

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

STUDY NUMBER THREE – GENESIS 40:1-23

INTRODUCTION:

Paul W. Powell says that the Apostle Paul probably is a man who suffered more than any other individual in endeavoring to communicate the Gospel.

Paul tells about some of the mind-boggling, teeth-rattling, gut-wrenching experiences he faced as a missionary. He was whipped at least five times with thirty-nine lashes on each occasion. He was beaten with sticks three other times. He was stoned at Lystra and left for dead; he suffered shipwreck on three occasions and as a result of one of them he was in the open seas for a day and a night.

In his many journeys he faced constant danger from the water, robbers who operated without restraint, and opposition from his own countrymen as well as from the heathen. Whether Paul was in the city or in the wilderness, on the seas or on the land, it was all the same. There were times when he was hungry, thirsty, and cold, without adequate clothing.

And if that were not enough, he carried on his missionary work while suffering constant and excruciating pain. He tells about this pain when he says, “There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me”.

The word thorn suggests the nature of his affliction. It was intensely painful. The word flesh locates it. This was not some person or a group of persons who troubled Paul. It was his flesh; it was a physical affliction. Guesses as to what this thorn was range from epilepsy to migraine headaches, and from malaria and the fever that accompanies it, to inflamed eyes. But nobody can be sure of what it was. We only know that it was an intensely painful physical affliction that he suffered.

Singer Ray Charles was blind by the time he was seven years of age, probably due to glaucoma. He said that when his blindness came he could easily have sunk into apathy and self-pity. What saved him was his mother's courage and intelligence. She simply would not let him do that. She insisted that he become self-sufficient. So she made him scrub the floors, sweep, and even chop wood so that he would not have to depend on other people the rest of his life.

She told him, "You are blind, not stupid. You have lost your eyes, not your mind."

There are many people who when trouble comes focus more on what they've lost than on what they have left. They go through life counting their blessings on their fingertips and their burdens on their pocket calculators. The result is that when real trouble comes, instead of walking through the valley of the shadow of death, they wallow in it. They become victims of despair and they indulge in self-pity.

Justice Brandeis once advised his impatient daughter, “My dear, if you would only recognize that life is hard, things would be so much easier for you.”

Birth and death are bookends that go on each side of life and give meaning to it. The people who recognize and accept this are the ones who handle adversity best.

I probably would say that I would have to rate Joseph very high as a person who has an incredible capacity to handle the adversities of life and to keep on bouncing back no matter how bad it is.

He has had dreams in episode number one. Dreams of grandeur, dreams of being in a position of great leadership and blessing and then at the end of study number one he is beaten by his brothers and sold into slavery into the land of Egypt.

In the land of Egypt he has had seven or eight good years. It has been sunshine for a brief time in the midst of difficulty. In working in Potiphar’s house he has been very successful but out of the work it also became a time of sensuous, sensuous temptation. He could have lost it and he would have lost more from her love than he would have from the hatred of his brothers. He ran from this but as the story goes Potiphar put him in prison because she accuses him from something else.

So as we turn in the third episode of “As the World Turns” or “The Days of Our Lives” the story that is so relevant and so practical. Joseph has been in prison now for about a year as the scene of today’s study opens. He is 28. Can you imagine celebrating your 28th birthday in prison? And we are going to have to look in on him and see how he is doing. It has been 11 years now since he has seen anybody in his family.

You know when God makes promises to you and God does not do anything for about 10 years, it is usually about the length of time in the Bible that people can last. I mean God made a wonderful promise to Abraham and Sarah that they were going to have a baby. They lasted for 10 years and then Sarah said it has to be God’s plan for us to help Him out. And of course, Sarah sends Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid into Abraham and Ishmael is born. And it is 15 years later finally that God brings about his miraculous provision in the birth of Isaac. Or can you figure that Joseph might be right on the verge of frayed nerves thinking that this must be just about the time that God is going to do something. I mean 11 years and being in prison for 1 year, certainly we must be on the verge of the dreams.

Listen to

Genesis 16:3,4

And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight.

And of course out of that you have the birth of the Arab nation and all of the struggles and problems that the seed has faced ever since that day.

Joseph must feel, humanly speaking, that 11 years is just about enough. Certainly everything is right around the corner. So with thinking like that you read the first verse. What do you think of? Look at it.

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

What is your first thought? "Oh boy! Providential circumstances. God is at work. Here comes the cupbearer and the baker of Pharaoh the king. Obviously God is going to work this into something that is going to bring about my deliverance immediately." And those are probably the suppositions that are going on in the thought process of Joseph at this time.

Now these men that are put into prison with Joseph are going to have a part to play in this but the part to play is not the part that Joseph thinks that they are going to play as you are going to see in just a few minutes.

God always comes to us in different ways than we think.

He came to Moses in a burning bush.

He came to Jacob at Bethel.

He came to Saul while he was out fetching his father's lost donkeys.

He came to Gideon while he was beating out enough grain in order to keep his family together.

And he came to David while he was feeding the sheep.

And here God comes and allows these two to be put into prison.

And there are great expectations on Joseph's part to think that this must possibly be exactly what God has planned. And so many times are expectations and anticipations are not the will of God for our lives.

Now he has overruled a lot of things in these difficult circumstances. And why these two men are put into prison we do not know. There is some thought.

The cupbearer is like a press secretary. He is very close to the Pharaoh of the land. He was one responsible for pressing the grapes and then drinking it to see that there had been no poison put in it before it was given to the king.

The baker was a very meticulous individual. During the time of baking in the land of Egypt that at this time there were 38 different varieties of cakes and 57 different varieties of bread. So the fellow really had an important position.

Now who knows. Maybe the two of them entered into an alliance to poison Pharaoh. Maybe it was going to come through what he drank. Or maybe it was going to come through what he ate. And maybe they did and maybe they did not as we will see in the story enter into an alliance. Maybe just one of them is guilty and they both were thrown in for it.

Who knows, being a southern king, what greater crisis could you have than a carrot cake that did not rise and cornbread that fell, you know I mean it is just one of those things that might possibly have happened or maybe there was a fly swimming in the grape juice or something like that. At least they did something bad

enough to offend him that he throws him into prison and we do not know what the crime or offense was.

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

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

Those words “in the same prison where Joseph was confined” are words of providence, of purpose, of indication that God is at work.

I mean did you ever stop to think, now just for a minute that right here sitting in this room providentially that God brought someone here as a special gift to do something in your life this week? Now that is a beautiful thing about being sensitive to where God puts us and the people He brings into our lives. He never makes a mistake. And you will miss it if you get withdrawn and selfish and fail to move around and see the possibilities that sit right here as to God working.

Out of all the prisons, here comes the cupbearer and the baker and they are dropped right in the same prison where Joseph is confined.

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

What is special about that verse? Who is the captain of the guard? Potiphar. You see what has happened. Potiphar does not believe the story of his wife but to save face for him and his wife both, he has to leave Joseph in prison but he is going to give Joseph all the responsibilities that he had while he was running the house.

You give the Lord time he will even make your enemies be at peace with you if you will just trust Him to work out the details. And here that consistent, faithful, up attitude, hanging in there when everything is falling apart and the wheels have come off, staying with it, he now has the responsibility in the prison delegated by Potiphar to take care of these two who have been placed there.

You know when you read the record of history it is incredible what has happened in prison. You know you would think that is the last place on earth that you would want to be and that certainly is probably it. And what a place of bitterness and depression and resentment but some of the greatest things have happened in prison. John Bunyan, after 12 years, writes *Pilgrim's Progress*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes *The Cost of Discipleship*. Martin Luther translated the entire New Testament into German while he was in prison. The Apostle Paul wrote many of the 13 epistles that he wrote in the New Testament as a result of being in prison. John imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos wrote the book of Revelation.

You see, one thing you are going to have to learn is if you are getting ready to go to heaven you are going to meet some pretty tall timber up there. You better be planning on being triumphant in some of your circumstances so you have something to talk about instead of sitting around crying in self-pity over the picky little thing you are going through.

I mean some of those guys have been fed to wild animals and torn limb to limb and have had incredible suffering. But they bounced back and hung in there and left a blessing behind them. You know that is what God expects from all of us. Deny ourselves and pick up our cross and get after it. And quit getting on this. What good does it do for you to indulge in self-pity? And what good does it do for somebody else to listen to your self-pity? You know I mean it does absolutely nothing. You will never be remembered in the future by your friends when you die as to all the indulgence in self-pity in the hard life that you had as an individual. The thing that people are always going to remember is the blessing of your life, the incredible ability to conquer and to be victorious in impossible circumstances. That is what people are going to remember.

And here Joseph has won the hearts and he has won the heart of Potiphar and he trusts him.

I will give you a principle:

The secret to victory in traumatic circumstances is to see with the eye of man the hand of God in every circumstance and event.

There is no bitterness in Joseph today. He is in prison, it is rough but he has learned one thing and that is to be quick to hear and slow to speak and slow to anger. He is just SILENT and he is SERVANT. And he is hanging in there as he ministers to others.

v. 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.

Now you see the sovereign intervention. They have been put in prison, Joseph is the one who is charged with the responsibility for the boys, and all of the sudden one night both of them have dreams and the writer is very careful to say that each of these dreams are very different. They each have different interpretations.

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

Now here comes Joseph, he usually brings a bowl of hot water and a towel and some Speed Stick and a Gillette disposable and a little shave cream and some aftershave.

And he comes in on his first trip and brings this stuff in and sits it down with a big smile on his face and says, “good morning guys.” And man they are just, you know, they look like the funnest piece of the book of Lamentations or they have been weaned on a dill pickle or something. They are just totally, totally sad, dejected. They are just really down. And that is not like them to let the prison get to them but that is the way they were.

And so he decides to just leave the stuff and he goes and then pretty soon he comes back with their meal tray and the Pyramid Journal so they can keep up on everything that is going on around them while they are in prison.

And then he says to them, “you know what in the world is going on? Why are you so dejected?” Do you know why they are dejected? The reason they are is because they have had some dreams and they question whether God might not be telling them something in the dreams.

These two men have feelings inside that God is in this. And He is going to say something to both of them and their future probably hangs on an interpretation of those dreams. And naturally they are a little bit dejected.

v. 7 So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why are your faces so sad today?”

v. 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.”

That verse happens to be one of the key verses in the whole of the study.

You see what resilience, what incredible confidence the man has in God. “Do not interpretations belong to God?”

Put him into prison for a year.

Delay is not denial.

Disappointment is his appointment.

Nothing will ever separate me from the love of God.

“Do not interpretations belong to God?” Tell them to me please.

Now listen to these dreams because there is a powerful message in them.

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

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

v. 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."

Well the cupbearer decides to go first because he has the more prominent position. And he tells his story.

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

And you can just see the old cupbearer saying three days something is going happen. He has just has seventy-two hours left.

v. 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.

Can you see the guy dancing in the cell? I mean he starts marking time from right then. Seventy-two hours, just three days and I am out of this place. And I am going to be restored to my position as the cupbearer for Pharaoh. I am going to get to go back. I am going to be set free. Obviously they found out that I am not guilty.

Now here comes the one time that Joseph is human. This is the one time when it really gets to him. He is not bitter or resentful but you see the weakness of the flesh. You see it.

v. 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.

You know sir, I scratch your back, and you scratch mine. One favor deserves another. I did this for you. Now 72 hours from now when you are pressing the grapes in the cup on his birthday, would you just tell him about the fellow that interpreted the dreams that is down here in the prison and get me out of this place. I just want you to remember me.

Now that is a whole lot like the Lord Jesus, isn't it? The very night that he was betrayed he took bread in the cup and he said "This do in remembrance of Me."

You know I have learned one thing in my ministry and that is I have had to learn it kind of painfully that you do not ever expect people to remember what you do for them.

And here Joseph is going to be really hurt because he thinks that this is the providential circumstance of God to get him out of prison and he has two more years left to tell you the truth. And he isn't getting out because of the memory of a cupbearer but when God say, "I am opening the door and it is time to get out." And that hurts sometimes. When you are just depending upon people to remember things so that you can carry on and do what you want to do.

Well he is just going to be open and honest.

v. 15 For 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.”

Well, he really is kind to his brothers. He was “forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews.” He does not say anything about them selling him. And then he is very kind to Potiphar and Mrs. Potiphar. He could have said several things about her that probably would not have made the record but he did not say a word about her. And in this situation, “I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”

v. 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.

You can just see it, he does not even give Joseph the time to invite him to tell it. Boy he is going to tell it because it is so similar to the dream that the cupbearer has had he is going to get it right out there and get a favorable interpretation too that he is going to be restored as the baker, right?

v. 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.”

You can just sense the expectations, the excitement, the thrill that this is really what is going to happen for him.

You know one thing? I have to admire Joseph. Do you think he is tempted a tad bit right now to tamper with the interpretation of a dream to give a favorable disposition so there is two men who are going to cooperate with the possibility of his project of getting out of here?

You know that is 2 Timothy 2:15

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

Do not worry about your approval by men because ultimately you are going to stand before God and he is going to be faithful. Now watch it.

v. 18 “This is what it means,” Joseph said. “The three baskets are three days.

In 72 more hours something good is going to happen to me. Now that is a seed faith there, excuse me. He is living with false suppositions here.

v. 19 Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh.”

Ouch! Isn't that amazing? Why are those dreams put together and why are those stories like that? Joseph stands faithfully between two men. One who dies and one who is delivered. Jesus Christ, the perfect example of Joseph being the type, hung upon a cross with one thief who said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom" and another who refused to respond. One was delivered and one died in judgment.

This baker feels like his dream is exactly the same and Joseph says, "no." In three days he is delivered and in three days you die. That is what God is saying. My, you can just feel the awesome sense of fear on the part of the baker and freedom and excitement on the part of the cupbaker as Joseph has just given his message.

Two men a lot alike but their destinies are totally opposite.

Two men who have come with similar dreams but they die. That is the difference in Cain and Abel. Abel comes with the sacrificial lamb which God predesigned in His program. Cain comes with the work of the ground and he is rejected. There is only one way to get into heaven and that is through receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior. There is only one way to get here physically and that is by the birth through a mama. And all of you sit here with physical life because you went through that process, the only way to get here. God does not have a bunch of ways for you to get here physically and I can tell you He has only one way to get

you into heaven I do not care how many Eastern religion books you read or how many denominations and how many religious processes you go through there is only one way to get to the Father's house and He has a right to tell you how you are going to get in. And that is through Jesus Christ. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me.

Well, look at verse 20.

v. 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:

You see Potiphar has been doing his work upstairs and he has been checking out and running down some leads and he has discovered that the baker is indeed the one who is guilty of this program for liquidating the Pharaoh. And he takes his report into Pharaoh and it is Pharaoh's birthday and he realizes these two officials are down there and to make the party complete he wants them all to come up. So all the officials are together and on his birthday he reads the results of Potiphar's investigation and as a result of that.

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

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

Saddest verse in all the study in the life of Joseph is the next, isn't it?

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

Jacob was at the 14-year mark when he decided that it was time for him to go back and God said, "no you are staying at Uncle Laban's for 6 more years."

For Joseph, he is at the 11-year mark. And God is saying, "you are not getting out yet. There are still 2 more years and you have some things that are yet to be learned and my deliverance is not going to be on the memory of someone who is a cupbearer. It will be in my time and in my way."

Andrew Murray, who lived a long time ago, gave three principles to help us in any adversity:

First: God brought me here; it is by His will that I am in this strait place; so I am going to rest.

Number two: He will keep me in His love, and give me grace in the trial.

And finally: He will ultimately make the trial a blessing, teaching me what I need to learn.

Here are the lessons from today's study.

LESSON #1: If you are going through a time of difficulty these are the three things you need to remember:

- 1. God's way is the best way.**
- 2. God's time for the deliverance is the best time.**
- 3. It is important to remember that His grace is always sufficient for us.**

LESSON #2: We are to put no confidence in man.

That is Psalm 118:8

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.”

Man at his best will only fail us so it is best not to put confidence in man.

**LESSON #3: We need to learn to wait on the Lord.
Psalm 27:14.**

LESSON #4: We have learned that it is necessary to be faithful in the presentation of the message. That was hard for him to tell the cupbearer and the baker and to be faithful. But you and I have the same responsibility.

LESSON #5: The cure for bitterness in our relationships with each other is to see God providentially using the human vehicle.

And here is the biggest lesson of all.

LESSON #6: Never let circumstances affect the divine relationship. Whatever you do, do not lose your confidence in God.

LESSON #7: God often uses the little insignificant happenings in our lives for His ultimate purpose.

LESSON #8: The closer expectations and anticipations are to reality, the happier you are going to be.

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v. 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.

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LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

LESSON #1: If you are now going through a time of difficulty or testing, there are three things you should remember: (1) God's way is the best way. He is using these circumstances to bring about the peaceable fruit of righteousness in your life. (2) God's time for deliverance is the best time. He is working out the impossible circumstances for your very best interest. And even though there are lonely years of waiting, God will be on schedule. (3) It is important to remember that His grace is always sufficient for us as we are going through the difficult circumstances.

LESSON #2: We are to put no confidence in man, for man at his best will only fail us. If Joseph had totally depended on him, he would have never been able to understand why he still had to spend two years in prison. Never put your confidence in man.

LESSON #3: We need to learn to wait on the Lord.

LESSON #4: We have learned that it is necessary to be faithful in the presentation of the message of death and deliverance. It is more important to give God's message than it is to be approved by man.

LESSON #5: The cure for bitterness in our relationships with each other is to see God providentially using the human vehicle to the accomplishment of His purpose, and thus Joseph is triumphant in his relationship with Potiphar.

LESSON #6: Never let circumstances affect the divine relationship.

LESSON #7: God often uses the little insignificant happenings in our lives to the ultimate accomplishment of His purpose.

LESSON #8: The closer expectations and anticipations are to reality, the happier you are going to be.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Genesis 40:1-23 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. Who is also placed in prison with Joseph during this time?

3. Describe the dream of the chief cupbearer and Joseph's interpretation of it.

4. What request does Joseph make of the chief cupbearer when he is leaving prison, according to verses 14 & 15?

5. What gave the chief baker courage to reveal his dream to Joseph?

6. Describe the dream and Joseph's interpretation of it.

7. How did the fulfillment of this dream take place, according to verses 20-22?

8. What does the chief cupbearer do in verse 23?

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

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