

The Original Gen-Xer

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 12th of November 2000.

The preacher is Warwick Grant. His sermon is entitled The Original Genexa and is from Genesis chapter 37 verses 2 to 36.

I particularly remember this guy that I was at high school with. I won't tell you his name. Rowan, I think it was. Anyway, I remember Rowan.

I remember Rowan and we all remember Rowan. Now this guy Rowan openly claimed that by the time he was 25 he would have made his first million dollars. Now, Rowan wasn't a Christian at the time and if you ask most people at my school they would have said, oh Rowan, yeah, we know Rowan.

That's the guy that shows off a lot, doesn't it? And he was pretty full of himself. Now, I don't know whether he made his first million by the time he was 25 but I did hear a few years later that he became a Christian.

[1 : 14] So maybe the whole deal of making a million dollars was no longer important to him. I suspect his values changed. But I do remember him at that time as being a braggart and a show-off.

Well, we encounter in some ways a similar character here in tonight's Bible reading in the person of Joseph. Let's have a quick snapshot of Joseph's ancestry.

His great-grandfather was Abraham. His grandfather was Isaac. His dad was Jacob and Jacob's name became Israel and Joseph was one of 12 brothers and we know of one sister that he had too.

Now, Jacob or Israel, he had four wives, two official wives and he also married the servant girls of his official wives, if you like.

And his children were all from these four women. And he'd fathered Joseph later on in his life. I think Joseph was the second last son that he had.

[2 : 19] And I think this was one of the reasons for his favouritism towards Joseph because this was the young boy who he had fathered in his old age. Well, we see in verse 2 of chapter 37 that Joseph was 17 years old, the same age as Anthony Colley.

Where are you, Anthony? He's under the seat at the moment. No, he's not. There he is. So Anthony's 17. So this is the age that Joseph was. And he was mining the sheep with his brothers.

And he basically just dobbs them in, dobbs his brothers in to their dad. Now, perhaps Jacob, who had a close relationship with Joseph, had charged him with, look, can you let me know how things go, please?

I'd like to know. I'd like to have a report. And so Joseph was bound to report back to his dad about how things were going in the field. Also, because of his favouritism towards Joseph, Israel, or I'll use the name Israel for Jacob now.

Israel had given a special robe to Joseph. Now, we know it as the coat of many colours. But the Hebrew could also be described as a coat with long sleeves.

[3 : 30] It could mean either. It would probably be an ankle-length garment that was quite distinctive, the sort of thing that only royalty would wear. Isn't it interesting that even today, what we wear gives an indication of our social status or our perceived social status.

And the same in those days. This garment on Joseph was a constant sign to the brothers of Jacob or Israel's favouritism towards Joseph.

He was the favoured son of his father. In this family, because of his favouritism, jealousies arose. Now, this might be part of your own personal experience.

I'm an only child, so this has never been part of my own experience. But if you have brothers and sisters, often they tell me, oh, you can get jealous pretty easily about things, about possessions, experiences, and things like that.

We're told in verse 4 that his brothers hated him. Now remember, this is the family through whom God was going to bless the whole world.

[4 : 39] He made that promise to Abraham way back in Genesis 12. And through this family and the descendants, God was going to bless the whole world. Strange family to pick, don't you think?

Are we surprised? How can God use this bunch of dysfunctional brothers? And yet he could. And he did. I wonder if you ever feel that you're just beyond God's...

God could never use me. I'm just not good enough. There's no way God could use me to do anything for him. My family's too messed up. My background's all screwed up. I've got issues in my life I'm trying to deal with.

I just can't get on top of it all. Take heart. God could use this family. And he did use them to bless the whole world ultimately. And he can use you and your family as well.

Just submit to him. And let him work. Well, as I say in verse 4, the dysfunction in this family is shown by the use of the verb hate.

[5 : 47] They hated Joseph. And in our language, in English, we say we hate someone. It can just remain as an attitude to someone. I hate that person. And we just sort of leave it out there.

I hate them. But in the Hebrew, it's a word which has implications of you're going to act on that hate. It's like you've got a bow that you're drawing tight and eventually you release an arrow.

And hateful actions did follow as a result of the brother's attitude. But now in verse 5, we read the details of Joseph's first dream.

Verses 5 to 7. Let's read from verse 6. He said to them, Listen to this dream that I dreamed. There we were, binding sheaves in the field.

Suddenly, my sheaf rose and stood upright. Then your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf. Strange dream.

[6 : 46] But often dreams are strange, aren't they? And the meaning of this dream is quite clear. We can imagine the annoyance of the little brothers at their little upstart brother as he went on about these dreams.

We all sort of have that caricature of the younger brother who's really enthusiastic and bubbly and wanting to talk and share all their experiences. That's the sort of picture we get of Joseph here.

In verse 8, we're told that they hated him even more. They hated him even more because of his dreams and his words. Who was he anyway, presuming to rule over them?

The only rule that they had at that time was God and of course their father. There was no kingship or anything like that in those days. Who did he think he was?

Well, in verse 9, we see he has another dream and he told it to his brothers saying, Look, I've had another dream. The sun, the moon and the eleven stars were bowing down to me. In this dream, the implication is that not only were his brothers bowing down to him, but his step-mom and his dad were as well.

[7 : 57] We think his own mother, Rachel, had died at this stage and Leah, I think, was his step-mother. And the brothers were jealous of him even more and his father rebuked him.

Now, no mention is made here of the source of these dreams. Where do these dreams come from? Is this just a young kid's fertile imagination? Were they from God?

We're not told, but we're told that his father kept the matter in mind. There are occasions, plenty of occasions in the Bible, where God speaks to his people through dreams.

Joseph was told to go ahead and marry Mary despite the fact that she was pregnant with Jesus. in a dream, he was told that. And there are other occasions too.

God can use and does use dreams. Particularly, there are many occasions in the Bible. That's not to say we should expect guidance from him in dreams today, but he can.

[9 : 00] But he guides us ultimately through the scriptures as we discussed earlier this year. Well, Israel, or Jacob, sent Joseph on a fact-finding mission to see if the brothers and their flocks were well.

And we read verse 14. So he said to him, Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock and bring word back to me. So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

Well, Shechem was about 60 to 70 kilometers north of Hebron. And it was a substantial journey that Joseph had to make. The significant thing here is that Joseph is leaving the protection of his father.

He's going to be 60 or 70 Ks away from his dad. Away from his father's protective, cocooning influence. He seems to be becoming vulnerable.

Particularly, he's on the way to these hateful brothers. Well, in verse 15, we're told that he bumps into some bloke who advises Joseph that he heard the brothers say they were going to a place called Dothan or Dothan, about another 30 Ks from Shechem.

[10 : 14] And it was at this place that he found his brothers. Now just remember, this bowstring of hate was pulled tight, ready to be released.

this plot of murder that they were thinking about was not a heat of the moment thing. It was a cold, act of conspiracy against their little brother.

A cold-blooded desire to kill their little brother. I reckon the most common motive for an act of murder is jealousy of some sort or another.

It could be over a person or over possessions or money or status or whatever. Were the brothers jealous of their father's favour?

It reminds us of the first brothers in the Bible, Cain and Abel. Cain was jealous of God's favour which had been bestowed on his brother Abel and Cain murdered Abel.

[11 : 19] Is this a similar situation here where there's some envy and jealousy for the father's favour? Let's look at verses 19 and 20. 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 shall say that a wild animal has devoured him and we shall see what will become of his dreams. Let's read on. Reuben comes into the picture.

When Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands saying, Let us not take his life. Reuben said to them, Shed no blood, throw him into this pit here in the wilderness but lay no hand on him that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of the robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty. There was no water in it.

This pit would have been like a big cistern that was used to store water and we're told that it was empty. Joseph here is portrayed as a silent character.

[12 : 28] We don't hear anything about what he says. Was he terrified? We don't know from this passage but we do know from a couple of chapters later in chapter 42 verse 21 that Joseph would have been absolutely terrified.

they were reflecting the brothers on this incident and they said alas we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother. We saw his anguish when he pleaded with us but we would not listen.

Imagine this guy surrounded by his 11 brothers basically death in his face thinking he was about to be murdered. Would have been a ghastly experience for him.

But Reuben was the oldest of the brothers and he opposed the murder plan. And verse 22 tells us that he planned secretly to rescue Joseph from the pit and save his life.

Now in the society of this time if the father wasn't present the father's responsibility and authority would be conveyed to the oldest brother who was present. So Reuben would on returning to his dad have to give an account of Joseph's life.

[13 : 41] Of all that had happened. I don't think he would like the prospect of telling his dad well Joseph's dead. Look at how uncaring these brothers are.

After they have thrown their brother into a pit what do they do in verse 25? They sat down to eat. This was really a cold blooded act. And what should pass by but a caravan of Ishmaelites also called Midianites and they passed by on a historically well verified trade route.

Judah another one of the brothers is a bit of an opportunist and he warns his brothers of the consequences of their actions. Judah said to his brothers this is verse 26 what profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?

Come let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him for he is our brother our own flesh and his brothers agreed.

So there was sort of plan A, B and C in this story. Plan A was cold blooded murder. Plan B Reuben's plan B was a secret rescue but Judah's plan C was get rid of Joseph but no murder and that was the plan that was implemented.

[15 : 10] Reuben is away from the situation when the Ishmaelites get Joseph Reuben comes back to the pit Joseph's gone. What does Reuben say? We see that in verse 29 Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit.

He tore his clothes. Tearing one's clothes as well as annoying your mum would be an act of grief and mourning.

And that was a traditional way people showed grief and mourning by ripping their clothes. But he was only concerned for himself. He wasn't really concerned for Jacob. He was concerned. He had to face his dad and tell him this news.

Look what he says in that second part of verse 30. He returned to his brothers and said, The boy is gone and I, where can I turn? Not, where's Joseph?

What's going to happen to me? He was afraid of the consequences for himself, not really for his brother. Well, we know the end of this part of the story.

[16 : 16] They got a goat and slaughtered it, dipped the robe in the blood of the goat and took it back to Jacob, or it was taken back to Jacob, and he was deceived into thinking that a wild animal had killed Joseph.

It's ironic, isn't it, that Jacob himself had deceived his father Isaac through a few actions which we heard about in previous sermons, and by offering him the meat of a kid, the meat of a goat.

And through the blood of a goat now, he has deceived himself. He refused to be comforted. His favor, which the other sons had so longed for, was still missing from their lives.

He had no favor for them. Joseph was gone. All he wanted to do was go to Sheol, the place of the dead, and to join his young son. At the end of this chapter we read that the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

God, what a mess, eh? Really cheers you up, doesn't it, this story?

[17 : 36] It's a great one, isn't it? Do you like it? Sort of thing you'll tell your kids at bedtime to get them off to sleep quietly. What do we learn from this?

What do we learn from this mess? Well, when they taught us how to preach, they said, make sure you give points of application. How do people apply what they've learned from the scriptures?

What do we take away from this? It's all very well to know what it meant at the time, what it means in the context of the whole Bible. When people leave the church, what will they go away with able to apply in their lives?

Well, what are the points of application for us from this passage? Is it parents? Don't favour any particular child.

Is that a point of application? Is it to children? Don't show off. Don't be a show off. Is it to older brothers and sisters? Make sure you love your little brother and sister.

[18 : 36] Or perhaps it's children, don't deceive your dad. Well, maybe, but I don't really think they're the main points of application from this passage.

I think the main point of application in this passage is that God is in control no matter what. In bad events, he can bring good out of them, and he is working to.

In Genesis 45, which we'll be coming to in a few weeks' time, we'll hear sequences of this story. Genesis 45, verses 4 and 5, we actually read when the brothers were reunited with Joseph in Egypt as a result of a whole series of events.

And Joseph was sort of veiled from his brothers. They couldn't identify him as Joseph. And he had to make it clear to them that this was he, Joseph, who was still alive. Let me just read what it says there.

Joseph said to his brothers, come closer to me. And they came closer. He said, I'm your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

[19 : 52] And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

There had been a big famine, and part of God's plan was for Joseph to be in Egypt, to save the people from the consequences of that famine. God was in on this whole story, this mess of human activity.

God was there working his purposes out. Reminded me of a verse of Paul's letter to the Romans, Romans chapter 8, verse 28, a fairly well-known Bible verse.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Often we're in the middle of a big mess.

We don't know what to do. We don't know where to go. We don't know where we're headed. We don't know what God's doing. But if we submit to him and trust him, we can know that's the best thing we can be doing.

[21 : 05] In our darkest hours, we can be sure that God is working his purposes out. Even though we can't see, it's like we've got one bit of a jigsaw puzzle, and that's all we can see, and it's meaningless, and yet God has the whole picture, and he knows what's going on.

I tried to think of a situation in the experience of our church here that was perhaps a good illustration to use of this working out. I thought of the death of a lovely lady who was known to many of us called Sue Horrocks.

Some of you may have not met Sue. She died a couple of years ago of cancer, and she was only 39. Her husband and son and daughter still worshiped with us at our 10 a.m.

congregation. And many of us asked at the time, God, why did you not answer our prayers to heal Sue? We had a meeting in the church before she died where Sue came in, we laid hands on her and prayed for her, and yet still God chose not to heal her.

Now a lot of good things came out of Sue's tragic death. A lot of us admired her faith and courage in the face of cancer. She was an inspiration to all of us to follow Jesus as she did herself.

[22 : 22] But there are still things that we ask, why God did you heal her? There are questions that remain unanswered. God knows what God he's doing.

God knows what he's doing.

God is working his purposes out. And what are God's purposes? What are God's plans for the universe? What is God on about? God tells us in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10 9 and 10 Paul writes God has made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

God wants to gather up all things into Christ, into Jesus. He wants everyone to acknowledge him as Lord and to know his love.

That's God's plan. That's what he's working towards. Through our messes, our human messes, our lives, God is doing his work. Even though we're not sure, we can't see, we can trust that he's doing that.

[23 : 57] God is in control. And this story reminds us too of the greatest mess that was ever made by God's followers.

God sent his son, Jesus. He had a group of followers, 11 or 12 of them, meant to serve him and follow him to the end. They all abandoned him.

There were 11 left after the betrayer killed himself. 11 brothers disowned Joseph. 11 disciples ran away from Jesus.

And through that dark moment of human history, when Jesus hung on that cross, the son of God himself had been killed, been crucified. What a ghastly thing for humans to do to God, to kill him.

God was still in control. And he was there because God meant for him to be there. Jesus wasn't on the cross because he got up a few people's noses and said a few wrong things and so they said we'll condemn him to the cross.

[25 : 09] He was there because it was God's plan and he was there. And he was on that cross dying for your sins and mine. It was God's plan. God was working his purposes out despite the evil and sin of human beings.

God is in control. Even through the bleakest moments of history, God is working his purposes out. That's the title of the next song we're going to sing.

I'll invite the musicians to come up and let me just read you some of the words from this song. God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year.

God is working his purpose out and the time is drawing near. nearer and nearer draws the time. The time that will surely be when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

That's the purpose. That's the goal. And God's working towards it. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.