

9th August 2020 10am: You Alone Can Rescue: Joseph & His Brothers

Service led by Beryl Dayus, readings by Mark King, Peter Jackson & Mike Dayus,
talk by Mike Berry

Transcript only of notices, readings and talk

Notices.....	1
First Reading: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28.....	1
Second Reading: Psalm 105:16-22.....	2
Talk.....	3
Third reading: Psalm 105:1-6.....	5

Notices

[Beryl Dayus:]

So we come to the notices. All the notices are on the news sheet. There are just three, really, that I'd like to draw your attention to, in case you've just joined us.

1. There will not be a live six o'clock service tonight as today is Mary Sumner day, founder of Mother's Union. And normally we would celebrate that in church at the six o'clock service. But today there's going to be a special service streamed at nine o'clock [pm], and all the details of how to join that are on the news sheet. If nine o'clock isn't convenient to you, then you will be able to watch it at a later date and a later time. So, after the event.
2. Next week's six o'clock will be an outdoor service, weather permitting, and that will be taking place on the grass outside of the vicarage. Do let people know if you're intending to go, and please read the notice in full.
3. And of course the Wednesday Bible Study: do join this if you possibly can. It's a really good, lively discussion and sound teaching.

First Reading: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

[Mark King:]

¹ Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

² This is the account of Jacob.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

And now from verse 12

¹² Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, 'As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.'

'Very well,' he replied.

¹⁴ So he said to him, 'Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.' Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, ‘What are you looking for?’

¹⁶ He replied, ‘I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?’

¹⁷ ‘They have moved on from here,’ the man answered. ‘I heard them say, “Let’s go to Dothan.”’

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

¹⁹ ‘Here comes that dreamer!’ they said to each other. ²⁰ ‘Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.’

²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. ‘Let’s not take his life,’ he said.

²² ‘Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.’ Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe – the ornate robe he was wearing – ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, ‘What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?’

²⁷ Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.’ His brothers agreed.

²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels[b] of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Second Reading: Psalm 105:16-22

[Peter Jackson:]

¹⁶ He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food;

¹⁷ and he sent a man before them – Joseph, sold as a slave.

¹⁸ They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons,

¹⁹ till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.

²⁰ The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free.

²¹ He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed,

²² to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.

Talk

[Mike Berry:]

Good morning everybody. I thought I'd like to introduce myself for some of you who may not know me well. I trained as a pharmacist. But I spent all my life in academia, working in northern Nigeria, Liverpool, Malaysia, and ultimately Malawi and hence, of course, the elephants [on cushions behind him], which Katie my wife loves very much. She's a teacher, and ultimately after teaching primary, secondary, and adult education, she became a teacher of children with special learning needs. So that's us.

But our theme this morning is about a young man, aged 17 years old, called Joseph. Now Joseph, as far as his brothers were concerned, probably thought he had a very vivid imagination. He kept having dreams and two of the dreams particularly upset them. Perhaps if we asked somebody on the street, what they knew about Joseph they would say, "Oh, is he the character in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Joseph and the Technicolour Dreamcoat*?" Andrew Lloyd Webber was quite clever in taking two issues for Joseph's brothers and putting them together in one word. He called it a Dream-coat. Because the dreams were partly the problem, at least in two of them, he suggested that his brothers would bow down to him eventually, even though he was very young, and the last child in the family. It was so concerning that even his father actually asked him whether he would bow down to him as well. The other problem was the coat. His father loved Joseph very much, perhaps because he was the baby of the family, I don't know, but he gave him a very special coat, a coat which had many colours on. Now the children will have had lots of nice things to do. One of them will be to colour in the coat. And this is a picture of Joseph with his brothers, and this is probably rather like the actual event, a coat of stripes of many colours.



The brothers became very jealous of this, and unfortunately plotted to kill him. Reuben, one of the brothers, did try to rescue him at the beginning, but failed to do so. It was to no avail. And as we were to discover, only God could rescue Joseph from this situation.

So what was the effect on Joseph of what happened? We read it in the story. I'm sure there was terrible apprehension, fear, probably absolute terror, as they flung him into the cistern, the well. As the time came that he was shackled by the Ishmaelites as a slave, he would have been exceedingly uncomfortable and very worried about the future. And when he got to Egypt, I have no doubt that he was in great awe of the Egyptian court, and indeed fearsome, in case he put a foot wrong. Katie and I have had a great privilege, because we went to see the exhibition of Tutankhamen in Cairo. And those of you who've been watching the television programme *Valley of the Kings* will no doubt realise how wonderful this court was in comparison to his own humble background in a shepherd family. So I'm sure there was lots of terror for him.

Let me tell you a story about when I was 27 years old. I arrived in Nigeria. It was immediately after the Biafran war and there were still pock marks in some of the buildings where the bullets had landed. And I was a day late, the reason being that there had been a terrible fog at Heathrow Airport, so the plane couldn't take off. I had been promised transport to take me 100 miles from Kano down to Zaria. And there was nobody there, there was only one man standing on the forecourt outside the airport: an airport which would in those days have been more like Coventry airport than it would have been like Birmingham.

I'll tell you more about that later.

For Joseph things would never be the same. He suffered, I've no doubt, in the cistern, a great fear of death. When he was enslaved, of course, there was a fear not only of the present, and of the uncomfortable feelings that he had about that but of the future. And when he got to Egypt, he would have been fearsome of the Pharaoh's displeasure.

What about the brothers? Well, I'm sure overall they did have a sense of guilt, particularly as they went on to deceive their own father as well, pretending that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. And then there was of course the fear of retribution: it hung over him, I've no doubt, like a large cloud: should they ever meet up with that brother again if he survived, what would happen to them?

What was the outcome for Joseph, and indeed for me in my circumstances? Well, Joseph, of course we know, was saved by interpreting Pharaoh's dream. And because of that, he was promoted for his wisdom. He was given great power and authority in the court, especially to train elders and princes in the court. And it brought to mind that verse of the Scriptures which says, "All things are working together for the good of those who love God." ¹

Well, how about me arriving in Nigeria? Well, a few weeks before I was due to fly, my best man and I were standing on Waterloo railway station (sorry, train station these days), and we saw something glinting on the floor. And it turned out to be a Nigerian sixpenny piece. Dave put it into my hand and said, "There you are, Mike, the Lord has given you your first spending money!" When I stood on the forecourt at the airport, I approached the man, and said, "Can you tell me where there's a telephone?" He may have been speaking Hausa only, I didn't know. But he was able to point me around the corner to a public telephone hanging on the wall. I was able then to make a phone call to the people I'd been told to contact [...] and asked them for some help. And they sent a vehicle to look after me and take me 100 miles to Zaria. I had a sixpenny piece, which I was able to put into the telephone box. All things are working together for good.

As to Joseph: well, he survived the threat of death. He gained Pharaoh's confidence and was released from bondage as a slave, and he was given a very solid future in the court.

He was, it proved to be, a wonderful man. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Most men can survive adversity, but to prove a man's character give him power." And so he gained great power. A little song we used to sing came to my mind,

And the end is not yet, praise the Lord;
Blessings new He's still bestowing,
And my cup is overflowing,
For the end is not yet, Praise the Lord!

And [the end] wasn't for Joseph. But what about his brothers? Haha! Well, they were sent by their father to Egypt to get resources, during a period of famine. You can only imagine their terror, when they realised that the man before them who they met was Joseph. And so they fell on their faces in fear. And then, a very unexpected thing happen: Joseph met them in tears: tears, because for the first time in many years, he was meeting the members of his family, and also hearing that his father was still alive. So what did he do? Well, the first thing was, he made provision for their need. He sent them off back home with sacks of grain. The second thing was, he forgave their sins against him. And the

¹ Romans 8:28

