

Movie "God's Not Dead"

John Mundfrom, pastor at Skrefsrud, died yesterday. Pray for Lorilee and his son.

We observed last week life's ups and downs and noticed the emphasis in the text of God's presence with Joseph through them all. So, I want to begin this morning's message by asking you to think about how you respond to life's ups and downs.

The ups: Do you know how most people think about God in the up times of life?

They don't. Often we forget God in the good times.

We don't pray, read our Bibles, give, serve, seek God.

We're busy... often too busy to think about God.

The downs: How do people tend to think about God when things are hard?

Well... often they think about God a lot.

God gets our attention when things go badly.

But we cry out for answers.

We want to be rescued, healed, vindicated. We want God's help.

Sometimes we even get angry at God when He doesn't seem to help us.

We often feel in the hard times that God has forgotten us and we need to get His attention and earn His favor.

Think about it from God's perspective... all these people who ignore Him when He blesses them... and then they remember Him when things go badly... and they insist He bless them.

Why should He?

Why should He bless them when it seems only to make them forget Him?

Why should He remember us at all?

I don't know why.

But God's love and grace is at the center of who He is... and so He remembers us.

God is good. God loves to make a special place in His plans for each of us.

And, our troubles, when they come, He makes a part of His good plan for us.

God did not forget Joseph. God will not forget you.

Joseph was 17 years old, he had two dreams given to him by God.

Shortly thereafter Joseph is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers.

His father thinks him dead.

Joseph then finds himself in Egypt in the service of Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard.

But God is with Joseph, so, within a few years he rises to be the chief steward of Potiphar's household.

However, after he refuses the advances of Potiphar's wife, he finds himself unjustly thrown into prison...

The very prison that is under Potiphar's authority... supervised by the chief jailor.

The prison into which the Pharaoh puts his own prisoners.

God is with Joseph in prison and so he rises to a supervisor's role once again... **Gen. 39:20-23**

From Gen. 39:20-41:13 Joseph is in the dungeon... also translated "the pit."

Gen. 41:46 tells us that Joseph was 30 when he left prison to appear in Pharaoh's court.

Thus a reasonable deduction is that Joseph spent around 6 years in Potiphar's house.

Then he spent another 7 years in prison... from age 23-30.

Those are tough years to spend in a dungeon.

How would you feel about all this if you were Joseph?

Did Joseph shake his fist at God?

Did Joseph decide that, well, God must not be all that powerful or faithful?

Maybe God left on a vacation or fell asleep and forgot about Joseph?

Maybe God was just not all that active in Egypt?

Or, maybe events took God by surprise and it was taking Him a while to devise a way to get Joseph out?

If ever someone has a reason to think that they have been abandoned by God...

a guy sold into slavery by his family and then unjustly imprisoned by his owner has that reason. Right?

Well, let us look to the text of the story and find out.

I. Joseph and the two inmates, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" 40:1-8

Now I want you to think first about this prison. It is not a nice place.

Prisons today often have TVs and cafeterias, libraries and job training.

Put all of that out of your mind.

Think dungeon... with stone corridors and windows so small and so high you cannot even see out.

There are wooden doors with a gap at the bottom where your bowl of gruel gets pushed in once a day.

There is a pot in the corner in which you do your duty when you must and you sleep on a stone floor.

It is dark. It stinks. You are hungry. You are alone. **Psalms 105:17-19**

This is Joseph's home for 5 years so far... God testing Joseph.

And, yet, there is something missing in Joseph that we would expect to be there. It would be there for many of us.

There is no complaint.

Imagine the people of God wandering in the wilderness, and all their complaining, hearing this.

Do we see any complaining in Joseph?

Do we see any grumpiness?

Do we see anger?

Do we see resentment toward Potiphar or his wife?

Is there resentment toward his brothers?

No. Why?

It is because Joseph knows that God is with him.

In fact, it is the presence of the Lord that causes Joseph to become the trusted caretaker of the prison.

Don't forget that he's still in the prison. But look at what he's doing.

Joseph is taking care of the other prisoners. (vs. 40)

I imagine he delivers food to them daily and empties their chamber pots.

It is not how a guy wants to spend his 20s, but it's an improvement over the cell all day.

Joseph is visiting with the prisoners... vs. 6-7

We've heard of two: Pharaoh's cupbearer (wine taster) and baker = both important to the security of the king.

And, he notices how they are doing.

What an amazing guy! He's not even thinking of himself at this point.

And, he's amazingly perceptive, "Why are your faces sad today?"

Should they be happy? They're in prison!

But he notices that something else is bothering them.

Furthermore, Joseph, even in this dark place, even when things have gone badly for him, recognizes the activity of God.

Are you looking for God even in dark places?

Are you saying to God, "God, things are really bad. What are You doing? What are you saying?"

God last spoke to Joseph in dreams when he was 17... some 11 years ago at this point.

But Joseph has not forgotten.

Even here, in prison, Joseph knows, God is working... God is speaking.

And, Joseph is not at all upset that God does not speak to him directly.

Isn't this interesting.

God speaks to these two people who don't know much about God. He does so for Joseph's sake.

God is reassuring Joseph. God is at work on Joseph's behalf, though Joseph does not know how.

But Joseph knows this. God is here. God is active.

So, Joseph says to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God. Tell the dreams to me."

II. Joseph interprets two dreams

40:9-19

Now, before we get into these dreams, it is important to think about the nature of dreams from God in the Bible.

People ask, "Does God still speak through dreams today... like He did then?"

He does.

I hear about this particularly in the Moslem world... but all over the world.

It happens particularly in places where witnesses are few and the Bible is difficult to get.

Then people ask, "How will I know if God is speaking to me in a dream?"

You'll know. I promise you.

People in the Bible never ask, "Was that God?"

No. when God speaks to people in a dream, they remember the dream.

They cannot forget it.

Often they cannot sleep. They are scared. They are ill.

They cannot get the dream out of their mind.

We see this with Jacob, with Joseph, with Pharaoh, Daniel, with the Prophets, with Joseph, with Mary, with Peter.

These two dreams have fairly simple interpretations.

The first: the cupbearer... his head is going to be lifted up! He's going to be freed in three days.

The we have a request from Joseph. (vss. 14-15)

The second: the baker... in three days his head is going to be lifted up in a different way. He's going to be hanged.

Ouch!

Remember, it is God who holds life and death in His hand.

But let us consider Joseph's request of the cupbearer... and we get a little insight into how Joseph is feeling.

1. He wants to get out. This is not an easy nice happy time for him. It is hard.

2. He's not blaming anyone... not his brothers, not Potiphar nor the wife. Has he forgiven them in his heart?

3. He protests his innocence.

So, he asks the cupbearer not to forget him.

What happens?

III. Joseph forgotten

40: 20-23

First we see that Joseph's interpretations of the dreams are exactly correct. It happens just that way.

But, the cupbearer forgets Joseph.

Now we know that it was not as though the cupbearer didn't know or recall what had happened.

I imagine that he actually worked to put Joseph out of his mind.

He forgot on purpose.

After all, how do you approach Pharaoh about this?

Do you make it your project to get the guy in prison free?

It is probably enough to just keep your head down and keep your job.

We find at the beginning of Gen. 41 that Joseph sits in prison for another two years.

Imagine that! Every day hoping for news that the cupbearer has done something to tell someone.

At first, maybe every time the prison doors opened he might have run to hear some news.

Then, as days and weeks go by... he only walked.

Finally, he no longer got up at all. Would there be any news of the cupbearer?

But, no... nothing... forgotten.

And, people will forget you. People will be unfaithful, ungrateful, unhelpful... not all the time, but some of the time.

Don't put your trust in people. Don't put your hope in people. You will be disappointed.

But, we find, disappointment does not have to make you bitter.

No. This made Joseph more ready.

Why? Because Joseph was not ultimately trusting in the cupbearer.

He was trusting in God.

And Joseph knew that God knew exactly what He is doing... even when God seems to be taking His time.

You see. The cupbearer forgot Joseph, but God did not forget Joseph.

God was just waiting for the right time.

IV. Joseph remembered

41:1-14

Now we are going to look more closely at this dream of Pharaoh's next week, but I want you to see something now.

God is faithful to Joseph.

God remembered him.

God has never forgotten him.

God had Joseph waiting in prison until that very moment when God would send Pharaoh this dream.

He did not get out of prison a moment too soon... and not a moment too late.

And, all along Joseph knew that God had a plan and God was working it out.

You might ask why... Why did Joseph have to be in prison all that time.

Could God have found another way?

Apparently not.

We ask that question ourselves about things that we have to go through.

"God, why do I have to go through this?"

"God, could you not do it a different way?"

Well, apparently not. "But why?" you might ask.

Let's look again at Joseph. Why? Why did he have to go through all that sold into slavery and the years in prison?

1. He was learning to trust God.

2. He was learning humility. We see a very different man before Pharaoh than the boy who spoke to his brothers.

3. He was learning to serve and to carry out complex administration. He would need that when put over all Egypt.

4. He was learning compassion.

5. He was learning to resist sin. Power corrupts.

6. He was learning to forgive. "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord."

7. He was learning to listen to God however God might speak.

Do you see the common theme? Joseph had a lot to learn... and he learned it.

Do you and I need to learn a lot from God?

Yes we do.

When you are going through hardship, let God take you to school... and do your homework so you can learn the lessons.

Go through the hardship and pain on your knees with your Bible open before you.

Then you're going to learn. You're going to be changed.

God never forgets you, nor does He forget what He's doing in you and with you.

God wants to use you, but there are deep lessons along the way.

Are you willing to learn from God?