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Series: *Joseph – Living the Dream*

Title: *Faithful in Adversity*

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Scripture: Genesis 37:12-36

If you have been watching the news the past couple weeks, you know that forest fires have raged across millions of acres of land in California, Oregon, and Washington, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes.

Summer fires like this are somewhat normal in this part of our country, but this year it has been especially devastating. For example:

- In California, fires have burned across more land than in the last two years combined.
- In Oregon, fires have blazed across nearly one million acres, destroying entire towns.

The sad fact is 95% of these fires are caused by human error and a few weeks ago just such a blaze cost a fire fighter his life. I'm referring to the fire that was started in California by a family who were hosting a gender-reveal party. They had a smoke-grenade-like device that was designed to give out either blue or pink smoke and when it went off, it set the very dry grass on fire. The family tried to douse the flames with water bottles, but the fire spread too quickly. They could face criminal charges and may also have to pay for the staggering cost of extinguishing the fire.

Last week we began a study of the life of Joseph, which is recorded in Genesis 37-50. And when we ended our study of the first chapter of his life I told you that the jealousy and bitterness that Joseph's brothers felt for him was like that dry California grass. All that would be needed for THAT family to set it ablaze was a tiny spark. This morning we read about the spark that began that blaze, a "blaze of adversity" that was almost as costly, for it nearly cost our hero his life.

Take your Bibles and turn to Genesis 37 and let's pick up where we left off last week in verse 12. Keep them open as we work our way through the rest of the chapter. I want you to know that Bob Russell's study on Genesis has been very helpful to me in this morning's message.

Now the sad thing about all this is the fact that the spark that started this "blaze of adversity" in Joseph's life came from his father. Look at verse 13. Jacob says, ***"Joseph, you know that your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."***

Now Shechem was fifty miles north. That's a long trip to make on foot, a five-day journey. Why would Jacob send Joseph, in that ornate robe, all by himself all that way? I mean, not only would this teenager face the danger of the road. He would also be at the mercy of his ten, older brothers who obviously hated him.

Remember what we talked about last week?

- They hated him because he was his father's favorite.
- They hated him because he wore that special coat that his father had given to him all the time;
- They hated him because he had arrogantly reported a couple of visions that he had that one day he was going to rule over them.

This errand shows us that Jacob was blind to the intensity of the sibling rivalry that existed. He had no idea how BAD things were.

Now, of course some sibling rivalry is to be expected. In fact, if your children are not bickering over time in the bathroom or who's wearing whose clothes or who's sitting on what side of the car or who ate the last Oreo, I would start checking pulses. It is normal for living, breathing siblings to fight. This week as Becca finished moving into her new home, she found some apology notes she had written to Sarah back when they were teens. It was kind of moving to see her apology for their bickering. I remember those years, I knew it was normal for sisters to fight but I was so glad when those years passed!

Well, this sibling rivalry in Jacob's home was not normal. It was excessive, intense, and remember, Joseph's ten elder brothers not only hated him, they had also demonstrated a taste for violence and for murder in the past. In Genesis 34, their sister, Dinah, had been raped by the son of the king of Shechem. That young prince wanted to make amends by marrying Dinah. Jacob's sons said, *"Well---okay---but you and every male in the city must be circumcised."* The prince agreed. But, then on the third day, knowing those men were recovering from this "surgery" and in no shape to fight back, the brothers went in and took revenge. Verse 25 says, ***"Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. The sons of Jacob looted the city where their sister had been defiled. They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses."***

Understand, these brothers weren't just administering justice; they were reeking vengeance. They robbed, they vandalized, they abused, kidnapped, they murdered, and they seemed to enjoy doing it. But when Jacob, the father, found out about it, he didn't punish the sons. He just said, *"That was a bad political move. We're going to be hated in this area."*

Well now he sends Joseph out to see how these hateful, potentially violent brothers are doing. What a ridiculous idea! How could he be so naïve about his sons' true nature?! It reminds me of parents I've known who had a hard time being objective about their children. The children get into deep trouble and they say, *"Well, they have a good heart. They were just sowing their wild oats. They were being a little frisky."* Or *"You must have misunderstood. My child NEVER does anything wrong."* Mom and Dad, if you get warning signs early, don't ignore them. If a school teacher, youth pastor, or policeman says, *"We've got a bit of a problem here,"* don't get defensive. Don't try and explain it away. It could be that your child needs some serious help.

Well, Jacob's sons NEEDED help. They needed correction after the Shechem massacre but he didn't give it. He was too passive. In fact, his passive nature kept him from really KNOWING his sons so he could see no problem sending Joseph off alone to check on his dangerous, hateful siblings. It was a decision that Jacob would regret for the rest of his life.

And while we're talking about "teachable moments" for parents, let's stop and remind ourselves that we must be alert to the spiritual dangers in our world and not send our children into an environment that they aren't equipped to handle. If you send your teenager off to college without some strong training and accountability planning, you are sending them into a morally dangerous environment, like lambs among the wolves. If you send your young teenager to the beach for Spring Break without adult supervision, or you let them go off to a movie or a party and you don't ask questions like: *"Where are you going? Who's going with you? How long are you gonna stay? When are you coming back? Who are you riding with?"* then you are naïve about the physical and spiritual dangers of our culture. I know you cannot keep them isolated at home and you can't protect them from temptation forever, but you can be careful not to throw them to the adversary without the necessary equipment and preparation. Remember our text from two weeks ago? Peter warned, ***"Satan stalks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."***

When I was in high school, I got a part in the Senior Class Play. The night after the last performance there was a cast party at the home of one of the cast members. I asked my parents if I could go and they strongly advised I not. They reminded me that this was not my church youth group, the party was not in a home where the family went to church. They told me I wouldn't enjoy myself because there would be a lot of alcohol, but with my promise that I would not drink, they let me make my own decision and they let me go. Well, they were right to warn me. There were no adults and I was the only one not drinking. Everyone else was bombed out of their head, it was as if I was alone at the party. It was not fun and to make matters worse, I gave a friend a ride home and he threw up all over the back seat of my dad's car. My friend stumbled into his house and went to bed and his parents never found out. But of course mine did, dad was quite upset and as I worked hard to clean his car and remove that horrible smell, I remember thanking God for parents who warned me about the world. I decided I would listen to them the next time.

Okay, go back to verse 13. Look at Joseph's response to his dad's request that he check on his brothers. He says, **"Very well."** You'd expect Joseph to say, *"Hey, Dad, I don't want to go. That's a long way. My brothers don't like me. I got things I want to do around here. Please don't send me."* But Joseph was cooperative; he was respectful; he was obedient. Those are the characteristics that God is going to use in his life later when he is put in OTHER bad situations.

Look at verse 15, ***"When he arrived at Shechem," he couldn't find his brothers. He asked a local resident if he had seen them. "They have moved on from here," the man said.***

"I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" Now Joseph could easily turn back, go home and say, ***"Dad, they're not there."*** Or when he learned they were at Dothan to say, *"Well, I've done what my father asked me. I'm certainly not going to chase them down there. I've already gone 50 miles. I've gone to Shechem to check on them and they are not here. My job is done. I'm not going another 14 MORE miles. Nope---I'm headed home."*

But Joseph was not afraid to go the extra mile. He was willing to put forth the extra effort to do what his dad had asked, check on his brothers. Those are OTHER qualities that will serve him well later in life.

Well, Joseph went to Dothan and as he topped a hill he looked down and saw his brothers tending his father's vast flock. And they saw him too. The moment they realized it was him in that ROBE, it was like striking the match. They knew they were 64 miles from home, far from their father's rule, so this was their opportunity to take revenge. Look at verse 18, ***"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.'"***

You know, I've watched a lot of westerns in my day and seen the formation of a lot of lynch mobs and that has taught me that a mob usually sinks to the level of its lowest participant. People will do things and say things in a large group that they would never do and say otherwise. That's why the sheriff, if he's played by John Wayne, always knows who in the mob to confront. If you neutralize that "lowest level participant" who is the ringleader, the mob will disperse.

Well, with this principle in mind, we would be wise to be wary of a group of bitter, angry people: strikers on a picket line, the losing team on the bus, church members tired of listening to the same guy preach long sermons... dangerous people. Well, this group of ten brothers was dangerous like that. Someone said, ***"Let's go on and kill him! Let's just throw him in this cistern."*** And the rest went along. They said, ***"Yeah, let's say some ferocious animal killed him."*** Alone, I don't think any of them would have done that, but together they had the courage to act on their jealousy. Only one brother, Reuben the oldest, tried to stop it.

Look at verse 21, ***“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.”***

Reuben could have put a stop to this, but he didn’t because he was a coward. In Genesis 49 when Jacob gave Reuben his blessing, he said he was ***“as unstable as water.”*** I mean, Reuben did not have the courage to say, ***“Hey, guys, you’re going to do that over my dead body. That’s wrong!”*** I think if he had, the others would have backed down, but he didn’t and they didn’t.

Look at verse 23. ***“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.”*** Think of how Joseph must have felt at this moment. What a terrible thing to happen! Sure, he had disagreements with his brothers, but this was the real deal. They weren’t just trying to scare him. They wanted to HURT him.

They ripped off his coat. They tore it to pieces, that special coat. They beat him up, they threw him into the cistern and they laughed at him as he begged to come out. In fact, verse 25 said that as he cried for help, they sat down to eat their meal! 22 years later they would remember that moment of shame. In Genesis 42:21 it says, ***“We saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen.”***

Okay back to our text. Verse 25 says, 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.***

Judah sold him for 22 pieces of silver. Ironically, centuries later, another Judah---Judas---same name, different pronunciation, would sell Someone far greater than Joseph for 30 pieces of silver. While they were eating, Reuben apparently got up from the table and left, pretending to be on another errand. He gave his siblings time to finish eating and then he cowardly SNUCK BACK to the cistern to help Joseph get out so that he could run back home. But by then Joseph was gone. Reuben tore his clothes and went back to his brothers and he said, ***“The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?”***

Even then, he could have done something. He could have forced his brothers to go get Joseph back. He could have done that himself but he weakly went along with the rest. They agreed to lie to their father and set it up so that it looked like Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. They took that hated robe and used it as a weapon to hurt their father, the way he had hurt them when he gave it to Joseph. They tore it and dipped it in goat’s blood. When Jacob saw it, he said, ***“Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.” Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.*** (vs 33) Note that not one of those ten brothers cared enough about their father to say, ***“Dad, I cannot stand to see you weep anymore. I’ve got to tell you the truth. Joseph isn’t dead. We sold him as a slave to Egypt. Let’s go get him.”*** No one comforted him by telling the truth.

Okay, what faith lessons can we learn from this “second chapter” in Joseph’s life?

1.) Good times are FRAGILE.

In this fallen world, good times don’t always last. I mean, you begin a day like any other not suspecting that it will end any differently and, all of a sudden, something happens and all of life is different.

- You discover a lump on your body and you think it might be cancerous.

- You go into your boss's office and he says, *"We don't need you any more."*
- You find a note your marriage partner has written to a lover.
- You get a phone call, *"Dad's had a heart attack."*
- You're just driving along, ordinary day, thinking about simple things and a truck pulls in front of you; and all of a sudden, you wake up in intensive care or maybe standing before your Creator.

It can happen so quickly, can't it? That's what happened to Joseph. One day he's young, healthy, wealthy, pampered by his father and the next day he's tied up on his way to Egypt.

When the caravan arrives, he is sold as a slave. Verse 36 reads, ***"Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard."*** Potiphar was Pharaoh's chief executioner, a tough man, head of the Gestapo of Egypt. If you're a slave, you don't want to be bought by a man like that. He knows how to teach obedience.

He'd treat a new slave rough so that he would learn respect for authority. Joseph have the worst of sleeping quarters. He'd be given the most menial task. Here was pampered Joseph and all of a sudden, taking out the garbage, scrubbing out the latrines, carrying heavy burdens in the heat of the desert. Remember, we have faith in GOD, not in this world. Bad can come to any of us and it can come quickly.

That leads to the next faith lesson.

2.) Bad times are INEVITABLE.

As Job warned, ***"Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward."*** (Job 5:7)

2nd Timothy 3:12 says, ***"Those that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."***

In John 16:33 Jesus said, ***"In this world you WILL have trouble."***

The point is, not only is good fragile, bad is inevitable. It's coming sooner or later so we had better be prepared. In her autobiography, Helen Hayes, the famous actress of yesteryear, tells about cooking her first Thanksgiving dinner. She warned her husband, Charles, and her son, James, *"Now I know this is the first time I've ever cooked a turkey and if it isn't any good, I don't want anybody to say anything. We'll just get up from the table without comment and we'll go out to a restaurant to eat."* Then she went into the kitchen and she came back bearing the turkey. When she got back her husband and son were seated at the table with their hats and coats on.

The point is we shouldn't be surprised when bad comes, as though something strange were happening to us. We must prepare ourselves by studying God's Word, spending time in prayer, building up our shield of faith, so that when bad comes, we will be ready.

Here's a third faith lesson Joseph teaches us.

3.) Effort is ESSENTIAL.

As we'll see in our study, Joseph didn't give up and say, *"Poor me!"* No, he made the best of his situation.

In his book, *God's Man in Egypt* Leslie Flynn points out that Joseph could've gone around saying, *"No speaka Egyptian. No speaka Egyptian. You know, these aren't my kind of people. This isn't my kind of place. I don't deserve to be treated like this. I'm not a slave. I don't want anything to do with this culture."*

But Joseph didn't. He made the best of a bad situation. He decided to bloom where he was planted. He went to work. He learned the language; he learned the culture; he observed the people. He began to find favor with his master because he worked hard.

J. Oswald Sanders said, *"When you walk with God, there are marks that even the people of the world can see."* Joseph was faithful to the Lord. Even though he didn't understand why he was here, he was faithful as a slave, he did his work as unto the Lord and his master noticed and promoted him. Well, we must learn to walk in Joseph's "faith steps." When tough times come, we must rely on God and ask Him to help us bear fruit for His kingdom. As Galatians 6:9 says, we must not, **"...grow weary in doing good. In due season, we'll reap a harvest if we don't give up."** When bad times come, we KEEP going to church. We KEEP reading the Bible. We KEEP talking to God in prayer. As long as we are able, we KEEP doing the good work God has laid before us. So, Good is fragile, Bad is inevitable, Effort is essential and finally,

4.) God is FAITHFUL.

In bad times you anchor yourself to that fact. You believe His promises.

For example:

Romans 8:28, ***"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."***

And Isaiah 43:2, ***"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned."***

Note, God does not say you will never face bad times. No, He says, *"I will be at work even in those bad times---for your benefit!"* God does not say, *"You'll never have a flood."* No, He says, *"When the flood comes, I'll see to it you don't drown."* He doesn't say, *"You'll never have a fire."* He says, *"When the fire comes, I'll see to it that you're not burned."* We have to trust when the bad comes that God is still good, still faithful to keep His promises.

Bob Russell writes,

"There's no victory without a battle. There's no crown without a cross. There's no resurrection without a death. There's no rainbow without a storm. There's no empty tomb without a Calvary.

There's no sunrise without a night. There's no solution without a problem. There's no perseverance without hardship."

We must remember that our God is faithful!