

Fortified

Genesis 37-50

Central Idea: Despite hard trials in our lives, we should stand firm in our character as examples of godliness.

Introduction

As we finish our series in Genesis, I want to talk about an incredible man of immense fortification, Joseph. Joseph's a pretty impressive guy if you look at his circumstances and how he reacts. But we must realize that Joseph's situations that challenge his inner fortitude and character are not necessarily the fault of others alone. Joseph himself can get into trouble as well, and God is of course evaluating Joseph based on his trials as well, working things out for his eventual good.

I am one of those people who can cause my own problems. I tend to over-think things. You could give me a project to work through, and it'd take me forever because I develop these elaborate schemes while missing the quick and easy approaches. Maybe you know one or two under-thinkers who get into trouble because they have no plan or attempt to even look at their options. No matter what the case, many of us can identify with Joseph as we take a closer look at his life.

Text – Genesis 25:19-28

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 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." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ 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.

- I. Stand firm despite the jealousy of others.
 - A. Sometimes we make our own situations worse.
 - i. Joseph is an interesting character to say the least. He was a favorite of his father because he was born in a time when his dad was getting older. But favoritism can be a very bad policy, for it separates people into schisms.

- ii. Jacob has a clear and defined favorite in Joseph, and he shows it by showering Joseph with gifts, especially a very special coat which may have either had long sleeves or is a coat of many colors.
 - iii. The Hebrew text is hard to translate when it comes to the coat, and the Septuagint says a coat with long sleeves. A long-sleeved coat was a sign of rulership, so this might actually fit better.
 - iv. Nevertheless, Joseph tattle-tells on his brothers in the field a couple of times, so he isn't getting on their good side. His privileged status in the family is making them jealous and angry.
 - v. The problem is that Joseph doesn't help matters at all when he has two dreams about his brothers and parents bowing down to him later in life, and blabs about it to both groups!
 - vi. If Joseph would have done like Mary and hidden these things away in his heart, the story would probably be very different. But Joseph tells everyone about them and fuels the resentment that is already there.
 - vii. **Application:** There are all kinds of things that can help us to diffuse a dangerous situation like this. Tact could help us to speak what must be said without gaining the wrath of those we say it to. Wisdom would teach us that some things are better kept to ourselves for a certain time. We must be concerned to not lie or push a situation off, but also to demonstrate tact and wisdom in what God reveals to us!
- B. Our bad decisions do not excuse others' decisions.
- i. Just because Joseph tells these things and exacerbates the situation does not mean it justifies the way his brothers react. They see him coming one day and want to kill him.
 - ii. At no time in the Bible is killing your brother condoned. In fact, it is the first open sin done out of anger by Cain to Abel. Now we have the same situation, except there are eleven angry Cain's headed for an unsuspecting Abel.
 - iii. Jealousy and anger can fuel the most dangerous of violent approaches to your situation. It is best to wait out the anger so that you can think more objectively about how to deal with something that is bothering you.
 - iv. Jealousy gives us a license to abuse someone that we feel is unfairly at an advantage. It lessens our ability to operate by the high standards God has laid out in His Word.
 - v. Anger is a dangerous animal that destroys our ability to be objective and logical. It makes us react before we even have time to work out the possible outcomes of a situation, and it helps us to do what we will pay for later.

- vi. The brothers are not excused because Joseph fuels these emotions. They must deal with them properly, and they certainly don't do that at all. Rueben, the oldest, attempts to rescue Joseph in the conversation about killing him, and they end up throwing Joseph into a pit.
 - vii. But when Rueben is not with them, Judah has the idea to sell their brother into slavery, and that's exactly what happens when wisdom does not prevail. We make bad decisions!
 - viii. **Application:** We need wisdom in our world as things get more and more out of whack. We are observing so many changes that are acceptable to our culture, but not to God's standards. We must act with wisdom and not react out of anger or any other approach. We need to process how best to be redemptive in our society that is choosing an ungodly path. Acting out of anger will only take our privilege to bring godly counsel into people's lives.
- II. Stand firm despite the unfair accusations.
- A. Some people may want to trip us up.
 - i. Joseph's brothers definitely have a vendetta against him. They want to see him suffer for his privileged place in the household. But Joseph doesn't see it this way, as we read in our text.
 - ii. There are people like that today who will do everything in their power to make sure you don't succeed or that you aren't able to use your blessing to help others.
 - iii. This goes to the heart of the issue of our fallen world, that there are some that just want to see the world burn. They don't want to see anything positive or good happen.
 - iv. Now Joseph's brothers are not necessarily these types of people, but in their anger and jealousy, they look like those types of people. They settle on a plan to sell Joseph into slavery.
 - v. It's ironic that Joseph, who was top dog at home will now be the lowest of slaves abroad. The brothers sell him out so that they don't have to put up with his pompous presence at home.
 - vi. This attitude of those who are against us has come through even for the church and its saints. Persecution is becoming more and more prevalent around the world in our day.
 - vii. There are people who will hurt us because of what we believe, how we live and what we stand for. We can't really help it if they are angry about Christ, because it's not like we'll stop preaching and living the Christ life.
 - viii. **Application:** When dealing with difficult people, we need to ask God for patience and love. People may stand against you, but the Lord is with you, and if He doesn't stop their attacks here on this earth, He will judge them

for their attacks in the end. We must not resort to anger and revenge and jealousy, but rather trust in God to avenge our plight.

B. Some people might ignore our plight.

- i. Anyone reading the text might wonder what chapter 38 has to do with the rest of Joseph's story. If you removed that chapter about Judah and Tamar, the story would go on without a hitch.
- ii. So why did Moses find it necessary to put it there? Remember that Judah is the one to get the idea to sell Joseph off to slave traders. Then, we take a look at Judah before we see how Joseph reacts.
- iii. I believe this chapter is in the Bible to show a difference between Joseph's brother Judah and Joseph, how they both deal with issues that come up in their lives. It is meant to compare them in their character.
- iv. We will see how Joseph fares in just a chapter, but we take a brief pause and look at how Judah does in his life with his challenges. Judah has sons and one of them marries a woman named Tamar.
- v. But this son angers the Lord and He kills him. The man dies without an heir and Tamar is left a widow, unable in that culture to provide for or protect herself.
- vi. So Judah does what the custom of his day required, later formalized into Levirate marriage, and offers his next son to her. But this son's first child will be an heir for the dead brother.
- vii. All of this system is designed to protect the widow in a culture where women were protected and provided for by the men in their lives. But this son does not produce a son for her. God kills him too.
- viii. Tamar is promised a son by Judah later, but Judah lets a long time go by and does not give the son to her. So she takes matters into her own hands because of the injustice Judah has given her.
- ix. She dresses up as a prostitute and hooks Judah into sleeping with her and gets pregnant. She takes his possessions for proof that he did this to her. Then later, when he wants her killed for her immorality, she shows him his possessions and he says that she was more righteous than him.
- x. Here then is the point of this story being placed here. Judah does not act wisely or godly in his approach in his family. The fact that he is willing to sell off a brother is bad enough, but this is only one of his character flaws. It also shows us how Perez and Zerah come about, as part of the line of the Messiah.
- xi. Judah is the kind of person who is unjust in another way. He doesn't actively pursue you, but he passively ignores your plight. He did it to his brother and to his daughter-in-law.

- xii. **Application:** Ignoring someone's plight does not make it go away. In fact, it makes the problem worse, and the suffering will come back on those who ignore injustice. We need to not be like Judah, to stand up to injustice and not allow it to continue, thereby becoming part of the injustice! Let us be like Jesus and do our part to help in injustices.
- III. Stand firm in your convictions.
- A. Always excel in whatever situation you're in.
 - i. One of the more impressive character traits of Joseph is his attitude and his work ethic. No matter where Joseph is in life, he is giving it his all. Any one of us would complain about being sold into slavery.
 - ii. But Joseph doesn't complain or mope around or give up at all. In fact, he works hard when he gets to Potiphar's house and becomes the master of everything that a slave can master.
 - iii. He is second only to Potiphar and God prospers everything Joseph touches. Potiphar learns that when God is blessing His people, you just jump on board with it.
 - iv. I believe that God's blessing comes so readily to Joseph partly because of his attitude about his situations and his work ethic. Joseph's name means, "The Lord increases" and it's interesting because this is the story of Joseph's life.
 - v. No matter how low on the totem pole Joseph ends up, he always rises to the top. How does he do that? With a great attitude about life and trials. While any one of us would want to complain or produce less, Joseph maintains excellence no matter what has been done to him.
 - vi. He seems to be able to let injustice done to him roll off his back and keeps on trucking. Joseph doesn't sit and stew over how people have treated him, but does his very best even as a slave and prisoner.
 - vii. **Application:** What's your attitude when a trial comes into your life? For many, the attitude is one of reservation. Why would I give my best if it's just going to be trampled over? For others, they completely give up and do nothing. They stick their heads in the sand or even suggest it's not happening to them. But we need to have the attitude that every trial is a way that God is teaching us something, and that He walks with us through these trials. We are not alone, and the situation is never hopeless when God is with us!
 - B. Always trust God to be with you in trials.
 - i. Throughout his life, Joseph trusts in God. No matter if he's the special and privileged son of Jacob, the slave at the bottom of the pit, the privileged servant of Potiphar, the prisoner in jail, the warden's personal assistant, or

the second in command of all of Egypt, the world power, Joseph holds that God has put him in those positions to shine.

- ii. Joseph through wisdom and God's ability to interpret dreams finds himself second in command, and finally, the dreams of his youth come true. They take quite a while, but eventually, he's on the throne chilling one day, and eleven guys walk in, bow before him, and ask for bread in a time of famine.
- iii. Guess what? Joseph recognizes these guys. They're his brothers! The first of the two dreams is fulfilled! He who saw interpretations for others' dreams and saw them come to pass over and over is now seeing his come to pass.
- iv. The brothers must be tested though. While Joseph forgave them long ago, he doesn't want to see history repeat itself. Even after forgiveness, wisdom teaches us not to just jump into that situation that hurt is with that person again.
- v. Joseph is cautious and tests his brothers. Have they learned their lessons as he has learned his all these years? The story shows us that the brothers are remorseful for what they did to him long ago, and they prize their siblings much more than they did back then.
- vi. Joseph uses Benjamin to prove this. There's nothing wrong with testing people who have been unjust. That doesn't necessarily mean that we haven't forgiven them, but that we are not ready to trust them yet, and that is wise.
- vii. People have to earn your trust, but once all is forgiven, we find that the parents come to Egypt as well during the famine, and guess what, the second dream Joseph had in his youth comes true!
- viii. But Joseph completely forgives and trusts his brothers when he sees their care for Benjamin. And that trust never questioned until Jacob finally passes away.
- ix. The brothers get worried and wonder what Joseph will do now that dad's not here to keep things together. They are afraid that he hasn't really forgiven and trusted them, and that is what brings us to our text.
- x. Joseph's attitude comes through as he explains that God used their evil plans to teach him to be excellent and to trust in God for everything. Joseph is not angry with his brothers. He is grateful to God for changing evil purposes to good.
- xi. **Application:** That's the kind of God that we serve today. He is stronger than evil, and can bend its original intentions toward the good that He is doing. He can take the worst situations and redeem them. I'm reminded of when I was lost and alone, and when I called out to God and became

saved, God took that horrible situation of a young man headed to Hell and gave him eternal life! Now I live for God and serve His purposes! God took the worst situation and turned it for His good! And He does the same today with those who put their trust in Him. What terrible situation are you facing today that you need God to show you His good purpose in it?

Conclusion

We can learn a lot about attitude from Joseph as we face our own trials. Some of the trials we face will be because of our own lack of wisdom at times or other issues we create. We can indeed create problems for ourselves. But Joseph teaches us that God is bigger than our trials, and He can shape them into positive endings. We must trust in God and never give up, excel in the places He puts us in, and stand firm in the trial to see His results! What are you facing today? How did you react to the trial? Now we know that we can have a good attitude, even in the midst of our trials and sufferings!

Action Points

- No matter how they start, don't let your trials become stronger than your character. Trust in Jesus to bring you through them!
- High standards often lead to conflict, and sometimes your high standards will not be rewarded in this fallen world. Be ready to stand for God's principles.
- Always approach uncomfortable and hard trials with a Joseph attitude, that God is going to use the trial to benefit your character and trust in Him, that He's going to set all things right.