

Joseph – God Intended it For Good

Joseph is a story as gripping and dramatic as anything we will read, it has been made into best-selling shows. Joseph and his coat of many colours. It is one of the greatest stories ever told. A story of God's hand being upon a young man, a young man whom God rescued, and used to be the reason for Israel becoming a great nation. He also used Joseph to save the world from famine. Joseph's name means “the one who increases” and he certainly increased the Jewish nation.

Joseph's positive attitude shines throughout the story.

Thrown into a pit by his brothers and left for dead; sold to Egyptian traders as a slave; cast out of Potiphar's house because of being falsely accused of attempting to rape Potiphar's wife; thrown into an Egyptian jail and left to rot. But through it all, it would appear that Joseph did not lose his faith, nor the gift of seeing the future through visions.

His positive attitude took him through crisis after crisis, and at the end of his life's story, he could look back and see God's hand in it.

The story of Joseph has been one which people have marvelled at. It is a story that speaks on so many levels, but ultimately a story of sacrifice and grace.

Today, I want us to focus on some of Joseph's last words recorded in Genesis. They come after his father Jacob dies and his brothers come to Joseph to repent of the hardship that they had put Joseph through. Their message to Joseph was one of repentance and when Joseph heard it, he wept. His vision that he had as a young lad had now come the full circle.

He said this 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.”*

What made Joseph different? Was his life the result of a human tangle or a divine plan? That is a good question for our lives also, are our lives about blind chance or is there a bigger plan for each of our lives?

But let us look at Joseph and ask the question: what made him different?

What was the X-factor in his life?

I think that it was Joseph's understanding of life, his interpretation of life, which was the crucial factor that would carry him resiliently through his trials.

What do I mean by “his interpretation”?

Well, what did life mean for him? What was his *raison d’etre* – his reason for living.

I suggest three things that Joseph had that helped him through the tough times. Three things essential to us also.

Firstly, he had faith. Faith which was obvious from a young boy. He was a visionary. God gave him visions of the future. He saw into the future, and it was no accident that he was given the vision of his brothers and parents bowing down before him. God gave him this vision that would keep him going through the tough times. He had something to believe in.

Faith is a powerful resource and especially a faith that sees into the future, and trusts in the hand of God.

What is your vision for the future?

Can you see brighter days?

Can you see beyond this time of crisis into a new beginning?

If you can't, the chances are that you are being pulled down by darker forces, so that you cannot see God's hand above and beyond.

The psalmist in Psalm 139, had the eye of faith, when he wrote, *you are before me and you are behind me and you lay your hand upon me.*

I encourage you today to dream, yes like Joseph, dream of a better future, and see beyond the crisis. Faith is about holding on to that dream and stepping out and trusting God.

Secondly, he had hope. Hope, not in his own strength or power, but hope in a Living God. Hope that God was in this with him. He never gave up hoping. He could say at the end to his brothers, God used these circumstances to bring about good.

Now only hope in the loving presence of God could do this.

Our hope is in a Creator God. A God who established this universe. A God who has spoken and all things came into being.

John Calvin, the 16th century theologian wrote, “God has implanted in all people a certain understanding of the divine majesty and that a sense of divinity is by nature engraved on human hearts.” If that be the case, then we are all able to see something of God in the world around us, whether that is

in the skilful ordering of the universe, where Calvin writes, “wherever you cast your eye there is no spot on the universe wherein you cannot discern some part of his glory”. Or it may be looking at the incredible design of human beings and microscopic organisms.

Isn't that wonderful that God has revealed himself to us, and that creation is like a mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible.

Psalm 8 says it all...“When I consider the heavens. The work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you have made, what is man that you are mindful of him...”

This hope that Joseph had was in the God of Abraham, Isaac and his father Jacob. He was brought up under Jacob's fatherly eye and Jacob no doubt passed on to him the encounters that he had with the Living God. Joseph never lost his hope, and wherever, or whatever, he was called to do, he knew that the God of Israel was with him

Its good for us also to place our hope in this Living God. The God who created the universe, the stars, the sun and the moon, who initiated life and who gave us breath; when we have hope in the source of the universe, and the very spark of life, then there is nothing that we cannot overcome.

Thirdly Love. He was a man who chose the power of love. Oh, he could have had all his brothers killed. He could have snapped his fingers and the Egyptian guards would have had his brothers executed. That was the power he had. Everything was put under his control. But he chose the way of love. He said to them, “*Don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.*” He reassured them and spoke kindly to them. He held no resentment.

Love is the most powerful of all the weapons that one possesses. I call it a weapon because it can destroy evil. I love the story of Gordon Wilson whose daughter was murdered in Enniskillen in 1984. She lay under the rubble, after the bomb explosion, and she looked up and said *Daddy, I love you* and she died holding his hand. Gordon was interviewed on television not long after this and he said, “*I hold no grudge. I forgive those who murdered my daughter.*” I believe that statement played a huge role in the turning of the tide in Ireland and people from both sides of the divide respected this man and felt his pain, losing his daughter needlessly, but then for him having the strength of character to forgive the bombers.

Forgiveness is a great power, and Joseph held no grudge against his brothers. Why? Simply because he saw a greater power at work, he saw the power of God, raising him up to save his people.

What is the power that controls our life?

Is it revenge, bitterness, or can we be gracious enough to look to God and see the redemptive power in Him and to see that God is at work in our lives, and that he wants us to model that same love that Joseph had.

But Joseph was a forerunner of Jesus.

Many, many years later, God was to intervene again in his world and this time he chose another young man called Jesus.

He chose Jesus, to be his instrument of bringing others to know his love and mercy. This same Jesus was to be like Joseph in so many ways, abandoned by his disciples, as Joseph was abandoned by his brothers, betrayed, denied and crucified on a cross as Joseph was left for dead in a pit.

But like Joseph, Jesus' life had a purpose, and in the words of Paul, *"All things work together for the good for those who believe."*

Who would have thought that the cross would have been a good thing? But God used the cross by putting his Son on the cross to save the world.

God made peace through his Son Jesus and so reconciled us to himself.

In your life, what are the challenges that you face?

Can God take these challenges and turn them into positives?

Is he working out his purpose in your life?

So, Faith, Hope and Love are three very real friends on our journey through life, and the more that we see them and get to know them, well, the easier life will become.

Today, Joseph reminds us that God has a plan for our lives and that if we submit to his plan and trust in his will, then our lives will be a blessing to ourselves and to others.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen