

Introduction

If you have been coming to OIC on a regular basis, you will have noticed from my teaching and preaching that the story of the life of Joseph is working on several levels.

On one level is a real story about Joseph, his brothers and his father Jacob.

On another level, God is transforming a bad family into a good family.

However, there is another level, which Joseph certainly could not see at the time, and that was concerning Jesus Christ.

Joseph was the most complete type of Christ.

God was working His purposes out in the life of Joseph to fulfill His promises made to Abraham, and his descendants.

Let me just unpack some of these levels so that you can fully understand what is going on in the pages of scripture.

The first level concerns the actual historical events that are taking place in the story.

We have a very dysfunctional family with Jacob, the father as the head in charge.

Most of his children were not nice men.

They did not have any love for each other, and they had no respect for their father.

Immorality, deception and murder were some of their sins.

On top of all these sins, they were starting to lose their identity as God's people.

Through inter-marriage they had started to adopt the gods of the Canaanites.

This was a very bad situation.

But why was it bad?

Well, it was bad because the Salvation of the world depends on this family surviving and remaining recognisable as God's people.

Actually one of the brothers, Judah, is destined to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ Himself.

So how can all these men ever be saved and transformed?

How can this family be kept away from these Canaanite gods long enough to grow into a great nation, as God had promised?

The answer to this question is the story of Joseph.

Joseph was sent down to Egypt to save lots of people, and in the process some real bad brothers needed to have their lives transformed.

Psalm 105: v. 16-24.

¹⁶ Moreover He called for a famine in the land;
He destroyed all the provision of bread.

¹⁷ He sent a man before them—
Joseph—*who* was sold as a slave.

¹⁸ They hurt his feet with fetters,
He was laid in irons.

¹⁹ Until the time that his word came to pass,
The word of the LORD tested him.

²⁰ The king sent and released him,
The ruler of the people let him go free.

²¹ He made him lord of his house,
And ruler of all his possessions,

²² To bind his princes at his pleasure,
And teach his elders wisdom.

²³ Israel also came into Egypt,
And Jacob dwelt in the land of Ham.

²⁴ He increased His people greatly,
And made them stronger than their enemies.

On the basis of what the Bible teaches us, there are two things going on in this story.

There is both the salvation and transformation of this family.

Basically the transformation started last week.

The brothers had their consciences awakened and then were convicted of their sin and confessed their sin in the hearing of Joseph.

God needed to change the situation, both for the brothers and the future of Israel, because eventually Jesus Christ would come through this family line to rescue the spiritual life of all those who would put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, God's Son.

We learnt last week that it was an act of "Grace" on the part of Joseph to send his brothers back to their father in Canaan, with lots of grain, and the return of all their money.

God is a God of "Grace" and He was working through Joseph.

I would like to stop for a moment to consider that even in our own lives, God is working at different levels.

We are in our own personal zone, with our job and family etc.

However, God is outside of this situation, working out His plan, to achieve what He wants to do.

So when we go through difficult times, or confusing times, we can be assured that God is working His

purposes out in our lives. Co-operating with God, through His Holy Spirit is a key part of the process. Joseph seemed to understand this process.

With this in mind, let us continue the story from Chapter 43.

1. Preparation for a return to Egypt - v. 1-14.

The famine continued in Canaan and then the supply of food that the brothers had received from Joseph, started to run out.

Jacob told the brothers to go back and buy some more food.

Judah demanded that they take Benjamin with them.

If they didn't do this, then they could not get any food and would be put into prison as spies.

Although Jacob argued with Judah, in the end it was agreed that Benjamin would travel with the brothers to Egypt.

This was the only way that the family could survive.

They had no choice in the matter.

Jacob insisted that the brothers take lots of gifts and also take double the amount of money in their sacks.

This was to return the money which may have been given to them by mistake, and also to purchase some more grain.

In v. 14 Jacob's last words were:

¹⁴ And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"

So is there anything going on in this passage that we should note?

1. Desperate situation for the family - In v. 8 Judah tells his father that if he doesn't go down to Egypt then their entire families would die.

Here we see the hand of God, forcing the situation.

Judah had absolutely no choice in the situation. God was making sure that he went.

When God forces our hand, for us to do something, or go somewhere for Him, then maybe He, just maybe He is going to do a great thing, in and through our lives.

Be alive to the hand of God pushing you in a direction to serve Him somewhere.

Almost 4 years ago a process of events began which ultimately resulted in God forcing His hand to direct us, not to Egypt but to Japan.

It took about 10 months for God to work through about 75 people in order to bring Wendy and myself to Japan to serve Osaka International Church.

Although it was a different situation, I can see clearly now as I look back, that the hand of God was forcing the situation.

It was not our choice, but we know that it was His choice.

A desperate situation does not mean that God is not in control. Remember God works on a different level for His purposes.

Judah understands clearly that the whole survival of all of their families depends on their relationship with an unknown Egyptian.

Judah seems to be taking more of a leadership role in the situation.

Joseph was not just responsible for the survival of this family in Canaan. Joseph was responsible for feeding the whole of the known world.

Joseph is the most complete type of Christ.

Jesus Christ is the only person who can save the world.

Just like Joseph, you must go through Jesus, there is no other person and there is no other name or no other way that you be rescued from death and hell.

1 Timothy 2: v. 1-7 in the N.L.T.

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ² Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. ⁵ For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. ⁷ And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I'm not exaggerating—just telling the truth.

2. God does not bypass cultures, he works with them and so should we.

In a western culture it does not seem a big thing that Jacob made sure that the brothers brought lots of gifts to give the head a food distribution of the world.

As we know in Japan, bringing a gift at appropriate times is very important in Japanese culture.

As lots of us are foreigners in Japan, we must always try to fit in with the culture if it doesn't go against our Biblical convictions.

Unfortunately, one of the first missionaries who came to Japan, lost an opportunity to evangelise because he failed to bring a gift to a leader in a particular area.

We now continue with the story from v. 15.

2. An unusual lunch with the mystery man of Egypt. – v. 15-34.

There is an expression that is used in the western world that says:

"There is no such thing as a free lunch".

What people mean by that is that if somebody takes you out for lunch and pays for it, then that person is after something.

Either it is a favour or a business deal or some other motive etc.

In the case of Joseph inviting his brothers for a free lunch, there was definitely a motive to discover as much as he could about what was going on in their lives.

Joseph also wanted to know what his father Jacob was doing.

What we need to remember is that there must have been thousands of foreigners coming to Egypt to buy grain.

Why was it that these insignificant brothers were being singled out for special attention and entertained at the home of such a powerful person?

It was well known at this time that high ranking officials had small private prisons in their home complex.

In v. 18 we are told that the brothers were afraid.

The brothers thought that their invitation to the home of Joseph was to do with the money that was returned to their sacks on their first visit to Egypt.

They spoke to one of Joseph's housekeepers about the incident with the money that was left in their sacks. They explained that they had come to return the money.

The answer that the steward gave in v.23 is amazing.

²³ But he said, "Peace *be* with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

The Hebrew speaking steward responded with the word "Shalom- lakem" which is translated as "Peace be with you".

This was the traditional Hebrew greeting for receiving guests.

The steward confessed that it was their God and the God of their father that had provided their money. Remember Jacob's prayer in v.14.

¹⁴ And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"

The steward confessed to putting the money in their sacks.

After this Simeon suddenly appeared. Perhaps he had just been released from the home prison in the house?

This must have given some encouragement to the brothers.

At least they would not be charged with theft.

In v. 26 we are told that Joseph arrived home for lunch and he was showered with presents from the brothers. (Very Japanese)

All the brothers bowed down before Joseph.

After Joseph enquired about Jacob, the brothers bowed down again.

In v. 29 we are told that when Joseph saw his younger brother Benjamin, he was emotionally overcome, and had to go somewhere privately to weep.

After Joseph had a wash and controlled his emotions, he returned to have lunch with his brothers.

Joseph ate separately from his brothers because it was an abomination for Egyptians to eat with Hebrews.

Benjamin had 5 times as much food as everybody else.

There was plenty of drink, quite possibly alcohol, and they were all merry.

In fact, it was a great party-like celebration.

However, the brothers didn't know what they were celebrating. Only Joseph knew the secret.

Now when this party was going on, Joseph was acting like the old Japanese "**Ninja**".

He was doing something secretly.

Remember I said "there is no such thing as a free lunch"? Well Joseph had put on the free lunch so that he could secretly arrange something.

So while the party was going on Joseph arranged for his steward to put all the money back into the brothers' sacks, and in addition Joseph told his steward to put his personal silver cup into the mouth of Benjamin's sack.

When the morning came, all the brothers left, including Benjamin and Simeon.

The brothers must have breathed a sigh of relief.

They got all the grain they could carry, there were no charges made against the extra money they had last time and both Simeon and Benjamin were safe with them.

Jacob their father would be very happy that they had made a successful journey to Egypt.

However just as the brothers had left the city and were on their way back home, suddenly something happened to disturb their peace.

Joseph's steward caught up with them and made an allegation against the brothers, that one of them had stolen the "Master's Silver Cup" from the house.

All of their sacks were searched and they discovered that Benjamin had Joseph's silver cup in his sack.

They all returned to Joseph's house and Joseph said that Benjamin was to remain there as his slave and the rest of the brothers could return home with all the grain.

Judah pleaded with Joseph that he should be allowed to stay behind and take the punishment for something he did not do, although Judah did plead the innocence of Benjamin.

Judah had made a promise to Jacob about Benjamin's safety and he could not allow Benjamin to remain in Egypt.

We come now to chapter 45: v. 1. Joseph couldn't restrain himself any longer. He made everybody leave the room. There was only Joseph and his brothers in the room. Then Joseph wept aloud. It was so noisy that everybody outside the room heard him. Then Joseph revealed to his brothers who he really was.

Chapter 45: v. 4-8. (N.L.T.)

⁴ "Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. ⁵ But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. ⁶ This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. ⁸ So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.

What Joseph said here is the key that unlocks the whole mystery of the life of Joseph.

So what personal applications can we make from these two chapters and 8 verses, so that we can leave here today, both encouraged and challenged in a walk with Jesus?

Applications

1. We must ALL be encouraged today that God has a plan for our lives, and that His plan and that His ways are much better than our ways.

Therefore, by surrendering our lives to God fully, we can more easily fit into God's plan for our lives. Isaiah 55: v. 8 in N.K.J.

⁸ "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD.

Ezekiel 18: v.25 in N.K.J.

²⁵ "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?"

Romans 12: v. 1-2 in N.K.J.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God

Here we have both an encouragement and a challenge.

There was a missionary many years ago who had spent 5 years translating the New Testament into an African Language.

This was before computers, so everything had to be hand written.

One day he returned to his home and as he saw his home in the distance it was ablaze with fire. The whole building was destroyed and 5 years of translation work went up in smoke.

As the missionary sat down and wept, God spoke to him and the Holy Spirit comforted him.

Five years later he realised why the fire had destroyed his home and his translation had been destroyed.

The Missionary did more language study with the African tribe and understood more of their culture, and decided he needed to translate not just the New Testament, but the whole Bible.

He was so grateful that God gave him another chance, because of the fire.

God had a greater plan than the missionary, and His work was blessed in that part of Africa for many years.

2. Be encouraged that God answers prayer, according to His will.

In Chapter 43v. 14 Moses allows us to hear Jacob's prayer.

¹⁴ And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"

God answered that prayer in an amazing way according to His timing and His will.

Answers to prayer are sometimes NO, because God knows the future.

Answers to prayer are sometimes WAIT, because God's timing is best. You may not be ready to receive the answer yet.

Finally answers to prayer are sometimes immediately YES, because it fits into the purposes of God.

God always answers prayer when we are in a relationship with Him.

Perhaps today you haven't begun that relationship, maybe you would like to start that relationship by confessing your sin to Jesus Christ.

He died on a cross to take the punishment for your sin, and He calls you today to "COME" to Him, just as you are.

You can do that in the prayer lift time after the service.

Prayer is a vast subject and if you weren't at our retreat this year, please ask for a copy of the "Doctrine of Prayer". It will help you.

3. God often uses challenging times in our lives to bring us to Jesus for the first time, and also to keep us close to Jesus.

It is a known fact that more people are open to the Christian Gospel message in poor countries than in rich countries.

Rich people and people who are self-sufficient with their money and their lives seem to ignore God and the gospel message.

In times of hardship and spiritual depression, people cry out to God, because nobody else can help.

Many people start searching for answers to life when their lives do not satisfy themselves or when they hit very difficult times.

It is at these times that God is able to give them answers to their greatest need.

The greatest need for mankind is Jesus Christ.

The greatest need for Christians is more of Jesus and His Grace.

I have a friend in the U.K. who was put in prison because he robbed lots of Post Offices with a gun.

When he was in prison his probation officer witnessed to him about Jesus.

He cried to God and was wonderfully saved.

God called him to be a Missionary in the Gambia. He was later arrested and put in prison and tortured every week.

He was in such a small prison cell he could hardly move.

When I read His book I cried a lot because of what he suffered.

A miracle happened and he escaped.

He was so physically and emotionally damaged, that his counsellor told him to write a book about his experiences.

He did this. It is called "Time to Tell".

God has used this book to reach many people with the Gospel and lots of people have become Christians.

What suffering he went through, but what glorious results.

May God help us to trust Him, when His plans destroy our plans.

(Please listen to his testimony on YouTube – called David Fulton's Talk on his experiences in the Gambia 09/10/14 at Winchester University.)