

# **LAND OF BONDAGE OR OPPORTUNITY?**

## **Genesis 37 - 49**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is true that in life, external conditions always surround us and they always change. While these external conditions exist, we still have the challenge of shaping what happens within us, what become of us internally. This sermon emphasizes the need for us to consider with great seriousness what we are within ourselves. The Christian's greatest concern in life must not be focused on changing external conditions. It must be focused on developing the inner person into a genuine person of God. That developed "genuine godly inner person" thrives in any external condition.

### **ANALOGY**

What makes physical life a land of bondage to some and a land of opportunity to others? For some life is always a land of bondage. In all circumstances, all they ever see is trouble. Nothing ever works for their advantage. All blessings turn to bitterness. Even with good health, a good family, trustworthy friends, a secure job, and a good home, life is still bleak and oppressive.

Yet, others find life to be ceaseless opportunity. The greater their adversities are, the greater their opportunities are. Poor health liberates their personality. Hardships are stepping stones to a fuller life. Trials are a ladder to a higher plain of living. Every adversity that comes their way results in a blessing to them.

If a person for whom life is always a land of bondage and a person for whom life is opportunity are placed in the same circumstances, the first would still be in bondage and the second would still see opportunity. If the circumstances were excellent, it would be the same. If the circumstances were horrible, it would be the same. Why? Why is that true? It is not merely

external conditions that produce our outlook on life. Internal outlooks are just as important. Quite often, ***what we are within ourselves chain us to bondage or liberate us to see opportunity***. That is why the Christian's greatest concern in life must not be focused on changing external conditions. It must be focused on developing the inner person into a genuine person of God.

Consider a man not in the prison yet living a life of one who is imprisoned and the imprisoned man living in freedom. The difference is what one is within oneself. Let's consider the life of Joseph, who was physically sold into slavery but never lived in bondage. Let's think about him in a manner that maybe we never thought about him before.

## **Joseph**

To Joseph, life is always a land of opportunity. He turned his land of bondage into his land of opportunity.

Joseph was his father's favorite child among all his father's thirteen (13) children. Joseph did not work in the fields with the flocks as did his brothers. He had a special garment to wear. His brothers resented him as they harbored feelings of jealousy. He had two dreams that implied his family members would someday bow before him. This did nothing to improve his relationship with his brothers and they plotted his death. With greed and hatred, they eventually sold him into slavery to a caravan of traders [*Ishmaelites*] on the way to Egypt. Joseph's life encountered one hardship after another. When he arrived in Egypt, he was sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard.

Joseph had grown up as a rich man's son. He had grown up as the favored son of the rich man. Can you imagine the adjustment involved in falling from the status of a rich man's son to the status of a slave?

Joseph proved himself to be responsible, resourceful, and trustworthy to Potiphar. Joseph prospered in all he did. He prospered to the extent that Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything. Potiphar did not even know what he owned! Just as the situation looked hopeful, Potiphar's wife was attracted to Joseph and began a continual effort to seduce him. Joseph resisted her advances for two (2) reasons - *he could not sin against God* and *he could not abuse Potiphar in that manner*. Potiphar's wife persisted until one day she found him alone in the house. When he resisted her advances, she took hold of his robe in an attempt to force him. He left the robe in her hand and fled. Angered by his rejection, she screamed and told the other servants Joseph attempted to rape her. She reported the same story to her husband that evening. In anger, Potiphar had Joseph placed in the royal prison.

Can you imagine Joseph's sense of hurt and disappointment for being punished for something he refused to do? In prison, he demonstrated the

same resourcefulness and trustworthiness. All he did went well. Soon he was in charge of all the prisoners. Later Pharaoh became upset with his baker and butler and had them placed in the royal prison. They came under Joseph's care. He interpreted their dreams with only the request that he be remembered. When the butler was restored to his position, he forgot about Joseph.

Here we need to make two observations. As a child, Joseph had spiritual values and principles instilled in his life as a child. He may have been spoiled but his understanding of God was not neglected. This help to explain a little why he reacted to adversity the way he did. His understanding of God preserved him.

***Assuming we reverse the thinking about Joseph and his situations***

When Joseph woke up in Egypt as a slave, he could have said:

- "Life had dealt me a horrible injustice!" "I had it all--a future, power, certain prosperity, and happiness!" "Now I have nothing--and there is no chance my father will find me or that I will escape." "There is little benefit I can derive from this awful situation--I will still be a slave no matter what happens." "I will just get by...now this Potiphar's wife keep seducing me...these my thoughts about God are pure nonsense!" "My problems are only going to increase!" "The odds of my marrying as a slave are not good." "Since I am a slave, I better grab what pleasure I can get when I can get it." "It is time for me to find some pleasure." "Sure, I trusted God--but where did that get me?" "Sure, my parents taught me the ways of God--but now I am in the real world and must be realistic." "Potiphar will never know the difference!"

When Joseph was in prison he could have reasoned:

- "The dignity of man, the rewards of integrity, the principles of honor--what a laugh!" "Where was dignity when my brothers sold me?" "Where was integrity when I did 'the right thing' in refusing the advances of Potiphar's wife?" "Where was honor after I interpreted the dreams?" "People use people--kindness given is kindness forgotten!" "The only real philosophy is '*look out for yourself.*'"

If at any time Joseph embraced these ***assumed views***, he would have been a ***man of bondage in a land of bondage***. The ***inner man***, the ***real person*** Joseph was, used his trials as steps on the ladder of triumph. Because ***he refused to "get by,"*** because ***he was a man of honor who accepted personal responsibility,*** because ***he refused to forget God,*** because ***he maintained concern for people, Egypt became his land of opportunity.***

- ✚ When Pharaoh had a dream that defied interpretation, the butler remembered Joseph.

- ✚ Because Joseph was sustained by his faith and godly character, things happened in Egypt that would never have happened in Palestine.
- ✚ He ascended to the position of the second most powerful man in the world.
- ✚ He delivered that world's greatest nation from famine and ruin.
- ✚ He delivered his own family from starvation.
- ✚ He united his family in peace.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are times when one's life will be full of difficult, trying or tragic moments. Bloodshed, accidents and rituals here and there. Loss of jobs and marriages with ups and downs. People moving to places they do not wish to live because circumstances. Some lives are just an economic roller coaster. It could be living with the consequences of some bad decisions.

Each of us must know the true issue confronting us. The true issue confronting us is not who we are when everything is going well. The true issue confronting us is who are we when nothing is going well. Every day of life, there is a lot you can do to help yourself, and a lot you can do to hinder yourself. For Joseph, Egypt was never a land of bondage. It was always his land of opportunity. His faith in God and strength of godly character sustained him.

Let's build our faith in God and enhance our strength of godly character to sustain us in a world hostile to God. Let's build our faith in God and repositioned our godly character to determine who we are rather than adversity determining who we are. We understand that Christian faith, Christian living, and godly principles are never nonsense even in times of adversity. Our prayer is that every stage of our lives should be our land of opportunity in Jesus Christ Name – amen!