

The Rock: 04-26-2020

Long-term faithfulness:

The journey of Joseph

First reading:

Title: Exile

Scripture: Genesis 37:18-36

Theme:

In looking at this portion of Scripture, it is very important to remember that: If God is sovereign over it, He has purpose in it, and He will get you through it.

Introduction:

That is critical to understand -Mark Batterson has said many times that a change of place + a change of pace = A change of perspective.

And we all, before we dig in today, have to admit or at least acknowledge some very difficult things:

1-That often times God uses our current situation to grow us in ways we normally wouldn't, and stretch us in ways we would rather avoid.

2-To help us work out our salvation, to grow in knowledge and grace, we are sometimes forced out of our places of comfort - for our long-term good and growth, whether it be for a short period of time or long, it happens.

We really need to keep that in front of us, especially today. Because our story takes a very ugly turn, but in God's goodness, it is for the absolute best, not only for Joseph, but for his brothers and the people of God.

The Story:

We left off last week with Joseph's brothers seeing him coming and deciding to kill him. Only to have Reuben step in and "save him".

That peacefully unsettling truth of God's will. In order for Joseph to become the "man of his dreams", he is going to be displaced in a very painful way.

There is no way Joseph can grow to be what God has called him to, if he is left as the spoiled favorite in a very broken family.

And sadly, what that means is that while God is not the cause of his upcoming suffering -He is sovereign over it and through it.

And until we can at least get our hands around that thought, we won't get much from this story. And I am sure that their great-great-grandfather Abraham didn't have this behavior and scenario in mind when God told him:

"Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

-Genesis 15:13-16 ESV

But God is in it. As an aside, it helps us today in our current crisis. Really? Yes.

So much stuff is floating around the internet regarding end-times, plagues, God's judgement for our sinfulness, etc.

The best way to understand things today, is to know that while God did not cause (or send) this virus, HE IS SOVEREIGN over it all, and through it all.

And how we respond in the midst of the crisis, defines our character as individuals, as a community, and as a nation.

Back to our story, because here comes Joseph -sent by his Dad simply to see if his brothers are ok.

But the family dynamics are at a boiling point. Joseph doesn't know this yet, but he is about to find out what "being quarantined" is really all about.

"They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father."

-Genesis 37:18-22 ESV

"Here comes this dreamer." How little they thought of their brother. His

arrogance, and his position has pushed them to the point of wanting to kill.

That thought alone ought to unsettle us, but as always, there is one. Rueben...

He has the where-with-all to speak a bit of sense to his brothers, and gets them to agree to a less drastic measure for the moment.

"So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it."

-Genesis 37:23-24 ESV

This is no Hobbit hole. It was a cistern for collecting water which would have had a very narrow opening at the top and opening up to a round walled cavern in the ground. Thankfully it had no water in it.

But there is something for us to notice. The robe or coat of many colors. That identifier that many of us remember this story by.

It was how people knew it was Joseph, and I think it important for us to see, because the writer here uses it in that way.

His brothers knew it was him coming. How? The coat. It was how Joseph identified himself. "I am Dad's favorite! And I've got the coat to prove it."

In essence, to destroy the coat, destroyed his identity.

It was, in every sense, the first steps in taking away who he was.

The journey to who he was to become, began in the darkness of a pit, at the violent hands of his brothers.

There is very little to do in confinement but think, pray, and sort out just what might have gone wrong.

Sometimes we discover ourselves in moments such as this, that perhaps we were a bigger part of the problem than we at first thought.

Now, I can only speculate here as to what Joseph was thinking in the darkness, for we aren't told. But we are all human beings, and anger, rage, panic, fear, blame, all these come to mind.

But then, so don't contemplation, self-reflection, leading to self-awareness of the fact that he too had a big part in getting to where he was.

Never to excuse what his brothers did, but to fix a very bad situation like this, everyone involved has to acknowledge their part, their shortcomings, if ever there is to be growth in God and in Christ.

What else does one do in this pit?

We find that his brothers at the moment aren't there in their thinking. Instead:

"...they sat down to eat."

-Genesis 37:25a ESV

If that seems very cold-hearted, it ought to, because it is.

But you see, unaddressed problems, concerns, and even poorly handled issues, put folks into situations just like this.

Not so much the desire to dispose of a sibling, but the dysfunctional behavior, the inappropriate handling of an issue or conflict.

The beauty of this story, and there is beauty, is God's grace, because we know the end. But it is very ugly right now and we have to deal with that ugliness.

Why? Because, unresolved conflict, unaddressed issues and problems fester. They grow in the dark and affect a great many things and people.

Unity-trust-relationship dynamics and so on are all impacted by how one deals with or does not deal with such things.

This is a family, and perhaps for you, this story hits home. At the personal level, the family unit.

Perhaps it's the work environment, where things are just "out there". Perhaps it's the church community.

How do you deal with issues?"

Core value number 2 for me is: **I will handle all conflict Biblically.** So, at a personal level, I have to take ownership of things, sorting out what I need to do.

I cannot be, nor will I be responsible for how others act / respond, But I can and must be for myself.

Making sure I am doing all I can to handle things Biblically -AND from the community and cooperate level, teach that this is the appropriate way to handle all issues and conflict.

Hard? Absolutely! It makes me very unsettled, and even sick to my stomach. I hate conflict! Surprising at that sounds for some.

But this is God's desire for us, that we handle all conflicts and differences

Biblically. It is the harder thing to do, but it is the right thing to do!

You see, LOVE-unity-humility-gentleness-patience, all come out of handling things in a Biblical way. Remember Ephesians 4, from back in February? The message titled: "The Family of God".

Now, before we think: "Man I know someone who really needs to hear this and get a grip on it."

Ask yourself first: "Do I need to hear this and get a grip on this? Am I handling all conflict biblically?" It's a hard question, but it is the right question.

Because none of Jacob's boys would be where they were, eating food around a fire while their brother was in the darkness of a pit, if they were more self-reflective.

I told you, this is a hard part of the story, and sadly it gets worse before it gets better. Because, at some point around the fire and the food, Judah comes up with a scheme:

"And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers,

"What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt."

-Genesis 37:25b-28 ESV

"Hey guys, we don't have to kill him, because then we'd be guilty." WOW! Just WOW!" "Let's make some money out of this instead!"

Here's a good time to ask a couple of those questions from last week:

- 1- Where is God in the midst of that?
(His brothers)
- 2- What does one do when everything seems to go against you? (Joseph)

As always, God is right in the middle of it all. He is sovereign even in the foolishness and selfish choices of His kids. Now, He will use this later in life to bring about repentance and salvation.

But for now, it looks pretty rough!

And that echoes once again forward to Jesus, doesn't it? He didn't come for righteous people. Why? There aren't any.

We are all in the same leaky boat as we journey in life. Jew, Greek, atheist, agnostic, pantheist, gay, straight. In other words, the whole world.

You see, Paul in addressing the Jews in Rome about how God sees humanity as a whole says to his fellow Jews:

"Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

-Romans 3:9-12 ESV

Awesome! Same leaky boat for all of us, inside the church as well as outside!

Jesus steps into that leaky boat, full of humanity, repairs the leak, in the midst of us thinking there is no leak, or not wanting it fixed:

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who

believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

-Romans 3:21-24 ESV

God's grace in our brokenness is the most beautiful and hopeful thing that I know of. In my brokenness, in your brokenness, He picks us up, dusts us off, and as any good Dad would do, He straightens us out with a smile and says: "Do better my child, do better."

Joseph's brothers will learn of that grace. It will take a lifetime, but they will learn it.

As for Joseph's question of everything being against you, and what do you do? Well, you grow in grace and in trust of God's sovereign hand, and you grow in character before God and man.

But that comes next week through the hint of who he was sold to.