

Sermon Series: Overcome: Living Beyond Your Circumstances

To be used with: Session Three: Overcome Being Forgotten

Sermon Title Possibilities:

Worthwhile Waiting

Unwavering Usefulness

Scripture: Genesis 39:21-23, 40:5-8, 20-23

Connection to Unit Theme: *Overcome: Living Beyond Your Circumstances* is a character study on the Old Testament hero, Joseph. In spite of periods of significant opposition and personal crisis, Joseph's faith led to international leadership and the preservation of God's people. He is an amazing example from Scripture of what it means to overcome difficult circumstances.. These sermon outlines cover the same topics and scripture passages as are being studied in small groups. This will allow you as a pastor the chance to reinforce what learners encounter in small group Bible study and influence the growth of your church body.

Session 3 is called "Overcome Being Forgotten" and illustrates how important it is, especially when you feel forgotten to "keep doing what God has gifted you to do."

Introduction:

In an effort to help travelers do a better job keeping up with personal belongings, London City Airport published lists of the most common and most unusual items left behind at the airport.¹ Making the list of most common: belts, mobile phones, and umbrellas. Making the most unusual report: a bag of diamonds, an artificial skull, and a glass eye.

People lose things. I do it. You do it. Our kids are among the worst culprits. Incidentally, this is a good time to remind you of the church lost and found. You can find it full of items you all leave behind from week to week.

Forgetfulness isn't so much a sin as it is a nuisance. It's an inconvenience when referring to car keys or reading glasses. What about the intangible lapses in memory? Have you ever forgotten an important occasion like an anniversary or birthday? Men, you can really only forget once because when you do, you'll never be allowed to again. If you are fortunate, you have someone in your life that begins dropping hints with enough lead-time for you to plan accordingly.

It is one thing to be forgetful, but another to be forgotten. Have you ever experienced that feeling? Have you ever entertained the idea that God might be too busy for you or your problems; too disinterested in your thoughts or wanderings; or too distant to be available in your life?

When we last left Joseph, he was thrown in jail for a crime he didn't commit. It would have been easy for Joseph in this repeat moment of despair to feel forgotten. Somehow, though, he didn't soak up the opportunity to sulk. Genesis 39 and 40 paint a very different picture of both God and of Joseph.

Regarding God:

I. Circumstances don't indicate God's memory. [Genesis 39:21]

Joseph's accommodations during this stage of his sojourn away from family are referred to in several different manners throughout the narrative.

Genesis 39:20 names it a prison. Genesis 40:3 refers to it as the house of the captain of the guard. Did Potiphar have his own private jail as part of his homestead? Genesis 40:7 calls the prison Joseph's lord's house while verse 15 names it the dungeon or pit. Unless Joseph was moved to a new location with the change of each verse of scripture, these were descriptions of the same abode.

While the exact nature of his penitentiary is not known, one fact can be certain. Joseph was imprisoned. But God had not forgotten. In Genesis 39:21, we find hope and comfort. In spite of the move, God maintained His memory. He showed Joseph the best manner of love and care. What is the best manner of God's loving care? His presence. He was with Joseph.

The transfer is clear. In your pit, God is there. In your dungeon, His presence is your comfort. In your prison, He hasn't forgotten you or forsaken you. No matter what you name your prison, God is always there. Your circumstance, no matter how dark, will never come close to proving otherwise.

II. Circumstances don't limit God's ability. [Genesis 39:23]

If there was ever a medium where God's artistry could truly shine, it is pain. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, catastrophes, persecutions, and in pressures, because of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." [2 Corinthians 12:10] Paul might as well have been referring to Joseph.

Circumstances surprise us. They never surprise God.

Circumstances limit us. They never limit God.

In the middle of what could have been a major setback, God once again sprang Joseph forward into a position of responsibility. Why would that matter in the Joseph narrative? Joseph cut his teeth leading other slaves in Potiphar's good graces. Now, he takes a stab at leading a once royal staff in Potiphar's dark dungeon. Either way, our young Hebrew was getting a crash course in leadership. One might say that he was being groomed for something significant, perhaps to co-rule a country? Imagine the spirit of turmoil experienced by leading desperate inmates. Imagine the spirit of turmoil experienced by rulers leading hungry masses.

C.S. Lewis wrote in The Problem of Pain, "

"We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."ii

Pain definitely gets our attention and puts us in a place of dependence on God. Ultimately it is more than a megaphone. It's a university. Inside struggle, we can get the equivalent of a liberal arts education in what it means to illustrate faith.

Difficult circumstances don't indicate that God has forgotten about you or that He will not rescue you. Difficult circumstances don't determine the measure of God's work or worth in your life.

Regarding Us:

I. Circumstances don't determine our usefulness. [Genesis 39:22]

Circumstances do not limit the ability of God to love us. Neither do they inhibit his ability to use us. Genesis 39:22 highlight Joseph's newfound success as a designated driving force while in prison. The

Bible says that whatever happened in that Egyptian slammer was according to Joseph. Much like Potiphar, the warden completely trusted Joseph, to the point of complete empowerment.

Difficult circumstances don't determine our usefulness to God or to others around us. Perhaps the first conclusion you deduce when the proverbial prison walls close in is that you're useless. The cry of depression is that no one loves you. No one needs you. No one will miss you. That cry is the boldest of lies. No matter the depth of your pain and personal imprisonment, you matter to God. You matter to this body. You matter to your family. You matter to the world we live in. Your circumstances don't determine your usefulness. That is God's job and He specializes in using weak vessels to manage daily details and accomplish major miracles.

God can use you where you are at in a powerful way. Your usefulness is not determined by the circumstance you are in, but by the Holy Spirit of God in you.

II. Circumstances don't distinguish our gifts. [Genesis 37:5; 40:8, 22; 41:25]

God gave Joseph the gift of interpreting dreams and understanding vision. They were glimpses into the future and how God would unfold His story. These dreams and visions occurred as a boy living at home. Remember the ones that incited hatred in his brothers? The ability to determine dreams happened in prison as a leader among prisoners. It happened in Pharaoh's court under immense pressure. In each case, it was not the circumstance that distinguished Joseph's gifts but God and the way He determined to use Joseph.

When faced with a difficult circumstance, you may automatically ask the question, "Why did this happen to me?" A better emphasis might be, "Why did you happen to this?" What is it that God might want to do uniquely through you in the middle of that messy moment? The answer to that is part of why He has you there. Circumstances don't distinguish your gifting. Instead, your gifting indicates how God might want to use you in those circumstances.

Circumstances may affect your mood or your spirit, but they don't define the resourcefulness of God when it comes to using a willing servant, endowed with gifts of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish His good purpose. The question isn't what God can do through you, but what you believe God can do through you.

Conclusion:

Joseph could have felt forgotten of God, being thrown in prison as an innocent man, once again falling from prominence, first in his father's house and now in Potiphar's. Ultimately, we know that Joseph was never forgotten by God, but he was forgotten by the cupbearer who had real opportunity to help the brother out. Two years passed according to Genesis 41:1. And all we know is that Joseph remained faithful.

It really is a matter of distinct trust. We must trust what God's word says about Him and also what it drives us to believe about us. At the end of the narrative, is God powerful or not? Are you His child or not? Are you committed to follow Him regardless of circumstance or not? While the enemy cannot theft your salvation, he can thwart your focus.

Feeling forgotten is a tool in the enemy's tackle box. Ironically, our greatest weapon against the attack of feeling forgotten, is our own memory. We must remember that God has promised to never leave or forsake. [Deuteronomy 31:6] We must remember that nothing is impossible with Him. [Luke 1:37] We must remember that we have been created with a purpose to do good works. [Ephesians 2:10] When we remember who God is and who we are, feeling forgotten fades.

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ⁱ Web Source: http://www.london24.com/entertainment/around-the-web/london_city_airport_publishes_top_10_most_unusual_lost_items_1_2211330

ⁱⁱ Web Source: <http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2976220-the-problem-of-pain>