

“Joseph: Dealing With Disappointment”

GENESIS 40

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If you have been with us for the last two weeks, then you know that we are in the middle of a series of lessons based on the life of Joseph in the Old Testament book of Genesis. Two weeks ago, we learned that even though Joseph grew up in a messed-up family, he did not allow his unusual and dysfunctional family background to get in the way of serving God. He refused to use his family history as an excuse. And then last Sunday, we learned that when Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery by his messed-up brothers, he faced an incredibly powerful temptation. Based on that temptation, we studied some basic ideas that apply to the temptations we face today – we are to be on guard at all times, we are to recognize sin for what it really is, like Joseph, we are to do whatever it takes to escape, and then finally, we are not to be discouraged by the immediate results. As you remember, Joseph did everything right – he tried to reason with Potiphar’s wife, he did the best he could to just stay away from her, but when she went in for the kill shot, Joseph had to leave his coat in her hands, and he made a run for it. So, Joseph did everything right in that he refused to sin against God by having an intimate relationship with another man’s wife, but for doing the right thing, Joseph was thrown into prison. And that’s where we left it last Sunday morning. Joseph is in prison because he had the courage to stand up and do the right thing.

This morning I would like for us to focus in on Genesis 40 as we learn some valuable lessons based on how Joseph dealt with disappointment. I wanted to title this lesson, “Dealing with Disappointment, Delay, Discouragement, Injustice, Abuse, and Mistreatment,” and that would have been a more accurate title; however, that title would not fit at the top of this lesson, it would not fit on our website, and it would certainly not fit on the wall up here either, so I have shortened it to “Dealing With Disappointment.” After an amazing spiritual victory, after standing up with courage just as he should have done, Joseph is now in prison, and that would have certainly been disappointing, to say the least. This morning, then, we want to pay attention to how Joseph deals with these very disappointing and discouraging circumstances.

Someone has very wisely described these situations as the “waiting rooms” of life, and I believe that is an interesting and very accurate description. We know that Joseph was sold into slavery at the age of 17 and that he finally stood before Pharaoh at the age of 30, so we are talking very roughly about a 13-year period of waiting and disappointment. So let’s think, then, in terms of this being a waiting room for Joseph. You know, there are some rooms where I am very comfortable. I am personally very comfortable in my own living room. I have my large green leather chair that I got off of Craigslist several years ago, I have the woodstove over to my

left, behind me I have an old radio from Goodwill and a reading lamp from UW SWAP, and on my right I have a little table that I'm now in the process of refinishing. It is from a garage sale, and it is the perfect size for my morning coffee and a newspaper. In that little spot, I am comfortable. In that spot, I am inches away from the kitchen and the rest of my family, and everything is just the way I want it. But there are other rooms I've been in that make me nervous. There are other rooms where I feel out of place. I'm thinking about the waiting room at my dentist. We have a great dentist – we love our dentist! He has nice chairs, great carpet, good lighting – but for some reason I just don't like being in his waiting room! I'm thinking about some of the waiting rooms at various hospitals. I'm thinking about the room where you wait to have your blood drawn. There are some rooms that make me uneasy. There are some rooms that are heavy with the smell of fear. There are some rooms that make us uncomfortable. And that's the kind of room that Joseph is in in Genesis 40. He is in a time of transition, and the transition does not seem to be going very well. I've told you before about the apartment where we lived when we first moved to Madison as we were waiting for our house to be built. We lived there for about three months, and in that apartment we were never comfortable. Something just didn't feel right. We were living out of boxes, and something was just wrong. We didn't feel well physically or emotionally the whole time we were there. For you, maybe it's less a place than it is a circumstance – an illness, being picked on at school, being overlooked at work, marriage trouble, financial trouble, unemployment. Right now, some of us might be a little uptight politically. We might be a little unsettled. I am suggesting that that is the kind of situation Joseph is going through. He was living through a time of disappointment – he was unsettled. The question, then, is not, how we can avoid being unsettled, because sometimes things are beyond our control. The question is: How do we respond in the middle of it? How do we live through times of discouragement? How do we respond to disappointment? Genesis 40...

¹ Then it came about after these things, the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. ² Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. ³ So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the same place where Joseph was imprisoned. ⁴ The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time. ⁵ Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. ⁷ He asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?" ⁸ Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please." ⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, there was a vine in front of me; ¹⁰ and on the vine were three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, and its clusters produced ripe grapes. ¹¹ Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand." ¹² Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; ¹³ within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. ¹⁵ For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon." ¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head; ¹⁷ and in the top basket there were some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds

were eating them out of the basket on my head.”¹⁸ Then Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days;¹⁹ within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you.”²⁰ Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand;²² but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

As we think about this passage and as we allow the word of God to speak to us and change us this morning, I would like for us to focus in on two very simple lessons from Joseph during what must have been an incredibly frustrating time in his life.

- I. **First of all, as we focus in on the first seven verses, I would like for us to notice that as he is in prison for a crime he did not commit, as he is waiting for justice for roughly 11 years now, as he is confined and forgotten, JOSEPH SOMEHOW MANAGES TO BE GENUINELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE OTHERS WHO ARE WITH HIM, AND HE SHOWS THIS CONCERN IN A VERY CONCRETE WAY.**

So he’s in prison, and in the middle of it, Pharaoh gets mad (he gets *“furious,”* as the Bible says in verse 2), he throws his baker and his cupbearer in prison. In verse 4, we find that the chief jailer put Joseph in charge of these men, and then the Bible says that Joseph *“took care of them.”* Some of you might have a footnote or even another translation of that phrase. The text actually says that Joseph *“served”* these men. He *“ministered”* to them. These men are obviously terrified, and the Bible says (in verses 6-7), *“When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. He asked Pharaoh’s officials who were with him in confinement in his master’s house, ‘Why are your faces so sad today?’”* And this is something that is amazing to me. Joseph had plenty of trouble of his own – here he is in prison for a crime he did not commit, but in the middle of his own trouble, Joseph was paying attention to the needs of others. He notices that these men were *“dejected.”* He could tell by looking at these men that there was something wrong, something beyond just being in prison (which certainly would have been bad enough). But he notices that there was something wrong, and so he says something, *“Why are your faces so sad today?”* That right there probably goes far beyond what the normal jailer at that time would have said. Most people in Joseph’s position would not have paid attention to these two men – after all, who cares? They’re in prison – they’re not supposed to be happy! But Joseph notices that they were especially troubled, and so he speaks up. Perhaps there is something he can do. He pays attention to their situation, and then he steps in with an expression of concern. He forgets about his own troubles long enough to notice that someone else was hurting and struggling. He was serving his fellow prisoners. We see this kind of service encouraged elsewhere in the Bible. We think of Paul (also in prison) as Paul used his imprisonment to reach out to fellow prisoners and also to the guards and those in charge – we read about this in Acts 16 and also in Philippians 1. Most of us have noticed in life that when we experience some kind of challenging situation, that puts us in a unique position to serve others who may be going through the same experience. Our own struggles have a way of making us empathetic. When we struggle with something, we have a unique perspective on life.

Serving others has at least two benefits in Joseph’s life. First of all, it kept him from wallowing in self-pity. Of all people, Joseph could have just curled up in a corner and cried himself to sleep every night, “Oh, this is bad, this is really bad! My brothers hate me, my father thinks I’m dead, I’ve been falsely accused for 11 years, and now I will die in prison.” We have no record of Joseph ever saying that. Joseph might have been frustrated, but we have no record of Joseph sitting around feeling sorry for himself and doing nothing. Instead, time and time

again, Joseph was put in charge of whatever he tried to do, and he did well – and that goes for the prison. Helping others helped Joseph.

There is a second benefit to Joseph helping others, of course, and that is (as we know from reading ahead a little bit), this incident will end up being a turning point in Joseph's life. At the time, of course, Joseph has no idea. There was no angel saying, "Hey, Joseph, these guys are your ticket out of here!" No indication that these men were important to his future. All he knows is that there are two men who are new in prison who need a little bit of encouragement. At the time, this relatively minor act of compassion did not seem to be a very big deal, but it ended up being incredibly important in the big picture.

Joseph, then, paid attention to the needs of others and stepped in to do something. I am reminded of Paul's words in Philippians 2:3-4 where we are told to, ***"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."*** In a time of personal disappointment, as Joseph was stuck in life's waiting room for several years, Joseph looked out for the interests of others, and that right there should be an encouragement to us today. No matter what we're going through, most of us probably have a way of helping others along the way.

II. There is a second very simple lesson from this chapter, and that is: During these years in prison, during these years of abuse and neglect, JOSEPH DID NOT ALLOW THE DREAM TO DIE.

In verse 8, Joseph learns that the men had both had a dream. Now, right at that moment, you know what Joseph is thinking! Joseph has had some incredibly vivid dreams from a very young age, and some of those dreams had gotten him in a bit of trouble! At that moment, then, Joseph had to react to the news of these dreams. On one hand, Joseph could have said, "Oh no! No more dreams please!" Joseph could have said, "Oh, I've had some dreams, and my dreams are not coming true, so leave me out of this!" Joseph could have said, "Yeah, I had a dream once – I dreamed that my brothers bowed down to me. But we see how that worked out! Instead of bowing down to me, they sold me into slavery." That's what Joseph could have said, and yet please notice what Joseph actually said. Immediately upon hearing that these men had had a dream, Joseph said (in verse 8), ***"Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please."*** And with that, I believe we have a little insight into Joseph's mind at this point. At this point in his life, even in prison, even estranged from his messed up family, Joseph is thinking: I had a dream, and God is still working on it! In spite of every circumstance in his life beating him down, Joseph did not allow the dream to die, but he continued trusting in God's plan. And so as I look at it then, these dreams from these two men were actually a gentle reminder that God was still in control. Someday, somehow, God was going to work it out and Joseph's dream would in some way be fulfilled; otherwise, Joseph would not have given the interpretations. Joseph knew what Peter knew in 2 Peter 3:9, that God is not slow in keeping His promises, as some count slowness. Yes, God might be slow as WE count slowness, but God's plan and our plans might not always match up.

Joseph, then, instead of becoming bitter with this reminder, he once again reacts with compassion. He interprets the cupbearer's dream. In three days, the man would be restored to his position. The baker likes this interpretation, and so he asks Joseph to interpret his dream. Here again, Joseph has to make a decision. He can give the proper interpretation, or he can soften the blow. Thankfully, Joseph has the courage to tell the truth even when it was not popular. In three days the baker would die. Joseph, then, once again was faithful to the dream.

Of course, these two dreams are not the end of this ordeal. The cupbearer gets restored, and the baker gets whacked, and I can just see Joseph sitting on the edge of his seat – any minute now, Pharaoh is going to come down here and apologize...but he waited and waited, hours turn into days, days turn into weeks, weeks turn into months, months turn into years, and that day never came. We end Chapter 40 with the words, ***“Yet the cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”*** The waiting continued.

Today, how do we react when our dreams seem to be derailed? Of course, we don't have those visions from God like Joseph had. But what kind of attitude do we have when life doesn't go as we think it should? What do we do when it seems like God has forgotten about us? Like Joseph, we might be tempted to give up, but hopefully we also hang on and continue doing what we need to do. We think of some of what the apostle Paul went through – beatings, and shipwrecks, and all kinds of abuse – and this is what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, ***“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”*** Paul had a rough life, but he also refused to let the dream die. Paul continued living the Christian life. Paul, like Joseph, in the waiting room of disappointment, continued to hang on to God's plan for his life. Both men continued putting their trust in God.

Conclusion:

This morning we have talked about spending time in God's waiting room, and we have discovered from Genesis 40 that Joseph serves as an amazing example. And what makes Joseph especially amazing is that he had no spiritual heroes to look up to for advice. He had no one to lean on for encouragement. Joseph was cut off from any positive reinforcement, and yet Joseph continued to do the right thing. Joseph was blazing a trail. We might say that Joseph was blazing a trail for the rest of us. As a young man, Joseph was setting the example. Earlier this morning, brother _____ read the words of Paul in Romans 8:28. Coming from a man who had also spent time in prison for doing the right thing, the Bible says, ***“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*** Those are some difficult words, but Joseph reminds us that it is possible to patiently endure, continuing to put our trust in God's plan. Joseph spent 13 years in God's waiting room. If you think about it, that's the equivalent of 4 years in college, 4 years in graduate school, and 5 years of on-the-job training. That's how long it took for God to prepare Joseph for what was about to happen next. And as he waited, Joseph served others with genuine concern and he refused to allow God's dream to die. He trusted God's plan and knew that God was with him.

How do we deal with challenges? Oh, I wish it could be a one-time decision. I wish we could just do the right thing and be done with it, but we have learned from Joseph that trusting God is an ongoing challenge. It is a lifetime commitment. There will be ups and downs. There will be times when it will seem much easier to just give in. But Joseph reminds us that it is possible to be faithful over a long period of time in very difficult circumstances.

There is something I haven't pointed out about that passage in Romans, and that is, it applies to those who love God, to those who are called according to God's purpose. In 2 Thessalonians 2:14, the apostle Paul explains that we are called through the gospel. The gospel is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We respond to that message with humble obedience. God tells us that we need to die to sin, that we need to turn away from sin. At that point, we are ready to be immersed with Christ in baptism and to then be raised up out of the water to live a new life. If you have something we need to pray about, let us know. If you have any questions and would like to study together, let us know. But if you are

ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing together...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com