

Living the Dream?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in Genesis chapter 37. Genesis chapter 37, and if we read again at verse 18.

Genesis 37 at verse 18. And they, that is Joseph's brothers, they saw Joseph 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 that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.

We will see what will become of his dreams. I'm sure that we're all familiar with the name Martin Luther King, because Martin Luther King, he was an African-American Baptist minister, and he was also the most visible leader in the American civil rights movement from 1955 until his assassination in 1968.

And even though we may not have been old enough at the time, or for some of us, we weren't even born then, and yet we're all familiar with his most famous speech in 1963, where he declared to his black American audience, he said, I have a dream.

[1 : 2 9] I have a dream. Martin Luther King said, I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I have a dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, that all men are created equal. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.

And quoting from Isaiah 40, Martin Luther King, he went on to say, I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

I have a dream. You know, it was a powerful and passionate speech that sought to remind a past generation as well as this present generation, it sought to remind them that black lives do matter.

But you know, as we saw last Lord's Day, centuries before Martin Luther King walked on this earth, there was also another declaration that was made. And it was a similar declaration to Martin Luther King's declaration.

[2 : 5 4] Because as we saw, and much to the annoyance and anger of his brothers, Joseph made an announcement to his family. He said, I've had a dream. I've had a dream.

And as we saw, Joseph had had, in fact, he had had two dreams with the same emphasis. And these two dreams were two witnesses to the truth of God's word.

That God had spoken to Joseph and God had revealed to Joseph that one day he would be in this exalted position where his father and his brothers would all bow down to him.

But as we consider this next section in the life of Joseph, we see that Joseph certainly didn't think that he was living the dream. Joseph may have had a dream, but looking at his life and going through what he went through, Joseph wasn't living the dream.

Instead, in Joseph's mind, his dream had turned into more of a nightmare. It was a mess. And so I'd like us to consider this passage, the second half of chapter 37.

[4 : 04] I want us to see it, to look at it under three headings. Sending the Son, similarities with the Son, and sorrow for the Son.

Sending the Son. Similarities with the Son, and sorrow for the Son. So first of all, sending the Son.

Sending the Son. If we look at verse 12, it says, Now when we consider the opening section of this passage last Lord's Day, we saw that the story of Joseph is a story of faithfulness.

It's not Joseph's faithfulness or Jacob's faithfulness, but it's God's faithfulness. Because in the story of Joseph, God is faithful to his covenant. God is faithful to his gospel promise.

And God is faithful to his word. And God was being faithful to Joseph even when things got messy and he couldn't understand what was going on in the story of his life.

[5 : 33] Remarkably, God isn't mentioned in the story of Joseph. But just because God isn't mentioned doesn't mean that God is absent in the story of Joseph. In fact, we could say that it's God who is the main character in the story of Joseph.

He's the author of the story. He's the director in the drama. He has written the storyline. Joseph might not understand the storyline. He might not see all the twists and all the turns that are written in the narrative.

But God does. And God is going to use it all for good and ultimately for his own glory. You know, we often hear people saying the devil is in the detail.

We hear them saying the devil is in the detail. But that phrase, it actually originated from an earlier phrase which was God is in the detail. It's not the devil who's in the detail but God is in the detail.

And you know, that's certainly the case in the story of Joseph. God is in the detail. Because when Jacob sent Joseph to go and see if there was shalom between him and his brothers, he sent him to Shechem.

[6 : 47] We read there in verse 14, so he said to him, go now, save it as well with your brothers and with the flock and bring me word. So he sent him from the valley of Hebron and he came to Shechem.

And you know, it's interesting that when you work out what these place names actually mean to this family or what they meant to this family, you know, for the most part, these place names, they don't mean very much to us.

It's just like if I talk about Melbost. Now, you've heard of Melbost, maybe you've been there, maybe you know somebody who lives there, but it doesn't mean very much to you living in Barvis.

But for me, it's home. Melbost is home and for Jacob and his family, the valley of Hebron was home. It was where the family home was located and it had been their home for generations because although they travelled around shepherding the sheep, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they had all lived in the valley of Hebron.

They'd all lived in this land of Canaan, which is the promised land. Therefore, at that time, the promised land was their home. That was their father's house.

[8 : 02] That's where they all grew up. That was part of their heritage. But the valley of Hebron in the promised land, it was not only where Abraham and Isaac and Jacob lived, it was also where they were all buried.

It was their resting place. It was their long home. And you often see that with people, don't you? People who have lived away on the mainland for many years, but when they die, their remains are brought home to be buried in their final resting place.

And that's because home means something to people. Home is where we belong. Home is where we feel comfortable and where we can just be ourselves. As the saying goes, home is where the heart is.

But what we read is that the father sent the son away from home. Jacob sent Joseph 50 miles away from home to Shechem.

But Shechem wasn't the nicest of places. And it didn't hold the nicest of memories for Jacob's family either. because if you read, if you read it in chapter 34, Shechem is the place where Joseph's, or Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, was raped.

[9 : 21] That's what takes place in chapter 34. And Shechem was also the place where Dinah's older brothers, Simeon and Levi, they took revenge on the place of Shechem and killed all the men in Shechem because of what had happened to their little sister.

But you know, what I find interesting about the father sending the son, he sent the son to Shechem to find his brothers. What I find interesting about this is that when Joseph arrived in Shechem, his brothers weren't there.

There was nobody there. And as a 17-year-old, Joseph was left to wander aimlessly in the fields of Shechem, a very dangerous place for someone belonging to Jacob's family.

But Joseph, he was lost. He was wandering aimlessly looking for his family. And he was wandering aimlessly until in the sweet providence of God, we read in verse 15, a man found him.

A man found him wandering in the fields and the man asked him, what are you seeking? And Joseph said, I am seeking my brothers. Tell me please where they are pasturing the flock.

[10 : 33] And the man said, they have gone away for I heard them say, let us go to Dothan. So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. You know, as Joseph wandered in the fields of Shechem, as he wandered, looking lost, he met a stranger.

We don't know anything about this stranger. We don't know his name. We're not told why he was there. We don't even know how he saw Joseph. But God, in his sweet providence, he had this stranger speak to Joseph and direct him to Dothan, where his brothers were.

You know, it was a providential meeting and we can't miss that. This is a providential meeting and it was all part of God's sovereign plan.

And you know, it's amazing to think that because of this stranger, this unknown man, because of him, everything else in the story of Joseph took place.

Because if this stranger hadn't been there and if he hadn't heard, overheard, Joseph's brothers talking, if he didn't know where Joseph's brothers had travelled to, then Joseph, he would have wandered around the fields of Shechem for a wee while and then gone home.

[11 : 53] And if Joseph had gone home, he wouldn't have met his brothers. He wouldn't have been thrown into the pit. He wouldn't have been sold into Egypt and he wouldn't have been imprisoned.

If Joseph had gone back home to the valley of Hebron, he wouldn't have been exalted. He wouldn't have become prime minister. He wouldn't have saved his family. And you know, if we look at the bigger picture of all this, in God's plan of redemption, if there was no man in the field, if this stranger hadn't met with Joseph, then there would have been no exodus from Egypt.

There would have been no story of God's people, no coming of God's Son, no preaching of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and no Christians in Barbas and beyond.

But you know, the wonder of wonders is that God so planned and purposed this meeting between Joseph and this stranger, He so planned and purposed it according to His sweet providence.

And He did it all, my friend, because God is in the detail. God is in the detail. He's in the detail of our lives. Every single detail, He knows about it.

[13 : 05] and He has seen it all beforehand. You know, it's Liam Golliger who states in his brilliant book on the story of Joseph, he says, Providence is a word that every Christian should know because it refers to God's good government over our lives.

My friend, we are not the victims of luck or chance or fate or fortune or karma. No, God in His providence has seen it all take place beforehand.

That's what the word providence means. It means seen beforehand. Seen beforehand. God has seen beforehand. Before the foundation of the world. Before God spoke into the darkness and said, let there be light, God saw it.

God saw it all. He has seen every detail in our lives. And like the story of Joseph's life, God might not be clearly seen in your life but that doesn't mean He's absent.

No, He's everywhere present. He's active in the detail of our lives. Therefore, we must remember this morning that our disappointments are God's appointments.

[14 : 23] Our disappointments are God's appointments because with God there are no accidents. There are no incidents. There are no chance meetings.

There are no lucky escapes. There are no random relationships. Nothing is a result of fate or fortune. No, it's all according to the sweet and divine providence of Almighty God.

And you know, don't you just love that statement in the Catechism? You know, the Catechism, it's so neglected in our day and generation but it's a wonderful document. The Catechism asks, what are the works of providence?

God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

That doesn't mean we're robots but it does mean that God has seen our lives in every detail beforehand. And like he was working in the life of Joseph, God is working in our lives.

[15 : 29] God is working through our lives. He's working in the mess and he's working for our good and ultimately for his glory. My friend, whatever you're going through this morning, your comfort and assurance is that God knows it and God sees it and God understands it and God is present in the detail.

Present in the detail. God is in the detail. That's your comfort this morning. God is in the detail.

And so we see sending the sun. Let me see secondly similarities with the sun. Similarities with the sun. So sending the sun and similarities with the sun.

Now look at 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 that a fierce animal has devoured him and we will see what will become of his dreams.

[16 : 46] Now when I say similarities with the sun I don't mean similarities with Jacob's sons. I mean similarities with the son of God Jesus Christ.

Because as we said last week there are many similarities that we can draw between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus. Now I don't want to be accused of spiritualising the passage or reading into the text what isn't actually there.

God. But you know we have to remember that God is the author of this story. God is the author of this story. The story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation it's all history.

It's his story. It's God's story. And God is the director in the drama. He is the author of the storyline. He writes the script.

He orders the twists and the turns. He puts in the narrative. He begins new chapters and he turns the pages in the story. And you know if we can't see the similarities between the life of Joseph in the Old Testament and the life of Jesus in the New Testament if we can't see it then we're missing the point.

[17 : 56] Because the story of Joseph my friend it's an illustration. It's a foreshadowing. It's a picture of what's to come. As the saying goes the new is in the old concealed but the old is in the new revealed.

The new is in the old concealed but the old is in the new revealed. And that's what we see here when we consider the similarities with the son.

Because in this opening chapter to the story of Joseph we see that Joseph is the favoured son. He was loved by his father. He was given a position of exaltation by his father.

He was given a royal tunic by his father. He was given that coat of many colours. He was given this position of exaltation above his brothers. And then we have Joseph's dreams which is God's word.

It's God's covenant promise to Joseph. But as the narrative progresses we see that the father sends the son. He sends the son of exaltation.

[19 : 04] He sends him to a place of humiliation. Jacob sent the son from the father's house. He sent him from the promised land and he sent him down to Shechem and down to Dothan.

And it's there that Joseph met his brothers. He met those who were bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. And it's interesting that Joseph's brothers, they knew that Joseph was coming over the horizon.

Undoubtedly they probably saw Joseph in his coat of many colours. They saw his royal tunic of blue and purple and gold. And their response to Joseph was look, here comes the dreamer.

Here comes the dreamer. And when Joseph meets his brothers he is met with rejection and ridicule and ruin. They strip Joseph of his royal coat and they cast him down, down, down into the pit.

That certainly wasn't what Joseph thought he was promised. But it was all part of God's plan, God's purpose and God's path for Joseph's life. But you can see the similarities with the son, can't you?

[20 : 17] You can see the similarities with the son. You can see that the greater than Joseph, our Jesus, he was the favoured son. He was the royal son.

He was one with the father. He was loved by the father. He was the only begotten son of the father, full of grace and truth. He was in this position of exaltation.

He was king of kings, lord of lords, and yet he was sent by the father. He was sent from the father's house. He was sent from the promised land of heaven.

He was sent because God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. My friend, our Jesus, he humbled himself from the crown of glory to the cradle in Bethlehem.

and he became one of us. He was born like us, born of our bone, flesh of our flesh. And like Joseph, our Jesus, he came to his own brothers.

[21 : 19] He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. And as the Bible tells us, he was despised and rejected by man. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

But it goes farther, doesn't it? It goes farther because there are more similarities with the son. Because as we read Joseph's brothers, they strip him of his royal tunic.

They throw him in a pit and they sell him into Egypt for the price of a slave. And that's what Judas did with our Jesus, didn't he? He sold him for the price of a slave.

And they stripped our Jesus. They stripped him of his seamless robe and cast lots for it. They spat on our Jesus. They scourged our Jesus.

They nailed our Jesus. They crucified our Jesus. They nailed our Jesus hand and foot to a Roman cross. But unlike Joseph, when it came to our Jesus, they did shed his blood.

[22 : 25] They did leave him to die. They did kill our Jesus. But more than that, the glory of the gospel is that our Jesus wasn't humbled by others.

Our Jesus humbled himself. And he humbled himself, my friend, from the crown of glory to the cradle in Bethlehem all the way down to the cross of Calvary.

He humbled himself down, down, down, from the crown to the cradle to the cross. And it was on that cross, my friend, that our Jesus bore our sin in his own body.

It was on that cross that our Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. It was on that cross that our Jesus, he cried out in the darkness and the dereliction of the cross, he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And you know, Joseph, he echoed those words centuries earlier from the pit, didn't he? Because if you actually read through the story of Joseph and you come to chapter 42, we see there that when Joseph was in the pit, his brothers could see and hear the distress of his soul.

[23 : 50] That's what we read. His brothers could see and hear his distress of soul. Joseph was in the darkness of dereliction and distress because Joseph thought that he wasn't living this dream of exaltation.

In his mind it was a nightmare of humiliation. Joseph might have thought that his life was a mess, but it was all part of God's perfect plan, path, and purpose for Joseph's life.

Even though his brothers meant evil against him, my friend, the Lord meant it for good. God was humbling Joseph. God was emptying Joseph.

God was equipping Joseph to bring the fullness of blessing to a family and also the nations of the world. And you know, there's similarities with the son.

Because you know, we might look at the cross, the cross upon which the prince of glory died. We might look at Calvary and think, what a mess. What a mess.

[25 : 01] There's the son of God, crucified, crowned with thorns, bleeding, dying. What a mess. But you know, the New Testament assures us and affirms to us that Jesus was delivered up.

And he was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Jesus was delivered up according to the sweet plan and providence of God.

It was all according to the perfect plan and purpose and promise and even providence of Almighty God, the son of God, my friend. He was humiliated and emptied of himself in order to bring the fullness of blessing to the world.

My friend, can you see the similarities with the son? Can you see the similarities between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus? Can you see that the story of Joseph is a foreshadowing?

It's an illustration. It's a picture of what was to come in the life of Jesus. Can you see, my friend? Can you see that the greater than Joseph is our Jesus?

[26 : 07] The greater than Joseph is our Jesus? Do you know, I keep calling him our Jesus. Jesus is my Jesus.

But is he your Jesus? He's my Jesus. But is he your Jesus? Because he needs to be your Jesus.

Oh, he needs to be your Jesus. It's no use you saying he's someone else's Jesus. He needs to be your Jesus.

And he needs to be your Jesus today. And so we see similarities with the son. But then lastly, we see sorrowing for the son.

Sending the son, similarities with the son, and sorrowing for the son. Sorrowing for the son. Look at verse 31. Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.

[27 : 12] 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. Then Jacob tore his garments and put on sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son 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 the grave to my son mourning.

Thus his father wept for him. You know, it's the news that every parent dreads to hear that knock on the door and to be told that something has happened to one of your children.

You know, I've often been reminded by parents with older children. children. I've often been told that I should be so thankful that I can lock the door at night and know that my children are safely tucked up in bed.

[28 : 18] But you know, when they've grown up and when they're out in the big bad world, you just don't know what can happen to them at any given moment, which is always a worry.

It's always a worry in the back of a parent's mind. And when Joseph's brothers, when they returned home, Jacob must have known that there was something wrong. Because they weren't due home for a number of months yet.

But when Jacob saw them, and then he saw this coat that was once full of many colors, but it's now one color, it's stained blood red. And when Jacob saw it, he knew something had happened.

He knew something was wrong. But it seems that even though there was sorrow for the son, there was no sorrow from the siblings. Because they asked their father through gritted teeth, is this your son's tunic or not?

Of course it was his son's tunic. How could they be so horrible to their father? How could they cover up what they had done? But they let Jacob, they let him come to his own conclusion.

[29 : 26] They let Jacob come to his own conclusion about Joseph, his own beloved son. Because it's Jacob, he says, he identified it and he said, it is my son's robe. And then he comes to the conclusion, a fierce animal has devoured him.

Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces. Then Jacob tore his garments, put on sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. You know, the loss of Rachel, Jacob's favoured wife, it was still raw.

It hadn't been all that long since Rachel had died giving birth to the youngest son, Benjamin. And now Jacob's favoured son, he was also gone.

And it's no surprise that Jacob couldn't be comforted by anyone in his family. He couldn't be comforted by anyone. But you wonder what went through Jacob's mind because he knew that God had spoken to Joseph.

He knew that he had sent Joseph away from home. Jacob believed the dreams of Joseph. He took them to heart. We read that in verse 11 that he kept these things in his heart.

[30 : 41] But now Jacob wasn't living the dream either. He was in a nightmare. It was all a mess. It all seemed so messy.

But you know, when you consider the life of Jacob, you see that the deceiver was finally deceived. The name Jacob means deceiver. And for many years of his life, Jacob was a deceiver.

In fact, when his father Isaac, when Isaac was old and blind, it was Jacob who deceived his father. He deceived his father by impersonating his brother Esau and stealing his birthright.

And Jacob, he had been a master of deception all his life. But now in his old age, he himself is being deceived. Jacob's sons were deceiving the deceiver.

They're deceiving their father just like Jacob had deceived his father. And you know, you look at Jacob's life, and it's a sorry mess.

[31 : 50] But you know, it's a solemn reminder to us of what Paul wrote to the church in Rome. We're not to take things into our own hands. Because vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.

You know, it was the 19th century poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He wrote, Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.

Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all. I'll read it again. Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.

Though with patience he grinds waiting, with exactness he grinds all. You know, it's a reminder to us that vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.

It's a reminder to us that God is not absent in our lives. God is everywhere present. And God is sovereignly working in our messy lives, and he's working through our sins.

[33 : 02] He's working through our sicknesses and our sufferings and our sorrows, and he's working in order to shape us, and teach us, and mould us, and form us, and fashion us to be more like the greater than Joseph, Jesus Christ.

You know, in his commentary on this passage, Sinclair Ferguson, he makes a wonderful point about Jacob's farewell to Joseph. And with this I'll conclude.

You know, Sinclair Ferguson, he said, it would have been the most natural thing in the world for Jacob to have said to Joseph, as he left his father's house to go to Shechem.

It would have been the most natural thing to say to Joseph, tell your brothers that I'm asking for them, and by the way, God loves you, and he has a wonderful plan for your life.

Sinclair Ferguson says, as Reformed Presbyterian Christians, we don't preach and promote a prosperity gospel. We don't preach and promote a prosperity gospel that says, smile, God loves you, he has a wonderful plan for your life, but we do preach and promote the theology to back it up.

[34 : 18] You know, God loved Joseph, he says, and he did have a wonderful plan for his life, but it wasn't Joseph's plan. It wasn't Joseph's brother's plan.

It wasn't Jacob's plan. It was the Lord's plan. It was the Lord's plan. His brothers meant evil against him, but the Lord meant it all for good.

