

Foundations: Joseph II
Suffering Setbacks
Genesis 39:6-21 (AFBC 10/15/17)

Well, we turn again today to the trials and tribulations of our patriarch, Joseph. With our text today, Joseph ends up in jail—and we're going to leave him there for a while.

In the meantime, you'll be hearing from Joshua—not the book of the Bible, but our Associate Pastor, Josh Hunt. You'll be in very good hands while Pam and I take some vacation time and perform an out-of-town wedding.

Lord willing, when we return, we will continue with the fascinating story of Joseph. Better times are ahead for this patriarch, but Joseph suffered some terrible setbacks along the way, and this is what we're focusing on this morning.

If you're old enough to remember the variety show called "Hee Haw"—some of us are, right?—

--now, for those of you who are longevity-challenged (i.e., you're young), Hee Haw was a country-themed variety show. It had some good humor and music and it was lots of fun.

For me, though, nothing on the show stuck in my memory as vividly as the old farmer in coveralls who, on every show, would sing, "*If it weren't for bad luck, **(what?)** I'd have no luck at all...*" and he and his buddy would commence to commiserate—complaining about all their many, many troubles.

Now, their problems were all made up--but we were amused by them. Today, we have what's called Reality Shows where the troubles are *supposedly* REAL—and, sadly, many seem to find THAT entertaining! Gullibility is obviously on the rise among us!

As we take a second look at Joseph today, it may seem to us that Joseph would do well as part of a reality show—or even as that guy on *Hee-Haw*--because it's beginning to seem like "if it weren't for bad luck, Joseph would have no luck at all." For quite a while, this was the reality Joseph had to deal with!

Now, his life didn't start out bad. Last week, we talked about Joseph, the dreamer of dreams. We recalled his "multi-colored-coat-wearing-favored-child status"--but this all changed when he

found himself in a deep, dark hole. His jealous older brothers threw him into that cistern, and then they sold him into slavery.

It must have seemed like a bit of good fortune, though, when Potiphar bought him. He was one of Pharaoh's officials. Genesis 39:2 tells us that **"The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master."**

Soon, in fact, Potiphar was trusting Joseph with his whole household. We'll pick up the story now with verse 6 of Genesis 39 where we learn that this rare bit of good luck for Joseph quickly turns bad, landing him in jail (**Genesis 39:6-21**):

So he (Potiphar) left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, 7 and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"
(That had some reality show overtones, right?...except, it says...)

8 But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

13 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, 14 she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. 15 When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

16 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave

you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. 20 Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

Bad things happen to good people. Sometimes they happen when you're really trying to do the right thing—at least, play by the rules--but you still encounter one setback after another. This kept happening to Joseph, yet he somehow manages to make the best of these bad situations.

This is a real test of faith for any of us—to trust God and continue doing our best when we know that life has been unfair and we've been the victim of circumstances or had troubles come our way that we really didn't deserve.

Potiphar recognized the good qualities in Joseph. He put him in charge of his household. But Joseph had a problem--although most of us wouldn't regard it as such—but the Bible says Joseph was "well-built and handsome."

Potiphar's wife couldn't help but notice this, and that's when it became a problem for him. Actually, she did more than just notice; she went on the offensive and invited him to her bed!

More reality show stuff, right?—except there's a problem with this script: seventeen year old Joseph tells her "no."

Now, he does this in the nicest way he knows how. He tries his best not to offend her. "Don't take this personally," he says, "but I am really indebted to your husband. He's put me in charge of everything around here... except you, of course. He says you're off limits, and God does too; so if it's okay, I'm going to pass on your gracious offer."

Well, that wasn't okay. She continues the chase, and Joseph keeps running away...until one day, they're alone together in the house. She seizes the opportunity, grabs hold of him, and says,

"This is our moment!" But instead, Joseph is gone in a flash, leaving his cloak behind.

Well, as so often happens, strong attraction morphs into vindictiveness. Mrs. Potiphar decides she'll teach this boy a lesson he won't soon forget.

She screams "rape" while still holding on to evidence of the crime. How else could she have come into possession of his cloak? The boy is obviously guilty. So... Potiphar does what he believes he must to do: he has young Joseph thrown in jail.

Sometimes, friends, truth is a difficult thing to "get at." As truth has become more allusive, I've tried to remind you on a regular basis that we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are in the truth business.

Without a commitment to the truth, we're not worth our salt. We're children of darkness rather than light.

We're commanded not to bear false witness, to refrain from gossip, to refuse to press the send button on information we've not confirmed to be at least true—even better, it should pass the test of being helpful rather than hurtful—no matter who asks us to share it or what they say will happen to us if we don't.

Jesus told us our "yes" should always mean yes, and our "no" should mean no. He said it's only the truth that sets us free! And that's not just Gospel truth—although the Truth of Christ should be the basis for all truth, and for our commitment to the truth.

But it's also economic truth that sets us free, and political truth, and historical truth, and relationship truth. We must be committed to the truth in every arena of life—because any less than this means we just keep on perpetuating lies that enslave us and prevent us from knowing the freedom God desires for us.

Potiphar chose to believe the lie his wife told him rather than the truth his servant told. I guess that's understandable. Under the circumstances, it would have been much more painful for him to have believed Joseph, so he bought into a lie instead.

Sometimes the truth is so hard for us to hear, we just choose to hang on to something false instead. It's not healthy. It's not fair.

And it's certainly not helpful. But somehow we've convinced ourselves it's less painful to just go on believing the lie. We're comfortable doing that, you see.

If we learn anything from Joseph's story, it's that truth is not always what it first appears to be—and that sometimes people in places of power and influence will distort the truth to serve their own ends.

When Joseph's brothers showed the coat of many colors, now all torn and bloody, to their father, he assumed that a wild animal had killed his son—and none of Joseph's brothers tried to correct that misimpression. It was better for them if dad kept believing the lie.

Then comes that non-affair with Potiphar's wife—but who is he to believe—her... or Joseph? Of course, he believes her—she's his wife. She has her evidence, and Joseph wasn't really one of them anyway—so he probably shouldn't be trusted!

Something may be spoken as Gospel truth, but as that well-known song from *Porgy and Bess* states, "It ain't necessarily so!" It's a wise person who says, "Let's wait until all the evidence is in. Let's wait until the jury returns with its decision." The truth has a way of coming out—but it often takes time.

What evil is done in this world by those who cannot find it in their power to hold their tongues—who cannot leave a word of gossip unspoken. Steer clear of those persons--except to confront them. Listen to how the Apostle James deals with this evil:

3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. (James 3:3-10)

Praise and cursing, worship and slander—from the same mouth—don't buy it; don't believe it! That's the height of hypocrisy--and should never to be tolerated among God's people.

As I reflected on Joseph's dilemma, I felt the need to go back and revisit Rudyard Kipling's classic poem. You're no doubt familiar with it. I won't read it all--just this much (**IF by R. Kipling**):

**IF you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:**

**If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:
(Then)...Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!**

In many ways, young Joseph demonstrated a manly maturity; but the point here is not that Joseph coped with all these setbacks *by himself* or *under his own power*. Three times in Genesis 39, we find this phrase: "the Lord was with Joseph." Three times!

That's the theme of this chapter: Joseph, whom we found in a pit last week—his first major setback--ends up wrongly imprisoned now; but he's still okay—not angry or bitter or defeated. There's something far more significant than "luck" at work here: "the Lord was with Joseph."

Joseph knew this. That's not to say he understood why these troubles were happening, or how this would eventually resolve and lead to good things in his life. Joseph simply realized that he was not alone—the Lord was with him.

Whatever we have to go through in life, whatever struggles we face--whether they're self-inflicted, or happen through no fault of our own--the Lord is with us—just as He was with Joseph. Do you understand this—is this your faith, your blessed assurance? How comforting it is to know... to trust in God's presence.

Sometimes troubles come our way because we've chosen to do the *right* thing. This is what happened to Joseph; and years later, Jesus would tell us: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for *righteousness sake*, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

Sometimes bad and sad things come our way due to the sins of others. We saw that in Joseph's story last week when the jealousy of his brothers caused them to throw him in a pit and sell him as a slave.

Yes, Joseph's actions compounded his problems—telling his brothers about those lofty dreams and wearing his coat of many colors a bit too proudly—sometimes we also bring troubles on ourselves and also on those we love.

Still, God is with us, loving us, forgiving us, bringing something good from the bad; and, in time, He will even make sense out of the senseless.

Until then, God promises that His grace will be sufficient for us—even when others are losing their heads and blaming us, or dealing in lies and hate while we refuse to do so—that's when we must hold on to God... and keep the faith.

God will prevail. He will make life good again! That's His promise—and God keeps His promises. Thanks be to God!