**Harvest Thanksgiving September 24th 2023 St Andrews Search the Scriptures** Acts 7 v 2 - 18

Part 1.

**Intro**

As I prepared this, I became aware that we are not all at the same stage in our walk with the Lord Jesus.

I shall borrow an illustration from our friend, Dan Harris, of an amateur football match: of those on the field some players are very experienced, knowledgeable footballers, others are new to the game but are involved. Among the spectators, some are wondering whether they’d like to get involved in the game.

So, if you’re a mature Christian, please excuse me if I explain what seems very clear to you, but please keep listening – who knows, maybe God wants to speak to you this morning (I’m sure He does). Or, using Dan’s metaphor, If you are new to the game, or just wondering whether you want to join the team, and I say something you don’t understand, please ask me or one of the other Team members, afterwards.

**All scripture**

When I started to think about our harvest thanksgiving, my mind turned to the story of Joseph in Genesis 37 - … who saved grain in the seven good years, so that there was more than enough to feed the nation – and others - in the seven bad years. This is particularly relevant as we have been hearing about Food Bank.

Recently, I was shocked to hear that in some churches they do not read, let alone study, the Old Testament.

Paul wrote to Timothy: 2 Tim. 3 v 16, 17 (NIV)

*All scripture (and of course he meant the OT, because the NT wasn’t compiled yet), All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man (and woman) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Jesus said to some religious teachers, John 5 v 39 (TPV):

*“You are busy analysing the scriptures, poring over them hoping to gain eternal life. Everything you read points to me, yet you still refuse to come to me so I can give you the life you’re looking for – eternal life.”*

You see, the Jewish teachers of the Law had the right idea in searching the scriptures to find out what pleases God and how they could gain eternal life, but they were missing the main issue. The scriptures they had, our OT, clearly pointed to the coming Messiah, a descendant of David, who would be the one who would be the gateway to eternal life if they believed in Him. However, many of them rejected Jesus, who was that Messiah, the anointed One.

Sadly, it is still possible for people to study the Bible as literature, or theology and so on, and completely miss any real personal encounter with the Living God, through Jesus Christ.

Watchman Nee (great Chinese preacher): “In [these] many persons down the centuries, Christ moved to express Himself, and the sum of the records is the Word of God, ‘the things concerning Himself.’ “

For instance:

John 8 v 56 Jesus said: “Your Father **Abraham** rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day.” (Abraham lived a couple of millennia before Jesus was born.)

Heb. 11 v 23 **Moses**, who predated Jesus’; birth by centuries, “regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt …”

Acts 2 v 25 **David** wrote psalms that point to the coming Messiah, Jesus, centuries before His birth.

John 12 v 41 **Isaiah,** the great prophet**,** who also lived centuries before Jesus, **“**saw Jesus’s glory and spoke about Him.”

There are many prophecies and psalms which speak of the coming Messiah;

There are probable pre-incarnation appearances e.g. the fourth man in the fiery furnace, the Captain of the Lord’s armies at Jericho and others.

When you read Jesus’ words in the gospels, notice how much of his teaching comes from the Old Testament – the full counsel of God. (A Bible with cross-references and footnotes will help you to spot it.)

Then there are what we call ‘types’ by which we mean people whose stories in some way foreshadowed Christ.

In part 2 of this sermon, we’ll be looking at Joseph in Genesis 37 – 50. There is only time, this morning, to skim the surface of his story, but I want to show you, if you don’t already know it, that there are great riches to be mined in the Old Testament and so much of it points us to Jesus, Son of God, Messiah.

**Reading: Acts 7 v 2 - 18**

**Part 2 Joseph’s life**

When we read the account of Joseph’s life at **age 17**, (Gen 37) we can come to the conclusion that he was a stuck-up, privileged little prig: he was his father’s favourite son who told tales on his older half-brothers and had dreams that one day all his family would bow down to him – and he told his brothers this!

What a totally unpleasant person, no wonder his brothers wanted rid of him! Every time they saw him in the extra special garment that spoke of his special place in his father’s affections, they hated him more and more.

But if we take sin out of this – of course Joseph, like all of us had the innate bias toward sin – but, if we take the sin out of these things, we begin to see pointers toward Christ: He was special and dearly loved by his Father. He was the same and yet set apart. He saw wrong behaviour and didn’t join in but saw it for the sin against His Father that it was. He knew that He was set apart for God’s purposes.

Joseph’s life goes like this (indicate ups and downs:

**High:** Father’s favourite

**Low:** Half-brothers were jealous and hated him

**Even lower**: half-brothers plan to murder him

**Up a bit:** sold into slavery instead

**Up a bit:** taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, a just and good owner.

**Gen. 39 v 2 says: "The Lord was with Joseph, and he prospered.”**

**Up more:** Potiphar’s household did well because of Joseph. Potiphar ‘saw **that the Lord was with him** and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did’ so he promoted Joseph to being in charge of the whole household.

**Down:** Joseph was very good-looking and Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him, but Joseph rebuffed her advances, so she accused him of rape and Potiphar had Joseph put in prison.

Gen. 39 v 20, 21 “But while Joseph was there in the prison, **the Lord was with him**; He showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warder.”

**Up a bit:** the prison-warder made Joseph a trusty and put him in charge of the other prisoners.

Four times we read that ‘**the Lord was with Joseph**’ and he prospered. I love the ancient Wycliffe translation which (if I remember correctly), says: “Joseph was a lucky fellow, for the Lord was with him.”

We might not think Joseph was a lucky fellow – sold into slavery by his family, wrongly accused and imprisoned for years, and during his time in prison, given false hope and then forgotten and left there.

But ‘luck’ doesn’t come into it. **The Lord was with Joseph – in his highs and his lows**. When things looked up and when he was dashed down again and languished in jail. Remember, he was still a young man, still in his twenties, and through it all, the highs and the lows, he walked in integrity and kept his faith in the Lord God.

As the martyr, Stephen, said in his final address, just before he was stoned, (our reading ):

‘Because the patriarchs [i.e. Joseph’s half-brothers] were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. **But God was with him,** and rescued him from all his troubles…’

**God’s plan comes to fruition**

Well God’s timing isn’t like ours. Joseph hoped that his former fellow prisoner, Pharoah’s chief cup-bearer, would put in a good word for him, but it was two more years until, one night Pharoah had two vivid dreams that he thought, rightly, were significant. None of his wise men or magicians could interpret them and then the Cup-bearer remembered that Joseph, in prison, had been able to interpret two dreams and the interpretations came true.

So, Joseph was brought to Pharoah and says, “I cannot interpret your dreams, but God will give Pharoah the answer he desires”.

The dreams were a warning from God that there would be seven years of severe famine, but before that, there would be seven exceptionally good years of harvests. Joseph recommended that Pharoah appoint a discerning and wise man to oversee officials throughout Egypt who will gather 1/5th of the good harvests to be stored ready for the famine years. Pharoah promptly appointed this young Hebrew to be over all Egypt, second only to Pharoah himself.

And he was still only thirty.

So, when the famine came, there was grain in Egypt, not only for themselves, but other people from the surrounding nations came to buy grain.

Two years into the famine, Joseph’s ten half-brothers turned up to buy food. Of course, they didn’t recognise that this great Egyptian official, was the half-brother they had so badly treated. Joseph kept a bit of a distance from them, in case they suspected he wasn’t Egyptian, and he spoke through an interpreter, so they didn’t realise that he could understand what they said among themselves.

Then there is quite a convoluted extended episode which you can read for yourself in Genesis 42 – 44, whereby Joseph gets the whole of his family – the Hebrew tribe – to move down to Egypt, rather than just buying grain to take back with them.

In a tremendous act of forgiveness and demonstration of his understanding of the ways of God, Joseph forgives his brothers, recognising that what they meant for ill, God used to save their whole family.

Years later, when their father, Jacob, died, the brothers were afraid that without his protection, Joseph might turn on them. so, they come to him asking for forgiveness, and he reassures them: (Genesis 50 v 20) ‘You intended to harm me …’ notice, he doesn’t negate their sin or minimise it. When someone sins against us, it’s important to recognise it for what it is and its impact on us; it is important that we excuse the excusable, but also that we forgive the inexcusable – that’s what God does for us – forgives what we might call the unforgiveable.

So, Joseph reassures them; You intended to harm me, but God – **but God -**  intended it for good’.

**Conclusion on Joseph**

So, we see many things in Joseph’s life which point us to the Lord Jesus; here are some of them:

* He was favoured and different, so his brothers were jealous and hated him. Mt. 27 v 17. 18 It was out of **envy** that the religious rulers had handed Jesus over to Pilate.
* Joseph was sold by his brothers for pieces of silver; Judas was paid thirty pieces of silver for betraying Jesus.
* Joseph was wrongly accused, so was Jesus
* Saved not only his own people (=the Jews), but also Egypt (=the gentiles)
* Joseph was thought to be dead; Jesus actually died. In a sense Joseph was resurrected to his family; Jesus was really resurrected.
* Joseph freely forgave those who sinned against him – Jesus on the cross ‘Father, forgive them …’, and also forgives us.
* When Joseph had revealed himself to his brothers, he sent them off to bring the rest of the family to live under his protection in Egypt. Jesus brings us into His kingdom while in the world.
* Joseph said to them Gen. 45 v 20 “Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.” We can bring nothing of ourselves into the act of salvation and, more than that, amazingly, we come into the riches of God’s kingdom. The prodigal son returned to the Father’s welcome, a ring and robe of authority and a feast. Oh, the grace of God!
* Joseph fulfilled God’s purpose in saving God’s chosen family, and of course Jesus fulfilled God’s purpose in making salvation available to all who will receive it.

Looking beyond the ‘type’ or foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus, we can also learn from Joseph in that:

* He heard from God
* He was faithful in increasingly difficult circumstances
* He influenced the ruler - how we need godly men and women in places of influence.
* He had Godly Wisdom in harvest and famine -in good times and bad.

**Lessons for us:**

If we belong to the Lord, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we can trust that He is with us and He’s using those circumstances for his purposes. Rom. 8 v 28

‘Trust and obey...’ It was a choice for Joseph every day, through good times and bad, whether to trust God and believe that God had a plan for his life.

It was a choice for Jesus to do only what the Father showed Him. We see that choice starkly presented In Gethsemane, ’Father, if it’s possible … yet, not My will but Yours.’

It is a choice for us day by day, in all circumstances. Trust and obey.

Whether we are up or down, in good times or bad, let us be faithful to the Lord and always honour Him.

So, I hope I’ve whetted your appetite to go deeper into the Bible, mining the gems that are found there and finding Christ in all the Scriptures.