

Well, during the summer we take a break from our normal teaching series, and follow the set readings for the Sunday. And today we find ourselves in what is a very familiar story. We all know it from either years in Sunday School, or from a School musical, or maybe seeing Jason Donavon sing 'Any dream will do' at a west end show. Whatever image you have of this familiar story, I pray today that you will come with opened minds to what God wants to teach you and I, that God will teach us all something new about this familiar story.

So, just as we begin, let's bring ourselves before the God who wants to do new things in us every day. Lord, we ask that your Holy Spirit would speak to us afresh this day through your living Word. Help those of us that have cold hearts to welcome your word into our hearts this day. And may the words I have prepared bring you honour and glory, In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

I want you think for a moment about your family background – because in this gathering there may be many of us with a rather challenging family history, and we may think that it's a thing that only has emerged in the modern family era. Well folks I've news for you, it happened thousands of years ago also. Joseph was raised as a child in what today would be considered as a dysfunctional family filled with a number of different relationships blended together, and a father who really didn't display much authority or direction. I'm sure you can work this out for yourselves, but if you have one man (that's Jacob) who has 13 children, from 4 different wives, there's going to be a few problems along the way. Now to make it worse, you have a tremendous mix of sibling rivalry brewing when you have 1 son who the father so obviously makes the favourite over the others.

Our opening verses say that *'Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons'*. I don't know whether this resonates for those of you have more than one child, or grew up in a home with siblings – but every so often my sons Josh and Nathan will come to me and ask me to decide which son I consider the favourite. Of course I remind them that I love them both the same, even though they each want to be up on the other. But here in our story we read that Jacob loves Joseph more than all his other sons. You know, for one young man (Joseph) in that family unit, it's going to bring a wonderful sense of the future to him, but that same verse will enrage the other boys. After all, Jacob's sons were longing for recognition, for affirmation, for words of encouragement – in fact, anything would be nice. And so you can see how the storm clouds are brewing on the horizon – this is a disaster waiting to happen. So now we see in verse 12 that the brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem. Meanwhile Joseph is back at home. They are managing the livestock = it would have been thousands of goats and sheep, you would have to take them from ground to ground to give them places to graze. They are the ones sleeping outside at night on hard ground, they're dealing with all the difficulties. Now remember that the last image they have of Joseph before they leave their father's house – is of Joseph wearing an ornate robe. They left for the hills with hatred in their hearts, so much that scripture says they don't have a kind word to say to him. And if that's not enough, Joseph informs them that he has had a dream in which his brothers would be bowing down in front of him. They're enraged, their jealous, and they feel that their father doesn't care for them. Who does this Joseph think he is – pumped up little so and so. Rage and jealousy grow and grow in their hearts. You know that image of a robe is very significant. It wasn't just that it was ornate. Long garments were never used for those who would do manual labour. Because obviously it would trail along the ground and get dirty. Whereas the labourers' clothes would have been short sleeved and short on the legs. Therefore by Jacob gifting Joseph with this robe, he was telling the rest of his family that Joseph would never be expected to work all his life. It just shows how stupid Jacob was to not see what he was creating in his family. And he doesn't even stop there. To make things worse, he sends Joseph now to the fields to see his

brothers – essentially to check up on what they were doing. And so verse 18 says *‘The [brothers] saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him’*. Do you get a sense of where this is going. These guys see him and they hate him, they’re saying, “That guy is coming to inspect us, to write down all about us, and then he’s going to head back to our dad and give a bad report about us. We hate him so much”.

Now I wonder with the picture that has been in your mind about the familiar Joseph story, have you ever considered how horrible this verse is that we’ve just read – ‘they plotted to kill him’.

This is their own brother. They didn’t say, let’s bully him or scare him away, or let’s hurt him by giving him a Chinese burn. Does anyone remember a Chinese burn? We used to do it in school to each other. It’s when you get a mate’s arm, and you twist the skin in opposite directions which can be really sore. That’s the kind of thing that brothers might do to each other. And for these brothers you might think that’s the route they are going to take with Joseph. But no, it says they want to kill him. You see they had been so damaged over the years with a father who really had no idea of how to look after them, so they probably understood that this wouldn’t just deal with a brother that they hated, but it would make Jacob waken up to his responsibilities. It’s rather sick isn’t it? This is the depths of the hatred in this family unit. But notice that the hatred was there before the act of what they would do next took place.

For some of us, we might think that sin only happens when a bad action takes place. But remember folks that it is birthed from something else – in our story today that was jealousy, rage. You see transformation that takes place for a Christian isn’t just about saying that we will stop doing certain things – it’s also about Jesus changing our hearts. We should be seeking to get to the cause of why we do certain things. A few months ago I was infected with COVID which I thought I got over relatively quickly, however it left a longer lasting issue with my breathing. I spoke to the doctor who gave me something, but it didn’t fix the problem – why? Because he hadn’t sounded my chest, he hadn’t ran any tests, in fact it was all done over the phone. So it was no surprise that within a couple of weeks I was back at the doctors again. This time he took samples & bloods, and it was then they found that there was something happening inside that they hadn’t seen. You see the doctor was treating my cough but he wasn’t treating the internal cause. He hadn’t properly examined me. And it’s the same with us, we can try to stop our behaviour to certain things, but unless the root cause is dealt with you can be sure as eggs are eggs, it will come back in some form or other. The sin is not just the action, it’s also the cause. We need Jesus to make us different people from the inside out. It’s possible for someone to look fine on the outside but be corrupt on the inside. That’s how it was with Joseph’s brothers.

So now they mock Joseph – verse 19 *“Here comes the dreamer. Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we will see what comes of his dreams”*. So not only are these guys thinking about killing him, they are now plotting how they will do it, and then they are thinking of a cover up. So we will smash him to death, then we will throw him into one of those water cisterns where no one will find him, and then we will tell dad that a wild animal has come and killed him – that will work well. It’s one thing to have sin in your heart, but then it’s another thing to think about doing it, and then it’s another thing to do it, and then to cover it up.

I know that as I think about Joseph’s early life, I think about these dreams that have built him up, the favouritism that he had received from his father. And yet things are about to change so radically. You see these dreams were not specifically for Joseph, they were dreams, specific messages from God about the future of the entire family. And these brothers are saying that these dreams are not true, they are going to do something to stop those dreams

becoming a reality, no way are they going to have a future where they will bow down before their brother. They have to shut Joseph up.

And so they determined to defeat those words spoken into Joseph. But remember those dreams, those words were from God. And therefore no words from God will ever be defeated. Remember Isaiah 55:11 *'My word that proceeds from my mouth will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I please and it will prosper where I send it'*. In other words, these dreams would be fulfilled, irrespective of what the brothers are trying to tear down. So things appear to be going wrong for Joseph, and yet God's purposes will be fulfilled. But here we see a little glimmer of hope in verse 21 as Reuben tries to throw Joseph a life line. Reuben's not trying to get the brothers to stop their attack – he's trying to outsmart them. And it seems to work. The brothers are attacking Joseph both physically and mentally, and then they grab the coat of many colours and remove it from him. Remember that coat declared inheritance and favour from the father, and so the brothers are declaring that Joseph's inheritance is now gone. Now for those that haven't yet seen the similarities, many commentators here show the connections between Joseph and the life of Jesus. Remember how Jesus was treated? He was stripped of everything before he was crucified. And those around Jesus would mock him, taunting him to have his Father save him now. Even though Jesus was put up on a cross and Joseph was thrown into a pit, notice that both Joseph and Jesus were cursed, they were stripped, and they were put into a place where people thought they couldn't be saved from.

These guys were trying to strip Joseph's relationship with his Father. For those of you today that can declare that you have a living relationship with the Lord (and by that I don't mean that you come to church regularly, or you are involved in the life of the church – I mean that you truly know Jesus as your Lord), then if that's you, you too can feel the pain of attack when Satan tries to strip us from that relationship and that inheritance we have with God. He hates the fact that God loves you so deeply. He wants to rip away your coat of inheritance. For some of you, you need to declare today to the Lord - Father I am going to receive that inheritance. I'm not going to allow Satan to pull me away from that inheritance. The brothers threw Joseph down into the cistern. He doesn't know what to do, he calls out, but the brothers are now more occupied in their dinner. Can you believe that? They've literally moved on from their actions – there's absolutely no remorse. They're heartless even though their brother is agonising in the pit. They can even eat their dinner whilst considering that once they're finished they are going to kill him. Later in Genesis 42 we see the brothers recalling in the past how they heard Joseph crying out it says that they ignored him – such was the depths of their hatred. Now some of you might think, well it was a relief that the brothers then decide to sell him to passing Ishmaelites, but again think about it. They've decided that instead of killing their brother, it's would be far better to sell him into slavery for the rest of his life. Folks, if you have brothers like this, why would you ever need enemies. And then in verse 28, as the rope is lowered down into the cistern, Joseph is thinking his brothers have changed their mind. He realises that he's maybe been a spoilt brother enjoying all the inheritance from his father, but now that he has another chance, well it's going to be better from here on in. Wrong – he's lifted out and as he starts to make his way towards Egypt he can hear the clinking of silver as the brothers count their fortune. Joseph has effectively moved from one pit into another. The brothers thought that their days will now be better – the dreamer has gone.

So let's now apply this to today. Some of you today have been treated horribly by others – some of you have felt as though you were in that pit. Maybe it happened a long time ago, where some cruel person has put you down in that metaphorical pit – you feel that your hopes for your life will never be fully met because of what someone else has done to you.

Folks, just as much as it is true that what Joseph's brothers tried to do to him, they could not derail God's plans for his life, so God's plans for your life can not be derailed by what someone else has done to you. It doesn't mean that people can't hurt you, after all Jesus said that you will have trials in this life, but God promises that he will be Lord of your life if you trust in him fully. No matter how terrible it has been in the past or even today in the present, God is mighty and can redeem and restore. He can take the evil that has been done to you, and he can use it for his glory. God's word about Joseph was proved true no matter what others did to him, and the same is true for you today. The good news today is that because of what Jesus did on that cross and raising from the dead and being Lord of your life, you are not bound by what others have done to you. Surrender to God's plan, and see what God will do in your life. Yes we all can feel as though we are in a pit, but now is the time to seek God in it, to know that irrespective of how low you feel, God will fulfil his promises, in the way that he did with Joseph
Let's pray.