

Juxtaposition

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Date: 26 April 2015

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Lovely to be with you. We're going to start our series proper, Joseph and the Gospel of Many Colors.

This was one of those weeks where I started on Monday, and I didn't really get the passage until Wednesday afternoon, having spent a lot of time in it, and I hope as we look at it you'll see some of the hard work that's gone into putting this together.

It's called juxtaposition. This is Zionachana. That's his name. He is the head of the biggest family in the world.

He's also the head of a polygamous Christian cult known as Chana, after himself. He has 39 wives, 94 children, 14 daughters-in-law, and 33 grandchildren.

The family live in a 100-room, four-story house in Bekawang village in India. The family, all 167 of them, are organized with military precision.

[1 : 16] A normal evening meal requires 30 chickens, 132 pounds of potatoes, and 220 pounds of rice. The interview that Zionachana did with the Guardian newspaper.

He was asked, how does your family stay together? And he said, my family is a harmonious picture of mutual love, care, and respect.

My family is a harmonious picture of mutual love, care, and respect. Well, as we climb into Genesis chapter 37, and the beginning of the Joseph story proper, we see Jacob has 35 less wives, 81 less children.

But it is anything but a picture of mutual love, care, and respect. It is a messy, grisly, sordid, and divided rabble of schemers, murderers, liars, and haters.

It is reading portions of Scripture like the ones we're about to read that we have caused to doubt whether 2 Timothy 3 verse 16 is true. We're forced to ask, is this really inspired Scripture?

[2 : 41] Is this really breathed out by God? Is it actually useful to us? How can it correct us, teach us? What will it do to train us in righteousness?

Well, my hope is by the time that we all leave tonight, we'll go, this is a real portion of Scripture. This isn't just something that Moses inserted to fill up the pages because he wanted to get 50 chapters as a nice round number.

But for that to happen, we need God's help. So why don't we pray together? Paul rejoiced that whilst in Ephesus, he said, I have proclaimed the whole counsel of God and not shrug back.

So Lord, as we come to this section of your word, that we would in all honesty prefer to skip over, would you speak to us through it? Would you do it for Jesus' sake?

And in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you've got a Bible, please turn to Genesis chapter 37. So we're going to call chapter 37 the white sheep of the family.

[3 : 52] The white sheep of the family referring to Joseph, who seems to be a stellar example of faithfulness amidst a rabble of black sheep.

First thing I'd love you to do is look at chapter 37 verse 2. Do you see how that starts? This is the account of Jacob's family line. That phrase is what's called a toledoth saying.

And there's 11 of them in Genesis. The first one's in chapter 2 verse 4, where it says these are the generations of how the earth came into being. The second one is chapter 5 verse 1, where it says these are the generations of Adam.

And then we get all the characters that we mentioned last week with this toledoth saying. Chapter 37 verse 2 is the last toledoth saying, the 11th toledoth saying in Genesis.

And it refers to Jacob and his family. In fact, Genesis 37 verse 2 is the last toledoth saying in the whole of the Old Testament.

[4 : 54] Because from this moment on, the entire story will be focused around this genealogy. The genealogy of Jacob, whose name is changed to Israel, and God's dealing with them throughout the remaining 38 books of the Old Testament.

There's one other toledoth saying in the Bible. And it comes in Matthew chapter 1 verse 1. This is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

That when God does a new thing through his son to create a new Israel, there's a new toledoth saying. And a new toledoth saying that we're all a part of.

As those welcomed as children of God through the Lord Jesus. When God starts a new thing with a new Israel formed in and through his son. He says, I want to mark this.

This is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah. And so we move on and we learn about Joseph. It's funny that it's Jacob's family, but the first character we're introduced to is Joseph.

[6 : 08] And actually he's going to be the main character for the remaining 13 chapters of the book of Genesis. He has more ink written about him in Genesis than anybody else.

He is a big player. And we're all very familiar with the story. When I was growing up, we were one of the posh families who had a car with a CD player.

And the only CD we actually owned was Joseph and his Technicolor Dreamcoat. So by the age of 12, I could pretty much recite the whole thing by heart. And I would give you a rendition, but I am keen that you'll stay and not depart.

Joseph is the ostracized brother. And I think as we see the first 11 verses unfold, we see just how ostracized he is. Do you see in the remainder of verse 2, he's working with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.

That these are the sons of the two slave women, Rachel's slave and Leah's slave. That it seems like even amongst the legitimate brothers, the daughters of Rachel and Leah, and the daughters of the slave women, he seems to be thrown towards the slave women.

[7 : 25] That he seems to be treated by his brothers as not the real deal, not a legitimate son. And then verse 3, we read now, Israel, Jacob loved Joseph more than any of the others.

Jacob loves Joseph most, even though he's the 11th born son. He loves him the most. Why does he love him the most? Well, the passage says because he was born to Jacob in his old age.

But also he's the first son of Rachel. Jacob's one true love. The one that he really wanted to marry. The one that he worked 14 years in order that he could be married to her.

Do we love that passage in Genesis? One of the most romantic bits in the Bible. That Joseph worked for seven years, but it seemed like merely days because his love for Rachel was so great. And so Joseph, Rachel's firstborn son, becomes his favorite. And isn't it strange how Jacob repeats the sins of his father, Isaac?

[8 : 39] That what predetermined Jacob's early life? Well, it was the fact that Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob. And here we are, the sins of fathers repeated in their children.

That Jacob loves Joseph most. And he wants to show this, he wants to mark this by giving Joseph a coat of many colors.

Although to really ruin it for you, the Hebrew doesn't really suggest many colors. It simply says many threads. And lots of people are coming around to the idea that it's not many threads of many colors, but many threads.

Because it was a long-sleeved coat that went down to his ankles. It was an ornate robe. And the significance is enormous. Because you give this coat to somebody in middle management.

You give this coat to somebody who's not going to be scrabbling around doing the manual labor. What Joseph is actually doing in this passage is he's giving Joseph a promotion.

[9 : 52] He's promoting him from amongst his brothers to be an overseer over his brothers. And do you see this? Joseph, who's already ostracized by his brothers, that's been compounded massively.

That's been compounded massively by somebody being promoted from among their peers. And so hatred, the spark of jealousy is turned to an inferno of hatred.

Joseph compounds the issue. God gives him a dream of these sheaves bowing down to Joseph. Joseph sheaves.

And then there's picture of the stars bowing down to Joseph with the moon and the sun as well. So it's compounded.

The gap, the gulf that existed between them is widening and widening and widening. Do you see how many times it says that they hated him? Look at verse 4.

[10:55] They hated him and could not speak a kind word about him. Verse 5. They hated him all the more. Verse 8. End of. And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Verse 11. His brothers were jealous of him. This is absolute hatred for their brother Joseph. And so it moves on in verse 12 that Joseph now has this executive role.

So while all his brothers go to do the heavy serious shepherding, Joseph stays at home to do the paperwork and play minesweeper on the PC. And he's not until it comes that Jacob wants Joseph to go and do a sight visit.

Until he says, I think it's time you went to check on the flock and your brothers as well. This is a very serious, this is a very dangerous and very distant mission.

It's dangerous because of the place. the place they're camped is Shechem. This has real significance because back in Genesis chapter 34, a guy called Shechem steals the brother sister Dina.

[12:21] He abducts her, he defiles her and he tries to make her his wife. And Simeon and Levi deceive the Shechemites as they say, yeah, you can have our sister but we insist that you're all circumcised.

And so all the Shechemites are circumcised and while they're still sore, it says, after the third day, Levi and Simeon butcher them all. And then as they're all dead, all the other brothers come and they plunder the city.

And now Jacob is sending Joseph to this place to check up on those brothers who are shepherding the flock there. It's also distant that where Jacob and Joseph are and where Shechem is is about 50 miles.

That's a long journey by foot to do a site visit. And Joseph in response says the only words he says in the whole chapter.

He says as it's put in the NIV very well, the literal is here I am. It's the word of an obedient son carrying out the will of their father.

[13:41] So obediently Joseph goes on the long and dangerous journey to do a site inspection. And he gets to Shechem and there's no flocks and there's no brothers.

Now if Joseph was a legalist he'd go home at that point. I remember growing up that my mum told me to tidy my room.

So I did but I simply took all the mess out of my room and threw it on the landing. And I said to my mum my room is tidy. The landing that's your business. It hurt a lot.

That's what legalists do. They do just enough. Joseph gets to Shechem there's no brothers he should have gone home. But he chats to a man who says they've gone to Dothan. Dothan's another 13 miles.

50 plus 13 is a 63 mile journey. And his brothers see him coming. A plan is hatched and then they know by killing Joseph they will end his delusions of grandeur.

[14:50] and will certainly make sure that the dream of bowing down to him will never happen. Reuben seems to be like a good guy because he steps in.

He says let's not get blood on our hands let's just throw him in the pit and leave him to die. Although it seems from the reading of verse 29 that Reuben wants to come back later and save Joseph.

Perhaps to get back in Jacob's good books having already slept with Bilhah Jacob's wife in chapter 35 verse 22. So Reuben thinks if he can bring Joseph back unharmed he'll be back in the good books.

So they strip him and they throw him in the pit and then they care so little that they have lunch. They sat down for a sandwich verse 25 and then an Ishmaelite caravan arrives and Judah sees a way not just not to get blood on his hands but to make a pretty penny as well.

And so Joseph is sold for 20 pieces of silver and then they deceive Jacob they kill a goat they dip in his robe they take it back to their dad and they play the innocent we found this do you know whose it is and Jacob is utterly inconsolable well that's the famous story but what do we make of it what sort of things are we supposed to make of this is it the application that if your brothers are shepherding in the distance don't go is it try and drive a higher price with the Ishmaelites if you're selling your brother what are we to do well I think there's three things that I think massively help us

in this passage this passage is there to help us with and to teach us here's the first obedience doesn't mean comfort obedience doesn't mean comfort

[17 : 12] Moses is very clear in this passage he gives nothing about how Joseph feels what Joseph does it says nothing about whether he's stirring them all the time by playing the superiority cards it says nothing that every time he came into his brother's presence he was wearing the robe and pretending that he was on a Milan catwalk none of that all it simply says is Joseph was obedient Joseph obeyed and at every point Joseph obeys things didn't get better for him they got worse he did exactly what was expected of him and at every point he paid the price same in our lives obedience being obedient to the Lord Jesus is no guarantee of a comfortable life in fact obedience to Jesus leads to more hatred being despised being spoken against being ridiculed being belittled than if you just stay quiet and fit in obedience does not mean comfort comforts and unless we know that we'll be surprised when it gets tough we'll be surprised when the road gets rough and steep we'll be like the seed that falls on the rocky ground that will receive the word with joy but have no root so when tribulation and persecution arise on account of the gospel immediately we'll fall away there is a real cost to following

Jesus a tangible cost to being obedient to him and unless we realize that we will not weather the storm unless we see that obedience to Jesus is the most important thing that comes at the highest price we'll always sit down remain quiet and blend in point number two God is never mentioned but everywhere present God is never mentioned but everywhere present I think what we see in this chapter is that God is awesome in his providence though he is not mentioned we see his hand in every sentence every act moving his pieces around the board so that Joseph will be in just the right place when the crunch time comes providence according to the Westminster confession says this providence is that

God the creator of all things does uphold direct dispose and govern all creatures actions and things from the greatest even to the least by his most wise and holy care according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will to the praise of his wisdom power justice goodness and mercy let me just point out six examples of this number one Joseph is in a dysfunctional family that seems massively play into the unfolding of the story the presentation of an ornate robe only widens the gulf between Joseph and his brothers meaning that when we get to crunch point they want to kill him or at least sell him point three he gets to Shechem and it just so happens there's a man in Shechem who knows where his brothers are in Dothan number four they throw him in a cistern and Moses is so clear the cistern was empty there was no water in it Joseph wasn't treading water until the Ishmaelites arrived there was no water in it point five the caravan arrived at just the right time point six last verse he ended up being sold to Potiphar one of Pharaoh's officials the captain of the guard some people will say this is just chance it's just happenstance but I think Moses is inviting us to see it as providence God is not like some grand chess master who sees what's happening and then reacts but God knows the end from the beginning he knows how the story is to unfold yes everyone does what they see fit to do but they only actually end up doing what God has predestined to happen an awesome providence God's hand of providence moving the pieces around the board for his glory and the ultimate blessing of many many people and it's the same in your life

God very seldom at least in my life miraculously intervenes in my day to day that never happens really but he is providentially guiding each of our lives providing what we need bringing chance encounters with people for whom we can influence for the Lord Jesus providentially bringing into our lives a church family whom we can walk through life with to encourage us and spur us on to love and good deeds but we need eyes to see it or else we'll miss it that God is doing infinitely more behind our backs than he is in front of our face and it's only as we look back and see his kindness his goodness his sovereignty and his providence in our lives that we really start to give him thanks for all that he's been doing point three this is a shadow story in Hebrews it talks about things that happened in the Old

[23 : 32] Testament are like shadows of things to come this story about an obedient son who goes on a long journey out of obedience to his father who ends up being rejected by his own and sold for silver and suffers at the hands of wicked men yet ultimately leads to saving many is a shadow of a better story a better story of a greater obedient son who goes on a greater journey from the glories of heaven to the squalor of earth who came to his own and his own did not receive him who was betrayed for silver into the hands of wicked men who nailed him to a cross and through this God

would be pleased to save many even you and me now we need to be very careful when we read the old testament that we don't allegorize that we don't try and see Jesus under every stone and round every corner in every symbol but I think if we read

Acts 7 and Stephen's speech before he gets stoned this is exactly what he says that just as Joseph was rejected by his brothers so you rejected the Lord of life the Messiah when he came that's exactly how Stephen uses the story and so we see that Joseph is the white sheep of the family and we learn that obedience doesn't mean comfort that God is never mentioned but everywhere present and that it's a shadow a type of things to come and so if you thought that was grisly chapter 38 knocks the socks off it well it seems like a very strange interlude doesn't it like we had Joseph who we know about and he ends up in Egypt and we're expecting Potiphar's wife but we get this really awkward interlude about Judah in this rather sordid chain of events

Judah's debauchery is put before the unfolding of the rest of the story yet it is an important link not just in the Joseph story but in the remainder of our Bible and I want to just take five minutes to show you why the first thing we see is this that Judah goes down it's written even more explicit than it captures it in the NIV it says Judah went down from his family and he turned aside to see his friend the Adolamite named Hira he went down and he turned aside and the way that language is always used is about rebellion the rest of the Bible is the same word used of Jonah who goes down to Joppa and down into the ship it's that same idea Judah is leaving the covenant family and the covenant land saying

I want nothing to do with any of you now he's turned aside and then we see his lust he saw he took he went into her it's that explicit he sees Shua he took Shua he went in to Shua and Shua is a Canaanite the very people who are not to marry God's chosen people we see the length that Abraham goes to to get a wife for Isaac who's not from the surrounding region do you know that great story where the servant goes and he hangs out on the side of town and this girl comes along and she waters his camels so he thinks she must be the one because Isaac is to marry one of God's covenant people and here we see Judah going completely the other way it's a rapid decline Judah isolates himself and we see so quickly he gets into all sorts of trouble see that in our church don't we that people isolate themselves and they wander away and all too quickly the decline is rapid I wonder if God would place on our hearts those that we used to see a lot and now not so much and I wonder if he would send us to reach out to them and bring them back before they get into deep and desperate difficulty he takes Shua as a wife and they have three sons and it seems when it comes to registering the birth Judah's lost for word so he calls the first one Ah he calls the second one Onan and then he calls his third son Sheila which doesn't sound like a very masculine name for a boy either and then he sets about getting them all married and so Ur marries Tamar there's only one problem though verse 7

[28 : 54] Ur Judah's firstborn was wicked in the Lord's sight so the Lord put him to death he's judged in real time and in this sight they have Levirate marriage although Levirate marriage isn't going to be written down until Leviticus 25 where that if your elder brother dies your responsibility is to marry his wife and to bring her into the family home and provide heirs most famous example of that is Ruth and Boaz and so Tamar marries Onan the only problem is is that Onan is also evil and he is killed he wants to not produce an heir for Ur and the Lord judges him verse 10 so the Lord put him to death also so it seems that Tamar's last hope of a husband and having offspring for Ur is Sheila but

Judah's afraid that Tamar is a witch and so in verse 11 he deceives Tamar Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar live as a widow in your father's household until my son Sheila grows up but as an excuse for he thought he might die too just like his brothers so Tamar rather than live in the house to which he had come is sent back to where she had come from Judah has no intention of Tamar marrying Sheila so what's going to happen to Tamar well it seems that a long period unfolds and Shua Judah's wife dies and after Judah had recovered from his grief he went up to Timna to the men who were shearing his sheep and his friend Hiru the Adolamite went with him and Tamar gets word of Judah's travel plans and she disguises herself as a prostitute lures her father-in-law is going to be paid a goat gets left his signet ring his cord and his staff as a down payment a guarantee and so

Judah goes home sends a servant with the goat can't find this temple prostitute and so the goat remains it's very interesting as I look this week the goat seemed to play a pretty big part in this family line if you remember when Jacob deceived Isaac that he was Esau what did he do he put

goat's fur on his arms to make him look hairy back in chapter 37 when it seemed that Joseph had been killed by wild animals what did they do they dipped his coat in goat's blood and here we find a goat at the centre of a deception as well I don't think I don't know if that's significant I'll just put it out there as a freebie the truth is found out that somebody says to

Judah your daughter in law is guilty of prostitution and as a result she is now pregnant Judah said bring her out and let her be burned to death seems so one-sided doesn't it I mean Judah was hardly a man of restraint when he was going up to shear his cattle the minute he gets wind of it he goes we need a bonfire but you see Tamar's ahead of the game she sent a message I am pregnant to the man who owns these and Judah's mortified truth is found out that the deception's unveiled and Judah is undone so what do we make of this how do we apply this to our lives I think three things again firstly I think Moses has done something really clever in his editorial work that he's juxtaposed Judah's unrestraint Judah's debauchery and what are we going to learn next we're going to learn about Joseph's restraint and his celibacy that again he's showing Joseph's unusual obedience his unusual character over and over against the mire and the pit that he comes from that his faithfulness shines out all the more against the backdrop of the family that he comes from first one juxtaposition Judah's debauchery set aside set against Joseph's celibacy secondly I think this is a real turning point in Judah's life we saw in chapter 37 that Judah was quite keen on making a quick buck from his brother that he has ten brothers in the field he's thinking two pieces of silver that's a great day's work we see him here he's not exactly a knight in shining armour he's a rat bag but we see in chapter 28 verse 26 a real turning point

[34 : 43] Judah recognised them and said she is more righteous than I since I wouldn't give her to my son Shailah she is more righteous than I this is an omission of guilt on Judah's part his omission of sin you could say that this is repentance and actually we're going to see that this is a defining moment in Judah's life before chapter 38 verse 26 he is a rapper the next time we're going to see him he is Jacob's chief carer he's going to be the one who says no I'll take Benjamin's place and we're going to see that this confession of guilt is the hinge on which that transformation happens repentance is always the hinge on which transformation happens that when we come to God and say do you know what I've messed up

I'm guilty and deserve nothing and yet there's Jesus that's when transformation happens repentance is key in Judah's life lastly and with this we're done Judah is a key inclusion as we looked at last week it is through Judah that the promised seed would come Ruth chapter 4 verse 18 will take this son who seems to just pip his brother to the post to be born is in Ruth chapter 4 verse 18 and it's from Peres we go down and we go down and we get to Obed and Obed is the father of David we see back in Matthew chapter 1 that Tamar is included in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus so significant because Tamar's a Gentile and an outsider and yet we see that the promise to Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed happens three generations later it's almost as though Jesus is choosing his ancestors to show the kind of people whom his death would mean salvation for to show the depth and breadth of his exhaustible grace because there's four women in

Jesus's genealogy Tamar a Gentile who pretends to be a prostitute Rahab a Gentile who is actually a prostitute Ruth who is an outsider not a prostitute but a Moabite who's a descendant of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter and Bathsheba who's an adulterer do you think that Jesus chooses his ancestors to show the inexhaustible grace that his death will mean for all who will come to him in repentance and faith you look at that genealogy and you see that there is no limit to God's grace that he pours it out he makes outsiders insiders he makes the unclean clean and he makes those without hope and without God in the world children of the living God who will inherit eternal life by grace through faith in Christ where do I pray

God Father God we do pray that your word would resonate with us as we go on from this place Father that what is your truth seared on our hearts would continue to reverberate in our lives Father that we would live in the light of grace that it would shape everything about us it would mean obedience Father it would mean counting the cost it would mean giving up comfort in order to be dangerous for the Lord Jesus Father may you use us this week to make outsiders insiders may you use us to make creatures of wrath into children of the living God and Father will you do it all for your glory by the power of your spirit in order that your grace would have effect in the lives of people in our life

Father do this for the glory of your son we pray in his mighty name Amen