

Introduction

This talk is very personal for me. Joseph has always been an Old Testament character I have admired and whose life and Godliness I have always been drawn to. There are so many lessons for us today. Here are just some that I have learned, been taught and God has revealed – to me and other people, starting in Genesis 37..

Overview of Joseph

In many ways we can characterise the life of Joseph into 5 stages:

1. Joseph the Boy / Dreamer
2. Joseph the Slave
3. Joseph in Prison
4. Joseph as Ruler over Egypt
5. Joseph and his Family Reunited

Joseph as a Foreshadowing of Jesus

Interestingly, Joseph is the only character in the Old Testament (that we really get to know) that the Bible finds no fault with (we could argue the others are Melchizedek, and in different ways, Job). It's quite an extraordinary testimony, considering the faith of many other people listed, whose failings we can all relate to. We are not saying that Joseph was perfect as surely he was not, unlike Jesus who was perfect. But it is significant.

Because of this, many people see Joseph as what's called a 'foreshadowing' of Jesus. What does this mean? Simply that we see characteristics and signs in the life of Joseph that we can directly relate to the life of Jesus. Here are just some listed below. Why are they listed? Because in this we see characteristics that we need to emulate as children of God, as we know they are found in and through Jesus himself, our example..

1. Both Joseph and Jesus were rejected by their families, having done nothing wrong. Joseph was rejected by his brothers, Jesus by his own people of Israel.
2. Both were men of complete integrity, whom God spoke to very clearly throughout their lives.
3. Both were falsely accused and suffered the consequences of that. Jesus was killed on the Cross, Joseph was imprisoned for 7 years and forgotten about.
4. Both were thrown down to the lowest place, but both were raised up to the highest place. Jesus was crucified but resurrected to the Father's side in heaven. Joseph was imprisoned and raised up to Ruler over Egypt, under the Pharaoh.
5. Both were used by God to save his people and Gentiles. Jesus died so that we can all be saved (both Jew and Gentile). Joseph as Ruler meant that his family (in the lineage of Jesus) and the Egyptians were saved from starvation when the famine came.

6. Both Joseph and Jesus served God, faithfully getting on with their life's mission, despite incredible hardships. Both didn't complain or backbite, instead choosing to forgive.

7. One point is left – Joseph was one day reunited with his family. There is a day coming when Jesus will be reunited with part of his family, the people of Israel. When the brothers of Joseph came to him in Egypt, they bowed down. This parallels with Jesus – at whose name one day, every knee will bow.

Other Old Testament Examples of Jesus

There are other Old Testament examples that point to Jesus – in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Moses and others. As you read the Old Testament, look out for these moments, events and characteristics in people's lives.

Let's look through the life of Joseph in more detail, having considered the overview of his life above:

Joseph Rejected

In Genesis 37, we find Joseph for the first time as a 17 year-old. He is his Father's favourite – we learn in verse 3 that his father, 'Israel loved him more than his other sons.' We find Joseph given a coat, with long sleeves and talking to his brothers about dreams that the whole family would one day bow down to him. There are some people who believe Joseph was arrogant. But I don't agree but think that here we see a young man simply being carefree and a little unwise in what he said! The Bible warns us to be careful in what we say, a lesson we'd do well to learn. For Joseph, it cost him dearly as his brothers became inflamed with jealousy at his dreams, and sold him into slavery. The same kind of reaction is there to the Christian message today – we see this with persecution around the globe.

In Genesis 39, Joseph is sold into slavery. But Joseph gets his head down and works hard. In fact, his work is so good that the head of the House, called Potiphar put Joseph in charge of the whole house. We read in Gen 39.3, that 'Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord made Joseph successful in everything he did.' What an incredible verse. I don't know about you, but I want God to be on my life in this powerful way. We want people to say of us, 'the Lord is with that person.' We need to be people who have the mark, the accent, the flavour of Jesus on our lives, knowing that it is the Lord who makes us what we are. If you're in a situation that isn't ideal, keep going forward, trusting in God, being faithful and he will bring you through.

He failed in his first business attempt. He tried politics and within one year he failed there also. He went back to business for another try and failed again. Three failures in three years. He asked his fiancée to marry him after 4 years of going out. She said no. Later, another sweetheart died. He struggled for the next 2 years and suffered a nervous breakdown. After 2 years to recover, he tried once again in the political world and was defeated in his bid to be elected as Speaker of the House. 2 years after this he ran for a seat in Congress and was defeated. It was during this time that his 4 year-old son died. He spent the next 7 years in political obscurity and then ran again for a political office – this time in the Senate. Again, he was defeated. The following year he was nominated for Vice-president but was defeated along with his running mate in the general election. After 2 more years he tried for the Senate but was defeated.

Then, another 2 years later in 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected as the 16th President of the United States! 24 years of sheer endurance!

Joseph – Man of Integrity

Right from his early years we see that Joseph *'gave his father bad reports about his brothers'* (Gen 37.2). Was Joseph being a snitch, grassing up his brothers? Possibly. But as likely, is that Joseph saw they were not doing what was right and reported it back. We see a clear understanding of right and wrong. But this goes further.. Joseph heard clearly from God. Although God's name is not mentioned, he has dreams – a clear sign of God speaking in the Old Testament. Over time, he would also learn the spiritual gift of interpretation too. In faith, he would act on what God said to him and it would save many lives.

Today in the world, many Muslims who come to faith see a vision of Jesus. Why? Because dreams are important to them, it is a way that God communicates with them. Maybe we too, have dreams or can interpret what God is saying. Let's not be negligent in using the different gifts and skills God has given to us. And let us act wisely on what God says.. Like Joseph, like Esther, we will be used by God to save many people.

Let's not be like Joseph's brothers. In Gen 37.4, we see that when Joseph recounted a dream, they hated him for it. His father, Israel (or Jacob), was also annoyed about the dream but later, in verse 11, we read that while the brothers were jealous, Israel *'thought about what all these things could mean..'* How do you react to the Word of God? How do you and others react when you see the favour of God is on yourself / someone else?

Joseph Falsely Accused

We see the integrity in the life of Joseph reach new levels in Genesis 39. Joseph had been put in charge of the house of Potiphar and of everything that he owned. But Joseph was also brought to the attention of Potiphar's wife. Remember that when God uses you and blesses what you do, there will be those who hate you, resent you, or who are attracted to you in the wrong way and who tempt you. This can often be from within the church family, so be warned and stay accountable.

In Proverbs 7, we read about the Woman of Adultery who lures men to her. But we also find our defence against this in verses 1-5.. *"Follow my advice, my son; always treasure my commands. Obey them and live! Guard my teachings as your most precious possession. Tie them on your fingers as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. Love wisdom like a sister; make insight a beloved member of your family. Let them hold you back from an affair with an immoral woman, from listening to the flattery of an adulterous woman."* (NLT) We also have the promise that God will provide a way out when temptation comes along. The best advice is to do what Joseph did – and run away.

This led to Joseph being falsely accused of attempted rape. As a result he lost his position, his job and was imprisoned. But God used this for good. Twice we read that God used this for good – Gen 45 and 50. One day God would use this to elevate Joseph up and save many people. But right now, Joseph couldn't see that. How did he react? Bitterness, anger, hate, lack of forgiveness? We read in verses 21-23 that the Lord was with Joseph in prison, caused the warder to like Joseph. Joseph was chosen to take care of the other prisoners,

responsible for whatever was done in the prison. So even in prison, Joseph was right with God, close to God, looking out for others first, showing integrity and caring for others first..

Right now, you may be in a dark place, in a prison, feeling trapped and cannot see the future. But let me encourage you from the Word of God that God has a plan for you and he will bring you through. You can play your part by staying close to God, hearing from him and serving him, faithfully without complaint, however dark your circumstances. Remember a servant is not greater than his master and our master is Jesus –

2 John 15:20- *"Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."*

Joseph was forgotten about in prison, even by the King's Officer he helped, Gen 40.23, *'but the officer who served wine did not remember Joseph, he forgot all about him'*. The future looked a little bleak..

Joseph Cast Down but Raised Up

One thing we find in the Bible is that often when God moves, he does so with great speed and power. One day Joseph was languishing in a prison cell, faithfully serving God in adversity. Suddenly, the King's Officer remembered about Joseph when the King of Egypt had a dream that no-one in the King's court could interpret. He remembered that Joseph could interpret dreams. So the King sent for Joseph. Imagine being there in prison, next you hear word that 'The King has sent for you..' Awesome words, and ones which God is speaking to you and me today – the King wants you, to serve him, to preach and live his Gospel of hope.

Joseph went to the King. He must have been nervous – moving up with God always requires steps of faith. Someone needed to interpret the King's dreams and the responsibility lay on him. He was suited and booted and went before the King. Here was his moment. Here was God's timing – to elevate Joseph, to save Joseph's family – and to bring glory to the one true God. Joseph stepped forward and interpreted the King's dreams. In verses 41.33, he even wrote his own job description (*"And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt."*) How cool to write your own job description – be careful what you ask for! And remember these are the kinds of things that God looks for (and to build) in a disciple's life.

SUDDENLY – BANG!

Joseph becomes ruler over Egypt – the King recognising in verse 37 that 'God's Spirit is truly in him.' He then acted in relation to the revelation God had given him. Can someone say the same about you? Is God's Spirit truly in you? Are you set apart? So Joseph's promotion came. Are you ready for God to move you on? Has God worked on your character and have you responded? Be encouraged if you're in a dark place. In God's timing, he will move. Walk with God, obey God and act out your faith in God.

Joseph used to save God's people

God is intent on using Joseph to save a people for himself – a people who will provide the history for Jesus himself. Joseph himself pointed this out to his brothers in Genesis 45.5-7 *"..it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."* We then read in Genesis 50.20, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."*

God used Joseph in incredible ways, he will use us too. It will be different to Joseph, but we must recognise that God works all things for the good of those who love him, as Romans 8.28. Like Joseph, we must make sure we act on what God has said – lives could depend on it. Nothing is too small, nothing is insignificant in the Kingdom of God – what you do is significant, when you obey God it is significant.

Story – When Tommy Kyllonen felt God's call to urban youth work, God led him to Crossover Community Church Tampa in 1996, a small church with just 40 adults. Tommy and his wife took over the youth ministry unpaid, at the church, connecting with young people through hip-hop, basketball and a youth service. They started with just 4 teens attending. Very quickly the youth ministry overtook the numbers in the church, with over 200 attending by 2002 when Tommy took over the leading of the whole church. The church became purpose driven, relevantly engaging with the culture around them. Today, the church has over 400 people attend, with 100s more reached through teenage and young adult programmes and God using the church to impact and inspire churches around the globe.

Joseph Serving Faithfully and Forgiving

When Joseph spoke to his brothers, he could no longer contain his excitement about seeing his family again. Joseph cried and explained who he was. He went on to comfort his brothers saying in Gen 45.5, *'do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.'* Joseph had forgiven his brothers. We must also presume that with God's favour resting on him in Egypt and in prison, that he had forgiven his brothers and the others who wronged him. On the Cross, Jesus cried out (in Luke 23.34), *'Father forgive them for they do not know what they do.'* In the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22.32), we see Jesus cry out to God, *'Not my will but yours be done.'* The Christian life is one of obedience, of responding to what God says. It is also a life where God uses the seemingly weak to humble the strong and move through it..

We all heard about the news of forgiveness in the wake of the killing of Anthony Walker in Merseyside. Anthony was a Christian and so are his families. They forgave those who brutally killed their son..

His mum, Mrs Walker stated: "Why live a life sentence? Hate killed my son, so why should I be a victim too? Unforgiveness makes you a victim and why should I be a victim? Anthony spent his life forgiving. His life stood for peace, love and forgiveness and I brought them up that way... I have to practice what I preach. I don't feel any bitterness towards them really, truly, all I feel is... I feel sad for the family."

His sister Dominique said, "I did say I forgive and I do still stand by that because you have to. That's one of the things I was raised on and what my mum taught me. I feel sorry for them because they didn't know what they were doing, they don't understand the magnitude of what they've done."

We also may have heard of the testimony of Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty at Victory Christian Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. During the morning service of Nov 20th 2005, a man walked up to him during an altar call – and punched him in the face. The event made national and international headlines on TV channels such as NBC, CNN, Fox and MSNB and David Letterman on CBS. As the man was arrested, Daugherty led the congregation in prayer to forgive the man – and they continued to sing and praise God.

"What started out as a bad situation turned out to be an opportunity to share the gospel," Daugherty says. Numerous television networks have done segments on the incident. The church has posted the video of the entire sermon with the footage of the attack and subsequent apology. Many people are ordering copies.

Daugherty says God allowed the incident so more people could hear about Jesus, who suffered beatings, torture, humiliation and public execution yet still loved His enemies. "I have been able to tell people that Jesus suffered a whole lot more than I did," Daugherty says. "When Jesus was crucified, He said, 'Father, forgive them.' " Daugherty not only forgave Rogers from the pulpit but he also visited him last week at a Tulsa jail.

At The Name of Jesus every knee will bow

In Gen 42.6, 50.18 we the brothers bow to Joseph. Again, God was faithful in fulfilling prophecy and vision. We see a parallel with Jesus – Philippians 2:10- *"...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."* If God has spoken something over your life, believe that it will happen. *God is not a man that he should lie* (Numbers 23.19). *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever* (Hebrews 13.8). I really want you to be encouraged today. This also gives us an example. In Genesis 48.12, Joseph went to visit his father who was expected to die. Joseph bowed his face to the ground in front of his Father. In a way, this is also our example. We are to serve people, but most of all, to serve the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

Response

If you haven't yet bowed your knee at the foot of the King, today – now is the time to do so. Maybe you've never responded to Jesus, maybe you need to re-submit, maybe you need to submit more. Now is the time to respond to God's call.