

Text: Genesis 40

Title: "God's Work of Providence Calls us to Faithful Patience"

Time: July 12, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: If *Life is a Bowl of Cherries, What am I Doing in the Pits?* is the title of a book that was written by Erma Bombeck in 1978. We had a copy of it in our home, and I can remember it as a fun book to read even for me as a kid. Bombeck helps her readers laugh their way through some of the less serious pits of everyday family life.

Many of the pits of life are not really laughing matters. Joseph has found himself in some serious pits, and Genesis 40 finds him in another (v. 15). The word translated *dungeon* here is the Hebrew word *cistern* or *pit*. It is the same word that is used in 37:29 to describe the well that Joseph's brothers had used to kidnap him. God's plan of providential care for our lives often means that life is not a bowl of cherries, and that we find ourselves sometimes in the pits.

We have already seen from Genesis 37-39 that the life of Joseph teaches us important truths about God's work of providence. God has a plan that encompasses and accounts for all things, that is designed to bring Him glory, and that He is executing flawlessly as the One who is eternal, as the One who can see before, the One who can see the end from the beginning.

We have seen that this plan can be either a bane or a blessing to us depending on how we respond to it. Chapters 37-39 taught us that we must respond to God's providence over our lives with faithful submission, faithful surrender, and faithful purity. Now in chapter 40, I want us to see how God's work of providence calls us to faithful patience.

I. Be faithfully patient when treated as though you are not faithful (vv. 1-4).

Illustration: When I was in high school learning to write in English class, my teacher would make us develop a thesis in which we needed to both compare and contrast two concepts. To compare two things, you had to write about how they were similar. To contrast two things, you had to write about how they were different. The ability to contrast and compare is an important literary tool of clear communication. Moses presents both a comparison and a contrast for us in the verses we have just read.

Application: “After these things” refers to the events of Chapter 39, and this reference highlights a contrast in our text between Joseph and the servants of Pharaoh. Joseph had been faithful; the servants of Pharaoh had not. Joseph refused sin (39:9); the servants of Pharaoh committed it (40:1). Yet in spite of this difference, the outcomes of their different actions are roughly the same. Both Joseph and the servants of Pharaoh incurred the wrath of their masters (39:19-20; 40:2), and both landed in prison for a time (vv. 3-4).

God has a plan that is being executed in a world that is in rebellion against Him. His work of providence involves an ongoing battle against evil. If we are going to respond as a people who are blessed by God’s plan, we have to be prepared to be ill treated by a world that stands opposed to that plan. God’s plan calls us to faithful patience in the face of this injustice. We need to be faithfully patient when we go unrewarded for that faithfulness.

The experiences of Joseph do not comport very well with the wealth and prosperity gospel we hear so much about today. Joelolsteen.com advertises a message series the popular preacher has entitled, “Experiencing God’s Favor.” The write up on the website says this about the series:

“When you learn to tap into God’s favor, you will have a tremendous advantage. Doors will open for you that remain closed for others. You will receive preferential treatment that seems unusual to most people, but for those living in the favor of God, it is no less than you expect.

“We should live each day anticipating more of God’s favor. I Peter 1:13 says, ‘Gird up the loins of your mind and hope to the end for the divine favor that is coming.’ [The untwisted rendering of this verse is actually: ‘hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.’] In his new series, “Experiencing God’s Favor,” Joel Osteen shows you how to get your thinking in line with God’s thinking and receive more of His favor than you ever imagined possible. This enlightening two-message set includes: ‘Experiencing More of God’s Favor,’ [and] ‘Speaking Favor Over Your Life.’

“It only takes one touch of God’s favor to completely turn your situation around. Discover the key to turning adversity into victory, failure into success, and sickness into abundant good health as you unlock the power of God’s divine favor in your life.” [<http://bookstore.joelosteen.com/p-5602-experiencing-gods-favor.aspx>, 4/2/08.]

God’s favor was on Joseph in the pits and on Egypt’s throne. God’s grace enabled him to endure mistreatment and to enjoy promotion. It is utter nonsense to suggest that Joseph needed Joel’s tapes to experience more of God’s favor as he was imprisoned under the accusations of Potipher’s wife, and so it is utter nonsense to suggest that we need them to do so. God is working his plan in an evil world, and that sometimes means that we have to be faithful patiently, even when that faithfulness goes unrewarded, even when we are treated as though we have not been faithful. We hope to the end for the grace and reward that will be ours when Jesus comes again, not for some advantage coming to us in this life.

II. Be faithfully patient when the answers we seek belong to the Lord (vv. 5-15).

Illustration: It is often important to pay attention to the details of something that is said. We were discussing last Wednesday evening the leftover amount of \$431 from our 2008 Harvest Offering, which was raised for our flooring needs downstairs, and our deacon pointed out that when he made the announcement about the offering he was careful to state that although our intension was to use the money for downstairs flooring, we would consider the funds open to other options as well. It is careful to remember the details of what was said in a context like that.

Application: Let's take that careful look at Joseph's comment designed to comfort his friends in verse 8. I want us to notice that the truth that Joseph claims to bring cheer to the hearts of the cupbearer and the baker was not that "God makes known to us all the specific interpretations." Whether that is true is left open until Joseph hears the dream.

The truth that Joseph understood, and which he hoped would comfort his dejected friends, was the truth that interpretations belong to God, i.e. that even though we do not understand the meaning of it all, the God who loves us and is with us and is working His sovereign plan does.

Note that Joseph specifically understood the interpretation of the dreams of these men in a way he did not understand his own dreams. Do you remember what they were? The sheaves of grain bowed to him and the stars, sun, and moon did as well. We can hear the pain of Joseph's own lack of understanding the specifics of how this was going to work out for him in his plea to the cupbearer in vv. 14-15. God's revelation said one thing, and it looked very much like Joseph's experiences were telling him the exact opposite. How did Joseph

cope with that reality of godly living? He believed that interpretations belong to the Lord, and that was enough.

We need to understand that God gives us the promises of His Word, not only to encourage and take care of us, but also to test, develop, and prepare us for future service (Ps. 105:17-19, “He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him.”).

It is when those promises seem less true to our experience that the intensive testing is going on. Joseph passed the test. He responded to God’s plan with faithful patience believing that the answers he sought did exist and that they belonged to the Lord who would make them plain in His good time.

III. Be faithfully patient when the task is an unpleasant one (vv. 16-19).

Application: Wouldn’t it be wonderful to be able to interpret dreams and have the future revealed to you? Well, not really. Because the Bible is full of prophecy, each of us as believers, illumined by the Holy Spirit, has the ability to interpret a revelation of God, which predicts the future. Much of this future is very bleak for the world in which we live. Part of the stewardship of the gift of God’s revelation is the call that we have to let people understand the negative as well as the positive aspects of its truth. This can be an unpleasant task, but it is an important one and one to which we must be faithful.

What if Joseph had been unwilling to let the baker know about the specific meaning of his dream? We are left to our imaginations for an answer, but how might the interpretation Joseph faithfully gave the baker have affected him? Well, the response of faith would have been, “Joseph, I only have three days—How can I know the God who is with you in such a

powerful way?" You see, for the baker, having birds pick his flesh off his body did not have to be his end. But in order for there to be any hope beyond the grave, Joseph needed to let him know that he only had three days. What a crime it would have been for Joseph to remain silent. We need to be faithfully patient even when the task God's revelation calls us to is an unpleasant one.

IV. Be faithfully patient when we feel forgotten (vv. 20-23).

Illustration: When I say that I forgot where I placed my keys, I mean something different than when I say that I forgot to remain faithful to my wife. The second of these things is really not a lapse in memory. When I forget to remain faithful to my wife, what I am really doing is choosing not to remember and to be bound by the covenantal relationship I have with my wife.

Application: We read here that the cupbearer forgot Joseph. Verse 23 tells us the obvious, that to forget is to fail to remember. Forgetting about someone is the opposite of remembering him.

But I also want us to notice this morning that it is also the opposite of something our translation calls "kindness" in v. 14. In that verse, the Hebrew word for *remembering* used in v. 23 appears twice, once in the phrase *think on me* (literally, *remember me with yourself*) and the phrase *make mention of me* (literally, *cause me to be remembered*).

Remembering shows this kindness; forgetting fails to show this kindness. The word translated *kindness* here is the very special Hebrew word *hesed*, which describes the covenantal love of faithfulness to a relationship. Joseph says remember me as your friend; show kindness by not forgetting the relationship we have had. The cupbearer forgets anyway.

But chapter 39 does tell us of the One who never forgets. It uses the same word *kindness* or *hesed* to describe the way He is ever faithful to those with whom He is especially related (39:21). God does not forget His covenant people; the precious flock for whom He gave His only Son. "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

He gave us His Son; will he withhold that provision that we seem to be lacking? He gave us His Son; is He going to forget us now?

The cupbearer forgot Joseph for another two years, and languishing in prison, having been forgotten in this way, can certainly make a person feel absolutely deserted. But Joseph had come to understand that the Lord never forgets His own; He always abides faithful to the relationship He has established with His people. Be faithfully patient when you feel forgotten, because you are not forgotten.

Conclusion: Life under God's plan is not supposed to be a bowl of cherries. We need to respond with faithful patience when the Lord's perfect plan puts us in the pits. We are there according to His purpose and for His praise. Trust Him. He is trustworthy. Be faithful to Him. He is always faithful to us.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching