

lives in this country that we have been given the coat to wear. Before the English, the Spanish wore it, and before the Spanish, the Dutch and the French. Before them, the Romans, and the Greeks.

But this is the important thing: what matters is the way you wear the coat. And may I make this appeal to each of you personally, if you happen to be the one in your family, or in your circle who is wearing the coat, more highly favored and more richly blessed than the people around you, then wear the coat quietly, humbly and gratefully. You are what you are largely, not because of anything you may have done, but because things have been given to you in order to make you what you are. And we as a nation ought to wear the coat without arrogance. If you travel abroad, don't flash your dollars in front of people who barely have enough to buy the very necessities of life. Don't brag about what we have in this country when you know that people who fought, bled and died in the last war haven't half as much as we have. If only we as a nation can wear this coat quietly and humbly, cooperating with the other nations of the world instead of trying to dictate to them and boss them, then we may wear the coat to good advantage. If we don't, the brothers of the world will become jealous, and tension will increase until the pot boils over, and they will strip the coat from us, dip it in blood and send it back to the Father after they have eliminated us from the scene.

THE CLOSING And so as we come to the end of this sermon, I would say that there's just one last thing in the well for us to see. See how what we often think is the end of the story is only the end of the chapter. It's hard to imagine any contemporary writer writing in more nobly language the scene that takes place when Jacob learns of Joseph's death:

"Jacob rent his clothes and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him. But he refused to be comforted and he said, 'I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning'"

You see Jacob thought Joseph was dead, but the truth was that Joseph had just begun to live. This may not be the heart of the gospel but it comes close to it. The next time you're tempted to think that the story has ended for you, remember Jacob. Remember that when he thought the story had ended, it was only the end of a chapter. Remember that when he thought Joseph was dead, Joseph, as you will see next week, was already on his way to Egypt. He was just beginning to life!

LET US PRAY:

Help us, our Father, as we go about our way, privately and publicly, that if the coat of many colors should fall on our shoulders, that we may wear it quietly and gratefully. Help us to always remember that although the story may have ended, it is only the end of the chapter, and that new chapters of life are continually opening. In thy name we pray. Amen

are often the most natural things, and therefore the most beguiling things in the world. I suppose that it was natural for Jacob to think more highly of Joseph than of his brothers. After all he was more attractive. I imagine that it was natural for a young boy of 17 to lose his head because of this, and it was natural for his brothers to be jealous. But what I'd like to say in connection with this thought is this. It's so easy for us to look into the secret places of our lives and say it's perfectly natural for a man to want to be happy (even though he may have to step on a few people in order to get ahead and gain his happiness). It's so easy for us to say to ourselves, it's natural for me to want to satisfy these strong desires and appetites (even though I may have to step outside of the accepted standards of morality). To bring this point to a head: I think we're often deceived by this cult of the natural. Everything that is natural is by no means wrong, but everything that is natural is not necessarily right, and this policy of "doing what comes naturally" is a dangerous policy and can lead a person into hot water, and into a great deal of unhappiness.

BACK TO THE STORY

But now let's get back to the story. We find that things reach a climax quickly. The brothers soon lose patience with Joseph and set out deliberately to kill him. The opportunity presents itself, but one of the older brothers intercedes and talks them out of killing him on the spot. Instead they decide to throw him into an old, dry abandoned well. For all practical purposes, Joseph is eliminated from the family scene. You'll recall that just before they threw him into the well, they stripped him of his coat of many colors and dipped it in the blood of an animal and then took it home to their father. They told their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal, and of course the father believed them. They had their revenge, and Jacob had a broken heart. All the factors are in the picture - cruelty, envy, grief, jealousy, possessive love, pride, violence, and together they weave a tapestry of tragedy. They tell the story of a family that was caught in the web of evil. They did what seemed to be a natural thing, and as they did evil crept right into the heart of their lives. And so as this part of the story comes to an end, darkness has fallen upon the stage.

LOOK ONCE AGAIN

But just look once again into the well, and as you do you'll be reminded of the fact that there will always be some people who wear the coat of many colors. There will always be some person who are more richly blessed and highly endowed than their neighbors or their families.

I think of an English family around the year 1800. They had five children, four boys and a girl. Their youngest boy died in infancy. The girl married a Spaniard, and went to live in Spain and lived the rest of her life in relative obscurity. Another boy died at the age of 19 from tuberculosis. Another son came to this country, and was seldom heard from again. The fourth son wrote poetry - "The Ode to a Nightingale", "The Ode to a Grecian Urn", and the line "When I have fears that I shall cease to be". Yes, in this case the favored son, the one who wore the coat of many colors was John Keats.

And what's true of individuals is equally true of nations. I was so aware of this several years ago when I was studying in Great Britain. Great Britain has worn the coat of many colors for two hundred years or more, and I think, has worn the coat well. But it isn't wearing the coat now, and it may never wear it again. And one has the feeling if he

brothers smarted under his presumptuous attitude.

And then finally Joseph was simply superior to his brothers. He was smarter than they were. He was more attractive. He was more richly blessed and highly endowed. He was destined for great things. He inherited his father's intelligence, his father's quick-wittedness, and his father's shrewdness. He had inherited his mother's charm and beauty. You'll recall that his mother was Rachel, the beautiful Jewish girl, one of the four wives of Jacob. And I suppose that when you get a combination of intelligence and charm together in one person, you have something that's irresistible. I imagine that the brothers were smart enough to recognize Joseph's superiority, but they lacked the will to accept it gratefully. They hated him for it!

And so these three things - Jacob's favoritism, Joseph's bad behavior, and Joseph's actual superiority added up to a tense situation. It was a situation that some of you may recognize for certainly it is not foreign or strange to family life even today.

ITS MEANING FOR US Now suppose we pause for a few minutes at this point to look deep into the well and consider some of the things that we see.

FIRST of all, if you look carefully to one side, you'll see that no one comes into the world with a completely clean slate. No one makes an absolutely fresh start in life. That is to say that we all come into the world trailing the traits and the characteristics of our parents, both good and bad. It's something to think about, and it can send your mind off in different directions. For instance, if a young man wants to know what a young lady of twenty will be like when she is forty five, all one has to do is to look at her mother. Not always of course, but more often than not. In other words, we cannot separate ourselves completely from our backgrounds. All of us inherit the traits and the characteristics and the ideals of our parents, and I suppose the secret is to be able to develop the good traits and leave out the bad ones, but this is often easier said than done. So much for the first thought.

A second thought that we see reflected in this story is that evil often creeps into the best of things and into the most sacred of places. Once again, it's something we ought to think about because it can take us so unawares. For instance, we think of the family circle as being the one place where human ties are tender and secure, where loyalties are safe and found, and yet it was into the family circle of Jacob that evil crept in its basest form. And it almost goes without saying that it is into family circles the likes of which are represented here that evil sometimes creeps by way of disloyalty, gossip, irresponsibility and jealousy, and then before you know it the family circle foundations are beginning to disintegrate. Once again this thought can send your mind off in different directions, and we think of how evil can creep into the high circles of our government. We've seen it happen recently in this country. It can creep into the circles of organized labor. It can destroy life if we are not constantly on guard.

A third thought that is reflected in this old story can be expressed in this fashion. See how the things that get us into trouble

"JOSEPH - AT HOME"

INTRODUCTION

I think that the most interesting stories in the world are stories about people - real people, made of common clay, and yet lifted by life often in strange and unpredictable ways above the level of the average and the ordinary. And some of the most interesting people lived a long time ago. Sometimes we're amazed when we stop to consider the impact that some of these people made upon life, the vibrations of which we can still feel even today.

Of course the Bible is full of stories about interesting people. You might call it the Gallery of Great Biographies. And one of the best and one of the oldest is the story of Joseph. I've chosen to preach a series of three sermons on that story. Now, I suppose that some of you will wonder why, when the world is in the condition that it is, that a minister would go back some thirty-three hundred years or more to a story about a man who lived in an entirely different world under circumstances quite different from those that we live under. Why should he? The reason is this: sometimes we see ourselves and our world a little better when we look into the deep wells of the past. We find in them a perspective of depth that we seldom find in the shallow currents of present day thought. Therefore, today and for the next two Sundays, I shall look with you into the deep well of the story of Joseph and see what the reflections of that story tell us about life and the world in which we live.

CHAPTER ONE

The first chapter of the story is entitled "Joseph At Home." When the story begins, Joseph is seventeen years of age. He's on the threshold of life, more than a boy to be sure, but not yet quite a man. He's at that age that most people fail to appreciate until after it's past. As you recall, Joseph had eleven brothers, and he was cordially and completely disliked by all of them. And it's not hard to discover the reasons why he wasn't liked by his brothers.

To begin with, he was his father's favorite son. He was next to the youngest, and for some reason or other, the "baby" of the family is sometimes the object of an affection that none of the other children ever knows. Joseph was the "baby" of his family. His father displayed a greater love for him than he did for the other sons. I won't go into the reasons why. We'll leave it at this that he was his father's favorite. His father, Jacob, made no attempt to hide his great feeling for the young son Joseph. He let everyone know that Joseph was his favorite. And then finally there came the time when Jacob gave Joseph the coat of many colors. This coat set Joseph apart from his brothers. It was a sign of affection and naturally this made Joseph all the more unpopular with his brothers.

Added to this was the fact that Joseph behaved like a spoiled child. He was a tattletale, and on more than one occasion he went running to his father with stories about his brothers that were not to their favor. I suppose if there's anything that's unbearable in the world of young people and children it's a tattletale. Joseph was arrogant too. He flaunted his coat before his brothers. He swaggered and strutted before them, and began to even tell his brothers stories of strange dreams that he had. In all of this, Joseph you see did not hesitate to assume the role of lordship over his brothers, and his

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The reason is this: sometimes we see ourselves and our world a little better when we look into the deep wells of the past. We find in them a perspective of depth that we seldom find in the shallow currents of present day thought. Therefore, today and for the next two Sundays, we shall look into the deep well of the story of Joseph and see what the reflections of that story have to tell us about life and the world you and I live in...try to make sense of.

CHAPTER ONE

The first chapter of the story is entitled, "Joseph - At Home". When the story begins, Joseph is seventeen years of age. He's on the threshold of life - more than a boy to be sure, but not yet quite a man. He's at that age that most people fail to appreciate until after it's past. As you may remember, Joseph had eleven brothers and he was cordially and completely disliked by all of them. And it's not hard to find the reasons why brotherly love didn't flow in his direction.

To begin with, he was his father's favorite son. He was next to the youngest and for some reason or other, the "baby" of the family is apt to be the object of an affection that none of the other children ever knows. ~~Joseph was the "baby" of his family.~~ His father displayed a greater love for him than he did for the other sons. His father, Jacob, made no attempt to hide the feelings he had for his young son, Joseph. He let everyone know that Joseph was his favorite. There came that day when Jacob gave Joseph the coat of many colors. This coat set Joseph apart from his brothers. It was a sign of affection and naturally this made Joseph all the more unpopular with his brothers.

Add to this was the fact that Joseph behaved like a spoiled child. He was a tattletale, and on more than one occasion he went running to his father with stories about his brothers that were not to their favor. I suppose if there's anything that's unbearable in the world of young people and children it's a tattletale. Joseph was arrogant, too. He flaunted his coat before his brothers. He swaggered and strutted before them, and began to tell his brothers of strange dreams that he had. In all of this, Joseph did not hesitate to assume the role of lordship over his brothers, and his brothers smarted under his presumptuous attitude.

And then finally Joseph was simply superior to his brothers. He was smarter than they were. He was more attractive. He was more richly blessed and more highly endowed. He was destined for great things. He inherited his father's intelligence, his father's quick-wittedness, and his father's shrewdness. He

had inherited his mother's charm and beauty. His mother was Rachel, the beautiful Jewish girl. And when you get a combination of intelligence and charm together in one person, you have something that's irresistible! I have a feeling that the brothers were smart enough to recognize Joseph's superiority, but they lacked the will to accept it gracefully and gratefully. They hated him for it!

And so these three things: Jacob's obvious favoritism, Joseph's poor behavior, and Joseph's actual superiority added up to a tense, explosive family situation.

ITS MEANING FOR US

Let's pause for a few minutes at this point in the narrative to look deep into the well and consider some of the things that we already see reflected there.

1 First of all, if you look carefully over to one side, you'll see that no one comes into this world with a completely clean slate. We all come into the world trailing the traits and characteristics of our parents - both good and bad.

It's something to think about and it can send your mind off in different directions. For instance, it's often said that if a young man wants to know what a young lady of twenty will be like when she's 45, all he has to do is to look at her mother. Not always, of course, but more often than not it's apt to be fairly accurate. We cannot separate ourselves completely from our backgrounds. All of us have inherited the traits, the characteristics, the strengths and weaknesses of our parents, and I suppose the secret is to be able to hold on to the good traits and let go of the weaknesses - but, this is often easier said than done.

2 A second thought that we see reflected in the well of this story is that evil often creeps into the best of things and most sacred of places. It can take us unawares. For instance, we think of the family circle as being the one place where human ties are secure, tender, where loyalties are safe and sound, and yet it was in the family circle of Jacob that evil quietly crept in in its basest form.

And it almost goes without saying that it is into family circles like those represented here that evil sometimes creeps - by way of jealousy, disloyalty, gossip, irresponsibility - and then before you know it the family circle foundations are in danger of crumbling, disintegrating. Again, this observation or reflection can nudge your mind off in different directions, and we think of how evil and wrong-doing can creep into high circles of government. We've seen it happen. Prompted by a thirst for power, for greed, good men lower their guard and before you know it - it happens. Lives are destroyed. Homes wrecked.

3 A third thought that is reflected in this story can be expressed in this fashion. See how things that so often get us into trouble are often the most natural things, and therefore the most beguiling things in the world. I suppose it was only natural for Jacob to think more highly of Joseph. More attractive and more intelligent and more charming - it was natural to lean in his direction. And I imagine it was natural for a boy of 17 to lose his head because of this and natural for his brothers to be jealous...resentful.

It's so easy for us to look into the secret places of our lives and say it's perfectly natural for a man to want to be happy - even though he may have to step on a few people in order to get ahead and gain happiness. It's so easy for us to say to ourselves - it's natural for me to want to satisfy these strong

desires and appetites - even though I may have to step outside of the accepted standards of moral behavior. To bring this point to a head: I think we're often deceived by this "cult of the natural". Everything that is natural is by no means wrong, but everything that is natural is not necessarily right, and the idea of always "doing what comes naturally" is a bit dangerous and can get a person into hot water and end up producing a great deal of unhappiness.

BACK TO THE STORY

But now let's get back to the story. We find that things reach a climax quickly.

The brothers lose patience with Joseph and set out deliberately to kill him. The opportunity presents itself, but one of the older brothers intercedes and talks them out of killing him on the spot. Instead they decide to throw him into an old, dry abandoned well. For all practical purposes, Joseph is eliminated from the family scene.

Just before they threw him into the well, they tore off the coat of many colors and dipped it in the blood of an animal and then took it home to their father, Jacob. They told their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal, and the father believed them. They had their revenge and Jacob had a broken heart. All the factors are in the picture - cruelty, envy, grief, jealousy, possessive love, pride, violence and together they weave a tapestry of tragedy. They tell the story of a family caught in the web of evil. They did what seemed to be a natural thing, and as they did evil crept right into the heart of their lives. And so as this part of the story comes to an end, darkness has fallen upon the stage.

LOOK ONCE AGAIN

Look once more into the well and as you do you'll be reminded of the fact that there will always be some people who seem chosen to wear the coat of many colors - person who seem richly blessed and highly endowed, more blessed and endowed than their neighbors or others in their families.

I think of an English family around the year 1800. They had five children - four boys and a girl. The youngest boy died in infancy. The girl married a man from Spain and went to live in Spain and lived the rest of her life in relative obscurity. Another boy died at the age of 19 from tuberculosis. Another son came to this country and was seldom heard from again. The fourth son wrote poetry - "The Ode to a Nightingale", "The Ode to a Grecian Urn", the line, "When I have fears that I shall cease to be". Yes, in this case the favored son, the one who wore the coat of many colors was Joahn Keats.

And what's true of individuals is also true of nations. For ^{2 or 3}centuries, ~~2 or 3~~ Great Britain wore the coats and wore the coat well. But it isn't wearing the coat now and may never wear it again. And one has the feeling that we have been given the coat to wear. Before the English, the Spanish wore it, and before the Spanish, the Dutch and the French. Before them, the Romans and the Greeks.

But this is the important thing: what matters is the way you wear the coat. And may I make this appeal to each of you personally. If you happen to be the one in your family, or in your circle who is wearing the coat, more highly favored and more richly blessed than the people around you, then wear the coat - quietly, humbly, gratefully. You are what you are largely - not because of anything you may have done, but because things have been given to you in order to make you what you are!

And as a nation, we ought to wear the coat without arrogance. If only we as a nation can wear this coat quietly and humbly, cooperating with the other nations of the world instead of trying to dictate to them, or boss them around, or bully them, then we may wear the coat to good advantage. If we don't, the brothers of the world will become jealous, and tension will increase until the pot one day boils over, and they will strip the coat from us, dip it in blood and send it back to the Father after they have eliminated us from the scene.

CLOSING As we come to the end of this sermon, I would say that there's just one last thing in the well for us to see. See how what we often think is the end of the story is only the end of the chapter. It's hard to imagine any contemporary writer writing in more noble language the scene that takes place when Jacob learns of Joseph's supposed death:

"Jacob rent his clothes and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him. But he refused to be comforted and he said, 'I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning'".

You see Jacob thought Joseph was dead, but the truth was that Joseph had just begun to live. This may not be the heart of the gospel, but it comes close to it. The next time you're tempted to think that the story has ended for you, remember Jacob. Remember that when he thought the story had ended, it was only the end of a chapter. Remember that when he thought Joseph was dead, Joseph, as you'll see next week, was already on his way to Egypt. He was just beginning to live. Great things were ahead!

LET US PRAY Help us, Our Father, as we go about our way - privately and publicly - that if the coat of many colors should fall on our shoulders, that we may wear it quietly and gratefully. Help us to remember, too, that although the story may have ended, it is only the end of the chapter, and that new chapters of life are continually opening. In thy name we pray. Amen.