The Trials of Joseph

Zanesville, OH | February 10, 2019 | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:** Gen. 37, 39-40

**Intro**:

* The story of Joseph does not begin as how one would imagine based on how it ended. Joseph’s life as a young adult was quite the experience to say the least. For 13 years Joseph experienced 3 major trials that would determine the outcome of his fate, how far he would go and how much he would grow. Over the course of these trials, these tumultuous circumstances, he could either be broken, or he could be established. What does the bible tell us about **how Joseph dealt with these things?**

1. **Detested and Sold into Egyptian Slavery: Gen. 37:1-36**
   1. The first of these events takes place when Joseph is 17 years old. We are told that he is the favorite child of his father Jacob and the rest of his brothers hated him because of that (vv. 2-4).
   2. Furthermore, Joseph has a rather interesting dream which he relays to his brothers. In the dream, the sheaves of the 11 brothers bow down at the sheaf of Joseph signifying that they would be in a lesser role to him at some point in time and they hated him even more on account of that dream (vv. 5-8).
   3. If that wasn’t bad enough (Tensions rising and Joseph already has 2 strikes against him), he has yet another dream in which the sun, moon and 11 stars all bow down to him signifying that his entire family would serve Him (vv. 9-11). In the eyes of his brothers, this is the last straw.
   4. The brothers, on account of their growing hatred and jealousy of Joseph, plot to kill him at first but the plan is thwarted by Reuben (vv. 11-22). The 10 brothers then decide to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, and he is later sold into Egyptian slavery (vv. 23-36).
   5. The brothers have gotten their wish that they would rid themselves of Joseph and at the ripe age of 17 Joseph finds himself at the mercy of the Egyptians.
2. **Falsely Accused and Thrown into Prison: Gen. 39:1-23**
   1. Despite what must have been an immensely troubling and painful ordeal, the bible tells us that God was with Joseph and he prospered in Egypt. His master recognized this and put him in charge of his household (vv. 2-6). There is a silver lining to trial 1.
   2. However, the bible tells us that Potiphar’s wife sought to seduce Joseph and to commit adultery with him. Just when things were looking up here comes the devil. He does well and refuses on account of his faith and loyalty to God, but she would not let up (vv. 7-10).
   3. Joseph repeatedly refuses her advances and she decides to take matters in her own hands. On a certain occasion when they were alone in the house, she grabbed him by his garment and asked him to commit fornication. Joseph does not mull it over or give in but instead he runs away (vv. 11-12).
   4. In an effort to cover up her sin and her plot to sleep with Joseph, she says to the men of the house and her husband that it was Joseph who sought to take advantage of her. Potiphar, having believed his wife, throws Joseph into prison (vv. 13-20).
   5. Joseph finds himself in a familiar position once again having been repaid evil for the good he has done. Despite this, the bible tells us that God was with him and God watched over him (vv. 21-23).
3. **Delivered help but Ignored and Forgotten: Gen. 40:1-23**
   1. While in prison, Joseph encounters two servants of Pharaoh: a cupbearer and a baker. On a certain occasion Joseph noted that they both seemed depressed, down in the dumps. Joseph is willing to help these men (vv. 1-8).
   2. Both men had troubling dreams that they could not decipher. Joseph states that God can help them clear up that mess. Note that despite going through difficult and unfair circumstances, Joseph’s connection to God is as strong as ever.
   3. The cupbearer tells Joseph his dream first and Joseph relays the interpretation of the dream from God. He also tells him to remember him when he is restored to Pharaoh (vv. 9-15).
   4. The baker is told by Joseph the meaning of his dream and he is not so fortunate as the cupbearer. The bible tells us that the fate of both men occurred just as God said through Joseph (vv. 16-22).
   5. The bible tells us, however, that the cupbearer, finding favor in Pharaoh sight once more, does not remember Joseph as he asked. Instead Joseph is ignored and forgotten (v. 23). He is repaid wrong for the good he has done.

**Lessons from Joseph’s Trials**

1. **The Nature of Trials**
   1. It can make us bitter:
      1. Trials do not decide the outcome of our lives, how far we go and how much we grow. We have the power and the ability to decide whether or not the trials we face will overcome us and make us bitter.
      2. Trials can come from Satan (the devil) and his goal is to make us bitter and to push us to resent God (Job 1:9-22; 2:4-10; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).
   2. It can make us better:
      1. As Christians, we ought to look at trials with the mindset that it will make us better. Joseph went through 3 major trials that really forced him to the edge. He could have easily chosen to give up, lose heart, curse God and die.
      2. Instead he chose to persevere, endure and grow. Trials will come and sometimes God sends them our way (ex. Tested Abraham) for our own good (Jam. 1:2-4, 12; 1 Pet. 1:6-9).
2. **God’s care for His people**
   1. Despite having three strikes against Him, despite everything looking dismal, Joseph held on to God and God was constantly with Him. Joseph lost his family and friends, but He was not alone (Deut. 31:8; Psa. 37:28; Heb. 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:3-5).
   2. We may suffer, we may experience pain, we may lose everything, and things may seem impossible to overcome but God is able, and He will make sure our eternal destiny is bright (Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:8-18).
3. **YHWH: The God of Reversals**
   1. At the beginning of this lesson, we said that the story of Joseph does not begin as how one would imagine based on how it ended. He was 17 and was sold into slavery. He was falsely accused and thrown into prison. He was ignored and forgotten by someone he helped.
   2. Yet, despite all this, Joseph’s life at 30 and beyond would be a complete reversal of what he went through for 13 years. He became the second most powerful man in Egypt (cupbearer remembered him when Pharaoh needed dreams interpreted) (Gen. 41).
   3. Things began to change for Joseph and this time it was going to be for good. His dreams (Gen. 37) finally came to pass and He was blessed by God (Gen. 42-50). All these things happened because of YHWH: **The God of Reversals!**
   4. Joseph states on two occasions, that the chain of events he suffered through that began with his brothers’ decision to get rid of him was meant for evil, but God meant it for good (Gen. 45:5-9; 50:20).
   5. There are numerous examples of God’s great reversals in the scriptures (Hannah’s prayer, Valley of Dry Bones, Jonah in the water etc.) and His power transcends natural law and order. He is able to defy all human thought and He does the impossible time and time again.
   6. There is no greater reversal than that of Jesus’ death on the cross in conjunction with the Resurrection. Wicked men and disobedient leaders sought Jesus’ death because of hatred and jealousy (like Joseph’s brothers). They got their wish that was meant for evil, but God meant it for good (Acts. 2:22-24; 3:13-15; 13:26-30).