

2026 TALK 20.9.26, GENESIS 41:46-57, COLOSSIANS 1:3-14

PERSONAL SALVATION & SHORT-SIGHTED THINKING...?

We love the story of Joseph don't we? More widely, this is a harvest, good new story. But who can forget Joseph's coat of many colours?. Or the dreams of Joseph's youth, which he somehow didn't realise were a problem for his brothers. The awfulness of them having his murder on their minds. Thankfully the brothers don't repeat the terrible mistake of their murderous ancestor, Cain. At the last-minute they show some form of mercy & decide to sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt instead. Then the brothers join in lying to their father, Jacob. Talk about an awful form of 'poetic justice', at least for Jacob, who was in his earlier life, well-practised in deception & lying.

It's such a complex story, with so many twists and turns. So much here of betrayal, deception, trouble & affliction over many years. Having thought he had landed on his feet with Potiphar, Joseph ends up in prison. He interprets the dreams of two of his fellow inmates – one is set free and the other executed. Talk about walking a tight-rope between life & death, between hope & despair... We know something of this ourselves don't we? There is so much to deal with in our own lives; all this with a back-drop of all sorts of machinations of so-called 'world leaders' & other powerful figures in the background. Each of us have, like Joseph, much to be grateful for & much to be grieved about.

Shortly after our reading, Joseph is surprised to see his brothers in Egypt, there to buy grain due to the widespread famine across the Middle East. We know the story. His brothers don't recognise him. Joseph gives them a hard time, for what they did to him. And (a bit like his father, Jacob, before him) he has this gargantuan wrestling match inside his head. Part of him wants them to be punished. He is clearly tempted to give them a taste of their own medicine & to throw them into prison for a long time. Yet, by a miracle of God's grace he is able to forgive his brothers. He breaks down & embraces them. And as a result Joseph is joyfully re-united with his whole family. Jacob is able to finally enjoy 'retirement' in Egypt, with his family fully restored to a life together. What a wonderful picture! What a wonderful conclusion to such a troubled tale. Thanks be to God for his gracious purposes, for his long-term vision for salvation, not only for Joseph's family, but for all of Egypt. More of this later.

On top of all this, Joseph himself is personally fruitful. During the 7 years of abundance in Egypt, which he predicted, Joseph has two sons. The first called Manasseh, so named because God has helped him 'forget his past troubles'. The second called Ephraim, because God has 'made him *fruitful* in the land of his suffering'.

What we see in Joseph's life, by God's grace, are three things beginning with F...

Forgetfulness – being able to leave behind with God past hurts.

Forgiveness – being able to embrace those who have done evil to him.

Fruitfulness – being able to produce new life, even in the land of his suffering.

Alleluia! How great is our God! Being able to transform a story full of bad news into a good news story. As Joseph says to his brothers, once they are re-united: 'What you meant for evil, God meant for good: the saving of many people'. Joseph was in exactly the right place at the right time to become a Saviour, not only of Egypt, but also of many nations around Egypt. Alleluia! PTL!

Egypt's 7 years of abundance were swiftly followed by 7 years of famine. I wonder where our nation is today... ? Are we in a period of abundance? No, I think we can all agree we are experiencing a period of famine. Perhaps ever since the economic crash of 2008...? Or even before that... Just last week, we marked 25 years since the Twin Towers & the start of 'The War on Terror'... Both our nation & the nations of our world seem to be going through a troubling, even terrifying time of it... What better time than during a period of famine to learn, in the words of Jesus, Saviour of all: that 'no-one lives on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God...?' God knows our need for daily bread, but we need much more than this don't we?

And here we come to the cautionary part of the tale of Joseph... Yes, there is something here, after the joy of Joseph & Jacob, to give us plenty to ponder. Yes, Joseph has the foresight, due to the warnings of his dreams, to save up & store the surplus from those 7 years of good harvests. He saves this grain up in the cities closest to where it was grown. So that, when the seven years of famine come along, he is able to open these store-houses, easily distribute the grain, and save the lives of many in Egypt & beyond. However, there is a big 'but' here. For all the generosity of spirit he personally showed to his brothers, Joseph is unable to show a similar generosity of spirit to the people around

him. He seems to have a 'blind spot' when it comes to economic salvation... And when it comes to environmental salvation too...

We don't know what price Joseph set on these huge quantities of grain. And yes, the Egyptians continued to be grateful to Joseph for his foresight. **So grateful** that they are willing to sell their livestock, their land, even their bodies to Pharaoh, so they can keep feeding their families. But I can't help thinking: this grain was grown by these people. So, why didn't Joseph sell this to them at a heavily discounted price? (Perhaps he could have charged a higher price for people beyond Egypt, who hadn't grown this grain...?). So, Joseph would still have made money for Pharaoh's coffers & still been in favour with Pharaoh...

I don't know what Joseph was thinking here. Perhaps he wanted, given the insecurity of his younger life, to make sure that his position with Pharaoh was completely secure. Perhaps the potential wealth he could see he would make for the nation of Egypt (and therefore for himself & his family) went to his head...?. We have seen plenty of examples of this in recent times haven't we? Wealthy people increasingly obsessed with their power & personal wealth... I'm not entirely sure of the back story of Joseph here. **But we can see** the result. The people of Egypt end up in permanent bondage to Pharaoh. Power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few people. Meanwhile the people themselves have no power to find a way out of their poverty & daily slavery. No surprise then, that when you roll forward a few years - the descendants of Joseph are themselves in slavery in Egypt. Despite the personal salvation & freedom of Joseph & his family, the unintended consequences of Joseph's actions lead to his own family in the future becoming enslaved in Egypt, just as he was himself... Oh dear...! Due to the deceptive influences of 'the world, the flesh & the devil', even good intentions can become misguided & corrupted. Our own political & economic systems are founded on positive ideals, but the reality is v different. In the words of the US Constitution: 'All people are created equal – but everywhere are in chains'... Likewise, God's creation also groans.

I would like us to watch a video from Zambia, produced by the church development charity, Christian Aid. This is a wake-up call to us, if needed, about the dangers of wealth being concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority. This leads to profound injustices across our world. For example, the people of Zambia, are struggling with both international debt & climate change. Neither of these things they are personally responsible for. Their labour in the fields is

getting much harder for them & less fruitful. **And** what they produce hardly manages to pay the interest which Zambia is still expected to pay to the international banks!... How can this be?... This is very far from the vision of the prophets of old, one of whom declared: 'Let justice roll on like a river & righteousness like a never-failing stream'... Here's the story of Precious (VIDEO). We are living through a time of intense global famine. But for the moment, at least, we in Europe & North America, are still enjoying abundance... But here's the good news: God wants freedom & fruitfulness for **all** his creation. This is why Jesus came to this world: to set us free to live fruitful lives. Even in the midst of poverty, injustice & famine, we can know God's goodness & be fruitful. (This is what the story of Precious, from Zambia, teaches us). As we look to Jesus, our perfect Saviour, we too can cry out to God in our trouble & suffering. (And to our governments as well). Like Jesus, even in the most awful times, we can grow in faith & love & bear true & lasting fruit for eternal life.

Today we again gather to this table & fix our eyes on Jesus, the author & perfecter of our faith. We do this to celebrate his unique example for us. In three simple ways, Jesus's life, death & resurrection for us, can teach us much. Jesus demonstrated for us:

Forgetfulness – Jesus was able to leave with God, hurts of the present & past.

Forgiveness – Jesus embraced those who had done & were doing evil to him.

Fruitfulness – Jesus' death produced new life, even in the place of his suffering.

During the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus, the True Vine, declared: ***'I have eagerly longed to celebrate this Passover with you before I suffer...*** This cup is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in my Father's Kingdom'... Glory to God!

And as Paul comments: ***'The One who was rich, for our sake became poor, so that we might be made rich.'*** But the good news doesn't finish there does it? We are called to freely receive the gift God has given us in Christ. Yes...? We are each called to say 'yes' to God & to follow Jesus on the highway of holiness. The path of freedom; walking as children of God, in the light of God's word, towards the light of God's dwelling place... PTL!

And, yes, because of Jesus, we will **always** be indebted to God. But unlike Joseph in Egypt, God does not demand re-payment. Indeed, our Father knows,

as we surely also know, that there is ***no way*** we can pretend to ***begin*** to repay Jesus. How can we repay our God for his faithful, eternal loving-kindness towards us?. The only 'repayment' God really looks for is our joyful gratitude. And this joyful, daily response of our hearts will - by God's grace - produce lasting fruit, to God's glory. This is the freedom of God's economy. It is born in glorious freedom & it results in glorious freedom!. Alleluia! Thanks be to God for the good news of Jesus. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!...