

The Rock: 05-10-2020

Long-term faithfulness:

The journey of Joseph

Title: God in the silence

Scripture: Genesis 40:1-22

Theme:

Joseph makes the most of the situation he finds himself in through his faithful obedience. Yet in the world we live in, the culture we deal with—sarcasm, negativity, cynicism, would only see in a story like this, injustice and asks the question: Where is God?

Introduction:

One will never survive such a journey if we do not discover in the middle of the mess, **Who God is, who we are, and what purpose he has for us.**

A life of faith like Joseph, is the journey we all must decide to take. Do we? Do we allow our character to grow in a God-centered, missional type of way?

These are great questions to ask as we look this morning at how Joseph simply focused on doing the next right thing.

The Story:

Not only did Joseph get dreams about what God was going to do, but he also had the ability to discern what they meant.

We find that out when a couple of misbehaving servants of Pharaoh show up in prison.

"Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined."

-Genesis 40:1-3 ESV

As we begin to look at this portion of Joseph's life, I think it good that we understand his mindset right at this moment.

The verse that I think is most important in this chapter, because of the insight it gives, is verse 15:

"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."

-Genesis 40:15 ESV

Taken all by itself, one would think he was having a bit of a pity party. But in context of the entire chapter and his life, I believe it is something else completely.

It is a reflection and an acknowledgment that Joseph fully understands his situation, and yet he focuses on God's purposes and the gifts he has been given.

He uses them to the glory of God, and he hopes, also to his advantage.

"...remember me when it is well with you..."

-Genesis 40:14a ESV

Being falsely accused and imprisoned doesn't change how he responds or reacts. Nor does it mean he just sits in the corner sulking and waiting for God to do something for him.

Because he was an active participant in the plan and purpose of God, and in doing so, puts himself in the position of being "miraculously delivered."

Although it will take some time, as everything has so far in his life, Joseph stays faithful, even though he's upset with his situation.

Not to take off down a long and winding road, but I was thinking of Hebrews 11 as I studied for this. That great chapter on the heroes of the faith.

Verses 21-22 say this of Joseph:

"By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones."

-Hebrews 11:21-22 ESV

His only mention is framed out in Exodus thinking. He knew the purpose of his life as well as the promises of God and that was his focus.

That, at what was the very beginning of a 400-year ordeal, God in the end would prove faithful to his promise.

And Joseph believed that to the extent he made preparations for his bones to be brought back to the promised land.

How do we function (deal with) the quiet, confusing times when God seems silent? Are they moments of growth, times of deeper understanding, or re-focus perhaps?

If we see our current situation, such as it is, we discover that we actually have great opportunity. But we may have to remind ourselves that long-term faithfulness in one direction is what will get us there.

The church is meeting in a different way, but that does not mean our mission and task has changed.

Go into the world, make disciples. Do we see this as perhaps the start of something new? A shift in direction, and if so, do we ask the hard question of:

If these new things are what you want us to start doing Lord, what is it that I /we must STOP doing in order to focus on the new thing.

We can never go a new way doing the same old thing. That is such a clear truth, yet we tend to muddy the waters because we are afraid to let go.

Ok, far enough down that long and winding road. Because Joseph understood this principle. God was growing him and preparing him.

Yet, I can imagine that he wrestled with many of these same questions. Again verse 15 is for our benefit. It gives us a lot of insight into the heart and mind of this young man.

Because when these two people, the cup bearer and the baker had dreams, Joseph uses his gifts to help them.

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

-Genesis 40:6-8 ESV

Look boys, I can tell you about the dream, but don't think it's about me. God alone is the one who gives understanding into these things.

So Joseph hears their dreams, both of them fairly simple, but with dynamically different answers:

"Then Joseph said to him, (the cupbearer) "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. 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. 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.”

-Genesis 40:12-14 ESV

The caveat here: Don't forget me! Please, get me out of here.

The baker is not so lucky. Thinking he's going to get a good interpretation; he tells Joseph what his dream was all about and get this:

“This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. 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.”

-Genesis 40:18-19 ESV

Not really something I would suggest leading with, myself. But there you have it. “You're gonna hang and the birds are gonna eat you. Have a good day...”

I can imagine the baker. “Well that didn't end well. Are you sure you heard your God correctly? I'm not a real fan of what you've said.”

“Well, I'm not a real fan of being in prison, but here we are. I know there is a purpose in all of this and that's why I want you to remember me before Pharaoh.”

Joseph reminds me of Daniel (The Prophet), and vice-versa. Two young men in exile, who have the gift of interpreting dreams.

Both serve pagan/heathen masters to the best of their ability AND to the glory of God.

And yet, they never violate their core principles of their character. **God is first in all things and all situations.**

Because of that, all things work out. Strangely enough, this is how Joseph is to eventually become known to Pharaoh.

Through ordinary, everyday events with Providential undertones. Remember how the chapter started: "Sometime after this..."

After what? After he was thrown in prison. Joseph's faithfulness to this point, sets him up to be in the right position at the right time, for when two men who are closest to Pharaoh, end up in his care.

Coincidence? I don't think so. Listen, if Joseph had not been falsely accused and sent to prison, do you think he would have ever left the service of Potiphar?

In asking that question, we **Discover God** to be in the process. Because I don't think Joseph would have left his service.

Would you? I probably wouldn't. In fact, as I reflect back over some of the key moments in my life, if I had not been "displaced", I am pretty sure I would have stayed right where I was.

So, what that really means is that in the middle of bad things happening to a good person **-God is at work.**

How? In the fact that he is actually using the false accusation to position Joseph in such a way to be recognized by Pharaoh himself.

Now, I know that many times we have found ourselves in bad positions because we have made one too many foolish and dumb decisions.

But I would challenge you in the midst of that, I would challenge all of us in fact, to ask deeper questions:

"If I am prayerfully doing what God is calling me to do, and things go wrong or get very hard: **What is God trying to show me? What is he trying to grow in my life and stretch me in?**

You see, the false teaching that says: Your faith is not strong enough, and that's why you suffer, struggle and have bad things happen to you.

That theology falls completely apart when held up against the lives of Joseph, Daniel and Paul the apostle.

Say nothing of looking at the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Why?

Because all of these men, Joseph included, were doing everything right, and yet things just seemed to keep going wrong.

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

-Genesis 40:23 ESV

And verse 15 once again:

"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."

-Genesis 40:15 ESV

Do any of us honestly believe it is because his faith just isn't what it should be? As though our faith determines God's plans and purposes for us.

No, Joseph is exactly where he is supposed to be in the plans and purposes of God. And that is a hard truth.

Because we may very well think that God has actually abandoned him, or gone

silent in the midst of all this
injustice.

Unless we have the Holy Spirit to open
our hearts and minds to understand all
this, we will be just like our culture:

Cynical, sarcastic and wondering if God
even exists in all this mess. Rest
assured, He does. If you are in Christ,
be patient with those who are not.

Extend grace, because the truth of the
matter is this: Yes, it looks very much
like God is silent or perhaps simply
doesn't exist when we read stories like
this.

Be prayerful for the non-believer, allow
them to ask questions and wonder. You and
I did before we came to Christ. Even now
as I grow in Jesus, there are things,
injustices in this world that I struggle
with and ask: Why, God?

It's ok to do that. You are asking the
right questions of the right God. He
wants us to come to him. Especially in
the silence, and the injustice.

Joseph knows he is falsely imprisoned.
But he knows that God is not silent in it
all. He wasn't then, he isn't now, and he
certainly wasn't on the cross.

That moment in human history when Sin and all injustice was dealt with, once and for all time.

Jesus, King and Lord, didn't deserve what he got, and yet it was God's will for Him.

"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again."

-Matthew 26:41-44 ESV

Here in the prison of Egypt, we see the same steadfast faithfulness in Joseph. Now, he may not understand **WHY** he is stuck there, but he does know **THAT GOD** is with him.

He knows who God is, he is discovering who he is in light of that truth, and in the gift of interpretation, and it seems administration as well, he is discovering what his purpose is in God's plan.

So, what does he do? Does he get bitter? Stop believing God and get cynical about

life? NO, he steps in and simply continues to do **the next right thing**, no matter what the cost.

Are you doing that? Are you thinking and praying in that way? I want to challenge you to do so. Ask God what He is doing in the circumstances of your life, and what you should be doing to grow in your relationship with Him.

I close with this, as a reflective thought for us all.

Joseph didn't have this "Oh well" attitude. Neither did he tackle each day and situation with cynicism and sarcasm. (I have to remind myself each day not to be this way. It is an on-going battle for me)

He faced it head on in light of who he knew God to be. You see, God is in the silence, and if we recognize it, we grow in deep character and spiritual ways.

He is forming us all and shaping us for what He has next for us to do. As individuals and as a community of believers here at The Rock. So, let's be prayerful in that direction.

Long-term faithfulness got us to where we are, and continued long-term faithfulness will get us to where He is calling us to go next.