

The Cloud of Witnesses

Joseph

Lesson 1: Joseph – The Young Dreamer

Reading

Genesis 37:1-11.

The Young Dreamer

Joseph was born while Jacob was still working for Laban. He experienced the severance of the family ties, Jacob's encounter with God leaving him with a limp and the reunion with Esau. He was, of course, Jacob's favourite wife Rachel's firstborn son. He was also born later in Jacob's life, so was undoubtedly seen as a miracle baby and even more special. That led to him being doted on by his father who, as a sign of favouritism, gave him that world famous multi-coloured coat.

Joseph was 17 years old and obviously knew that he was his Dad's favourite son and that enabled him to spy on his brothers and give bad reports about them to Jacob. Consequently, his brothers hated him. Nevertheless, he shared with them a dream. A dream he would have been wiser to keep to himself. A dream, which suggested that his brothers would bow down to him in due course. He then exacerbated their indignation by saying there was a follow-up dream where Mum and Dad bowed to the ground before him as well. Adding insult to injury, he boasted about it to his father. None was amused, although it seems Jacob pondered the whole thing over in his mind.

This introduction to Joseph is not the most admiring, is it? By 17 he surely should have got over telling on his brothers. I wonder how he got the dream. Was he asleep or did he just daydream about the future, like most teenagers?

Whatever the case, it got to him. He was so excited he couldn't keep it to himself. He clearly hadn't thought through the ramifications of sharing it and did so in a very arrogant way. Those who were the butt of the dream were understandably defensive about it.

I believe God wants us all to dream. To sit down with a blank piece of paper in front of us and ask Him what He has planned for us. Try to see where you are, where you have come from and what God may want you to do for Him. Remember that He is the Creator of the world and that nothing is impossible for Him.

Once He gives the dream to you, cherish it. Don't go sharing it with everyone, try and be spiritually discerning. Above all, give it back to God and let Him make it a reality in His way and in His time. But don't let it die, regardless of what happens next!

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 1 continued: Joseph – The Young Dreamer

Joseph would say to us today...

Don't be afraid to dream – ask God for one and then live in the expectation of its fulfilment - just be careful who you share it with.

Prayer

Father, it's an awesome thought that You have a specific plan and purpose for my life. Please help me understand what it is and help me fulfil it to the best of my ability. Amen.

Additional readings

Jeremiah 29:11-14; Ephesians 3:14-21; Psalm 37:1-11.

Questions

What does God want you to do with your life?

How much has been fulfilled so far?

What do you think is preventing the rest from happening?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 2: Joseph – The Outcast From His Family

Reading

Genesis 37:12-36.

The Outcast From His Family

Wisdom does not seem to be the hallmark of the Jacob family at this time in their journey. Not only had Jacob made Joseph his favourite son to the almost exclusion of all the others, but Joseph had capitalised on it by his behaviour and through sharing his dream.

However, Jacob then did something quite remarkable. He sent Joseph off alone to his hateful brothers and guess what – wearing no less a garment than the red-rag-to-a-bull multicoloured tunic? It would announce his coming 500 metres away. His brothers had moved on from the expected place, so by the time Joseph arrived, he was anxious and weary. His brothers, on the other hand, were angry and prepared.

He might be flesh and blood but that was of no consequence – their jealousy and pent-up frustration were to be released. They took him and would have killed him had not Reuben stepped in and changed their plan. Rather than kill him, they just put him in a water cistern. At least that saved Joseph's life.

However, circumstances changed and so did their resolve. Determined to rid themselves of their brother and the offending dream, they decided to sell him off to the nomadic Ishmaelites who happened to be passing by on their way to Egypt.

Getting 20 shekels in return, they were now better off without him in more ways than one. Reuben was horrified upon his return, realising that Joseph was now as good as dead, never to be seen again. How could he tell Jacob the terrible news? So, together the brothers hatched their callous plan, hoping to cover their shame – but without thinking through the effect on Joseph's father.

Clever but cruel they gave Jacob the robe dipped in blood and awaited for him to come to his own 'fatal' conclusions. *We didn't lie, we just asked the question – is this your son's robe?* What heartless men they were. Jacob, naturally enough, succumbed to their planned deduction and with it began his depression and decease.

Oh, he didn't die physically, but emotionally he did; he lost all hope of ever seeing Joseph alive again and he lost his will to live. His dreams were extinguished along with Joseph's.

How easy it is for us to lose hope isn't it? - Yet how vital a component to our lives. We need to be realistic. Life is hard – bad things happen to good people. Life is not a breeze – only the misguided think so. Every one who has lived will tell you that sometime they would have shouted out – this isn't fair – life isn't fair. They are right!

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 2 continued: Joseph – The Outcast From His Family

However, no matter how others treat us, we must never lose hope that God still loves us and has a purpose for us. No matter what happens to you – never ever forget this –as a Christian, you are a Prince or Princess of the King of kings.

Joseph would say to us today...

Life is neither easy nor just – get over it.

Prayer

Jesus, You know how Joseph felt because You went through similar experiences. Please help me to remember that life isn't easy, and even when family and friends let me down or abuse me, with Your help I can be an overcomer. I can win, because You know what it's like and can give me the strength to persevere. Please help me today and every day to live in victory. Thank You. Amen.

Additional readings

Psalm 22:1-28; Job 1:1-22; Luke 23:1-25; James 1:2-4.

Questions

Why do good people suffer?

What trials are you facing right now?

What issues in your life do you need to let go of?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 3: Joseph – The Wrongfully Accused

Reading

Genesis 39:1-23.

The Wrongfully Accused

Chapter 37 ends – *Meanwhile the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard...* Joseph's life pattern was established –up down, up down. Favourite son turned to slave. Then Potiphar saw that God was with Joseph and so promoted him within the household. In the end, he didn't have to worry about anything, except what to eat. What a life. And what a life for Joseph. Still a slave but a favourite slave and entrusted with everything Potiphar had.

Everything was going smoothly – and according to plan. Wait a minute – what was the plan? The dream was Jacob and the family bowing down to Joseph. Joseph on a pedestal and everyone bowing down to him. Joseph must surely have thought, *I wonder – is this part of the plan?*

Then began the temptation. Notice I said began... Potiphar's wife started taking notice of Joseph. She saw that *he was handsome and well built*. How could she resist him? A slave – one 'born' to do her bidding. She had married Potiphar and he had done so well for him she could indulge her every whim. No one would deny Potiphar's wife of anything her heart desired. And her heart did desire it.

So the invitation was given – *Come to bed with me!* I said invitation but it was slightly more than that, wasn't it? Her being the mistress of the home and all that it meant? He refused. He didn't succumb to the temptation. He didn't rationalise it away. He didn't start feeling sorry for himself or that he deserved it for all that he had been through and allow him any self-pity - that no one else liked him anyway. No, he refused.

She kept on day after day; he refused her demands and even kept away from her. That's the best way of dealing with temptation – run away. What was his reasoning? How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? He called it what it was – a wicked thing – a sin against God. Oh, that today we would recognise sin for what it is in the sight of a holy God? That's how we overcome temptation – recognise it for what it is. Even if we can do it in secret, even if no one finds out – it is still sin and it is wicked in the eyes of the Lord. God hasn't changed – it's we who have moved the goal posts.

What Joseph knew and what we so often forget is that we may go ahead and sin but the guilt remains to haunt us. Our own conscience is damaged forever. We lose our integrity, and if you lose your integrity, it is nigh on impossible to get it back – and the worse thing is it represents the real you.

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 3 continued: Joseph – The Wrongfully Accused

Giving in may seem enjoyable and even justifiable in the short term, but in the long term, it is like a virulent cancerous growth.

The Good News is that God can forgive. If we confess our *wicked sins* to Him and ask Him to forgive us, He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He gets rid of all the guilt and sets us free. However, it's so much better to maintain our integrity intact in the first place.

The tragedy was that, though he withstood her advances, she was still able to have him thrown in prison for 'slighting her' and keeping his integrity.

Joseph would say to us today...

Don't give in to the subtle pressures of temptations - maintain your integrity regardless of the cost to you – it is the best way and the way to true freedom.

Prayer

Father, it's so easy to give in to temptation, especially when everyone else seems not to see it as such and just give in anyway. Help me remember that this life is only temporary and life with You is Eternal and the blessings for following You outweigh anything I can ever experience elsewhere. Amen.

Additional readings

Isaiah 53; Daniel 6:1-28; Acts 7:48-60.

Questions

Why is it so important we keep our integrity?

How should we react when we are wrongfully accused of something?

How do we get into a position where we can forgive those who have wronged us?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 4: Joseph – The Privileged Prisoner

Reading

Genesis 40:1-23.

The Privileged Prisoner

Chapter 39 ends with Joseph in prison. How would you like to be put into prison for doing what is right? That's what happened to Joseph. He stood up to a woman who wanted him to commit adultery and so ended up in jail.

But the Bible says the Lord was with him. Joseph may be in prison but the warden recognised him as a person of integrity and so put him in the privileged position of looking after everything. The warden didn't need to worry about anything under Joseph's care.

The honesty of his life in Canaan was the same honesty in Potiphar's house whilst he was a slave. It was the same honesty that caused him to be thrown in prison, and the same honesty would support him in that place.

Students often think that certificates impress employers. They are more impressed by integrity, dependability, punctuality, loyalty, honesty and trustworthiness. You may not get certificates for these attributes but promotion usually follows.

Joseph's life reveals how a person with the right attitudes can handle conflicts and struggles with composure and resolve. We can only get the right attitudes from integrity because guilt permeates every aspect of our lives. No matter where he was, in Potiphar's home, in prison or, as we shall see later, in Pharaoh's palace – his character was the same. In the pit or on the mountaintop, he was genuine and consistent.

It's a challenge for us all. We don't become honest through promotion. We don't become trustworthy when we are in a responsible position. We first prove our honesty and trustworthiness in the small things and in the hidden areas before we can ever have our true characters exposed in a more visible arena.

People don't lose integrity in a moment of haste or indiscretion – they already lost it because it was not given the priority it should have been given. The decisions we make are based upon the foundation of our character – if that is suspect so will our decisions be.

While in prison, Joseph's special ability was revealed once more. The cupbearer and baker arrived under suspicion. Both had dreams they didn't understand and shared them with Joseph. He interpreted them, and true to the interpretation, the cupbearer was restored and the baker executed.

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 4 continued: Joseph – The Privileged Prisoner

However, in his relief the cupbearer forgot all about Joseph who had to continue his life as a prisoner. Albeit a privileged prisoner.

Joseph would say to us today...

No matter where you are, remember God is watching over you for good.

Prayer

Father, thank You for reminding me that I am not alone. You do know where I am and what I am going through each day. Help me live today as if You are there right beside me and keep me trusting that I shall experience Your good sometime soon. Amen.

Additional readings

Psalm 139; Daniel 1:3-20; Romans 8:28-39.

Questions

What are the good things God has done in your life?

Why is it important for us to have a gratitude attitude?

What things can you thank God for this week?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 5: Joseph – The King’s Messenger

Reading

Genesis 41:1-40.

The King’s Messenger

Two years passed. No doubt two long years for Joseph, who probably couldn’t help wondering why the cupbearer could have forgotten him. Did he even begin to doubt God? Yes, he held a responsible and privileged position but he was still a prisoner. Why was God silent? What was going on? Would he ever get out of there alive?

There’s an old hymn, which reads – *God moves in a mysterious way – His wonders to perform.* I don’t think Joseph wrote it but he may well have inspired it. Who would have thought that God would give Pharaoh a dream? God was a God of the Hebrews, not the Egyptians – they had their own gods.

However, God did and so poor old Pharaoh had a bad night. The day didn’t dawn any brighter when having asked his magicians, advisers and wise men for understanding, they stood there blank-faced and no doubt open-mouthed – if not frowning and fearful. They had proved to be impotent and helpless.

Isn’t it interesting how such a moment can concentrate the mind? The cupbearer, who had been as puzzled as the rest, suddenly got a surge of courage. He remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh. Pharaoh, clutching at any available straw, asked for Joseph to be presented to him and told him of his dilemma.

I love Joseph’s response, don’t you? *I can’t interpret it either, but God will give you the answer.* I wonder what he was thinking – *I’ll give you the answer but I don’t want you blaming me for it – perhaps?*

So Joseph revealed what God was going to do – give Egypt 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of drought. Having explained that, he went on with his survival plan. The plan was so impressive that Pharaoh saw no alternative but to find a suitable person to fill the role, and at that moment, no one seemed more suited to it than Joseph.

The other advisers were so relieved that the dreams had been interpreted and their necks saved that they readily agreed to Pharaoh’s plan. What they were unaware of was that it was in fact God’s plan all along. God had been waiting until everything was in its right place so He could move Joseph up to centre-stage and on track for the fulfilment of the dream He had given Joseph decades before.

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 5 continued: Joseph – The King's Messenger

Do you get the feeling it's worth waiting for God? Wasn't it amazing how everything came together just at that moment. No more hanging around – bang – straight from dungeon to Prime Minister. Straight from foreigner to trusted administrator and highest official. That had to be God. Wonderful execution!

Joseph would say to us today...

God never keeps a good person down. You may feel forgotten, lonely or even discarded by God. Don't give up. Don't lose hope. Wait for His timing – it can be quite unexpected. Sooner or later, like a cork, you will have to surface.

Prayer

Father, thank You so much that You love me, and no matter what happens to me, I can trust my future to You. Thank You that we see from Scripture You always care for Your people and always exonerate them in the end. Thank You that You are a good God and Your plans and goals are always for our best. Amen.

Additional readings

Joshua 1:1-18; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Acts 6:1-15.

Questions

Why is it so hard to wait for God?

What can you do today to really please or help your boss?

While we wait for 'our time' what do we need to keep focused on?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 6: Joseph – The Prime Minister of Egypt

Reading

Genesis 41:41-57.

The Prime Minister of Egypt

I wonder how Joseph felt once he was made Prime Minister. It takes a man with moral character and integrity to handle a promotion that big. The answer lies in the fact that all the way through he knew who he was – a servant of the Lord. He also believed he was a man of destiny. He would not settle and succumb to his circumstances.

As a slave, he would work to become the best slave he could. As a prisoner, he would work to be the best prisoner. Honesty, trustworthiness and integrity were the hallmarks of Joseph's life. Everyone trusted, respected and looked up to him, even while he was in the lowest position any person could be in. His attitude was what made the difference.

He had a dream from God and he was going to follow it through – not by force but through self-control and obedience. Yes, he was obedient to the circumstances but not a slave to them. His eyes were focused on God and his trust grew from year to year and from one experience to the other. The circumstances may change but God remained the same and so did Joseph's trust in God. He would persevere, accept what was 'given' to him and trust God for the outworking of it.

Yes, Joseph is a fantastic example to us all. He could have given up. He could have discarded the dream – especially as it seemed that as soon as he received it, everything conspired to make it seem increasingly impossible to be fulfilled. However, Joseph was determined to see it through. Yes, I'm sure that Joseph, like the rest of us, experienced doubts and wondered what God was up to. Maybe he even asked God "Why?"

But his faith in God never wavered. He was Jacob's son, a true son of Israel. He'd seen what Jacob went through and decided that Jacob's God was faithful and so he would make Jacob's God his God and serve Him. Even as Prime Minister, he would believe the dream – Pharaoh's dream, and fulfil the requirements to the letter. He went throughout the land storing grain and preparing for the drought.

Each and every time, he concentrated on the job in hand and left the rest to God. And God delivered. Delivered him from slavery, delivered him from prison and eventually delivered him from drought. Through it all, God never left him but made Joseph prosper.

God wants to do the same for you. In this world we seem so intent on today that the future has become insignificant. We seek instant gratification. Instant coffee, instant or fast food, instant sexual gratification, regardless of the consequences on others or us. We have become sucked in by the age-old philosophy – eat, drink and be merry (indulge).

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 6 continued: Joseph – The Prime Minister of Egypt

Joseph would say to us today...

Think of the future. The circumstances never change the promises of God. Be resolute. Don't give up on your dream from God and don't do anything which might jeopardise it.

Prayer

Father, thank You that You are a totally trustworthy God. Thank You that Your promises have never failed and never will fail. Thank You that I can live in the light of the promises in the Bible. Help me to trust You more and to make those promises mine. Amen.

Additional readings

Joshua 24:1-16; 2 Corinthians 1:18-22; Hebrews 11:13-40.

Questions

What has happened to you which has challenged your faith in God?

What promises of God are you hanging on to?

What price are you prepared to pay in order to wait for them to become a reality?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 7: Joseph – The Brotherly Encounter

Reading

Genesis 42:1-28.

The Brotherly Encounter

It had to happen. God had orchestrated the drought and it would be as severe in Canaan as in Egypt. Sooner or later, Jacob and his family would be drawn into Egypt. Just as water is sucked over a waterfall.

Joseph's brothers arrived weary, anxious and timid. They were only on a buying trip but it was in a foreign land with strange customs, and by the very nature of the situation, they were on the defensive. They needed help and they needed it desperately.

However, they were only the surface problems – what we often call the presenting problems. There were deeper issues that were haunting them. They had effectively murdered their brother without remorse. They had lied to their father whom they were watching deteriorate by the month. All joy and laughter had left them and in its place guilt, like a cancer, was destroying them.

That issue was far worse than any shortage of food. They needed to be forgiven and yet had nowhere to turn to receive it. They couldn't ask Joseph – he was as good as dead. And Jacob was in no position to help – he was grieving too deeply.

The future was bleak indeed, and on top of that, they were now desperate for food.

God is into both forgiveness and reconciliation. We look at the drought and consider it a debilitating trial. God saw it as a means to reconciliation, joy and blessing. That's why God says our thoughts are not like His thoughts nor are our ways His ways. We see things from a selfish perspective – He sees things globally and with a perspective of eternity.

The brothers had to bow before Joseph. He recognised at once who they were, but they didn't have a clue. Guilt blinds us to the truth. It makes us afraid of the very truth which will set us free. Joseph was able to 'play' with them. He spoke in Egyptian and they in Hebrew. But he could, of course, understand their conversation. When Reuben chided the other brothers on their treatment of Joseph being the reason for their current discomfort – Joseph turned and wept.

What love he still held for them. He could have had them executed there and then with one wink or movement of a finger, and all the injustice of the past made good. However, Joseph chose the better way. He chose the way of grace, forgiveness and love. A hard choice -but a much softer way to live and it produces a much brighter future.

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 7 continued: Joseph – The Brotherly Encounter

Joseph could hold his head high while his brothers were stooped in shame. No bitterness held Joseph captive; he was free to love and forgive – it is the way of the Master – Jesus.

Joseph would say to us today...

Don't harbour bitterness – it doesn't affect the one you are bitter at – it just ruins your own life. Let it go because the price on you is far too great.

Prayer

Father, help me keep short accounts. Short accounts with You and short accounts with my family, friends and workmates. Lord, guard me from bitterness, envy and strife and help me forgive others, as I need to be forgiven. Amen.

Additional readings

Obadiah; Luke 15:11-32; Matthew 18:21-35; Matthew 6:9-15.

Questions

What are the reasons we become bitter?

Why does bitterness do us more harm than the person we are bitter about?

How do we 'let go' of bitterness?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 8: Joseph – The Brotherly Revelation

Reading

Genesis 45:1-28.

The Brotherly Revelation

What an amazing man Joseph was. Though his brothers had treated him worse than an enemy, his love for them had grown. When he sent his brothers back with the grain, he returned their money and gave them all the provisions they required. Were the brothers grateful? No, they just felt an even greater sense of guilt.

The whole episode was repeated on the second journey when Joseph schemed to see and spend time with his only close brother, Benjamin. When the other brothers vehemently objected, Joseph revealed his true identity.

Yes, he began by telling them that he was the one they sold into slavery, but quickly added a merciful rider – *Don't be distressed or angry with yourselves, because God sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives through a great deliverance.* No malice, no retribution, no sarcastic digs – just a statement of faith and fact.

He didn't pretend they hadn't meant to do him harm, he didn't sweep their betrayal under the carpet; he acknowledged it in front of them but gave them hope by showing a new perspective. *You didn't send me here, God did.* Yes, they got rid of him but the rest of it was God's plan. God orchestrated the journey to Egypt because He had a bigger plan. Their plan was mean and selfish; God's was full of grace.

Joseph was able to see the bigger picture because he was free from guilt, jealousy, malice, hatred and determined retribution. He had committed his life to God, so he was in God's hands every step of the way. It wasn't easy, many times it wasn't pleasant, but through it all, he determined it was God's plan and he would walk in it with a gratitude attitude.

He stood tall as Prime Minister only after standing tall as a slave and prisoner. His back was not bent with the baggage of the past. He looked into the face of God and saw reflected back one of His children. That gave him the confidence to face the present and the future with resolution and hope, no matter what the circumstances were that he would have to pass through on his journey to reach his destiny.

When you are faced with your adversary, how do you react? We all need to remember that, as the old saying goes – *there but for the grace of God go I.* We are all imperfect beings with selfish agendas. Try to remember that and give grace wherever and whenever needed. You might need it too, one day.

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 8 continued: Joseph – The Brotherly Revelation

Joseph would say to us today...

Try and see God's purposes being worked out in your life regardless of the circumstances. It's the only path to love, life, joy, freedom and peace.

Prayer

Father, I'm almost afraid to pray – teach me to trust You more – as I know it will require me being stretched. But I do want to trust You more and I do want to become more and more like Jesus. Help me realise that what I've gone through You can use to help others on their journey through life. Please lead me to someone I can help today. Amen.

Additional readings

Psalm 23; Ephesians 2:1-10; 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Questions

How have you grown through the hard times you have experienced?

How does our trust in God grow?

How can God use you now, since you have gone through some hard times?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 9: Joseph – The Dream Comes True

Reading

Genesis 46:1-7, 26-34.

The Dream Comes True

Joseph didn't orchestrate the fulfilment of his dream – he left it to God. Had Joseph forced it, it would probably have been in some field in Canaan on a sunny afternoon while he was still a teenager – a fleeting boost of ego. No, it wasn't his dream – it was a dream from God. They are best left to the Originator.

Jacob travelled to Egypt. He knew it was not God's general intention for Israel to go to Egypt. Egypt speaks of earthly help and earthly riches and Jacob knew God didn't need any help – He was quite capable of acting supernaturally. However, he had an encounter with God on the way - at Beersheba – after he had spent time worshipping God. God gave him the all clear and he set off on the long journey south.

Joseph, meanwhile, set aside Goshen – the prime agricultural land – for the family's new homeland.

Imagine the reunion. Jacob, 130 years old, finally meeting up with his favourite son whom he hasn't seen for about 13 years and whom he thought was dead. Joseph threw his arms around him in the biggest hug they ever had. All the pain, all the loneliness, all the despair and all the longing finally squeezed and flushed away. Both of them restored and rejuvenated.

Did Joseph demand Jacob bow before him? No, before he had a chance to do so, Joseph had run to him and crushed him in his warm embrace; the years of separation melting away between them. Oh, the joy. Oh, the release. Oh, the hope for the future. Oh, the security and friendship rekindled. Now the family was back together again, never to fragment or live in deceit.

Could Joseph have imagined such a scene as that as a young 17 year old? I doubt it. Because God is so much bigger than us. God's conclusions are always far superior and beyond our puny imaginations.

I don't know what you are facing today, or in the near future. Maybe the picture is not inviting. Maybe you are even struggling to hold on. God wants to say to you – *I know where you are. I haven't abandoned you, left you or given up on you. I am still on track. I know what I am doing and Your time of trial is coming to an end. Just let Me put the final pieces in place and keep trusting Me to fulfil My plans for you. I will never leave you, forsake you or stop loving you. My way is best.*

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 9 continued: Joseph – The Dream Comes True

Joseph would say to us today...

The fulfilment of God's dream will be beyond your wildest dreams. So don't rush God; let Him fulfil His work in you in His time, and then enjoy it to the max.

Prayer

God, what an incredible climax to Joseph's life! Going from thinking he would never see his family again to being able to honour Jacob from the second highest position in the land. God, Your plan was awesome and awesomely concluded. Please help me see that You have an equally awesome plan and conclusion for my life. Help me not to get frustrated or to try and force it but allow You to stamp Your perfection upon it – for Your glory I ask. Amen.

Additional readings

Habakkuk 2: 2-3 & 3:1-19; Ecclesiastes 3:1-14; Revelation 21:1-7.

Questions

How have you felt when you realised a great expectation?

What are the problems we face when we try and get to the result too soon?

What happens when you force a flower to open?

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 10: Joseph – Man Of Faith And Deeds

Reading

Genesis 50:1-26.

Man Of Faith And Deeds

Even in victory, Joseph remembered who he was and that the final dream was yet unfinished. Yes, God had raised him from slavery and prison to become the ruler of the land – the second highest official. Yes, everyone did have to bow to the ground before him. And yes, his brothers had done just that.

The family had been re-united and saved from the fiercest famine to rock and devastate the region. Jacob had come and lived there so they could be one close-knit family once more. The tribes had settled down. Then Jacob died, and true to his wishes, his body was taken back to the family gravesite at Mamre.

The guilt-ridden brothers were once more pricked with fear. Had Joseph only been gracious to them for the sake of Jacob or because he had been there with them all? Would they now see his true colours and be victimised? They decided to face Joseph with their conjured up father's plea for clemency. How wrong they were. They had already seen Joseph's true colours. He was as gracious when Jacob died as he had been all along. He wasn't the one with the problem – they were. Joseph repeated his reassurance and the fact that though they had meant their actions for evil – God had turned them to good, for Joseph and for them.

Life would eventually begin to settle down to the normal humdrum of living. But not for Joseph. Yes, he would remain Prime Minister and go about his ministerial duties; however, he held onto that position, but only lightly. His vision was far distant. He could see Canaan – the God-ordained homeland for Israel.

He was fearful that his brothers would get sidetracked by Egypt. Would they be happy to settle for ease and comfort? Would they assimilate the culture of Egypt, forsake their heritage and miss out on their destiny? Yes, they would follow their father's God as long as he was alive – maybe even follow Him as long as Joseph was around to check on them. But what would happen once Joseph left?

Would their heritage be lost? Would they settle for second-best?

Joseph certainly had his doubts about their intentions to keep true to their inheritance. So, before he died, he had them promise that they would not bury him in Egypt. His request was quite specific and interesting. He didn't demand being treated like Jacob. He didn't ask them to take his bones and bury them in the family gravesite as soon as he died.

The Cloud of Witnesses

Lesson 10 continued: Joseph – Man Of Faith And Deeds

His eyes were on a more distant horizon. No. He demanded that they keep his bones in a coffin until the time came when the whole tribe of Israel would be delivered from Egypt, and go as a people to re-inhabit the promised land of Canaan. His bones would be a constant reminder that one-day they would leave and be set free.

His bones were to be carried at the Exodus to Canaan and be buried there. And they were, by Moses, about 400 years later – see Exodus 13:19. They were buried at Shechem, as recorded in Joshua 24: 32.

Joseph would say to us today...

Remember, this earth is going to pass away. Jesus is coming back. Never lose sight of your final destiny – the best is yet to come!

Prayer

Father, please never ever let me forget that this earth is only temporary – just the prelude to what is the most important and most rewarding experience I can ever have. Help me to fulfil my role on earth in the expectation of being with You in Heaven for Eternity. Amen.

Additional readings

Matthew 25:14-30; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:35-58.

Questions

What was Joseph looking ahead to?

What is the goal of your life?

What difference does the expectation of Heaven make to your ambitions and lifestyle?