

5th in the series on *Heroes of Faith*)

The Story of Joseph

Genesis 37:1-36

Joseph is described as the eleventh and favorite son of Jacob and the first-born of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. Joseph was a spoiled, pampered child, never letting his brothers forget his status and never taking the blame for anything in the family. His brothers hated him for this. Jacob had a special coat made for Joseph at the expense of the brothers. Further, with great arrogance, Joseph shares a dream about his brothers bowing down to him. Finally, the brothers had had enough. They plotted his demise and sold Joseph to slave traders heading to Egypt. They took the special coat; covered it in lamb's blood, telling their father Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. They thought this would be the end of Joseph, but little did they know the plan God had for Joseph and for them.

Genesis 39:1-23

Joseph is sold to an Egyptian soldier named Potiphar. As Joseph matures to be a man, he proves to be an intelligent, wise, honest, and hard working slave. His youthful arrogance has seemed to melt with maturity. Quickly, he rises to the head of the Potiphar household, administering all of Potiphar's affairs. It is said that Joseph became a successful man because his master noticed "that the Lord was with him, and the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands." In the mind of the writer, all other factors in Joseph's rise to importance are of secondary importance. For the man who is favored by God, there is nothing that cannot be overcome.

Joseph's success comes to an end as he makes the Potiphar a wealthy man. In the process, Potiphar's wife falls in love with Joseph and approaches him with her desire. Joseph is true to his master, even at the outrage of the soldier's wife. To get revenge against Joseph, she lies and accuses Joseph of approaching her. Potiphar is enraged and has Joseph thrown in jail. Even in jail God favors Joseph and all he does prospers.

Genesis 40:1-41:57

One of the expressions used to describe Joseph is "the Lord of dreams" or "master of dreams." It is this mastery that now causes Joseph to rise to even greater heights. While in prison, word of his ability to interpret dreams spreads. Even the Pharaoh hears of Joseph's ability and calls on him to interpret his dreams. Joseph is very accurate in his interpretations. This leads to the appointment of Joseph to run the government of Egypt. Each time that Joseph's social status is improved, we are reminded that it is under the auspices of God.

At the height of his power, Joseph predicts, through the interpretation of a dream, a worldwide seven year famine. As such, Egypt prepares for the famine by storing grain to sell to other nations. Egypt rises to great power and wealth. With Egypt, the influence of Joseph increases also.

Genesis 42:1-43:34

The famine affects the land of Canaan and Jacob sends Joseph's brothers to buy grain from the Egyptians. Not recognizing Joseph, the brothers deal directly with the estranged Joseph. Over a period of time the brothers travel back and forth from Canaan to Egypt. Joseph seems to make it difficult on his brothers, but they never really pay for any of the grain they receive from Egypt.

Genesis 45:1-47:12

Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers and promises prosperity to them. They go get Jacob and the entire company moves Egypt to be under the protection of Joseph.

Genesis 50:15-26

After their father Jacob dies, the brothers are afraid for their lives thinking that Joseph would now do harm to them because they sold him into slavery. Instead Joseph shows mercy on his brothers. Joseph gives witness to the fact that God has been in the midst of all that has happened.

Joseph said to them, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? 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. So do not fear, I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he reassured them and comforted them.

Romans 8:28

This is one of the best known passages in the New Testament. The implications of this verse are far greater than just the "working for good" in our lives. The passage points to the perfect will of God that is over all creation. We see life through the lenses of our experience, while the purposes of God are often greater than our individual experience. To proclaim "all things work together for good," is an act of obedience and faith that God's holy will prevails no matter how unfair things may seem. Joseph is an example of this divine action, as the unjust actions of those around Joseph are used for good.

Questions for further reflection

1. How does Joseph change in the story?
2. Can you characterize the story with one word?
3. How is Joseph's story your story?
4. What is God like in the story?
5. To whom do you best relate in the story – Joseph or his brothers?

Next Week's Worship

Sermon – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – Commitment

Daniel 3:13-30

John 16:29-33

Please note: The following daily readings allows you to study other passages that speak to the place of scripture in our lives. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper. In this week's reading we finish the book of James.

This book is often misunderstood as emphasizing works over faith. Martin Luther in the 16th century referred to James as the "epistle of straw". Luther believed that the focus of "salvation by faith" is lost in James as he teaches his reader about the importance of works as a person of faith in Christ.

James' message is for the person who has lost touch with the high call of Christ in their behavior. It is far more than an "epistle of straw". As the apostle Paul says, "By your fruit you shall be known." Likewise, James knows that our life with Christ begins in faith, and then leads to a new way to live.

Monday – Read *James 5:1-6*. This paragraph introduces James final thoughts. The reading begins with a warning to those who have material goods. Closer examination of the passage shows that the warning is toward those who selfishly keep their wealth at the expense of God's work and God's creation. According to James, the reliance on material goods instead of God will bring heart ache and trouble. Listen today to God's call on your life. Do you depend on God for your security?

Tuesday – Read *James 5:7-11*. James again emphasizes the ways of God by lifting up patience, endurance, compassion and mercy. He warns us about our conduct with others, assuring us that our conduct with each other is the measure of our faith. In what situations do you need patience today? Pray for God's endurance in your life. Watch for those who need your mercy and compassion.

Wednesday – Read *James 5:12*. This short passage reminds us that our every word we speak is a reflection of Christ's presence in our lives. Watch your words. There is no need to swear an oath, but let your integrity speak for itself. Begin and end this day with a prayer for those you will meet. How does your language show what or who leads your decisions? Will you need to swear an oath for others to believe you?

Thursday – Read *James 5:13-18*. This is one of the most popular passages in the Bible concerning prayer. It is a promise for God's providence when those of faith pray. Do you need prayer for a health, family or work situation? Do others need your prayers? Who are those right with God that will pray with you for these situations? Today ask at least one person to pray with you.

Friday – Read *James 5:19-20*. James is not referring to people who have ceased to be believers. Rather he refers to those who have slipped into error in their daily Christian lives. This morning pray for your closest associates and friends. In what way is God leading you to shepherd their faith? Do you have a spiritual mentor? Who prays with you and keeps you accountable to God?