

The Rock: 05-17-2020

Long-term faithfulness:

The journey of Joseph

Title: Time to shine

Scripture: Genesis 41:1-16

Theme:

Overnight success often takes years of quiet work and preparation. Each event in Joseph's life was preparing him for this moment.

Introduction:

Long-term faithfulness is seen in the day to day showing up, doing the hard work, most of which no one but God will see, then going home -and the next day getting up to do the same thing all over again.

One of the biggest mistakes any of us makes - most especially when we are young is to think we can get to the moment of victory without any of the trial, the struggle, and the blood, sweat and tears.

This isn't something that we can attribute to the "younger generation". If we take some time to reflect, each of us when we were young, tended to misjudge

our capacity, say nothing of our abilities.

Lacking maturity and experience tends to cause us, as Jim Boyce would say, to over-estimate what we can do in one year, and underestimate what we can accomplish in five years.

As human beings we probably learn more in our discomfort and our adversity than we do in the easy times and great victories.

In fact, I am convinced that it is in adversity and trial that victory and success is born, if we understand our situations rightly.

If we see God's purpose and plan in it all. Charles Spurgeon once said:

"No flowers wear so lovely a blue as those which grow at the foot of a frozen glacier; no stars gleam so brightly as those which glisten in the polar sky; no water tastes so sweet as that which springs amid the desert sand; and no faith is so precious as that which lives and triumphs in adversity."

-Charles Spurgeon: Morning and Evening

The Story:

Joseph is about to triumph as his faith has grown. Now, if we read this story and

think in terms of days, or weeks or even months, since his journey began, we miss the depth of his journey and trial.

We know, if we have read his story that it wasn't that; because the writer, while not giving exact dates, drops a date or two here and there to help us.

Now, we aren't going to tackle this entire chapter today, it's too long and has too much to cover.

But this is the moment, the reason for the journey of Joseph into Egypt. Just remember, it didn't start on a Monday and end the next Saturday.

If we can recall where we started back in chapter 37 almost a month ago, we found that Joseph was the ripe old age of 17:

"Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers..."

-Genesis 37:2a ESV

He was a bit arrogant and immature, as most 17-year old people are. Nothing has changed.

It was there we discovered that God can use the most dysfunctional and broken of people to move his plans forward.

From his dad Jacob and his deceitfulness, to his playing of favorites among his

kids, we learned that some interesting family dynamics began to play out.

That led us to a very ugly portion of Scripture. His brothers were at the breaking point because of all the family issues.

Their hatred for their brother Joseph boiled over into a plot to kill him. Only to have one brother try to save him, while another schemed to sell him into slavery.

Not dealing with conflict and issues in a Biblical way always leads to mistrust, unsettled and even bitter relationships.

We learned core-value number two here: We must deal with all conflict Biblically, if we are going to grow in a healthy way.

And grow, Joseph did. His character grew in his trial, and his faithfulness to God grew, as well as did his gift of administration.

They shined in Potiphar's house -even in adversity, Joseph grew.

Only to find that the reward for his faithfulness and good character, as well as his desire to honor God, got him thrown into prison.

Where, we find, that instead of bitterness, we see faithfulness. Faithfulness toward God as well as those whom he served.

In the trial, God was working on Joseph's behalf. We know the end of the story, so we know that God was working all these events for Joseph's good.

"But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

-Genesis 50:19-20 ESV

Paul the apostle reminds us of this as well:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

-Romans 8:28 ESV

BUT, at the moment, Joseph doesn't know the end. He simply knows the here and now, and is being faithful IN THE MOMENT.

All of us, in every sense of the word, are in Joseph's shoes. What do I mean by that?

Every one of us is on a faith journey of discovering God- Discovering ourselves- Discovering our purpose.

As a church, yes, but even more importantly -as individuals. God's children, his image bearers must be very healthy if the entire community is to be successful.

As a group of individuals, we have chosen to journey together as a community of believers.

But one of the lessons we are learning from the story of Joseph is God's plan and purpose, and that in it all, it is HIM who calls us and has put us together.

Purposefully so for His plan to reach our community with the Gospel. That means each of us in our own individual giftings is a necessary part of this body.

For the long-term success and health, we have to prayerfully realize: WE NEED EACH OTHER. That love, unity, gentleness, humility, patience -all are born out of our love for Jesus and then toward one another.

An upward and outward focus -toward and then toward others -helps us to have a Joseph mind-set and attitude.

In prison, he thrives, even though he knows injustice seems to have won.

Remember last week, the cup-bearer and the baker show up and Joseph helps them. He is gifted in "interpretation of dreams". "I'll tell you what they mean, just remember to tell Pharaoh about me."

But the cup-bearer forgot:

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

-Genesis 40:23 ESV

OR -Was it actually part of God's plan all along? Yes, to both. He forgot, but in the purpose and plan of God, it was supposed to be that way.

We cannot force God's hand or make Him do things, as though He is some sort of slot-machine God. Beholden to our requests and demands.

His timing is perfect and his plans for us are the best. Too often we operate (even unknowingly) as if He needs to be there when we call and then we tuck him safely back onto the shelf of our convenience, until we need Him again.

No, He is God all the time, or He is not God at all in our lives.

Faithful obedience, long-term growth in the truth that God is in each and every event in our lives is what will get us to the finish line. That is being a disciple, and a life-long follower of Jesus.

Because we discover that:

"After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile."

-Genesis 41:1a ESV

Two years after the release of the cup-bearer, Pharaoh had a dream. This is THE moment that God has been preparing Joseph for.

Not able to understand what he sees, Pharaoh does what all pagan kings and masters did -he summons magicians. Only to discover that they have zero clue:

"So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh."

-Genesis 41:8 ESV

THEN: The cup-bearer all of a sudden remembers Joseph. Because it is about God's plan and timing. Pharaoh didn't

need to know about this Hebrew dream-
interpreter until this moment.

"Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my offenses today. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

-Genesis 41:9-13 ESV

That leads me to this question: What was it that Joseph was doing for these two years? The text doesn't tell us, but based on his response, we can safely say with Spurgeon:

"his faith was precious and thriving in the adversity" of prison. No bitterness, anger, rage and cynicism in his situation. Just faithful obedience.

And because of that, now was his time to shine. With no bitterness about how long

this has taken, he simply gets himself cleaned up, and is presented to Pharaoh:

"Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

-Genesis 41:14-15 ESV

"Well, it's been quite some time that I've been unjustly imprisoned, and some sort of retribution needs to be paid to me.

You want to know about your dream and what it means, well, it'll cost you! I have what you need, and you will pay for it."

Is that what happens? Nope. This is the moment and what do we see? A servant's heart who knows God and the call on his life:

"Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

-Genesis 41:16 ESV

It is not in me -GOD will give Pharaoh...

Not one mention of the struggles, the adversity, the injustices of being sold into slavery, and being thrown into prison.

Nothing of that. Could we respond in such a way? The answer is YES, if our focus is right.

Paul, from prison writes the following to the believers in Philippi:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

-Philippians 4:4-9 ESV

That's perspective! If it is upward and outward, upward toward God and outward toward others, and not inward: "It's all about me and my issues", we discover that our issues will be taken care of within our desire to please God and serve others.

A major lesson for us from Joseph is this: His faith in God and attitude toward others was shaped and strengthened in and through all of his trials.

He came to know, at some point on his faith journey that this was what God had called him to and had been preparing him for.

Overnight success, it seems for Joseph took about thirteen years. Later in chapter 41 we find:

"Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

Genesis 41:46a ESV

He was seventeen remember, when he was sold into slavery. Thirteen years of ups and downs, successes and failures, injustices and at the same time, God's favor.

Each one of us is on this same faith journey -with all that this life entails.

And it is as Paul the Apostle describes in his letter to the church at Colosse:

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings **for your sake**, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for **the sake of his body, that is, the church**, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me **for you**, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory.**"

-Colossians 1:24-27 ESV

It is Christ in you, the HOPE of glory who will get you to the finish line of the "over-night success".

Paul, a servant of God, just as Joseph was, sought what was best for others and the glory of God, at the cost of his freedom and well-being.

My deep desire and heart for all of you is that Christ be in you, and that you be conformed to his image and be launched into the world in whatever capacity he has called you to.

To shine like lights in a dark world,
making Jesus our king known -not only by
what you say, but in what you do. Being
prepared for that moment, just as Joseph
was.