

Riches To Rags

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweep from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. If you'd like to learn a little more about us as a church, you can always go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, I'm just pumped that you are listening today to God's Word being preached. And my prayer every day for my own heart as I get into the Word is that the Word will not just be on my lips or in my mind, but that it will come into my heart and transform every single part of my life.

Now, I have to tell you that I am a sucker for a good rags-to-riches story. You know, Rocky, the pursuit of happiness, Cinderella, not very macho.

And one story that's as American as the city of Pittsburgh is about a man who was actually born in Scotland in 1835. Came into this world, honestly, with very little.

The second son of Will, a hand-loom weaver, and Margaret, who sewed shoes. His life wasn't easy. He didn't have much. And yet his parents saw hope on the horizon as they sailed for America when he was 12 years old, landing just outside of Pittsburgh.

[1 : 21] Now, I didn't mention that he probably had the equivalent of a fourth-grade education. And by the time he was a young teenager, he was working full-time. At first, he was what they called a bobbin boy at a cotton factory where he was basically a gopher.

You know, go for this, go for that. He earned \$1.20 a week. That's only around \$50 today. Ambitious, hardworking. He started climbing the ladder, including being a messenger in a telegraph office.

And then he was the secretary and telegraph operator at the railroad. And then he succeeded his boss in being the railroad division superintendent. And while in this role, where he was making a little more money, he made some great investments in things like coal, iron, oil, railroad sleeping cars.

At 30 years old, he left that job to strike out on his own with the railroad and even started the Keystone Bridge Company. From there, his wealth and influence exploded, ultimately being known for his steel empire.

And I have a feeling that many of you know who I'm probably talking about. We would call him Andrew Carnegie. He actually pronounced his last name Carnegie, who honestly, at one time, he was worth the equivalent of \$10 billion today.

[2 : 48] But here's the cool thing about his story. Because we know wealth is not a good indicator of true kingdom success. And listen, his story, man, it has its flaws as well.

But today, toward the end of his life, as we look at that today, he gave most of his wealth away. Building 2,500 libraries, giving large sums to science, education, world peace, other initiatives. He even donated 7,600 organs to churches. And when he died at 83, he had inspired many with his story.

Listen, we all love a good underdog rags to riches tale like this. But have you ever heard of a riches to rags story?

Not exactly what Hollywood is looking for, right? But today, as we pick back up in the third week of our series called Living the Dream, we're going to see Joseph go from riches to rags.

[3 : 54] From daddy's favor and blessings to a life of slavery. And I know, I know, you might be thinking, Ray, Joseph's story is riches to rags to even greater riches.

And I agree. And it's all because the Lord's hand was upon him. But let's not jump too far ahead of our story, okay? We don't want to miss what the Lord wants us to see today.

See, we've already covered the favoritism that Joseph's dad, Jacob, had showed towards him. And even the jealousy, hatred, and envy that his siblings held toward their cocky little brother.

And today we see their bitterness kind of taken to new heights. So grab your Bibles. If you're a person who likes to follow along, grab your Bible. First book, really easy to find, Genesis. Go ahead and turn to chapter 37. And we'll start where we left off last week in verse 12. And as you're getting there, please know you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app.

[4 : 57] It's a free download to see the book of Genesis. But also, if you'd like to see our detailed notes that we have for you, you can go to the YouVersion Bible app.

Go to the menu under Events. Go to First Christian Church of Greensburg. You can see it that way. But let's look here at Genesis 37. Let's start in verse 12.

It says, Now, if you understand the pure vitriol, the pure hatred that Joseph's brothers had toward him, you can see why his father sent them all the way to graze the flocks near Shechem, kind of keeping precious Joseph and his technicolor dreamcoat close to him at home.

And yet, he must not have understood the full extent because he sends him now to go check on his brothers, to see how they and the flocks are doing, and then to report back.

Now, we don't always understand the distance from one place to another. So, from the Valley of Hebron, where Joseph was, to Shechem would have been about 40 miles.

[6 : 34] And he walked all the way on this big journey. And then when he gets there, he can't find them. A man tells him, because he sees him wandering around in his field, and he tells him that he heard those guys talking about going to a town called Dothan, which was about another 10 miles away.

Now, let's go ahead and look here in Genesis 37. And you're going to see me today kind of weave this story together with Scripture and then even telling other parts of it.

So, let's start in Genesis 37, the second half of verse 17. So, Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

Here comes that dreamer, they said to each other. Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.

Yikes, right? Those dreams Joseph had where he was ruling over his brothers, man, they got these boys fired up. You add the hurt from seeing Joseph, you know, Rachel's kid, get treated better, even received that bright-colored robe that they all secretly wanted.

[7 : 53] And now they watch him wear it way too much, strutting around, arrogant as can be, and here he comes now wearing it again. Man, you can see that coat a mile away.

So, they can see this kid coming, and they devise a wicked plan. Listen, these guys knew all about the God of the universe. They knew that he had what God had done, from Adam and Eve, to Noah, to Abraham, to Papaw Isaac, and yet they let their bitterness override their faith.

They let their hurt outweigh the truth that they lived by. So, they got a plan. They're going to get rid of this little punk, and they're going to murder him, throw his body in a cistern, lie about him being viciously attacked by a ferocious animal, all because those dreams that I think deep down, I really do think this, I think they knew that they were true.

And what they couldn't see in the moment is that Joseph ruling over them would actually save their lives. All they could feel in that moment was the favoritism of daddy that awoke pride in them, that created a concoction of envy, jealousy, and rage that they intended to guzzle down generously. But there was one brother whose mother was Leah, and I don't know if it was compassion or the obligation he felt being the oldest child, but Reuben, who had later become a great sandwich, okay, I'm kidding, but he jumps in to convince them not to kill baby bro.

[9 : 29] He says, rough him up, take his coat, throw him in the cistern, he won't last long anyways. And by the way, all along, his plan is to sneak back over when they're not around, rescue him, and take him back to daddy safely.

Well, it happens as they planned. Joseph was roughed up, stripped of his fancy robe, thrown in the cistern that was empty, it says, with no water. And if that's where he stays, you know what, he's not gonna last long.

He's gonna starve to death. He's gonna not have any water. Now, fun fact for you trivia buffs, archaeologists have actually uncovered this area, and that word dothan, in the original language it was written in, literally means two wells, two cisterns.

And when they found them, one of them has the inscription that translates into English, the pit of Joseph. Now, back to the story. At some point, Reuben exits the stage.

He walks away from where the brothers are, and he leaves them there by the cistern. And in Genesis 37, let's pick back up in verse 25 here, it says, as they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead.

[10:49] Their camels were loaded with spices, balm, and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. So they were gonna go sell stuff to make money. Judah said to his brothers, what will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?

Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood. Oh yeah, so compassionate, right? And then it says his brothers agreed.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the cistern, and they sold him for 20 shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt.

Okay, so what we just saw was from riches to rags. Their pride not only got the best of them, but their greed decided to take a turn as they sold him into slavery for what a boy his age would go for, 20 shekels of silver.

Guys, that is only eight ounces. That's around \$300 today if you, and then if you divide it among the brothers, it's basically just a nice lunch for each person.

[11:56] But more than anything, they got their revenge. They thought they had satisfied their bitterness. And then here comes Reuben. He thinks it's all gonna be okay. He's gonna rescue baby bro.

And he finds out that Joseph is long gone. He's now a slave, and he's headed towards Egypt. He knew this wasn't good, and now started the cover-up.

Instead of coming clean, he's gonna go along with the cover-up. Now, have you ever noticed that one lie usually turns into bigger ones that have to keep going?

And it's not uncommon for followers of Jesus to get caught in this trap while they tell their little white lies to cover the behind, and then that gets them into big trouble eventually as one lie turns into another, turns into another, and usually the truth is forgotten.

So they take the fancy coat, they dip it in goat's blood, and they deliver it to Daddy Jacob. Here's what Genesis 37, starting in 33, says. It says he recognized it and said, It is my son's robe.

[13:07] Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces. And then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and he mourned his son many days.

Now, there are some of you listening to this right now that you can relate. Maybe you've lost a child, and you know the devastation that Jacob was feeling because in his mind, although he's been deceived and Joseph is alive, in his mind, in this moment, Joseph is dead to him, okay?

He thinks he's been killed. That's his reality for roughly 22 years until he learns of the truth. But for Joseph, the journey is just beginning as he's gone from the blessed life to slavery, from riches to rags with no promise that it's going to get better.

So, I wanted to take this first part of this message just to simply share the narrative, the story, and a few helpful details.

But I want to spend the rest of this message looking a little deeper at Joseph's brothers to see how dangerous bitterness and unforgiveness can be in your life and in mine. Because we too, at some level, have held on to things where we thought we were being wronged.

[14:26] And as Barbara Bartocci has said in her book on this topic, she said, bitterness is like a boomerang. You send it soaring toward the person or situation that has wronged you and it comes back.

You're the one who is hurt. And before we can give this to the Lord, before we can really move on in a healthy, God-honoring way, we have to face it.

Do you have any Christians who are walking around carrying bitterness, not able to walk in the joy of their salvation? Man, a lot of us have fallen into that trap. And as I thought back on my life, I had four faces very quickly come into my mind that had hurt me at some point in some profound way.

One was from childhood. Three from an adult. Being an adult. And yet, when we get really honest, there are some situations where we weren't completely innocent either.

Where it's a little bit of both sides doing stuff they shouldn't have. Because what happens? Hurt people, you've heard this before, have the tendency to turn around and hurt people.

[15:32] And although I've tried to give these faces to the Lord many, many times, I'm telling you, I'm just being real with you, at this point, two of them still flare up from time to time and they put me back behind bars.

Now, I know I've quoted this before, but it's so powerful and so true. Lewis B. Smedes once said, to forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was actually you.

So, as we look at Joseph's brothers who had a legitimate gripe, their dad did not love them the way he should have. He clearly carried on favoritism that he saw and felt with his own parents.

And it really is sad how unhealth can flow from one generation to another if it's not surrendered to Jesus. And that's why today, listen, I'm going to get real bold here because I feel like God is leading me to say this.

We are going to dig both feet in. This is why we're drawing a line in the sand today. And we're saying, Satan, I'm done with bitterness. I'm done with unforgiveness controlling my life.

[16:40] I am through seeing those around me hurt because I won't deal with my pain. I am overrunning from job to job, from friendship to friendship, from church to church, making excuses for why everyone is out to get poor little me.

I am tired of medicating or drinking it away. I am not a victim. In fact, Romans 8, 37 tells me I am more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus, my Lord.

1 John 4, 4, He who is in me is greater than he who is in the world. And the reason, guys, and I am so passionate about this is because I too at times have let my past, my own hang-ups, imposter syndrome, insecurities, failures, what others think and say, grudges, lead me down very unhealthy paths.

And church, that's not the destiny of those who've been bought by the blood. Let me say it again. That's not the destiny for you if you've been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ. There is victory in one name.

The name above all other names. The name that every knee will someday bow before, like it or not. And that's the name of Jesus. Anybody listening to this tired of being tired?

[18:02] Anybody ready to do more than just religious activity out of some kind of moral obligation? Anybody ready to truly walk in Galatians 5 that teaches us the result or the fruit that comes when the Holy Spirit is living in you, guiding your every step?

What does that look like? What does Scripture tell us in Galatians 5? Here's what comes out when you're truly led step by step by the Holy Spirit. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Yeah, I'll take two scoops of that, right? And what the enemy loves to do, though, if he can't stop you from giving your life to Jesus, he'll quickly make you ineffective for the kingdom.

He'll try to make you miserable, not walking in the joy of your salvation. And one way he does that is take your pain and help you turn it into bitterness and unforgiveness.

And when those things truly take root in your life, no matter how well-meaning you are, ugly things are going to come out of you and me.

[19:18] Just look at Joseph's brothers. Guys, I'm telling you, they had a wicked culture around them. They were not the awful hellions that you could find by going to other places in the world at that time.

They simply let their hurt fester and turn into bitterness that led them to do something they would never do to beat up their own flesh and blood and even try to kill him.

It then leads to lies and deceit and years of shame doing things they never, never thought they would. Now, let's look at the other list in Galatians 5.19.

And I'm actually going to read this from the New Living Translation. I just think it kind of puts it in simpler terms for us. But it says, when you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear.

So this is the opposite. So we just talked about the fruit of the Holy Spirit being active in your life. Now we're talking about when you're in control, when the flesh is in control, when the sinful nature is in control.

[20:22] Here's what it becomes. Sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.

And while this list is speaking of all sin and its results, listen, I think we can take this and get specific here. And we can look specifically at unforgiveness and bitterness and rage and anger.

And as we've worked through this list, how easy is it when you've been hurt and you've let it fester in your heart, how easy is it to run to sexual immorality and impurity and lustful pleasures?

I can't help but picture so many young men and women who run outside of God's perfect design for intimacy and the bonds of marriage between a man and a woman coming together in marriage, not before but building that close friendship that's necessary and then coming together in the beauty of marriage.

The people who have thrown modesty out the window. And while that fire of sexual intimacy, it's beautiful when it's in the fireplace, but when it spreads outside of the place where God intended it, I'll tell you what, it becomes destructive and it can burn everything down.

[21 : 58] And a lot of people, maybe even listening to this, have been there and done that and yet it's often a cry for help because this pain is just too much. Or what about idolatry or sorcery or witchcraft?

How easy is it to let your baggage cause you to bow down at altars that don't satisfy? Worshiping the sun, moon, and stars instead of the one awesome enough to create them.

Worshiping control or possessions or status or wealth. Always hungering for more because I don't know if you've noticed it's never, never, ever, ever enough.

What about hostility, quarreling, dissension, outbursts of anger, division, envy? Have you ever met someone who has conflict every single place they go?

Same results, just different faces, always going from job to job or church to church or whatever the situation is. Always, always having conflict.

[23 : 00] In fact, we had a lady in one of our ministries that when she was healthy, man, she was one of the most influential people in the church doing fantastic things for the glory of God but I'm telling you I got to a point where I could set my watch if I wore one that every six to nine months there was going to be a big blow up about something.

I mean, it was just going to hit the fan and because I knew this person well and Bethany and I loved her dearly, we knew it was past baggage that had to be surrendered to Jesus that kept festering and blowing up and that can be true of any of us.

What about another one on that list? What about drunkenness? We could go around our church family and hear one heartbreaking story after another of how hurt people ran to the bottle for healing and how it left a wake of devastation upon those they loved the most.

Listen, no one ever woke up one day and said, hey, I think I'll take my hurts that have turned into intense bitterness and rage and unforgiveness and I think I'll just let them lead me to a life of running from man to man or woman to woman or I think I'll have conflict in my life constantly.

I just love it. You know, I gotta have conflict so I can get revenge on anyone I perceive comes against me or I'll just run to some cult to fill my cup only to be left empty or some drug or bottle that may feel good for a moment but will cost me everything.

[24 : 27] No one wants that, right? But that's what sin does. It promises so much. It leads us places that we never wanted to go.

It leaves you lost and empty and longing for something more. But listen, here's the good news and this is so outside of my typical preaching style but that's okay because the Holy Spirit is leading to one thing today that I want you to absolutely get listening to this message.

Bitterness will leave you where you don't want to be but Jesus, you know what? He will set you free. Bitterness will leave you where you don't want to be but Jesus will set you free.

Do you believe that? Do you truly believe that? Because John 8, 36 tells us, so if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.

Now, here comes the tough part. Letting go of that bitterness. Maybe it will require you to simply surrender all to Jesus today.

[25 : 35] Or maybe it will demand surrender, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Let the Holy Spirit guide you. If you're a believer, you have God living inside of you.

Let Him lead you. But as you can see, this service, this message, you know, may be a little different than others that I preach.

And when the Lord is guiding us through the Scriptures, I've got to tell you, I mean, He brought this to my mind and I was immediately overwhelmed, but we've got to let that bitterness go.

We have to surrender it to Him. Because what does Colossians 3, 5 say? Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

So whatever is keeping you from truly walking in the power and peace and grace and joy of your salvation has to be put to death.

[26 : 33] That sin has to go. And today, we're talking specifically about bitterness, about anger, about rage, the very things that we saw from Joseph's brothers that turned them into men that they never wanted to be.

So today, I just want to encourage you. take some time. Write down those names, maybe those faces you're picturing right now, those situations, whatever it is, write it down.

Write it down on paper. Pray over it and just say, Lord, I'm not going to let this bitterness destroy me from the inside any longer.

Jesus, today, I give it to you. And I want you to wad it up, throw it in the trash. If you're safe with it, burn it. Whatever you got to do. But today, we give that bitterness to Him and we live for Jesus.

Amen? All right. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, I just thank You so much for Your Word today. Thank You for how You have spoken truth and life into us.

[27 : 45] Father, I pray that You will just take this and that You will just deal with the bitterness in our hearts, that we may surrender it to You no matter how far in our life we have to go back, that we may surrender it to You, that we will reconcile and heal and forgive if we need to make something right with someone, Lord, that we will follow that.

But Lord, we just give You permission to take this Word of God and to stir our hearts and to make us more and more into the image of Jesus. Jesus, we love You.

We adore You. Thank You for dealing with these painful things in our hearts so that we can truly walk in Your peace and joy. We love You, Jesus. We pray all this in Your precious name.

Amen. Hey, real quick, if you have been listening to this and you have faith questions, you want to talk about giving your life to Jesus, you want to learn more about First Christian Church of Greensburg, once again, my name is Ray.

I'm the lead pastor here. You can do a couple things to get a hold of us. You can call us in the office, 812-663-8488. That's 812-663-8488.

[28 : 58] Or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you. Hope you have a great week.