

Joseph the Captive by Andrew Harrex

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Readings:

Gen 37: 19-36

¹⁹They said to one another, ‘Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.’ ²¹But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, ‘Let us not take his life.’ ²²Reuben said to them, ‘Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him’—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. ²³So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves* that he wore; ²⁴and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.’ And his brothers agreed. ²⁸When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes. ³⁰He returned to his brothers, and said, ‘The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?’ ³¹Then they took Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. ³²They had the long robe with sleeves* taken to their father, and they said, ‘This we have found; see now whether it is your son’s robe or not.’ ³³He recognized it, and said, ‘It is my son’s robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.’ ³⁴Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son for many days. ³⁵All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, ‘No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.’ Thus his father bewailed him. ³⁶Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

Luke 4:16-19

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

Focus on cage – discuss with neighbour

(cage sitting on stage)

I wonder what you see when you look at this? What images does it bring to mind? How would it feel to be inside this? How might it feel to be inside this right now, looking out at all of us? Pretty odd and uncomfortable I would imagine.

There can be many ways we find ourselves captives. Turn to your neighbour and discuss how any of these might be things that hold us captive.

Facebook

TV

Broken relationships

Unemployment

Poor health

Finances/Money – too much, not enough

Addictions

Past hurts

Lack of self-confidence

Fear

Loneliness

Appearance

Power

Current news - A wedding and a death

I wonder how much of the news of this last week you have been aware of?

What your thoughts are about the various big events that have occurred?

On Friday night many in the world watched as two people escaped the captivity of singleness and made vows of marriage together. They think perhaps 2 billion people watched that event. Some in our world might say that in getting married the captivity has only just begun ... but whatever your view, how hard will it be for this couple to live with the eyes of the world on their every move? I wonder if at times they might feel like they are inside a cage, captives to public life.

Then on Monday afternoon we heard of a death. How might we as Christ-followers feel about the death of a man who has led an organisation that has killed many innocent people? There were scenes of people dancing and celebrating in the streets, great parties of people overwhelmed with joy at this death. Could it be that those who danced were captive to as much hatred and revenge as the one who was killed?

Summary of last week – Joseph the dreamer

Last week Richard began the series on Joseph. He talked about Joseph the dreamer and spoke of realising the dream that God has for us. Talents and good looks and strength won't get you where God dreams for you to get. We need to relinquish the small dreams we have and trust God for his plans for our

lives. We need to step out of the captivity of our own dreams and live in the fullness of what he calls us to be.

Intro - Joseph the captive

Today we look at Joseph the captive. Indeed much of what we read in Genesis about Joseph is about the time he spent in captivity.

3 stages of Captivity

Stage 1 - Betrayed

The first stage of Joseph's captivity begins with today's reading from Genesis 37. He is betrayed by his jealous brothers. Instead of simply killing him and tossing him into a well they decide they can make some money from him and sell him off into slavery. All but Reuben agree to this. Their jealousy has become a cage for them where they are unable to see past the hurt of their father's favouritism. One of the small groups who used the study material that has been prepared for this series shared how every person in their group could relate to the issue of favouritism – sometimes as the recipient and sometimes as the one not receiving it. The reality of learning to treat all people equally is a challenge we all face.

Joseph falls from the position of favoured son to become a slave in Egypt.

Stage 2 - Falsely accused

In Genesis 39 we read that God's blessing on Joseph earns him a place of authority in Potiphar's house. Eventually his good looks catch the eye of his master's wife. Refusing to succumb to the sexual temptation before him, Joseph is falsely accused of rape. He is thrown into prison. It is interesting to

note that the normal punishment for this crime would have been death so Joseph is shown leniency by Potiphar. It would seem Joseph's integrity and faithfulness in service saw him receive some grace. But what must life in the Pharaoh's prison have been like? Bearing the brunt of the false accusations of others is incredibly hurtful and difficult. Whether it is in the school playground or the office building something within us wants to rise up and respond in anger.

Teaching illustration

When I was a young teacher there was an older staff member who was not impressed with me. It got back to me that they were saying some very hurtful things about me. I was really mad at the gossip they were spreading and went next door to speak to a Christian colleague. I began to tell him what they had said about me and he stopped me and asked if I was going to talk to the person concerned about it. He said that if not I would either have to stop talking or he would have to leave the room. He made me realise that I was just as guilty of gossip as this other staff member. My hurt had made me a captive to the very thing that had hurt me in the first place.

Stage 3 - Forgotten

We see the 3rd stage of Joseph's captivity in his dealings with the cupbearer. God again favours Joseph and he is appointed by the Chief jailer to oversee much of the prisons work. It is not clear how long Joseph has been in prison when he interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. Predicting the cupbearer's release Joseph asks to be remembered by him .

"...remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. For in fact I was

stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.” Gen 40:14,15

But we read at the end of Chap 40 *“yet the cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”*

For two more years Joseph remains captive in this prison. It is only at the age of 30 he is appointed to Pharaoh’s court.

Joseph not a slave to his captivity

What must it have felt like for Joseph? To look back on his life and see through no fault of his own he has had to suffer because of the abuse and lies of others.

Somewhere around the age of 17 Joseph has been betrayed and taken to a foreign land as a slave. By the time he is released by Pharaoh nearly half of his life is spent in captivity. Caged in a place he does not deserve to be.

Yet throughout this time Joseph never seems to allow this captivity to define him. He may be betrayed by his brothers but holds no hatred towards them. When in a place of power over them he forgives rather than taking vengeance. When held as a slave and caged in a dungeon he seems able to rise above his situation and live in hope.

Jesus experience

Betrayed, Falsely accused, Forgotten or forsaken. Does this sound familiar? In this post-Easter time we recognise that in his passion week Jesus experienced these things. He allowed himself to become a captive to the manipulations and accusations of sinful humanity. Jesus knows what it feels like to be held

captive. And he experienced this so that what he said at the beginning of his ministry might be true. That he came ...

*“... to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free”.*

Bike accident

Growing up I was hugely self-conscious about the way I looked. My mum tells me that when I was 5 I stopped sucking my thumb because I thought it wasn't cool. As a child and a teenager worrying about my appearance was a major stress for me. Having the right clothes, the right body shape, the right sized nose. Now some level of this is perfectly normal but for me it became a captive experience. It affected my confidence in myself, what I believed people thought of me and how I would behave and interact with others. Even after making a faith commitment as a 15 year old it was still something I struggled with. But having Jesus in your life means you cannot help but be changed.

In 1994 I was teaching in Auckland and while cycling to school one morning a car hit me. Without going into too many details my face took the brunt of the impact and I have the scars and the false teeth to prove it.

The thing was that when I woke up a few days after the accident, with teeth missing and a face sewn back together I was overwhelmed by this sense of joy that I was alive. I still had two eyes, arms and legs that worked and a uninjured brain because I had worn my helmet.

My nose was bigger, my face was scarred and my chin stuck out a bit more. The thing was that I realised how I looked no longer had power over me. I felt God had released me from the captivity of worry and fear about my appearance. It was no longer a source of oppression for me and I was able to walk free. Jesus had done what he said he came to do and helped me out of a prison I was held captive in.

Joseph summary

The amazing thing about Joseph it seems to me is that in all the years he was enslaved and imprisoned he wasn't held captive. He did not harbour bitterness or hatred and seemed able to forgive. Yes he was really hurt by what his brothers did to him and that comes out later in the story, but he doesn't let it control him. He doesn't give up and he doesn't get bound up by the circumstances he finds himself in.

Why is that?

Because he doesn't lose sight of God. The integrity and faithfulness and work ethic he shows is based on trust in God and holding on to a belief that God has a big plan that Joseph cannot see yet.

"...you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people..." Gen. 50:20

He was able to rise above his situation and live in hope.

Close

Remember that list from the beginning?

Are you free or are there things that are holding you captive that you need Jesus to set you free from?

Is there some area of your life that holds you captive?

Jesus makes it possible for us to bring a Joseph attitude to every area of our lives. Will we let his Spirit bring us release by helping us see past our circumstances and live in the hope that God has a big plan?

We are going to take a moment to be silent. It is a time to reflect on what God would want to say to us about what we have heard. Then Rod and the team will lead us and after two songs I would like to lead us in a responsive prayer during which there will be a time for you to silently bring before God those areas of your life that you feel captive to.

The service will close with another song but there will be opportunity for any who wish to receive prayer today to come to the first few rows and talk with someone. May you know freedom today.