

THE SCROLLS

Making Lemonade: Finding Faith When Life Turns Sour | Genesis 40-41

Life Lesson

God's delays are not always His denials. Often, He uses seasons of waiting, disappointment, and apparent obscurity to shape our character, deepen our faith, and prepare us for purposes greater than we currently see. Like Joseph, we may not understand God's plan while going through it, but eventually, we often find that every pit, prison, and delay was part of His perfect plan. Trusting God's timing takes faith, but His purposes are always worth the wait.

Examine Scripture

Read Genesis 40:1-22 and Genesis 41:1-57

As you read Scripture, slow down and ask these three questions to move from information to transformation:

- 1. What does this passage reveal about who God is?**
- 2. How is God calling you to grow or change?**
- 3. What is God leading you to do or who is He calling you to be in your everyday life?**

-From the Sermon Series Bookmark and Sermon Notes

In God's Waiting Room

There are few places in Scripture as dark, cold, and seemingly forgotten as the Egyptian prison where Joseph sat. He had done everything right. He fled from Potiphar's wife, preserving his purity, only to be rewarded with chains. As with the pit, Joseph was wrongly thrown into prison. He was betrayed by his brothers and tossed into a pit just to be sold into slavery. Here, Joseph is seemingly betrayed by his own righteousness and integrity and thrown into prison. He did not deserve to be in prison any more than he deserved to be in the pit. Yet, at least in the pit, he could justify his situation by blaming it on the evil and sinful nature of his brothers. However, in prison, Joseph was there because his righteousness caused him to resist the advances of Potiphar's lustful wife. He did what was right, yet he was still in prison. In the pit, he was trapped by his brothers' sinfulness; in prison, he was imprisoned by his own righteousness and morality. He was only in the pit for a little while, but he remained in prison for two years. Which do you think was harder for him to understand? More so in the prison than in the pit, Joseph felt the heavy burden of waiting.

Then, a glimmer of hope appears. He interprets the dream of Pharaoh's chief cupbearer. All Joseph asks in return is a simple favor: "But when all goes well for you, remember that I was with you. Please show kindness to me by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this prison" (40:14). It seemed like the perfect, humanly engineered escape route. But the chapter ends with some of the heartbreaking words in the book of Genesis: "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him" (40:23).

Have you ever been forgotten by someone who promised to help? Have you watched weeks turn into months, and months turn into years of deafening silence? Has hope turned into thoughts of abandonment? The Puritan Thomas Brooks beautifully captures what happens during these seasons of heavy waiting: "God's denying or delaying the things we ask for is not always out of anger or disrespect... but out of love, to test our patience, to exercise our

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faith, and to make the mercy we seek more sweet and desirable when it arrives."

Joseph wanted out of prison, but God wanted to get the prison out of Joseph. If the cupbearer had remembered Joseph right away, Joseph might have been released as a nameless, escaped Hebrew slave, fleeing back to Canaan. Though not described, Joseph needed to be refined; he needed to learn and mature, or perhaps even have the root of bitterness extinguished. God's delay was not a denial; it was the slow, deliberate sharpening of a tool meant to save nations. Joseph wanted to be saved, but God wanted to use him to save others; to save His people.

40:1-23

As we saw at the end of Chapter 39, Joseph has already gained authority and influence in the prison: "The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there" (39:22). So, in God's providence and sovereignty, two of Pharaoh's officials were thrown into that very prison, and because they were prisoners of status, Joseph was to be their personal attendant. He was to take care of them. Thus, the sovereign hands of God begin to move pieces into place.

The chief cupbearer and the chief baker held important positions with Pharaoh. In an absolute monarchy like ancient Egypt, the greatest threat to a ruler was not an invading army but an internal plot to poison him. The chief cupbearer tasted the wine before the king drank, meaning he held Pharaoh's life in his hands every day. Because of this close involvement, cupbearers often became trusted confidants, political advisors, and influential figures in the royal court. Similarly, the chief baker was in charge of all food preparation in the palace. Like the cupbearer, any mistake or betrayal on his part could lead to the ruler's death. In (40:1), we read that these two men "offended their master, the king of Egypt." Although the scripture does not clearly state the offense, the historical context suggests a suspected conspiracy to poison Pharaoh. Since the source of the plot was unknown, both men were imprisoned while investigations took place to determine their guilt or innocence.

Joseph, who had keen insight, noticed that the two men were very upset. They might have been afraid for their lives because they understood how serious their situation was. However, their worry came from their dreams and the lack of an interpreter. Now, we understand why Joseph was thrown into the pit, taken to Potiphar, and eventually put in prison. He was there by divine providence to interpret these dreams and gain an audience with Pharaoh. From the perspective of divine sovereignty, they were the exact links Joseph

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needed to move from prison to the palace. Charles Spurgeon, demonstrating how God uses ordinary and broken people to accomplish His grand plans, said: "See how God moves the great wheels of His providence by small cogs! The offense of a baker and the forgetfulness of a butler are made to work together to bring about Joseph's deliverance, the preservation of Jacob's descendants, and the fulfillment of the divine covenant."

The interpretations of these dreams seem straightforward because we already know the outcomes, but again, in this culture, dreams were viewed as divine messages that needed careful interpretation. So, Joseph, gifted by God, was able to interpret them. For the cupbearer, he would be released and restored to Pharaoh's service within three days. The baker, however, did not get such an optimistic interpretation. Notice how brutally honest Joseph was: "The three baskets are three days. In just three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from off you—and hang you on a tree. Then the birds will eat the flesh from your body" (40:18-19). You can even see Joseph's confidence in his interpretation because he only made a request to the cupbearer: "But when all goes well for you, remember that I was with you. Please show kindness to me by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this prison" (v. 14). He made no request to the baker because he knew he would perish.

As Joseph's interpretations proved correct, the cupbearer was restored to Pharaoh's favor, and the baker was executed. However, in (v. 23), there is a very dark and tragic statement: "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him."

The cupbearer's initial failure—forgetting Joseph for two full years—seems cruel. But it was entirely strategic. If the cupbearer had mentioned Joseph right away, Joseph might have been pardoned, but he would have returned to Canaan. By recalling Joseph only when Pharaoh had a dream that no one else could interpret, the cupbearer brought him to Pharaoh at the perfect moment when his gift could command full attention.

41:1-57

For two years, nothing changed. Joseph woke up to the same cold stone walls, the same iron chains, and the same stale bread. Then, one night, everything shifted. Pharaoh had a dream. Suddenly, the forgotten Hebrew is remembered. The text moves with breathless speed in Genesis 41:14: "Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to Pharaoh." Again, Charles Spurgeon observed: "God's clocks are not like ours; they do not strike when we expect, but they always strike at the right time. The Lord knows when to

Personal Reflection

1. Have you ever gone through a time when doing the right thing seemed to bring hardship instead of blessing? How did that experience impact your trust in God's justice and goodness?
2. Which "waiting room" are you in right now? Are there prayers, hopes, or dreams that feel delayed, and how is God using this season to shape your character and faith?
3. Have you ever felt abandoned by someone you trusted or relied on? How did you react, and what does Joseph's experience teach you about seeking your security in God instead of people?
4. Reflect on a difficult situation in your life that God later transformed for a greater purpose. How does that past experience help you trust His providence in your current challenges?
5. When God eventually opens a door or answers a prayer, where do you tend to give the credit? Like Joseph before Pharaoh, how can you develop a heart that humbly points others to God's power and faithfulness instead of your own abilities?

Commentaries

Expositor's Bible Commentary
(Abridged Edition): New Testament
Edited by Kenneth Barker

New Bible Commentary Edited by D. A. Carson

NIV Application Commentary:
Genesis by John H. Walton

Mt. Zion's Mission

Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to
MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
disciples of Jesus Christ.

deliver His people; He will not let them suffer a moment longer than is absolutely necessary for their good and His glory.”

Notice Joseph's posture when he finally stands before the most powerful monarch on earth. Pharaoh says, “I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream to interpret it.” If Joseph were acting on his own flesh, this was his moment to bargain. He could have said, “Yes, I am the master of dreams. Now let's talk about my freedom.” Instead, Joseph immediately deflects the glory and gives it to the One who deserves it: “I am not able to,” Joseph answered Pharaoh. “It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer” (41:16).

Suffering had done its deep work. The seemingly arrogant, or at least oblivious, teenager who once flaunted his coat of many colors before his brothers had been replaced by a man who knew that he was absolutely nothing, and God was absolutely everything. When Pharaoh looks at this young Hebrew slave, he doesn't just see a clever administrator. He sees something supernatural: “Can we find anyone like this, a man who has God's spirit in him?” (41:38).

God's providence led Joseph from the pit to prison and eventually to the palace. As the great Puritan John Flavel wrote in his treatise *The Mystery of Providence*: “Providence is like a Hebrew word; it can only be read backwards. It is the joy of the Christian to sit down and recount all the matches and loops of providence, how things fell out just so, to accomplish the perfect will of God.”

We serve a God who enters the depths of our lives. Centuries after Joseph, another innocent Man was stripped of His clothes, falsely accused, and not just thrown into an Egyptian prison but also onto a Roman cross. Jesus endured the ultimate abandonment—forgotten by men and forsaken by God because of our sin—so that you and I would never be forgotten. Just like Joseph, He was raised from the pit of the grave and given a name above every other name, seated at the right hand of Majesty. If He can carry the salvation of the world through a cross, He can handle your waiting season. Trust His unseen hand. Trust in His plan. Trust in His purpose. Trust in His providence.

Trusting in the providence of God is not ignoring our circumstances; it is simply understanding that “all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). In other words, in all things, whether in the pit, the prison, or the palace, all things are for His glory and our good!