

Dealing with Disappointment

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Sermon Audio file

Joseph - Dealing with Disappointment

Genesis 39: 20-40: 23

Welcome - ???

Song - Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Song - Yet not I but Christ through me

Celebrations

Birthdays - Mon 31st May - Tiger-Lilly, Wed 2nd June - Malcolm Owers, Thur 3rd June - Chris Thompson

Intro - 12th May 2001... FA Cup Final, Arsenal v Liverpool... Stephen just 7 years old. "I'm really, really, really, really disappointed..." And that's what it means to be an Arsenal supporter! Turn to the present and one of our members has been in constant pain in their left leg. They were due an appointment last Thursday... at last... cancelled... disappointment... they had an appointment THIS Tuesday... at last! Sadly they were told they were too high risk for any operation and would just have to manage the pain... what a disappointment.

I hope we have all been disappointed. If not then we have never had any dreams, goals or expectations. BUT disappointment hurts... not got the job you wanted? Kids not turned out as you had hoped? Friend has let you down? Disappointed with ourselves...? Acted impulsively? Said something we regret? Hurt spouse? Disappointed with God...? Prayer apparently unanswered? Seemingly pointless suffering? No answers?

We have been considering our dealing with 'Changing Times'. And we have been doing that through turning to God's Word and exploring the life of Joseph in the Old Testament... He's known both Despair and Success!

Genesis 39-40 reveals Joseph's life as a complex mix of God's blessing and human disappointment. Our focus today is going to be on that... Joseph was obviously blessed by God through the confirmation of two prophetic visions. Yet, we see him going through trials that would sink a normal human into a world of despair and hopelessness.

After the unfathomable betrayal by his brothers, who even plotted his murder, Joseph ended up a slave in Potiphar's house (39: 1). God was with Joseph and blessed him so that Potiphar entrusted his whole estate and wealth to Joseph's care (39: 3-6). Just when things appeared to be going well for Joseph, as the right-hand of a powerful official in Egypt, Potiphar's wife took a fancy to him and schemed to get him into bed with her. She preyed, pestered, and even cornered him one day. Joseph, wisely and

courageously, simply fled from her advances (39: 7–12). We then see the reaction of a woman scorned. Potiphar's wife fabricated the charges of Joseph's attempted rape to ruin him (39: 13–19).

It's getting to be a bit like a soap opera! We now hear what happened next... (Eastenders intro music?!)

Gen 39: 20-40: 23 read by Jill Rowles

Interview with Jill

Time of sharing or Roving mic to congregation??

Prayers led by Glyn or Tory

Song - Forever Jesus

CK Slot by Sarah

Message - I read a story which is perhaps of a modern equivalent to what Joseph experienced. The husband went out to his car one morning only to discover that it wouldn't start because the battery had been stolen. After lifting up the bonnet, he discovered a note which said something to this effect: "I'm sorry I had to take your battery, but it was an emergency and I had to get to the hospital. I will return your battery as soon as I can." A little later the battery was returned with another note: "Thank you so much for the use of your battery. To express our appreciation and to make up for the inconvenience we have caused you, here are two tickets to the Dallas Cowboy game this Sunday." The couple was ecstatic. They were fans of the Cowboys, having stickers in all the windows of their car, and were thrilled at the opportunity to go to the game. What a wonderful turnaround this had been. But when they returned home from the game they discovered, to their dismay, that their apartment had been cleaned out. The tickets had simply been a trick to get them out of the house.

Disappointment is not a sin - what matters is how we handle it

How do you handle Disappointment? Joseph was rejected by his family, and instead of his God-given dreams coming true and people bowing to him he became a slave, instead of being rewarded for refusing to commit adultery he lost his job and was thrown into prison, and when he helped another whilst in prison and hoped that'd be remembered, he was simply forgotten. "Thanks God!" Those are all major disappointments and Joseph would have had every reason to have been hurt by them. We have no record that he showed resentment or bitterness, however, as a result of what seemed to be one dent after another. Genesis doesn't discuss the prison conditions Joseph faced, but we do find a description of how he was treated in Ps. 105: 18, "His feet were hurt with shackles; his neck was put in a collar of iron." Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. For the second time in his life, he had followed God's will and got a raw deal for it.

B. Meyer speaks to us: "If you have sown seeds of holiness and love to reap nothing but disappointment, loss, suffering, and hate - you know something of what Joseph felt in that wretched dungeon hole."

We lash out if we allow our disappointment to impact us - and it often does. Our faith, sense of drive, self-esteem, even purpose for living. "Where is God...?!" Hold on to your conviction that God reigns over all the details of your life. It is amazing that how people try to solve the mystery of suffering or disappointment never seems to have occurred to Joseph, or Job or Paul. These who suffered so much for their faith never once expressed any sense that God is limited in what He has control over. People today, believers included, can be inclined to either blame God, wonder where He is, or maybe even create exemption clauses that we think protects God when hard things happen. Rather, own this... "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to

his purpose" (Rom. 8: 28). But that verse means nothing if God is not in absolute control over the events and details of our lives. His rule over everything is the ground of our hope, the assurance that justice will have the last word, and the promise that this life cannot compare to what He has in store for us in the next...

Learn to wait upon on God. Isaiah knew well this truth, and gave us these great words: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall soar on wings as eagles; they shall run and not grow weary; they shall run and not be faint" (40: 31). Verse for the year!!

Where was God for Joseph...? "But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him" (Gen 39: 20) => something beyond our circumstances dictates God's presence.

Don't allow disappointment to be an excuse for self pity

Some people have a gift of feeling sorry for themselves, there will never be any change or way forward unless they choose to be rid of the chains of bitterness. Christians too...

"Oh dear... you think you got it bad, well let me tell you what I've been through!" (4 Yorkshiremen sketch!)

Although Joseph did not deserve to be in prison he responded to it in an incredible fashion. We can see the way in which his character grew during his imprisonment. Joseph does not appear to be filled with a sense of "Woe is me". Two of the Kings officials are imprisoned - the specifics of what had happened to bring about this falling out with the king we are never told - and assigned to him to look after, "and he attended them" (40: 4). The literal translation is that he 'ministered' to them. These are trusted officials of Pharaoh's court.

The chief cupbearer was not only responsible for tasting the king's food and drink to make sure that he was not poisoned but he was also a trusted political advisor. The baker had the responsibility of cooking the food that Pharaoh would eat.

R T Kendall, "Many of God's preparations for us are simply aimed to get our eyes off ourselves; to lead us out from our self-pity." Joseph didn't focus on himself but on others. Read 40: 5-8. His response...?

It really is amazing that Joseph would want to have anything to do with dreams; after all it was his own dreams that had started all of this. Even in the midst of his own adversity he reached out to help others.

There is never anything to be gained from self-pity - other than maybe a loss of friends...

Ruth Calkin wrote a poem titled, 'In the Morning', that goes like this:

Today, Lord, I have an unshakable conviction. A positive resolute assurance that what you have spoken is unalterably true. But today, Lord, my sick body feels stronger. And the stomping pain quietly subsides.

Tomorrow... If I must struggle again with aching exhaustion, with twisting pain... Until I am breathless. Until I am utterly spent. Until fear eclipses the last vestige of hope... Then, Lord - Then grant me the enabling grace, to believe without feeling, to know without seeing, to clasp Your invisible hand and wait with invincible trust...For the morning.

Allow God to use your disappointment

C.S. Lewis in his book "The Problem of Pain" says, "God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain." When disappointed, we have two choices, we can become bitter

and disillusioned or we can use our difficulties as a means of displaying our hope and trust in God.

It was Joseph's right handling of his disappointment that paved way for an opportunity. "After they had been in custody for some time..." (4) => that Joseph had built up a relationship with them, they trusted him, liked him, and that's why they then opened up. If people open up to you then this may well be the reason...

What was Joseph thinking all this time...? You don't have much in prison, but what you do have is time. Potiphar had put Joseph in prison, the King's officials were put into the same prison as Joseph. Wonder whether he thought that they would be a vehicle for him to access a place of power and influence, so his earlier dreams would then be fulfilled...?

The Cupbearer and Baker both come to him with dreams. "YES! This is it!" Joseph still had this God-given gift! "This will be my passport for freedom!" Wrong! He even hinted to the Cupbearer to put in a good word for him! Both dreams came true - good news for one but bad news for the other!

And for Joseph...? "The Cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him" (40: 23)

There may well have been a sense of hope that Joseph had as the Cupbearer was released, "Any day now, I will be pardoned!" But any such hope was soon dispelled... he's still in prison... alone with his disappointment. The days turned to weeks, then months, and all the lights went out for Joseph.

Instead of being remembered, rewarded and freed, he was forgotten. The next 2 years must have been the darkest days of Joseph's life. The book of Proverbs says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick..." (Proverbs 13: 12). We are not told the reason that the Cupbearer did not keep his promise, we simply read, "...he did not remember Joseph but forgot him." (40: 23).

We may well have received or seen a birthday card that says, "Blessed are they who never expect a present for their birthday... for they will never be disappointed!" But when you have expectation raised, only to be dashed then your disappointment is doubled.

When facing continued disappointment continue to trust God

As disappointing as was to be forgotten, and unknown to Joseph, another even better opportunity is coming. It will be another 2 years but it was coming and it would be worth the wait. Perhaps for you today it has been more than 2 years of waiting. Though you are not in a literal prison you are trapped by the unpleasant realities of life, such as circumstances over which we have no control and from which you cannot remove yourselves. But you need to remember that your circumstances are never only what they appear on the surface. We do not know what miraculous events God might be orchestrating through our situation. Our responsibility is to trust Him in spite of appearances.

"Another two years then passed..." (41: 1) => > 700 days... what would Joseph had been thinking...? No idea, but he refused to let go of his faith and trust in God. Neither should we...

"Why not?" Because there is nothing better that you or I can do.

When some of Jesus' disciples left him he turned to some of his closest followers and said, "What about you? Are you going to leave too because what you're hearing or facing is pretty tough?" They replied, "Where else can we go? YOU have the words to eternal life!"

What about us...? Will things be better if we take matters into our own hands...? Should we maybe help God along a bit...? Shall we alter our theology to fit around the circumstances that we find ourselves in...?

For some here, you are disappointed. You feel forgotten. God seems slow to act. Trust Him.

David said, "They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed" (Ps 22: 5)

"Those who hope in me will not be disappointed" (Isaiah 49: 23)

I don't keep a journal but I do take notes when away on a course or when I've been on sabbatical. I found something I once wrote down... My confession - told God all the things I was disappointed about... "What are you going to do with my disappointments, Lord?" "What are you going to do about them...?"

Joseph was unjustly imprisoned, in fact imprisoned for doing the right thing. Prison comes in different forms for different people. We can be imprisoned by our circumstances, trapped in situations that we are powerless to change. We can be imprisoned by the expectations of others. You may be imprisoned by guilt. Many of us are walking around with a load of guilt, from things that may have happened years before. Others may have forgiven us but we have not forgiven ourselves. Regardless of what "prison experience" we may find ourselves facing, Joseph can provide us with insights for coping. One of the things that we must keep in mind as we examine Joseph's life is that God is not as interested in our circumstances as He is of our response to them.

Songs to Close - Break every chain > > Raise a Hallelujah

Conclusion - Where is God when Joseph is thrown in the dungeon? Does His silence mean He's absent? We're not left to wonder. "The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper" (39: 23). God was with Joseph in the palace of Potiphar, and when Joseph went to prison God was there too. When we are trapped by difficult circumstances, the quickest and easiest response is to feel that God has forgotten us. When fear threatens to overwhelm us we need to stop and remember that the Lord is still with us. No promise of scripture is more comforting than "I will never leave you nor will I ever forsake you." (Deut. 31: 6, Joshua 1: 6, Hebrews 13: 5).

The Blessing

Closing Prayer??