

RESTORING SHATTERED DREAMS

I have a very unique talent, maybe you have this talent as well, or your kids probably do. I break things. Quite often in fact. What makes my talent even more special is my knack for breaking the supposedly “Unbreakable”. While I doubt this will get me a spot on a superhero team, it was quite a talent. Several years ago, we had the Rubbermaid Tupperware containers; supposed to stand up to the toughness of life. I dropped it perfectly from the fridge, only a foot or so, but that was enough to crack the container and the cover. When Melissa and I got married, we bought a set of, supposedly, break-, stain-, and chip-resistant plates. I mentioned my unique talent earlier? As of today, I have broken 3 of them! Now, let me tell you something: When these break, they shatter into a MILLION LITTLE PIECES! Imagine trying to fix something like that. It’s nearly impossible!!

Over the course of preparing to speak, I was praying for God’s guidance and wisdom. One thing in our Scripture readings kept sticking out to me: BROKENNESS. Whether it is dreams that have been broken; or families repeating the same broken choices generation after generation. You can see the broken pieces of their lives, sometimes a casualty of their own choices, often choices that are thrust on them by others. Yet, through all of that you see the moments that God comes in, when everything seems to be at its worst, when all seems beyond repair; God restores what was broken; He rights what was wrong.

Over the next few weeks I want to dive into some areas in our own lives where God can restore what has been BROKEN.

Let’s jump right into today’s teaching: It’s a story we’re all very familiar with. It’s the Genesis story of Joseph. Who here has a sibling? Would you say you get along well with them? How many of you have dealt with rivalry between the siblings? Well, this is quite a rivalry here between Joseph and his brothers. Let’s take a look at the Scriptures and see if we can find, maybe, what adds to the rivalry.

Gen 37:2-4

“This is the account of Jacob and his family. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he often tended his father’s flocks. He worked for his half brothers, the sons of his father’s wives Bilhah and Zilpah. But Joseph reported to his father some of the bad things his brothers were doing.”

Strike 1

Good or bad, Joseph is a bit of an informer, a tattle-tale, letting Dad know what his brothers were up to. You can see how that would get annoying.

“Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for

Joseph—a beautiful robe. But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him."

Strike 2

OK now we have some favoritism going on here. Any of you know there is favoritism in your family? Who here is the favorite? I've stated before I was not the favorite. Although I was firstborn it wasn't me. Joel, the middle brother came along, and he was not the favorite. Then came the baby brother, 12 years difference between us. He wasn't the favorite either. Then came Abby, their little dog. They dress her, when they are away and someone is watching her, they talk to her on the phone, she dictates bedtime. She is the favorite!

Joseph is known to be the favorite, their father loved him more, and their Dad sealed it with a special gift. I'm sure anytime Joseph was around he would wear that robe just to rub it in. You got one of these? No? Just me?

But what really sealed the rivalry were the dreams:

"One night Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever. 'Listen to this dream,' he said. 'We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine!'

His brothers responded, 'So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.

Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. 'Listen, I have had another dream,' he said. 'The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!'

This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. 'What kind of dream is that?' he asked. 'Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?' But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant."

Gen. 37:5-8

The turning point, the nail in the coffin so to speak. His dreams. In it he shared how, in essence, his brothers and even parents would bow down in honor of him. That stirred up lots of issues, even for his parents. In their culture the parents were honored, respected. The oldest sibling would receive all the blessings. What Joseph was saying in these dreams was huge! Against the culture norms. Despite all that Joseph is in the Christian terminology "Blessed and highly Favored" he has it all going right for him, everything together and looking up.

One day his brothers were in the fields with the flocks, and Joseph's father sent him to fetch the brothers.

And then it comes crashing down.

“When Joseph’s brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him. ‘Here comes the dreamer!’ they said. ‘Come on, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can tell our father, ‘A wild animal has eaten him.’” Gen. 37:18

This last line has always stood out for me. And the key to what we are talking about today: **“Then we’ll see what becomes of his dreams!” Gen. 37:20c**

If you know anything about Joseph’s story this is the start of it all falling apart. Beaten. Sold into slavery. Even when it starts looking up, like gaining favor with Pharaoh’s captain of the guard, it then crashes even farther. Accused of rape. His life is one big roller coaster ride. 1 step forward 2 steps back. In prison he interprets a dream for someone important, and then that guy forgets all about Joseph. Even though it doesn’t state that Joseph ever voiced this, if I was in his shoes, I would be broken about these dreams that never came true.

I think no matter our background we have at some point experienced life like a roller coaster. Everything is great and then we feel like life slides downhill, up, and back again. But then there are some of us that the roller coaster wouldn’t even touch what we feel like our life has been through. We feel like we are modern day Josephs. The dream we had for life, the future were dashed and shattered and we are left holding the broken pieces of it.

The loving family we dreamed of having is shattered by divorce, and now we don’t know who to trust, we don’t know who is safe; we don’t feel secure. The job you worked so hard to achieve was suddenly lost, and now you don’t even know how you will make ends meet. All that you had saved in retirement dries up in a moment and now you don’t know what your future will hold. There are many similar scenarios that we’ve experienced. I knew of someone that had a bright future ahead of them college wise. Scouts were looking to give him a full ride, and there where hopes of future professional prospects in sports. And in 1 game, 1 bad turn, 1 little pop, and suddenly that whole dream is gone because of 1 MRI and a torn ACL.

Maybe for some of you the dreams that were taken away from you happened long before you can remember. Abuse; a dysfunctional family; the lies that have been engrained into your belief system; your inner voice saying, “this is all I will ever be.”

Many of us can identify with those scenarios; those situations. Maybe you have one that I didn’t mention. The result, however, is the same: the dreams you had, the dreams you hoped for became shattered. You feel like that shattered plate: It will never be made whole again.

If you walk away with only 1 piece of information today; 1 thing that you take with you; It is this: **Just because a dream is shattered, it doesn’t mean that it’s destroyed.**

Today I want to share with you briefly how God can restore the broken dreams, and what it will require from us.

1. Trust God is by your side (Even when you can't see Him).

Have you ever done a trust fall? I've had 2 extremes of kids do it. One type that couldn't turn their back on me because they wanted to be sure I was ready to catch them. When they turned away, they would panic because they couldn't see me. The second type was so trusting that, as I was explaining what to do, they dropped and I had to scramble to catch them!

I think, in life, I lean too much toward the type that panics. I need to be reassured in tough times, in rough situations. Anyone here feel that same way? It can be hard to trust God especially when we don't see Him constantly working. When we don't feel Him continually near to us. That leaves us feeling like God has abandoned us. As if He's taken us on some crazy journey and left us in the middle of nowhere to fend for ourselves. But if there is one thing we learn, as we see the examples all throughout the Bible, it is that even when we can't see God, He is always working in the background.

Throughout Joseph's experience he had moments where he was highly favored, where people that had forgotten about him, suddenly remembered him at the right time and place. There were times that Joseph was facing death, then he was rescued. Time and time again what may look like coincidence was actually God moving the pieces into place.

Trust can be hard, especially in the midst of feeling as though our dreams are shattered and our feelings of loss. Those feelings get magnified when we don't get responses from God immediately or when it seems as though the "worst" continues to happen. But God has never, and will never, abandoned you and me when we're walking with Him. If you feel alone now and wonder where He is, trust that He is in the background working things together for the bigger picture.

As we will see in the story of Joseph, in the end, God worked things out not only for Joseph, but for millions of others as well.

2. Refuse to live in Defeat

Have you ever played a game with a cheater? You see this quite often in youth games. A teen is clearly out, people are pointing out that they're out. Yet they refuse to leave the game. They play unaffected by what just happened, and often with a renewed focus and determination. Probably they're trying to drown out the complaints of those playing the game according to the rules. While I am not saying cheating is good, there is something about playing in a way where defeat doesn't hold you down.

Genesis 39 tells of how Joseph is purchased as a slave and gains favor with Potiphar a captain of the pharaoh's guards. While there he is given much responsibility. Potiphar's wife is attracted to Joseph, and he keeps refusing her advances. One day she corners him alone and Joseph chooses to run away to avoid the sin. She is insulted and accuses him of rape, then he is thrown into prison. You would think after something like that he would be upset, angry, curse God for this endless cycle. But that's not what happens. In fact, we see Joseph, once again, gain responsibility and thrive! This time within the prison!! It reminds me of the story of Paul and Silas:

Acts 16:16-25

“One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved.’

This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And instantly it left her.

Her masters’ hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. ‘The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!’ they shouted to the city officials. ‘They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice.’

A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn’t escape. So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks. Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.”

In prison for doing right. And yet instead of complaining, living in defeat, they are choosing to worship God, and those around them, prisoners, and guards, are watching.

For those of us who have had our dreams shattered we need to take a page out of these guys’ playbook. When it feels as though our dreams have been shattered, we have been robbed of our future, no matter what bad report you are facing, we have to refuse to live defeated.

It is easy for me to become focused on me, and share about how much of a victim I am. And while we may have been hurt, and wrong may have been done, the more we choose to live in it, and allow that to define who we are the more we sabotage ourselves. Look at what Paul and Silas did. They changed their attitude and their focus. They turned to God.

On the topic of turning to God:

3. Surrender the Broken Pieces to God

We may say we don't like to rely on others when we've been going through tough things. I like to carry the weight by myself. Many of us see the brokenness as a sign of weakness. We don't share what has been lost; we don't share what dreams have been broken. The idea of trusting God with the broken pieces can seem even more ludicrous especially when we feel we don't want anyone to carry it with us. We think we're good on our own.

The truth is, no matter how much a lone warrior we think we are, many of us DO lean on other things to restore our brokenness. It's just not always the healthiest choice. We lean in on addiction, using it to cover up or numb the pain or experiences we have gone through. We overcompensate and become bogged down by even more cycles that are tough to break.

For some people, we look to relationships, whether it's with our spouses, or, for those that aren't married, we look to dating relationships to repair the brokenness we feel. While it's great to have others to help you through it, if all of your hopes and dreams being restored are resting on other humans' shoulders, I hate to disappoint you; they will never fill that role.

Here's an example: think of a problematic car. Occasionally it breaks down while driving, the windshield wipers constantly go on all on their own, it stalls out all the time, it's not a safe car and you don't know what's wrong. So, maybe you go to Facebook to complain about it. Does that fix it? No!

You ignore the issues. Does THAT fix it? No! Maybe you decide, "If I keep filling it up with gas that will make the situation better." If your car was low on gas that would help, but you're using all the wrong things to fix the problem. Go to the mechanic! The one who knows cars! They can fix what is wrong!!

Many of us are willing to fill our brokenness, and our shattered dreams with so many things that will never restore them. Yet God, the great restorer, is willing to take the pieces. The source, that one that can help repair and restore. But He doesn't rip the pieces from us. We have to choose to give Him the broken pieces.

Let's jump back to the story of Joseph. There has been a major famine in the land, and they head to Egypt to ask for food and resources.

Genesis 42:1-5: "When Jacob heard that grain was available in Egypt, he said to his sons, 'Why are you standing around looking at one another? I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy enough grain to keep us alive. Otherwise, we'll die.'

So Joseph's ten older brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain. But Jacob wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, go with them, for fear some harm might come to him. So Jacob's sons arrived in Egypt along with others to buy food, for the famine was in Canaan as well."

Realize decades have passed since they got rid of their brother. Joseph has battled it out all that time trying to survive going from a slave to prisoner and more. At times it looked like he wasn't getting any closer to his dreams but, instead, getting farther from them. Yet here are his brothers now! And this happens...

“Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of selling grain to all the people, it was to him that his brothers came. When they arrived, they bowed before him with their faces to the ground.” Gen. 42:6

I know it's only a small verse, but in this moment the dreams from decades ago that were shattered, the dreams that his brothers said, “let's see what comes of them”, the dreams that they set out to destroy, come to fruition!

On top of that, think about Joseph's position: He is literally holding their lives (the lives of those who attempted to kill him, those who despised him, lied about him, and tore him from his life) are in his hands. Many of us would be hungry for revenge. It would be easy to make excuses for why they deserved what was coming to them. Instead, Joseph welcomes them in and feeds them.

See Number 4, the last, and final, point.

4. Grow through the process.

Often, we cannot control the situations we find ourselves in when our dreams shatter around us. More often than not it is something we couldn't have expected, something out of our hands. The bad medical news wasn't something we could have accounted for. Losing that job and our future wasn't something we ever thought would happen. That death that hit you so hard, it wasn't something you planned for.

And while it won't take away the pain, change our emotions, or rise the dead back to life. We can allow God to grow us in the midst of this unavoidable process.

It didn't happen overnight and required lots of struggles, lots of growth even on Joseph's part. I mean think about that the very same people who harmed him, are now asking for his help. And what does he do? He helps them!

Later Joseph puts it this way when his brothers are scared of what he will do.

Gen 50:20

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.”

Think of the growth that had to happen in Joseph; allowing the process to mold him, rather than mar him.

If we have to go through it, I would rather come out more refined than I went into it.

The Challenge:

The challenge that I believe God is laying out before you and me today; the question I want to ask is: What dreams in your life have been shattered?

By your choices?

By others?

On purpose?

Or by accident?

I challenge you to live in victory, not defeat. To be a member of God's family, instead of feeling alone. Give your broken pieces to the only one who can restore them! Realize this: When He does restore what's been shattered, it may be different from what you thought it would be. The good news is: It will ALWAYS be more than we could imagine!

That young man that was injured, he ended up not going to THAT specific college, never got signed by the NFL. However, he is an amazing Pastor and has been instrumental in leading many to God.

He didn't get lost in the process. He didn't get destroyed by the shattered dreams. He allowed God to mold him through the process. In the end the dreams he thought were shattered, God restored in a better way than he could have imagined.

Remember if you only walk away with 1 line remember:

Just because a dream is shattered, it doesn't mean that it's destroyed.

What dreams will you allow God to start the process of restoring in your life today?

COMMUNION

Mark 14:22-26 "As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'Take it, for this is My body.' And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many. I tell you the truth, I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new in the Kingdom of God.' Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives."