

November 1, 2015 "God's Plan For Hard Times" Pt. 2 Genesis
37:2-11

Joseph was a special young man. For all his problems, (he was basically a spoiled brat), he was special. Grounds for disliking him start with the fact that he is a younger brother. It is one of those facts of family life, the eldest tends to have the hardest time. To put it bluntly, the older you are in the family pecking order as a child, the more responsibility you tend to carry. You not only have to figure out how to be your parent's child, you wind up showing your parents what works, and what does not. Which is to say children do not come with a manual. Parents have to figure out parenting on the run and on top of all the other family routines, responsibilities and relationships.

Throw into the mix the father Jacob who plays favourites, and there is room for lots to go wrong. Joseph played Jacob to some extent like a fiddle. When he is asked to go out into the fields with his brothers he does so. But he either does not recognize the realities surrounding relationships, or he has his own very selfish interests. He's a tattler. He carries stories. In other words he safeguards his special place within the family with his father, at the expense of his relationship with his brothers...with all of them! It makes for a disaster that is waiting to occur.

And yet with that said, Joseph is indeed special. He has dreams. He shares them carelessly and that throws fuel on the fire of the blooming dislike, which becomes hatred on the part of his older brothers. He tells them about the dream which runs counter to all of the Hebrew conventions within the family circle. The eldest is the key son. Age confers status. The youngest is supposed to be the least. Joseph tells them he has dreamed about harvesting sheaves

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grain. You have seen them in the fields. In Joseph's dream his sheaf stands taller than all the rest. And the rest, their number is the same as the number of his brothers by the way...bow down before Joseph's sheaf of grain. It recalls something Jesus said...the last shall be first. And with all of his brothers, the image did not go down well. They choked on the thought. It became the perfect stew for bitterness, that descended into outright hatred.

Even with his father, Joseph is careless. He runs off at the

mouth. He tells Jacob, the head of the household, the head of the family, the one who owns the flocks and herds, and on whose wealth the prosperity of the family depends. Joseph had another dream. He saw, “the sun and the moon and 11 stars and they bowed down to him. For once Jacob was outraged at the thought of this favourite son. It was unheard of to think of such a thing. “What are you thinking boy! Use your head for more than a hat rack! Do you dare to think your mother and I and your brothers are going to treat you as royalty? His brothers are intensely jealous of him and his relationship with the “old man.” And yet for all Joseph's father's anger, Jacob thinks about that conversation time and time again. Is it the wisdom of age? Point is, Joseph's father does not dismiss this dream out of hand. He remembers it. He chews on it like yesterday's bubble gum. Not relishing it, but never discarding the idea either.

What's the message here? Because we know what Paul Harvey used to call “the rest of the story,” we know God is in these dreams. God has a plan to save Jacob and the youngest child Benjamin, and every one of these older brothers and their families, and the family fortune which is tied up in livestock. Joseph has a destiny. God's hand is upon him to do greater things than anyone can even begin to imagine. And for all the bad stuff that happens to

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Joseph, all that bad stuff plays a part in the unfolding fortunes of the kid everyone but Daddydislikes.

Max Lucado, looking over the whole of the Joseph Saga, and it reads like the plot for a reality tv series, says, “Joseph is a walking Pinata. Every one wants a turn to take a shot at kicking him while he is down, so that he will stay there.” He also adds concerning the rest of us, “If you have a pulse, you have problems.” We can argue that Joseph helped to create his. The fact is they are huge. Sold into slavery, on the surface of things everything is going in the wrong direction. He finds himself in a foreign land. He has no name. He can't speak the language. He has no standing. He has no control over what is happening to him and what is going to happen to him. And that begs a really big question. Remember that this is not a movie script. What we are dealing with here is history. Ancient history but history nonetheless.

Here is the question. How did Joseph survive. More than that!

How did Joseph thrive in the midst of all this hardship. His problems assault him from every direction. His circumstances go from bad to worse. People make promises to him that they do not keep. He works his butt off and there is no reward, in fact there is worse punishment. It is not fair. And yet like Rocky Balboa in the charity boxing match against Apollo Creed, every time he gets knocked down, Joseph gets back up. He tries even harder.

Joseph has never forgotten those dreams. He has a sense of destiny. He has assumed God is near and dear to him, and that God has and will remember him. Here is a great thing to remember in the midst of trouble. What is the one thing that can't be taken away from you. No matter how bad it gets. No matter how negative

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the ledger is in terms of your losses. What is it you can never lose? The one element no one can touch? You can lose your health. You can lose your wealth. You can lose your job. You can lose your home. What is it that you cannot lose?

This is a story after all, not about Joseph so much, as about God. You have a God given destiny. You were created for a reason. You are God's child. Jesus reminded the disciples, "you did not choose me, I chose you." You are in fact, God's first choice. You really have to take this personally. If there was no one on earth who needed saving, you did. I did. We did. God was so committed to saving you, saving me, saving us from our sinfulness...not because we are beautiful, or the best, rather because we have an ultimate need...to save us from our particular sins and shortcomings, God committed to send His Son, to give His Son up unto the cross. To raise Him up the 3rd day that we might be raised up. You have a God given destiny.

You are God's child. And you are God's child forever. Call me strange. I occasionally walk in grave yards. There are nice trees. There are good pathways..even roads. Easy walking. But here is a truth about walking in graveyards. You must never believe what you read on the tombstones. The tombstones say you were born on a date, and you die on a date. Short dash. No details. 2nd Corinthians 5:1 says this: "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building

from God, at eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”

Life can rob us of our dreams. You know what my dream was because I have shared that with you. I wanted to be a singer. I wanted to be a recording artist. I wanted to be a performer. I dreamt

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of singing and living to see people pay for the privilege of seeing the performance. When I came to faith in Jesus I discovered my destiny did not lie down that road. I took the other path. I have been involved in ministry for close to 50 years...43 as an ordained minister. Praising God every step of the way. I have a weekly engagement to perform every week. God gave me a second chance at that which I did not expect.

I volunteered to do pulpit supply when I retired...to help. To help churches without a fixed minister. That's how we met! That's how I became the minister here. What I did understand was even though my eye health made it impossible for me to do full time ministry anymore, it was clear the way things unfolded that God was not done with me yet. It is clear that God is not done with us yet! So please excuse me if I say,...in the meantime I have an engagement to play and sing and preach and teach at St. Andrew's. With you. With us. God is honouring my faith. My destiny is playing out according to His plan. Never forget this. God is also honouring your faith. Your destiny is also playing out according to His plan. And one of the ways we can see there is special and divine blessing on our continuing down this road is in the finances of the church. There are bigger and wealthier churches in our Presbytery than ours. We are the only one whose finances come in on or close to the budgeted amount quarter after quarter, year after year.

I had a great time last Sunday, our 161st anniversary. Glenn emailed later in the day or early the next to tell me we were at 85 % of our budgeted income...in hand. You are doing great things in the name of God. We are going to make it...again. 2016 we will still be here. We will still be praising God. We will have problems. I promise. Some of them will really rock us! Some of our problems

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will come out of left field and make us wonder if we are up to the job. Wrong emphasis. We are up to following where God leads. We are up to

following Jesus our Master, our Lord. We are up to pursuing the will of the Holy Spirit.

I have an eternal destiny. So do you. Pursue the will of God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. The question Joseph faced is the one we must face. In the midst of the heat of battle, the pains and the problems of life, are we going to be God's man, God's woman, God's child? The lesson of Joseph's story is by God's grace. He believed as we must, following the Lord, somehow, we will get through the challenges. By the grace of God Joseph would become the man that he was meant to be. By the grace of God we trust in God, and take one more step and then another.

Let us pray;

Lead on O King eternal! Lead wherever the road will take us.
Grant us the faith to follow and the faith to continually praise your name.
Amen