

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 11/8/92
Genesis 41 "From Prison to the Palace in a Day!"

Communion: Read Mark 14:17-25

Jesus was betrayed. Later He was exalted. He was rejected. Later He was honored. First came the Cross. Then came the Crown. He reminded His disciples of both truths the night before His crucifixion.

This morning we'll see Joseph following this same pattern.
"From the Prison to the Palace in a Day!" Genesis 41

Intro: Why do bad things happen to good people?

Illust: Elie Wiesel was a man who suffered unjustly in a horrid, Nazi concentration camp. We today can not fathom the hellish experience he endured. It reduced what faith he had to a scorched cinder (Swindoll, 19). Here's what he said in his book entitled Night. "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp..."

None of us are exempt from pain. We live in world of pain. Swindoll is right when he observes--Every day children are stolen, abused, and aborted. Every day wives are battered. Every day spouses are abandoned by unfaithful partners. Drunk drivers maim and kill. Gossip and slander ruin reputations.

We can't escape pain in life. But the greatest test is how we respond to it.

Quote: Viktor Frankl wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms--to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." (Swindoll, 20)

I hurt when I listen to people who have been victimized. Both Christians and non-Christians. The accounts are incredible. There are a lot of hurting people around us. Their pain is intense. They can't escape from it. Perhaps it's you.

Q: How can we have the right attitude when our lives are inflicted by pain?

A: There's no easy answer. I will not offer to you trite cliches. But having said that, I am convinced God gives us firm guidance for this delicate question. In His Word, namely in the true account of the life of Joseph. Let's turn to Genesis 41.

Q: Why is Joseph qualified to answer that question for us?

A: Joseph had been hurt badly.

1. He was betrayed by his brothers (ch 37).
2. He was falsely framed by Potiphar's wife (ch 39).
3. He was unjustly sent to prison by Potiphar (ch 39).
4. He was forgotten by the Cupbearer (ch 40).

40:23 "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him."

Joseph's pain was excruciating. Men had shafted him time and time again. He'd been forgotten by men. No doubt he wondered if he'd been forgotten by God.

He could have grown bitter and despondent. After all, 2 whole years from the prime of his youth were wasted in prison. He could have become cynical and sarcastic. But he didn't.

Q: What kept Joseph going when he was in the pits?

A: God was real to him. His relationship with God was his #1 priority in life.

We're going to see this morning that God's ways are not always our ways. But God's ways are always good.

Proposition: When it seemed as though God had forgotten Joseph, He was still at work. God was still at the controls. Let's zero in on 3 steps that God controlled in Genesis 41.

I. Step 1--God Revealed (1-32).

II. Step 2--God Reversed (33-44).

III. Step 3--God Rewarded (45-57).

Application: Two responses...

1. During the waiting period, trust God without panic.
2. During the time of reward, thank God without pride.

I. Step 1--God Revealed (1-32).

V 1a "And it came to pass at the end of 2 full years..."

Those words strike like a dagger--TWO FULL YEARS. For Joseph, those were 2 years of waiting, wondering, wishing, wanting, and working. There he was, locked up against his will, far away from the only person in his life who really loved him, his father. The days passed, the weeks, then the months, even years. Two years earlier a glimmer of hope flickered for Joseph when he interpreted the Cupbearer's dream, and pleaded his case with him. But now the flicker was gone. Or was it?

No. God was still at the controls. Look what happened to Pharaoh...

V 1b "Pharaoh dreamed..."

Pharaoh actually had 2 dreams. Here's the first...

Vv 2-4 "And behold there came up out of the river 7 well favored cows..."

This is an Egyptian dream. The Hebrew is precise. The cows came up out of THE river, that being the Nile. Pharaoh saw the cows coming up out of the river. In Egypt, cattle would stand almost submerged in the Nile river, for protection from the heat and the flies.

Pharaoh watched as 7 healthy cows left the water and came on the bank of the river. They were followed by 7 sickly cows. Here's the strange part of the dream. The 7 sick cows ate the 7 healthy cows! After seeing that, Pharaoh woke up! We would have too!

When he fell back asleep, he dreamed a second dream...

Vv 5-7 "And he slept and dreamed the second time..."

The "east wind" (6) is a technical term for the desert wind. The Arabs actually distinguished between 2 "east winds," one that lasted 50 days and usually came in the Springtime, and another that was much shorter. In both cases, hot winds swept in from the desert and scorched and withered all plant life.

Watch what happened when Pharaoh got up in the morning.

V 8 "And it came to pass...his spirit was troubled...called for the magicians..."

Pharoah was the most powerful man in the country, if not in the world at the time. He had wealth and power. He called the shots and people jumped into action. Yet watch him here. He was miserable. His spirit was confused.

Illust: Elections were last week. Please remember that God is still on the throne of the universe! (see Isaiah 6)

Pharoah looked for help. He called on the experts to help him, those trained in magic and witchcraft. His problem was that he looked for help in the wrong places!

Illust: Like we often do...

Q: Where's the right place to look? Mt 11:28 "Come unto Me all ye..."

Then guess who entered the scene? The Cupbearer!

Vv 9-13 "Then spoke the chief butler..."

Two words impress me. In v 9--"THIS DAY." Just think of the timing, God's timing, in Joseph's life. Just at the right time, God brought the Midianite caravan to transport Joseph to Egypt. Just at the right time, God opened up a need for a slave in Potiphar's household. Just at the right time, God caused Joseph's path to cross with Pharoah's Cupbearer in prison. And just at the right time, God reminded the forgetful butler that the prisoner Joseph could interpret dreams.

Note: God's timing is perfect! There's no such thing as "chance."

Illust:

Q: What happened next?

V 14 "Then Pharoah sent and called Joseph..."

You can imagine Joseph's appearance after 2 years in an Egyptian jail. Notice they shaved him. Hebrews wore facial hair. It was not appropriate in Egyptian etiquette.

Q: How do you think Joseph felt when he heard he was being summoned by Pharoah? Here was his chance for amnesty! Do you think he was afraid or nervous? Wouldn't you expect him to be intimidated as he stood before the most powerful man in the world, the man who had the power to set him free or send him back to prison?

Listen to the dialogue...

Pharoah: "I've heard about you... You can interpret my dream." (15)

Joseph: "It's not me." (16) NIV, "I can't."

What! Joseph, don't blow your chance! Toot your own horn fellow! God helps those who help themselves, right?! Wrong! (Illust: Harold Morris before Parole Bd)

Joseph: "God shall give Pharoah an answer of peace."

Did you see that?! Right there is perhaps Joseph's greatest characteristics.

Key: He pointed people to God!

In ch 39, he pointed Potiphar's attention to God (39:3). He also pointed the warden's attention to God (39:23). In ch 40, he pointed the attention of the Cupbearer and Baker to God (40:8). And here in ch 41, when standing before Pharoah, he turned the spotlight on God.

Pharoah recounted his dream to Joseph in vv 17-24.

Watch what Joseph did next. He pointed Pharaoh's attention to the true God.
v 25 "God hath shown..."
v 28 "What God is about to do He showeth unto Pharaoh"
What? 7 years of plenty/7 years of famine (vv 29-30)
v 32 "the thing is established by God"

Q: Did Pharaoh catch on? Did his attention turn to Joseph's God?

A: V 39 "God hath shown the all this..."

Application: What's your ambition in life? Is it, like Joseph's, to make God great in people's eyes? Or is it to promote your own agenda?

Illust:

Tran: There's step one in Joseph's journey from prison to the palace--God revealed. God revealed His sovereign plan for the world. He used two dreams of Pharaoh. And He gave His man Joseph the ability and opportunity to interpret the dreams.

II. Step 2--God Reversed (33-44).

Q: What did God reverse? Joseph's status!

Do you know what catches my attention in this scene? Joseph's confidence. Here he is before the great Pharaoh. He's a slave, worse than that, a slave with a criminal record. Yet you don't see him shaking in his boots. He's confident. Not in himself, but in his God!

Illust:

Vv 33-36 "Now let Pharaoh seek out a man..."

Wow, what a great plan! Joseph exhibited great ingenuity and wisdom. He was a practical man. Pharaoh recognized it.

Vv 37-44 "And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh..."

What a turn of events! Just think of it! In less than an hour, Joseph went from the prison to the palace! When he woke up that morning, he was a felon. When he lay down that night, he was the number 2 man in all of Egypt!

Q: Why did it happen? God did it! God reversed Joseph's status.

Q: You say, "Why did God wait so long?"

I don't know. I doubt Joseph knew either. Here's our problem. We don't see things from God's perspective. When we're inflicted by pain, we're tempted to ask: "Why did God let this happen to me? I was trying to live for Him..." Sometimes we act as though we deserved privileged information about God's sovereign plan.

Quote: J.I. Packer describes that temptation in his outstanding book, Knowing God, "People feel that if they were really walking close to God, so that He could impart wisdom to them freely, then they would...discern the real purpose of everything that happened to them, and it would be clear to them every moment how God was making all things work together for good."

But we don't always know. God's ways ARE higher than our ways.

Here's what Joseph says to us. We may not know WHY God does what He does. But we can be sure that He is in total control, and that He is good.

Challenge: Our task is this. Be FAITHFUL WHERE WE ARE!

Determine every day that you're going to live for Jesus Christ. Now you may be thinking, "But I deserve better! I deserve a better job, better neighbors, better health...I deserve better!"

Quote: George Whitefield's darkest hour (96, 101)

Joseph would say, "Leave that up to God. Be faithful where you are. God is totally capable of reversing your circumstances in His time."

Illust: Job was a man who felt forgotten by God...

Job 23:3-4 "O that I knew where I might find Him. I would set my cause before Him."

Job 23:8-9 "Behold I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him..."

But listen to Job's affirmation.

Job 23:10 "But He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tested me, I shall come forth as gold."

Notice Job said "WHEN He has tested me," not IF. There's no quick way to refine gold. Neither is there a quick way for God to refine our character.

Quote: A.W. Tozer said, "It is necessary for God to use the hammer, the file, and the furnace in His holy work of preparing a saint for true sainthood. It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply."

There's no doubt Joseph had been through the fire. He had been hurt deeply.

Illust:

Tran: How can we have the right attitude when our lives are inflicted by pain? Gen 41 tells us loud and clear that God is in control. In Joseph's case, God revealed, reversed.

III. Step 3--God Rewarded (45-57).

God rewarded Joseph! How? In two ways...

A. God rewarded Joseph with Favor.

Vv 46-47 "And Pharaoh called Joseph's name..."

What a Cinderella story! From rags to riches! But don't lose sight of God! God did it! God promoted Joseph. God granted him favor with Pharaoh. God granted Joseph favor with the Egyptians.

I have a question.

Q: Do you think Joseph was "gunshy" after his third promotion?

Remember this is the third time he's been promoted. What happened the first 2 times? The first time was in Potiphar's house. He started as a lowly slave, moved up the ladder to Potiphar's chief executive, and then was thrown into prison. So he started over. He was a prisoner, so he determined to be the best prisoner he could be. He was promoted to be the warden's right hand man. Just when it looked like he would get out, the Cupbearer forgot him. His hopes were dashed again. He must have felt like a yo-yo.

Unlike some of us, Joe was not a pessimist. You don't see him grumbling, "Yea, I've been promoted, but I wonder what bad thing will happen next!"

God rewarded Joseph with favor.

Illust:

B. God rewarded Joseph with a Family.

God gave him a wife, and 2 sons. Their Hebrew names are important:

1. Manasseh (51) = "forgetting"

Manasseh means "to take the sting out of a memory." Listen. Had Joe been hurt in his life? Yes! Badly! Don't minimize his pain. Especially when we see how he forgave his brothers in ch 42. Don't ever get the idea forgiveness is easy. It's not. We need supernatural help.

2. Ephraim (52) = "fruitful"

Contrast: Noone thought of Joe in 40:23. Everyone came to him in 41:57!

Sometimes you may feel like nobody knows what's going on in your life.

Illust: Last week we flew to Rapid City, SD to visit my brother and his family. When Sherry and I left Dayton, it was gloomy and overcast. The 737 left the runway and cruised into the thick clouds. Minutes passed. As I peered out the window, I could see nothing but greyish, blah clouds. Until all of the sudden, the plane broke through the foggy blanket, and we were surrounded by bright blue sky and brilliant sunlight! Then something struck me. The sun had been shining all along! I just couldn't perceive it. The clouds blocked the sunlight and blue sky, but they were there nonetheless!

I don't know what's going on in your life right now. Perhaps you're on top of cloud nine, sailing along. Or perhaps your world is gray, and you're wondering if God has forgotten you.

I want to be very practical. Chuck Swindoll identifies 2 important responses that Joseph made that revealed that God was real to him. We need to make the same responses today.

1. During the waiting period, trust God without panic.

We can't avoid pain in our lives. Whether it's cancer or a broken relationship or a job termination. All of us will have cupbearers in our lives who will let us down when we need them the most. They'll forget us. And all we can do is wait.

Listen. During the waiting period, we must choose to trust God w/o panic. Ps 9:10; 20:7; 37:3, 5; 56:4, 11; 91:2

2. During the time of reward, thank God without pride.

When the pain is great, we call out to God often. We promise Him that if He'll get us out of the affliction, we'll never forget to praise Him and honor Him and live for Him. But often when He does, we don't.

Here's the second practical response. During the time of reward, when God does remove the pain, when God does send the showers of blessing, when the sky is blue and the sunshine bright, thank Him without pride! Thank Him continually.