

Week 4 – Forgotten but Faithful – Genesis 40:1-23

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-8

Introduction

If I were to ask you, “What is the greatest disappointment you have ever endured?” I’m pretty sure none of us would be at a loss for words

Actually, the most difficult thing for many of us might be choosing which disappointment to mention as the greatest from our list of disappointments

The fact is, we all suffer from disappointment because disappointment is just a part of life in this fallen world

We have all had expectations that have not been met or desires that have gone unfulfilled or we have relied on others only to have them let us down

But perhaps some of our biggest disappointments result from prayers that aren’t answered as we would like

This is particularly so when we believe we are praying according to God’s will and yet our prayers seem to be ignored

It can be quite difficult to prevent becoming cynical and deciding that it’s best not to expect anything from God or man and that way we can avoid having our hopes and expectations denied

English poet, Alexander Pope, [Pope.jpg] had his own little Beatitude that expressed that exact sentiment:

“Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.”

Looking at Joseph’s life up to this point we might well understand that he might be more than a little disappointed

Everything seemed to be going well for him as his father’s favorite child until the day his brothers sold him to some Midianite traders who carried him off to Egypt and sold him to the captain of Pharaoh’s guard, a man named Potiphar. Still, Joseph kept his spirits up and maintained his integrity through diligence and loyalty until, after at least 10 years of servitude his success as a slave was recognized by his master and he was promoted to a position of great authority in Potiphar’s house

But just as Joseph had to believe his prayers were finally answered, Potiphar’s wife took an illegitimate interest in him

And when he resisted her sexual advances because he knew to do otherwise would be to sin against God and his master, she turned on him and accused him of trying to rape her and Joseph found himself thrown into the king’s prison

But still, as we saw last week when we considered chapter 39, Joseph continued as he had while working for Potiphar and it wasn’t long before he had won the affection of the head jailer who put him in charge of the other prisoners

God blessed Joseph in everything he did because, to this point, he hadn’t let his circumstances affect his attitude, as evil and unjust as those circumstances were

It’s an interesting fact that it’s often easier to maintain equilibrium when you don’t expect much – as Alexander Pope would say

But let a glimmer of hope enter in and all of a sudden you can be set up for the deepest of disappointments

And as we will see this morning, that was Joseph’s situation as he is joined in prison by two very influential men, one of whom just might be his ticket out of there

Our text this morning is Genesis 40 (page 33) which takes place some unspecified amount of time after the events of chapter 39

Look with me at the first verses of the chapter and follow along as I read: (**Genesis 40:1-4**)

Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.

We aren't told just what these two men did to upset Pharaoh but it's interesting that they both were involved with providing food to him

Perhaps he was unhappy with a meal they had prepared or maybe he got sick after eating we just don't know

But whatever their offense was, it was enough to get them cast into prison alongside Joseph

And in this introduction to the main account we see a very interesting detail that would be easy to overlook

I want you to notice in **verse 3** just where this prison was located – *“in the house of the captain of the guard”*

And as we know from last week, the captain of the guard was none other than Potiphar himself

So now we know the answer to precisely where Joseph is and we find that Potiphar didn't exactly send him very far away after all – he's still in the same house

And we see that Potiphar put Joseph in charge of looking after these two very influential men from Pharaoh's court

What we need to recognize is that none of these occurrences are mere happenstance

Rather, what we are seeing is God's sovereignty in all the details of Joseph's life just as we saw when we studied the account of Jonah

The biggest difference between the account of Jonah and the account of Joseph is that Jonah actively resisted doing God's will whereas Joseph only sought to be obedient to it

But, just like it was with Jonah, all of Joseph's trials and travails had a God-ordained purpose

Proverbs 19:21 tells us - *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.*

And while each of the characters were acting according to their own purposes, God also had a purpose and God's purpose was to prepare Joseph for his use in saving many people during the years of famine still in the future

Everything that has happened to this point in the account of Joseph's life seems to be meant to harm him but God was working in each of them to bring about his desired end

Each step that appeared to be headed downward actually brought Joseph closer to the point where God could eventually deliver and elevate him

And we need to recognize that nothing has changed in that regard

God is still on his throne and he is still directing the affairs of men

But, if you're like me, you need to be reminded of that truth from time to time

It's really easy to see God's providential hand on your life and to believe he is directing your affairs when things are going well

But when things take a turn for the worse and we find ourselves in a tough situation or when people mistreat us then it's not so easy to accept that as also being within God's control and that he might just be refining and preparing us for some future work

Today we are going to find that Joseph shows us a great example of how we should approach the disappointments of life so that we can keep them from defeating or even derailing us

And the first thing we are going to see is that, in spite of being unjustly incarcerated, Joseph still continued **caring about others**

I. Caring about Others

Let's pick up the account in verse 5 (**Genesis 40:5-7**) –

And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, “Why are your faces downcast today?”

I think we would agree that Joseph had plenty of problems of his own to worry about

He believed that God had a plan in mind for him and here he was locked up in prison on a trumped-up charge

He might well be wondering if God had forgotten him or if maybe the dreams of his youth were the result of eating a pepperoni pizza too late at night

But as we see to be typical of Joseph, he took his responsibility to watch over these two fellow prisoners seriously so he noticed when they appeared troubled one morning as he made his rounds

And the way he inquired of them revealed a level of kindness and respect

While we can only guess at his tone and demeanor it appears he asked like one who, once he is made aware of the difficulty, will do whatever he can to alleviate it

We can learn a very valuable lesson from Joseph's example

What do most of us do when we are discouraged or downhearted?

Some of us might lash out at anyone who comes near

Some of us might moan and groan and complain about our sorry state

But if our disappointment is great enough, most of us have the tendency to withdraw and wallow in self-pity

When we are really and truly bummed out and feeling low the last thing we want to do is to be around other people
Isn't that true?

Can I let you in on a little secret?

If you want to get over the blues fight the urge to withdraw or complain and get busy

Go out and find someone to serve

You shouldn't have too much trouble finding someone who is suffering at least as much disappointment or discouragement as you are and even if you can do nothing else you can at least offer to listen to their tale of woe

That's really what we're told to do as a general rule in **Galatians 6:2** and in the latter half of **Romans 12:15**

Ask them why they are downcast and just hear them out – it's surprising how helpful just letting someone unburden themselves can be for both of you

Then we see in Joseph's example that we need to reorient our thinking regarding disappointment

If we're honest, we tend to think that since we are a child of the King we should be treated like royalty

And we get upset when things don't go the way we think they should or don't happen when we think they should

But **we shouldn't be surprised** when we suffer wrongly or are treated unjustly – especially when that mistreatment comes at the hands of the world around us

After all, as Christ-followers we are the followers of the one who was most misunderstood and most unjustly mistreated of all

And Jesus himself warned us that this would be our lot in life in **John 15:18**

The second thing we need to do to reorient our thinking is to **give up on revenge** or even defending ourselves from unwarranted attacks

Romans 12:19 tells us that rectifying wrongs is God's department and we can trust that he will settle all accounts fairly in the end

So we don't need to trouble ourselves with clearing our name or getting even

We can just go on and do the next thing and leave it to God to vindicate us

That means we should expect mistreatment, let it go, and determine to **continue to do what is right**

And we do what is right simply because it is right to do right regardless of whether it profits us here and now

That's what we see Joseph doing

He continued caring about others and being concerned for their welfare even in the midst of his own suffering

And he kept right on **working for God** and doing what God put before him to do

II. Working for God

When Joseph asked the two men why they appeared troubled the told him that they had each been the recipient of a similar dream

The ancient Egyptians put a great deal of stock in dreams and there were people who made their living interpreting the dreams of the people

And so these two officials believed their dreams concerned their futures and, if they had been able, they would have straightaway gone to an interpreter to discover their fate

But here they were, locked in the king's prison and unable to find out – no wonder they were gloomy

In response, Joseph makes a statement in the form of a question in the last part of verse 8 (**Genesis 40:8b**) that reveals a profound truth – *“Do not interpretations belong to God?”*

Clearly, God meant to communicate to these two men through their dreams precisely in order to give Joseph the opportunity to interpret their dreams

This is rather interesting because – at least to this point – we have not seen any ability on the part of Joseph to interpret dreams

I mean, the meanings of two dreams that he had as a youth were really obvious

One doesn't need to be particularly gifted in oneirocriticism (O-nigh-ro-criticism) to know that Joseph's dreams revealed the idea that his parents and siblings would one day bow down to him

By the way, oneirocriticism is the art of interpreting dreams and an oneirocritic is the person who does the interpreting
Who knew?

Anyway, while Joseph's dreams were obvious the dreams of these two men were rather odd and needed an interpreter to discern their meaning

And Joseph, knowing that all interpretation belongs to God, boldly asks for the men to tell him their dreams trusting that God would give him the ability to accurately interpret them

Joseph knew God and he knew that he knew God and he was confident that God would give him the right interpretation even though he also knew he didn't have the ability to interpret dreams on his own – that ability belongs to God

The cupbearer spoke up first and we read what he related about his dream beginning in verse 9 (**Genesis 40:9-11**) –

“In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.”

As is common with dreams it appears things happened that were outside the natural order

In his dream, the cupbearer witnessed a rapid sequence of budding, blossoming, and ripening of grapes on three branches of a grapevine

Then when he squeezed the grapes into Pharaoh's cup they instantly turned into wine – after all, Pharaoh's didn't drink fresh-squeezed grape juice...

And he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand

That is some odd imagery to be sure but we see that Joseph doesn't appear to hesitate at all but gives the interpretation right away in verse 12-13 (**Genesis 40:12-13**) –

“This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer...”

Of course, when he heard that the cupbearer's dream portended a good outcome he was eager to have his dream likewise interpreted so he told Joseph the details of his dream which was equally bizarre

Look with me at verse 16-17 (**Genesis 40:16-17**) –

“I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.”

And God also gave Joseph the interpretation of the baker's dream just as confidently and quickly as we see in verses 18-19 (**Genesis 40:18-19**) –

“This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you.”

In this we see that Joseph was working on behalf of God – he was representing God and speaking what God revealed. He wasn't trying to curry favor or win friends for himself – he boldly spoke what God told him regardless of whether it was good news or bad news.

Us today

Whether you believe God speaks to us in our dreams to day or not, we know that God primarily speaks to us through his written Word and that we have the indwelling Holy Spirit who helps us understand God's truth.

And we can be confident that every believer has the ability and the responsibility to tell what he or she has seen and heard from God.

We are to speak as “oracles of God” when we share what we know as we see in 1Peter 4:11 which means that we don't just tell people what they want to hear.

We aren't supposed to only share the cupbearer's message but are to be just as faithful to share the baker's message.

Yes, we want people to know that God loves them and wants to spend eternity with them but we are also responsible to tell them that they are sinners who are destined for an eternity apart from God unless they put their trust in Christ alone.

Many are eager to proclaim loudly that God loves the sinner but unwilling to tell anyone that God hates their sin.

If we want to be faithful to God, as Joseph was, we must share everything that God reveals to us.

We aren't able to hear the tone that Joseph used when he interpreted the dreams but I would suspect that he was appropriate to each occasion.

I imagine he was upbeat when he interpreted the cupbearer's dream and that he was as gracious as he could be in telling the baker what his dream meant – and we must be careful to do likewise in each and every case.

Truth must be shared, even hard truth, but truth isn't meant to be a club we use to bludgeon people.

But the point is, God didn't save us to see us sit on the bench – he saved us so that we could serve him.

Whether we are riding high or brought low our priority needs to be on working for God.

And that's the attitude that Joseph models for us as he eagerly went about doing God's business in the king's prison.

Next we want to notice that Joseph continued **trusting in God** in spite of whatever happened

III. Trusting in God

In verses 14-15 we see Joseph do a very human thing, something we've not seen him do up to this point

He pled his innocence and asked the cupbearer to remember him after he was restored to his former position and to mention his case to Pharaoh in the hope that he might be released

Let's look at what Joseph said (**Genesis 40:14-15**) –

“Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.”

There are some who are critical of Joseph for this request because they say he shouldn't have appealed to man for help but that he should have just waited for God to deliver him

But is it really so difficult to sympathize with Joseph and see how he might rightly have thought that God sent these two men to the same prison as he was in for some greater purpose?

Do we really think it was wrong for him to ask for the cupbearer to do him a kindness thinking that might have been God's design for this whole incident?

After all, Joseph was quite restrained in describing his case

He threw no one under the bus – not his brothers, not Potiphar, and not Potiphar's wife – he very simply all that had happened to him and said he didn't deserve to be in prison

I simply can't agree that Joseph did anything wrong here

And as the account continues we see that things happened just as God revealed to Joseph they would

Look with me at verses 20-22 (**Genesis 40:20-22**) –

On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

Imagine what Joseph had to be thinking when the prison door opened and the two officials were summoned

It's not difficult to suppose that the cupbearer had agreed to tell Pharaoh about Joseph after Joseph had just interpreted his dream for him – and given him a favorable interpretation at that

And Joseph had to believe that the cupbearer would follow through

I suspect that for a time Joseph looked up expectantly every time the prison door opened thinking that maybe this time he too would be summoned

But in **verse 23** we read the sorry truth – *Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.*

Since we all tend to forget things from time to time we might be prone to excuse a bout of forgetfulness on the cupbearer's part

But this wasn't a case of something simply slipping his mind

The double statement used here, “he did not remember, but forgot” is meant to show that his forgetfulness was not an accident

Perhaps the cupbearer was a bit tentative when he was first reinstated and he hesitated to bring Joseph up too soon and was waiting for the conditions to be just right – after all, he didn't want to wind up back in prison himself

Then, after waiting got to be a habit he just allowed the situation to become permanent

Or, it's possible the cupbearer wasn't an honest man but an opportunist who would say anything to look good and further his own ends

In any event, it seems unlikely that the memory of Joseph simply slipped away from him

And when we look ahead to **Genesis 41:1** we see that Joseph remained in prison for another 2 years

It would have been natural at this point for Joseph to finally give up and become bitter

He had been betrayed over and over again in spite doing his utmost to do well and live in a God-honoring way

But, as we will see next week, Joseph didn't allow his circumstances to embitter him or make him lash out in rebellion

Rather, it seems he continued on as he always had and served God by doing well in prison

And during those two years of what had to be profound disappointment God was preparing him even though he was unaware of it as we will see in future weeks as the account continues

We all have that same choice to make and we can allow our circumstances to either make us bitter or better

Which way we choose typically comes down to whether we see our circumstances as being under God's authority and control and, therefore, having passed through God's scrutiny before we encountered them that those situations that we want so badly to escape are actually part of God's loving will for us

Conclusion

We don't have to let disappointment defeat us or even derail us from doing what God would have us do

Trust me; I know how difficult each of those steps we talked about can be

It is an extremely difficult thing to unjustly suffer at the hands of others because it is unjust and it seems that God should protect his child from being treated unjustly

And it's hard to accept when people let us down – especially when it happens repeatedly

But Joseph shows us that it can be done when we focus on God and what he is doing in our lives through those things

We simply have to accept that people are going to fail us

We need to stop relying on people and expecting them to do God's job in our lives because all people are bound to fail us at some point - even the best of us has limitations and are sure to prove to be less able or willing than we hoped

So, instead of letting the failures of men and our disillusionment with them make us bitter we need to allow them to cause us to look to the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God

The cupbearer likely assured Joseph that he would remember him before Pharaoh as soon as he got a chance and he forgot

Jesus assured the thief who was hanging on a cross beside him that he would remember him – and we know he did

God hadn't forgotten Joseph and neither will he forget us no matter how dark things seem to get

The late Dr. James Montgomery Boice [Boice.jpg] put it this way –

"Why trust a creature who can only live by taking one breath at a time? If he misses just one breath, he dies. Trust God who is the eternal breath from whom all our little breaths come."

And **Psalm 118:8** tells us – *It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.*

God may not act as quickly as we would like – he may leave us in the dark place far longer than we are comfortable with

It might, at times, seem like our prayers are bouncing off the ceiling and not making it to God's ears

But the day will come when God determines it's time and he will release us

That tells us we need to wait for God because he really does know what is best for us

And God oftentimes does his greatest work in us when we have no other recourse than to wait on him

God had not told Joseph how long his imprisonment would last

He only knew that he had to wait on God and trust that, in God's own time, the door of the prison would be opened for his release

We want everything to be fair – as we define fair

People who do well should be rewarded and those who do ill should be punished

But in God's economy things don't always work that way in the short term and we often find good people like Joseph in bad situations

As Chuck Swindoll [Swindoll.jpg] once said, *"[God has] been known to allow unfair treatment to occur in the lives of some absolutely innocent folks - for reasons far more profound and deep than they or we could have imagined."*

And sometimes the work God is doing in a person's life causes him to move very slowly in providing relief

But we can rest assured that God never forgets us and God will never fail us and follow Joseph's example until that time comes

Disappointment doesn't have to defeat us or derail us – we can be faithful even when it appears we've been forgotten

Let's pray