

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/25/92
Genesis 40 "When God Seems Far Away"

Intro:

Illust: We have a new resident in our home. His name is Mickey. Katie's pet hamster. He's an intriguing creature to watch...There's one thing he does that fascinates me. He has a wheel in his cage. He hops on that wheel and starts running. He runs and runs, around and around. For hours on end. The book says hamsters can run several miles a day (!)! I watch that little creature as he pumps those legs as if there was no tomorrow. And it hits me, he's pouring all that energy into running, but he's getting nowhere!

Q: Can you identify? Do you ever feel like you're a participant in the ratrace of life, but getting nowhere? Do you ever wonder if your life really has any purpose and direction and meaning?

Illust:

Q: Have you ever felt forgotten by God?

Quote: C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed, "Meanwhile, where is God?..."

Joseph was a man who, humanly speaking, had every right to feel that he was forgotten and forsaken by God. This morning, we once again return to probe into his life. Our text today is Genesis 40. Let me retrace his steps briefly.

In his early years, he had been his father's favorite son. Dad Jacob set Joseph up for great heartache by giving him preferential treatment, namely by placing the ornamental coat of many colors on his shoulders. His 10 older brothers despised him. Then the bottom fell out of his life.

Joseph was a young man at the time, around 17 years of age. By the time he was around 20, he had lost nearly everything a person could value.

1. Joseph had lost his family (ch 39).

His brothers sold him into slavery. His father, whom he loved more than anyone in the world, was deceived into thinking he had been killed by a wild animal. Joseph would not see his beloved father for the next 13 eternal years.

2. Joseph had lost his freedom (ch 39).

In the prime of his youth, Joseph became a slave in a far away country. There he knew no one. He had been victimized by his own flesh and blood. He had lost his freedom. In the eyes of the world, he was no longer a person, but a thing, a piece of property, owned by a man named Potiphar.

3. Joseph had lost his Reputation (ch 39).

I think this was perhaps the most painful to bear. Joseph did what was right. He did the right thing! When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, he remained loyal to his master and to his God. He said "No!" to the enticement of sexual sin. He did the right thing. But it all backfired! The crafty woman framed him. She fabricated a lie about him. She said he was the guilty party, that he attacked her. And he was helpless to protect himself. Who would believe his word against hers? He was a lowly slave. She was married to a man who worked for the Pharaoh of Egypt! In a legal system much like ours, he was assumed guilty until proven innocent.

Illust: Clarence Thomas case...

He was thrown into prison. Joseph had lost everything--his family, his freedom, and now his reputation. When we come to Gen 40, Joseph is in the deepest valley of his life. And it's going to get even deeper before we leave.

Q: Have you ever felt like God had forgotten you, that He was far away?

Proposition: This morning, Genesis 40 is going to teach us that even in the lowest points of our lives, even if we feel forsaken and forgotten, God is still at work.

I. The Story of Genesis 40

- A. Episode #1: The People (1-4)
- B. Episode #2: The Problem (5-19)
- C. Episode #3: The Party (20-22)

II. The Significance of Genesis 40

- A. What it's NOT...
 - 1. To promote dreams
 - 2. To impress us with Joseph
- B. What it IS... (23)
 - 1. To show us that God never forgets us
 - a. Though we may feel forgotten
 - b. Though men may forget us
 - 2. To challenge us to trust in God

Our approach is this. We want to look at the story, then the significance.

I. The Story of Genesis 40

When the story begins, Joseph is in prison, a special prison reserved for political prisoners. Even in prison, though, God was real to Joseph. God's hand was so evident in his life that the warden promoted him to administrator of the prisoners.

READ 39:21-23

Now let's look at the 3 episodes of Gen 40.

A. Episode #1: The People (1-4)

Vv 1-2 "And it came to pass...the butler...the baker...offended their lord..."

Here we're introduced to 2 staff members of Pharaoh's administration. The first is called the "butler" in the KJV. The word indicates he was actually not a blacksuited doorhop, but the king's cupbearer. That's the same job Nehemiah had for King Artaxerxes. The cupbearer tasted the King's drink first to make sure it wasn't poisoned and would be pleasing to his boss. The other fellow was Pharaoh's chief baker.

We're told these men "offended" their boss. How, we're not informed. Maybe the Baker burnt the King's pastries and the Cupbearer spilled the juice on his boss's favorite shirt! What happened?

V 3 "And he put them in prison in the house of the captain of the guard..."

Aha! The plot thickens a bit! While they await their trial these men are detained in the same political prison holding Joseph. In fact, who was in charge of this prison, acc to v 3? "The captain of the guard" Who was that? Potiphar! Evidently Joseph had regained some of his trust, for look what he did in v 4.

V 4 "And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them..."

The cupbearer and baker were put in Joseph's custody. For how long did he attend them? "A season," though we're not sure how long that is.

B. Episode #2: The Problem (5-19)

V 5 "And they dreamed a dream both of them..."

How coincidental that both men dreamed such peculiar dreams the same night! Or was it a coincidence? The next morning, Joseph made his rounds...

Vv 6-8 "And Joseph came in unto them...Why are you so sad?"

In ancient Egypt, as in other ancient countries, people had strong beliefs and superstitions regarding dreams. It was not uncommon to rely on dreams to unveil the future. So when these 2 Egyptian officials had similar dreams the same night, they were sure they related to their destiny. But they had a problem. Being incarcerated, they had no access to the interpreters commonly sought in Egypt. Then along came Joseph!

Joseph is quite a man of God! He's quite a model for us. One of the things we'll see Joseph do throughout his life is bring God into his conversations with people. Not in a forced, canned manner. But naturally. Here, when the butler and baker are stumped by their dreams, Joseph points out with conviction, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" I like that. Joe wasn't interested in bringing people's attention to himself. That's pride. No, he redirected people's attention to God. That's evangelism.

Illust:

Next, the cupbearer shares his dream with Joseph.

Vv 9-11 "And the chief butler told his dream..."

A strange dream! The cupbearer had seen a vine with 3 branches. The vine budded and produced grapes. Then the cupbearer saw himself squeeze juice out of the grapes into a cup, and give it to Pharaoh.

What did the dream mean? Remember, Joe didn't interpret the dream by using mere human skill. Rather God revealed it to him.

Vv 12-13 "And Joe said...Yet within 3 days..."

In 3 days, you'll be out of jail! In fact, Pharaoh will restore you to your job!

Then Joseph threw in a P.S.

Vv 14-15 "But think on me...for I have done nothing..."

You can feel for Joseph. He'd been wronged. He was the victim of selfish hands--his brother's who sold him, Potiphar's wife who framed him, Potiphar who sentenced him. His appeal is clear, "Butler, don't forget me! Please don't. Help me!"

The Baker liked what he heard. So he took his turn...

Vv 16-17 "When the chief baker..."

Another strange dream, to us. The Baker was walking with 3 baskets of bread on his head. You can still see this practice of carrying baskets on the head in the Middle East today. In the top basket, there were the baked goods intended for Pharaoh. Notice the phrase "all manner of foods" (17). One commentary I read said there were 38 varieties of cakes and 57 varieties of breads (Kidner). But what happened before the Baker met the Pharaoh? The birds ate the goods in the top basket!

Then came Joseph's interpretation...

Vv 18-19 "And Joseph answered..."

Notice the obvious play on words...

v 13 To the Cupbearer--"lift up thy head"

v 19 To the Baker--"lift up thy head from off thee"

Q: Did Joseph really believe these dreams would happen as he said?

A: There's no doubt he did. He knew it was from God. In fact, notice he makes no mention to the Baker about making mention of him before Pharaoh. Why not? He knew it would do no good. In 3 days, the Cupbearer would be exonerated, while the Baker would be executed.

Illust:

The story reaches the climax in episode 3--The people, the problem, and...

C. Episode #3: The Party (20-22)

V 20 "And it came to pass...Pharaoh's birthday...a feast..."

Everything happened just as Joseph predicted. On the third day, Pharaoh threw a grand party. He invited all his official staff, including the 2 imprisoned household servants. It was some party. Not everyone, however, celebrated...

V 21 "And he restored the chief butler..."

V 22 "But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted..."

Illust:

What a story! But why? What's the point?

Tran: Having looked at the 3 episodes of the story, let's probe the significance.

II. The Significance of Genesis 40

I want to probe the significance of Gen 40 from 2 angles. First...

A. What it's NOT...

God did NOT give us Gen 40 to...

1. To promote dreams

Did God use dreams in leading His people in Bible times? Yes--remember Joseph's dreams in ch 37? Does God still want us to depend on dreams for guidance? No. Why not? Why are we different than Joseph? God gave Joseph and other biblical

characters special guidance through dreams. But we have the completed special revelation, the sufficient Scriptures. We have no need for extra revelation.

II Pt 1:3 "has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness"

II Pt 1:19 "We have a more sure word of prophecy..."

2. *To impress us with Joseph*

Joseph was quite a man. But if you close the book of Gen 40 impressed merely with Joseph, you've missed the main character.

What is the significance of Gen 40?

B. What it IS... (23)

V 23 "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him."

The cupbearer was just like everybody else. All he could think of was himself. When Joseph needed him the most, he forgot him. Listen. This wasn't a momentary lapse of memory. He didn't just forget him in the thrill of the birthday party...

41:4 "...at the end of 2 full years..."

Joseph was abandoned for 2 full years in prison! Wow, just when you think things can't get worse for Joseph, they do. Blow number one, he was betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave. Blow number two, he was framed by Potiphar's wife and sent to prison. Blow number three, he was forgotten by the only man who could aid his cause.

Three strikes and you're out! Right? Not always!

The story of Joseph in Gen 40 is designed to accomplish 2 purposes for us:

1. *To show us that God never forgets us*

God never forgets us. Never. God never forgets us though 2 things may happen:

a. Though we may feel forgotten

b. Though men may forget us

V 23 takes us down to the pit that held Joseph. He had been forgotten by men. And no doubt he felt forgotten by God.

Illust: Story of Mary Verghese (Yancey, 88)

Gen 40 shows us that God never forgets us. There's a second purpose...

2. *To challenge us to trust in God*

Joseph was forgotten by men. He had to learn the basic truth of Christianity. How does a person become a Christian, and how does a person live the Christian life? The answer is the same...

Rom 1:17 "The just shall live by faith." (Gal 3:11; Hab 2:4)

Joseph's faith was not dependent upon his circumstances. His faith was dependent upon his faithful God. He knew what God had revealed to him through the dreams in Gen 37. He knew that the trials were not the end of the story.

In many ways, Joseph is a picture for us of the Lord Jesus Christ. (see Alan Stringfellow, "Through the Bible in One Year")

--Joseph was the well-beloved son of his father. So was Christ. (Mt 3:17)

--Joseph was sent by his father, and willingly went to do his will. (Jn 3:16)

--Joseph was victimized by the hateful plot of his own. (Jn 1:10)

--Joseph was tempted and did not yield. (Mt 4)

--Joseph was accused and condemned wrongfully. (Mt 26:59, 65)

Is 53:3-4 "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows...yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."

--Later Joseph was exalted and given power over all Egypt. (Mt 28:18)

--Ultimately, the people of Egypt and the world, and even Joseph's brothers, would come to Joseph that their lives might be saved (47:25).

Acts 4:12 says of Jesus, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is..."

There in the lonely prison, Joseph was learning that he must put his trust, not in his feelings, not in people, but in God. So must we...

Eg--Divorce victims...

Eg--Teens let down by friends

Q: Who are you trusting now?

Challenge: God will at times allow us to hit bottom so we'll learn to trust Him.

Prov 3:5-6

Ps 9:10; 20:7; 37:3, 5; 56:4, 11; 91:2

Q: Are you trusting in God?