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Series: *Joseph – Living the Dream*

Title: *Faithful When Discouraged*

Preacher: Mark Adams

Scripture: Genesis 39:20b – Genesis 40:23

Genesis 39:

20b - But while Joseph was there in the prison,

21 - the Lord was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

22 - So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.

23 - The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Genesis 40:

1 - Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt.

2 - Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker,

3 - and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined.

4 - The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time,

5 - each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

6 - When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected.

7 - So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why do you look so sad today?"

8 - "We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

9 - So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me,

10 - and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes.

11 - Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand."

12 - "This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days.

13 - Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer.

14 - But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.

15 - I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

16 - When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread.

17 - In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."

18 - "This is what it means," Joseph said. "The three baskets are three days.

19 - Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale your body on a pole. And the birds will eat away your flesh."

20 - Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials:

21 - He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand—

22 - but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

23 - The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

If you've driven the sixty-four miles that make up the Capital Beltway you know each section is unique.

- There are the nearly constant traffic jams that frequent the American Legion Bridge on the northwest section of the beltway.
- There's the complex spaghetti junction in Springfield where I-95 and 395 and the beltway all come together.

But the section that stands out to me is between 270 and Georgia Avenue, that part where you pass the Mormon Temple. This section of 495 is called *"the roller coaster."* I first saw it given that name on a Rand McNally map of D.C. and I understand why. On that part of the beltway you zoom at 60 MPH up and down hills and tight turns. It really is like a roller coaster.

In fact, if your kids complain about not being able to go to Kings Dominion because of Covid-19, put them in the car, and drive back and forth on that part of the beltway! Have them hold up their arms as they go down a hill! But you keep your hands on the wheel because that section is also called *"the danger corridor"* due to the fact that it averages over 260 crashes every year.

This part of the beltway came to mind because Joseph's life has been a real roller coaster. Put on your "seat belts" and lower the shoulder restraints and let's take a quick "review ride:" And if you want to hold up your hands on the downhills, feel free!

As a young teen Joseph was at the peak; he was his father's favorite, pampered, loved, and given that special coat that said, *"This kid doesn't have to work!"* But when he turns 17 there's a downhill, he dreams his dreams and is sold into slavery by his brothers.

He's bought by a high-ranking official in Egypt, Potiphar, and moves back up hill as he is given more and more responsibility until he is riding high as Potiphar's righthand man. Then there's another downhill as Mrs. Potiphar falsely accuses him of assault, and he is thrown into prison.

By the way, the word for prison in verse 3 of our text is translated *"round house."* In verse 15 Joseph calls it a *"pit"* using the same word that was translated as *"cistern"* to describe the hole that he was thrown into by his brothers. This prison or dungeon was probably a windowless, stifling, smelly and filthy, half-buried hall with a roof shaped like an inverted bowl. Psalm 105:18 says that while there, they bruised Joseph's feet with shackles and his neck was put in irons. You couldn't get much lower than Joseph was at this point.

But then Joseph heads up hill again. Remember? The first two verses we read say that ***"While Joseph was there in prison, the Lord was with him."*** By the way, as I said last week, one of the MAIN lessons we can glean from Joseph's life is that God is ALWAYS with us.

The words of Psalm 139 come to mind. In those words, David asks the question that is on our minds as we go through tough times: *"Where are You Lord---are You here with me in this? Are you with me in this pandemic?"* And the answer is YES, there is NO WHERE we can go that God is not. Joseph learned that even when he ***"made his bed in the depths"*** of that prison God was there. He learned that God was WITH HIM in that dank darkness for as David puts it, ***"even the darkness is not dark to God"*** ---***"for darkness is as light to God."*** Listen, even in---ESPECIALLY in---the toughest nightmares of life, God is with us. ***"His right hand always holds us fast."*** So, with God's ***"ever-present help in time of trouble,"*** once again Joseph stood out and continued to "move uphill." You see, the warden noticed Joseph's integrity and as had happened at the Potiphar estate, Joseph was given great responsibility. Look at verses 22-23 again: ***"So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did."***

Well, some time later---we don't know HOW much later---but sometime later the prison received two VIPs; the Pharaoh's cupbearer, and baker. Now a cupbearer was entrusted not only with choosing the king's beverages, but also making sure those drinks had not been tampered with in any way. So, he was a trusted royal confidant with significant influence. Egyptian cupbearers were sometimes called *"pure of hands,"* a reference to the fact that a cupbearer must be a man of integrity because he tasted the wine before it came to the king.

Bakers or “royal table scribes” as it is literally translated, held a similar position of trust since they directly oversaw the preparation and integrity of the ruler’s food and would have regular access to his presence. So, these were two VERY important guys.

Well, for some reason, Pharaoh accused both of them of wrongdoing. We’re not sure why.

- Maybe it was because there had been a poisoning and Pharaoh almost died and he didn’t know if the poison was in the wine or the bread.

Or

- Maybe they tried to put him on a health diet of some kind and he didn’t like sugar-free wine and bread made of cauliflower.

But whatever the reason, they were both thrown in prison. Well, the arrival of such prestigious political prisoners would have produced a significant disruption of jail routine. You see, these two guys required special treatment. Caring for them called for great wisdom and diplomatic skill. I mean if a prisoner like this was found innocent but had been treated as if he was guilty, or if they were treated too leniently and then it came out that they had indeed committed some crime, well in either case there would have been serious repercussions for the warden.

Well, who you gonna call in a situation like this? Not Ghostbusters! No, JOSEPH. You need someone like him, a man of integrity and wisdom. By the way did you notice WHO put Joseph be put in charge of these prisoners? Verse 4 says, **“The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph.”** Who was the **“Captain of the guard?”** Right, Mr. Potiphar. He no doubt said to the warden, who was already impressed with Joseph, *“I am putting these two under Joseph’s care. He was the best employee I ever had. No one can do a better job at this than him.”*

So, Joseph was entrusted with their care. He’s riding high! Well time passed and one morning both of these men said they had dreams and they didn’t understand what they meant. Understand, ancient Egyptians put a lot of stock in dreams because they believed that dreams put them in contact with another world. And the fact that they EACH had dreams on the same night was a big deal.

But in that prison, they didn’t have access to anyone who could interpret their dreams. And, as one commentator puts it, to these Egyptians, *“a dream without an accompanying interpretation was like a diagnosis without a prognosis.”* Well, Joseph noticed their concern and after he gave God the credit in advance, he offered to explain the meaning of their nightmares. He told the cupbearer his dream meant that in three days he would be restored to his position. Joseph also asked the cupbearer that when he was restored, would he please tell the Pharaoh of his situation. Look at verses 14 and 15 **“When all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”**

I’m sure at this point the baker eagerly asked for his dream to be interpreted. But he didn’t like what Joseph said, for he told him his dream meant that in three days he would be executed. Well, thanks be to God, Joseph’s interpretation of both dreams was right on. Three days later was the Pharaoh’s birthday; he gave a feast for all his officials and had the cupbearer and the baker brought out. Look at verse 21 and following, **“He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand---but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.”**

And then just when things are looking good in verse 23 Joseph’s roller coaster life takes another downhill. It says, **“The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.”**

Now, I’m sure you will agree that there is a vast difference between roller coasters at Kings Dominion and the “roller coasters of life.” I mean riding up and down the Anaconda or the Grizzly is fun, but when it comes to life, good followed by bad over and over again can be discouraging. I mean there comes a point when the downhills of life become too much for us and we get discouraged and just want to give up. Plus, in life we don’t know when or if the next uphill will

come. Joseph's example is perfect for help in times like this. What can he teach us about the discouraging "downhills" of life?

First Joseph would say:

1.) Keep being FAITHFUL.

Last week we learned that the reward for doing the right thing isn't always immediate, it certainly wasn't for Joseph. When he resisted Mrs. Potiphar's advances saying, "No! I won't sin against God! I won't betray my master's trust!" and then he fled temptation as God says we should---instead of being rewarded---he was thrown into a dark, dank, deep prison.

At this point, it would be understandable for Joseph to become bitter toward God, especially as the days and weeks and months dragged by. You'd expect him to say, "God is this the way you reward the righteous? What about those dreams I had of being a ruler when I was a boy? Is that ever going to happen? Where are You?" But not Joseph, he maintained his faith in God even in the downhills of life. When sold to Potiphar as a slave he had determined to be the best slave ever and now he determined to be the best prisoner ever. Joseph knew that God is not partially sovereign, so he understood that for some reason God had brought him to this place and so he faithfully fulfilled his assignments to the best of his ability.

When we get discouraged by the repeated downhills of life instead of giving up, Joseph's example shows we should keep up, keep up—keep being faithful. Keep doing your job, whatever it is, as unto the Lord.

I'm reminded of an old poem by Frank Stanton. It's entitled "Keep A-Goin'." In fact, when I point to you, I want you to say those words: "Keep A-Goin'"

*If you strike a thorn or rose,
Keep a-goin'!*

*If it hails or if it snows,
Keep a-goin'!*

*'Taint no use to sit an' whine
When the fish ain't on your line;
Bait your hook an' keep a-tryin'--
Keep a-goin'!*

*When the weather kills your crop,
Keep a-goin'!
Though 'tis work to reach the top,
Keep a-goin'!*

*S'pose you're out o' ev'ry dime,
Gittin' broke ain't any crime;
Tell the world you're feelin' prime--
Keep a-goin'!*

*When it looks like all is up,
Keep a-goin'!
Drain the sweetness from the cup,
Keep a-goin'!*

*See the wild birds on the wing,
Hear the bells that sweetly ring,
When you feel like singin.' sing--
Keep a-goin'!*

I don't know if Mr. Stanton realized it but his poem is the definition of faithfulness, continuing to live as God calls you to live, keeping going no matter how hard it is. I mean, it doesn't take any faith to follow God in the good times, no, we show our faith in Him best when even in the bad times of life---we keep a goin'. Joseph's faithfulness in doing his daily prison duties reminds us that routine integrity and faithfulness aren't routine. Too many of us, too much of the time believe that we honor God in the extraordinary and special events of life, not in its normal routines. But most of life is lived in the ordinary. Joseph's routine faithfulness on the Potiphar estate is part of what put him in contact with the man in prison who would eventually provide a connection with Pharaoh. The way Joseph chose to keep a goin', doing the next right thing and the next right thing---even in the midst of undeserved suffering in that prison---was the means God used to launch him into a position he couldn't have imagined.

So, in the downhill of life, the discouraging times, times of sickness and financial hardship and relational nightmares, keep being faithful to God.

That leads to a second thing Joseph would tell us.

2.) Keep on HELPING others.

Instead of being SELF-FOCUSED, instead of sulking about your own sorrows; follow Joseph's example and be OTHER-FOCUSED. Look at verse 6, ***"When Joseph came to them [the cupbearer and the baker] the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So, he asked them 'Why are your faces so sad today?'"*** Now think about it. Here's Joseph—unfairly imprisoned, people have given him the shaft—and he says to these two guys, *"You guys look down---what's up? How can I help?"* Joseph was selflessly sensitive to the hurts of other people when you'd expect him to have a pity-party for himself. You'd expect him to say, *"Hey, don't trouble me with your problems. I've got problems enough of my own."*

But not Joseph.

By the way, the best way to overcome your own discouragement is to minister to somebody else. It's incredible how soon you begin to feel better if you get your mind off your own problems and focus on helping somebody else.

Dr. William Stigen was suffering from severe depression years ago. A wise counselor told him the best thing he could do would be to find somebody else to encourage. So Stigen forced himself to sit down and write a thank you note to an old teacher whom he remembered gave him a love for literature. He wrote a short note saying, *"Thank you for teaching me to appreciate poetry and prose."* A few days later he received a return note that read, *"Dear Willy, When I read your letter I was blinded with tears, for I remember you as a little fellow in class and it warmed my old heart. I've taught school for fifty years and yours is the first letter of thanks I've ever received from a student. I shall cherish it until the day I die."*

Stigen was so moved by that return note that he remembered somebody else that he needed to thank, and he wrote another note of encouragement. Within a few days, he had written 500 notes of encouragement and gratitude, and it completely healed his discouraged spirit.

Are you discouraged today? Have you got the Covid blues? Do you want to get better or do you enjoy wallowing in self-pity? If you really want to get better, you look for somebody to encourage, someone to help. 2nd Corinthians 1:4 says, ***"God comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received."***

One of the reasons God allows us to suffer is so that we can be sensitive to others and say, *"I understand how you feel, but it's gonna be better."*

Keep being faithful.

Keep helping others.

And finally, Joseph would say,

3.) **Keep TRUSTING God.**

Imagine how Joseph felt as the days went by and it became obvious that the cupbearer had forgotten him. He saw him and the baker leave and I'm sure news filtered down into the prison as to what had happened to them. Joseph must have thought, *"Any day now! Any day now and I'll be summoned to the Pharaoh and explain my case and I'll be released!"*

But days turned into weeks and weeks into months. I can't help but think of Proverbs 13:12 which says, ***"Hope deferred makes the heart sick."*** Trusting God while we wait is HARD isn't it? I think it was Ortberg who said, *"Waiting is the hardest work of hope."* Well, Joseph did that hard work. He kept trusting God day after day, week after week and remember he didn't know he would be freed in two years. There was no Gideon Bible in that prison that he could pick out and read the end of chapter 41 and say, *"Oh, I'm gonna be second only to the Pharaoh in just two years. I can hold on 'til then!"* No, for all Joseph knew, he was going to spend the rest of his life in that dark dank hole in the ground. But in spite of all those reasons for discouragement, Joseph held on.

He held fast to what he knew about the goodness, grace, and sovereign power of God, he fought to hang on to the message of his dreams when he was a teen in Hebron. He surely spent a great deal of his time in prayer, so that when the day finally came and God tapped him on the shoulder, Joseph was still walking closely enough with God to feel His finger. When the day came that he was finally summoned into the Pharaoh's presence, more about that in two weeks, when that day happened Joseph's faith in God took a giant step forward---for he could look back and see that if the cupbearer had mentioned Joseph two years earlier---Joseph would have probably just been returned to serve as Potiphar's slave or sold to some other master or have been allowed to go back home to Hebron. But God had something much better in mind so He waited until in His perfect timing He sent the Pharaoh a dream, a dream that would lead to so much more. Joseph learned that as Lamentations 3:25-26 say, ***"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."***

Let's pray.