

## A God Directed Heart

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston, NC

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September 13, 2020

Diaspora XXVI – The Church Scattered, Twenty-sixth Sunday

Text: Genesis 37:12-36

Purpose: To help us realize that God desires us to willingly turn our heart to Him. But at times, God turns the hearts of individuals, including the hearts of rulers and kings, to accomplish His will. This does not minimize our free will, but it also doesn't thwart God's purposes.

We are barraged everyday by the news and the “analysis” of it. Many people tune into Fox News with its ongoing commentary of the political climate. Others get their news from the Today Show, NBC, CBS, CNN or ABC. Others get their news from individual podcasts from commentators that rant about how wrong the latest vote by some senator is or how right or wrong, the United States position is in Israel, Iran, Iraq or Afghanistan. It doesn't matter if you are a Democrat or a Republican; the mud slinging is going to get fierce between now and November. When the election is over, the nation will give a collective sigh.



But have you ever heard or considered that God directs the heart of a nation's leader? Scripture affirms that truth time and time again. God is interested in the affairs of men. Last week, I mentioned we were going to examine the life

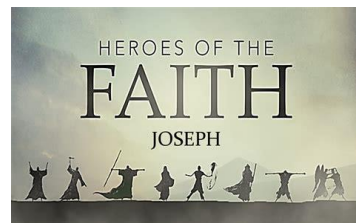
of Moses this Sunday. I got ahead of myself when I said that. We will do that next week. This week we will focus on the story of Joseph which takes up the last 14 chapters of the Book of Genesis.

The story of Joseph is God's accurate presentation and flawless analysis of the "news" of Egypt and Israel. Just as God was actively working in Joseph's family life, God is also working in your family's life. God not only **knows all** that happens, but He also **understands all** that happens, because **He is in supreme control over all** that happens.



We emphasize so much that we have "free will," and that we are "captains of our own ship" that we forget that God is actively involved in the affairs of men and nations. God has not changed; and though some may consider the story of Joseph as ancient history, it is really as fresh for our news today. God still works thorough men and women of faith to carry out His purposes – even through the lives of pagan rulers.

We see in Joseph's life that he held fast to his faith. God was redirecting the future of the family of Jacob through the placement of Joseph in Egypt. Joseph was unshakable because His faith was deeply rooted in the invisible, immovable, and unchanging God!



Our nation is reeling from the onslaught of changes over the last few years. The changes over the past six months have been even more dramatic.

- Recently due to COVID, our Governor has taken the unprecedented steps to shut down large portions of our economy, regulated our movement, and required masks for everyone. There are a lot of people questioning how arbitrary some of the rules are and how it appears to be an overreach of authority.
- Our federal government has essentially taken over the **healthcare** industry with the Affordable Care Act.
- Although it is not mentioned very much these days, the issue of **immigration** and the rules and regulations related to that still need to be overhauled.
- Internationally, our country has confronted China over their **trade practices**. New agreements have been signed with many countries regulating trade. Our role in climate change and the international monetary fund is changing quickly.
- Our **national debt** continues to increase as the economy is suffering from many businesses being closed due to the COVID pandemic. Stimulus payments went out a few months ago, with a second one is under discussion and consideration – all of which will add to our national debt.
- The coronavirus has caused an unprecedented economic and social earthquake across our nation: Businesses are closing, schools are struggling, teachers are overwhelmed, toilet paper and paper towels were in short supply, the debate about wearing masks vs. not wearing masks continues.



- I have heard reports that 1 out of 5 businesses will close, 30% of church members will not return, and according to Barna’s latest report, 1 out of 5 churches will close within the next 18 months.
- There is ongoing **violence**, looting, and destruction of property in many cities across our nation. The reason behind these unrestrained events is still up for debate.
- I know several people that are now under a 14-day **quarantine** period due to coming in contact with someone that may or may not have contracted the coronavirus.
- The Lord is shaking our nation and world like never before. Are we listening?

So many people are terrified and worried about the direction of our community, state, and nation. We see massive political struggles that have polarized our nation as never before. On top of all that, there is a moral crisis that is causing families to break up, desperate people robbing others, random gunfire killing children in their homes, homelessness on the rise, and an increasing number of people eating at soup kitchens. Because so many are now unemployed, I am sure there will be a rise in evictions, foreclosures, and bankruptcies. The result will be an increase in homelessness.



But as the winds of change blow across our nation, state, and community, **WE DO NOT NEED TO FEAR**. Why? Because the One that controls the winds, also turns the hearts of leaders and rulers. We need to be reminded, “God is still in control!” God never has to say, “I didn't know that! I didn't expect it to happen that way!” Rest in the

truth that God is ultimately in control – not the President, not members of the Senate or the House of Representatives, not the Governor, and not the Mayor.



That does not mean we need to hide our head in the sand and pretend nothing is wrong. We as Christians need to stand for Godly principles and to love others just as Christ loves us. We do need to protect ourselves and our families. We do need to try to become more self-sufficient. We do need to make sure we are as prepared as we can be in case things get worse. But we do not need to let fear rule our hearts and lives.

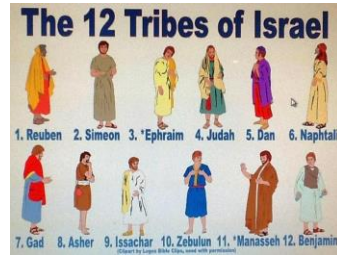
The story of Joseph is one that proves we can learn how to live righteously even in the midst of life’s most difficult circumstances. The story of Joseph is a beautiful “type” of Christ. We see Joseph nestled into a family. As we read earlier in our scripture passage, we see he was betrayed. We identify with his unjust suffering. In the end, we see Joseph exalted.

### **Nestled into a Family**

As we learned last week, we see that Jacob, now renamed Israel, was the proud father of twelve young men. These men eventually would make up the twelve tribes of Israel. Each family would take on a special role in the life and nation of Israel. The Levites would become the priests in the temple. The people of the tribe of Dan would become the judges among the people. One of the descendants of Judah would be the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. The

Bible often refers to Jacob's offspring as "The Children of Israel."

I came across this last week and wanted to share it with you this morning. Joey was an inquisitive young child that was always asking his Sunday school teacher questions.



One day Joey said, "Teacher, there's somethin' I can't figger out."<sup>1</sup>

"What's that Joey?" asked the Sunday school teacher.

"Well accordin' to the Bible, the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, right?"

"Right."

"An' the Children of Israel beat up the Philistines, right?"

"Er--right."

"An' the Children of Israel built the Temple, right?"

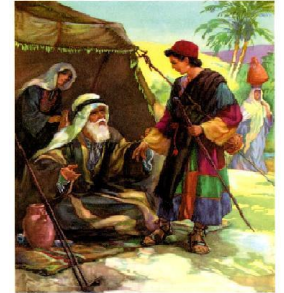
"Again you're right."

"An' the Children of Israel fought the 'gyptians, an' the Children of Israel fought the Romans, an' the Children of Israel wuz always doin' somethin' important, right?"

"All that is right, too," agreed the teacher. "So what's your question?"

"What I wanna know is this," demanded Joey. "What wuz all the grown-ups doin'?"

Jacob, the father of these twelve sons, was not a perfect father. Any person that has two wives and two handmaids and twelve sons is bound to have trouble in the family. If you remember, Isaac and Rebekah established the pattern of loving one child over the other child. Jacob repeated this pattern in his life because the Bible says he loved his wife Rebekah more than Leah. And he loved Joseph and Benjamin more than the other sons. Jacob loved Joseph so much more, that he gave him a special coat – one the scripture describes as the "coat of many colors."



This "coat of many colors," according to David Jeremiah, was really a white robe that had long sleeves and went down to Joseph's ankles. At the fringe of the robe and the sleeves, was a piece of colored ribbon to signify that Joseph was the spiritual leader and future head of the family.

When one child is favored over another, jealousy rears its ugly head. To make matters worse, one day Joseph, when he was a young boy, had a dream that his brothers and their father one day would come and bow down to Joseph.

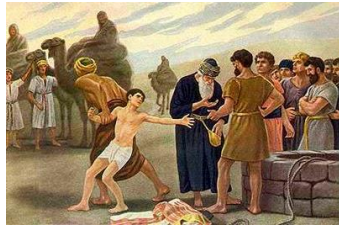


All of them were indignant, Jacob included, at the idea that "they would do such a thing!" But Joseph never forgot the dream.

<sup>1</sup> Mikey's Funnies, 8/4/2014, A Bible Funny

## Joseph's Betrayal

One day, while the older sons were tending the sheep in a distant field, Jacob sent Joseph to check up on them. As Joseph was coming toward them, his brothers conspired to kill the young 17-year-old boy. Reuben, the oldest son, pleaded with them not to kill him, and instead they sold him as a slave to a passing caravan. They thought they were getting rid of their problem. But this “solution” haunted them all their lives. Many of us have taken the short cut in life and tried to eliminate our problems, when in fact, we make matters worse. Joseph's eleven sons harbored their sin until they met Joseph again in the King's palace in Egypt many years later.



As Joseph was riding away with the caravan, the brothers knew they needed to tell their father something. They took the “coat of many colors” and dipped it in sheep's blood to make it appear Joseph was eaten by a wild animal. Even years later, Jacob was still grieving for his son. Our sin always affects others. It may not seem that way at the time, but it does.

## Unjust Suffering

Once Joseph came to Egypt, he was sold to the court official Potiphar. Joseph was a quick learner and was soon put in charge of ALL the affairs of the home. His master, the court official, trusted Joseph with the other servants, and even the household money. The master didn't even give a second thought to the affairs of the home because he trusted Joseph.

But when things are going so well, often something happens to disrupt our routine. The wife of Joseph's master wanted Joseph to go to bed with her. Joseph refused to do such a thing. He feared God and put his relationship with God above any short-term pleasure he could have experienced. In addition, Joseph did not want to violate his master's trust. He refused to yield to that temptation. **Joseph's heart was God directed, not flesh directed.**



One day, when Joseph was alone with her in the house, he again refused her advances. Joseph fled the house as she grabbed his outer robe in her hand. She called for others to come and lied saying Joseph tried to rape her. The master had to accept the word of his wife over the word of a slave. Unfairly accused of a crime, Joseph was put into prison.

While in prison, Joseph was once again trusted and was again put in charge of others. The guards trusted him so much, that they put him in charge of all the other prisoners.

One day while in prison, two men had a special dream. One man had been the chief baker for the king. The other man was the cup bearer for the king. Joseph interpreted their dreams and determined that in three days, the chief baker would be executed while the cup bearer would be restored to his former position before the king.

Joseph made the cup bearer promise to mention his situation to the king when he was restored. But as it sometimes happens, Joseph was forgotten. The restored

cupbearer forgot to help Joseph and he remained there in prison. Joseph was innocent of the crime he was accused of and now, the cup bearer failed to assist and plead his case before the king.

Maybe you have been betrayed by someone in your life. Even Jesus found Himself in a similar situation. He was wrongly accused by the Pharisees and Sadducees, He was wrongly imprisoned, He was punished for crimes He didn't commit, and was betrayed by Judas, one of His inner circle for silver money. You can see why some consider Joseph was a type of Christ figure in the Old Testament.

### **Joseph Exalted**

Just as Jesus didn't stay in the grave forever, Joseph didn't stay in the prison forever.

One day, the King of Egypt had a dream. In the dream he saw seven fat cows grazing along the Nile River. Out of the river came seven of the skinniest, ugliest, leanest cows you ever saw. But what surprised the king was that the seven lean cows ate the seven fat cows and they didn't look like they had eaten anything at all. When he finished that dream, the King had a second dream that was similar to the first dream.

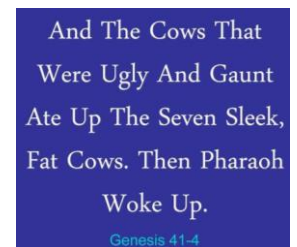


In the second dream, there were seven large heads of grain growing along the Nile River. Again, there came seven skinny, ugly, thin heads of grain. And just like with the cows, the skinny grain consumed the fat heads of grain but the skinny grain remained skinny.

The King consulted all of his wise counselors and they couldn't interpret the dreams. It was at that moment that the cup bearer remembered Joseph who was still in prison. The cup bearer told the king of a person that could interpret his dreams. The King immediately called for Joseph to come and see the King. But before he could enter the presence of the King, he had to change his clothes and become presentable.

Joseph told the king that he could not interpret the dream. Only God could give the interpretation. Joseph told the king that the two dreams were really one dream. Since it was dreamed twice, it surely would come to pass.

The seven fat cows and the seven large heads of grain represented seven years of prosperity. There would be plenty of food in the land. The seven lean cows and seven small heads of grain represented the seven years of famine over the land.



Joseph advised the king to choose a person to oversee the collection of 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the grain during the good years and store it in the various towns in Egypt. Then when the seven years of famine came, there would be food in the land.

The King was so impressed with this advice, that he chose Joseph to be the second in command over the entire nation. The only one greater than Joseph would be the King himself. Immediately Joseph was elevated from being a prisoner in jail to the second highest person in the entire kingdom.

Faithfully Joseph administered the collection of 20% of all the grain grown for seven years. Grain silos were built throughout the land to store the grain for the coming famine. During the first seven years, there was plenty of food and everyone was satisfied with what Joseph was doing. But after the seven years of plenty, the crops began to fail because there was little or no rain. There was not enough grain to feed people. When the people came to Pharaoh, he sent the people to Joseph for grain.



Every year the famine seemed to get worse. At first the people bought grain from Joseph's storehouse. Next, after their money failed, they sold their livestock to the Joseph to purchase grain. Then when they had no livestock, they sold their land to Joseph. Lastly, they sold themselves as slaves to Joseph. Towards the end of the seven years, the Pharaoh, with the help of Joseph, owned all the money, cattle, land, and people. It was during the midst of this famine that Joseph's family, who were still living in Canaan, would come down to Egypt to purchase grain.

### The Encounter with His Brothers

You would think now that Joseph was second in command; this power would have gone to his head. But it did not. One day, ten foreigners came to Egypt to purchase grain for their family. Even though it had been many years, Joseph immediately recognized them as his brothers. As they were standing there, they bowed down before Joseph as a way of honoring him and requesting that

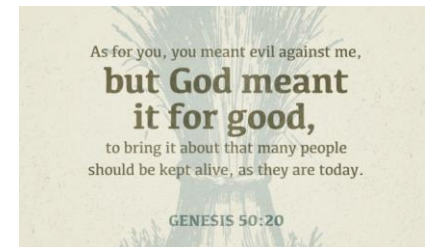


he fill their sacks with grain. Joseph remembered the dream he had as a young boy. That one day, the family would come and bow down before Joseph.

Joseph wanted to immediately tell them who he was but first he needed to find out some more information about his father Jacob and test their loyalty to his younger brother Benjamin. He needed to see they were remorseful for their prior actions of selling him into slavery. The brothers didn't recognize that the person they had been trying to buy grain from was actually their brother.

Through a series of trials and tests, Joseph learned that all ten of his brothers were still grieved in the way they had treated Joseph. He learned that his father was still alive and that they would do anything to protect the youngest son Benjamin. They were even willing to exchange their freedom to protect him. Joseph couldn't stand it anymore. He broke down and told them everything that had happened.

They were in shock. They really thought that after all this time; Joseph was as good as dead. They were afraid that now that he was in a position of power, they would be punished. But Joseph realized that the hand of God was with the situation all the time. Joseph said, *"You may have meant it for evil, but God turned it into good. Because of this, I have been able to save this family from the famine."*



We need to realize that sometimes, even in the midst of the worst of situations we find ourselves in, the silent hand of God is working in the background – though we may not

understand it at the time. Joseph realized God turned his bad situation into good. We need to trust God that he can turn our bad situation into good as well.

## **A Reversal of Situations**

When his brothers betrayed Joseph and sold him for twenty pieces of silver, God allowed that to happen. When he was tested by Potiphar's wife, Joseph remained faithful to God and didn't do evil. When he was placed in the King's prison, he became a faithful leader and responsibly managed the other prisoners. When the king needed his dream interpreted, he didn't rely on his own insight, he depended upon God. When Joseph became the second in command in all of Egypt, he faithfully discharged his duties and saved the nation of Egypt and his family.

Joseph, at the insistence of the Pharaoh, brought his family from Canaan to live in Egypt. Because they were sheep herders, they were segregated away from other Egyptians because they were considered "unclean" and they shouldn't intermingle with society. Jacob brought 66 individuals from his family with him and they settled in the fertile region of Goshen.

It was there that they lived, prospered, and grew in number. It was 400 years later that a deliverer by the name of Moses would come and set them free from their forced servitude in Egypt.

## **Lessons for us today**

God has given us many opportunities to turn to Him. He



calls us to follow Him in the midst of life's most difficult times. In Joseph's case, it must have been difficult to resist the temptation in Potiphar's house. But Joseph valued his relationship with God, and would not participate in what was wrong. He valued his walk with God more than any temporary gratification. Maybe you are at a crossroads in your life. Are you tempted to take the way of the world or do you take the way of God? There are blessings for obeying God. But there are consequences for disobedience to God as well. Which will you choose?

While unjustly imprisoned, Joseph sat there forgotten by everyone – his family, his former master - especially by the cup bearer who promised to plead his case before the king. What about you? Are you facing injustice and persecution for standing up for what is right and just? Keep in mind that God works all things together for good for those that love him and are called according to His purpose. Be sure you are in God's will and then trust God for the details.

When Joseph reached a great position of responsibility, he faithfully discharged his duties. He didn't sit back and soak up the good life. He went to work and was a good steward of the resources he was entrusted with. Each of us has been entrusted with resources. What are you doing with them? Are you putting them to work for God? Or are you squandering them on your own selfish desires?

We need to be reminded; God wiped out the entire wealth of the people of Egypt in seven years. He removed their personal wealth (cash), the personal assets (cattle), the real assets (land), and their personal freedom (slavery). At the hand of God, the same could happen to our nation.



Please continue to pray for our nation as we seek to determine whose we are as a nation. God still is interested in the affairs of men and nations.

What made the difference for Joseph was that **he had a God directed heart.** He did what was right – consistently. Even then, he faced being rejected by his family, he faced prison, he faced being forgotten and alone. But God worked it all out for him and his family.



One of my favorite Bible verses is Proverbs 3:5-6. *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”* Joseph trusted the Lord, and the Lord directed his paths. The same can happen for you!

We as individuals need to make sure we have a God directed heart.

We as a community need to make sure we have a God directed heart.

We as a nation need to make sure we have a God directed heart.



When our heart resonates with God’s heart, then there will be peace – in our hearts, in our community, and in our nation.

**LET US PRAY**