

Wise Beyond Words
October 13, 2013

As your pastor I know some of the challenges that many of you are struggling to work through. Some of you have employment issues. Some have other economic issues. Some of you are dealing with significant relationship problems such as marriage, parent to children, extended family, co-worker issues, or issues with neighbors.

Some of you are dealing with chronic health conditions that require medication and regular doctor visits. Some of these can be life-threatening if not closely monitored.

Some of you are carrying emotional baggage from your past, such as broken relationships, immorality issues, or other kinds of sins. Some of you are suffering from mistakes in judgment about investments or debt.

Maybe your life is messed up because of what others have done to you. Your life has missed the goals you set for it, hoped for it, not because of what you did, but because of what others did in sinning against you.

There are many different issues represented right here in our small congregation. We have Jesus in common, but our lives are more diverse than we think.

Any one of the issues I have mentioned may cause you to feel that you are of not much use to God. You may think you are ill qualified to make much of a difference for the Kingdom of God. You want to be used, but don't see how God can use you in the condition you are in. You think that something in your life experience disqualifies you from being part of the great things God is doing in this world.

Well If you are thinking such a thing about yourself today, I have good news for you. God is bigger and wiser than you know. God is even now preparing to use your unique life for His kingdom.

We serve a big God. He knows more than we can comprehend. He is mightier than all the power in the universe. And our God is wiser than words can describe. God can take any person, any life experience, and use it for good. Today's story gives us a great example of that. We're going to look at the life of a man who lost everything. And yet he found God could use even him. His name is Joseph.

Genesis 37:2-8 (NIV) Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

This sounds like just a normal dream, except that it later came true.

Genesis 37:12-14 (NIV) Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks... and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks... Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me."

Genesis 37:17-28 (NIV)

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe--the richly ornamented robe he was wearing--and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood."

His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Joseph is sold by the caravan to an Egyptian, an official working for the king. Joseph worked hard as a slave and God watched over him and blessed all his work. God so blessed his work that Joseph's owner kept moving him into more and more responsible positions until eventually Joseph was the steward over the household.

One day when Joseph's master was away from home, the man's wife tried to get Joseph in bed with her. Joseph refused, knowing it was against God's will for him to do such a thing. So she accused Joseph of trying to rape her and Joseph's owner had him thrown into prison.

In prison Joseph was a hard worker and conscientious. God watched over him and blessed his work. God so blessed Joseph's work, that the prison officials gave Joseph more and more responsibility.

We have to jump over a large part of the story now. But in this part of the story, that dream that Joseph had as a teenager comes true. Joseph became head of all of Egypt, second only to the king. This middle part of Joseph's story is quite interesting, and I encourage you to read it this afternoon.

But moving ahead in the story, we learn that God revealed to Joseph that there would be seven years of bumper harvests followed by seven years of severe drought. Joseph had been put in charge of saving up grain during the seven years of bumper crops. Now, in the drought, people were coming to Egypt to buy grain. And Joseph's brothers came down from Canaan to Egypt to buy grain.

Genesis 45:4 (NIV) Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!"

Joseph recognized his brothers and revealed himself to them. You can imagine their shock when they found out who this Egyptian official was. Because they had sold Joseph into slavery and he now had great power and authority, they feared for their lives.

Genesis 45:5-8 (NIV) "And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Now we can only imagine what each of us would do in such a situation as Joseph's. I hope, that as followers of Jesus Christ, we would each behave as mercifully as Joseph did. But there is more to the story than his mercy.

The point I want you to see is Joseph's take on the events of his life. Look at what he concludes when he thinks about his life. He says to them, "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." That is a remarkable way of seeing what they did to him.

He doesn't lessen what they did. He doesn't say, "It was okay." He doesn't say it wasn't a sin. He doesn't excuse it. He points out how God used it to bring about a great good for God's people.

Joseph's brothers go back to Canaan and bring dad and the whole clan to Egypt to live. Later, when dear old dad dies, the brothers start to fear that NOW Joseph will exact his revenge.

Genesis 50:18-21 (NIV) His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

There is much about Joseph to admire. We can admire his faith in God. Despite being sold into slavery He continued to serve God. Despite being taken far from home, with no hope of ever seeing any of his family again, he had faith in God. He continued to serve God despite all that had happened to him. He had determined to serve God even in a foreign land. We can admire his faith.

We can admire his courage. We can admire his work ethic. We can admire his integrity. As a slave, and later in jail, he made the best of a bad situation. There is a lot to like about Joseph.

But Joseph isn't really our focus this morning. The God he believed in is our focus. We looked at Joseph because of what he learned about God, something we all need to learn. Look again at what Joseph teaches his brothers about God. For in this we see something great.

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good." This is true today. No example is greater than Jesus, the most righteous man who ever lived, demonstrating in powerful miracles the presence and authority of God. He was killed, murdered by those in authority over Israel.

Yet, this was no surprise to God. While not being involved in their sin, God knew all along it would end this way. God allowed this to happen so that Jesus' death could provide for our forgiveness.

This morning, God wants us to believe what Joseph believed. **God will use everything in my life for good.** God is so wise that He can use even the bad things in your life to accomplish His own purposes. God has promises to keep to you and God has a plan to fulfill those promises.

The Christian missionary, Paul, says the same in one of his letters to the Christians living in Rome.

Romans 8:28 (NIV) And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God will use everything in my life for good. God will use all the experiences of your life for His Kingdom. Despite all the negative experiences in your life, God is working out His plans. Nothing you experience is going to stop God from accomplishing His will in you and through your life. God can use all your experiences, good and bad, positive and negative, to work His will.

So put your faith fully in God, today, to do what He said He would do. No life is beyond fitting in His plans. God will use everything in my life for good.

One of our missionary couples, Tim and Iracema Kunkel, serving in Uruguay learned this lesson too. When their second child, Steven was diagnosed as autistic, they thought that maybe they should leave Uruguay and their work and come back to the states. "But then I realized that when God called us to missions, He knew the children we were going to have. He allowed this to happen, and He has a purpose in this."

With no help for special needs children in Uruguay, Iracema Kunkel studied special education in order to know how to educate Steven. This turned into a ministry to Uruguayan couples who had autistic children.

You can read more of their story, and what happened to Steven, in Commission Stories (Volume 5, Number 3).
<http://www.commissionstories.com/americas/stories/view/autistic-missionary-kid-teaches-imb-writer-a-lesson-in-miracles>

Oh, see the wonderful wisdom of God. See the wisdom of God in Jesus' death. What God's enemies thought would harm Jesus, turned out to bring Him glory, and us forgiveness.

God is working that same wisdom in your life today. God can use any experience of your life in His plans. Sometimes it is by you helping others who are now going through similar life experiences. God can incorporate the uniqueness of your life into the work of His kingdom.

Make this a part of your prayers of faith each day. God will use everything in my life for good.

Say this to your money problems. Say this to your relationship problems. Say this to your physical problems. Say this even of sins others commit against you. Everything that happens in my life God can use for good.

Never think you are beyond use to God's kingdom. Lean in to God and see how He wants to use your unique self and your unique life for His glory.