

Place: Lurgan Baptist 24:1:2010

GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

Reading: Genesis 37:1-11

2. RISING ABOVE THE CIRCUMSTANCES

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch lady whose family risked their lives during the Second World War to provide a hiding place in their home for persecuted Jews. Some one betrayed them and as a result her watch maker father was sent to a concentration camp where he died ten days later. Corrie and her beloved sister Betsie were incarcerated at Ravensbruck. They were starved, covered with fleas and made to suffer. *Betsie did not survive the horror of the camp but Corrie gaunt, filthy, and weak was released in October 1944.* She later found out that an order had been given at the end of that very week to kill all women her age and older. An error in prison paperwork was the catalyst God used to release her. Corrie vowed if the Lord allowed her to live, she would tell as many people as possible about the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. She also promised to go wherever the Lord led. Although she was fifty nine years of age when released she travelled all over the world for the next thirty years speaking in more than sixty countries, captivating audiences with her inspiring faith and love for the Lord. She went to be with the Lord in 1983 on her ninety first birthday.

Before she died in the concentration camp In Ravensbruck, her sister Betsie said to Corrie, “ *Corrie your whole life has been a training for the work you are doing here in prison and for the work you will do afterward.*” Corrie used to say, “ *God has plans, not problems for our lives.*” In the course of her talks she often showed the reverse side of an embroidered bookmark. It looked like a meaningless mass of tangled threads. Corrie would turn it over and there written plainly were the words, “ *God is love.*” She then quoted these words,

*My life is but a weaving between my God and me
I cannot choose the colours He weaveth steadily
Oft' times He weaveth sorrow and I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper and I the underside*

*Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skilful
hand, As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He
has planned*

*He knows, He loves, He cares, nothing this truth can
dim
He gives the very best to those who leave the choice to
Him.*

Joseph's coat of many colors' was a reflection of the life that he would live. Indeed, in these early chapters his life would seem to be a mass of tangled and meaningless threads. However, we have got to remember that it was

God who was pulling the strings and weaving the threads in Joseph's life. Sometimes we are tempted to wonder in the midst of all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of life, ***Does God care ? Is God in control ? And if so, what might we expect ?*** We don't know if Joseph asked those questions before he was seventeen, what we do know is. Few people have faced more disappointments than Joseph. For about thirteen years from the time he was seventeen until the time he was thirty, things did little else than go wrong for him, humanly speaking. Yet even in these early life circumstances God was shaping Joseph in preparation for what was to come. **Rising above the Circumstances ?** Are you doing that ? Let me try and give you some pictures here that flow from the passage.

(1) JOSEPH: THE FAMILY BACKGROUND

Where did Joseph come from ? If you were to see his name for the first time in (Gen Ch 37) you might ask that question. Did Joseph have the kind of family background we might expect to produce a person of such exceptional character ? ***What were Joseph's family ties ?*** All of us have them, and they all mean something. Our family ties can be frustrating or full, blessed or benighted. There's no question that Joseph came from quite a family. No other seventeen year old can boast that his great-grandfather is Abraham, his grandfather Isaac, and his father Jacob. You see, by looking at Joseph we can trace the family ties and the influences on Joseph's early life. Now when you think of Joseph's family life it does not make pleasant reading. I mean,

(a) THERE WAS DECEIT IN THIS FAMILY:

Joseph's father Jacob was a cheat a con-man. His character was revealed at his birth when he grasped the heel of his twin Esau and was given a name that means "*deceiver, chisler, trickster, or supplanter.*" Jacob certainly lived up to that name. Do you recall he began his career of deceit by tricking Esau out of his ***birthright ?*** (25:33) Then he deceived his father Isaac into conferring on him the ***blessing*** that should have belonged to Esau. (27:36) Esau vowed to kill Jacob, so his mother Rebekah sent Jacob to live with her brother Laban in the land of Paddan Aram. (28:2) There he met the love of his life, and he loved Rachel so passionately that he offered to work for his Uncle Laban seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage. I think as a father, we need to bring back that law, do you not ? Now, Laban was a bit of schemer himself. So when seven years were completed, Laban deceived Jacob by slipping his older daughter Leah into the wedding chamber. (29:25) *It sounds like a soap opera doesn't it ?* You know when Laban went to bed that night, he must have said to his wife, "*Wait until Jacob discovers what I've done. Its going to be unbelievable.*"

Do you know something ? Jacob got a dose of his own medicine. Laban had done to Jacob what Jacob had done to Esau, ticked him out of something that was rightfully his. I mean here is the history of Joseph's parents, not ideal by any standards. (a)

(b) THERE WAS DIVISION IN THIS FAMILY:

Do you ever hear parents and grandparents talk about their family ? For some you would think they dropped right out of heaven. They are so perfect. If you're going to understand something of the animosity towards Joseph, you need to look at the relationship between Jacob and his wives. In rapid succession the Bible describes how the first twelve children of Jacob were born, eleven sons and a daughter. Altogether, Leah bore Jacob six sons and a daughter, Dinah. Leah also gave her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob, and through her Jacob had two more sons. When Rachel could not conceive, she gave her maidservant Bilhah to Jacob, and Bilhah bore two sons. Finally, we read "*And God remembered Rachel and she conceived and bare a son and called his name Joseph.*" (30:22) That was quite a family. One father, four mothers, two were wives, and two were concubines, eleven sons and one daughter. And at the end of this mixed up complicated family, Joseph arrived. Think how this twelve sons were born. The tension, the jealousy, the jockeying for position. My its no wonder that there was division among them. (a) (b)

(c) *THERE WAS DEATH IN THIS FAMILY:*

Actually, there were three deaths in Joseph's family when he was growing up. First, Deborah, the maid of Isaac's wife, Rebekah died. (24:59 35:8) Not long after that, Joseph's grandfather Isaac died. (35:29) But the one that broke his heart was the death of his mother Rachel. (35:19) You see, the threads of pain and sorrow and bereavement were woven into this young man's life. My this was a family of twists and turns that could have

turned Joseph bitter towards God and others, but he rose above his circumstances to be the incredible man of God he was. ***Are you discouraged because of your background ? Do you live amongst a crowd of miserable, selfish, conniving people ?*** Perhaps your parents are divorced, and your relatives are more interested in money and material gain than in spiritual standing. They would rather gain the whole world and risk their souls. I mean, what chance have you to live for God, keep your mind and life pure ? You have repented of your sin and trusted the Saviour but somehow you feel out-numbered and powerless. Things must have been lonely for Joseph too. But in the rough and tumble of a less than perfect family life, God was preparing Joseph for the role He had planned for him.

All over the world there are people who are bitter about their backgrounds or position in life. "*If only this, if only that,*" they moan. "*If only my nose were a different shape. If only my Dad drove a Mercedes. If only my family were normal.*" Yet never do we find Joseph saying, "***If only.***" My I don't care what your background is, how dark your circumstances, how thin your wallet, how lacking your opportunities for earthly advancement. God says, "*Them that honour me I will honour.*" (1 Sam 2:30) (1)

(2) JOSEPH: THE FAVOURITE SON

Have you got favourites in your family ? Do you know families who have ? "*Fathers Day,*" the small boy pointed out, "*is just like Mother's Day, only you don't*

need to spend as much.” A father has been defined as someone who carries pictures where his money used to be. “ *The trouble with a parent is that by the time you are experienced you are unemployed,*” said another.

Parenthood is no easy task whatever its definition, and one of its deadliest traps is when a parent shows favour to one child above another. Do you see here,

(a) THE FACT OF JACOB’S FAVOURITISM:

Look if you will at (37:3) Was it right ? No. Playing favourites among your family can be devastating. But this is the way it was for Jacob. Joseph was his baby boy, born in his old age, to the only woman Jacob ever loved.

Rachel was a stunningly beautiful woman and no doubt her son inherited a lot of her good looks. Now that Rachel was dead Joseph was a constant reminder to his father of the woman he had laboured fourteen years to have. Her son was his link to the past and he showed deference to him. Did you notice that Jacob did nothing to hide this favouritism ? For he gave to Joseph a “ *coat of many colours.*” (37:3) A varicolored tunic. H. C. Leupold says, “ *the tunic was sleeved and extended to the ankles.*”

You can’t work very well in a garment that has sleeves and extends all the way down to the ankles, especially if it’s a costly ornamented robe. You see, by giving Joseph this full length robe, Jacob was putting him a class apart for it signified rank. It indicated that the wearer was an overseer or master. It was a robe of nobility. It became a visible reminder to the brothers of Joseph’s favoured status. They hated him for it.

My do you see what favouritism does ? It fuels jealousy so deadly that it can kill. Favouritism breeds division. It brings discord into a family. That’s why you need to watch that look of deference in your eye, that touch, that planning, those gifts towards your children. *If you don’t, long after you are gone, that look, that touch, that plan, that gift, will rancor in the heart of those who were not deferred to.* You see, Jacob’s actions were unwise. For we see here, not only (a) but,

(b) THE FOLLY OF JACOB’S FAVOURITISM:

Even though God’s providence was constantly overruling in Joseph’s life, his father’s actions were unwise. Do you recall that Jacob’s relationship with his brother Esau had been destroyed for years because of favouritism ? The favouritism of his parents Isaac and Rebekah. The Bible tells us “ *And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*” (25:28) It was Rebekah’s scheming to promote her “ **pet,**” within the family that plunged it into chaos. Wouldn’t you have thought those painful memories would have prevented Jacob making the same mistake with his sons ? But no. For history repeats itself. As Alistair Begg said “ *Jacob probably thought, ‘ I know Esau wanted to kill me, but I won’t let anything happen to Jacob.’*” Is there not a warning here for us as parents ? Do we realise that all our children are unique gifts from God ? Do you recognize each of your kid’s unique personality, individual ability and special needs ? My ***favouritism within a family is a foolishness that leads to fury.*** (1) (2)

(3) JOSEPH: THE FAITHFUL TEENAGER

One mother said she was worried about her teenage daughter and son's failing eyesight. She said her daughter could not find anything to wear in a wardrobe full of clothes and her son could not find anything to eat in a fridge full of food. As we all know there are many more problems facing teenagers than "failing eyesight." Society is concerned about teenage drinking and drug taking, yet when we read of such facts and figures, the story of Joseph is a breath of fresh air. Here he was, just seventeen years of age, and he was marching to the beat of a different drum. You see, when you look at Joseph, it does not take you long to realise that there was something different about him.

(a) HE WAS DIFFERENT IN HIS WALK:

Later in this story we read that Joseph was "separate from his brethren." (49:26) Indeed he was. He stood apart from in so many ways and especially in his conduct. The context here says that he brought "unto his father their evil report." (37:2) Was Joseph just a "tell tale," because he told his father of their "evil doings?" I don't think so. Rather he was concerned for his father's reputation and God's honour. Here was a young man who was living in a dysfunctional family, where rape, cruelty, and incest stained the lives of his brothers and sister as they lived for themselves and the Devil. But Joseph was different. He loved God with all his heart. He was obedient to the Lord in every way. He was a spiritually minded young man. Don't you think those older brothers

tried to get him to listen to their smutty jokes, drink their cheap liquor, run with their wild women? I can just hear those older brothers, "Man, Joseph what's wrong. Are you chicken? Daddy's not around. He'll never know. Go ahead, its fun. Don't be a sissy." Is this what you are facing **at school**? Are others trying to get you to go to their wild parties, drink their alcohol, use their drugs, listen to their anti-Christ music? Could it be that this is what you are facing **at work**? Maybe in the **business** world you've been told you'll never make sales if you don't drink and you'll never be promoted if you don't go to the office parties. Will you dare to be different? Will you dare to obey the Word of God which says, "And be not conformed to this world", (Rom 12:1) Don't let the world around squeeze you into its mould. Take your stand openly, valiantly and defiantly. Augustine, who later became a great theologian in the church was a teenager the same age as Joseph when his father sent to Carthage to further his education. He stayed in the home of a wealthy magnate by the name of Romanianus. He arrived a month before his studies began to acclimate himself in the big city. *In the house of Romanianus he met Marcus, the magnate's pampered nephew.*

Marcus offered to initiate Augustine into the city life. After dinner the two went out for the evening. First they went to Harbour Square, where the idlers spent their time hearing and telling everything new. Then off to a booth for a round or two of wine. After a while they went to the temple of Tanit with its provocative girls dancing in full view. Then to a house of ill repute. Augustine said,

“ *We’re not going in there ?*” “ *Where else ?*” said Marcus. “ *Have you been there before ?*” “ *Been here. I come here all the time, come on what we are waiting for ?*” Then prodded by the pressure put on him by Marcus, he abandoned himself to sin. Augustine had a godly mother called Monica, and she continued to pray, and Augustine was gloriously saved. My is the world, the flesh and the devil putting pressure on you to conform ? Will you be like Joseph ? Will you dare to be different ? (a)

(b) HE WAS DIFFERENT IN HIS WISDOM:

The words “ *son of his old age,*” (37:3) was a Hebrew expression for “ *a wise son, one who possessed wisdom above his years.*” You might say, he had an old head on young shoulders. There was a godly wisdom about Joseph even in his youth. His dreams indicated that he was different from the people around him. He had a perception of the future. In those days before the Bible was written the Lord often revealed His will by dreams. Joseph saw the future. He lived with eternity’s values in view. Most people live for the present but Joseph lived for the future. Do you ? How do the things you do measure up in the light of eternity ? My are you different because you have the wisdom to perceive that a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions ? Young folk, be like Joseph, don’t go with the flow. Dare to be different. (1) (2) (3)

(4) JOSEPH: THE FOCAL POINT

You see, he was the focal point for his brother’s hostility. You talk, about hostility in a family. Incidentally, did you notice the progression of hostility in this chapter ? It wasn’t just that his brothers didn’t like him or were irritated by him. They hated him enough to kill him. Did you notice,

(a) THE ROOT OF THIS HATRED: JEALOUSY:

“ *And his brethren envied him.*” (37:11) They couldn’t speak kindly to Joseph. They couldn’t engage Joseph in conversation without hatred and venom spilling out. They were clearly jealous of him. Did you know there are people who have not spoken to their brothers or sisters in years because of the monster called jealousy ? Solomon was right when he said, “ *jealousy is cruel as the grave.*” (S.O.S. 8:6) My jealousy is a monster, a giant that will eat us alive. The happiness and success of others is poison to the bloodstream of the jealous. I wonder is this the cause of your hostility to other believers ? Are you jealous of their home, their car, their holidays, their lifestyle, their children ? *Did you know that pastors can get jealous of one another ?* F. B. Meyer tells how his fellow preacher G. Campbell Morgan came to preach in the same location as Meyer. Gradually, people began drifting from Meyer’s congregation to Morgans. Meyer later wrote of how envy and jealousy began to grip his soul and the only release he could find was to pray for Campbell Morgan and ask the Lord to bless his ministry.

Meyer prayed that God would bless Morgan’s ministry so much there wouldn’t enough seats to hold all the people

who wanted to hear him, and that they would come and listen to F. B. Meyer. (a)

(b) THE FRUIT OF THIS HATRED: SLAVERY:

For Joseph landed in a pit in Canaan, and then in a prison in Egypt, yet he just continued to trust God. Mind you as Joseph lay in the pit I don't think he shouted, "*Praise the Lord, don't you fellows know I'm going to be Governor of Egypt and free you one day from death and starvation. This pit is marvelous because it is the actual highway of God's guidance for me.*" My no pit of suffering in our lives ever appears to be the path to blessing. I mean look at Joseph now. Broken, destitute, and forsaken. Gone was the coat of distinction, gone was home support, gone was every visible means of help. Is this just like you ? Are you hemmed in ? You can't go back and you can't seem to go forward. Perhaps the questions are tumbling from your lips. **Does God know ? Does God care ? Is God in control ?** Yes, for you are the object of God's providential care. So much so that you can say with the hymnwriter,

**My times are in Thy hand
Why should I doubt or fear
My Father's hand will never cause
His child a needless tear**