

Joseph: Beyond the Technicolor Dreamcoat || Genesis 39:1-23

Rev. Drew Hanson || September 23, 2018

Introduction

Last week we discussed how God's blessing does not always mean that we are certain and comfortable. In fact, there are times that God calls us to bless others, and in that blessing we are called to leave behind certainty and comfort.

Part of this morning's New Testament reading speaks to that. The Beatitudes were read, and at the end, it says this, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Shoe Story

If we are being honest, this is hard to hear. When people revile me, and persecute me, and utter evil against me...blessed is not the word I would think of to describe myself. When I was in middle school I was walking from lunch to P.E., now in Southern California schools look different. The average campus has very few indoor hallways, and rather has several buildings containing classrooms and you walk around outside between classes. So, I'm walking to PE after lunch meaning most of the school was out and walking to their next classes, and when I was in middle school there was a fad where it was cool to have skater shoes, shoes designed for skate boarding. And they were big shoes that you didn't knot so they looked loose. Wanting to be cool, but only owning New Balances (which tells you how cool I was in middle school), I re-laced my shoes to make them look like skater shoes. All this meant that my shoes were way too loose. So I'm walking to PE in my very-not-

cool New Balances and I trip. It's one of those trips where you catch yourself but it takes a few steps to catch yourself. Well this one took my about ten yards to catch myself. And when I finally stopped this epic trip, I look down and I no longer have my shoes! I look back and my left shoe is about five yards behind me and the right shoe is about five yards behind that one. Obviously, I'm embarrassed. And then this kid, not a very nice kid, looks at me, points at me, and yells, "Freak!" You know what my first thought was? The first thing that went through my mind?

Blessed am I when people revile me and persecute me and utter all kinds of evil, like FREAK.

Of course not! I wanted to hide in a hole. My point is that when bad things happen to us, we rarely think we are blessed. So why does Jesus teach this?

This morning we'll seek to answer that question with the story of Joseph.

Joseph before Egypt

First, let's do a refresher on Joseph's background. Joseph was the favorite of 12 sons of Jacob, who had also been called Israel. Jacob was the son of Isaac, and Isaac was the son of Abraham, who we talked about last week. These men are the patriarchs of Israel. Joseph was given a coat by his father Jacob, symbolizing Jacob's favoritism. The word describing this coat in Hebrew is actually difficult to translate, but it means something between a coat with sleeves and the amazing technicolor dreamcoat. Regardless of what it meant, it symbolized Joseph as the favorite. That didn't sit well with his brothers, especially the ten brothers who were older than him. To add to their jealousy, Joseph, who is only 17, also had special dreams that he would share

with his brothers. The first dream involved the twelve brothers binding sheaves of wheat in the field. Joseph's sheaf stood and all the other sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to him. Clearly, this means to his brothers that one day they will all bow down to Joseph. Maybe some dreams are better kept to one's self. This dream made them hate Joseph more.

Then Joseph has another dream, and because he didn't learn his lesson the first time, he again tells his brothers about the dream. There was a sun, a moon, and eleven stars bowing down to Joseph. Now it involved his father, mother, and brothers all bowing down to Joseph. This didn't sit well with any of them.

It got to the point where the older brothers decided to get rid of him and throw him in a pit to leave him to die. Then they see a caravan of Ishmaelites, so they decide to profit off their brother and instead of let him die, they'd make some money off of him by selling him into slavery. They took this special coat, covered it with goat's blood, took it to Jacob and said your son, Joseph, is dead. Jacob is devastated.

But we as the readers know that Joseph is not dead, but rather heading to Egypt to be sold there as a slave. That's when the narrative of Genesis begins following Joseph and his story.

Joseph in Egypt: Good times

Our reading this morning introduces us to Joseph's time in Egypt. I want you to notice some fun word play in this reading. We talk about our life having ups and downs. Joseph's life was filled with ups and downs, both figuratively and literally. He was thrown *down* into a pit by his brothers, only to be lifted *up* out of the pit and sold into slavery. Then, Genesis 39:1 says, "Now Joseph was taken *down* to Egypt..." Thankfully for Joseph, this literal down is quickly followed by a figurative up. Look at

verses 2-5: “The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. So, Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all he had.” Not bad for a kid from a foreign nation who was just thrown into a pit and sold into slavery by his brothers. The key to this whole story are those five words that began verse 2, “The Lord was with Joseph.” I feel like I might sound like a broken record, but again God provides a sliver of hope. Imagine how terrifying it would be to be Joseph, a 17 year old young man, being sold into slavery by your own brothers, and brought hundreds of miles away from the only home you’ve known. Think of the dread of that trip, which could have lasted weeks. But the Lord was with him. No matter how bleak our situations are, God is always providing us with at least a sliver of hope.

Joseph’s life is a roller coaster. It has figurative and literal ups and downs. As we continue learning about Joseph’s life, think of the ups and downs in your life. I’m sure many of you have had roller coaster lives as well, and the rides not yet over for us. Find places you connect with Joseph’s story and think of the ways that God is present in both the ups and downs. And remember that like Joseph, the Lord was, is, and will always be with you.

Joseph in Egypt: Bad times

The next paragraph starts off interestingly. It says, “Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking.” For anyone taking notes, please write that this is what I would like on my tombstone someday: Drew Hanson, handsome and good-looking, Genesis 39:6.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. Why does Scripture give us this detail? Because those good looks do not mean good fortune for

our young hero. Joseph's master's wife see how handsome he is and tries to seduce him. He refuses. She continues trying to seduce him and he continues to refuse until one day, she turns on him and claims that he was the one trying to seduce her. So Joseph's life takes another turn down, as Genesis 39:20 says, "And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison." Imagine how terrifying this would be, sold into slavery, sent to a foreign nation, and then thrown into prison. But again, we get this sliver of hope.

Verse 21 says, "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer." I wonder if sometimes in our lives we miss God's presence because of the expectations that we throw on God. Look at this, God shows that he is with Joseph because he makes the chief jailer like him. This means that life in prison will at least be manageable for Joseph, so that maybe someday he can get out. But I wonder if we would miss that?

Let me explain what I mean. If I were in Joseph's position, I would be petitioning for God to get me out of prison, to return me home, or at least somewhere where I'll be free and safe. God get me out of this prison. I would assume that God was with me only if I got that freedom. But God shows his presence through the chief jailer's favor. In our downs in life, in our prisons, in our sorrows or grief, I wonder if God shows us his presence in little ways like that because we expect the big things. We expect to be released from prison, we expect it immediately, and we miss the small graces that God gives us in the midst of suffering.

You see, God gives us these slivers of hope because there is a day coming when that hope is fully shown. These slivers of hope get us through the next day or week or year, whatever it is, but we are always

promised salvation from whatever ails us. That could come in this life or in eternity, but it is indeed promised.

For Joseph, God provides the full hope of being released from prison.

Joseph after prison

Funny enough, it was Joseph's dreams that got him in trouble with his brothers, but it was interpreting others' dreams that gets him out of prison and into the good graces of the Pharaoh of Egypt himself. There were two prisoners with Joseph, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. They each had a dream, and God gave Joseph the ability to interpret their dreams. Their dreams came true, and two years later, Pharaoh had dreams that none of his people could interpret. At that point, the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph, and suggested that Joseph be freed from prison to help Pharaoh interpret these dreams.

Joseph correctly interpreted that God was warning Egypt about an upcoming famine that would last seven years after seven years of plenty. So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of basically everything, making him like a vice-pharaoh, and thanks to Joseph's dream interpreting and subsequent planning to prepare for the famine, he saves Egypt. All because God was with him. Joseph did not lose hope, but held onto those slivers of hope, those little graces in the midst of suffering, and he became truly blessed.

While Joseph was leading Egypt during the famine, people from other nations came seeking help, as the famine struck other places as well. This included Joseph's brothers, who did not recognize Joseph. Joseph saves them, redeems them, and then reveals that he is the brother they sold into slavery. There's more to the story, so I suggest you read it, but it culminates in Joseph being reunited to his father Jacob, who was so

devastated when he thought Joseph died. Despite the ups and downs of Joseph's life, the story ends happy.

For Us

The story of Joseph helps us reframe how we see suffering. In Genesis 50, Joseph is talking to his brothers, and after all they had done, planning to kill him and instead selling him into slavery, Joseph says this to them: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good." God did not cause the suffering, but God was able to work within that suffering to save and produce new life.

Instead of asking "Why would God do this to me?" or "Why would God allow this to happen?" the Joseph story invites us to ask, "What can God do with this situation?" "Where can God go from here?" "Where can God take me from here?" Ultimately, the Joseph story is not a story about Joseph, but about God, and his constant faithfulness in the face of suffering.

Jesus knew about suffering. His suffering during the crucifixion shows us that he understands suffering. The cross is the ultimate sign of God's presence. From the pain and suffering of the cross comes the beauty and joy of salvation and everlasting life. Through suffering, Jesus brings new life. When suffering happens, we can *expect* God to bring new life.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are blessed in the ups and the downs of life. Maybe even especially in the downs because God is present to those who suffer. God brings new life in the face of suffering. When you are in the downs of life, the

pits or the Egyptian prisons of life, ask yourself, “What can God do with this situation? Where can God go from here? Where can God take me from here?” Keep an eye out for those slivers of hope, hold on to those small graces, and remember that God is with you. God is always with you.