

10-09-11

When Life's Not Fair

Genesis 37-50

A huge crowd was watching the famous tightrope walker, Blondin, cross Niagara Falls one day in 1860. He crossed it numerous times – a 1,000-foot trip 160 feet above the raging waters. He not only walked across it; he also pushed a wheelbarrow across it. One little boy just stared in amazement. So after completing a crossing the fellow looked at that little boy and he said, “Do you believe I could take a person across in the wheelbarrow without falling?” – “Yes, sir. I really do.” The fellow says, “Well then, get in, son.” (Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations*)

Where is your trust level with God? Do you really trust Him with everything?

When everything in your life, or a major thing in your life, falls apart, do you still trust God?

Notice – the title of this message is NOT – Life's Not Fair, that's a given, but rather, **When** Life's Not Fair.

We're going to look at part of the Joseph story in Genesis. We can't go into details about this extensive story, Ch. 37-50, but we will look at some specific areas of his life today. All in all, this must be pretty important stuff. Why else would there be such a huge chunk of Scripture devoted to this man's life? The Joseph story takes up 40% of Genesis. So let me give you some background to lead into today's focus...

Life's Not Fair -

Gen. 37 – We see that Joseph is loved by his father (Jacob) more than his brothers (favoritism). This causes jealousy by his brothers against him, and they hated him. This wasn't his fault – **Life's not fair.**

Joseph has prophetic dreams – he dreams that his brothers would bow down to him; he also dreams that his brothers and parents would bow down to him. He tells his brothers and father about these dreams and this causes even more hatred. His brothers plan to kill him. **Life's just not fair.**

Rather than kill him, his brothers sell him to some gypsies for a few pieces of silver (sound familiar?). They, in turn, sell him to Potiphar, an Egyptian official. Joseph is forced to work in slavery to Potiphar.

Joseph works diligently and with integrity - - God blesses Potiphar because of Joseph. Joe worked for God, not Potiphar.

Potiphar's Wife – (39:1-20) - Then Joseph has a major trial of faith. Potiphar's wife has the hots for Joe. She entices him; she flat out asks him; she practically begs him to sleep with her. No one would know. But Joe refuses her advances every time. She gets him by the coat and he flees the scene leaving her holding his coat. She accuses him of trying to rape her with his coat as evidence, and Joe lands in prison for something he didn't do. He was serving God, falsely accused and is sent to prison. This guy can't win – **Life certainly is not fair.**

The Forgetful Cupbearer – (40:23) – Joe works well in prison and is put in charge of the inmates and the affairs of the prison. Things are going as well as they can under the circumstances. God is blessing Joe again. Then Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker wind up in prison. They both have dreams that Joseph interprets. All Joe asks is that the cupbearer remembers him to Pharaoh when he is restored to his position.

Gen 40:23 - *The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.*

Nice – how quickly we forget. So Joe is stuck in prison another two years for no good reason.

Life is just not fair.

Let's break from the story for a moment or two and think about more relevant ordeals of life that just aren't fair.

Pastor Wayne Brooks - -

George Malcolm - -

My cancer situation - -

Life is not fair, but what do we do WHEN life's not fair? How do we act, react. What do we feel about God at those times?

How Can I Cope?

Put God at the Center of Your Life – (39:9; 40:8)

Gen 39:9 - *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?*

No matter what came Joseph's way, his first concern was always about God, not himself. He could have slept with Potiphar's wife. Maybe no one would find out, but God would know. We always have to consider that God knows everything about us – what we do or don't do – what we think about. One way to cope with the situations of life we find ourselves in is to keep God central in our life and mind.

Gen 40:8 - *"We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them."*

Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

Joseph could have taken the credit and made a name for himself, but it's not about him. For Joseph, it's always all about God. Interpretation of dreams belongs to God even if He uses Joseph to accomplish it. Instead, Joseph is known forever because God honored him for honoring God. Forty percent of the book of Genesis is devoted to this man's story with God, and how God used him to save Israel at this time.

Trust in God's Plan and Control – (39:2, 21)

Gen 39:2-4 - *The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.*

His master saw, noticed, could tell, it was obvious – that the Lord was with Joseph. God has a plan for our lives if we belong to him. We have to know that and believe it. We must walk by faith many times, but knowing God is carrying out His plan.

“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness – For without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Gen 39:21 -*the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.*

God granted him favor because it was evident that Joseph kept God first in his life. He walked with integrity before God no matter what the circumstances. He didn't get bitter; he didn't get even; he didn't hold grudges; he just kept moving forward in relationship with his God – and he was favored. Bad things still happened to him – Life's not fair – but God is – Joe focused on that!

Why Should I Try?

“Unfair” situations are “Spiritual Opportunities” to mature in FAITH

James 1:2-5 - *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* Yeah!

Trials make us persevere, and perseverance brings about maturity in the Faith. Whatever you are going through, persevere in the faith. Whatever you will go through in the future – persevere in Christ.

ENOS – has to persevere and mature – growth comes in trials and sufferings – Why do you think they wrote these passages – Because it's important! We must grow and learn to persevere through all situations and remain faithful to God and His promises to us – Persevere no matter what!

Rom 5:3-5 – *Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

We have Hope or we will learn about hope through our trials and sufferings. It all comes down to God's Love – His love for you and me – vs. 5 – Hope does not disappoint us BECAUSE – God has poured out His Love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

I have felt overwhelmed and scared – I didn't know if I would live or die – BUT – BUT – God poured out His love into my heart by His Holy Spirit. I would be OK whether my physical life was over or I would be restored – Praise God for the latter. Maturity is a process.... A never-ending process.

When we first met Joseph, he was an egotistical teenager who deliberately irritated his family. Then he was sold into slavery, falsely accused, and thrown into prison. Along the way, Joseph matured. His life seemed unfair but he was prepared for it. Why? He put God at the center, and he trusted God's plan. Tough times offer us some of the best opportunities to grow in our faith. But to seize these opportunities, we must trust that God has a plan.

There's only one way Joseph could say to his brothers at the end of his journey – I forgive you – I don't hold a grudge.

They feared once their father died, Joseph would get them back for what they did.

Gen 50:19-21 - *But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*

Life's not fair, but God has a plan – always.

Chuck Swindoll's Illustration – p. 586-587 – The Road of Life – by Tim Hansel, Holy Sweat

Thank God for the tough times; He'll use them to help you grow.

Even when life isn't fair, we can trust God!

God has the wheelbarrow, and He's asking you to GET IN. Do you trust him? Do you believe He can take you across to the other side safely, without stumbling, over the turbulent situations in life? Believing is not enough – We must GET IN.