

The Gospel According to Joseph: The Hidden God

October 18, 2015

To encounter Christ together,
To share our lives with one another,
To sacrificially care for those God has placed in our path.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Great is Thy Faithfulness by Chisholm

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer.)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou has been, Thou forever will be.

Chorus

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love
Chorus

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
Chorus

Icebreaker

If you could hop in a DeLorean (*If you're gonna build a time machine into a car, why not do it with some style?*)
and travel 22 years into the future, what would you want to know about your life ahead?

Text for Discussion: Genesis 37:2-11,23-35

²Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. ⁵Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. ⁹Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" ¹¹And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

²³So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes ³⁰and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?" ³¹Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³²And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." ³⁴Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

What so often undermines our faith is our personal experience – the conflict and hardship, the tragedy and sadness – making it difficult to reconcile a benevolent God with a malevolent world. Joseph's story is one of the most beloved of the Bible. It's easy to skip to its conclusion, and say, "Didn't it all work out? Didn't God use it all for good?" But to do so cheapens this deeply human story, for through it we find truths and answers to our own times of hardship:

1 – Don't be surprised when we don't understand. God's ways are long and hidden. What may seem a series of coincidences in Joseph's life, perfectly align so that 22 years later, two great cultures (Israel/Egypt) may be saved and their futures ensured in the face of a horrific drought. And how are we to interpret the events of our own lives? Are they random? Or is God at work? Is God shadowy and distant? Does God watch us, rewarding or punishing our actions? Or is there a personal, almighty, benevolent God who wants us to know Him and trust Him with every detail of our lives because He is big enough to be able to wield even the terrible, evil things of our world, weaving them into something beautiful and good for those who love Him?

2 – God's ways may often be hidden, but they are always good. We can trust that nothing is in our path that is not for good. God loves us so much that, yes, sometimes he will allow pain to enter our lives. Some may respond, "Well if that's the deal, I opt out." But what none of us can opt out of is pain. Will we face this pain alone, perhaps with a few friends? Or will we turn to God and find that He is near, offering us rest? To our anguished questions, God doesn't give us an airtight argument. He gives us a perfect person, Jesus, who like Joseph was cast down before He would be raised up and return in glory to save the world. If we will but turn to Him, we too can learn to say "I live to show His power, Who once did bring my joys to weep and now my griefs to sing."

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

What role do you believe God has in your experiences and circumstances?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

1. Do you have life experience(s) that make it difficult for you to stand firm in your faith?
2. Looking to this week's passage, what sins did Joseph, his brothers and Jacob each contribute to create the terrible family situation? How do the brothers illustrate James 3:14-16?
 - o Have you seen certain sins "passed down" in families? Have you received any? To what extent are you responsible for others' sins against you and their effect in your life?
3. In what way does Joseph's story point us to Christ? *(Acts 7 can help with this question).*
4. **Guiding Question:** What role do you believe God has in your experiences and circumstances?
 - o Is there an experience in your life you can point to that shows God is great? That God is good?
 - o Has a prayer ever gone unanswered, which (after a time) you could see God's goodness in?
 - o Does knowing that God's ways are "long and hidden" change how you think about prayer?

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Read Psalm 121 together. Praise God for His sovereignty, His care, and His unfailing love for us.
- How can you as a Community Group support and encourage one another through difficult times? Pray that God would work through each of you to grow the care, the trust and the support of your group.

Community Group Announcement

As our church grows, so does our need for people to start and lead new Community Groups. If you're curious about what that means, or you're just interested in making your own group better... this is for you. Attending does not commit you to leading, but if you are interested in leading a group this is the necessary first step:

New Leader Training

Saturday, November 7th: 9:30am – 1:30pm

<http://pacificcrossroads.org/new-leader-training/>