

“But I’m Innocent!”

In the Face of Opposition, part 2

Genesis 39:1-23

[title slide] *Welcome. Prayer.* Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on us. Conquer our fears. Open our hearts. Help us to live the way you lived, and love the way you loved. If there is anything about us you want to change, give us the strength to do it. Send your Holy Spirit upon us and revive us. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

[Harrison Ford] One of my favorite movies came out in 1993. It was, “The Fugitive,” starring Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones. The movie poster read, “A murdered wife. A one-armed man. An obsessed detective. The chase begins.” In the movie, Harrison Ford plays a doctor who is falsely accused of killing his wife. While on the run from US Marshalls, he uncovers the truth but still has to convince the others. There’s one particular scene that I love. It takes place at a huge waterfall, as the US Marshall, played by Tommy Lee Jones, closes in on the capture. “I’m innocent!” yells Ford. “I don’t care,” yells Jones in return.

Ever had that moment in your own life? You were innocent! You know you were. And yet, no one wanted to hear your excuse.

[finger pointing] Anybody growing up with siblings knows that moment. The pointing of the finger. “It wasn’t my fault! It was him! It was her! It was the dog!” I know. I have two brothers. I even promised myself as I parent, I would be fair and impartial and learn from my mistakes. Yeah, that didn’t quite work out. As a parent, I am still trying to figure out who made the mess, left the dirty socks on the floor, broke that brand-new thing we haven’t had even two days...and I usually guess wrong. And in the midst of the ensuing argument, I admit, I have uttered that phrase, “I don’t care.”

We like to think we are innocent. We like to defend ourselves. There’s always someone else to blame, right? And when we feel we’ve gotten a crummy deal, we gripe and complain.

Complaining gets us nowhere. If we try to blame others, the Bible stops us short. Last week, we talked about Daniel, who was squeaky clean, yet got thrown to the lions. Daniel didn’t blame anyone for the mess he got into. He waited patiently for God to rescue him.

[Joseph and brothers] And then there’s Joseph. If anyone had the right to say, “This isn’t fair! I’m innocent!” it was Joseph. The book of Genesis tells us how Joseph’s brothers faked his death and sold him into slavery in Egypt. Joseph became a slave, a tradable commodity. He was sold to Potiphar, the head of the guard for Pharaoh, yet because God was with Joseph, he excelled in his duties. Potiphar put him in charge of the whole house. Things were starting to get marginally better.

[Joseph and woman] Then Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. Joseph did the right thing: he resisted, he refused, he ran away. He would not compromise. He would not sin against his master or his God. And as a reward for his integrity, Potiphar’s wife framed him. Joseph was thrown in prison. Yet while he was in prison, Joseph still excelled, earning the respect of the jailer, who put him in charge of everything.

[Joseph and Potiphar] Betrayal. Slavery. Corruption. Prison. Joseph faced all of this. And he had a choice. He was staring down a group of Egyptians who were saying, “I don’t care.” Joseph could have blamed, accused, denied, grumbled, and sulked. He could have folded his arms and said, “Fine! First my brothers, now Potiphar’s wife! I give up.” But he didn’t.

[Joseph and his brothers] A common expression comes to mind: “Get bitter, or get better.” Joseph got better. They say, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” Life gave Joseph a ton of lemons, and Joseph not only made lemonade, he built a lemonade stand. And when that stand burned down, he bought a whole orchard and built a juice factory!

The Bible attributes Joseph’s success to God. Joseph held on to God’s law no matter what. Joseph worked hard in whatever situation he found himself in. It was a partnership.

[Joseph and woman] Can you imagine how hard it would have been for Joseph to resist his master’s wife? It would have been a perfect chance to get even. He could have even justified the affair as God having mercy on him. A pastor friend of mine told this story during a Bible study in the prison once. The inmates believed it was more likely for Jonah to be swallowed by a whale than for Joseph to resist temptation!

How much moral fiber did Joseph have? He came from a broken, dysfunctional family. His great-grandfather Abraham, grandfather Isaac, and father Jacob were all liars and had broken relationships. Abraham and Jacob were not exactly faithful husbands either! It could have been easy for Joseph to just give in and say, “Whatever. We’ve always been messed up.” But he didn’t. Joseph broke the chain of his family’s past. And he did it all without complaining or protesting his innocence. He simply lived the way God wanted him to.

[Verse, girl] Do we follow Joseph’s example? Do we cherish our integrity? Do we follow God’s law, no matter what? Do we resist the urge to complain and make excuses? Philippians 2:14 says that we are to “do everything without grumbling or complaining.” I have a love-hate relationship with that verse.

[Joseph reconciles] Joseph never grumbled or complained. God was with him. And in the end, Joseph saw the big picture. God used the brokenness in his family, all four generations of it, to save his people. For those who haven’t read Genesis all the way to the end, here’s what happens next: after languishing in prison for years, Joseph interprets the Pharaoh’s dreams, predicts a famine, and is placed in charge of all of Egypt to save the day. He reunites with his brothers and father, forgives them, and saves his whole family from starvation. God uses Joseph’s righteousness to redeem the people of Israel.

[Verse – Romans 8:28] Will God always use our brokenness to work good? That’s a hard question. Romans 8:28 indicates that all things work together for those who love God. I think God can use our brokenness, but only if we are willing. Our attitude will go a long way to determining how God uses our experiences.

When calamity and injustice hit us, our initial reaction is to cry, “Unfair! I’m innocent! I don’t deserve this!” We usually offer excuses to anyone who will listen. Frankly, we won’t convince anyone with our words. Truth is, sometimes we are punished wrongly. It happens in this world. But we shouldn’t argue our way back out. Joseph trusted God to defend him. We should, too. We need the right attitude. Patience. Calmness. Serenity. Humbleness. The willingness to work through our circumstances and trust God. That’s what Joseph did. Joseph had the right attitude.

[Verse – Philippians 2:6-8] Someone else had the right attitude, too: Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:6-8 says, Jesus, “being in very nature God, ...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant..... And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”

Jesus went to the cross and didn’t defend his innocence. Pilate knew he was innocent (John 18:38, 19:4). The disciples knew he was innocent. Even God the Father knew Jesus was innocent. Jesus never committed a crime or a sin or had a bad thought in his entire life. Jesus is the model of true innocence. And they crucified him. Who are we to say, “It’s not fair!” Are we really going to compare ourselves to him?

[Hands, heart] We’ve all made mistakes. None of us are truly innocent. Yet God gives us all a second chance. God wiped your slate clean. So what will you do? For starters, don’t go around claiming to be innocent; live like you’re forgiven. Live out God’s commands. Guard your integrity. Experience freedom through surrender. Don’t worry about what other people say about you.

[Fingers] There is one other lesson I learn from this story: We need to help each other have accountability and good boundaries. After all, Joseph was alone when Potiphar’s wife accosted him. Every pastor, teacher, and counselor knows, when you meet with someone, have good boundaries. When counsel someone, there is always somebody else in the building. We have windows in our offices, nursery and classrooms. Children’s Church lessons are taught in an open room. Everyone who works with children and youth in our church must complete training and background checks. That way we stay accountable to each other and protect each other.

[Title slide] Even with good safe guards, we may have to weather accusations. So are you living like Joseph so that nothing sticks? If so, keep it up! If not, get down on your knees and ask God to forgive you. Trust God to use you in any circumstance. Don’t argue your innocence. Have humility. We are all fallen, broken people. We all need to ask Christ to forgive us, to save us and to justify us before the holy God Almighty. God is faithful and just and will forgive us, if we ask in Jesus’ name. And he will guide us to live with integrity. We just

need to have the same attitude as Daniel, Joseph, Jesus, and all the saints. We can, if we commit to this goal together.

Let’s pray.

(Continue with Communion.)

Blessing *(by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries)*

“May the dance of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—bless you and surround you this day and every day, saving you into a life of love and empowering you to witness to God’s salvific work as we build the kingdom of God wherever we go. Amen.”

Memory Verse:

1st Peter 2:20 - “...if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is commendable before God.”

Reflection questions:

1. When have you “suffered for doing good”? Did you feel like God had a purpose for your suffering?
2. When have you been accused falsely? Was the accusation resolved fairly?
3. When has defending yourself worked? When has it made the situation worse?
4. Why do you think Joseph prospered when so much evil was happening to him?
5. When we confess, Jesus Christ forgives us and makes us truly innocent before God Almighty. Who in your life needs to hear that truth? How can you tell it to them?