

July 31, 11 Gen. 32-50; 37:1-5

## FROM PITS TO PALACES

Have you ever felt like you were in a pit and there was no way out? Have you ever felt like the hole was getting deeper and deeper and you wish you had a ladder? Our country seems to be struggling with that with our debt these days. Families sometimes too, not always because of what they have done, but sometimes circumstances that arise. The other day on the news there was a story of some guy who had a disagreement with his girlfriend and after some nasty words between them and his actions, she called the police. Meanwhile her boyfriend decided to take off before they arrested him. He ran into some woods to hide. Somehow he pried open a sewer cover he saw and climbed inside to hide. I'm not sure and how long he was there before he began to yell out for help. You see, first of all, he got stuck because he was a little bit larger than the hole in the sewer. Then there were the snakes that were there biting him all over the place and being wedged down there. Add to that the sewerage and you can see he really was in the pits. Finally he could care less about his future so he cried out for help and the police heard his calls pulled him to safety and then arrested him. It reminds me of the old saying, 'you can run, but you can't hide.'

Now that might seem to be the extreme. Not everyone is literally in the pits, but on occasion we hear stories of someone getting stuck in some kind of hole. But because of our lives situations we sometimes think we are. And when we get there, sometimes we just don't know what to do or where to turn. It was sad to read the other day of another music star who had lots to live for dying at the age of 27. From what we have learned about her, drugs and alcohol were a major part of her life. She too might have been in the pits of lives struggles not knowing how to climb out, maybe not knowing who to call, who to trust, where to get life sustaining everlasting help. Her fame may have been her pitfall. Her

solution was the drugs and alcohol. Not a good mix. Haven't seen where either of those have been a solution to a problem. In reality They often compound the problems.

Today we look to Joseph to find out when life throws you lemons, just make a lemon shake-up. When you're in the pits of life's struggles, don't look down, look up.

Out of last week's hero Jacob comes 12 sons. But one, Joseph was the favorite. Born to Rachael, the love of his life, and for whom he worked 14 years to have as his wife. But she died while giving birth to Benjamin and it seems Joseph and Benjamin were favored over their brothers but, Joseph more so.

Joseph found himself in pit number one day which I will call **the pit of jealousy and anger.**

You all know that story. But a simple recap goes like this. Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors which angered the brothers. They plotted to get rid of Joseph one day when Joseph came to check on them. They were tired of his coat, his dad's favoritism, and his whacky dreams that one day he would rule over them and they would bow down to him. We might even say while his brothers worked hard with the flocks and stuff, he didn't have to get his hands dirty. He could lie in the fields of clover and dream away. When he came that day to check on them, a plan arose to do away with him. They grabbed and stripped him of his coat, tossed him in a pit, perhaps so deep he could not get out. If the critters didn't get him they decided to kill him. Meanwhile a caravan came along going to Egypt and instead of killing poor, poor Joseph, they sold him and shared the profit, killed a goat and dipped his coat into the blood to look like Joseph was killed by some ferocious animal. Then took the coat home to their dad and told him how Joseph fought the good fight to defend them and gave his life to save them. At least that's the stage version of "Joseph and His Many Colored Coat." Dad was never the same.

What do you think Joseph was thinking while in that pit? I wonder if he was pleading with his brothers to let him go and he would not tell dad about the situation. Maybe he promised he would be a different brother and not tell on them anymore. Do you think he was trying to strike a bargain with them? How was his dad going to handle the news that his favorite son was no longer around? It's hard to think what was going on in Joseph's mind that day. Maybe he was in prayer. Maybe he was questioning God. "Why did you allow this to happen to poor me?" could have been his prayer. At least one brother was on his side and wanted to let him go and not kill him. Joseph was between a rock and a hard place. He was so deep in the pit he didn't have any idea how to get out of it. And then when the brothers took him from the pit and sold him, that was another story. Now he was being taken to another country where he could not speak the language, and he would not be able to see his father again.

Jealousy is a pretty dangerous feeling. It often leads to anger, which leads to something destructive. Just read the papers and you see some awful results from it. Many a TV or a movie deal with the subject and nothing good ever comes from those feelings. It's not just in relationships, but in job opportunities, sometimes in the ministry. For Joseph, it costs him time with his family, and brought him to a new land.

Pit number two came later for Joseph. This pit I call **the pit of rejection and anger**. Things seemed to be going great for Joseph as he was purchased by Potiphar, a rich person who was in Pharaoh's court. While God blessed his working for Potiphar, Potiphar's wife had her eyes on this cute Hebrew fellow. She became the Eve of her time. You know, seeing handsome Joseph every day thinking those thoughts that can get you into trouble. The more she saw Joseph the bigger the eyes, the more she lusted after him. Those wandering eyes of his wife brought trouble to Joseph. When Potiphar's wife made her move, Joseph rejected her advances over and over again. He did what some of our

tempted congressmen and other people, guys and gals, who get caught in the scene should have done, ran from that place as fast as his feet could move. Trouble was that Potiphar's wife grabbed his garment as he escaped. Being angry, there's the result of her rejection, she told a lie to her husband that Joseph had tried to make improper advances toward her. Potiphar, being between the rock and hard place having to believe either his wife or Joseph, sided with his wife, didn't even question Joseph and had him thrown in jail.

Doesn't seem as if Joseph can catch a break. None of the first two pits were his fault. He couldn't help it if his father favored him more. He couldn't help it if he was a good looking guy. "Hey God, it's not my fault. You made me like this! I can't help it if I look like Donnie Osmond" Joseph could have prayed. First trouble with his jealous brothers over a coat. Now trouble with a rejected wife and an angry husband who came to defense of his wife's honor...so it seemed. Bad enough Joseph was in Egypt, but now he might never see the light of day.

Have you noticed that nowhere have we seen God yet? But he was there. God was there with Joseph in each pit. How do we know? Because being in the pit his brothers had saved his life for another day. They could have wiped him out right away, but they didn't. And is it possible that God sent those hairy Ishmaelites along just as they were deciding how to get rid of Joseph? Just like his father, Joseph was being watched over by the God of his great-grandfather Abraham, his grandfather Isaac, his father Jacob. God's promises were being passed down from one generation to the other. Therefore, God had his hand on Joseph even though Joseph may not have seen it. Then again, God's hand was upon Joseph as he became a slave in the household of Potiphar, who was close to Pharaoh. And once again we would have to say that when you are in the pit, don't give up, look up.

Pit number three. Not easily described, but I thought I'd call this one **the pit of forgetfulness or maybe ingratitude**. While in prison he befriended two guys who were

sent to prison by Pharaoh because he was angry with them. While they were there Joseph interpreted their dreams to tell one he would be getting a call soon that Pharaoh had forgiven him. The other's fate was not so good. Pharaoh had not forgiven him and he would pay the price. On the day of the butler's release Joseph reminded the butler that he promised to tell Pharaoh about his case and maybe Pharaoh would shorten his sentence to "time served." "Yeah, yeah, Joseph, I'll tell him first chanced I get," the butler said. But, no dice. I guess the butler was so excited about saving his own neck and being restored to his favorite butler position that he forgot about Joseph and so Joseph's hope of release went away. You talk about ingratitude, the butler was full of it. Yet, as we read, God blessed Joseph in that place. He was no ordinary prisoner. The head guy made Joseph his assistant and Joseph ran the prison, and we might add, he did it well. Once again Joseph learned not to give up, but to cheer up, and to look up.

Now I know many of you have read this story, or seen the play, and you know much of this story. It's one of my favorites. It is found in Genesis chapter 32 to chapter 50. It is the last part of the Book of Genesis. 18 chapters, to be exact, on the life of Joseph and the salvation of God's people. How out of the pitfalls of life there is always hope and maybe even a crown. One thing we learn from this story is this....when you're in the pits of your life don't give up, just look up. Not everything in life goes smooth. God never promised we would never have troubles in this life. Because of sin, troubles will always be around. Read the whole Bible and you see that. Just read the Old Testament and you find troubles galore that God's people had to endure. This life is a journey of faith. You either have it, or you don't. It either grows or it dies. It either sustains you or you just don't believe. But in that, the troubles aren't the end, but they prepare a way for God to work through circumstances and through people. God did promise that he would be with us. He never promised to take us out of the situation. Paul reminds us that there will come testing and temptations, but God would give us a way out. We wish our lives would always be true

sailing, but that is not the case. But our lives become sailable when we turn the wheel over to God and we watch him work his glory riding out the storms.

Look back over all the years and you can see history supports that thought. We've had war upon war. We've had poverty, the great depression times. We've seen the stock market crashes. I remember asking some older folks a few years ago about those days and it was amazing they didn't think they were so poor. They had what they needed. They were thankful for what they had, not wanting a whole lot more. We've seen unemployment not only back in the depression times, but even today. We've seen or read about starvation in other countries, and that's in the current news of the day. We've had the promises of politicians to help solve some of this stuff, but here we are again in trouble with high unemployment, houses being foreclosed, high debt stuff wondering what is in store not only for us today but future generations. And it's not just this country. It's the whole world. Life is tough! There is no getting around it. Sometimes you wonder what's going to happen. Pitfalls! There all around us. They may not be big ones, but they're there.

Wow! That's a downer thought. But we have the answer. You see, God is still God. His promises are still good. One day he took Joseph out of the pit of jail and brought him before Pharaoh to interpret his dream about a fabulous harvest followed by a famine. Someone needed to be in charge to see them through it. Pharaoh said, "Joseph you're the man!" So they put a crown on his head, gave him a ring, and made him number two with all the powers of Pharaoh. Finally, Joseph got a break.

Isn't it interesting how God works? From pits to the palace. It didn't happen overnight. But it did happen. God never abandoned Joseph. He was always there. And here is something to think about this morning when you are in the pits. When we come to the end of the story which has a happy ending, you know Joseph forgives his brothers.

They and his dad come to Egypt during the famine at the request of Pharaoh, and they all live happily ever after, growing in numbers as the called people of God for over 400 years in Egypt.

Now we may never get to the palace like Joseph did, but you know, maybe we will. Maybe when this life is over and we get to heaven we will realize that each pit we found ourselves in helped us prepare to be in the presence of the King one day. You see Paul reminds us that those who persevere will receive their crown. Mine is waiting in a special place. One day I hope that I will be found worthy of wearing it. Maybe that's a lesson we continue to learn.

I encourage you to read the story of Joseph sometime. You'll find help through all the pitfalls of your life because you'll find God is always there.

So remember, when you are in the pits, don't give up, cheer up, look up and see the glory of God surrounding you. Let those who agree say a loud "Amen!"