

5 LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

By Pastor Bien A. Llobrera

LESSON ONE: RECEIVE GOD'S DREAM - Text: Genesis 37:1-11

1. INTRODUCTION:

- (a) Most of us know the story of Joseph in the Bible, how God made him ruler of Egypt second only to Pharaoh but only after going through horrible trials and after overcoming impossible odds. Some of us may even have seen a play or movie on Joseph's life.
- (b) Can you describe Joseph in one sentence?
- (c) I wish to suggest one description: *Joseph was a person raised by God to bring salvation to others.* Based on this description let me tell you something mind-blowing: YOU ARE A 'JOSEPH'. God is raising you up to make a difference in the life of one person, or many persons, or a nation even the world. But before you can become God's 'Joseph' to someone, you must learn the lessons that Joseph had to learn.

2. LESSON 1: You must receive GOD'S DREAM FOR YOU. Not YOUR own dream of what you want to become, but GOD'S dream of what He wants to make of you.

- (a) What is God's dream for you? God's dream for you is to make you into a certain kind of person whom He will place in a certain position in order to make a difference in the life of another.
- (b) What was God's dream for Joseph? For Moses? For Nehemiah? For the Virgin Mary? For Joseph, the husband of Mary?
- (c) Esther (4:14) gives us the key to understanding this matter of being a "Joseph": "You come to the kingdom for such a time as this."
- (d) At every point of our life, we are already a Joseph to at least one person. The least we can do is to point someone to Jesus. Nobody may ever hear about us -- but God knows who we are. We don't hear much about Andrew but a lot about his brother Peter; but it was Andrew who pointed Peter to Jesus. Everybody knows that Billy Graham has preached to more people about Christ in all of Christian history, but who has heard of Mordecai Ham, the person who led him to Christ?

But be warned:

- (a) A dreamer is usually a loner; he/she is often alone with God.
- (b) A dreamer doesn't follow the crowd; he/she refuses to be mediocre or just to get by; he/she has higher goals and standards; he/she works harder than everybody else.
- (c) A dreamer is usually misunderstood or hated by others.

3. Examples:

- (a) Jesus - Hebrews 10:5-7; John 4:31-34
- (b) Paul - Philippians 3:13,14; Colossians 1:28,29

ILLUSTRATION:

At the end of the movie Schindler's List, Mr. Schindler who had practically given everything in order to buy hundreds of Jews their freedom, looked at his remaining possession, his car, and he said: "If I had sold this car, how many more people I could have saved."

In the Philippines we have a saying, "Laging huli ang pagsisisi." "Regret always comes last."

By the grace of God, let us not be caught at the end of our life, saying: "I wish I could have done more."

And we could avoid that bitter regret by committing to serve the Lord today.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

LESSON TWO:

GIVE UP YOUR COAT - Text: Genesis 37:1-11

1. In our previous study we learned that, in order to be a person used by God to bless others, we must learn the lessons Joseph learned. We learned that this is Lesson 1: Have God's Dream for Your Life: God will make you into a person who will bring His salvation to others.
2. Today we study Lesson 2: Give Up Your Multi-colored Dreamcoat. Let's look at the story of Joseph in Genesis 37:3, 4, 13-24. Before Joseph could eventually become the person that God would use to bless others, he had to be stripped of his technicolored dream coat, which was the symbol of his pride and self-confidence.

The lesson today has two parts: (1) When Joseph was stripped of his coat; (2) When Joseph was thrown into the well.

PART ONE: THE COAT IS STRIPPED

Let's look at the story of Joseph, particularly about that part when his brothers stripped him of his multi-colored dream coat (Genesis 37:18-24)

3. Today, we have to go through the same experience as Joseph had experienced. We must be stripped of our dream coat.
 - (a) We must admit that each one of us is wearing a multi-colored dream coat.
 - (b) This dream-coat represents the Self & Self-Serving Goals and Attitudes.
 - (c) The Dreamcoat must be replaced by Christ's Servant Spirit.
4. Christ our Lord Himself demonstrated this process of humbling ourselves in John 13:1-17.

- (a) He took of His garments (symbolizing His position as Lord);
- (b) Then He tied a servant's towel around his waist (symbolizing His humility and servant-spirit);
- (c) Thus prepared, He proceeded to serve His disciples (God was able to use Him as a servant to bless others);
- (d) Finally, He commanded all His disciples (the 12 and all of us who come after them) to follow His example.

5. The apostle Paul caught the spirit of Christ's servanthip and gave an extended exhortation about how Christians may have Christ's spirit of servanthip as well in Philippians 2:1-11.

- (a) In verses 1-4, Paul tells Christians to have certain attitudes that promote the servant-spirit;
- (b) In verses 5-11, Paul uses Christ's ultimate example of servanthip -- from His divine self-emptying to His humble incarnation on to His humiliating death which all culminated in His becoming exalted as Lord and Savior of the world.

6. APPLICATION: Are we prepared to learn this lesson of self-humbling? Are we prepared to take on the Christ-like servant attitude? Only through giving up our multi-colored dreamcoat can we hope to become, like Joseph, God's instrument in blessing others.

PART TWO: THROWN INTO THE WELL

Throughout the Bible and Christian History, people first had to come to the end of their abilities and resources before God could use them as mighty instruments for His purposes.

A. Joseph came to the end of his abilities and resources when he was thrown into the well. Genesis 37:18-20, 23-24.

B. Moses had to fail in his first attempt to deliver his people and he wandered in the desert for 40 years before God finally commissioned him to the task. Exodus 2:11-15; 4:10-11.

C. Gideon's Army had to be reduced from several thousands down to three hundred. Judges 7:1-7.

D. Peter (Mark 14:29-31) and Paul (Romans 7:24-25) and everyone else after them that God ever used -- they all had to fail first.

E. The abiding lesson:: Before God can use us as a "Joseph" (God's special instrument) in our time, we must come to the end of our human resources in order to depend on God and His Spirit alone.

- (1) Old Testament: Jeremiah 17:5-8; Zechariah 4:6
- (2) New Testament: John 15:5; Philippians 4:13

F. APPLICATION:

- (1) We must accept our total inability; but we must not stop here.

(2) We must go on to claim God's ability to empower us.

These words from a couple of Gospel songs express the spirit of our lesson:

"When I've come to the place where You're all I got, I find You're all I need."

"When we've come to the end of our hoarded resources, our Father's full giving has only begun."

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

LESSON THREE: CHARACTER NOT REPUTATION - Text: Genesis 39:1-9

1. Difference between Reputation and Character

(a) Reputation is what you want other people to think you are and what you do when they are looking.

(b) Character is who you really are and what you do when you think nobody is looking.

2. People that God uses to bring His salvation and blessing to others have character, not only reputation.

(a) Joseph demonstrated character during a time of intense temptation (Genesis 39:1-9).

(b) The foundation of character: Genesis 39:9 - "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

(c) Have you heard the story about the Chicken Thief?

One night a chicken thief went out to steal some chicken from his neighbor's poultry farm. He looked to his right, he saw nobody there; he looked to his left, nobody; he looked to his back and to his front, nobody there. So he stretched out his hands to grab a chicken, but before he could take the chicken, he heard a voice from above, saying: "You forgot to look up here!"

(d) This is the meaning of Genesis 39:9, when Joseph told Mrs. Potiphar: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God." He was always looking up, and he knew that God was always looking down on him. That is character.

3. Character -- this is the one necessary qualification for usefulness in God's kingdom.

(a) Jesus always lived by this principle (John 8:29; 14:30,31)

(b) The apostle Paul modeled this principle (1 Cor. 10:31; 11:1; Colossians 3:22-24).

4. APPLICATION: To have godly Character...

(a) We must first receive Christ as Savior and Lord in our hearts.

(b) As Christians we must make sure that we have surrendered our life totally to the Lordship of Christ and we are filled with the Holy Spirit, walking by the Holy Spirit, and serving God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

LESSON FOUR:

GOD EQUIPS WHOM HE SELECTS - Text: Genesis 39:1-9

Lesson 4: God Equips whom He Elects

Let's review the lessons we have so far discovered from the life of Joseph::

Lesson 1: Have God's Dream for Your Life: God will make you into a person who will bring His salvation to others.

Lesson 2: Give Up Your Multi-colored Dreamcoat: This has a double application: (a) The Self & Self-Serving Goals and Attitudes ("Your Dreamcoat") must be replaced by Christ's Servant Spirit. (b) You must come to the end of your abilities & resources, and learn to depend on God alone.

Lesson 3: You Must Have Character, Not Merely Reputation

Our lesson today: God Equips Whom He Elects - Genesis 39:17-23

God prepares -- trains and equips -- those He selects as instruments for His work. Joseph was selected to do a special work for God; and God gave him special preparation.

1. UNDERGRADUATE COURSE: He obtained his "undergraduate degree" as a slave in the house of Potiphar. He could have stayed in that capacity for life, but that was not God's destiny for him. So God sent him to graduate school.

2. GRADUATE SCHOOL:

(a) It is very interesting how God engineered Joseph's entry into "graduate school". God caused a very painful experience to come into the life of Joseph. He was accused falsely and sent to prison for a crime he did not commit. If you were Joseph, what would be your attitude -- toward people who treat you unjustly? toward God who allows this injustice to happen?

(b) Joseph, as a normal person, most probably had the same feelings of hurt and doubt that we have. This was already part of graduate school.

COURSE #1: Trust God even when you don't understand what He is doing.

COURSE #2: Trust God with your reputation; don't worry about what people say about you; just be sure that God's approval is on your life. This doesn't mean we should ignore other people. This means that when people misunderstand, we must learn to leave our character and reputation in God's hand and trust Him to vindicate us in the end.

COURSE #3: Forgiving others. The Genesis story does not tell us precisely at this point that Joseph learned to forgive Mr. and Mrs. Potiphar for doing injustice to him. But looking forward to Genesis 50:19-20, we know that God made Joseph to go through this difficult course of learning to forgive even the worst crime that others had done to him.

NOTE: This is a KEY LESSON for all of us, if we are to go on in our Christian life. Not only in the ministry, but more foundationally in our growth in discipleship. The Lord laid down a non-negotiable principle in Matthew 6:14-15: Our ability to receive and experience God's forgiveness depends on our willingness to forgive others.

Let me ask you a very personal question: IS THERE SOMEONE WHO HAS HURT YOU SO MUCH THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED YOU WILL NEVER FORGIVE THAT PERSON AND YOU WILL NOT FORGET WHAT HE/SHE DID TO YOU?

God says to you, "FORGIVE or your Father in heaven will not forgive you."

But you say: "That person did a terrible thing to me?"

Christ answers: "When I was hanging on the cross, my enemies did the most terrible thing to me. But I forgave them. And I died on the cross in order to forgive you."

There are some young people who feel that their parents have failed them. You must forgive your parents.

Maybe, it's a family member or relative that you need to forgive.

Never mind who that person is: God says: Forgive and you will be forgiven. In other words, only as you forgive will you be able to receive God's forgiveness.

COURSE #4: Graduate Degree in Management

God was preparing Joseph to become ruler over the whole nation of Egypt. He already had an undergraduate degree in management from the house of Potiphar. We might say that he learned to manage a family business. But managing the whole nation is like managing a multi-national corporation. And God knew Joseph had to go to graduate school of business management. And where was this university?

God sent Joseph to a special school to prepare and equip him for his future great work. The University of the Royal Prison!

Note: This was the prison for royal prisoners -- not common criminals; persons like the king's butler and baker; included most probably were other former government officers. Through interaction with these educated prisoners he was getting a "graduate education": (a) about the ins and outs of the kingdom; (b) in human relations and psychology; (c) an MBA degree.

Other examples of people trained by God:

Moses: why was he in the wilderness for 40 years? Because he had to lead the nation of Israel in the desert for 40 years!

Young David: why a shepherd with only a sling as a weapon? Because one day he would kill a giant with that sling, and he would shepherd a nation.

Even Jesus had to go through a period of education and training - Luke 2:51,52.

APPLICATION

God has a special place of ministry prepared for us; He will make sure that we will get the necessary preparation and equipment. Young people, you must value the importance of:

(a) the normal process of education; learn all you can now in school;

(b) a life-long love for learning; keep on learning; NEVER STOP LEARNING!

(c) sensitivity and teachability towards God's on-going training program -- fair or unfair, whether we understand it or not, every situation and person that God allows in our life are part of the training program. Pray: "Lord, what are you teaching me in this situation -- or through this person?"

(d) serving the Lord NOW. God has already equipped you to serve Him in LITTLE WAYS now with your present education, experience and position (Esther 4:13,14). As you serve Him faithfully today, He will continue to equip you for that ultimate life-work He wants you to do tomorrow (Luke 16:10-12).

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

LESSON FIVE:

SUBMIT TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Text: Genesis 40:5-23; 41:1-44; 50:15-21

Review:

Lesson 1: Have God's Dream for Your Life: God will make you into a person who will bring His salvation to others.

Lesson 2: Give Up Your Multi-colored Dreamcoat: (a) The Self & Self-Serving Goals and Attitudes ("Your Dreamcoat") must be replaced by Christ's Servant Spirit. (b) Come to the end of your abilities & resources, and learn to depend on God alone.

Lesson 3: We Must Have Character, Not Merely Reputation

Lesson 4: God Equips Whom He Selects.

Today's Lesson: Submit to God's Sovereign Love and Power

People that God uses to bring His salvation and blessing to others need to learn to Submit to God's Sovereign Love and Power.

A. First of all, they need to learn to submit to GOD'S SOVEREIGN TIMING.

1. God is the God of Time and Purpose (Gen. 1:14-15; 15:13-16; Eccl. 3:1-8, 11; Daniel 2:20,21; 12:9-13; Habakkuk 2:2,3; Gal. 4:4,5; Rev. 9:13-15;10:5-7)

2. Time and Purpose in the Life of Christ (Galatians 4:4,5; John 2:4; 7:6, 30; 13:1; 17:1; 18:4; Luke 23:52; Acts 1:6-8).

3. Time and Purpose in the Life of People (Acts 17:26-27; 13:36)

3. Joseph had to learn to wait for God's time and God's way and God's purpose (Genesis 40:5-23). He hoped that the person he had helped (the king's butler) would obtain his release from prison. He did not know God was not interested in merely releasing him from prison. God was working out events ON THE STAGE OF WORLD HISTORY, preparing for the time to raise him from prison to the throne (Psalm 105:16-22). Had the king's butler gotten him out of prison, where do you think Joseph would have ended up? Most probably back home with his father who would have become very angry with his brothers who would have become even more jealous of him. And then what?

4. APPLICATION: We too must learn to wait for God's time and God's way and God's purpose.

(a) Today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2)

(b) Today is the day of consecration (Romans 13:11-14)

(c) Everyday is the day of preparation (1 Peter 3:15)

(cd) You are probably going through a very difficult time now. Always remember that God is preparing you for your life-work, like John the Baptist (Luke 1:80; 3:1-3).

B. Second, we need to learn to trust in GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN MAKING ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD.

1. In the life of Joseph this lesson is illustrated very clearly in Genesis 50:15-21. Joseph summarized the lesson in Genesis 50:20: "But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

2. How do we actually apply this lesson in our life?

(a) We must learn to thank God for everything (Ephesians 5:20) and in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18) because we know that God works out His purpose in everything for our good (Romans 8:28), although we may not immediately see or ever see God's purpose or our good.

(b) We must avoid getting mad at God, or avoid ever doubting God. We must not say, "Why did God do this to me?" Remember, nothing can touch you except as it is permitted by the nail-pierced hands (John 10:28,29).

(c) We must forgive and bless people who hurt us; we should avoid hating them or becoming bitter against them (Ephesians 6:12; Matt. 5:44).

(d) We must keep loving and serving God, and we must keep looking to Jesus the best way we know how, no matter what happens (Hebrews 12:1,2).

4. ILLUSTRATIONS of how God worked to make all things work together for good.

(a) Ancient times: Job in the Old Testament (Job 1:9,10).

(b) Modern times: Joni Earickson Tada - As a Christian teenager she became a quadriplegic because of a diving accident. But she praises God today because God prepared her for a special ministry to handicapped people all around the world and their families.

(c) For eternity: Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22-24, 36). The Cross was probably the greatest symbol of defeat in all of time and eternity -- EXCEPT that God turned the Cross into eternal victory because of the redemption that it accomplished!

FINAL CHALLENGE

Are you ready to become God's "JOSEPH" for your time?

Are you willing to learn these five lessons from the life of Joseph?

Lesson 1: Have God's Dream for Your Life: God will make you into a person who will bring His salvation to others.

Lesson 2: Give Up Your Multi-colored Dreamcoat: (a) The Self & Self-Serving Goals and Attitudes ("Your Dreamcoat") must be replaced by Christ's Servant Spirit. (b) Come to the end of your abilities & resources, and learn to depend on God alone.

Lesson 3: We Must Have Character, Not Merely Reputation

Lesson 4: God Equips Whom He Selects.

Lesson 5: Submit to God's Sovereign Love and Power

WE MAY SUMMARIZE ALL THESE LESSONS INTO ONE CHALLENGE:

WILL YOU BE FAITHFUL IN YOUR DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING NOW?