service how many ways have you seen God use this harmful virus for his good and when you list those ways out how does seeing them help you trust him more for now we're going to pray Father God we praise you that you are sovereign that Jesus is Lord and that you are able to use all these harmful things the harmful things in our city at the moment and harmful things in our lives for your good thank you that you are able to flip them and turn them around and manipulate them to bless people to save many souls please would we see this through this series please would it make us trust you more and we ask this in

Jesus name Amen