

Chosen but rejected

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Date: 03 September 2023

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[0 : 00] The first reading is from Genesis chapter 37, verses 1 to 17, found on page 36 of the Church Bibles.

Page 36, Genesis 37, starting at verse 1. Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being 17 years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives, and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a robe of many colours. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them,

[3 : 10] So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dotham. The second reading is Genesis chapter 37, starting at verse 18.

And that's on page 37 of the Bible. Genesis 37, starting at verse 18. They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to kill him.

So they said to one another, Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.

But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, Let us not take his life. And Reuben said to them, Then they sat down to eat.

And looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.

[4 : 53] Then Judah said to his brothers, What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.

And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianite traders passed by, and they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver.

They took Joseph to Egypt. When Reuben returned to the pit, and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes, and returned to his brothers, and said, The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?

Then they took Joseph's robe, and slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors, and brought it to their father, and said, This we have found. Please identify whether it's your son's robe or not.

And he identified it, and said, It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.

[6 : 08] Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son for many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, and said, No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.

Thus his father wept for him. Meanwhile, the Midianites had told him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Good morning. Do keep that passage open. My name is Andy. I'm on the staff team here. There is a handout on the back of the service sheet to let you know where we're going.

Let me pray as we start. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a faithful God, an unchanging God who speaks to us.

Please help us to listen to you now. Amen. Such a coat of many colours. How he loved his coat of many colours.

[7 : 16] It was red and yellow and green and brown and blue. Joseph's brothers weren't too pleased with what they saw. We have never liked him that or that much before. And now this coat has got our goat.

We feel life is unfair. And when Joseph graced the scene, his brothers turned a shade of green. His astounding clothing took the biscuit. Quite the smoothest person in a district.

I look handsome. I look smart. I am a walking work of art. Such a dazzling coat of many colours. How I love my coat of many colours.

Apologies if you have no idea what I've just been on about. You'd be grateful that I didn't sing it. Those lyrics from Joseph. And his amazing technicolour dream coat.

Millions have now seen the musical and have loved it. It's full of intrigue, betrayal and an inspiring ending. But then we ask, what's it all about?

[8 : 20] Why is this story in the Bible? Well, the narrator in the musical has a stab and tells us is this. It's the story of a boy whose dream came true and he could be you.

Later on in the musical, the Joseph character himself says this. Anyone from anywhere can make it if they get a lucky break. That's an inspiring message.

Follow your dreams like Joseph. Any dream will do. That's, if you like, the school assembly version of this story. But is that the message of the Joseph story that the author wants to give us?

In short, no. It's a part of a much bigger story. One that tells us the dealings of God with humanity. Showing us that God is at work.

God is at work. In all circumstances. To achieve his glorious purposes. Perhaps we struggle to believe that sometimes.

[9 : 24] Perhaps we can all pinpoint times in our lives and situations where it's felt like God is distant. Or unconcerned about our lives. Maybe that's how some of us feel about God now.

On a global scale with all the evil and suffering going on around us. But also personally. In our own lives. Not getting the grades.

Job insecurity. Family strife. Health issues. And death. Well, over the next few weeks up until the end of half term. We're going to look at this Joseph story.

And we are starting in chapter 37. Where God's name isn't even mentioned. I wonder if you noticed that. And God seems distant in this chapter.

And in Joseph's life. And yet many years later. Joseph could say this to his brothers. In Genesis 50. You meant evil against me.

[10 : 21] But God meant it for good. To bring it about. That many people should be kept alive. As they are today. So as we walk through this familiar story.

My prayer is that it will help us trust God. That he is always at work for his people. Even when we can't see what he's doing. And we're going to look at four ways that God is at work.

Through this chapter. To set up the rest of the story. We're scratching the surface today. And the first one is this. That God is at work through promises. God is at work through promises.

Now the whole of Genesis. Is about God's promises to humanity. If you like. We've dived into season four. Of the Genesis box set. So it's helpful to have a little recap.

Of season one to three. So season one. Opened in Genesis chapter one. With God's creation of the world. A perfect world. With God's people live. In perfect harmony with him.

[11 : 22] With God's promise. To bless the world. But once people chose to go their own way. Instead of obeying God. Things unraveled. Very quickly.

And death. Now reigns. God's promise. But season two. Opened in chapter 12. With hope. God has started his plan of redemption. Choosing a people who would be.

Have a special relationship with him. And bring blessing. To the world. It started with one man. Abraham. And God made him promises. In chapter 12. And promised him lands.

Promised him people. Seeds. That would be a great nation. And he promised blessing. Now progress was slow. Because Abraham only had one son.

But Isaac. In Genesis season three. The pace picked up. He had twins. Esau and Jacob. And God chose to develop his special family.

[12 : 22] Through Jacob's sons. And amazingly. Jacob fathered 12 sons. By four different women. Who will become on. To become the tribes of Israel.

And one of them. You can see there. In his amazing coat. Is Joseph. And so God. Has been at work. In Genesis. All the way through. Acting on his promises.

To bless. And so season four. Of Genesis. Opens in chapter 37. Verse two. These are the generations. Of Jacob.

That phrase. Marking out. A new phase. In God's plan. To bring blessing. To the world. And so fundamentally. As an aside.

This is not really. The Joseph story. It's the Jacob story. Or the Jacob. Joseph. And Judah. Story. As we'll come to see. In the weeks ahead.

[13:18] Well it may be a new phase. But humanity. Is just as messy. As it was. From Genesis three. We're introduced. To Jacob. And his family.

In verse two. Get a load of this. Verse two. Joseph. Being 17 years old. Was pastoring. The flock. With his brothers. He was a boy.

With the sons. Of Bilhar. And Zilpah. His father's wives. And Joseph. Brought a bad report. Of them. To their father. Now Israel. Loved Joseph. More than. Any other. Of his sons.

Because he was. The son. Of his old age. And he made him. A robe. Of many colors. Well here's Jacob. Breaking the golden rule. Of parenting. Don't have favorites.

I'm a middle child. So it's common for me. To think. That both of my brothers. Are the favorite child. But here. It's no secret. Especially when Joseph.

[14:13] Wears that famous. Robe. Joseph's brothers. Definitely weren't too pleased. With what they saw. In fact. Verse 4. When his brothers.

Saw that their father. Loved him. More than all his brothers. They hated him. And could not speak. Peacefully. To him. We might feel sorry.

For the brothers. At this point. But throughout this chapter. And the whole of Genesis. They showed themselves. To be an extremely. Brutish. And self-serving bunch.

The eldest. Reuben. Slept with his father's wife. Simeon and Levi. Killed all the males. In a city. As revenge. For their sister. Being assaulted. And then there's Judah.

The ringleader. In the plot. To kill Joseph. It's a family. Worthy of extenders. Basically. Isn't it? Yet through this messy family.

[15:10] God is still at work. Through his promises. And that is where Joseph. And his dreams come in. Throughout the Bible. God communicated. Through dreams.

So we think of. Jacob's dream. In chapter 28. Of the ladder. Or Daniel. In the Bible. Later on. Or Joseph. In the Christmas story. God doesn't need to communicate.

Like that. Anymore. He doesn't communicate. Through dreams. Because we have the full revelation. Of God. In Jesus. And his word. The Bible. To us. But before then.

In Genesis. As God gives these dreams to Joseph. The agenda. Is being set. God is setting out his promises. Verse 5.

Now Joseph had a dream. And when he told it to his brothers. They hated him even more. He said to them. Hear this dream that I have dreamed. Behold. We were binding sheaves in the field.

[16:06] And behold. My sheaf arose. And stood upright. And behold. Your sheaves gathered around it. And bowed down to my sheaf. His brothers said to him. Are you indeed to reign over us?

Are you indeed to rule over us? So they hated him even more. For his dreams. And his words. Joseph's first dream then. His sheaf stood upright.

And all the others bowed down. To his. They totally get what that meant. And then in the second dream. Verse 9. That gets underlined. And extended even further.

As the sun. The moon. And the stars. Bowing down. To Joseph. God is saying. That Joseph's family. Is going to bow down to him.

And the dreams coming in pairs. Suggest that it definitely will happen. A certainty. In their. Fulfillment. Well Joseph's brothers.

[17:02] Are grown men. They're not too impressed. But that they'll bow down. To teenage. Golden child. Joseph. Joseph. But after. Jacob. But Jacob. After getting over this initial.

Shock. Models to us. The right response. To God's promises. Verse 11. He kept the saying. In mind. Jacob pondered.

What he'd heard. Perhaps. Even recognized. God had spoken. Like he did to him. And so took it seriously. We'll see.

Through the story. How on the surface. These. These promises look very unlikely. And yet we know. How the story ends. As did the first readers. Of Genesis. They're not reading this. Going. What happened next? What happened next? They know they were fulfilled. Joseph. Does end up being bowed down to. In Egypt. And so these chapters.

[17:57] We're seeing how God works out his promises. His track record. This is his CV. Or his personal statement. Of promise keeping. And like the first readers.

We can look back. At God's fulfillment. Of these promises. In the past. And trust him for the future. Now that is a theme. We'll keep coming back to.

But for now. We have more of God's track record. To go on throughout the Bible. That's supremely his promise. In sending a rescuer. In Jesus. And so we can look forward.

To the new creation. That promise. To come in the future. With confidence. Because of God. Is a faithful God. Even when it doesn't look like it.

Even. When it doesn't feel like it. God is at work. Through promises. Secondly. God is at work. Through providence. Now providence.

[18:53] Providence refers to. God's good government. Of our lives. And we are not. The victims of luck. Or fate. But rather. God has mapped out. Our path.

From before. Time began. And is active. In the circumstances. Surprises. And even choices. In our lives. Even. When he seems.

Distant. God. Now one. Review. Of the Joseph's musical. On the parenting website. Reads. It's really great. It barely mentions God. And I guess.

As we said. We can think of that. When we read this chapter. God's name doesn't appear at all. And yet. Psalm 105. Picks up on the story of Joseph.

And says this. In verse 17. About God. He had sent a man. Ahead of them. Joseph. Who was sold. As a slave. So rather than go.

[19:50] An AWOL. God. Is present. Throughout the whole story. Getting Joseph. To where he wants him to be. He'd been present there. Giving Joseph the dreams.

And now he was present. In the provision of a stranger. To help him. In the search for his brothers. So in verse 12. Jacob sends Joseph.

To check up. On his brothers. Perhaps because he knows. They're not. Quite the most trustworthy bunch. But Joseph can't find them. And we pick up the story.

In verse 15. And a man found him. Wandering in the fields. And the man asked him. What are you seeking? I'm seeking my brothers.

He said. Tell me please. Where they are pastoring the flock. And the man said. They have gone. Gone away. For I heard them say. Let us go to Dotham.

[20:45] So Joseph went after his brothers. And found them. At Dotham. From a secular. Non-Christian worldview. That just. Seems like a very happy chance.

Doesn't it? A man just happens to be there. Who overheard the brothers. Say where they were going. I guess we can say. That if he hadn't been there. And taken the initiative.

Joseph could have just. Wandered around aimlessly. For a while. And given up. Gone back home. And wouldn't have ended up. In Egypt. But this is no chance encounter.

God is at work. He is setting the stage. For his promises. To be fulfilled. And then. When Joseph's brothers. Throw him into a pit. In verse 24.

The pit was empty. There was no water in it. Sounds like. There were water. In the other pits. But not this one. So Joseph didn't drown. He stayed alive.

[21:43] And then. With incredibly good timing. Slave traders pass by. And the plan changes. And yet. Through it all. God is sending a man.

Ahead of them. He's getting Joseph. And his people. To where he wants them to be. In Egypt. He is at work. He is sovereignly. Ordaining all things.

To achieve his plan. Now. To anyone. Looking in on this chapter. On the circumstances. Joseph goes through. On the ground. Well. God doesn't. Appear to be involved.

That's why Andrew Lloyd Webber. Can write a musical. About his life. And missed a point. Of what's going on. And I guess. In a similar way. It's why our non-Christian friends.

Can look at us. And see an obvious sign. That God is alive. And for us. Now. Like them. We. We struggle. To get up in the morning. And we get colds.

[22 : 39] And cancers. We grow old. And we die. Yet. As we see. Through the whole. Joseph's story. God is at work. Through all things.

That is what we are. To hold on to. For our own lives. God is at work. In the ups. And downs. Of life. To bless the world. And his people. And that includes.

Thirdly. Working through sin. Now. Genesis. From chapter three onwards. Describes our world. It's marred by sin. Right through to today.

And there's plenty of sin. On display. In this chapter. Isn't there? The story continues. Verse 18. They saw him from afar. And before.

He came near to them. They conspired against him. To kill him. They said to one another. Here comes this dreamer. Come now. Let us kill him. And throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say.

[23 : 37] That a fierce animal. Has devoured him. And we will see. What will become. Of his dreams. Joseph. Joseph. Becomes the Bible's. First fashion victim.

As it were. As the robe. Is stripped from him. And he ends up. In a pit. That's actually. Followed by these. Astounding actions. Of the brothers.

In verse 25. You see that. Then they sat down. To eat. How callous. They've just. Plotted to murder. Their very own brother.

And chucked him. In a pit. And in a next breath. They're munching on the sandwiches. Blocking out. The brothers. Screams. For help. That is evil.

And I guess. Us too. We come face to face. Don't we. With the ugliness of sin. In our world today. It's brutality. And we despair. How often.

[24 : 36] Do we feel. It's out of control. Where is God. In all this. But the presence of sin. Even in horrific ways. Doesn't mean. God is not there.

He's not surprised. By the actions. Of these brothers. And kind of. Has to adjust. His plans. God. Is at work. Through all things. He's still at work.

Even through sin. He has his own script. Written before. The beginning of time. That he's working to. You. Perfectly. Now please.

Don't misunderstand. God is not to blame. For sin. Nor does he approve. Of it. And each. Individual. Act of sin. Is still expressing. A rejection.

Of God. And his rule. And God. Still holds. People accountable. For their sin. Yet. In the light. Of Genesis. Chapter 50. Of that verse.

[25 : 30] That Joseph. Said it. At the start. God. God was at work. Using the evil. Using the hatred. And the murderous intent. Of the brothers. To accomplish.

His ultimate plan. The saving. Of lives. Including. Joseph's own. Undeserving. Brothers. I guess. We can see. A little bit. Of this. In the war. In Ukraine. Without doubt. An evil action. That has had. Disastrous. Effects. At many killed.

And others. Fleeing. The country. And yet. There are stories. Of God. Using it. For good. I've heard. Of baptisms. Up and down. The country. For Ukrainians.

Who have come to faith. As refugees. In this country. I read recently. Of a Ukrainian. Refugee. In Dorset. Running an evangelistic. Course. At her church. In Ukrainian.

[26 : 24] With 70. Coming along. For one of the events. God really is God. And he is really. At work. His sovereignty. And even his blessing.

Can be found. In the midst of the most heinous crimes. And the most disastrous circumstances. That what. That's what the Joseph story teaches us. And we see that supremely.

In the death of Jesus. Some 2,000 years ago. God sent his son into the world. And people knew this was the son. The heir. And yet. And yet. In Mark chapter 12.

They utter the same words. As Joseph's brothers. Come. Let us. Kill him. Though wicked men killed him. Of their own free choice.

It was what God determined. Beforehand should happen. Jesus too. Could say to the people. Of his day. See. You meant evil against me. But God meant it.

[27 : 22] For good. As with Joseph. So. With Jesus. That should give us. Great humility. Before God. Perhaps.

You're here today. And you wouldn't call yourself. A follower of Jesus. You're looking into the Christian faith. Well. We can see that. Nothing will stop God's purposes. Not even.

People's rejection of him. We see that in the Bible. See that in the book of Acts. As the gospel spreads. We see that all through church history. Where God's man. And God's people. Are attacked. The gospel spreads. That Jesus is Lord. He is sovereign. He's in charge. And nothing can stop that. And one day. Every knee will bow before him. And those on. Not on his side. Are indeed fighting a losing battle. What great humility. That we should have before this God. Who uses all things. Even sin. For his glorious purposes.

[28 : 21] Well for those of us. Already in trusting in Jesus. That also gives us great courage. Knowing that in his sovereignty. God takes the deepest wickedness of humanity. And uses it to advance his glorious promises.

Well that will keep us speaking openly about Jesus. Living for him. Even when it's costly. In our situation. Because God is at work.

Through all things. Even. Through sin. And that brings us on to our final point this morning. God is at work. Through suffering. God is at work.

Through suffering. In a world of sin. People suffer. We know that from the news. And from our own experience. At the end of chapter 37.

It's Jacob suffering. The apparent loss of his son. The brothers conceal their actions. By dipping Joseph's coat. In goat's blood. And letting Jacob come to his own conclusions.

[29 : 20] At verse 34. Then Jacob tore his garments. And put sackcloth on his loins. And mourned for his son for many days. All his sons and all his daughters.

Rose up to comfort him. But he refused to be comforted. And said no. I shall go down to Sheol. To my son mourning. Thus his father. Wept for him.

Jacob suffering. Very deeply here. And the chapter ends. With Joseph being people trafficked. To be thrown in a pit. And to listen to your brother's conversation.

About killing you. And to be pulled out of a pit. Expecting death. And then carted off to who knows where. What a traumatic experience for Joseph.

And yet the scripture tells us. In Romans 8.28. In the New Testament. And we know that for those who love God. That all things work together for good. For those who are called.

[30 : 22] According to his purpose. Joseph was definitely called. According to God's purpose. And then today. When people suffer. What's the question?

Well it's where is God? The assumption that he's absent. That he's not there. He's certainly not working through it. But as we see the Joseph story.

And know how it ends. We see God's caring. Providential hand. Is always at work for his people. Even in the midst. Of severe suffering.

On Friday. The Thanksgiving service. Was held for Jeremy Marshall. Who was diagnosed 10 years ago. With a rare form of cancer. And he spent his last year.

Speaking at church events. Up and down the country. About his trust in the Lord Jesus. And his hope. In the face of death. And he wrote a book about it.

[31 : 22] Hope in the face of the big sea. Hope in the face of death. And many many people. Have heard the gospel. Through his testimony.

A powerful example. Of God. Working through. The awful pain. And suffering of life. For his good purposes. Of saving lives.

Now we live in a world. That is just as messy. And sin ravaged. As Joseph's. But what an encouragement. To see that God doesn't retreat. When life gets messy.

Instead. He continues to work. For the good of his people. Through his promises. And providence. Even. Through sin. And suffering.

That's an enormous. Encouragement. To those of us. Who are suffering greatly. Or when we suffer. In the future. When a thousand questions. Run through our heads.

[32 : 20] With no answers in sight. And the answers. May not come. Until we get home to heaven. But one day. We will see the purpose. Of it all.

And rejoice. In the wisdom of God. And understanding at last. When we thought God. Was most absent. He was most near. To us.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father.

We praise you. That you are at work. In all things. That nothing surprises you. Through your promises. Through your sovereignty. Ordaining things.

In everyday life. Even through sin. And suffering. Please help us. To walk by. Faith. And not by sight. And trusting you. That you will achieve.
[33 : 16] Your glorious promises. Amen.