

JOSEPH: The Pit

Week 1: Genesis 37

- *“Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. He said to them, “Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and*

stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.”
-Genesis 37:2-11 (ESV)

- So, let's get a bit of context into this family:
- Jacob, the father of Joseph and his brothers—also known as Israel—grew up a momma's boy

because his dad favored his older brother Esau so much.

- And he had to run away from his family because he lied and tricked his father into giving him the blessing of the first born son that rightfully belonged to his older brother
- So when his brother was going to kill him, he took off and ran away to his uncle Laban from his mother's side.
- While there, he falls in love with his cousin Rachel, and asks Laban if he can marry her
 - Laban agrees, but only if he works his land for 7 years.
 - So Jacob does—and when the 7 years are up they have a wedding celebration, and things get a little wild and when he wakes up the next morning he realizes that he's not with Rachel, but Rachel's sister Leah!
 - Turns out Laban had tricked him and just passed it off as being a family custom for the older daughter to be married first—but says

he could marry Rachel as well, if he agrees to work another 7 years for him.

- So he does—and poor Leah is the afterthought and the unwanted, but God blesses her with 4 sons—Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah
- Rachel however, is barren, and being jealous of her sister—she tells Jacob to go sleep with her handmaiden Bilhah and have a couple kids with her
 - Which he does and Dan and Naphtali are born
- When Leah realizes that she isn't producing any kids anymore, not wanting her sister to catch up—she has her handmaiden Zilpah sleep with Jacob and they get two more sons through her: Gad and Asher
- Then it gets even worse for Rachel when Leah actually is able to conceive again—and she bears two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun and a daughter Dinah

- But then the Lord decides to bless Rachel and opens her womb and she gives birth to Joseph
 - Then about 15 years later or so—she has another son, Benjamin, but then unfortunately dies in the child birth
- So Joseph is the first born son to Jacob's beloved Rachel who he always favored so now naturally Joseph is the favored son.
 - And it causes so much hatred and turmoil among the family
- And you think your family has got some issues??
- And yet—THIS is the family that God uses to save the world??
 - These are the boys that God would have the 12 tribes of Israel named after?
 - This is the family line that God would send His own Son through??
 - Here's the point:

- GOD WORKS THROUGH MESSED UP FAMILIES

- This is what is so awesome about the Bible, because the bible doesn't hide the brokenness of it's heroes
- Every religious agenda is all about how you should live a better life and be a better person
 - They give you the rules, some examples of people who followed those rules, and if you follow their example then God will accept you
 - And many people even read the bible that way—but to do so is to read with blinders on
- God definitely doesn't want us to be like this messed up family that's full of hate, corruption, jealousy, polygamy, infidelity, and lies
- And the biblical writers do not hide their flaws—because we are never to be confused

about who the hero of the story is? There is only one Hero of the story and the entirety of the Bible is pointing to Him and Him alone.

- Dr Tim Keller once said, *“The purpose of the Bible is not to show us how to live a good life. The Bible shows us how Grace breaks into our lives against our will—and rescues you from the sin and brokenness that you would never be able to overcome on your own.”*
- You see, religion says: “Obey and you will be accepted”
 - The Gospel says: “When you know that you are accepted, only then will you begin to obey”
- The Bible shows us the turmoils and brokenness of this family—to highlight the mercy and workings of God
- It’s interesting that God is not mentioned or referred to one time in this chapter—because He is obviously not a priority to the family at this moment

- Jacob has made an idol of his son—the family is consumed by hatred and jealousy because of it
- And Joseph is an entitled and arrogant little thing
- I think a lot of people read through this whole account and just think “Poor Joseph—being in that messed up family...”
- But Joseph was just as messed up as any of them!
 - The first thing that we are told about Joseph is that he brought a “bad report” about his brothers to his father
 - In the original language it means that he’s a Tattle Tale!
 - No, really in the Hebrew it means an “ethically evil report”
 - Meaning, that he lied about them—he gave a false report

- It's like the sibling or the cousin that would tell on you for something you didn't do — just to see you get in trouble
- That's the kind of kid this is...he's a little punk!
- And clearly one of the reasons why he was this way — was because his father overtly favored him and loved him more than his other brothers
- One way he showed it—was by making him, what we call a coat of many colors
 - In the original language— it describes and tunic that reaches the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet that were reserved for and worn only by those of noble rank
- So you have this kid, who lies about everyone, gets away with everything, and is paraded around like he's God's greatest gift to the earth
 - How are his brothers supposed to feel about him?!
- Then he has a dream—and its not stated here, but at this time, when someone shared a dream like this, it was assumed that it was of divine origin
 - That God is revealing something to them in their dream
- Now, Joseph may be excited that he believes that God reveals something to him, that God is going to do something great through him
 - But when he shares the dream, he makes it about himself—not about God
 - He arrogantly summons his older brothers—and tells them that he had a dream that goes against their entire societal system
 - In their time and culture, everything was based around a patriarchal system—in which the children always honored and bowed to their parents—and when the parents are gone, the next eldest male in line would be the head of the family and the younger siblings would honor and bow to them

- But Joseph is declaring through these dreams that he has—that his older brothers will be bowing to and honoring him
 - And this doesn't take him by surprise because his whole life he has been unhealthily favored and celebrated by his father
 - His father's actions already make him feel like everyone should bow to him
- And he's so confident (or arrogant) about it—that when he has another similar dream—he even has no hesitation in sharing the dream with his dad
 - And when it says that Jacob rebuked him—that word in the Hebrew means *“To chide—to correct gently”*
 - So instead of nipping his arrogance and self-centeredness in the bud..he was just gentle with him
 - And as a result—Joseph was a young man with no thought of consequence
- Yet, God had divinely shown him a dream... God was going to use him for great things—that dream and that vision that God placed on his life would come to pass
 - But not before things got very difficult for him—and the Lord humbled him
 - There is no room for pride in the heart of a servant of God
- Any dream that God places into your heart and mind will never come easy—even though, for some reason, we always expect it to
 - Our generation is so infected with entitlement—We expect everything to be handed to us and have very little sense of consequence
 - We expect to have this great dream and have it fall into place for us, and when it doesn't, we victimize ourselves and talk about how unfair life is
- So many people want to be a professional athlete but very few want will actually put the work in that it takes to get there

- Everyone wants to live out the final result of the dream —but don't understand the sacrifice and hardship that will ensue on the way there
 - *I remember once, after a service a student came up to the stage, at a previous church, after I had preached. He put his hands on the pulpit and said, “Yea, I think I wanna do this. Kenny, I wanna be a preacher.... that doesn't take much schooling right?”*
 - *Then I began to tell him about the 64 page paper I had to write on 3 verse in Galatians and he said — “NEVER MIND...I'll figure out something else!”*
- For some reason we have bought into this mind set that if something is difficult—then it must not be God's will
 - Which all that is is over-spiritualizing a lack of discipling
- I pray that you get huge God sized dreams. I pray that the Holy Spirit puts a vision in your heart to carry His Kingdom in extraordinary ways...but I would fail you as a pastor if I

didn't not prepare you for the price that you will have to pay in order to live out that dream.

- It will be the hardest thing that you ever go through in your life because it will be the best thing you will ever go through in your life
- You will be stretched, challenged, hurt, and tested
- **“A Dream that isn't Tested is a Dream that can't be Trusted”**
 - I once met with a great pastor—Pastor Ken Forrester who was at Rocky Creek Baptist Church at the time. And I met with him shortly after I graduated college and was pursuing the pastorate
 - I had felt called by God I had a dream to be a pastor and I wanted to pursue that..and the first thing he told me was:
- **“A man cannot be greatly used by God, until He is first greatly broken by God—so how had God broken you?”**

- So I told him about how I had lived a lot like Joseph did for the first 18 years or so of his life
- Now, I was not overtly spoiled and favored as a child—but God was not the focus and priority in my life—I was
- I thought very little of consequence, because I had gotten away with so much for so long—but I wasn't aware of the calling that God had placed on my life just yet
 - And I firmly believe that He allowed my lack of character to catch up with me—and He broke me of myself on July 2nd 2009
- God was going to need to break Joseph of himself—and he was going to use the natural consequences of a broken family in order to do so
- One day Jacob sends Joseph to go check on his brothers while they're working in the fields
- ***“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)

- Reuben says, “Ayyyyy, lets not kill him, lets just rough him up and throw him into one of the pits.” Reuben was the oldest, they were all supposed to listen to him and honor him
- But as you can see, he doesn't have much of a backbone—he could have, or should have, as the oldest, put a stop to the whole thing

- He should have been able to put his foot down with his younger brothers —but instead he just tries to compromise and be secretive with them
- But, his brothers listen to him, for now...
- ***“And they took [Joseph] and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.” -Genesis 37:24 (ESV)***
 - *Can you imagine being Joseph, you just got jumped by your brothers and now you’re helpless and hurting in a pit, listening to your brothers decide whether to kill you not?!*
 - Most of us at this point would give up on life
 - If we were to experience anything like this being done toward us, it doesn’t matter what dreams or aspirations we might have had, we would throw in the towel right then and there
- However what we need to know this morning is that: **THE PIT CAN EITHER BREAK YOU OR IT CAN BUILD YOU**
- You see, God didn’t throw Joseph into the bit —he did not orchestrate the hatred and jealousy in the hearts of his brothers
- But God had a plan, and the brokenness of that family was not going to stop His plan
- God just had to work a little bit harder than He would have had to because of how messed up this family was
- Up in the earlier part of this passage you can see just how many things that God had to work through
 - Jacob just happened to send Joseph out to check on his brothers
 - His brothers ended up not even being where they were supposed to be—but Joseph just happens to pass a guy on the street telling him that they went to Dothan
 - They happen to see him as he’s still a long way off—Reuben just happened to be the one brother that didn’t want to kill him—

and talks them into just throwing him into a pit that just happened to be near

- It would have been a lot nicer if they all would have been more healthily parented, loved each other, and put God first —so God could just use them the way that He wanted to use them in a much easier way
- Alas, that was not the case—and you can see how God maneuvered through this train wreck of a family in order to do a work that no one else could do
- And now that Joseph finds himself in this pit he has a choice
 - He could victimize himself and blame everyone and everything around him
 - Or he could self reflect and take some ownership as to why and how he ended up in this pit
- You see, when God broke me of myself back in 2009—the pit that I was thrown in was actually a prison cell. Just for one night

- I had been arrested for something that no one would get in trouble for today
 - And when I expected to just be taken to the police station and had my parents called to pick me up—instead I get processed in an actual prison, not a jail
 - And while I was I on that cell floor—I could have blamed the officers for being unfair
 - I could have blamed the other guys who were with me for not being smart enough
- I could have blamed a number of other things for the ridiculous position that I was in
 - But in that moment—I believe by the grace of God—I could only blame myself
 - My choices, my actions, had led me to the point where I was —and I knew that something needed to change—and all I could think of in that moment was Jesus
- You see, I can't help but think that Joseph had a similar epiphany in that pit

- He could have just blamed his brothers, his circumstance, or even God
- But instead he may have thought of how cruel he had been to lie about his brothers, how he liked to see them get in trouble, how he flaunted his father's favoritism in front of them, how inconsiderate and disrespectful he had been to his older brothers —and he had no one to blame but himself
 - And he knew that something needed to change and all he could think of in that moment was the Lord
- We know that something changed in him, and the Lord became his priority because in chapter 39, as we'll see more next week— when he is faced with temptation his response is “How could I commit this great wickedness and sin against God?”
- His priorities and perspectives have shifted since being in the pit
 - Again, God did not throw Joseph into the pit— but He used that pit to break Joseph of himself
- When God has a call on your life—you will need to be humbled, you will need to struggle
- Some of it will be spiritual warfare, because a movement of God never happens without a fight.
 - Other times it will be God allowing things to happen in order to strengthen you and mold you into the person who can actually live out the call that He has placed on your life
 - And other times, you need to be humbled because you are too self absorbed with no sense of consequence—and you need a healthy fear of the Lord in your life
- And the Lord will allow a number of these things to happen in your life—because one of the worst things that could ever happen to you is to live out your dream or your call prematurely
 - You never want to live out a dream that you are not prepared for

- That's why God will allow you to go through hardships, trials, tests, and storms because He knows how to mold you and strengthen you through them in order to prepare you to live out the calling that He has on your life
- Now the Pit—was still just the first step: ***“Then they sat down to eat. 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 37:25-28 (ESV)***
- Not only was Joseph sold by his brothers—but for how much he was sold for was another humiliation
 - Because at this time 20 shekels of silver was how much they would have paid for a handicap slave
 - So either his brothers were terrible bargainers and businessmen—or they were making an intentional statement about how little they valued Joseph and wanted him to know it
 - They want him to know just how much they hated and rejected him—before he was sent off to Egypt
- *But you know....* **OFTEN TIMES, REJECTION PROVIDES DIRECTION**
 - You, see Joseph was supposed to go to Egypt—that was God's will and direction and plan for him
 - And to get there, he needed to be rejected and sold off by his brothers

- Now, this is a terrible thing that happened to him—and he can become bitter and depressed, or he can understand that the Lord has a new direction for his life
- You may feel like you're in a pit —but that could be God just changing your surroundings
 - For some of you, your job may feel like a pit right now— school may feel like a pit, your family life may feel like a pit
 - You or a loved one might have experienced sickness or a loss and everywhere you turn might make you feel like you're falling in one giant pit all of the time
- But I'm here to tell you that God can and wants to use all of that to build you and provide you direction in your life.
 - Change—in general, sometimes feels like a dark and empty pit
 - But if Joseph had not been rejected by his brothers and thrown into the pit, he wouldn't have gotten to where he needed to go—be

around the people that he needed to be around—or be the person that he needed to be

- As we continue to study Joseph—we are going to see from here on out that he is a different person.
 - He's no longer going to be the one who accuses falsely—even when he is falsely accused
 - He's no longer entitled—but happy to serve
 - His life is no longer, about him—his life is about God
- He has a new direction
- And also—sidenote: The more you follow God's plan for your life, the more God will take you away from the people that will hinder you from following His will for your life
 - If you have friends and influences that seem to leave your side while you chase after God, let them go! You'll be ok

- You don't need mans approval when you already have God's approval
 - Throughout your life and pursuit of God's Calling on your life, rejection will hit you, but you don't have to let it in you
- Sometimes rejection is just something that God uses to break down your life, so He can rebuild your life
 - I remember once I had made the decision to actually follow Him—I lost a lot of friends, and I believe that the Lord got a hold of me at a time when I was away from all of those previous influences intentionally
 - And when I told some of my old friends that I was going in a different direction in my life now—I never heard back from most of them
 - And I was rejected by many I thought were close friends....but God was providing me a new direction
- You cannot set out on a new path of life—while still walking with those from the old path
 - They'll pull you back every single time
- So in order to get us on the direction that He wants us to go—God wants to rebuild your influences, He wants to rebuild you circumstances, He wants to rebuild your attitude, He wants to rebuild the way you think
 - You may feel like you're in the pit—but you can be confident and know that this pit wont burry you, but provide an opportunity for God to rebuild your life in a way that you could never build it yourself
- If you are following His purpose for your life, He will give you a dream and a calling in your heart...a dream that is for your good and for His glory
 - But God will not let you make that dream all about you
 - If you have a dream for your life that you could pull off without God, thats not a dream worth chasing and it's not from God

- If you are His child, you will get a glimpse of a dream or a calling that God has put on your heart and mind— but that path in order to get there will never be what you expect it to be
 - There will be twists, turns, heartache, pain, rejection..and you will need Him through it all
- ***“When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?” Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, “This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not.” And he identified it and said, “It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.” Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.”***
-Genesis 37:29-34 (ESV)
 - *There's a famous quote that says, Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond*
 - It's very easy for us to look at this from a vantage point of the future and see how Romans 8:28 is played out if we know the end of the story
- However, at this moment: Joseph is chained to a foreigner's caravan—being sent off away from his family—no idea where he is going or what is ahead of him
 - In this moment all he knows is that his brothers hate him and he's probably never going to see his father, his friends, or his little brother Benjamin ever again
 - This is a terrible, terrible circumstance that has happened to Joseph—even if he was an annoying and arrogant little brother—He didn't deserve this!
- But what has happened to him, is only a small part of the circumstance he finds himself in

- What matters so much more—is how he is going to respond
- He can either drown in despair or he can cling to God
- As David would go on to write as he was alone out in the wilderness of Judah with everything seemingly going against him, he says: ***“O God, You are my God; earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh faints for You, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water....My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.” -Psalm 63:1, 8 (ESV)***
 - You know why God allows so many of us to hit the rock bottom of the pit? Because we won’t earnestly seek Him, thirst for Him, or cling to Him unless we find ourselves there
 - We are too self-absorbed, self-fulfilled, entitled and arrogant to know how desperately we need Him
- And He can’t use us, until He breaks us —of us...and sometimes the pit is the only way it can be done
- It doesn’t have to be!—but for those who are as stubborn as me, as I was—we need the pit...we need everything we thought we needed out of life stripped away, so we can cling to Him, and head the direction He wants us to go.
- ***“Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The Lord was with Joseph....” -Genesis 39:1-2 (ESV)***
- Wait, hold up— Joseph was jumped by His brothers, thrown into a pit, sold into slavery to foreigners...twice now...and passage says that The Lord was with him??
 - If any one us were to go through anything like this, the number 1 question we would be asking is.... “Where are You God?!?!”

- And the ironic part will be, for most of us— that, that would have been the first time we actually acknowledged God at all...to blame Him for not being there
- And yet, in His grace, He would still answer: “I’ve been right there with you the entire time”
 - You might be going through the worst season of your life, but the difference between depression and success will be your ability to wake up every single day and live in the acknowledgement that GOD IS WITH YOU
- ***“The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and 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 succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all***

that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.” -Genesis 39:2-6 (ESV)

- Not only was Joseph risen to a very respectable position—he was closer with the Lord than he had ever been.
- Would Joseph have ever gotten there if it hadn’t been for the pit?
- God may give you a vision, a goal, or a dream of what He wants to do through your life— but you will have no idea what the path will look like.
- *I’ve heard it said that when we walk with God— we have to be ok with Knowing, and not knowing*

- We have to know that He is with us and for us and working everything out for our good and His Glory
 - But we have to be ok, with not knowing exactly how He is going to do it all
- Too many people only want to follow God if they can fully see the path ahead of them—but that wouldn't take faith
- And Hebrews tells us “without faith, it is impossible to please Him”
- So the question is—will you walk by faith?
 - Would you stick with it, if it took a decade for your dream to become a reality? Would it still be worth it?
 - Are you willing to dig in and commit for the long haul? Even when it gets hard and you feel like you're in the pit?
- We can— because ultimately its not up to us to get there, its up to God to carry us there, because it's His vision and His will in the first place
- We can take all the pressure off of ourselves
- We don't have to live in frustration, we can live in anticipation
 - Knowing that even though I may feel like I'm in a dark empty pit.. We can be in that pit with anticipation, “OOOOHHH Where's God gonna take me when He pulls me out”
 - Knowing that even if we face rejection, we know that God could be clearing the path for a new direction
 - And even with how messed up we are and our families are—God can and still wants to use us for something great.