Promises and Faith **Genesis 40**
Trinity CRC, July 20, 2025 Rev. Richard J. deLange
Joseph Summer Series

40 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**.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear Congregation,

When I was 20 years old, I was working as a mechanic on farm equipment. I loved my job and was doing fairly well at it. Then one summer day, I stuck my finger in a piece of equipment to feel what was wrong with a pin that seemed to be seized. My boss, however, did not know I was doing that and at that same moment he forced the tightened pin loose and the tip of my finger got pinched off. I was off work for over a month. About a year later, I had another accident at work that resulted in a severe burn to my leg and a hospital stay. While in the hospital, I recognized that I had been resisting the Holy Spirit's nudging since high school to go to college and seminary in order to become a minister. I know I've told this story before, but I tell it to illustrate that God gets us where he wants us in one way or another. He uses the events of our lives to lead and direct our steps for his purposes.

He did this with Joseph too.

You may have heard the saying, "When God closes one door, another opens." Or "When God closes a door, he opens a window." From our perspective, those things are often difficult to see when we are in a time of wondering or uncertainty. But afterwards, we can sometimes look back and clearly see the hand of God directing the events of our lives to his purposes. But even that is not always crystal clear to us. Nonetheless it is clear to God. Meanwhile, our calling or our job as believers is to honour God in all we do as we trust him with the details of our lives, even when life is hard.

This story of Joseph in Genesis 40 shows us again that God who sits on the throne has the world and our lives securely in his care. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. Everyone in it! We are in the line of Abraham by faith, in the line of believers who are blessed by God to be a blessing to the nations, to the world. In gratefulness to God for his love for us, we offer our lives in his service. We seek to honour him in everything. So, this morning, let's look a little at the life of Joseph for clues about how we might do that.

In this chapter from the life of Joseph we see on display his confidence in God's promises. You could also call it his faith in God which shows up in many ways.

Faith Informing Action

First, his faith informs his actions.

As we come to Joseph in the jailhouse, we see immediately a contrast between Joseph and the butler (or the cupbearer) and the baker. Joseph has shown himself loyal and faithful even in prison. The butler and baker, however, are accused of doing something that offended their master, Pharaoh the King of Egypt. They were disloyal in some fashion. We aren't told what they did wrong.

However, we do know that they served in what we might call the defense department. In that day, enemies or opponents often used poison to get rid of a leader. So, the people responsible to put food and drink before the king were super important. They had to be trusted completely. The king's life rested in their hands.

Again, we don't know too many details. Maybe it was discovered that someone tried to poison the king and was nearly successful. Given what we know, perhaps an investigation took place while the two were in jail, and it was discovered that the poison was in the bread and not in the cup, which is why only the baker ended up being put to death. He either failed at his job or was the one who attempted to do the poisoning. We don't know for sure but it's almost certain that something was amiss. Those guys raised the suspicion of Pharaoh who threw them into prison for some sort of failure related to their job. The king would almost certainly not have tossed aside those men who would have been trusted and highly respected in the king's court.

Now, in contrast to the **Egyptian** cupbearer and baker, Joseph is a **foreigner** in the dungeon. While the king has lost trust in them, the warden, the chief jailer, who is called the captain of the guard in v.4, gains complete trust in Joseph.

Now, ask yourself, do people find us to be trustworthy in our circles? As Christians, we are called to live by God's standards in our work and life in general, regardless of what others are doing. Some people go to work and sit on their phones all day, giving their boss less effort than expected—at least when the boss is not looking. They seek shortcuts and ways to do less while seeking more and more pay for their increasingly substandard work. You are not being a blessing when you live that way. You are not showing yourself to be trustworthy.

Boys and girls, the same is true in your school and at home. When we don't do our best, we are dishonouring God who gave us talents and skills. We become lazy and disrespectful toward our parents and teachers. Instead, our faith must inform our work. We work as unto the Lord which means you do your best. You aim to be honourable, trustworthy, loyal, industrious and cheerful—as the Cadets say. We have to **fight** our bad attitude at times, allowing our faith to inform our actions. We have to recognize that our parents and teachers aren't perfect either, so we need to be forgiving when they fail. And we need to be ready to listen to them and do what they say, even when we don't want to, unless they are asking us to do something that God forbids.

It could not have been easy for Joseph to work faithfully in the jail while knowing he was innocent of the crime that landed him there. Anyway, we see that Joseph was a faithful and trustworthy servant even in the Egyptian prison. His faith led to integrity in his work which was noted and rewarded by the captain of the guard.

But whether our integrity gets the attention of others or not, we live for the Lord above all else. That's the only way we'll do what's right, whether it directly

benefits us or not. We do it for the Lord alone who sees all things and whom we seek to honour for his goodness and mercy to us.

Perhaps the best way to see Joseph in this story is as a man seeking to honour God while living in a world that constantly pulls us down. The book of Genesis shows us this repeatedly through the lives of the Patriarchs—from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We see how our world and the sinful desires of our own hearts tug against the good life God desires for us. Not the good life that is marked by health and wealth, as some preach, but a good life marked by faithfulness to God and his blessing that follows from obedience. This does not promise to be a road of worldly ease. In fact, we should always remember that Jesus said to us, “In this world you will have trouble” or tribulation (Jn 16:33). We’ll have challenges and opposition. The calling we have is to be light, regardless of the challenges that brings our way. We aim to live out our faith, to be reflected lights of Jesus in our world of darkness.

As much as it is tempting for us to say that Joseph is a model for us to follow, he is—more than that—one who points us to Christ. He was a fallen human like all of us who trusted God with his life. You see, from the point of our fallenness, we best recognize how much we need the redeeming grace of Jesus. Once we know how much we need him, we can better trust him and then offer our lives to honour him in all we do. Our faith informs our actions which makes us a greater blessing in our fallen world.

Faith Informing Worth of People

Secondly, we find in our study of Joseph here in Genesis 40 that faith must inform our own worth and the worth of others.

As one who points us to the coming Christ, we see in Joseph one who descended from the rank of the beloved son of his father to the role of a slave. He not only serves those who could somehow benefit him, like the captain of the guard. He also serves his fellow prisoners. He can do this because he does not have his self-worth tied up in the status symbols of this world. No, he knows he's a child of God and is called to the service of mankind, whether it’s at home with his father or in a dungeon full of criminals.

So often people who find themselves in tough places or situations become self absorbed. They feel sorry for themselves and can’t seem to get their head above their trouble. They say, “I’m a victim.” We have people who say things like, “I’m a victim of my upbringing. I had a bad father or mother. I’m a victim of a failed marriage. I’m a victim of a bad boss or a slipping economy. I’m a victim of a bad life or even of a demonic attack. Joseph could have fallen into that kind of victim mentality. He’s in prison **unjustly.**

Yet from that place, he sees his calling as a servant of God. With compassion, he sees the despair on the faces of two other prisoners who are, it seems, justly imprisoned. But regardless of their guilt or innocence, Joseph recognizes their despondency. Their heads hang down, their eyes betray fear,

their breathing shows anxiety. Worry-wrinkles protrude on their foreheads. Whatever their physical signs of trouble, Joseph took note. He cared enough to notice.

In v.4, we read that the captain of the guard assigned the butler and baker to Joseph, *and **he attended** them*. It doesn't say that he guarded them or that he ensured they were properly locked up. No, Joseph gave them his attention. There's a sense of service in that word. You get this foreshadowing of Jesus, as Paul tells us in Philippians 2, Jesus who makes himself a servant (v.7). And leading up to that, Paul reminds Christians,

> *Php 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

Joseph seems to understand this as his calling even in jail. Verse 6 says that

> *Gen 40:6 Joseph …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?"*

I imagine that some guards in a jail could care less about the mental health of their prisoners. I suspect that we might also think, "Well, it's good that people in jail feel their pain. They've done wrong and they deserve whatever discomfort they feel." It's easy not to care when they are hurting, especially if we think they are monsters of some kind. It's easy to say that they get what they have coming. It's easy to ignore them, despise them and dismiss them as unworthy of love. Have you ever done that?

That is not God's way. That is not the heart of God. Not the calling of Jesus. So, it should not be the heart of the Christian.

Joseph has long been removed from his Canaan home. But his faith in the God of his fathers has not left him. His brothers who threw him in a well and sold him as a slave may not have fully appreciated the worth of all people. And maybe Joseph didn't at the time either. However, the hardships Joseph has endured have helped him to see others as worthy of our compassion. The first chapter of 2nd Corinthians mentions that we, *with the comfort we have received, ought to comfort others*. The God of all compassion has touched the heart of Joseph to make him more compassionate, giving him eyes to see the pain in others and to care for them. Joseph understands, by God's grace, that we are blessed to be a blessing. We are not more worthy of anything than someone else.

We can learn from this chapter, too, that compassion isn't always about saying what's popular or only what's considered "nice." In our society today, when we suggest that we should tell people something they don't want to hear, that is called unloving. But that isn't always the case. Telling people the truth can be the most loving thing we can do.

Once the butler and baker shared their troubling dreams with Joseph, God gave Joseph the understanding to interpret those dreams. For the butler it was good news. In three days, you'll be lifting up the cup for the king again. But for the

baker it was bad news: you're going to be dead in three days. The king had the authority to execute justice as he saw fit. For Joseph, letting the baker know what he was facing was not unloving. These three days gave the baker time to grieve. Time to set his house in order. We could say he had this time to face his upcoming death. Time to repent and turn to God.

We have no further details but, through the baker's days of anxiety, Joseph would have continued to "attend" to the needs of these men. He could have continued to walk with the baker and help him find comfort in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who had strengthened Joseph himself. The point is that telling the truth when we know what God says or requires of humanity is loving. Giving people direction to find peace with God is loving. We can't force faith on anyone, but we can point them to God—the God who has been our comfort and strength and who helps us overcome our situations. And we do this because we see them as equals, as people worthy of our love and God's because Jesus came to die for all sinners.

Faith's Secure Foundation

There are many more things we could notice in this passage, but let me end by noting how Joseph's faith in God is not only steadfast; it also sustains him. Joseph's faith has a secure foundation. You can tell that Joseph—despite all the wrongs he has endured—has found his strength in the Lord, his God. By the time the butler and baker are jailed, Joseph has been away from his home for around 10 years. Ten years is a long time for us, right?

Waiting is one of the hardest things for us as people. I hear elderly folks talking about how hard it is to wait for the Lord to take them home to heaven. Younger people might find that very strange. But wait till you are 85 or 90 years old and you feel like you don't have too much purpose in life anymore. Or the strength and zeal you once had for life is greatly diminished. When we are sick, waiting is hard. When we are in periods of uncertainty or transition, waiting is hard. Trying to figure out what's next in our life is sometimes hard because it takes longer than we want.

Somehow, through all of the wrongs Joseph endured, through the time of waiting and through the uncertainty of what God was doing in his life, Joseph trusted God. He trusted that his heavenly father is sovereign and that he has a plan for each of our lives, and that he is at work even in the greatest times of need and struggle that we face.

I often counsel people to preach the gospel to themselves. If you know something to be true when you're in a period of goodness or light in your life, that's great. It's wonderful to know that God is with you when you feel good about life. But, as has been said by others, "Never doubt in the dark what you know is true in the light. Never doubt in the dark what you know is true in the light." This had to have been true for Joseph for many years. He had learned at home that God is faithful. God is a God who keeps his promises. God is, of course,

sovereign, the King of kings. And this God is good. He delivers, saves, helps, defends, is gracious and compassionate.

In chapter 39, Joseph's faith in God was noticed. And here in chapter 40, Joseph is quick to point people to his God, the help of Jahweh, the strength of his own heart and the God who longs for all people to worship him alone. This is why Joseph is quick to offer the help of his God when the cupbearers and baker reveal their dreams and want to understand the meaning. We read, in v.8,

> *Gen 40:8 Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."*

His confidence in God stands out.

This takes on even greater significance when we see that the butler is returned to his position as Pharaoh's cupbearer and the last verse of this chapter says,

> *Gen 40:23 The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.*

He forgot Joseph. But Joseph does not forget God because he knows that God will not forget him! For now, Joseph himself remains stuck in jail. Joseph is portrayed as a righteous figure who patiently obeys God in adverse circumstances, until God "remembers" him and acts to rescue him.

We see here that Joseph's faith is built on a solid foundation. He knows God is trustworthy. God will keep his promises, his word and be faithful to his people, regardless of what we go through. And our confidence is based on Jesus, the Son of God, who ensures that we are inheritors of all God's promises and his love. He will never leave us, forget or forsake us.

Friends, Joseph points us to Jesus. He takes on a priestly role, being an intercessor between God and man, pointing us to Jesus as our true and only intercessor between God and humanity. He has served his fellow prisons as a king, caring for them, reminding us of Christ our one true King who rules us with perfect love and righteousness. And Joseph serves as a prophet to the butler and baker, declaring his hope in God alone even as Jesus serves as our chief prophet who fully reveals to us the counsel and will of God concerning our salvation, says the catechism (LD 12).

So, congregation, let our wonderful faith in Jesus that secures us in time of change and uncertainty be the catalyst to move us forward into our world with love and grace as servants of God. Amen.