

## Ordinary Joe

Joseph's Life in the Book of Genesis  
How God Uses Ordinary People to Carry Out His Extraordinary Plans

Message 1 – "Dreamer"

Genesis 37

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Would you join your hearts with mine as we go before the Lord in prayer?

*Gracious Lord, we give You thanks for the powerful truth of Your Word and for the gift that that Word provides for each and every one of us. Lord, I pray that You would inspire each of us through the power of Your Holy Spirit. Lord, anoint my mouth, anoint my heart, anoint my words that somehow as they go from me out into every listener that they would all hear less of me and more of You. Holy Spirit speak, speak boldly for we, Your servants, are listening. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, friends, I have a question for you: What in particular do these individuals have in common?

<b>Mother Theresa</b>	<b>Anne Frank</b>
<b>Pope John Paul II</b>	<b>Rosa Parks</b>
<b>Francis of Assisi</b>	<b>David Green (founder of Hobby Lobby)</b>
<b>Susanna Wesley (mother of John and Charles Wesley)</b>	<b>Tom Managhan (founder of Domino's Pizza)</b>
<b>John Bunyan (author of Pilgrim's Progress)</b>	<b>S. Truett Cathy (founder of Chick-fil-A)</b>
<b>George Whitefield</b>	

What do they all have in common? I'll tell you what I think they have in common; it is this:

**They were ordinary people that God used to carry out extraordinary plans.**

Here's the deal. When you look at the entire Bible from Genesis through Revelation, there is one main truth that surpasses everything else from a human perspective. Do you know what that is? This is it: God uses ordinary people to carry out His extraordinary plans. No matter how this shakes out, you and I are ordinary people, right? When I think about ordinary, I cannot get beyond myself. There is no one more ordinary than me! Or perhaps, you. And somehow God promises throughout Scripture to use ordinary people like you and like me to carry out His extraordinary plans. But here's the question:

## What does God need to do to claim YOUR ordinary?

Friends, my name is David Woolverton and I'm one of the pastors here at St. Paul's Church and it's my honor to share with you the Word of God today. Today, and for the next several weeks it is going to be out of an incredible story. It's the story of Joseph. Joseph, an ordinary guy in an Old Testament book that we read about, who was a real person who God used through an incredible rollercoaster ride of a life to do an amazing thing out of which you and I are still benefitting.

Joseph was an 'ordinary Joe' that God somehow used out of his ordinariness to do extraordinary things, in fact to carry out God's extraordinary plan. Joseph's story is a roller coaster ride, one that would rival the tallest most twisty, turny rollercoaster in any amusement park anywhere on the face of this planet. Think about this, if you know the story you know what I'm talking about. Here was an ordinary guy who was the favored son of Jacob. Jacob was one of the patriarchs of Judaism. Abraham, Issac and Jacob, third in line! He's one of the favored sons of this trilogy of pin-up guys for Judaism. And one day his brothers sell him into slavery. He gets sold into slavery twice and after that he rises somehow to a position of incredible favor in the midst of a wealthy man's estate. Then he is falsely charged of rape then thrown in prison and then somehow from prison rises to second in command in all of Egypt. And all of that happens within the span of about 13 years! He's 17 years old as an ordinary young kid and by the time he's 30 he is in charge of Egypt. An ordinary guy who gets positioned by God to do something amazing. Why? Why does God do this? And why is this important for us today?

Friends, I believe with all of my heart that God is raising up the church today, a church of ordinary people to be a part of an amazing movement that God is initiating, not just for revival - oh no, I believe that what God is doing is that He is birthing something new.

And He's raising up the Church - that's you and me - ordinary people to be a part of carrying out this extraordinary plan. So, what we're going to do is look into the Scriptures at this story of Joseph and we're going to start in Genesis chapter 37. What I'm going to do is look with you at this passage of Scripture and periodically make some editorial comments just to explain what's going on, but ultimately we're going to lead to a place where I hope you and I will begin to get a picture of what God is going to birth through the Church.

I invite you to open up your Bible or Bible app and let's open ourselves up to what God has in mind to teach us, His Church for such a time as this. We'll start at Genesis 37, verse 1:

*Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. [The land of Israel today] This is the account of Jacob's family line. Joseph, a young man of 17 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*

**(Genesis 37:1-2)**

I've gotta stop and just fill in some of the gaps here, there's so much we could say here. His father's wives? He's got more than one? The whole concept of navigating more than one spouse, hey I don't know about you – but, that's just mind boggling! How many birthdays do you have to remember? How many anniversaries do you have to remember, right?

There's more to the story here and I want to walk with you just with a quick snippet. I've created a little chart here - when we talk about Jacob's wives and kids, we're really talking about an incredible love story that somehow goes wrong.

### **JACOB'S WIVES AND KIDS**

<b>Leah</b>	<b>Rachel</b>	<b>Bilhah</b>	<b>Zilpah</b>
<b>1 Reuben</b>	<b>12 Joseph</b>	<b>5 Dan</b>	<b>7 Gad</b>
<b>2 Simeon</b>	<b>13 Benjamin</b>	<b>6 Naphtali</b>	<b>8 Asher</b>
<b>3 Levi</b>			
<b>4 Judah</b>			
<b>9 Issachar</b>			
<b>10 Zebulun</b>			
<b>11 Dinah</b>			

The story is too long for me to go into great detail. Let me just say it this way: Jacob was a guy who fell head over heels in love with a young lady named Rachel. So, he goes to Rachel's father Laban and he says to Laban "I want to marry your daughter Rachel." So, Laban, being in his own way an entrepreneur and a scheming entrepreneur, says to Jacob, "I'll make a deal with you. You work for me for seven years and I will give you the hand of my daughter." So, Jacob works his back out for Laban and then seven years later it's time for him to claim his bride and everything is set. The wedding is set and Jacob is there, the nervous groom and the bride walks in. Back in the day it was the custom that the bride was completely veiled, barely could you even see her eyes and the wedding is done. After the wedding is done, he realizes that Laban did a very mischievous thing - he switched daughters and Jacob ended up marrying Leah!

Now according to the Bible Jacob clearly was not attracted to her and so he calls Laban out and he says, "We had a deal!" And Laban says, "Hey, it's not our custom to marry the younger daughter before the older daughter. But because I'm a nice guy I'll cut you a deal. Work with me another seven years and I'll give you the second daughter." So, Jacob, madly in love with Rachel continues working another seven years until the day when he can marry his beloved.

But here's where the story gets a little more complicated. It's now time for the brides and groom to begin building a family. So, Leah, clearly according to the scriptures was blessed with numerous children because God knows that Leah is not loved by her husband. It's a sad situation and so Leah knows that Jacob's heart is given over to Rachel. But the complication is that Rachel can't have kids for whatever reason. She is unable to get pregnant. So, a competition begins between the sisters. In order to

compete, Rachel and Leah then begin to bring in their handmaids, their nurses and they give their nurses over to their husband so that they can have children by the handmaids. Once the handmaids begin to have kids, they are raised by the respective wives. So, there are four women up on the screen here - Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah and all of them have a bunch of kids together, but Jacob really only has one love - Rachel. Everybody in the household knows that Jacob is playing favorites with Rachel. Favoritism is a part of this story and that is incredibly important, why? Keep reading -

*Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he had been born to him in his old age... (Genesis 37:3a)*

Now keep in mind, this is not just about Jacob being an old guy as he becomes a father to Joseph. What this is really about is that Joseph is the firstborn son of the woman that he's head-over-heels in love with. That's the essence of the favoritism. The name Joseph in Hebrew actually means "He will add". Hold on to that thought, we'll come back to that in a second. When we continue in verse 3 it says,

*...and he made an ornate robe for him...(Genesis 37:3b)*

The Hebrew translated, "ornate robe" is kind of a strange word and has over the generations been interpreted as a "coat of many colors". In fact, it has been made popular as a coat of many colors. We're just going to adopt that word "coat" for now. Reading on in verse 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 (Genesis 37:4)*

This is so important - the environment of favoritism that existed in the home, everybody knew Jacob loved Rachel and so when Joseph comes along, that's all that Jacob can see. Yeah, he sees that he has other kids, but Joseph - Joseph is the one. So, what we begin to see is how that favoritism plays out among the brothers. So, the brothers begin to have a distaste, or hatred for Joseph. Was it really Joseph? I'm a firm believer that when you look at this passage, what you see is classic triangulating. I think the brothers were actually angry at their father but rather than taking it to their father they just took it out on Joseph. It gets better. Let's keep in mind a few things, Joseph's coat was like a tunic and so he wore it wherever, regardless of the weather. So, his coat was also a symbol of the favoritism of his father, of the entitlement given to him by his dad. Hold on to that thought.

Now we read in verse 5,

*Joseph had a dream and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more (Genesis 37:5)*

That phrase, "all the more" is significant in Hebrew. It is the same root word as the name Joseph. Joseph means, "He will add", so their 'added-on hatred' is a play-on-words. Here, it refers to the added-on, additional hatred from the brothers to Joseph.

But Joseph doesn't seem to see it, he says to his brothers –

*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 37:5-8**)*

There's that phrase again, they hated him all the more. Verse 9 continues,

*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 11 stars were bowing down to me." 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?" His brothers were jealous of him but his father kept the matter in mind. Now his brothers had gone to graze his father's flock near Shechem and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied. (**Genesis 37:9-13**)*

"But they saw him in the distance..." How did they see him in the distance? His coat! Waving in the wind. Ornate, it announced his presence before Joseph actually arrived. Hmm... and it says here "they plotted to kill him."

I grew up with brothers and I was the youngest. There were times we didn't get along. And there were times growing up, as teenagers do, maybe as young adults that they may have entertained the idea of selling me off. Maybe that's true for you. But to plot to kill their brother? Verse 19,

*"Here comes that dreamer!" They said to each other. "Come 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." (**Genesis 37:19-20**)*

So, when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his coat and they took him and threw him into the cistern. "*The cistern was empty, there was no water in it*" (**Genesis 37:24**). That was an important statement to let the reader know he wasn't going to drown in the water, they had severely beaten him and thrown him into the cistern, but it was a dry well. So, the important feature that we need to remember in this story in this moment is that the attack actually surprised Joseph. He didn't see his brother's hatred. He couldn't see beyond his coat. His coat represented a sense of entitlement and favoritism and so he viewed his life from that vantage point. Something very telling we read next, verse 25 –

*As they sat down to eat their meal... (**Genesis 37:25**)*

A simple statement, most of us just gloss right over that. But this statement comes right after the brothers have beaten up their brother and thrown him into this well. They sit down and they eat. It shows the callousness of their character. So, keep this in mind - the 12 brothers, the 12 sons of Jacob these are the 12 tribes of Israel. We read about them throughout the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation. They are the heroes of Judaism, they are the hallmarks through which God builds an amazing story, but in order to get to that, we gotta' get through this moment. This moment really significantly damages their reputation. Is there anything that can redeem it? Verse 26,

*Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood. Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, [this is so ironic] he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed (Genesis 37:26-27).*

So, what they're saying is that instead of killing him, let's sell him off, let's see what we can get for him. And so how the story plays out, they got 20 pieces of silver, hmmm... verse 31,

*Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days (Genesis 37:31-33)*

*Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard. (Genesis 37:36).*

So, in essence what we have here is that we have these brothers, this band of brothers who were all hating Joseph because of what he represents - the favoritism of their father. In other words, they're angry with their Dad for showing favoritism to Joseph and pretty much setting aside his love for the other sons. So, their act against Joseph is not only callous towards Joseph, it's disrespectful and mean-spirited to their Dad. What they end up doing is taking this coat which is a symbol of the entitlement and favoritism and they cover it with blood and they take it to their old man, and they break his heart.

You know, sometimes we wish God would change our circumstances rather than changing us. But God goes after people.....why? Because (we've talked about it), He uses ordinary people to carry out his extraordinary plans. He focuses on people for a very important reason, because circumstances change when we do.

### **When people change circumstances shift.**

Hmmm.... Joe's coat - really a symbol of entitlement - actually put him into a place that he might never had gone without it. That makes me wonder, what would the story have been without that coat? Because God focuses on people, ordinary people, God has the unique ability to see what our "coats" cover. I have a question my friends, what's your "coat"? Another way of asking that question is,

## **What needs to end in your life right now as God prepares you for His greater purpose?**

This is really an intriguing question if you think about it, because in order for God to use Joseph - and He goes on to use Joseph - it's what we're going to read about in this series, Joseph had to let go of a few things. There were things about his character that had to end in order for him to be prepared to be used as an agent of extraordinary plans.

### **What's your 'coat'?**

- *What is it in your life that needs to be shed?*
- *What needs to end in order for God to use you to carry out that greater plan?*
- *Could it be an attitude of entitlement?*
- *Could it be unforgiveness, anger or fear?*
- *Could it be a low self-image, racism, or even nationalism?*
- *What is it that needs to end as God prepares you?*

You know, this series that we're in is a series that invites you to ask the deeper questions. Why? Because I believe that God is raising up the Church for this time, for right now. For what God is going to be doing that is huge. I really believe that He is going to use ordinary people like you and me. Ordinary people to carry out God's extraordinary plan, so I invite you this week in preparation for this journey to slightly change the words of this question into a prayer. Change it to this:

### **What needs to end in my life right now? As You, O God prepare me for Your greater purpose?**

You might discover that God has very unique plans in mind and you will also discover that the God that we serve, the God who never wastes a hurt is going to take your story and intersect it with His story and something new is going to be birthed. What's your coat? Will you pray with me?

*Lord God, I thank You for Your incredible Word. This is a journey that's drawing us deeper in trust and in faith knowing that You are preparing us for an extraordinary plan. Lord, we pray boldly that You would reveal to us what is it in our lives that needs to end right now as You prepare us for Your greater purpose. We submit to that purpose, Lord, because we trust You even as we pray in Jesus name, and all God's people said: Amen.*