

The Forgotten Promise. Really?

Մոռցուած Խոստովմը

A Sermon Series on the Life of Joseph

Gen 39:22-23; 40:1-23

It is not easy to be in the pit. Joseph's life is literally in a pit. Let us look back. He was attacked by his brothers, he was thrown into a pit to die, he was sold as a slave, he was resold as a slave-servant to Potiphar, he was elevated in the house to be the chief of the servants, he was falsely accused of adultery, and was thrown into the prison-pit.

You would think taking a stand for righteousness and witnessing to the truth would bring blessings, but instead our brother Joseph is in the "pit". **The narrator never expresses any anger or emotional outburst from Joseph.** This does not mean Joseph did not have any emotions. Remember later in the story he went inside and wept. Joseph was in prison. I wonder what was going in his mind. "If God is with me, how come I am going through all these difficulties?" But the biblical text emphasizes that the Lord was with Joseph, (last Sunday's sermon: Potiphar realized that the Lord was with Joseph.) The text does not indicate that Joseph was discouraged or in despair. He was faithful to God and a hard working person.

David went through tough times and asked these questions:

"Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (Psalm 10:1)

"How long, O LORD ? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"(Psalm 13:1-2)

God will answer these questions, patience!

-In Prison- God's *Hesed* (steadfast Love) (Gen 39:22-23)

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. ²³The 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.

How interesting... Joseph gets promoted again, and this time in prison. The chief of guards gives the control of the prison to Joseph. Again and again, I find loyalty of Joseph to his "masters" and to God. Integrity: loyal and trustworthy in ALL circumstances. This is what God wants us to have in the WORLD.

-The Butler and Baker Imprisoned with Joseph (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. ²And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody. (40:1-4)

How interesting that we find these two important people (Pharaoh's high-ranking officials) come to the same prison as Joseph. To become the king's *butler* or *baker* is a highly responsible job. Like Potiphar (the chief bodyguard), they should be **trustworthy**. They should test everything before giving it to the king. They had done something wrong against the king and were thrown in prison.

-The Butler's and the Baker's Dream (40:5-8)

⁵And 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. ⁶When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" ⁸They 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." (40:5-8)

Amazing attitude with Joseph. He is in prison, he finds new inmates who come from high society of the palace. His question to them: "Why are your faces downcast today?" Seriously Joseph. How come his face is not down?

Joseph's heart is with God. Maybe in "pit" but he knows God is at work.

Once again we find that dreams are means to show **God is sovereign**. Do you remember Joseph's dreams to his family? We will find later Pharaoh's dream about the future. In the Bible, we see two people who interpret dreams for their king: **Joseph and Daniel**. Each king was serving a pagan God, one in Egypt one in Mesopotamia. In the Bible, God used different ways to convey His message to people. Through these dreams, God told the people (pagan or Hebrew) that He is in control.

Do you see how Joseph gives the credit to God? Then Joseph said to them, "**Do not interpretations belong to God?** Tell me your dreams." (v.8)

In other words, when are you going to learn that God can help you? Why are you looking for your answers somewhere else? Don't we do the same thing? We seek for answers for our "dreams" in wrong places!

-The Good and Bad News that Joseph Gave (40:9-13, 16-19)

The first dream:

So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, ¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ 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.” ¹² Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. ¹³ 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. (40:9-13)

The second dream:

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, ¹⁷ 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.” ¹⁸ And Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. ¹⁹ 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.” (40:16-19)

Both had dreams. The butler's dream indicated a positive outcome, but the baker's dream had a bad ending.

Joseph did interpret the dreams. Joseph was **honest and bold**. He gave good and bad news. He did not compromise whatever God gave him to reveal.

Let me tell you that God revealed to us His will and commandments in the Bible. He revealed them through the prophets and His messengers. But God gave His final revelation through His Son Jesus Christ. The disciples and the authors of the Bible wrote these revelations to us in a book we call **the Bible**. Although the Bible has one message, which is the **Good News of Jesus Christ**, yet it is a **double-edged sword**.

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Heb 4:12)

God is not in the business of pleasing us. God is in business of molding us, making us to walk in the path of righteousness and justice.

We should not just hear things that make us “feel good.” There are sermons on TV that we hear that make you just “feel good.” There is nothing bad in feeling good, yet watch out, only in being with God, who encourages us and rebukes us, we can learn to “feel good”. The Word of God rebukes our sins. The Word of God encourages us that we are not alone in our walk and that The Lord is with us.

Joseph did not compromise the message. He gave the bad and the good news to the prisoners.

-Remember Me (40:14-15)

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 (prison NIV). ¹⁵For 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 (dungeon NIV).”(40:14-15)

For the first time ever we see that the narrator reveals Joseph’s inner thoughts. He reveals how Joseph **felt being in the pit, in the dungeon**. How he was carried off from his home and brought to Egypt by force. “*Show me some kindness*”. The word used here is **hesed**, which is the same word as used in describing how **God loves His creation**, His people. This is a **loyal love** to His people, even when they do not deserve it. God expresses that loyal love towards His creation (like *agape* in NT). Joseph is pleading to this man to show him kindness (*hesed*) and asking him not to forget him when he is released from the prison.

-The Fulfillment of the Dreams (40:20-22)

On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, 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. ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. ²² But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. (40:20-22)

It happened exactly as Joseph had predicted it. One was exalted and the other was hanged.

-The Forgotten Promise (40:23)

²³Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

How could he forget Joseph?

We humans are not good in remembering our promises. Even when we mean well, we have the habit of forgetting things.

Do you know that keeping a promise is a virtue?

Conclusion/Application:

1-The Forgotten promise is not forgotten by God

In chapter 41 we see that **after 2 years** the butler finally remembers that there was a man called Joseph in the prison.

Two years in the prison. Think about it. I remember my brother Sako had a car accident in Syria a long time ago. I was with him in the car. They took us to jail, (that was the law in Syria). Being a minor, I was soon released, but my brother, who was the driver, stayed in jail for a week. When my father visited him in the jail, my brother begged him to do anything to take him out of that place.

Two years in the jail with the hope that this man would one day remember him... A forgotten promise, yet you know God did not forget Joseph. In fact, God has His own timing.

When Jesus was buried in the tomb, the disciples and the people thought this was the end. But God did not forget His promise. Jesus was raised from the dead.

God did not forget Joseph, absolutely. **God had plans.** He had plans to preserve the seeds of this family. He had made a covenant with His people, that one day the Messiah would come from this family. Those plans required that Joseph stayed in prison, even for two years, so one day he would be exalted in Pharaoh's palace(41:9-14).

God is the main actor of this story, do not forget. He has the master plan. We need to learn to trust Him. **We need to learn that God is greater than the circumstances we live in.**

Let me give you another example from prison life:

God allowed Peter, Paul and the other disciples to be in the prison, closing the prison doors, so one day new doors would be opened in their lives. Because of the prison experience, new doors opened in palaces and public places to speak boldly about Christ.

Even **Stephen's speech** in Acts 7 includes a message from Joseph's life:

⁹"Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. (Acts 7:9,10 NIV)

Prison doors closed so that palace doors would be opened for Joseph.

The prophets of Israel faced similar situations where they did not understand everything but they trusted that God would reveal to them day-by-day.

**“Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing
without revealing his plan
to his servants the prophets.”** (Amos 3:7)

2 -Joseph learned to wait for the Lord

Joseph was in slavery for 13 years including the two years of prison. He learned to wait for the Lord.

Also he did not only sit down, relax and sleep all these years. **He was a doer.** Every place he went he was given charge of the situation. He became the chief executive in Potiphar’s house. He became the chief of the prison. He was a doer.

I heard from a preacher this interesting line. **“The church is not a cruise-ship; the church is a battleship.”**

In the cruise ship, people come and relax and others serve them.

In the battleship, everyone has an assignment. No one in a battleship complains about the chairs, the room temperature, or the food...etc. They are in a battle. They have learned to listen and obey the **commander-in-chief**.

We need to learn from Joseph that things can be tough, yet waiting for the Lord is the answer. This does not mean that we do nothing; this means we ask God to give us guidance how to be His servants daily in our lives.

Joseph did his best while waiting. In Eccles. 9:10 we read the following:

¹⁰ **Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.**

Did you hear that: Do it with all your might.

Let me finish with these words from the bible:

**“But those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)**

Amen

-I read about **Southwest Airlines**. Did you know how tough it was for this airline to start? **Colleen Barrett**, a secretary of a lawyer became the president of the airline. She says that they learned by going through difficult times. When they started three other airlines sued them. That made them struggle and helped them learn how to be an airline. The lawsuit provided Southwest with “free” advertisement on the first pages of all newspapers and magazines. It was the top hot news those days.

After three years of struggle, nowadays this airline is great one. I use it often when I go to LA.