

OPTICS



THE LIFE OF JOSEPH IN FOCUS

Optics: The Life of Joseph in Focus

Presbyopia: Nothing But Hope

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Discussion Notes

The Crossing Church

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OPENING

Today we are kicking off a short, but powerful three-week series dealing with this topic: how you and I see the world and our lives, through the lens of what we KNOW about God and our relationship WITH God. As we grow older, one of the changes we experience is not being able to see clearly. Sometimes the images are blurry just as we see the present as fuzzy and the future out of focus. Today we are looking at Joseph and doing some foundational corrective work on the optics through which we see things: the two lenses of our perspective and God's promise. The life of Joseph as presented in Genesis is one of hopefulness even under the most dire circumstances. He didn't allow his view of life to be blurred by the situations in which he found himself, but he remained hopeful because he believed that with a great God there is great hope.

SCRIPTURE¹

Genesis 37:3-8 "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age, and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: we were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.' His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said."

Genesis 37:23-28 "So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe - the ornate robe he was wearing - and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, 'What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.' His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt."

Genesis 39:1-4 "Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned."

Genesis 39:20-23 "Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did."

Genesis 40:4-8 "After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men - the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison - had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, 'Why do you look so sad today?' 'We both had dreams,' they answered, 'but there is no one to interpret them.' "

¹ All scripture listed is NIV unless otherwise indicated

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Genesis 40:20-23 “Now the third day was Pharaoh’s birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials. He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand - but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation. The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.”

Romans 8:35, 37, 38-39 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

OBSERVATION

Joseph’s complete trust in God gave him the strength to endure terrible circumstances and to hope for a better future. When his circumstances improved beyond anything he could have imagined, he humbly gave God the glory because he knew that God had been with him in prison and was still with him in brilliance. His vision was clear because he could see God clearly.

Question: What is going on in your life today that you are seeing through blurred vision?

APPLICATION

Through all of Joseph’s trials the Lord was with Him. He was sold by his brothers, falsely accused, thrown into prison for eleven years, and he was forgotten for two more years. Even in those circumstances, Joseph carried himself well. He emerged as a leader and someone who could be trusted. God was with him.

Question: Most of us have lived through a season of life where we have struggled with hope. Tell us about that season of your life.

Sometimes our problems seem bigger than the size of God’s promises. We may be looking for that promise of hope in God, but it seems elusive. We may actually be looking for happiness instead of hope. We have created a formula for happiness that looks like this: good circumstances = good feeling. But this is a flawed formula. The Bible doesn’t have a formula for happiness, instead it has a promise of hope. Hope is independent of our circumstances. As long as we believe we have a great God, which we do in Jesus, we have great hope because hope transcends our circumstances.

Question: When you experience difficult circumstances, where does your hope lie?

Question: What promise of God did you take hold of in your circumstance?

The Bible tells us that NOTHING can separate us from God when we become his children. This is a promise we can count on no matter what is going on in this life. Remember that this life is fleeting and we are here for a brief visit. Our future is with God in heaven and the disappointments of this life will be forgotten.

Question: In the past, before you met Jesus, what did you believe could separate you from God?

Question: Under what circumstances have you felt separated from God?

We often think that the difficulties of this life are related to how God views us. Regret looks backward - Anxiety looks around - hope looks forward. We can get beyond our feelings of guilt and regret when we remember this - we are more than conquerors and we have work to do for the Kingdom! God’s view of us is seen through the blood of Christ and our sins are covered as a result of His sacrifice for us.

Question: What is your reaction to this statement: my circumstances must be a reflection of how God feels about me. Have you been living as though this statement is true?

At the Crossing we are a church with a wide diversity of opinions and perspectives on the issues that surround us, but we have a hope that is great and a God who is greater.

Question: What have you said to someone whose life hasn’t been particularly smooth? What hope or promise of God have you offered them?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, too often we look to our circumstances for our measure of happiness. Yet we know that our joy comes from You alone and that nothing can separate us from You. Help us to be obedient and always look forward because You are with us and You love us beyond measure. In Jesus’ name. Amen.