Living A Life of Integrity
“The Pit Test”
Message 3 of 7 in “Living A Life of Integrity” series

Scripture Text: Genesis 37:12-27

Read Scripture Text: Genesis 37:12-27

P R A Y E R

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INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time a man fell into a pit.

A PHARISEE said “Righteous people don’t fall into pits.”

A PHILOSOPHER said, “It is only logical that someone would fall into a pit.”

A PSYCHIATRIST said, “Your mother and father are to blame for your pit.”

A NEWS REPORTER “wanted to do an exclusive story on the man in the pit.”

AN IRS AGENT asked the man if he was paying taxes on his pit.

A SELF-PITYING PERSON said, “You haven’t seen anything until you have seen my pit.”
A SENATOR AND CONGRESSMAN said, “The government will bail you out of your pit.”

A HUMANIST said, “Just believe in yourself and you can get out of that pit.”

(pause…….)

JESUS seeing the man’s hopeless and helpless situation, reached down and lifted the man out of his pit.

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Do you ever feel as though your life is in the PITS?

………..Sometimes we wind up in a FINANCIAL pit.

………..or a CAREER pit.

………..or a RELATIONSHIP pit.

…………Sometimes we wind up in a HEALTH pit.

………..or an ADDICTION pit.

………..or in a SPIRITUAL pit.

Along life’s journey PITS ARE INEVITABLE! We all wind up in some kind of a pit sooner or later.

What Is a Pit?

A pit is any difficult situation that leaves us feeling hopelessly and helpless as though there is no means of escape.
How Does One Wind Up In A Pit?

How does one wind up in a PIT? It usually happens in one of two ways...........

Sometimes we FALL INTO A PIT

- We make foolish choices.
- We engage in sinful habits.
- We are overtaken by an addiction.
- Or an uncontrolled tongue gets us in hot water.

Chances are when you look at some of the pits you have been in over the course of your life they were pits you dug for yourself.

Other times we get PUSHED INTO A PIT

- A friend stabs us in the back or betrays a confidence.
- A jealous or vindictive person spreads lies or false rumors about us.
- A spouse cheats on us.
- Our employer overlooks us for a promotion or a raise.

But no matter if you FALL INTO A PIT of your own accord or get PUSHED INTO A PIT by the actions of another, the point is this:

How you and I respond while in the “pits” of life will reveal the true depth of our character and integrity!

A pit will either make you or break you!

A pit will either make you BITTER or it will make you BETTER!
Let’s see how Joseph responded to “The Pit Test.”

First let’s consider..........

I. The Plot

1. Before we look at this PLOT, let me briefly refresh your memory concerning the sequence of events that led up to this dastardly deed.

   Remember in last week’s message we learned that there was really “bad blood” between Joseph and his ten older brothers.

   There were five factors that helped create this bad blood.

   One, Joseph was treated as “the favorite” by his father, Jacob.

   Two, Joseph had received the “coat of many colors” from his father. None of them received such a special gift.

   Three, Joseph “ratted” on four of his brothers for misbehaving in the sheep pasture.

   Four, Joseph revealed a dream he had that one day his brothers would bow down to him.

   And five, Joseph revealed a second dream that one day he would rule over his brothers.

   VERSE 4 of Genesis 37 says it all, “When his brothers saw that their father loved him (Joseph) more than any of them, they HATED him and could not speak a KIND word to him.”
2. While Jacob may have treated Joseph with special favoritism, he was genuinely concerned about the welfare of his other sons, but they were so blinded by their hatred and jealousy they didn’t see it.

v.12-14 Now his brothers had gone to graze their father’s flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, “As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them. “Very well,” he replied. So he said to him, “Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me. Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

3. Now it wasn’t a hop-a skip- and a jump from Hebron to Shechem. This was a 50-55 mile journey for Joseph, most likely on foot. Imagine how Joseph felt after traveling all that way only to discover his brothers were no longer in Shechem.

Joseph learned from a stranger that his brothers had moved the sheep to some pastureland near Dothan, which was about 30 miles farther north.

4. To say Joseph’s brothers weren’t very happy when they saw him coming would be a gross understatement.

5. When they saw Joseph, all the hatred, all the jealousy and all the animosity that had been festering in their minds and hearts came to the surface.

As we look again at our scripture text we see this plot unfold in three stages.
(A) First, we see THE PLOT IS CONCEIVED.

Read: VERSES 18-22

(B) Secondly, we see THE PLOT IS CARRIED OUT

Read: VERSES 23-28

(C) Then we see THE PLOT IS COVERED Up

Read: VERSES 29-36

6. They thought about! They did it! Then they lied about what they did!

7. Here we see what happens when negative emotions such as hatred, bitterness, resentment, jealousy, and envy are allowed to fester inside one’s heart.

   When these negative emotions are not dealt with properly they can give rise to ungodly, unethical behavior.

8. Before we move on let me ask you a soul-searching question: “Do you have any of these negative emotions festering inside your own heart?”
Secondly let’s consider........

II. The Pit  verses 23, 24

1. What was this “pit” Joseph’s brothers threw him into?

   The NIV translates the word “pit” as “cistern.”

   A cistern is an underground tank for storing water.

   But you notice verse 24 says, “there was no water in it.”

2. So this “pit” Joseph threw his brothers into was a dried up cistern or well that was obviously deep enough Joseph saw no visible means of escape.

3. Hebrew scholar, Dr. Haldeman, gives this interesting commentary about Joseph’s pit.

   The pit wherein there was no water is another name for Hades, the underworld, the abode of the disembodied dead. The “pit” is literally the place of the dead.”

   Jesus referred to this “pit” when He prophesied His death in Matthew 12:40......

   “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”
4. It is very interesting that the scriptures don’t give us a single hint as to how Joseph responded to being thrown into that pit.

   Did he yell and scream? Did he try to claw his way out? Did he sit and brood over being a victim of unfair treatment? The scriptures simply do not tell us.

5. But while we don’t know exactly how Joseph responded to the pit, one thing is true:

   Being in a pit will not only TEST your integrity it will REVEAL it.

6. That was true of JOSEPH and it is also true of you and me.

   Being in a pit will either bring out the BEST in you or it will bring out the WORST.

   If you want to see what you are really made of take careful note of how you respond when you find yourself in one of life’s pits.

   When you are in a pit you can either be the VICTIM or you can be the VICTOR.

   When you are in a pit you can either sit down and mope and pout about your pit……or you can stand up and let your FAITH and TRUST in GOD shine for the whole world to see!

Illustration: This past Wednesday night at Bible Study we were discussing how many of the Haitian people gave thanks to GOD when they were rescued from the ruins of the earthquake that has devastated their country. Those people were in the very PIT OF DEATH itself and yet they shouted for the whole world to hear, “Thank You Lord!” “Thank You Lord!”
Well we have looked at THE PLOT. And we have looked at THE PIT.

Finally let’s consider......

III. The Providence

1. Although GOD is not even mentioned in this 37th chapter of Genesis it is very obvious God was in control throughout this difficult ordeal in Joseph’s life.

2. For one thing, remember at first Joseph’s brothers planned to kill him. What changed their minds?

   vs. 21,22 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. “Don’t shed any blood.”

Was it Reuben who was protecting Joseph’s life or was it the divine providence of God?

3. Let’s consider something else. Verse 24 tells us Joseph’s brothers threw him into a cistern. Remember the purpose of a cistern is to hold water. Had there been water in the cistern Joseph was thrown into he either would have drowned or died of hypothermia.

   Yet verse 24 tells us, “there was no water in it.”

Coincidence or the divine providence of God?
4. Consider something else. We learn in verse 28 that Joseph was sold to a band of Midianites who were on their way to EGYPT. Not Syria, not Persia, not Mesopotamia, but EGYPT.

Now how does that reveal the divine providence of God?

Think of the important role Egypt would play in the development of the Israelite people in the years to come.

- If Joseph hadn’t been sold as a slave in Egypt Jacob and his sons would never have gone to live in Egypt.

- This means there would never have been a need for MOSES to come deliver the Israelites from Pharaoh.

- NO 10 PLAGUES
- NO EXODUS
- NO 10 COMMANDMENTS
- NO OVERTHROW OF JERICHO
- NO TAKING OVER THE PROMISED LAND.
- NO NATION FOR GOD TO CALL HIS OWN.
- NO HOMELAND FOR JESUS TO BE BORN IN HUNDREDS OF YEARS LATER.

You see, if Joseph had not been thrown into that pit and sold as a slave in Egypt the entire course of history and eternity would have been changed. Even in the midst of this terrible circumstance we can see God’s divine providence at work!
CONCLUSION

Although it never seems like it at the time, being in a PIT can be one of the best things that ever happened to us.

......It is in the PIT you and I do our deepest soul-searching.

......It is in the PIT we come to grips with what truly matters and what doesn’t.

......It is in the PIT our PRIDE is put to death and we learn the true meaning of humbling ourselves before the Lord.

......It is in the PIT our INTEGRITY is revealed, our CHARACTER is molded and our FAITH is refined.

......It is in the PIT we are brought to the end of our self-sufficiency and self-dependency and learn what it truly means to “trust in the Lord with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding.”

......It is in the PIT we are perfected into Christ-likeness.

So the next time you find yourself in a PIT just remember....... God planned it for our good!