

## **SERMON: 16 August 2020 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph tells his father and brothers that “God sent me before you to preserve life”.

Joseph was living in a time when life was being threatened. When the whole known world was experiencing a time of famine.

God speaks through him to save the people of Egypt and indeed the people of the nations.

When he gets the chance to interpret the Pharaoh’s dream he warns him that if he doesn’t act to preserve life then a great destruction would come.

Otherwise this famine will destroy the land  
(Genesis 41:36)

When I read this story I think to myself

If it hadn’t been for Joseph

In that place and that time

Things would have been disasterous.

We might think that that our prayer would be

O Lord send us a Joseph to save us

Because Joseph is the Jesus figure in the story

O lord send us a Jesus to save us

A Messiah

Hosanna. Save us Lord.

When of course God has done that very thing.

And this story foretells the Gospel in so many ways.

God has sent us a a Messiah

And God’s Messiah, Jesus, the Christ, comes to us still

In and through us and in and through one another

The Spirit of Christ working to bring life.

Jesus said I have come to bring life in abundance (John 10:10).

We may find ourselves in the wilderness  
but the promised land is coming nearer.

We may feel as if death is at work in us and all around  
but the spirit of resurrection is at work in us and through us.

We may be suffering at present but glory lies beyond.

We may see a decaying planet all around us by the renewal of creation has  
begun and will carry on to completion.

Heaven is on its way.

The earth will be filled with the glory as the waters cover the sea. Psalm  
72:19.

In the meantime we groan, we lament,  
In the Spirit and with the Spirit and with all of creation  
Groaning for all things to be renewed.

The Hebrew word used here for “preserve” life means (chawyeh) to flourish,  
enliven, revive, or sustain among other meanings.

God wants people to flourish.

God wants people to be enlivened.

God wants people to be revived.

God wants people be sustained.

**JOSEPH'S SUCCESS AND FAVOUR REVEALS THIS DESIRE THAT GOD  
HAS TO BLESS AND CAUSE TO FLOURISH**

Example - the success he has as servant in Potiphar's palace.

He was successful in whatever he turned his hand to, so he was put in charge  
of the affairs of the household.

And even when he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown in prison.

God shows him the same favour in prison. And he's put in charge of the affairs of the prison.

Until the day comes when he gets the chance to interpret the dreams of two fellow prisoners, one of whom promises to tell Pharaoh all about him when he gets out, but then forgets,

Until 2 years later the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt has a dream and the ex prisoner, who was his cup bearer, remembers that there is this Hebrew in prison who is able to interpret dream. He would be able to tell the king what his dream meant.

Joseph had had to wait in prison longer than he hoped.

But God was with him in the prison.

So when he emerges and is brought before the Pharaoh he puts Pharaoh right straight away by saying nits not him who can interpret dreams but only God can do so.

We know the story. He interprets the dream correctly and receives even more favour this time in the promotion he gets to be in charge of the affairs of the whole country, second only to the Pharaoh.

As Pharaoh put it,

"Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?"

(Genesis 41:38)

God's favour rested on Joseph wherever he found himself - whether in riches or in poverty.

In all things God was working for good, in and with the one who loves and trusts him.

N T Wright on that verse - emphasis is on working with God for (to be bring about) good.

With success and favour comes responsibility

You can see a progression in the responsibility that Joseph gets - from being in charge of a household to a prison to a palace and to a whole country and region.

Didn't Jesus say something about people using gifts and talents well and being put in charge of greater things?

Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things  
(Matthew 25:21)

Joseph was put in charge so that he, with God's help, could preserve life and bring life.

He could feed the hungry. He could help the poor. He could bring relief to those who were suffering.

All because God was working through him to bless those around him.

This help from God is highlighted most fully when his own family come to him in Egypt and bow before him, fulfilling the dream from some 20 or more years before.

God's grace and kindness is being ministered through Joseph.

And his brothers are humbled, changed by that grace.

It's the kindness of God that leads to repentance.

Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?  
(Romans 2:4)

Joseph's brothers are prepared to become slaves in Egypt rather than return home to Jacob without Benjamin.

They're no longer the brothers who would have thrown their own kin into the pit or sold them into slavery.

And Joseph is prepared to put all that behind him, and with God's help, forgive them totally and embrace them as if what had happened in the past had never happened.

He could see that God was working in him and through him to make all things good.

To feed the hungry.  
To help the poor.  
To bring relief to the suffering.  
These are the things God does.  
He has shown us what is good -

to do what is right, to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with your God  
(Micah 6:8)

The word *chavyeh* is very closely related to the word *yahveh*, the word we translate as Lord.

Jospeh makes use of the idea of lordship when he boldly claiming that

God has made me lord of all Egypt.

Joseph who was humiliated and rejected by his brothers; humbled by being sold into slavery and shown in prison;

Is now exalted by God and made lord of all.

This is yet another echo of the Gospel.

The one who was despised and humiliated, is exalted by God and made lord of all.

Paul uses similar language when he talks of Jesus as the supreme example of this humility

Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.  
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.  
When he appeared in human form,<sup>[d]</sup>  
he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.  
Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:6-11)

I believe what we need to hear in this is that the key to this flourishing, revival, enlivening and sustained life is embrace Christ as Lord.

So that, when Christ is Lord, then life happens.

When Christ is Lord, people flourish.

when Christ is Lord, people are enlivened.

when Christ is Lord, people are revived.

when Christ is Lord, people are sustained.

It's what God desires for us all.

And it's good news.

So let me finish by repeating what I said earlier

When Christ is Lord  
We may find ourselves in the wilderness  
but the promised land is coming nearer.

When Christ is Lord  
We may feel as if death is at work in us and all around  
but the spirit of resurrection is at work in us and through us.

When Christ is Lord  
We may be suffering at present but we know that glory lies beyond.

When Christ is Lord  
We may see a decaying planet all around us but we know that the renewal of  
creation has begun and will carry on to completion.

When Christ is Lord  
We know that Heaven is on its way.  
And the earth will be filled with glory.