

In case you haven't noticed, our auditorium is pretty full. Our plan is to pack it in and enjoy the 'full room energy' until August 18th, when we will move to two gatherings, 9am and 11am. Until then, let's continue to arrive at our Gathering early and choose seats in the middle of each row so seats are available for first time visitors.

Soft Intro

We did it! Last one of the series.

Recap our aim for this series

Sermon intro

On-ramp to Joseph

- technicolor dreamcoat - show of hands if you've seen this musical? If you ever see me wearing something like this, something is wrong.
- joseph king of dreams -

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible - Joseph gets a ton of screen time. And yet, outside of Genesis, very, very little is mentioned about him. Now I would argue there's a good reason for that...but before I tell you, let's get into the story.

If you have a Bible, we'll be in **Genesis 39...**

Now, as you're turning there, here's a little background on Joseph.

- Son of Jacob/Israel and Rachel. One of the youngest of 12 brothers.
- Begins having dreams - "I had this dream that all of you were bowing down to me."
- He's Jacob's favorite son - enter the coat of many colors - **37:9**
 - Now to be clear, what's the robe about? A number of scholars suggest that this is the family robe that gets passed down from the father to the first-born son. So Jacob treats Joseph almost like the second in command. Joseph is given this favoritism and prestige above everyone else.

So track with me here, if you had to map out Joseph's story, there are five big movements in his life. Movement 1 is he's exalted by his father. He's the favorite one.

Raised up by the father (Gen 37)

Raised up by his master (Gen 39)

Raised up by the Pharaoh

Brought down to the Pit (Gen 37, 39)

Brought down to Prison (Gen 40)

All this to say...this is not a good look if you have 11 other brothers.

For those of us who have siblings...imagine you're one of his brothers. Your father clearly has a favorite. Flaunting that before all of you. On top of that, Joseph keeps babbling on about his dreams, "Hey check this out. Dad gave me the family coat. Also...have I told you yet about the dream I had where you all are bowing down to me? Isn't that cool?"

So as the story unfolds the brothers get jealous. Which...yea, of course they would. All of them are out in the field and they see Joseph walking up to them, strutting his stuff, rocking out dad's coat. And then one of them says, "Hey psst...here comes Joseph. What's say we...you know...kill him."

I'm sorry. Wut? In my mind, you'd think they'd pull some prank on him. Or give him a wedgie. Or beat him up a little bit. Classic brother stuff. Nope. They go straight to "Let's kill him."

And two of his brothers, Reuben and Judah say, "Whoa whoa whoa. Fellas. Let's not do that. How about we throw him into a pit and say he was killed?" So that's what they do. They throw him into a pit. And then they eventually sell him into slavery.

And now we get to movement 2:

Raised up by the father (Gen 37)

Raised up by his master (Gen 39)

Raised up by the Pharaoh

Brought down to the Pit (Gen 37, 39)

Brought down to Prison (Gen 40)

Genesis 39:1

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

And now notice this next verse. What's it say?

Genesis 39:2

The LORD was with Joseph

Huh? It says Joseph goes from being the favored one in his family to being brought down into slavery. And yet it says the LORD was with Joseph. (Bible literacy tool - LORD is in all caps - what does that mean in Hebrew? Yahweh. The relational name of God - is with Joseph in the middle of all of this.)

Now let's just go ahead and state the obvious - I don't know if this is how most of us would think about the LORD being with us. When your life has been so upended, many of us would not say the LORD is with us.

We tend to associate the LORD with us when it comes to good things happening in our lives. Like if you watch a football game and the winning team is interviewed, we expect them to say something like "Well first of all I want to give glory to God, He made this win all possible." Totally normal thing for people to say. If you interview the losing team, you're not going to hear someone say, "Well first of all I want to give glory to God, He made this loss possible."

What I'm saying is - we tend to associate God's presence with blessing not suffering. But as we'll see... it's just not one or the other. It's both.

Keep reading:

Genesis 39:2-6

The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

So take a look at the trajectory here. Joseph goes from being raised up by his father, to being brought down low into slavery. And yet the LORD was with him and within a few verses, Joseph is raised up by his master. He's the favored one in the household. Basically second in command of everything. This leads to movement three in the Joseph narrative:

Raised up by the father (Gen 37)

Raised up by his master (Gen 39)

Raised up by the Pharaoh

Brought down to the Pit (Gen 37, 39)

Brought down to Prison (Gen 40)

Now if we stopped the story right there, it would be a quick happy-ending(ish) sorta story. Redemption story. He got knocked down, but get got up again, because you're never gonna bring him down. Hooray! But the story goes on...

Genesis 39:6

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

Just real quick. The only time that the phrase "handsome in form and appearance" is used elsewhere in the Bible is to describe his mother Rachel. Jacob sees Rachel and he lusts after her. We see something similar happen next.

Genesis 39:7

And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me."

More literally: **Sleep with me.** Yikes. What's Joseph going to do?

Genesis 39:8-10

But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. **9** He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" **10** And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

Here's an interesting note, is that Joseph, like so much of his life before this, can't control what happens to him, but he can control his response. Despite all that's happened to him, despite the temptation, he won't forsake his integrity.

Genesis 39:11-20

But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, **12** she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. **13** And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, **14** she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. **15** And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." **16** Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, **17** and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. **18** But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house."

19 As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. **20** And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

And so quickly, it seems Joseph goes from being raised up by his master to once again is brought low. Movement 4:

Raised up by the father (Gen 37)

Raised up by his master (Gen 39)

Raised up by the Pharaoh

Brought down to the Pit (Gen 37, 39)

Brought down to Prison (Gen 40)

Do you see the pattern here?

Now I don't know what you're feeling if you're Joseph at this moment. I know what I would be feeling at this moment.

- I would be feeling some sense of **righteous anger**, pleading for my innocence, "Hey I did nothing wrong! I'm innocent! God why did you do this to me?"
- I would be feeling very **defeated**, "Why me? Why did this happen to me again? Why can't I ever catch a break?"
- If I were Joseph in this situation I would be feeling utterly **hopeless**, "God you could have done something to stop this. But you didn't."

But then notice the next verse in the text:

Genesis 39:21

But the LORD was with Joseph

I'm sorry, what are we talking about?! Again, if I'm Joseph, I'll be honest with you, I don't know if I'm thinking "the LORD is with me." He was just sinned against. He was lied about, his reputation destroyed, his credibility ruined...and I don't know what your mental image is of this type of prison but I can almost guarantee you your

impression is not gross enough, is not dehumanizing enough, is not defiling enough, is not smelly enough, is not unsanitary enough. And God is with him?...in there? Reeeeeeally?

The text goes on:

Genesis 39:21-23

But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. **22** And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. **23** The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.

Now I'll clip through the story faster, but while he's in prison, Joseph becomes yet again the favored one. Despite all these terrible things happening in his life. And while in prison he hears two other prisoners who worked for the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, talking about their dreams. And Joseph's like, "Yea I know a thing or two about dreams, what are they?" And he tells them and he correctly interprets their dreams for them. He asks one of the prisoners, "Hey when you get out of here, and go back to work for Pharaoh, please remember me and get me out of here."

And sure enough that prisoner is released, works for Pharaoh again, and totally forgets about Joseph. And Joseph stays in prison for two...more...years.

Eventually Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, has a dream that bothers him so much that he wants someone to interpret the dream for him and no one is able to do it. And in that moment, the former prisoner says "Oh wait. There was a guy I did time with a couple of years ago that was really good at interpreting dreams."

So Pharaoh gets Joseph out of prison, tells him what the dream means. He basically says...Yea your dream means there will be a famine throughout the world. People will be out of food for seven years. And just like that Joseph is raised up out of the prison, and becomes second in command over all of Egypt. And this is where we get to our fifth and final movement:

Raised up by the father (Gen 37)

Raised up by his master (Gen 39)

Raised up by the Pharaoh

Brought down to the Pit (Gen 37, 39)

Brought down to Prison (Gen 40)

Again, do you see a pattern here in the Joseph story?

Raised up by the father. Brought down. Yet YHWH was with him. Raised up by his master. Brought down. Yes YHWH was with him. Raised up by the Pharaoh. And shortly after he's raised up again - he starts a family of his own and we're given some perspective on how he's viewed his life so far. Look at chapter 41:

Genesis 41:50-52

Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore them to him. **51** Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." **52** The name of the second he called Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Like we've said before - names in the Bible tell a story. And we see in Joseph's naming of his kids, he has perspective on all that has happened so far in his life. He's able to see his kids and say, "God is doing something, giving me something, to help me forget all I've gone through. He's made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

And again...**if the story ended there** it would make for a pretty good ending. From being rejected by his brothers to becoming second in command to the world's leading superpower. Abandoned by his family. Now he has a family of his own. But there's still some unresolved tension in the story.

Here's what I mean:

Once Joseph is put in charge by Pharaoh, a famine spreads throughout most of the known world soon after. Crops aren't coming in. People are starving. But Joseph saw in a dream that this would happen so Joseph gets the Egyptians to stock up on food and supplies before the famine hits. **Joseph's kinda the first doomsday prepper.** And as a result, all the surrounding peoples and nations go to Joseph asking for help, including.....Joseph's own brothers. 20 years has passed since his brothers have thrown him into the pit. And so they approach Joseph and don't recognize him at all. They think he's just some royal official, but Joseph knows exactly who they are and what they did to him.

And if you're Joseph, I don't know how you would react - if the very people who sold you into slavery came to you begging for help. And now here you are, they don't recognize you, and you have all this power in your hands. What I'm saying is...revenge is on the table. It's like right there for him to take. Not saying you should, I'm just saying, it's an option.

Now I would encourage you to read the story on your own. There's a lot of details in the story. But eventually, the brothers finally figure out who it is they're talking to. And once the lightbulb moment hits them, they fall to their knees and begin bowing down before him.

Genesis 50:17

'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.'

Can you hear their desperation? "Please forgive us - the servants of the God of your father. Joseph, remember your dad?! Your dad who loved you?! Think of him. What would he want you to do?"

Genesis 50:17-18

Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

His brothers fall down before him. Bowing down. And if you're a careful Bible reader - this is exactly what Joseph dreamed would happen all the way back in **Genesis 37!**

And notice what Joseph says:

Genesis 50:19

But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"

In other words - Joseph chooses reconciliation rather than revenge.

Genesis 50:20-21

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

[say a bit more here - add how Gen 50:20 is one of the biggest verses in the Torah/OT/Bible - Joseph is able to have a zoomed-out view of his life]

And thus concludes the Joseph story and the end of the book of Genesis.

As I said, Joseph gets more air time in Genesis than near any other character. He goes through all of these twists and turns and ups and downs - to where when you zoom out, you see a pattern emerge through it all. That no matter what happens - God is with him. And if you're an ancient Israelite reading this story, you see the pattern emerge and you would find comfort in the Joseph story. To know that no matter what happened in the life of you and your people - whether it was abundance or famine, whether it was comfort or suffering, whether it was victory or defeat, life or death - God is with you. And that means everything. **What others meant for evil, God means for good.**

Application

So how can we apply a story like this into our own lives? Two questions I want to pose for us:

1 - Do you know God being with you might not mean what you think it means?

Think about it - if you tend to tie God's presence in your life only when things go well in your life, then this story breaks the mold. **We need** to have a category in our minds that God is with you and near you **EVEN WHEN** life isn't turning out the way you want it to. **EVEN WHEN** suffering and injustice happen. **EVEN WHEN** you feel forgotten by the world - to know that God is with **EVEN THERE**.

And part of faithfully following Jesus is to have the ability **EVEN IN THE WORST** of things, to zoom out and let God's presence and nearness interpret the circumstances of your life. Yes, life will bring you down...and life will raise you up. We live in a broken world - sometimes things go great and you see victory over sin and sometimes you see sin seeming to get the best of you. Sometimes you'll be sinned against and people may spread lies about you like Joseph. For some of us, it will feel as though life brings you down more than it raises you up. And for others its the opposite - but no matter what - if you are in Christ, you **MUST** allow God's presence and nearness to interpret the facts of your life...

Because our feelings do not always accurately acknowledge and reflect God's presence and activity. But in time I find that the intellectual knowledge of God being with you in the pit leads to an experiential knowledge of his presence with you in the pit.

So If you are in a season where you feel like you're in some version of a pit, wrestling with some sense of betrayal you perceive, feeling imprisoned to circumstances you didn't ask for and do not want, I hope the your soul hears this - God is with you. God is with you. God is with you.

2 - Are you open to God making you fruitful in the land of your affliction?

Remember, earlier when Joseph has kids, he's able to zoom out and see God's hand in all of his suffering through it all.

He's able to zoom out even when he encounters evil and family betrayal, unjust treatment, undesirable circumstances, even a natural disaster.

Now what makes this so complex is, elsewhere in the Bible, God clearly says he hates evil. **AND YET** in this story God fulfills his promises through the evil that happens....And that somehow Joseph's faithfulness is a part of the equation.

There's complexity. God will do what He set out to do **AND** our actions play a part in what God does. Joseph's faithfulness, somehow, even amidst all the evil going on around him, God used.

And that's why Joseph is able to - even while looking at his brothers who betrayed him, he could say **Genesis 50:20** - "Yes, you meant this for evil. But God meant it for good."

When Joseph holds his baby boy, and he says, "Look-God is making me fruitful in the land of my affliction." But in the end, look how much greater the fruit is. It's not just a son, and a oodt outcome-it's the saving of his entire family and a future nation. His affliction was used to keep many alive, to preserve the people of God.

Now I also recognize that the difficulty and evil and suffering faced by those in this room is varied and complex. There are different categories and we always try to speak carefully to that. But in the broadest sense we'd do well to consider that our affliction need not be wasted.

And I think one of the worst things in the world would be that all of the evil and suffering we endure in this life is pointless. Meaningless. Beyond saving. But God takes all of those things and puts his healing hands around them, and brings redemption out of the worst of things. He does not waste it but brings fruit out of it.

And this means what was true for Joseph is also true for you in Christ. Whatever evil comes your way, if you are in Christ, none of it will be wasted.

How do we know that? Because we see this on clear display with the story of Jesus. God sends His Son into human history. The favored one, exalted by the Father - brought low by taking on flesh. Brought low through rejection by his own people. Brought low through betrayal and lied about by those he came to serve. Brought low through death on a cross, thrown into the pit of death. He experienced the worst of circumstances imaginable - - and in three days - He was raised up. Raised from the pit of death. And now He's raised up and seated at the right hand of God. Jesus was raised and now holds all power and authority. Jesus is the better Joseph, who through the evil done to him brings many to salvation.

Apart from Jesus, we are captive to our circumstances. And one of the the fastest ways to become a ghost is to never be able to deal with the suffering and difficulty life inevitably brings. Our suffering can not only be wasted, but we can be conquered by it, and forever brought low.

But the good news of Jesus says "even if you are kicked down and live your whole life in the pit, you will eventually be raised victorious with Christ."

So that is where we end this story of our ancestor Joseph, and this series. God being with you may not mean what you think it means. He wants to make you fruitful in the land of your affliction, if you will participate in his redemptive work to bring good from evil, to bring beauty out of the pain. That no matter how deep or wide the pit might feel for you, now matter how brought low you feel, if you are in Jesus and Jesus did not stay the pit then neither will you.

Jesus is our better Joseph who shows us that even at the very worst - God is with us. Even at the highest highs or lowest lows - God is with us and wants to draw near to you even in the pain. So that even when we are brought low, even when pain and suffering and death seem to get the final word over our lives, we know that through Jesus, our better Joseph, he will raise us up.

Pray
Communion