

JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 2

Dangerous Dreams

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 37:2-11
Subject:	How Joseph reacted when he received two dreams from God about his brothers bowing down to him, even though they were acting in a hostile way toward him.
Complement:	He shared his dreams with them.
Exegetical idea:	Even though Joseph's brothers were acting in a hostile way toward him, when Joseph received two dreams from God about his brothers bowing down to him he shared those dreams with his brothers.
Homiletical idea:	There is a time to be silent and there is a time to speak the truth in love.
Purpose:	To convince my hearers that there is a time to speak the truth in love and there is a time to be silent.

I am so thankful this morning for the Word of God. The joyful exclamation of the psalmist is true: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path..." Psalm 119:105. The holy Scriptures are not just human words about God. They are the word of God to humanity. The apostle Peter testified in 2 Peter 1:19-21, "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

That is why I'm so thankful for the Word of God today! And I'm thankful to be part of a church that teaches the Word of God. This past week, as I continued my study of the life of Joseph, I was impressed by the fact that Joseph had no written Scriptures to guide his path. Joseph lived hundreds of years before Moses, the great prophet of God who wrote the first books

of the Bible. All that Joseph had available to him were the oral accounts passed down from generation to generation.

I thought of some wise counsel in the Word of God that would have been especially helpful for Joseph as a young man growing up in a very dysfunctional family. That inspired counsel is found in Ecclesiastes 3. The wise man Solomon prefaces his comments with these words in Eccles. 3:1 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” This whole section from verses 2-8 would be worthy of your careful consideration but I want you to focus with me on the second half of Ecclesiastes 3:7. “...a time to be silent and a time to speak.”

A time to be silent and a time to speak - that wise counsel would have been very helpful to the young man Joseph. By the time Joseph was a teenager, his older brothers hated him, and in their minds at least, they had good reason. Their father Jacob showed open favoritism to Joseph. He was Rachel’s firstborn, and all of Joseph’s brothers knew that Rachel was the only woman that their father truly loved. Leah’s sons, and Zilpah’s sons, and Bilhah’s sons were clearly in second or third place. Showing open favoritism to one child is still damaging today. Jacob is partly to blame for the anger and hatred that his sons felt toward their younger brother Joseph.

Their father Jacob displayed his favoritism openly and publically by giving Joseph an unusual coat. The meaning of the Hebrew word used to describe this coat is unclear. The NIV translators have described this coat in Genesis 37:3 as “a richly ornamented robe.” The KJV translators described this garment as “a coat of many colors.” Some scholars believe that the Hebrew word is related to the word for extremities, as in hands and ankles, and so describes this

garment as “a long robe with sleeves.”

Whatever this garment looked like, it is clear that Joseph proudly wore it as a constant reminder to his older brothers that Joseph was the favored son. We read in Genesis 37:4, “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.”

Growing up in this hostile environment, Joseph would have been blessed if he had known and followed the counsel found in Ecclesiastes 3:7: There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Today we want to consider three incidents in Joseph’s early life where this counsel would have been helpful to him.

Incident #1. Genesis 37:2, “Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.” Joseph’s age is specifically mentioned—seventeen. He was a young man, not just an immature boy. Also notice that the sons of Leah are not mentioned. They were particularly hostile toward Joseph. But as a result of this bad report that Joseph brought back to their father Jacob, even the sons of Rachel’s maid Bilhah and the sons of Leah’s maid Zilpah became angry with Joseph.

Was this bad report truth or fiction? From everything else that we have learned about Joseph’s dysfunctional family, there’s a good chance that the bad report was true. If his brothers were stealing sheep or neglecting their responsibilities, then we might conclude that it was only right for Joseph to speak up, no matter what the personal cost. But if his brothers were getting drunk or acting inappropriately, it would have been better for Joseph to just keep silent. After all, Joseph was not his brothers’ parent or guardian. He was their spoiled baby brother. They

were already angry with him. Certainly, it would have been wise to carefully consider whether to be silent or whether to speak.

Incident #2. A second incident in Joseph's early life involved two dreams. We are not told explicitly that these dreams were from God, but the history of Joseph seems to clearly confirm that these dreams were not of Joseph's own making. The content of Joseph's first dream is recorded in Genesis 37:6-7. Joseph was working in the fields with his brothers and this is what he saw: "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."

I'm sure that this was a very vivid dream! Joseph had no problem remembering it. But let me ask you a question: If you had this dream about your angry brothers, is this a time to be silent or a time to speak? I would suggest that this is a time to be silent. Unfortunately, Joseph did not keep the content of this dream to himself. He just had to share it with his brothers! We read in Genesis 37:5 "Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more." Read on in Genesis 37:8. "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." We might add, "They hated him all the more because of his dream, what he said, and how he said it." There seems to be a problem for Joseph here. Maybe he sees this as a chance to gain a little advantage over his mean older brothers. You know, "Na na na na na!" I had a dream and you all bowed down to me!

I'm convinced that sharing the content of that dream with his brothers was a foolish mistake. He was just pouring fuel on the fire. Joseph was increasing his brothers' hostility. Why did Joseph do that? There is no indication that God instructed him to share the content of

the dream. So why did Joseph share the content of his dream with his brothers? Didn't Joseph realize how his brothers would react? Was he just naive or stupid?

When Joseph had a second dream, he also shared the content of that dream with his angry brothers. We can read that part of Joseph's story in Genesis 37:9. "Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' Joseph even told his father this dream, we read in Genesis 37:10-11, "When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?'

I'm personally convinced that Jacob misinterpreted Joseph's second dream. He assumed that he was the sun and Joseph's mother was the moon. Listen again. 'Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?' But Joseph's mother Rachel was already dead. She died in childbirth when Joseph's younger brother Benjamin was born. And there is no record that Jacob ever bowed down to Joseph. When Jacob eventually arrived in Egypt, Joseph hugged his father around the neck and kissed him.

So what is the meaning of this second dream? Could it be even more amazing than even Joseph's father recognized? In Egypt, the Pharaoh was considered to be a god, an embodiment of Horus, god of the sky. Have you ever seen an Egyptian picture of a man with a falcon's head? That is Horus. I was startled to learn this week that it was taught that one of Horus' eyes was the sun and the other eye was the moon. In Joseph's dream, both the sun and the moon bowed down to him. Could this portion of Joseph's dream have been fulfilled in the unusual honor bestowed upon Joseph by the god king Pharaoh? We'll study that amazing narrative in a later message in

this series.

Whatever the interpretation of Joseph's second dream, he insisted on telling its content to his brothers and that was like fanning the flames of their anger. Now they were even more jealous of him. Again, we wonder what was gained by sharing the content of this dream. Was this a time to speak or a time to be silent?

Incident #3. Then there is a third incident in Joseph's early life when he would have been wise to remember the counsel that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. The story is recorded in Genesis 37:12. "Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem." If you remember from last week's message, Jacob had purchased some land on the outskirts of Shechem to graze his flocks (Gen 33:19). Jacob continues: "'as you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them.' 'Very well,' he replied. So he said to him, 'Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.'"

Didn't Jacob realize that this would be a dangerous mission for Joseph? Had his brothers concealed their anger so carefully that their father was oblivious to their evil intent? The story continues in Genesis 37:14. "Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron." It was about 50 miles due north to Shechem—60 miles by road. After several days journey Joseph arrived at his father's parcel of land on the outskirts of Shechem. A man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" Now remember that Shechem was dangerous territory for the sons of Jacob. Years earlier Simeon and Levi had killed every male in the city because Shechem, son of Hamor, had violated their sister Dinah. Maybe that's the reason that they chose not to go on this trip! I can imagine that Joseph may have been a little uneasy when

he came to the grazing areas that his father owned near Shechem and his brothers were nowhere to be found. Joseph replied to the stranger, 'I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?' 'They have moved on from here,' the man answered. 'I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.' That was another 15-16 miles farther north. "So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him."

How were Joseph's brothers able to recognize him from a distance? Well, if you look down in Genesis 37:23, you'll discover that Joseph was wearing his richly embroidered coat. Now let me ask you another question. Does that seem wise to you, considering all of the hostility in the family? Does it seem wise to wear that elegant garment as you hike across the fields to meet with your angry brothers? Remember the counsel from the Word of God—there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Joseph didn't need to open his mouth and say a word. His coat sent a very powerful message to his angry brothers.

Listen to their reaction. Genesis 37:19, "'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'"

We learn a valuable lesson from this incident. We speak not only with words but also non-verbally, with our body language and even the way that we dress. If Joseph had applied that wise counsel that there is a time to be silent, what would he have done in this situation? Worn something else! Leave that coat of many colors packed up in a bundle in his tent.

But no; Joseph is either totally naive or somewhat stupid. He wears his richly embroidered coat as he walks out in the fields, far from any support or protection, and his

brothers are ready to kill him. But my intention is not be critical of Joseph today. Remember, Joseph grew up in a very dysfunctional family and he had no written Scriptures to provide wise counsel for his life. My intention is to learn a lesson from this story. One simple lesson that we can learn from these three incidents in the early life of Joseph is this: there is a time to be silent and there is a time to speak. Pray to God for wisdom to know when to be silent and when to speak.

Jesus, our Savior, had wisdom from God to know when to be silent and when to speak. Notice the response of Jesus when he was taken before Herod Antipas during the night of his trial. We can read the story in Luke 23:8-9. “When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had wanted to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.” There is a time to be silent. Why was Jesus silent? Because He knew that Herod was not open to truth. He just wanted to be entertained.

But we also learn from Jesus that there is a time to speak. There is a time to speak the truth in love even if we do so at a personal cost. John records the day that Jesus came to the Temple in Jerusalem on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. John clearly tells us at the beginning of John 7 that the Jewish leaders sought to kill Jesus. And yet, in spite of the personal danger to Himself, Jesus cried out in the midst of the crowd. We can read the story in John 7:37-39. “On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus

had not yet been glorified.”

Why did Jesus cry out so boldly in the courts of the Temple, even though the Jewish leaders were seeking to kill Him? Because Jesus had wisdom from God to know when to be silent and when to speak. And this was a time to speak! Why? Because there were people in the crowd whose hearts were open to God. Notice the testimony of John in John 7:40-44. “On hearing his words, some of the people said, ‘Surely this man is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘He is the Christ.’ Still others asked, ‘How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?’ (which, by the way is where Jesus was born, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah, given 700 years before His birth). “Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.”

Jesus is the ultimate example of living with integrity, and He understood the principle of truth from the Word of God: there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. If we take just this one principle of truth with us today, we will have done well. Remember, there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Ask for wisdom to know which one is most appropriate in any given situation. But the word of God is filled with many words of counsel. We have a resource that wasn't available to Joseph. So read the Word of God. Listen to counsel; receive instruction that you may be wise! This word of God can teach you how to live with integrity. The word of God can be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

And when you read the Word of God, you'll discover the most precious truth of all: that God loves you and no matter how troubled your past, no matter how turbulent your present, He has a good plan for your future!