

Joseph

Series: Heroes: Amazing Stories of Faith

Genesis 40:1-23

October 8, 2017

Well, welcome again to worship. It's so good to be together today. We've come together after many different experiences during the week. Some very good, others very bad, sometimes within the same day.

For the last few weeks, we have been studying heroes from the Bible and their amazing stories of faith. We looked at David and his encounter with Goliath and how he depended God and his past. We learned about Hannah and her desire to have a son, how she depended on God and the power of prayer. We studied Paul and his debate with the philosophers of Athens and how he depended upon God and the power of the Gospel. Last week, we examined Moses and how he depended upon God and God's presence.

Today, we are going to look at another hero with an amazing story of faith. I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin so that you can take some notes. Today's hero is not in a place we would normally associate with heroes. This one... was in prison.

There once were three inmates who dug under the prison wall to escape, and as they were digging, they came upon a metal canister. When one rubbed the jar to see if it had any writing on it, a genie appeared. He told them that, since there was three of them, they would be granted one wish each.

The first guy wished to be on a tropical island with 50 beautiful women and all the food and HBO for a lifetime. All of a sudden, poof, the guy disappeared.

The second guy wanted the same as his partner, except he wanted twice as much as the first, plus Showtime as well. Poof, he disappeared.

The third guy started crying. The genie asked him what was wrong. He said he missed his friends and wished they were back with him.¹

Well, today's story has 3 prisoners as well, and we will focus on the one named Joseph. Let me give you some background on Joseph: He was the son of the patriarch Jacob and Rachel. His mother was Jacob's favorite, and because he was born of her after years of barrenness, Joseph was Jacob's favorite as well. This was evidenced by his father's gift of a coat of many colors. Yes, it's not just a musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." This is a real story, and it caused enmity with his brothers. This only increased when Joseph began having dreams that seem to suggest he would rise high above not only his older brothers, but his father as well. The brothers plotted to kill him, but instead sold him to Midianite traders, who subsequently sold him into slavery to the captain of the guard of the Pharaoh named Potiphar. Joseph's wisdom and skill and the blessing of God were exceedingly apparent, so that Potiphar made Joseph the head of his household. The Bible says, "So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!"² However, Potiphar's wife saw how handsome Joseph was and started make unwanted advances toward him.

¹ From a sermon by Thomas Swope, Whistle While He Works, 6/4/2010

² Genesis 39:6 (NLT)

After one such entrapment and rejection by Joseph, she falsely accused him of attempted rape. As a result, he was thrown into prison.

Egyptian prisons were grim places with vile conditions. They were used to house forced laborers or, like Joseph, the accused who were awaiting trial. Prisoners were guilty until proven innocent, and there was no right to a speedy trial. Many prisoners never made it to court because trials were held at the whim of the ruler.

As a prisoner and slave, Joseph could have seen his situation as hopeless. Falsely accused not only as a rapist but a slave who tried to take what was his masters, Joseph found himself incarcerated for doing the right thing. His life had fallen so far that one had to wonder if God was punishing him for something.

Isn't that the way we interpret bad things happening to us: a punishment for something we've done? Certainly, we interpret blessings as favor from God, and the opposite when bad things happen, and you couldn't get worse than Joseph.

Here is the trait of a hero that I want us to see today. Write this down:

Joseph depended upon God and his witness.

We are going to see how our witness can save others and testify to the Lord, even when things in our lives seem to be in the worst hole we could ever imagine.

Here's where we come to our passage today.

READ GENESIS 40.

I want us to see 4 things in this passage about Joseph and his witness, even while in prison.

First, Joseph lived a Godly life.

We learn from the end of Genesis 39:

But the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And the LORD made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden. Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison. The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. The LORD was with him and caused everything he did to succeed.³

Even in prison, God blessed Joseph. Joseph did his best with each small task given him. His diligence and positive attitude were soon noticed by the warden, who promoted him to prison administrator.

My friends, your godly life is not just a result of your love and desire for God. God uses the faithful saint to bless others, especially those far from Him, as a way to show His greatness and power. Your life, even in the difficult times, is an essential witness of the Lord.

Second, Joseph cared about others.

Look at Genesis 40:6-7:

When Joseph saw them [that is, Pharaoh's former cupbearer and baker] the next morning, he noticed that they both looked upset. "Why do you look so worried today?" he asked them.⁴

In prison, the dominate attitude is one of selfishness. But Joseph cared about those who were with him in prison.

An old Italian lived alone in New Jersey. He wanted to plant his annual tomato garden, but it was very difficult work, as the ground was hard. His only son, Vincent,

³ Genesis 39:21-23 (NLT)

⁴ Genesis 40:6-7 (NLT)

who used to help him, was in prison. The old man wrote a letter to his son and described his predicament:

“Dear Vincent, I am feeling pretty sad, because it looks like I won’t be able to plant my tomato garden this year. I’m just getting too old to be digging up a garden plot. I know if you were here, my troubles would be over. I know you would be happy to dig up the ground for me, like in the old days. Love, Papa.”

A few days later, the father received a letter from his son: “Dear Pop, Don’t dig up that garden. That’s where the bodies are buried. Love, Vinnie.”

At 4:00 A.M. the next morning, FBI agents and local police arrived and dug up the entire area without finding any bodies. They apologized to the old man and left.

The same day, the man received another letter from his son: “Dear Pop, Go ahead and plant the tomatoes now. That’s the best I could do under the circumstances. I love you, Vinnie.”

When you are in your prison, do you care for others, or are you just focused on your problems and predicament? Part of Joseph’s witness in the midst of troubles was that he cared for others.

Third, Joseph gave God the glory.

Look at verse 8:

And they replied, “We both had dreams last night, but no one can tell us what they mean.” “Interpreting dreams is God’s business,” Joseph replied.⁵

Now, Joseph had a knack for interpreting dreams, and the ability to interpret dreams was a sought out skill. Dreams were seen as foretellers of future events.⁶ The Bible is full of dreams dreamt by rulers who needed interpreters to reveal the meaning. These interpreters would often be greatly rewarded.

So imagine having the ability to interpret dreams, and you are in prison. One’s first inclination would be to say, “I tell you what it means, but first, you’ve got to get me out of here.” You would probably use it to get out of your terrible situation.

Often when we are in difficult times in life, we talk about everything that is wrong and whose fault it is. We place blame and complain.

But Joseph gives God the glory. Imagine that:

- You find out you have cancer. “God, I don’t understand it, but I give You glory.”
- A family member dies tragically. “God, I don’t understand it, but I give You glory.”
- Your finances come to ruin. “God, I don’t understand it, but I give You glory.”
- You lose your job. “God, I don’t understand it, but I give You glory.”
- People reject you. “God, I don’t understand it, but I give You glory.”

Giving glory to God in the midst of the pain of your prison is the sign of a hero of the faith.

Finally, Joseph spoke truth.

He heard each of his fellow inmates’ dreams. He understood what they meant. He said, “This is what the dream means...”⁷ The cup-bearer’s dream indicated a positive outcome: “Within three days Pharaoh will lift you up and restore you to your position as his chief cup-bearer.”⁸

⁵ Genesis 40:8 (NLT)

⁶ See Genesis 40:8, 12, 18; 41:12, 41:25; Judges 7:14; Daniel 1:17; 2:4, 28, 36, 45; 4:20, 24

⁷ Genesis 40:12a, 18 (NLT)

⁸ Genesis 40:13 (NLT)

The baker on the other hand, not so much: Joseph predicted death in 3 days.⁹
In both cases, Joseph spoke truth.

I wonder how often we fail to speak truth into people's lives. We fail to tell others what the Bible says about certain actions. We don't stand up for what we know is right and true. And it hurts our witness.

My friends, Joseph was a hero because he witnessed to the Lord even in the midst of the prison of life. His amazing story of faith encourages and challenges us when we find ourselves in the pits due to no fault of our own. How we react speaks volumes to our faith. How you handle the troubles of life gives credence to or negates your witness. How you respond when life throws you a curve ball tells others about the power of God.

Corrie Ten Boom wrote, "When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."

Let me ask you, "Is God only good when the outcome is? We say "God is good" when the cancer is in remission, when we get the promotion. Is God good in the cemetery, in the unemployment line, when a child goes astray, when a prayer is left unanswered?

God is always good, and you will be a hero if you remember that.

You see, no matter your situation, or how painful it is, Jesus is there. He can touch your hurt. Jesus feels your hurt. He can use your hurt.

2 Corinthians 4:17 reads:

"For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!"¹⁰

Let me repeat that: For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

Are you facing a seemingly hopeless predicament? At work, at home, or at school, follow Joseph's example by taking each small task and doing your best. Remember how God turned Joseph's situation around. He will see your efforts and can reverse even overwhelming odds.

⁹ See Genesis 40:19

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:17 (NLT)