

Preaching Christ in Genesis 37-50

1. Common approaches to 'The Joseph Story'

Moralism

- Some truths – but nothing specifically Christian

Pietism

- Undoubted lessons about obedience – but we are not Joseph

'Gospel-ism'

- Reaction to the above – but we must take seriously the real history of salvation's story

2. A more wholesome approach

Recognise the perversity of sin

- The real problem is sin in the human heart

Recognise the promise and the pattern of Salvation

- The real solution is God's provision of salvation through a saviour

Recognise the participation with The Saviour

- All God's true servants are united to, and being conformed to, Christ

→ **Resolve to preach Christ – by preaching the purpose of the text**

- Don't be so focused on the Christological you forget to be biblical!

3. The Big Picture of Genesis 37-50

Not the 'Joseph Story'!

- 'This is the account of *Jacob*' (37:2): a family themselves in need of saving
- Genesis 50:20 controls whole story: God's *saving purpose* is key (not just providence)
- God saves them by shaping and sending them saviours – from among their own brothers
- The Structure of the whole story: begins (37-8), ends (49-50), and centres (44-5) on *Joseph AND Judah*.
- Echoes of God's saving pattern – for the world, and in his people

4. Questions to ask of every part of the narrative

- What evil of man is exposed (sin)
- What good of God is unfolding? (sovereign purpose)
- What do we learn about his purpose? (salvation) – its *nature* (grace) and its *means* (the saviour)

The Joseph and Judah Cycle

The structure shows the story's emphases: saving God's people Israel, and blessing of the world around, through Israel's saviours who embody the pattern and purpose of *the Redeemer*.

A Introduction: beginning of Joseph story (37:2-11)

- Joseph dreams the brothers will bow down; brothers hate him – cannot speak kindly to him

B Jacob mourns 'death' of Joseph (37:12-36)

- Jacob weeps at Hebron over Joseph's 'death', and refers to his own death
- Joseph goes from Canaan to Egypt

C Interlude: Judah signified as leader (38:1-30)

- Judah's first 3 sons bypassed; he unnaturally begets 2 sons
- Reversal of elder & younger, despite string tied to hand
- *Judah* signified as **leader** by birth of the twins

D Joseph's enslavement in Egypt (39:1-23)

- He is sold, purchased, and becomes a slave
- Finds favour, becomes second only to his master, in charge of Egypt's food

E Joseph Saviour of Egypt through disfavour at Pharaoh's court (40:1-41:57)

- Dishonouring & expulsion of Pharaoh's servants; imprisonments
- Life and Death

F Journeys of brothers to Egypt (42:1-43:34)

G *The reconciliation of Israel's family (44:1-45:1-15)*

- Through the Spirit of *Judah's* substitutionary sacrifice
- Through the Spirit of *Joseph's* sovereign mercy

F' Migration of family to Egypt (45:16-46:27)

E' Joseph Saviour of family through favour at Pharaoh's court (46:28-47:12)

- Honouring & welcome of Jacob's family by Pharaoh; granted best of land
- Life and Death

D' Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians (47:13-31)

- They are sold, purchased by, and become his slaves
- They seek his favour as master, the one in charge of Egypt's food

C' Interlude: Judah blessed as ruler (48:1-49:28)

- Jacob's first 3 sons bypassed; he unnaturally begets 2 sons
- Reversal of elder & younger, despite Joseph trying to uncross Jacob's hands
- *Judah* blessed as **king** by the blessing of the patriarch

B' Joseph mourns death of Jacob (49:29-50:14)

- Joseph weeps over Jacob's 'death', and buries him at Hebron
- Joseph goes from Canaan back to Egypt

A' Conclusion: end of Joseph story (50:15-26)

- brothers bow down to Joseph; fear he hates them – Joseph speaks kindly to them

Genesis 37

'He came unto his own...'
(John 1:11)

1. Simmering Conflict (v1-11)

- Enmity against the seed (cf context: Ch 36)
- The focus of the text – the brothers' hatred, and God's favour
- NT control: recognises a typical pattern (Acts 7)

2. Shocking Crime (v12-30)

- The brothers want rid of Joseph – to silence God's unwelcome revelation (his dreams, 20)
- Shamefully misuse a favoured son, sit down to eat, sell for pieces of silver (25-28)

3. Shameful Cover-up (v31-35)

- Tragic irony – Jacob reaps what he sowed; the entail of sin
- Cruelty, cowardice and grief – *man's evil at work*

4. Sovereign Control (v36)

- God's fingerprints. A familiar pattern, and plan – *God's good purpose at work*

A story that shows us:

1. The magnitude of God's mercy

– in the face of the failure of God's sinful people

2. The means of God's mercy

– seen in the familiarity of God's saving pattern

3. The mysteries of God's mercy

– seen in fruitfulness born of suffering and pain

2. The Mysterious Mercy of God's Presence

Genesis 39-40

- What does it look like, and feel like, to have God 'with' us, blessing us?
- Though always *merciful*, God's presence with his people is often *mysterious* – perplexing, and even deeply painful.

Introduction

- 2 scenes – each prefaced by assurance of God's *presence* in *blessing*
- in Potiphar's house: 39:1-6; and in Prison: 39:21-23
- not just a chapter with lessons about temptation!

An unmistakable message: the LORD is with Joseph to bless him, and through him – even when it looks like the very opposite!

1. The Pain of a faithful slave

- a story of fearful *pain* but reveals the *mystery* of God's ways. God was certainly with Joseph, yet it must have seemed to all, and often to Joseph himself, that God had forsaken and forgotten him

Serving faithfully in Potiphar's house – Genesis 39:1-20

- Joseph as the blessing of God, but an enemy target: losing with the LORD

Serving faithfully in Prison – Genesis 39:21-40:23

- Courageous, compassionate, but crushed hope

2. The Proving of a faithful Saviour

- a story of God's faithful *proving*, revealing the *mercy* of his ways, both in and through Joseph. Not forsaken, he is being forged by God; not punished, but *prepared* by God as a true saviour for his people.

The proving of Joseph

- Psalm 105:17-19 – his soul in the *iron-smelting furnace* of affliction for his brethren.
(cf Deut 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer 11:4)
- Stricken, crushed & suffering – for the saving of many lives (Isa 53:8-10; Gen 50:20)

The proving of Jesus

- A servant made perfect through suffering; afflicted in order to save his brethren.
Hebrews 2:10-12; 5:8-10; Matthew 2:15; 27:46

3. The Pattern of all Faithful Servants

In Joseph's story is the *pattern* for *all* faithful servants. A familiar pattern, because incarnated in Joseph's life and experience is the mystery of Christ's experience – which shapes the lives of all who are truly his own.

- Acts 7; Luke 24; 2 Timothy 1:8; Acts 14:22
- Sharing in suffering not as punishment from God, but by the *power* of God

To have God truly present with us in blessing means

1. There is real cost

- 2 Cor 4:12

2. We need real courage

3. We have real comfort

- 1 Sam 2:30; 2 Tim 4:17; Heb 13:5

3. A Revealing Reconciliation

Genesis 44:1 – 45:15

Introduction

- The climax of this story comes through a crisis which brings great *revelation* and great *reconciliation* together.
- *A Revelation*: of what *God* has been doing throughout the whole saga.
- *A Revealing reconciliation*: what is divulged about the brothers and, above all, about *God* himself, is what makes this wonderful reconciliation possible.
- 3 scenes – each proves very revealing indeed.

1. The Steward's Trap (44:1-13)

- Verses 1-13 describe the steward's trap which *reveals a spirit of real repentance* in the *brothers*.

The brothers' resolute solidarity with Benjamin proves that these men are not just convicted about their past. They are truly chastened and *changed*: bearing *fruit* in keeping with true repentance (Matt 3:8)

Have the brothers really changed?

- The truth revealed: this time they *stand with* their brother
(cf Matt 10:40; 25:40; 1 Jn 3:14 etc)

2. Joseph's Test (44:14-34)

- The revelations continue in verses 14-34, where Joseph's test reveals the *Spirit of the true Redeemer* in Judah.

A substitution and sacrifice

- Judah offers himself as a *substitute*, a vicarious *sacrifice*, so that Benjamin might go free and his own father's heart might not be broken forever (the longest speech in Genesis).

A submission to sovereignty

- Touched and changed by the grace of the Covenant God (38:26ff) Judah submits himself to the will of his father, to offer himself out of real and deep love for him and his brothers.

A Saviour's shadow

- The 'strange familiarity' of v32-34.

3. Joseph's Tears (45:1-15)

- The revelation through his tears reveal the *Spirit of the great Reconciler* in Joseph.

A wonderful revelation of Joseph's extraordinary *grace* but an even more wonderful revelation of Joseph's extraordinary *God*.

The tenderness of God's reconciling mercy

- grace revealed visibly and audibly in Joseph's weeping.

The triumph of God's reconciling grace

- God's sovereign *power*, steadfast *purpose*, & saving *pattern* revealed in Joseph's words.

The task of God's reconciling church

- God's dysfunctional family – but, through his grace, becoming light to the world.