

A preacher stood up to preach with a bandaid on his chin. "I'm sorry about the Band-Aid," he said, "but I cut my chin shaving this morning when I was thinking about the sermon."

One of the congregation said, "Why didn't you think about your chin and cut the sermon."

Thus encouraged...

2<sup>nd</sup> exciting episode of Cool Cats: Joseph.

Previously on Cool Cats:

The brothers of Joseph, burning up with jealousy because of Joseph's technicolour dream coat, send him to Egypt as a slave. God was right there with him, though—he not only rescued him from all his troubles but brought him to the attention of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He was so impressed with Joseph that he put him in charge of the whole country, including his personal affairs.

In this week's episode, we hear that...

Later a famine descended on that entire region, stretching from Egypt to Canaan, bringing terrific hardship. The hungry brothers looked high and low for food, but the cupboard was bare.

Jacob heard there was food in Egypt and sent the brothers to scout it out. Having confirmed the report, they went back to Egypt a second time to get food. On that visit, Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers and introduced the Jacob family to Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and everyone else in the family, seventy-five in all. That's how the Jacob family got to Egypt.

Joseph obviously an important character in Hebrew history.

Almost half the book of Genesis. 11,141 words. The whole Gospel of Mark isn't much longer.

Joseph is mentioned 212 times, but some refer to Jesus' Dad. Philip 31.  
Judith 1. Kylie 0.

Why is Joseph important? What did he do that was so great?

- Aggravated his brothers
- Got sold into slavery
- Was a good slave
- But a poor judge of women
- Jailed for a crime he didn't commit
- Interpreted some dreams
- Got a good job
- Did it well
- Played strange games with his brothers
- Caused his family to migrate to a foreign country where later they all became slaves and had to escape.

What made Joseph famous? I've had the mixed blessing of having met quite a few people who the world considers famous. Although I think my favourite *famous* story is about Davo.

Davo was always saying that he was famous. That all the famous people knew him and he knew all the famous people. So one day, Davo's boss called his bluff, "OK, Davo how about Mel Gibson?" "Oh yeah, Mel and I are old friends, and I can prove it." So Davo and his boss fly over to Hollywood and knock on Mel Gibson's door, and sure enough, Mel Gibson opens the door and shouts, "Davo! Great to see you! You and your friend come right in and join me for lunch!"

OK. So Davo's boss is impressed, but he's still sceptical. After they leave Mel Gibson's house, the boss tells Davo that he thinks the fact that Mel Gibson knew Davo was just lucky.

"No, no, just name anyone else," Davo says. The boss replies, "Prime Minister John Howard." "Little Johnny," Davo replies, "I know him, let's

fly to Canberra.” And off they go to Canberra. Davo and his boss are walking through the Great Hall in Canberra and John Howard spots them and hurries over. “Davo, what a surprise, I was just on my way to a meeting, but you and your friend come on in and let's have a cup of coffee first and catch up.”

Well, the boss is very shaken by now, but still not totally convinced. After they leave the Parliament House grounds, he expresses his doubts to Bubba, who again implores him to name anyone else. “President Bush,” his boss replies. “Sure!” says Davo. “I've known George W. a long time.” So off they fly to Washington.

Davo and his boss are assembled with the masses on the lawn of the White House when Bubba says, “This will never work. I can't catch George W.'s eye among all these people. Tell you what, I know all the security guards so let me just go inside and I'll come out on the Oval Office balcony with the President.” And Davo disappears into the crowd headed toward the White House front steps. Sure enough, half an hour later Davo emerges with President Bush on the balcony. But by the time Davo returns, he finds that his boss has had a heart attack and is surrounded by paramedics. Working his way to his boss's side, Davo asks him, “What happened?”

His boss looks up and says, “I was doing fine until you and the President came out on the balcony and the Japanese tourist next to me asked, 'Who's that on the balcony with Davo?’”

Well, Joseph clearly wasn't like Davo. He wasn't into fame. In fact, within a generation or two after he died, the Bible says a king came along who did not even remember him.

He'd save Egypt and most of the known world from starvation, and yet he was soon forgotten. Well, almost.

The memory of Joseph was preserved among his own people, but why?

Nothing to do with his technicolour dream coat.

Nothing to do with his work with Potiphar.

Nothing to do with his being a victim of sexual harassment by Mrs Potiphar.

Nothing to do with his ability to interpret dreams. Anyway, who ever had dreams as clear as the ones he had to interpret. Give me a break, you could have interpreted those dreams too.

Nothing to do with his role as an Egyptian administrator. Pretty soon a pharaoh arose who knew not Joseph.

I think Joseph remains an important figure in history today because he realised three important truths.

1. You are not important
2. Your life is no about you
3. You are not in control

I am not important. Jesus said we could only find ours true self, by first losing our false self. We had to become like a little child again. Indeed, we must be born again.

My life is not about me. This is so hard for us to learn. It is SO counter-cultural. A revolution of the mind is required. Like discovering that the earth is not the centre of the universe. Nor are you.

I am not in control. Again, this is so hard. Everywhere we hear the messages to take control of our lives. But it is wrong. As any addict who has gone through the 12-step recovery program knows, you must admit you are powerless before you can find true power.

I think one of the paradoxes of life is that we must first learn self-control, so that later we can surrender it.

Joseph's greatness came from these understanding. He knew he was not important. He knew his life was not about him. He knew he was not in control.

Maybe, when he got his technicolour dream coat he thought he was pretty cool. But he soon learned that clothes do not make the man. His brothers took away his coat, and threw him down a well. Maybe it was in that dark hole that true maturity began to dawn in Joseph's soul.

Soon he was an unimportant slave. He was not important.

A non-person by definition. His life was not about him.

Under someone else's control. He was not in control.

Yet out of this experience came greatness and significance.

It seems Joseph worked out how to give away his life and tap into a life of greater importance. He found out that if life was not about Joseph, who it WAS all about. He found out that if he was not in control, who WAS in control.

An old missionary couple had been working in Africa for years and were returning to New York to retire. They had no pension; their health was broken; they were defeated, discouraged, and afraid. They discovered they were booked on the same ship as American President Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from one of his big-game hunting expeditions.

No one paid any attention to them. They watched the fanfare that accompanied the President's entourage, with passengers trying to catch a glimpse of the great man. As the ship moved across the ocean, the old missionary said to his wife, "Something is wrong."

"Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these many years and have no one care a thing about us? Here this man comes back from a hunting trip and everybody makes a big fuss over him, but nobody gives two hoots about us."

"Dear, you shouldn't feel that way," his wife said. "I can't help it; it doesn't seem right." When the ship docked in New York, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor and other dignitaries were there. The papers were full of the President's arrival.

No one noticed the missionary couple. They slipped off the ship and found a cheap flat, hoping the next day to see what they could do, to make a living in the city.

That night the man's spirit broke. He said to his wife, "I can't take this; God is not treating us fairly."

His wife replied, "Why don't you go in the bedroom and tell that to the Lord?"

A short time later he came out from the bedroom, but now his face was completely different. His wife asked, "Dear, what happened?"

"The Lord settled it with me," he said. "I told Him how bitter I was that the President should receive this tremendous homecoming, when no one met us as we returned home. And when I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put His hand on my shoulder and simply said, 'But you're not home yet!'"

The missionary and Joseph had discovered the same thing. Your life is not important, but God has a plan for it that IS important.

Your life is not about you, it's all about Jesus and what he is doing in your world.

You are not in control, but God is.

Joseph had discovered the secret of living over the circumstances. How often do you hear people make excuses with the phrase "under the circumstances?"

I had a French friend who preached a memorable sermon on the topic "over the circumstances." I have never forgotten it.

He explained how in French he would say "in the circumstances" and he would often forget that in English we usually say "under the circumstances" not "in the circumstances" like they do in French.

As any of you who have struggled to learn another European language know, prepositions move about as you move from English to French to German to Italian.

In English one might say *I go to Sydney*.

In German, the preposition for *to* is usually *zu*, but in the sentence, *We go to Sydney* we have to use the preposition *nach* which usually means *after* as in *nachmittags=afternoon*. So to the English ear, the German sentence sounds like *We go after Sydney*.

In French, you use the preposition which is usually translated into English as *at*. *Nous allons a Sydney. We go at Sydney*.

Likewise with *under the circumstances*. As so often happens when you hear things through another language, you see things in a fresh way.

Joseph had learned that he did not have to live *under* the circumstances. He realised that the circumstances had made him unimportant. Under the circumstances he was a nobody.

He realised that his life was not about him. Under the circumstances he had no life to call his own. He was owned by someone else.

He realised that he was not in control. Under the circumstances he could not control what was happening to him. Mrs Potiphar could say what she liked and he was a gonner.

But Joseph did not live under the circumstances. He lived over the circumstances.

The reason Joseph is great and greatly remembered is because he was completely surrendered to God. Joseph knew what was important in life and it wasn't Joseph. It was God. Joseph knew that God could make something of his circumstances. He had an enduring faith that some good would come from his suffering. And his faith did not go unrewarded.

Joseph knew that his life was not about Joseph. Indeed, God had a plan. God wanted to show himself to be a God who cares for the poor, the slave, the imprisoned. But also he wanted to show himself as a saving God, a God who redeems, a God who lifts up the downtrodden.

This is why the story has endured. Not because of Joseph. He's unimportant. But because of what the story tells us about God. He's important. Life is about God. God is in control.

So Joseph was not buried under the circumstances because he knew God who was clearly over the circumstances, and who was working out his purpose as the years succeed to years. Joseph's role, as is ours, was to yield ourselves our lives and our circumstances to God. And watch what surprising things happen.

May we continue to be blessed as we give ourselves away every day to God and his will for our lives.

A-men.