

“Trusting God In the Dark”

Genesis 40:1-23

Let me invite you to turn with me in your Bible to Genesis 40. The lives of men and women in Scripture stand out to us as examples that we can learn from. Who of us is not profoundly impacted by the story of Abraham, the man of faith? Or encouraged by the determination of Nehemiah, or the faithfulness of Moses to lead God's people? God constantly uses the lives of men and women in Scripture to teach us, to encourage us, and to warn us. The Bible says:

Romans 15:4—“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

There are things which we learn from these imperfect and flawed individuals. Their mistakes, their failures, and their trust in the promise of God. For the past several weeks, we've been studying the life of Joseph on Sunday morning. Joseph's story spans an incredible 14 chapters in Genesis. We are introduced to him as a seventeen year old boy who travels from Canaan's pastures in search of his brothers. Then we weep with him as he is betrayed by those same brothers and thrown into a pit. We ache for him as he is slandered and falsely accused, sent to Egypt's prison, and then we shout with joy as he will be taken from that prison and given a high place of leadership in Pharaoh's palace. From the pit to Potiphar's, from Potiphar's to the prison, from the prison to the palace. And yet, what many people fail to see is that it was those difficult and painful things that God used to shape Joseph into the man that he became. Which is really important for us to know. God used all of his experiences to shape him into a man who loved God and will be greatly used by Him to accomplish His purpose. (Read)

Now, the last time we saw him was his imprisonment based upon the false charges which were brought against him by Potiphar's wife. He's in prison, and there's no mention of parole. The literal translation of the Hebrew word 'prison' is hole or pit. His home is a dark and miserable dungeon, a foul smelling place. Archeologists have

discovered similar prisons in the desert of Egypt where they placed prisoners. Those incarcerated would have shackles that went around their neck and their ankles. Remember how the psalmist described Joseph's experience:

Psalm 105:16-19—“Joseph, who was sold as a slave. His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron; until what he said came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.”

Joseph doesn't begin with a responsible position in prison, but by being shackled in isolation, kept in that condition for a length of time he has no way of knowing. But the Bible says the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love. That's the greatest statement made about his life.

“Steadfast Love” —*means to stretch out lovingkindness*

God will stretch out His grace to great lengths for Joseph in the prison, giving him favor with the keeper of the prison so that he is promoted. Now, he's not removed from the pit, but given responsibility while in it. There in the midst of the darkness, Joseph will learn to lean on the Lord like never before. So that he will understand what it means to trust God in the dark. Have you personally ever felt like you've been in a dark place? A verse from Isaiah is very fitting when we consider Joseph's life at this point:

Isaiah 50:10—“Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of His servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.”

Let the one who walks in darkness and has no light, that is, he or she has no answer for why they are in a difficult place or season. What are you to do in that dark place? Let him trust in the the name of the Lord and rely on his God. We make it through the dark seasons of life by trusting in God. And so let's consider that subject this morning, how to trust God in the dark. First of all, notice it involves:

1—REACTING to unfair circumstances (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.”

Trusting God in the dark is a matter of how we react to our unfair circumstances. I heard someone say that life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we react to it. I’m totally amazed with the way Joseph reacted to an unfair situation. Think about the unfairness of Joseph’s circumstances. He is confined in a prison for something he did not do. Before that, he had been taken to Egypt against his will as a slave, having been sold by his brothers, his own flesh and blood. It was all so unfair. Have you ever felt that life isn’t fair?

Sometimes you hear children acknowledge that something isn’t fair. You’re cutting up pieces of a cake, and one child says, “Hey, no fair! Her piece is bigger than mine!” There’s a fairness we expect based on a sense of justice that says everyone ought to be treated equally. But our experiences tell us that the world doesn’t always operate that way. This was something that Solomon observed in Ecclesiastes. He acknowledges that life is often unfair. He said:

Ecclesiastes 7:15—“In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.”

Ecclesiastes 8:14—“There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous.”

Solomon does not sugarcoat it—life under the sun is unfair and often upside-down. We live in a fallen world where sin has affected everything. Sadly, Joseph gets the raw end

of the deal. Or as Solomon would say, Joseph is one of the ‘righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked.’ In other words, he is treated as if he has been wicked. The last couple of verses in chapter 39 provide us with insight to how Joseph reacted to his unfair circumstances—“The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.” That tells me that he didn’t sit around and whine about the unfairness of his circumstances. Instead, he did all he could to make the most of the situation.

How do you react to the unfairness of life? Our reaction to circumstance reveals the focus of our heart. There are two ways we can handle it:

A self-centered reaction

If our focus is on ourselves, then we will likely to react to unfairness in life in ways that are negative and spiritually unproductive. We might wallow in self-pity. We may dwell on our pain and misfortune, feeling sorry for ourselves and ask, “Why me?” This can lead to a ‘victim’ mentality that is without gratitude and hinders our spiritual growth. When that happens, bitterness and resentment takes hold. We compare our situation with others, leading to feelings of envy or resentment toward those who seem better off than us. Then, we begin to believe that we deserve better than what we are getting. We grow demanding, discontent, and angry with God. It leads to a self-entitled mindset fueled by pride.

When we are self-focused, we can become consumed by our problems and fail to see the bigger picture of what God might be doing in our lives through the situation. Focusing on all the negative can make you a negative person. What if I told you a quarter can eclipse the sun? Take a quarter, hold it close enough to your eye, and you can block out the light of the sun. Now, that is one way to react to the stuff of life. But there is a much better way.

A God-centered reaction

In contrast, a God-centered focus helps us react with faith, patience, and humility—trusting His sovereignty even when life feels unfair. The Lord was with Joseph, and whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. In other words, the Lord is kept front and center in his life. I'll say more about this in a minute, but notice how others are made priority in his life. He is attending to the needs of others while in the prison. I mean, if ever there was a man who needed someone, it is Joseph. Right? Joseph, in viewing his circumstances, had every reason from a human perspective to say, "You know, I don't see that any of this is working to my benefit. I try to do the right thing for my father, I get thrown in a pit. I try to be nice to my brothers and check on them, and they throw me in a pit and sell me as a slave. In Egypt, I've tried to do the right thing, and I get thrown in the prison. I really don't deserve any of this!" But he's not thinking about himself here in these verses. The Lord is with Joseph, and he is ministering to the needs of those around him. That's what we see him doing in the prison. When Jesus Christ is first in my heart, other people will be made priority. Jesus said to His disciples, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Regardless of those things that have happened to Joseph, he continues entrusting himself to the righteous Judge.

It is what Peter explains to his readers in his first epistle:

1 Peter 2:19-23—“For this a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.”

Peter says that we endure our sorrows, all while mindful of God. Which is to say that we keep Him at the forefront of our thinking. No matter what is going on around us in the world, Christ is to be our focus! (See also Hebrews 12)

Chuck Swindoll — *“Every waking moment of our lives we operate from one of two viewpoints: human or divine. I often refer to these as the ‘horizontal’ perspective and the ‘vertical’ perspective. The more popular of the two is human; it’s also the easiest because it comes so naturally. The more fruitful of the two is divine.”*

And yet it’s difficult to lift our eyes from the horizontal, to live with the vertical perspective. I don’t know about you, but I often catch myself wanting to think my own thoughts, justify my own lack of faith, and bemoan my circumstances. The self-centered focus comes natural to our flesh. But to live with a God-centered perspective is the Holy Spirit’s work and only comes through time spent in His presence.

Friends, the attitude that we live with is of great importance and impacts our lives in ways we often fail to see. Attitude will make or break you. You can’t change what happens in life, but you can change your attitude with the help of the Holy Spirit. Changing our focus is the key to changing our attitude. There in the dark, Joseph is focused on the Lord. And because of that, he is thoughtful of others.

2—RESPONDING to unforeseen opportunities (40:5-22)

“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?’ They said to him, ‘We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.’ And Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me...’”

Trusting God in the dark is displayed in the way we react to our unfair circumstances, and it also involves responding to unforeseen opportunities. I’ve discovered that it is often in the dark places of life that God tends to open certain doors of opportunity. Unbeknownst to Joseph, something was going down in Pharaoh’s palace. Verse 2 says he became angry with two high ranking officials in his administration—the chief cupbearer and his chief baker. He places them in custody in the very place where

Joseph was confined. And of course, this is not incidental, nor is it coincidental, but it is providential. This will become a divine opportunity for Joseph in a number of ways. First, it will be an opportunity for him:

To serve others with compassion

Remember the last few verses of chapter 39 said that God gave Joseph favor with the keeper of the prison. Because of that, verse 4 says that he appointed Joseph to be with these two prisoners and he ‘attended’ them. The NLT says that he ‘looked after them.’

“Attended” — *the Hebrew word means to minister or serve*

Again, we’ve seen that Joseph is not self-centered in his focus. He is God-centered. But that also means that he is focused on others. Because God is foremost in his heart, other people will come before himself. I think we can find here a living illustration of the two greatest commandments being lived out in a man’s life. Joseph loves the Lord God with all of his heart, mind, and strength. And it is also evident that he loves his neighbor as himself. Friends, when Christ is foremost in your heart, serving other people will be the fruit.

The Bible says that both the chief cupbearer and the chief baker had been having some disturbing dreams. Verse 6 says, “When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled.” This prompted him to ask, “Why are your faces downcast today?” Though he’s got his own problems, Joseph is sensitive to the needs of those around him. And not only is he sensitive to those needs, he is also responsive. He sees another person in crisis, and offers to help as he can. Like the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, he shows mercy on someone else in distress.

The very best thing you can do when you’re in a dark place is to find someone else you can show mercy to. The dark places in life tempt us to turn inward, become closed off, or withdrawn from other people. But showing mercy shifts the focus from our hurt to someone else’s need, which breaks the iron grip of bitterness and softens our heart.

Matthew 5:7—“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

When you show mercy, you will reap a harvest of mercy in your own life. Offering compassion in your dark valley may in fact become the means by which God brings comfort to you. When you open up your heart to another in need, the Lord will fill it with His grace. God consistently shows His mercy to us even in our lowest moments. The Bible says:

Lamentations 3:22-23—“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in Him.’”

When we extend mercy in the midst of our hurt, we reflect His character. It becomes a form of worship—a declaration that we trust in Him and don’t need to take matters into our own hands. We’re trusting God with our situation and seek to bless others however we may. Joseph serves his fellow prisoners with compassion. And that is something we must all do in our lowest moments. Then notice how:

Joseph speaks the truth with clarity

Upon asking the cupbearer and baker why they were upset notice what they say in verse 8, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” Now, at this point I think we would give Joseph a pass if he were to say, “Listen, I had a dream one time too, and believe me when I say that it doesn’t mean a blessed thing!” Instead, Joseph says to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.” And the chief cupbearer then tells Joseph about how he had dreamed of a vine with three branches, and as soon as it budded, it then blossomed into ripened clusters of grapes. He says, “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.” Joseph explains to him the interpretation of the dream and how the branches are three days, after which Pharaoh will restore him to his former position as chief cupbearer.

Upon hearing the cupbearer receive a favorable word, the chief baker tells Joseph about his dream. He says in verse 16, “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 Joseph then interprets his dream, but not in the way the baker expects him to. The three baskets are three days in which the chief baker will be hanged and become food for the birds! Sure enough, on the third day, Pharaoh held a banquet and restored the chief cupbearer, but hanged the chief baker just as Joseph had said would happen. Good news for one, bad news for the other, and Joseph is faithful to tell them the truth.

That’s a powerful reminder for those of us today who speak the truth of God’s Word. We have not only the message of the cupbearer—the good news of grace, forgiveness, and redemption. But we’ve also been given the message of the baker—the bad news of death, hell, and eternal separation from God for the one who dies apart from Christ. Joseph is not a preacher who only likes to tell people what they want to hear. His prison becomes his pulpit. We must tell the truth, even when it is painful to hear. We do a person no favor when we ignore the hard realities of sin and unbelief. Genuine compassion is always honest, even if it makes us unpopular with those we long to reach.

Now, I wonder how your prison might also be your pulpit? What I mean is that the painful seasons, the prisons, the dark places you find yourself in from time to time are also platforms for God’s power to be on display in your life. If you’ve been through suffering of some kind—grief, illness, betrayal, depression—you understand it in a way that mere theory cannot provide. That empathy allows you to comfort others with care, not clichés. Paul writes about this:

2 Corinthians 1:3-4—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

It very well could be that your situation will provide you with some unique opportunities to serve others with compassion and to speak the truth with clarity. It did for Joseph.

There is a third thing about trusting God in the dark, and notice it involves:

3—RELYING on unfailing promises (40:14-15, 23)

“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’...Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”

Look back up at verse 14 and notice what Joseph requests of the cupbearer. Once he was restored by Pharaoh to his place of service, Joseph requested that he ‘remember’ him. In verses 14-15, he says to the cupbearer, “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.” Up until this point, maybe you’ve seen Joseph as some kind of invincible energizer bunny who keeps taking hits, but keeps on going. But here I think we see Joseph’s humanity on full display. While he understood that all of his days and all of his decisions were under God’s providential direction, he also recognized that God had given him the responsibility to take initiative. He’s doing the same thing you would do if you were in his situation. He says to the cupbearer, “When all is well with you, remember me...do me this kindness...tell Pharaoh about me and get me out of this place!” We can almost hear the pain in his voice as he says in verse 15, “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.” It was unfair, unjust suffering.

Once the cupbearer is released, Joseph must have thought that his release would soon come too. So you can imagine the hope and sense of anticipation that he must have had. But notice what verse 23 says, “Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.” After the cupbearer was restored, he forgets all about the man who helped him in prison. Then in the first verse of the next chapter, notice the emphasis that is placed on how ‘two whole years’ go by in Joseph’s life. Don’t overlook the fact that two years will pass before Joseph hears a word. Two years buried in an Egyptian

dungeon. Two years of doing the same grueling thing every day. Two years of wondering if he would ever see the light of day again.

Proverbs 13:12—“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

Deferred hope refers to longing for something that doesn't happen in the time or in the way we expected. It's the ache of waiting and praying while it seems that nothing changes. It is something that we all feel, that of delayed desires and unanswered prayers weighing heavily on the heart. I can't help but wonder what Joseph must have thought during the silence of those two years. It was all so undeserved and it was frankly so unfair. And it strikes a chord within all of us. In our own way, we've all experienced the pain of rejection and mistreatment at the hands of others.

- When you're unfairly mistreated by others

Whether it involves a family member or a friend turning on you, or not being there when you needed them. The way we are often treated by people can take its toll out on us in pain that runs deep.

- When you're unfairly restricted by circumstances

This is when you're confined to a set of circumstances that you cannot change or escape from. It takes many forms—sickness, a job you feel stuck in, a depression that you just can't seem to shake.

- When you're unfairly accused with words

Has anyone ever said something about you that was not true? Perhaps you've felt your character has come under attack. You've been falsely accused or misrepresented.

- When you're unfairly abandoned by friends

Some of you have felt the pain of a spouse who walked out on you, failing to live up to the marriage vows they made to you. Or someone who has exploited your generosity, or taken advantage of you. All of these circumstances involve the pain of suffering and

disappointment. But Christian hope doesn't resign to circumstances, but it relies upon unfailing promises. Where is your hope?

Psalm 146:3, 5-6—“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation...Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free.”

Two years is a long wait for sure. However, there is a big difference between God's 'no' and His 'not yet.' It looks like Joseph is buried and forgotten in the prison. But he's not buried, he's planted. Now, I don't know if you have ever thought about this, but 'burying' something and 'planting' something appear to be very similar. In both cases, the ground is opened up, something is put inside, and dirt is spread over until it is covered and out of sight. And even though the action is the same, the definitions of burying and planting are very different. When something is buried, the best part of it is gone and its future is over. But when something is planted, it stays hidden for a season so that it can spring up with new life and produce a harvest. Friend, that's the difference between being buried and planted.

John 12:24—“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Suffering comes before exaltation. It is the pattern of the cross (Philip, p. 543). What is preached in many churches today is a therapeutic gospel, or a 'cross-less' Christianity. A cross-less Christianity is a watered down version of the Christian faith that minimizes the message of the cross—the suffering, death, and sacrificial atonement of Jesus Christ for sin. It often replaces the biblical gospel with a more palatable and self-affirming message that appeals to a person's desire for happiness or social relevance. It will often speak about Jesus as a moral teacher, life coach, or cultural reformer—but not as the crucified and risen Savior who calls people to repentance, self-denial, and faith in His finished work. And it most certainly avoids the suffering associated with the cross of discipleship. But Jesus called His followers to pick up their cross daily!

Cross-less Christianity is popular because it tells people what they want to hear, but not what they need to hear. It offers the crown without the cross, the blessing without the brokenness, and the reward without repentance. It may fill seats, but it does not save souls. Only the true gospel—the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ—has power to save and sanctify.

Joseph may feel like he's been buried, but the reality is that he is only being planted for a season. God will bring him from a place of death to life, from humiliation to exaltation, which will points us to Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection, and the hope of resurrection for believers. You may feel like you've been buried too, forgotten in the darkness of what you've come to see as a hopeless situation. We have living hope!

There in the dark, what would God be saying to Joseph? Or, to bring it closer to home, what might He be saying to you in the midst of your darkness? The hymn writer said, "What more can He say than to you He hath said, to you unto Jesus for refuge have?" He's not going to say more than what He said. What has He said? He said it in His Word. What does he say in his Word? That is the issue.

Psalm 139:1-12—"O Lord, You have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not darkness to You; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You."

The Lord would say, "Do you want to know just how much I'm looking after you, Joseph? I am absolutely up front, behind, on top, below, in it, through it. I am well

aquainted with your situation, Joseph.” And my friend, if that’s true of Joseph, it’s most certainly true of you in Christ. A prison is a strange place to experience the presence of God, but that is what the text says—“the Lord was with Joseph.” It would be the darkness of the prison that God uses to shape Joseph and prepare Joseph for what was up ahead in his life. And though maybe not at that particular moment, but later on in his life, Joseph will be able to look back on that dark experience as having been a formative moment in his life. The Lord was working through it all to prepare him for future greatness. Friend, it is in the prisons and dark seasons of life where God often becomes real in our lives and our worship of Him is deepened

Psalm 119:71 — “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes.”

When we don’t have any light in our situation, we must learn to trust God in the dark:

- React in faith to our unfair circumstances
- Respond in love to those unforeseen opportunities
- Rest in hope upon His unfailing promises