

## A Long Wait

Genesis 39:21-40:22

Calvary Baptist Church of Holland

Sunday, November 13th, 2016

Pastor Paul L. Davis



**Key Goals:** (Know) Glimpse the sovereignty of God. (Feel) Feel content that God is in control. (Do) Choose to challenge ourselves.

**Introduction:** This morning we continue our epic adventure through the last chapters of the book of Genesis, with the theme of living differently. Each week you have had the opportunity to choose to challenge yourself. This morning you will have new and unique opportunities. Joseph's story dwarfs any other event or person in the entire book of Genesis. There are clearly things in this man's life that God wants us to know. Over the last two weeks, we painfully watched Joseph's roller coaster life: his father's favorite son, betrayed by 10 half-brothers, sold into slavery to an Egyptian named Potiphar. Because the LORD was with him, he became the ruler of the entire house until he was unfairly accused, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison. That is where we find Joseph—in prison. There are many of us this morning living in painful circumstances over which we have no control, and these circumstances are not going to end soon. In the midst of these circumstances, it is easy to become bitter and angry at God. What I love most about the Bible is that it is straightforward about our pain. Suffering is going to happen and II Timothy 3:12 warns that it is going to happen to people of faith. But instead of running from it, the Bible teaches us ways to use our suffering. James 1:2-4 tells us that suffering grows our faith and produces spiritual endurance. So instead of being surprised by difficulty and suffering (I Peter 4:12), we should prepare ourselves and look for God's good hand in it. Genesis 40 may be the greatest chapter in the Bible on how to suffer well. Let's see if we can spot some life lessons.

We will start where we left off last week, in Genesis 39:20. *And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.* The Hebrew word translated prison means "round house." Don't imagine this as a big modern prison with lots of cells; it was most likely a round underground room large enough for a few men, with its entrance in the ceiling. Watch how God shows up in verse 21. *But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.* YHWH was with Joseph and he showed him "steadfast love." The Hebrew word is "hesed," that is God's persistent and unconditional tenderness, kindness, and mercy. It is at the core of his relationship with man in that he seeks after us with love and forgiveness. It is one of the key descriptors of God in the Old Testament.

Turn with me quickly to Exodus 34:6-7. The context is Mount Sinai. The Children of Israel are at the base of the mountain, and this is just after the Golden Calf incident where Moses in anger threw down the two tablets of the Lord's commands. Moses has gone back up the mountain to meet with God a second time. In the midst of all the sin and rejection of God, the Lord comes down and meets with Moses. As he passes before him, God describes himself. *The Lord passed before him (Moses) and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (hesed) and faithfulness," keeping steadfast love (hesed) for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.* These two verses are one of the clearest descriptions of God that we have in the entire Bible; the best part is that it is God describing himself. These verses answer the question, "God, how would you describe you?" God says, "The best way to



describe me is: merciful, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in *hesed*<sup>1</sup>—persistent and unconditional tenderness, kindness, and mercy. The only descriptor that appears twice in these verses is *hesed*. God wants us to be clear that he is a persistently loving God. This aspect of God is everywhere in the Old Testament.

Because of God's steadfast love:

He is committed and faithful to us. Ho 2:19

He is drawn close to us. Jer. 31:3

He comforts us when we struggle. Ps 119:76

We can look to God for mercy. Ps 51:1

Our prayers are heard. Ps 119:149

We are preserved in times of trouble. Ps 40:11

We receive mercy. Isa 54:8

Believers can expect to know this love during affliction. Ps 42:7, 8

The most powerful aspect of Genesis 39:21 is that this is the first time God reveals himself as a God who is lovingly at work in our suffering—preserving us, comforting us, and faithfully hearing our prayers. God loved Joseph ... *and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*<sup>22</sup> *And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.*<sup>23</sup> *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.* Just like in Potiphar's house, Joseph's life was different. He was trusted and rose in authority.

Genesis 40:1–4

<sup>1</sup> *Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense (literally - sinned) against their lord the king of Egypt.* <sup>2</sup> *And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker,<sup>3</sup> and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard (Potiphar), in the prison where Joseph was confined.* <sup>4</sup> *The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.*

There is something going on here that is tough to spot in English. We have three people in this story: the captain of the guard, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. In the Hebrew, each of these men is described with the same word (captain/chief = "sar"<sup>2</sup>). In other words, these men were equals in Pharaoh's court. All of them would have been important advisors with Pharaoh's ear.

Genesis 40:5–8

<sup>5</sup> *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.* <sup>6</sup> *When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled.* <sup>7</sup> *So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?"* <sup>8</sup> *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."*

Notice Joseph's question. "*Do not interpretations belong to God?*" This is consistent with Joseph's witness and another opportunity to teach an Egyptian about YHWH. Think about the incredible closeness and

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<sup>1</sup> R. Laird Harris, "698 סֵרֵס," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 305.

<sup>2</sup> James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

confidence Joseph must have had in his relationship with YHWH to say to these powerful men, “Tell me your dreams and God will interpret them.”

Genesis 40:9–22

<sup>9</sup> So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me,<sup>10</sup> and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes.<sup>11</sup> 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.”

Without hesitation, Joseph gives an interpretation.

<sup>12</sup> Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness (the Hebrew is “hesed” he is asking for faithful kindness) to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.<sup>15</sup> 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.”

Joseph specifically asks the cupbearer for one thing—*hesed*—the kindness of sharing his story with Pharaoh. Joseph was not asking for a favor, he was calling the cupbearer to be lovingly-faithful to a person who helped him in a time of need. This is the same call that Jesus gives us: love others because we have been loved; forgive others because we have been forgiven!

<sup>16</sup> When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head,<sup>17</sup> 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.”<sup>18</sup> And Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days.<sup>19</sup> 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.”

This is not Joseph’s interpretation, it is God’s—and mercifully, Joseph gives it to him straight.

<sup>20</sup> On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday (probably a celebration of Ra’s rebirth—which was celebrated by giving gifts and releasing prisoners)<sup>3</sup>, 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.<sup>21</sup> He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.<sup>22</sup> But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.<sup>23</sup> Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Verse 23 is one of the most painful verses in our journey so far. Yes, brothers throwing one of their own in a pit is painful. Being falsely accused and convicted is painful. But being forgotten in your time of despair? That is uniquely painful. The first four words of Genesis 41 drive home the pain, because the story will not pick up again until *after two whole years*.

**Life Lesson #1: God’s *hesed* (persistent and unconditional tenderness, kindness, and mercy) is how and why we persevere through suffering.** We see in this passage and others that it is in times of affliction

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<sup>3</sup> K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 751–752.

that God hears our prayers, fulfills his promises, and draws close to us.<sup>4</sup> As we get toward the end of Joseph's life, we will see clearly how God was committed and faithful to Joseph. His lowest points will be the vehicles God uses to move Joseph to new opportunities and seasons of ministry.

**Life Lesson #2: Those who suffer well understand that God is with them.** When we studied chapter 39 last week, no one was surprised to hear that God was "with Joseph" on his successful rise in Potiphar's house (39:2-3). But we are told just as emphatically that God was with Joseph while he was in the pit (39:21-23). In chapter 40, no one could have had the confidence Joseph did that God was able to interpret dreams through him apart from an intimate walk with God in that dungeon. God is not far off. The God of the Bible is not aloof. He is close and he hears our prayers. Isaiah 41:17 says *When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them.*

**Life Lesson #3: "Remembering" someone who is suffering is a key role of the body of Christ.** Unfortunately, I think we can all relate to the cupbearer forgetting Joseph. At some point all of us have seen suffering, thought we should do something, and then forgotten. Our God never forgets us. Isaiah 49:15 asks a powerful question: *Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?* (The obvious answer is no.) *Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you.* Because our God is a God who remembers, we must remember too. The orphan, the widow, those in prison—we have been remembered, so we must remember!

**Challenge by Choice:** As we close, we are again offering you the opportunity to be challenged. There are cards with one of six different challenges on them; these are specific applications from this morning's message. By choosing a card, you will be like Joseph: you won't know what you will get—it may be something difficult, it may be something easy. Like Joseph, you will not know until you get there, but each of the challenges will help you live differently.

### Community Group Discussion

1. As you begin your discussion, have one group member open their Bible to Genesis 40 and have the rest of the group try to tell the story of Genesis 40 from memory. Discuss what you missed and what stood out.
2. Joseph's life is one of extremes. This week we saw him hit bottom by being forgotten. How does a deep faith in God help one through the extreme ups and downs in life?
3. This is the third time Joseph has been hurt by people he was living with and serving. Why do you think Joseph did not grow bitter or angry?
4. Discuss why you did or did not pick up a "challenge by choice" card.
5. Look up the following verses about God "remembering" people. Since you know God cannot forget, what is the Bible telling us that God was doing? (Genesis 8:1; 9:15, 16; 19:29; 30:22; 42:9)
6. Discuss your "challenge by choice." Will it be easy for you or hard? Why? Share with the group how they might pray for you to accomplish your challenge.

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<sup>4</sup> See these passages for details... Ho 2:19; Jer. 31:3; Ps 40:11; Ps 119:76; Ps 51:1; Isa 54:8; Ps 119:149; Ps 42:7, 8

