

If God is For Us: The Life and Trials of Joseph

The LORD Does Not Forget (Genesis 40:1-23)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on October 12, 2025

Introduction

- ❖ **Waiting is hard.** Especially in our day and age when everything happens so fast. **You don't have to wait for things anymore.** Have some nagging question about some super niche topic? You don't have to wait for a trip to the library. Just Google it right away or ask an AI bot. Miss seeing that family member or friend living overseas? You don't have to wait for that next visit. Just FaceTime them or get on Zoom.
 - Why would you endure waiting longer than two-days for that package to arrive? Or why can't everything be delivered on the same-day? Remember those days when you couldn't wait for that movie to come out on DVD, so you could rewatch it? Now it'll show up on a streamer in a matter of weeks. And while fast food drive-thru lanes are nothing new, you can now cut down the wait by ordering ahead of time on your app.
 - **We barely have to wait on anything anymore.** Which means we are being conditioned into becoming highly impatient people. It's excruciating to wait. We expect instant gratification and on-demand service. We want it all now.
- ❖ We can't sit still and wait on anything anymore. **Which unfortunately makes us ill-prepared for the life of faith. Because in the life of faith, the experience of delay is a common occurrence.** Some of you can testify to this harsh reality with your own stories of silent suffering as you waited and waited for your prayers to be answered. For your plans to come to fruition. For your dreams to come true. You can attest to it taking much longer than you expected. Or perhaps you're still waiting. Still wondering if it's ever going to happen.
 - Maybe you're waiting for that suitable mate, that future spouse. Or you're waiting for that long-hoped-for child, that addition to your family. Or you're waiting for that career opportunity, for that door to open. Or perhaps you have the responsibility and burden of a caregiver and you have no idea how long this difficult season will last. Or maybe you're the one with the debilitating illness and who knows how long you'll have to bear with this thorn in your flesh? Who knows how long you'll have to wait?
 - **Waiting is so hard. But, at the same time, waiting is so formative.** The posture of waiting can feel so unnatural and uncomfortable. The experience of delay can be so agonizing. **Waiting is a crucible.** But you don't put silver or gold in a crucible to destroy it, to burn it away. You're trying to refine it, to purify it. **And in the same way, God leads us through seasons of waiting for that same formative, soul-purifying, soul-shaping purpose.**
- ❖ I've shared before how those six years of waiting for our oldest child and those ten years until we were gifted a second child – **those long years of waiting, for my wife and I, were filled with much pain and disappointment.** But, at the same time, so much goodness and grace that I often didn't recognize (or at times refused to acknowledge) until much later.
 - But, in time, I began to realize that those years of waiting were instrumental in exposing in me a legalistic spirit where I had unfounded expectations that God should bless me with a child after all I've done for him. Through the delay, I learned important lessons about God's grace, and it formed in me and my wife a sensitivity to and compassion for other couples who are enduring their own seasons of waiting.

- ❖ **I'm sure many of you can testify to your own stories of seeing the budding and blossoming of spiritual fruit after a long and difficult season of waiting.** That's the hopeful message we can draw out of Genesis 40 this morning. We've been in Genesis lately covering the Life and Trials of Joseph. And we're definitely in the trials portion of his story.
 - And what we'll see is that contrary to how we often feel when the wait drags on – like God has forgotten about us or abandoned his promises – **the truth is that God never forgets his people and will always keep his promises, fulfilling all them, all at the right time.** As we walk through the chapter, we'll encounter three key moments: Joseph delayed; Joseph matured; and Joseph forgotten.

Joseph Delayed

- ❖ We'll begin with Joseph delayed. Joseph's story epitomizes the point we've been making about the experience of delay and waiting being commonplace in the life of faith. **Just think about the saints of old and how so many were characterized by a posture of waiting.**
 - Think about **Abraham**. The delay between when he was promised a son (Gen 12:4) to when Issac arrived (Gen 21:5) was **25 years**. He had to wait a quarter century. Or think of **Moses**. Scripture says he was 40 years old when he took it upon himself to deliver his people, unsuccessfully (Acts 7:23). It took a delay of **40 years** in Midian before he was ready to be that deliverer (Ex 7:7). And it took waiting another **40 years** in the wilderness before God's people could enter the Promised Land (a privilege Moses didn't even get to enjoy). Or think of David being anointed the next king of Israel as a mere teenager at around age 15. But having to wait **15 more years** until he was finally crowned king at the age of thirty (2 Sam 5:4).
 - And then there's the **70 years** of waiting that God's people had to endure while in exile in Babylon (Jer 29:10). Which is nothing compared to the roughly **700 years** between the prophecies in Isaiah 53 of a Suffering Servant and the incarnation of Christ in the Gospels. And that just pales in comparison to the over **2000 years and counting** that the Church has had to endure as we wait for Christ's promised return.
- ❖ **And then when we consider Joseph's story, we're reminded that he was introduced to us in chapter 37:2 as a seventeen year old.** Who received two very similar dreams that symbolically suggested that, somehow some way, his eleven brothers and father and mother would one day bow themselves to the ground before him and Joseph will rule and reign over them. And he rather immaturely shared those dreams with his family members, which damaged his relationship with his older brothers.
 - And, as the narrative unfolds, instead of bowing low to Joseph, his older brothers rise up and throw him into a pit. Their original plan was to kill him, but they instead sell him to Midianite traders who take him down to Egypt and sell him into slavery. In last week's passage, he rises up in the ranks of Potiphar's house, but is wrongly accused of a crime he didn't commit and gets thrown in prison. In what he describes, in v15, as another pit.

- ❖ **The point is that his story seems to be going nowhere. There's no apparent progress.** It keeps going in circles. Now he's back where he started. Back in a pit. And seemingly no closer to seeing his dreams come true.
 - And it's hard to tell how much time has passed and how long he's been waiting. We're only given statements like "*some time after this*," (v1) and "*some time in custody*." But we can piece together a timeline when we consider what we're told later in chapter 41:46, that Joseph was thirty years old when he entered into Pharaoh's service. And we're told in the first verse of chapter 41 that there's a two year span between our chapter and the next.
 - So that means, in our chapter, he's twenty-eight. **And to this point, he's been waiting 11 years for his dreams to come true.** And, in total, he ends up having to wait **13 years** for those dreams – not even to fully come true – but at least to get going in the right direction.
- ❖ So you can see how **13 years** compares to **15** for David; **25** for Abraham; **40** for Moses; **70** for the exiles; **700** for the readers of Isaiah's prophecy. It's relatively short in comparison. But long or short, in every case the experience of delay tests our patience and stretches our faith. Sometimes to what feels like a breaking point.
 - **Regardless of how long it ends up taking, in the moment, all you know is that your dreams are far from becoming a reality.** When you're in that season of waiting, you're just stuck with uncertainty. It doesn't mean life completely comes to a halt. It doesn't mean there aren't good things happening in your life. **But there is this nagging, undeniable sense that you're stuck.** Like you're in some sort of prison.
- ❖ You're like Joseph in Genesis 40. We're told that, even in prison, his administrative skills had a chance to shine. He was entrusted with greater responsibilities and privileges. Life was still happening. **Good things were still occurring. But nevertheless, he was still stuck in prison.** We don't know how many of those 11 years since he arrived in Egypt were spent incarcerated, but it's safe to assume he spent multiple years (maybe over half that time) stuck in prison with his two dreams from Genesis 37 still so far from becoming a reality.
 - I wouldn't be surprised if Joseph was struggling with the wait. Feeling like his faith was being stretched to a breaking point. If I were in his shoes, I'd be confused. I'd be questioning God's timing. Especially after he helps interpret the two dreams of these two fellow prisoners. The double dream that one night is similar to Joseph's back in chapter 37, and to Pharaoh's experience of a double dream in the next chapter. There in Genesis 41:32, Joseph explains that, "*the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.*"
- ❖ **So to see these two prisoners have their dreams fulfilled in three days, just reenforces Joseph's belief that a double dream means the fulfillment is fixed and will be brought about shortly.** So what is going on in his case? He's probably thinking, "What's happening LORD? Have you forgotten about me? Why is my double dream so long delayed?"

- ❖ As readers of Scripture and those familiar with his story, we know why. But, at this point, he has no clue. And, in that sense, he's like us. **When you're in the middle of your story, you have no clue why you have to wait and for how long?**
 - All you have are the promises of Scripture. You have the book of James and the promise in chapter one that "*the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*" (Jas 1:4) That could be translated as perseverance, fortitude, or just plain toughness. **Your faith needs to be stress-tested.** So the more you have to wait – the more your faith is stretched – the stronger it gets and the more steadfast you become. The grittier you get. When you're in the middle of your story, no one (but God) can tell you how long or why you have to wait. **But we can remind each other that the experience of delay – as difficult as it is – is intended to produce something good in you.**

Joseph Matured

- ❖ That's what Joseph came to experience, and that leads us to our second key moment in the story. We saw Joseph delayed. Now let's consider Joseph matured. **These long years of waiting were certainly producing a positive effect in him.** Let's look back at v1. We're introduced to Joseph's two prison mates: the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. They were two elite officials in the royal court who enjoyed direct and daily access to Pharaoh.
 - The chief cupbearers job was to taste any wine that the king was to consume that day. **Not just to ensure the highest of quality but to protect the king from poisoning.** And similarly, the chief baker would've been responsible for sampling the king's food for the same purposes. Now it's not clear what their offense was. But it's not a stretch to imagine Pharaoh having recently gotten sick after a meal, and it's not clear which one of them failed in their duty. Or worse, which one plotted against the king.
 - **Regardless of the exact offense, we're told in v3 that, by God's sovereign hand, the two men are placed in the same prison as Joseph.** In the custody of the captain of the guard. Which, remember, is Potiphar. That was his title back in chapter 39:1. So in God's providence, Potiphar assigns his best, most reliable prisoner to attend to these high-profile prisoners. He appoints Joseph.
- ❖ Now we're told, in v5, that after some time, the two officials both had vivid dreams on the same night. And the next morning, we're told that both were distressed and trouble. **Not particularly by the content of their dream but by the lack of access to any professional dream interpreters like the ones you find in the royal court.**
 - Ancient Egyptians placed a high value in the significance of dreams. **And there was an entire class of sorcerers and magicians dedicated to the art of divination – the practice of discovering hidden knowledge in the mind of god(s).** Various methods were applied. Looking for signs in animal guts (usually in organs like the liver). Watching the stars (astrology) or conjuring up the dead (necromancy). And a common means of divination in those days was dream interpretation.

- ❖ **So for the cupbearer and baker, to receive these vivid dreams and yet to lack a professional interpreter is particularly distressing.** If the gods are trying to tell me something through this dream, if there's no one to explain it to me, then what if I don't get the warning in time to avoid imminent danger? What if I don't know what opportunities to look for and end up missing out on God's best for my life? If you believe God is trying to send you an important message through a dream, then it's very upsetting to think that you're going to miss it and never get the message.
 - That's why their faces were so downcast the next morning. Joseph notices, and he's the one who speaks up. Look at v7, "*“Why are your faces downcast today?”*" ⁸*They said to him, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.”*"
 - Notice that Joseph doesn't promise an interpretation nor does he claim to possess the power to interpret. **He simply acknowledges that God can interpret dreams, and perhaps God might speak through him to give you insight to understand your dream.**
- ❖ **So the chief cupbearer bares his soul and tells Joseph his dream.** It very much pertained to his profession and seemed realistic enough. He saw a vine with three branches, which immediately, budded, blossomed, and ripened into grapes. And with Pharaoh's cup in hand, the cupbearer saw himself squeezing the grapes into the cup and placing it in Pharaoh's hand.
 - Joseph goes on, in v12, to give him the interpretation, which God provided. The three branches represent three days. "*In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office.*" You'll get your job back. **That language of lifting up your head is another way of saying Pharaoh will pardon and restore you.** In those days, it was customary to prostrate yourself in the presence of the king. If the king grants you favor and invites you to approach, he lifts your head – from off the floor.
- ❖ Now in v14, Joseph doesn't ask for any payment, as would be expected from a professional dream interpreter. **But he does ask the cupbearer to remember him.** To remember him after he's been restored and to do him the kindness of mentioning him to Pharaoh and pleading his case. Joseph goes on to testify of his innocence and how he was stolen out of his homeland, sold into slavery, and now falsely imprisoned.
 - **What's noted by many commentators is the maturity and sensitivity that Joseph displayed towards these two officials who were so troubled by their dreams.** It's in stark contrast to his seventeen-year-old self back in chapter 37 – who immaturely and insensitively blabbed about his dreams to his brothers. He wasn't thinking about them or their feelings or how his dreams might trouble them.
 - But now, even though he had every reason to keep his head down, to disregard the troubled look of their faces, to ignore the feelings of these fellow prisoners and just go about his own business – Joseph stopped what he was doing, inconvenienced himself, and tenderly asked what was wrong. How can I help?

- ❖ **His considerate questioning – his sensitivity towards others and their troubled feelings – that might not have come natural to Joseph.** It didn't seem characteristic of his younger self. But having experienced all the ups and downs in life – the highest of highs and the lowest of lows – **having endured all those long years of waiting and delay, Joseph was a different man by this point in the story.** He's matured.
 - The testing of his own faith produced something good in him. That's how it works. **It might not come natural for you to feel for the lonely, until you suffer through a season of loneliness yourself.** You might not be sensitive to the struggles of those who battle anxiety or mood swings, until you've experienced your own emotional rollercoaster. You might lack compassion for those who struggle with unfulfilled dreams and aspirations, until you go through your own season of failure and disappointment. **And having endured it, you're changed for the better.**
- ❖ Like I mentioned earlier, now that my wife and I know what infertility feels like – what it's like to wait with no clear answers, with no certainty of dreams coming true – we've grown much more sensitive towards other couples wrestling with the same things. I'm much more considerate now, even just in my words, in my questions.
 - **In my younger days, I very well might've asked an older couple without kids if they're thinking about starting a family any time soon.** Completely oblivious to the possibility that they might be actively trying or desperately praying for a child. In those days, I wouldn't have been sensitive enough to realize how insensitive that kind of question can be. No matter how well intentioned.
 - When your faith is tested – when you go through the crucible yourself – it never feels good. Your dreams and desires might still be unfulfilled. Answers and clarity might still be elusive. You might still feel stuck, like nothing has changed. **But one thing different is that now you're far more sensitive and far better equipped to minister to others going through the same thing.**

Joseph Forgotten

- ❖ But I realize that, even if that's true, even if you can sympathize better now with someone's pain – **that doesn't mean you're in a position, emotionally or spiritually, to effectively minister to others.** If you're bitter towards God – if you feel like he's forgotten or abandoned you – then I realize that the opportunity to care for others in their pain is not resonating with you right now. That's where we need to consider the third key moment in our chapter. We saw Joseph delayed, Joseph matured, and now Joseph forgotten.
- ❖ Let's go back to where we left off. In v16, the chief baker was encouraged to hear the favorable interpretation that the chief cupbearer received. So he shared his dream with Joseph hoping for more or less the same result. In his dream, he saw himself with three cake baskets stacked, one on top of the other, on his head. And in the top basket was all sorts of baked goods for Pharaoh. But in his dream, a flock of birds were assaulting him, eating out of the king's basket, eating Pharaoh's food.

- ❖ Joseph goes on to give him the interpretation. In three days, the bakers head will also be lifted up, but, in this case, it'll be lifted off from the baker! He's going to be executed. **In three days, he will be hanged on a tree.** That could've meant impaling you on a wooden spike and leaving your corpse there. Regardless of how you're executed, the point is your body is not buried but exposed for birds and other creatures to scavenge. This ancient custom is referenced elsewhere in the OT. **Deuteronomy 21:22-23 says that such a death – being hanged on a tree – was a sign of being under a curse by God.**
 - And for ancient Egyptians, such a death would've been a particularly horrible fate. Egyptians are famous for their belief that, to ensure a favorable afterlife for the deceased, it necessitates the proper care and burial of the body. They were meticulous in how they mummified and entombed the bodies of their loved ones. **So to have your body hung there on a stake to be eaten by birds of prey would've been an Egyptian's worst nightmare.**
- ❖ Well, after three days, we're told, in v21, that it was Pharaoh's birthday, and *"²¹He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. ²²But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."*
 - **What seemed like a perfect, divinely-timed opportunity to be rescued and restored from his unjust imprisonment just leads to more disappointment.** He had asked the cupbearer to remember him. But he did not. He forgot about Joseph.
- ❖ **But, of course, the whole point of the story is that God didn't. God doesn't forget. God remembered Joseph and was still with him, working out his redemptive plan in his perfect timing.** Had things gone according to Joseph's plan and *his* timing, the cupbearer would've immediately informed Pharaoh of Joseph's plight and his accurate interpretation. And that probably would've secured Joseph's freedom. He would've been released from prison and on his way. Maybe somehow making his way back home to his family.
 - But then two years later, when Pharaoh has his disturbing double dream, Joseph would be long gone and nowhere to be found. He wouldn't have been there in Pharaoh's prison. Easily accessible in order to interpret the king's dreams and secure for himself the top administrative position in all of Egypt. **If things had happened according to Joseph's timing, then those larger dreams he had been carrying around since he was seventeen would've gone unfulfilled.**
- ❖ **So in the end, we see that God's timing is always right.** I know, in the moment, in the middle of our stories, the wait seems senseless. It seems too long. But God is good. And God is wise. And he hasn't forgotten about us. He hasn't abandoned us.
 - **Joseph had to learn that – in order for God's redemptive plans to progress – he's going to have to experience a longer wait, and more injustice, and more suffering.** But there's a good purpose behind it all – to rescue God's people from future famine and death.

- ❖ Friends, let that truth speak to you. Especially if you're in a season right now where you're being asked to endure a long wait. Especially if you're wrestling with feelings of bitterness towards God. **I realize it's asking a lot for you to trust him. Especially considering how you've been begging for God to remember you. To remember you in your waiting, in your suffering, in your sadness. And yet it seems like he's forgotten.**
 - But he hasn't. The LORD does not forget. And remember this – **the One you're asking to “Remember you”; the One who is asking you to trust him – he is not ignorant of your pain.** He knows what it's like. He's been there in the crucible. He knows what it feels like to be forgotten and forsaken.

- ❖ **The One we're asking to “Remember us,” is the One we're responsible for nailing to a tree.** Jesus hung there on a tree bearing the curse of God that our sins deserved. And there, on the cross, he was forgotten and forsaken on a cosmic scale that we can never fathom. He did it for us and for our salvation. **So that we could have the assurance of never being forgotten or forsaken by the Almighty God of the Universe.**
 - So when he asks you to trust him in the waiting, in the delay, just remember that God's not asking you to do anything that he hasn't done himself or that he doesn't intimately understand. The LORD your God has not forgotten you, and he never will.