

## Sermon Notes, May 15, 2016

### Never Waste a Crisis, Genesis 39:1-10

Jonathan Hague has a very interesting exercise. He says imagine that you had a child, and when that child enters the world, for the first five minutes of that child's existence, you are given a script of what will be that child's entire life. And you get an eraser, and you can edit it. You can take out whatever you want to take out of your child's life. What would you erase? Wouldn't you want to take out all the stuff that would cause him or her pain and grief and hardship?

I am part of generation of adults that are sometimes called helicopter parents because we are constantly trying to swoop into our children's lives... their educational lives, their relational lives, their sports lives, their activities...to make sure nobody is mistreating them, nothing is disappointing them. To make sure they experience just one unobstructed success after another one.

If you could wave a magic wand, if you could erase every failure, every setback, all the pain, all the suffering...are you sure it would be a good idea for that child? Would it cause them to grow up to be a better, stronger, more generous, more true-hearted human being?

Is it possible that in some ways, people can actually grow from, maybe somehow even need adversity, setbacks, difficulties, heartache, to reach the fullest level of humanity, development, and growth?

So we come up against these very striking, kind of wince-inducing statements in the Bible. James puts it like this, *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything."*

Or Peter who writes, *"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed."*

Or these words from the apostle Paul. Let's read this together out while. Paul writes, *"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."*

We're looking in this miniseries that we're beginning today at *Never Wasting a Crisis*. Adversity, challenge, setback, hardship... are never things that we look forward to, but can God be present in them? Can He help us to learn? Can we grow through them?

I want to do this by looking at a character from the Bible that went through about as many crises as anybody I know. His name is Joseph. When we first meet Joseph, the crisis has not hit. Things are going well. But Joseph lives in a family where there are all these complicated dynamics going on, and they go back to Abraham. It is kind of like reality TV. Joseph is the number one son of the number one favorite wife. He is his daddy's boy. His dad gives him a coat—the coat of many colors, and it just kills his brothers, when they see Joseph wearing that coat.

But Joseph has got the world by its tail. It didn't hurt that he is physically impressive. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him. And then one day Joseph had a dream and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. Then he had another dream. He told it to his brothers and they hated him even more.

Finally, his brothers can't take it anymore. One day they get him off by themselves. They kidnap him. They take his coat. They cover it with animal blood. They show it to their father to convince him that Joseph is dead. They sell Joseph to a caravan to be taken down to Egypt and sold into slavery.

Literally overnight, Joseph has lost his status, lost his home, lost his financial resources, lost his parents, lost his future occupation, lost his culture, lost his family, lost his friends... everything.

Now where is his security?

Now, what is his identity?

Now, what is his purpose?

What is his dream?

What happened to Joseph is what happens to everybody one day, has or will happen to everybody here. We ordinarily live in something that we might think of as *"normal"* life, where circumstances are going about as we expect them to go, and then I can live with all these illusions.

I am secure because I have this money, because I have my health, because I have these abilities, etc. Until one day all of these illusions are revealed to be illusions by a crisis that breaks through my normal life. Maybe it is a financial crash.

Maybe you lose your job. Maybe it is a divorce.

Why me? Most of the time you don't know.

Another question that I could ask, usually I don't, is...why *not* me?

All the pain, all the suffering, all the hardship, all the grief. I look at the world through the centuries, how would I expect anything different, anything other...why *not* me?

But then eventually you come to the big question which is...what do I have left when what I thought I could stand on is gone?

You think you can stand on your health, your body, your marriage, your IQ, your abilities, your good intentions, your job, your talent, your friends, your reputation, and then one by one each one of those is shaken. One day my whole world shakes.

The strangest thing happens to Joseph. Nobody here cares that he was his daddy's favorite. Nobody here is asking him about his dreams. He is an alien. He is a stranger. He is an abducted, penniless, powerless slave. What in the world does Joseph have left? One thing, this amazing reality: "The Lord was with Joseph...and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master."

What must that have been like in his soul? To wake up & to have lost everything & to find here is God with me.

Because the Lord is with him, he has no more trouble. Everything works out great at the Potiphar's' house. He gets along wonderfully with Mr. Potiphar & Mrs. Potiphar & lives there happily ever after. Right? Not so much.

We will see next week; God is with him. He honors God. He resists temptations. But even through all of his obedience to God, he ends up in prison. Then the strangest thing happens...

"But while Joseph was there in prison, the Lord was with him."

He falls, and he falls, and he falls, until he falls into the arms of God.

Yet loss and heartache is not something simply to get over. This message is not about how if something bad happens to you, you just get back to being happy as soon as you can. Loss is something wrong that needs to be set right, that needs to be redeemed.

The Bible says that the day is coming when God will do that, but between this day and that day, the strangest thing happens to people in slavery, to people in prison, to people in a hole, people suffering loss, people suffering persecution, they find somehow God is there. God reveals to them that He is there.

When we walk through adversity, when we walk through setbacks, how can we do it in a way that leads to growth, in a way that makes us stronger, in a way that leads to redemption? How do we grow through adversity?

That is what we are going to look at next week through the life of Joseph.

But what I want to end today with is just one more question: Does God care?

When this happens, when the earth shakes, when your world gets shattered, when you don't know what to do...Does Heaven know? Does God care?

When Joseph got to the end of his life, all those tears, if you could have asked him,

"Joseph, when did you grow the most as a human being? When did you, kind of, begin to get over yourself? When did that steel get put into your soul? When did you find God nearest to you?"

What do you think Joseph would have said? I think he would have said, *"It was when I was a slave."* I think he would've said, *"It was when I was in prison, down at the bottom, and there when I lost everything, there was God."*

I think if Jacob could have been a helicopter dad, if Jacob could have had a script of Joseph's life and erased all of his tears ahead of time so that Joseph could have experienced nothing but sunshine and prosperity and applause and all his dreams coming true, and his sheaf standing taller than anybody else's, and the sun and the moon and the stars bowing down before him, I think that Joseph would never have met God the way he did.

If the uttermost foundations of your heart and happiness are your things, suffering and crisis will be pulling you away from the uttermost foundation of your happiness. Because that's what suffering is—that what a crisis will do.

Suffering is always taking away something important to you, some earthly thing. So if you build your life on things, suffering will make you sadder and sadder, madder and madder, worse and worse.

But if, as Joseph, you build your life on God, and though you certainly like having money and you certainly like having your health and you certainly like having friends and loved ones, the ultimate love is God's love. The ultimate wealth is God's love. The ultimate status is God's love. Then what suffering is doing is driving you deeper into the source of your joy.

See, if you build your life on things, suffering pulls you away from the source of your joy, and you're just going to get madder and madder and sadder and sadder and worse and worse, BUT if you build your life on God, then what happens is suffering drives you *into* Him, drives you *deeper* into the source of your joy.

Now, does God care?

It is an amazing thing about Jesus...Does anyone know what the shortest verse in the Bible is? *"Jesus wept."* His friend Lazarus dies. His friends all grieve. In Jesus, we have a God who cries. I don't know of any other religious system of thinking where *the god of that system* cries. But Christianity tells us that in Jesus, God cried. Does Heaven care? God cries.

John says in the last book of the Bible, *"The day is coming when God's dwelling place will now be among his people, and He will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Maybe some of you are right in the midst of a crushing loss right now. Somebody you love is dying. Maybe your health is creating all kinds of problems and because of it you're frustrated or even feeling despair. Or you're going through life and you've lost hope looking at the world as it is right now. In Jesus, God cries with you. In Jesus, our hope is that one day God will set this world right.