

**WEDNESDAY, 5/13/20**

**SERIES: Choosing Faith Over Fear**

**Speaker: Nat Crawford (w/Arnie & Cara**

**Title: Joseph Pt. 1**

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An emperor was growing old and knew it was time to choose His successor. He called the young people in the kingdom together and said, "It is time for me to step down and to choose the next emperor."

"I am giving each one of you a seed today. I want you to plant the seed, water it and come back one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed. I will then judge what you bring and choose who will be the next emperor!"

Ling received a seed like the others. He went home and excitedly told his mother the story. She helped him get a pot and planting soil, and he planted the seed and carefully watered it. Every day he watered it and watched to see if it had grown. After about three weeks, some of the other youths began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Ling kept checking his seed, but nothing grew. Three, four, five weeks went by, but nothing sprouted. As the year went by, he heard kids in the village brag about their plants. He saw other plants in windows and in the streets. But nothing worked for Ling.

A year went by and the day arrived. When Ling arrived at the palace, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by the other youths. They were all shapes and sizes. Ling put his empty pot on the floor and many of the others laughed at him.

A few felt sorry for him and said, "Hey, nice try." When the emperor arrived, he greeted the young people and then surveyed the room. Ling tried to hide in the back. He was ashamed.

"My, what great plants, trees and flowers you have grown," said the emperor. "Today, one of you will be appointed the next emperor!" All of a sudden, the emperor spotted Ling at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered his guards to bring him to the front. Ling was

terrified. "The emperor knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me killed!"

When Ling got to the front, the Emperor asked his name. "My name is Ling," he replied. The emperor looked at Ling, and then announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! His name is Ling!" Ling couldn't believe it. Ling couldn't even grow his seed. How could he be the new emperor?

Then the emperor said, "One year ago today, I gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. I gave you all boiled seeds, which would not grow. All of you, except Ling, have brought me trees, plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Ling was the only one with the courage to do what was right no matter what. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new emperor!"

Ling was a person of great character who didn't respond out of fear to cheat, to lie, or to manipulate. Instead, he did what he knew was right. This is much like the person we're going to spend time with over the next few days. And that person is Joseph.

Joseph is a man of great faith. He would continually choose faith over fear.

The real-life story of Joseph may be 4000 years old, but the lessons from his life are applicable to us today. Joseph was the son of Jacob. Joseph was the youngest of 12 sons and was Jacob's favorite. Jacob's favoritism made his sons very jealous of Joseph --so much so they hated him. And that leads us up to where we'll pick it up.

In Genesis 37, beginning in verse 5:

**Genesis 37:5-8 One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. <sup>6</sup>"Listen to this dream," he said. <sup>7</sup>"We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!"**

**<sup>8</sup>His brothers responded, "So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them."**

Joseph! What are you doing, bro? Here Joseph had this dream and tells his brothers about it. If I were Joseph, I would have kept my mouth shut. But Joseph had this dream and it meant

something. So he boyishly opens his mouth and tells them. But notice what Joseph demonstrates for us.

Here Joseph demonstrates an important quality of a person who chooses faith over fear. That's being honest.

Honesty comes at a price, but ultimately the truth sets us free. Joseph tells his brothers the dream exactly as he saw it. He doesn't change it. He could have lied. He could have kept his mouth shut. He knew his brothers didn't like him. They hated him.

Now I was an only child, so I didn't have to worry about the treatment of siblings, but I see how my kids treat each other, and they like each other. I can't imagine what life was like for Joseph. So for him to act in faith, is astonishing. Because he has to know this dream will tick off his brothers, but he proceeds to tell them and yep – they hate him more.

### **DISCUSSION:**

N: Well, here to talk about this more is Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole. It seems like today the truth is wildly unpopular, and if you speak the truth, you'd better be prepared for some serious pushback. How are you seeing people rejected for speaking truth?

C: Well, you see them fired. We're in this whole culture, where if someone is not fitting the narrative, or loving and accepting, as they try to disguise it, they fire them. People are getting fired. People's whole businesses are being affected, or taking away their whole livelihood. Families, you know, I know family members that don't get along because of that. They're not invited to the family picnic. And things like that, you know, it's just really sad.

A: I kind of look at it two different ways. We had a friend or an acquaintance who was a judge, and he had to make some decisions in favor of different lifestyles, when it came to different things that conflicted with his Christian beliefs. And he stepped down as a judge instead of going that road. And I felt really bad for him. It took him I think a year to really figure out what to do. So I get that. But on the other hand, I grew up when everybody was a Christian, it was the cultural thing to do, and we all considered ourselves Christians, and we weren't. But that was how we viewed ourselves as a society. So in some regards, and I know people get real upset about all the injustice, but it actually is a reminder. We're not all Christians. This isn't a Christian country. It maybe once was. But in some regards, it makes it more of what it really is. It's a battle against good versus evil. Satan versus Christ.

N: Yeah. And I think you brought up an important truth. The reality is that a lot of people, you look on social media, people identify themselves as this or that, but a lot of times, they have no grounds for their identification. You know, a lot of Christians by name, may have never come to saving faith in Christ, and you know, Apostle Paul said, examine yourself to see if you are really of the faith. And that's a wildly unpopular question to ask, and it's a sensitive subject, so I completely understand. But I think we need to be willing to, and help people really evaluate themselves, and evaluate their standing with God, and really come to terms with who they are and who He is. And that's going to be unpopular.

I think as Christians, we've been torn between speaking truth and showing love. As a pastor, I can't tell you how many counseling sessions I've been in, when you've got this tension between two different kinds of philosophies, when it comes to problems. You know, one side is very abrasive, and they're very attuned to dealing with conflict. The other side doesn't see any problem. And if they do, they put it under the rug and act like it doesn't exist. And I think that's honestly a real tension in Christians today. But would you say, that speaking truth and showing love, that kind of mercy and grace, both are essential in Christianity, right?

C: Well, I think they're intertwined, because when you do speak in truth, you are actually being the most loving, and people don't want their rats exposed, as we've heard in the past. But you know, with my kids, and we're God's children, you know, my son, he loves hunting. If I let him, I mean he'd run all over town with a gun, but it's not loving for me to let him do that, because there's going to be consequences down the road for him. And there's going to be consequences for other people. You know, when we think sin doesn't affect other people, it absolutely does affect other people. So you know, for me to say no to my son, that there's guidelines for firearm use, is actually the more loving thing to do. He's 13 and he doesn't always like to hear that. People just don't like to hear that things are bad for them. I mean, just because the world says that it's legal, doesn't mean that it's not harmful to you.

A: The speaking in love is real complicated, and I've seen it done a lot of times where it's very, very hurtful to non-believers. It's tricky.

C: Well, I think the motive is key. If you're going to talk to somebody about something, what are your motives? Do you genuinely love them and care about them, or do you just want to call them out for something? Because there are people, yeah, they do that, but it's not Jesus' fault. It's the difference between the Prodigal Son, who after the party was probably an awesome

evangelist for God and forgiveness, versus the older brother, who was still standing outside and pointing out everything that was wrong, instead of just going in and enjoying the gathering, the party, with everybody else.

N: Yeah, there's always a great tension. Again, we have to remember that nonbelievers are going to act like nonbelievers. And at the end of the day, until it comes to renovation of the heart, they will still have a bent towards acting like a nonbeliever. So I think it's important that we as Christians, when we approach those who are lost, those who are far from God, that we meet them where they're at, and that we show them the grace and mercy that God has shown us. And yet we don't have to back down from the truth. So I don't think what we're saying is to necessarily not speak up, on protecting the lives of unborn children, or taking care of the poor, things like that. But what we're saying is, make sure your heart is right, and focus on their heart, not necessarily always on the behavior. There's a great article, written by an atheist, who went over to Africa, and he saw all these people coming, and trying to basically fix the problems of the war and of government abuse. And really, the reality was this atheist goes, Nikes are not going to change the people. What these people need is an evangelist. They need Christianity. They need a reformation of the heart. That's the ticket. When an atheist recognizes that there is no amount of social reformation that will really fix the problem, but rather it is Jesus Christ, I think we better listen up, and I think that's what you guys are saying.

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**Genesis 37:9 "Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. "Listen, I have had another dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!"**

Yet again, Joseph has a dream. Only this time, he shares it with his brothers and his dad. His dad says, "You've got to be kidding me! I am the patriarch of this family, and you are going to rule over me? I love you, but son – you're crazy!"

Joseph's honesty almost reminds of that of a child. Kids just tell it like it is regardless of the consequences, Amen? Like my precious firstborn son Simon. He came up to me recently from behind, put his arms around me, and said: "Dad...your balding spot is getting worse." "Thanks, son..." He meant no harm. He was just telling me the truth.

The honesty of a child is humorous for sure, and I see much of this childlike honesty in Joseph. He was only a teenager, and well, teenagers often forget to use their filter of discernment. But Joseph, I'm sure, conveyed truth in a respectful way, regardless of the consequences.

That's what faith asks us to do. Faith asks us to do the right thing, in the right way, for the right reasons.

Today, we have a problem with facts and with truth. I suppose we've had this problem ever since Satan put doubt into the mind of Eve. But it's only continued and has increased today with the popularity of relativism: the belief that morals and truth is relative to a culture or an individual. But we're also struggling with the popularity of post-modernism, which is the belief that there is no truth. Post-modernism says that meaning is not objective, but instead subjective to the recipient. So I say, "Yes, ice cream is good." But 3 different people hear that, and all come away with something completely different. Like a bad game of telephone.

But we know that truth isn't relative and meaning isn't subjective. So, we as Christians need to be committed to truth and spreading truth. But like the Bible says, let's do it with grace.

Today, words like "sin" and "wrong" aren't popular. Concepts like "One way to God" are not in fashion. They're simply treated as small minded. But don't let that deter you. God is asking us to not back away with His truth – with His Gospel. He's asking us to listen to the words of Jesus and act on them.

Matthew 9:35-38, it says this, "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." <sup>1</sup>

Friends, as the world is faced with fear because of viruses, economic insecurity, job loss, relational issues, and a host of other problems, the world is in desperate need of truth, of the Gospel. The fields are ripe. You and I are the laborers. He's calling us to not be afraid, but to be bold with the good news...of hope...and of love and grace.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (Mt 9:35–38). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

God is asking us as His children to choose faith over fear today.

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N: I love that passage in Matthew 9: Jesus says, the harvest is ripe, but where are the workers? I think there are many people who are listening today who are feeling that tension between being bold with the Gospel because the harvest is ripe, but they don't want to be rejected. Cara, Arnie, what would you say to those people today who know that the harvest is ripe, but they're so afraid of rejection?

C: This one is hard for me to figure out, Nat, because maybe it's because I'm used to being rejected, but I don't really struggle with that. I know everyone wants to be liked and I want to be liked, but also if we believe, and truly believe, that people will for eternity be in torment, wouldn't we want to tell people what's true? I see people, and I mean politically, there's people I disagree with so strongly. I mean, I have to pray for them. It's not without difficulty, but I also don't want to see them go to Hell. So I guess if I'm not liked for something, then let it be that. I'll take it all day long. It's like a badge.

N: So would you say your perspective is more eternal than on the temporal?

C: Oh yeah, definitely. I mean, I just, because you know, that moment you accept Jesus, that's when you start your eternal life. And so this is, I'm just going to change addresses at some point. I just want people to be saved, and I don't care how big a stinker they are. You know, I'm a difficult person. God loves me and there was grace for me. There's grace for everybody, even if I disagree very strongly with them, by the way. [Right]. You know, you see what we would deem sort of that worst of the worst. But there's abortion doctors, there's mass murderers, serial killers, that have come to Jesus, and that grace extends to them. And I just don't want to see anybody perish. So if I'm going to be called names or anything for it, so be it. That's fine.

So you know, I have a book coming out in 2021 just to help people find ways of what I call a weasel evangelism, just to kind of sneak it into conversations. I think, you know, putting a formula on evangelism has been sort of the problem. Like you have to evangelize or tell someone about Jesus, within like 30 seconds of meeting them, or three minutes of meeting them. I think it just takes the relational piece out of it. If we could be relational, you might find ways you disagree, but everybody needs Jesus.

N: What I think you do, is what we're all called to do, is approach every relationship, every conversation with Gospel intentionality. In other words, we may be talking about groceries, we could be talking about a book, we could be talking about a TV show, but at the end of the day, we are attuned to who they are, and we're also aware of the need to move them closer to Jesus. And that's what you're doing in those conversations, right, Cara? [Right. That's exactly right.] Well, one thing I'm reminded of is that Jesus, He was rejected for being who He was. I mean, you think about how much He loved people, how much He served people, and that same crowd who cheered on Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem, was the same crowd that yelled, *Crucify him*. That's a sobering reality, but it's also a necessary reminder for us today.

What about what I said earlier, that truth isn't relative and that meaning isn't subjective? I think people are really struggling with this, even in the church. Arnie, how would you respond to a listener who is either personally struggling with this, or maybe a family member who is struggling with this idea, of truth is relative?

A: You know, that's such a deep topic. It's a matter of faith and how do you give faith to someone else? People try so hard to bend Scripture into their own reality, instead of just accepting what it is. Don't you think?

C: Well, I think we have to be careful, that if you want someone to be saved so badly, that you don't bend Scripture to fit into whatever lifestyle they're living. I think a lot of times churches will do that. Their reasonings might be that they're thinking they're loving the person, well, getting them in the door, but you're really leading them down a road of false hope.

N: Yeah. I think as believers, we need to be standing on God's Word, not because we just want to believe it's God's Word, but because history has proven it to be so, and because it's in fact true. The reality is, you and I, we may not like the reality of gravity, and we may want to just jump off of our roof, and bounce off the ground, and go right back up to the sky, but the reality is gravity exists, and you jump, you fall, and you hurt yourself. The same is true for all facts. There is no such thing as relative truth. It is just truth. And so we as believers need to stand on God's Word. And something that I've held to in my developing of theology and understanding the Bible, is clinging to a historic understanding of what Scripture has said. If this is what the Bible has meant and understood to be relating to for the past 2000 years, that is probably the way we should think



of it today. So the truth of the Bible is not relative. Application can be relative to the individual, but what the Bible has said and is clear on, those things do not change. So we, as believers, need to hold strong to the Word, hold to truth, no matter the cost, and allow God to handle the consequences.