

Lesson 4: Life of Joseph, God's Man--Prison (Genesis 39-41)

Introduction:

Joseph was:

Hated and rejected by his own brothers.

Physically abused and terrified.

Stolen from his home and family

Sold into slavery and reported as dead.

Seduced and then framed for attempted rape.

Shackled and thrown into prison. Psalm 105:17-18—*"He [God] sent a man before them, Joseph, {who} was sold as a slave. They afflicted his feet with fetters; He himself was laid in irons;*

Genesis 39:20—*"So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail."*

He was about to suffer 10 plus years of unjust abuse that would normally cause a man to be miserable, angry, bitter, and self-pitying. Is that what happened?

No! Why not? Because he knew, by faith that was bred through experience, that God was with him and was active in his life even when all was going wrong. This can keep any person from becoming bitter.

Verse 21—*"But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer."*

I. PRISON EXPERIENCE (Chapter 40)

A. Haven't we heard this story before?

Didn't this happen when Joseph was sold to Potiphar?

1. Joseph Advanced (39:22-40:4)

God is so powerful in his life that he is advanced to the top of the prison hierarchy with the jailer's full trust and support.

Genesis 39:22-23—*"And the chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible {for it.} The **chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge** because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper."*

In fact, Joseph ended up in charge of even the highest political prisoners. Chapter 40 tells us the story:

The King's personal cupbearer, who would be his personal taster to make sure he was not poisoned, and his baker, who would fix the king's favorite goodies did something to really bug the king, so he sent them to the club med prison.

Verse 3 says, "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. And verse 4

continues, "*And the captain of the bodyguard [Isn't that Potiphar] put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time.*"

2. Joseph Asked (40:5-8)

Both the cupbearer and the baker had dreams on the same night. The next morning when Joseph came in he saw that they were troubled and asked them what was wrong.

Verse 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.**"

Each man told Joseph their dreams and he interpreted them.

B. Doesn't someone always stand in the way?

1. Joseph Foretells (40:9-22)

Joseph predicts that the baker will be brought back to the king's court only to be found guilty and sentenced to lose his head. The cupbearer will, according to the meaning of his dream, be brought back into the court and restored to his job. Three days later on the Pharaoh's birthday his predictions came true in every detail.

2. Joseph Forgotten (40:14 and 23)

Joseph asks no payment but only requests that the cupbearer not forget him when he is restored to the side of the Pharaoh. Genesis 40:14--"*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. 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.*"

"Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." (v 23)

LESSONS:

As we reach the end of part one of today's lesson let's stop and think.

As Joseph finds himself being wrongly offended again and again he is confronted with a problem all of us have. Just after we hit the wall some well meaning brother or sister comes up to us and tells us to remember what Romans 8:28 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.*"

Nothing can hurt so much in the middle of our unearned suffering, pain, and injustice, but on the other hand **nothing gives us so much hope.**

We come, as Joseph did, face-to-face with the one who Dr. Francis Shaffer called, "The God who is there!"

There are no quick fixes, no instant prosperity, but even if it takes 10 to 13 years, God is working not only for Joseph but also for his family, his people, the Pharaoh and even the ungodly nation of Egypt.

Look at some valuable lessons we can learn from Joseph about:

DEALING WITH INJUSTICE

1. Don't let injustice affect your Godliness!

Joseph kept his integrity throughout his temptations and trials.

Paul explains in Romans 5:3 -5—*"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

Rather than weakening faith and godliness, people who find themselves surrounded by circumstances beyond their control find that they are more convinced than ever that they can do nothing apart from God.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 and 10 Paul explained it like this, *"And He [God] has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

If we allow suffering and injustice to build our character we become God's man or woman, more like Jesus . . . Then God can do great things through us to complete His plan for us, our families, and our worlds.

2. Don't let injustice cause you to be self-centered!

Joseph noticed the broken spirit of his two charges even though he had his own troubles and was a very busy man. He ministered to their need.

If we allow active compassion to become a part of our lives, if we care what is wrong in other's lives we become God's man or woman, more like Jesus . . . Then God can work in the areas of our needs as well.

3. Don't let injustice cause you to lose your faith!

Hebrews 11:6—*"And without faith it is impossible to please {Him} , for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and {that} He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."*

Joseph did not lose his heritage of faith even in the midst of injustice. He knew God could and would interpret the dreams because he knew from past experience that God had put him where He wanted him.

If we exercise our faith in God, which is to

Act based on our

Belief that God is who He says He is and have

Confidence that He will always keep his word we become more like Jesus, God's man or woman.

4. Don't let injustice go unchallenged!

Joseph didn't ignore the fact that he had been unjustly punished. We don't have to pretend that everything is all right. (What's wrong-oh, nothing.)

He said to the cupbearer, "Tell the Pharaoh I did nothing wrong, and I have been a victim."

If we speak out against actual injustice we are being God's man or woman, more like Jesus.

5. Don't let injustice cause you to become bitter!

Joseph presented his entire history of injustice without once mentioning a name.

Ephesians 4:31-5:2, *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."*

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

Bitterness clouds our vision causing us to make bad decisions.

Bitterness alienates people causing loneliness.

Bitterness spreads like cancer, which is incurable without a miracle of God.

If we fight injustice without malice toward individuals we are more like Jesus, God's man or woman.

Joseph reacted perfectly and, *"Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."* (v 23) and moving on into chapter 41 we find him still in jail.

"Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile."

Seven hundred and thirty more days of waiting. To what end? In his book *Joseph*, Gene Getz says, "One of the greatest virtues a Christian needs, but which most of us lack, is patience—that capacity to maintain our spiritual and emotional equilibrium when things are happening within us and around us that make us uncomfortable."

II. PRISON ESCAPE (Chapter 41)

A. Joseph Called

Most of chapter 41 is taken up describing the Pharaoh's two dreams. Simply stated they were a dream about seven fat healthy cows that were grazing and seven gaunt unhealthy cows came up from the Nile and ate the fat ones (vv 1-4). And a second dream about seven plump and good ears of grain that were devoured by seven thin and scorched ears (vv 5-7).

He called for his wise guys and magicians and they couldn't tell him what they meant even though he told them all the details. **Then** the cupbearer remembered Joseph and, even though it meant recalling his own painful past, he introduced his master to Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams (vv 8-13).

Verse 14 says, *"Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh."*

Joseph listened to the Pharaoh's dreams and told the boss that it was God, not himself, who answered these "needs to know," (vv15-24). Then he explained that Egypt would have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe famine which would devour everything unless desperate measure were followed (vv 25-32).

God also had a solution. *"And now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt."* This would be followed by organizing a system of overseers to collect, store and protect a portion of all produce until the famine hit (vv 33-36).

B. Joseph Commissioned

The Pharaoh and his people liked the idea and he asked them whom they might recommend (vv 37-38). Dah! . . . It's a no brainer!

He then answered his own question in verse 39, *"So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are."*

And so Pharaoh appointed Joseph his Prime Minister, saying, *"only in the throne I will be greater than you. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put the gold necklace around his neck. And he had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, " {Though} I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."* (vv40-44)

Next week we'll go with Joseph from prison to power and see how he did, but lets complete today by looking for more lessons.

LESSONS:

We looked at some valuable lessons we can learn from Joseph about **dealing with injustice**. Now let's see what we can learn about

DEALING WITH WAITING

1. God has His own timetable!

We think we're so smart. Most of us really don't have much problem with our self-esteem.

What if the cupbearer had done what *we* would have liked and told the Pharaoh earlier and he had been released and sent back home. No! God kept Joseph right where he had to be when Pharaoh needed him.

Our problem is that we really don't always believe that God knows what he's doing so we try to help Him out. We need to remember, "Father knows best."

If we wait on the Lord and let him work in our live, not always trying to preempt His plans, he will put us in the right place at the right time.

2. Waiting is spiritually healthy!

Isaiah 40:28-31 explains it clearly, *"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, And to {him who} lacks might He increases power.*

Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up {with} wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary."

David waited for God to make him king even though he was anointed.

Paul waited for God to make him a missionary even though he was an apostle.

Hannah waited for God to give her a son, and what a son Samuel was.

David said it like this, Psalm 27:13 and 14, "*{I would have despaired} unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD.*"

If we will wait on the Lord as David, Paul, Hanna and Joseph did he will develop our character and prepare us for His purpose.

3. Waiting is difficult!

This is an age of pushiness. I want patience, and I want it now!

Patience is a difficult virtue to develop in the age of:

Microwave ovens—No waiting for food

Drive through ATMs—No waiting for money

E-Mail—No waiting for communication

Fax Machines—No waiting for documents

Internet purchasing—No waiting for products

Oat brand power bars—No waiting for health

Instant gratification and quick fixes aren't biblical. We have to be "filled with the Spirit," and "let the Word dwell in us richly" and that means reading and studying the Word even if we don't feel like it, even when results don't show, even when our goals aren't reached, even when no one else cooperates, even if it hurts.

If we wait on the Lord and immerse ourselves in the Scriptures God will lead us in the paths of righteousness and obedience. Psalm 130:5 says it, "*I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope.*"

Lord help us to fight injustice without giving up our Godliness, becoming self-centered, losing our faith, ignoring the injustice, or developing bitterness in our hearts.

Lord help us to wait upon the You, not try to run ahead of You, allowing You to develop our character and mature us through Your Word. Help us be like Jesus, your men and your women.