

Sermon Notes – June 7, 2020
“Life Lessons From Joseph”
(Genesis 37:1-11)

(I hope you'll read Genesis chapters 37-50, if you get a chance to know the whole story of Joseph.)

Motivational speaker, Tim Storey, points out that hard times give us an opportunity to witness to others - to be a good example of faithfulness and integrity in the midst of bad times. He goes on to say that, “Somebody needs your test to turn into a testimony and somebody needs your mess to turn into a message.” Joseph’s story will bear witness to this idea.

As you read about the life of Joseph recorded in the book of Genesis chapters 37-50, you’ll definitely learn that life often tested him - life was not always fair - but God worked through all of the twists, turns, and detours in Joseph’s life to give us a message and used his life as a testimony to us of God’s faithfulness and His ability to bring good out of the bad and unfairness of life.

Join me as we look deeper into Joseph’s life. Joseph was the favored son of Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel. He was born in Jacob’s old age and Jacob spoiled him. He gave Joseph a coat of many colors - a symbol of honor and blessing - but the other brothers (11 of them) did not get a fancy coat and the blessings of the father, Jacob. Joseph also didn’t have to work as hard as the other brothers. He was a dreamer - he had grandiose dreams of being a ruler one day and his brothers bowing down to him - which made his brothers even more jealous and angry - for Joseph always shared his dreams aloud with the family. (You could definitely say that Joseph’s family was a bit dysfunctional.)

Joseph was so hated by his brothers that one day when their father, Jacob, sent him to check on the brothers out in the field, they plotted to kill him. When he arrived where they were, they stripped that beautiful coat off of him and threw him in a pit. All of a sudden, they looked up,

saw a caravan of slave traders going to Egypt, and decided to sell him as a slave for 20 shekels of silver. (They took his beautiful coat and dipped it in goat's blood and left their father to assume Joseph was killed by a ferocious animal.) When Joseph got to Egypt, the original slave traders sold him to Potiphar, captain of the Pharaoh's army. Now keep in mind – Joseph was born the son of a wealthy farmer and shepherd, but now he is in rags and a slave – talk about life not being fair. Joseph was hardworking and trustworthy and according to the scriptures, he was “handsome and well-built.” Well, Potiphar was gone from home a lot and I guess his privileged wife had too much free time on her hands. She was lonely. One day when her husband was away on business, she tried to seduce Joseph to have a sexual affair with her – but he refused and ran away. (Note: ***Joseph was a man of moral purity and integrity.***) But, I guess the scorned woman was not happy, so she told Potiphar that Joseph tried to rape her and she had his coat as evidence. Like any man deeply in love with his wife, Potiphar was furious and had Joseph thrown into prison. (Notice – Joseph has been sold into slavery by his own “flesh and blood” brothers – stripped of his family, his culture, and his privileged home – and on top of it, now he is in prison – falsely accused and imprisoned for something he didn't do. *Life isn't always fair, is it?*)

About two weeks ago, there was a man on TV's “America's Got Talent” who sang a beautiful solo and was given the golden buzzer to go from the tryouts to the finality of the show. That night when he introduced himself and they asked him to tell what he had been doing for the last few years (keep in mind, he's probably in his 50's), he said “I was imprisoned for the last 36 years of my life for a crime I did not commit, and after all these years, DNA testing has been improved, and it showed that I did not commit the crime. I was released recently and have been singing in church. I used to sing in prison, too, and folks encouraged me to try out my ability on your show.” I don't know where this man will end up with his singing, but he definitely has a talent. His story of being falsely accused reminded me of Joseph in our Bible story.

As we continue with Joseph's story, he stayed in prison for several years. While there, he met the Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. Both of these

men had dreams that they did not understand. One day, they shared their dreams with Joseph and he told them that God would help him explain the dreams. He told the baker that his dream meant that in three days, he would be released from prison and hanged by the Pharaoh - and that the cupbearer would be freed in three days, too, but he would be restored to service in Pharaoh's palace as his cupbearer. All of this came true in the next three days, but Joseph asked the cupbearer when he was leaving prison - remember me, especially to Pharaoh - maybe if you put in a good word for me, Pharaoh will release me from prison. The cupbearer promised to remember, but he forgot Joseph for two more years. Can you imagine that the friend you helped forgot you? (Sometimes life can be unfair, can't it? And speaking of twists and turns in Joseph's life, there were lots of them.)

One day, the Pharaoh had a dream and none of his magicians and wise counselors knew or understood it, but the cupbearer suddenly remembered Joseph in prison. Joseph is brought out of prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and he tells Pharaoh that God will help him explain the dreams. There will be seven years of prosperity and abundance in Egypt followed by seven years of famine in the land - and it's important now to put someone in charge of food storage while they are in the prosperous years so they will have enough food and grain for the people of Egypt in the years of famine and scarcity. Pharaoh is so impressed with Joseph's wisdom and discernment, he promotes Joseph to second-in-command to Pharaoh in Egypt. He will organize and administer the food storage and it's distribution. (*Notice Joseph has moved from a slave - to a criminal - to a ruler.* Remember Joseph's dreams at age 17 - one day others would bow down to him?)

At age 30, he has become a ruler - with power, position, and riches in Egypt. Several years later, guess who comes to Egypt for food and grain for their animals? Joseph's brothers! They came from Israel with money to ask for food. They do not recognize him, but he recognizes them. (Keep in mind, Joseph is now probably around 40 years of age, well-built, dressed like an Egyptian, and his speech has modified to that of Egypt.) Can't you imagine Joseph wanted some "payback" revenge? Well, he tried

initially to get back at the brothers and when you read chapters 42, 43, and 44 of Genesis, you'll learn Joseph used trickery and mischief - accused them of being spies - had their money and his silver cup placed in their bags - and then sent his soldiers after the brothers - and put them in jail for a few days. **But, Joseph was a strong believer in God and God's ways** and God wouldn't let him continue his charade. In chapter 45, Joseph breaks down in tears and confesses to his brothers that he is their long lost brother that they sold into slavery. "You meant what you did to me for evil and harm, but God intended it for good. You didn't send me here, but God sent me ahead of you to save your lives and to preserve a remnant of Israel." Joseph then persuades his brothers to have their father, Jacob, their families, and their animals brought to Egypt because of the famine in Israel.

At the end of the book of Genesis, Jacob the father, dies and when he died, Joseph's brothers became afraid again - that Joseph would seek revenge. They wrote a note (*as if it were from their father*) asking Joseph to forgive his brothers and to let them be his slaves. ***By now, Joseph has learned to live forgivingly*** - he reminds them, "you meant what you did for harm to me, but God brought good out of it." He forgives his brothers and tells them that he will provide for them and their families.

So, what can you learn from the story of Joseph?

1. **To have faith and trust in God.** Joseph had a strong faith and trust in God - trust that God is working behind the scenes, even when he didn't understand, and trust that God could bring good out of life's twists and turns, detours, and unfairness.
2. **Use the skills God has given you.** Joseph used the skills and gifts God gave him - a God-given talent to interpret dreams and a natural gift of organizing things and people - whether as a slave or an administrator of food supply.
3. **Be a person of character and integrity.** Joseph was a man of character and integrity - evidenced by his refusal to have an affair with Potiphar's wife. The world is watching us Christians. The

world wants to see and know that we are a people of integrity – choosing to do the right thing – even when no one is looking.

4. **Learn to live forgivingly.** He as a man who learned to live forgivingly – he forgave his brothers who hurt him so deeply. Joseph knew that God had forgiven him and that God expects us to grow in forgiving those who hurt us, intentionally or accidentally. Is it easy? No. Ask Joseph – just like us, he wanted some revenge, but because of his commitment to God and his growth as a Christian, he discovered God wanted him to forgive them.
5. **Never give up.** Joseph never gave up and he had the grace to deal with what life threw at him.

Jane Pauley, a former TV anchor for Dateline NBC, once was interviewed about her life and her family and she said this: *“I credit my parents with teaching me to take responsibility for my life. My parents always felt blessed, but life was not always easy for them. Tragedy and bitter disappointment was a factor in both of their lives. Life has been kinder to me, but my parents taught me that the number-one criteria for successful living was the grace to deal with what you’re dealt in life.”*

I think Joseph’s story teaches us that he had grace and a positive attitude and trust in God. **Never give up and trust God will find a way.** God found a way to make Joseph a ruler in Egypt and to provide for the Israelites – even with all of his life’s twists and turns and detours and setbacks.

As Tim Storey would say, *“**Somebody needs your test to be a testimony and somebody needs your mess to be a message.**”* God took Joseph’s story and made it into a testimony – and his mess definitely has a message for us. May God use the story of Joseph to speak some truth and inspiration in your life. Amen.