

Introduction

Excited about a new ministry at Grace Polaris, but getting discouraged because nothing was working out like I was promised or like I had hoped or planned—but God wasn't finished yet (save this for the end)

1. Joseph had an experience most (none?) of us have ever had: God revealed His plan for him:
 - a. How many of us wouldn't love for God to do the same for us—not in some general way, but with specific details like He did Joseph?
 - b. God had revealed to him that he would one day become a ruler and reign over his family
 - c. Joseph already had a pretty nice life—he was working in the family business, helping tend his father's flocks, and was the favorite son
 - d. God's plan must have come as quite an encouragement to him and suggested his life was only going to be getting even better; it was all up from here!
2. However, things didn't really go as one would expect and for the next couple of years his life is one big roller coaster:
 - a. His brothers started to hate him more and more, tossed him in a pit to die, sold him into slavery, and he ended up in captivity in a foreign land hundreds of miles away from home
 - b. The certainly doesn't look like what God revealed, but things take a positive turn when he earns the favor of his master, Potiphar, and is given compete, unsupervised charge of his estate—it certainly looks like God's plan is back on track
 - c. However, things take another negative turn and all that comes crashing down—when Potiphar's wife repeatedly tries to seduce him, he does the right thing by not only rejecting her advances but fleeing from her, only to be falsely accused of attempted rape and thrown into prison
3. The Bible doesn't reveal what Joseph must have been thinking through all of this, only that he served both God and his masters faithfully through all of it, and that God made him succeed in his service so that he gained the favor of his masters
4. The two things that have stood out to me so far in Joseph's story is that in spite of the circumstances, God was with Joseph and always at work, and Joseph continued to serve God faithfully in those circumstances—today we get another example of this
5. In our passage today we're going to see three things:
 - a. Joseph's circumstances were unfortunate, but they were part of God's bigger plan for him (40:1-4)
 - b. Despite his circumstances, Joseph sought to be used by God (40:5-8)
 - c. God honored Joseph's desire to be used in his current circumstances (40:9-22)

- d. Joseph's circumstances may not have changed as he hoped, but God wasn't done yet (40:23)

A. Joseph's circumstances were unfortunate, but they were part of God's bigger plan for him (READ 40:1-4)

1. The verses before these provide some context for us:
 - a. Joseph has been unjustly imprisoned for something he didn't do
 - b. But, God was with Joseph in his imprisonment and, like He had done for Joseph before in serving his master Potiphar, God caused Joseph to succeed at everything he did in the prison
 - c. As a result, just like he had done with Potiphar, he earned the favor of the chief jailer who then entrusted Joseph with the care of all the prisoners
 - d. He trusted Joseph so much that he didn't even supervise Joseph (READ 39:21-23)
 - e. Nonetheless, Joseph was still in prison, living as a slave, surrounded by unfair, unjust, and unfortunate circumstances
2. That's where we find him now in 40:1-4, but we'd be remiss if we didn't see how this all fits into God's plan:
 - a. V. 1 tells us that the cup bearer and baker for the Pharaoh (king of Egypt) did something to "**offend**" the king
 - b. The text doesn't tell us what they did to offend him, but v. 2 tells us that it was enough to make him "**furious**" with them
 - c. As a result, he had them thrown into the same jail as Joseph (REREAD 40:3):
 - 1) The jail was apparently connected to the house of the captain of the king's bodyguard which was Joseph's previous master, Potiphar (41:14 indicates the jail was a "**pit**")
 - 2) What's interesting to me here is that it was Potiphar, not the chief jailer, who specifically appointed Joseph to attend to the needs of the cupbearer and baker (4)—even though Potiphar threw Joseph into prison for thinking he attempted to rape his wife, he apparently trusted Joseph enough to care for two of the king's highest ranking officials
 - 3) V. 4 tells us that this continued for "some time": the bible doesn't tell us exactly how long this was, but most scholars estimate a few months to as much as a year or so based on a number of factors
 - d. I mentioned that we'd be remiss if we didn't see the greater picture here and how this all fits into God's plan:
 - 1) Joseph's situation and circumstances were unfair, unjust, and unfortunate and it would be reasonable for Joseph—and even for us—to question how any of this fit into God's plan
 - 2) Fortunately for us, we have an advantage Joseph didn't have because we have, as Paul Harvey used to say, "**the rest of the story**"

- 3) It wasn't by coincidence that the Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker ended up in prison next to Joseph
 - 4) What we know from reading ahead in Joseph's story is that God placed the men there to start a sequence of events that would ultimately lead Joseph from prison into the Pharaoh's service to become the second highest ranking official in the land
 - 5) What we see here is God working out his plan for Joseph even though it may not have looked like it
3. Takeaway: just because our circumstances may be unfair, unjust, or unfortunate, doesn't mean that God is not at work or will not accomplish His plan for our lives:
 - a. I am reminded of something Paul wrote regarding his first imprisonment in Rome:
 - 1) When Jesus called Paul as he was traveling on the road to Damascus, he informed him that that he would be His instrument to take the Gospel to the Gentiles
 - 2) Paul did just that and began his missionary journeys throughout the Roman empire, preaching the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles with great success
 - 3) However, along the way he was unfairly and unjustly arrested and spent two years in house arrest with a guard at his side as he waited for his trial
 - 4) While he was allowed to receive visitors at this time, he wasn't allowed to travel and it makes me wonder if Paul wondered what God was doing—he was used to being a traveling missionary, taking the Gospel to places it hadn't been preached, seeing people saved, but now he was stuck in a rented home
 - 5) How many opportunities do we think Paul really had to preach the Gospel?
 - 6) Yet, listen to what he wrote to the Philippians (READ 1:12-14)
 - b. Things often don't go how we plan, and sometimes we face unfair, unjust, and unfortunate circumstances but this doesn't change God's plans for us or His ability to accomplish those plans

<p>B. Despite his circumstances, Joseph sought to be used by God (40:5-8)</p>
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1. While the king's cupbearer and baker were in prison, God gave them each a dream but they were unable to understand the meaning of their dreams (READ 40:5-6):
 - a. The implication here is that the dreams were given to the men by God; the dreams were a form of direct revelation
 - b. Each dream had its own meaning ("**interpretation**"), but neither of the men knew the meaning of their dream
 - c. As a result, when Joseph saw them the next morning, they were "**dejected**"— other translations use words like depressed, troubled, distraught, or sad
2. When Joseph learned of their dreams, he immediately sought to be used by God (READ 40:7-19):
 - a. I think it's important to point out a few things about v. 8:

- 1) When Joseph learned of their dreams, notice that he didn't respond by saying, **"Tell me your dreams because I can interpret them"**; rather, he said **"Do not interpretations belong to God?"**
 - 2) Joseph recognized that not only did the dreams come from God, but the ability to interpret them came from God as well (in fact, in 41:16 when interpreting the Pharaoh's dream Joseph says, **"It is not in me; God will answer..."**)
 - 3) When he asked the men to recount the dreams to him, he fully recognized that understanding the dreams was something that God would have to reveal to him
 - 4) At this moment, he was seeking to be used by God to reveal His message to these men—so even in his unfortunate situation, he took advantage of an opportunity to be used by God
3. Takeaway: when we find ourselves in unfair, unjust, or unfortunate circumstances we should ask how God might use us in those circumstances
- a. It's easy for us to withdraw, feel sorry for ourselves, lose hope, become discouraged, or maybe even get angry with God over our circumstances
 - b. I'm sure there were times in the 1st century when the Apostles and early church were tempted to feel this way—they faced incredible opposition and persecution yet even in such
 - c. But, listen to what Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 4:7-5:11
 - d. Paul didn't regard the unpleasant, difficult, and challenging circumstances—or even persecution against him—to discourage him; rather, he sought to be used by God no matter what the circumstances to preach the Gospel and minister to the saints

<p>C. God honored Joseph's desire to be used in his current circumstances (40:9-22)</p>

1. The main point of the next 10 verses is to show how God used Joseph to interpret the meaning of each man's dream and reveal their fate (READ 40:9-19):
 - a. The cupbearer's dream revealed that he would be restored to the Pharaoh's service:
 - 1) In his dream, there were three vines, each with clusters of grapes
 - 2) He took those grapes, squeezed the grapes into the Pharaoh's cup, and handed it to the Pharaoh
 - 3) God revealed to Joseph that the dream meant that the cupbearer would be restored to his former position before the Pharaoh in three days
 - b. The baker wasn't so fortunate because his dream revealed that he would be hanged:
 - 1) In his dream, there were three baskets of white bread on his head
 - 2) In the top basket, there were different baked goods for the Pharaoh, but birds were eating it
 - 3) God revealed to Joseph that the dream mean the baker would not be restored to his former position but rather hanged in three days and his flesh eaten by birds
2. According to vs. 20-22, the interpretations given to Joseph by God fulfilled (READ 40:20-22):

- a. So three days after the cupbearer and baker had their dreams, the Pharaoh threw a birthday feast for all his servants where he ultimately restored the cupbearer to his former position and hung the baker
 - b. The most important phrase in this section is found at the end of v. 22: “**...just as Joseph had interpreted to them.**”
 - c. Joseph sought to be used by God and God used him
3. Takeaway: we shouldn’t let our circumstances distract us from being used by God:
- a. When we face unfair, unjust, or unfortunate circumstances, it’s easy for us to become distracted and turn our focus inward
 - b. Such times are unpleasant, even difficult, and it’s reasonable to want the circumstances to change; even Joseph did (REREAD 40:14-15)
 - c. However, Joseph didn’t wait for his circumstances to change to be used by God
 - d. He allowed himself to be used by God in the circumstances in which he found himself

D. Joseph’s circumstances may not have changed as he hoped, but God wasn’t done yet (READ 40:23)

- 1. Like all of us would have done, Joseph hoped for his circumstances to change and for the first time in who-knows how long, it looked like there was a real possibility they might:
 - a. Joseph recognized the genuine possibility that the cupbearer could help secure his release from prison; after all, he had just helped one of the Pharaoh’s highest ranking officials
 - b. We just read in 40:14-15 that Joseph pleaded with the cupbearer and remember him before the Pharaoh
 - c. But, as v. 23 this tells us that didn’t happen; rather, he just simply “**forgot him**”
 - d. Imagine the range of emotions Joseph must have gone through—from hope and eager expectation that he might finally be released, to patiently waiting for that day, to gradually seeing that hope fade away, day after day without any news of his release
 - e. If it were me, I’d be wondering if God also forgot about me
- 2. But, here’s the thing: God wasn’t done with Joseph yet:
 - a. We know this because we know the rest of the story
 - b. Joseph’s circumstances didn’t change immediately as he had hoped, but one day they would
 - c. Next week we’ll be in chapter 41 where we learn that two years later, the cupbearer finally remembered Joseph just as he had hoped and Joseph is released
- 3. Takeaway: Just because our circumstances don’t change, or change in accordance with our hopes or plans, doesn’t mean God has forgotten us

Back to the opening illustration—God wasn't finished yet; ultimately, I was able to do some teaching, became a member of the elder board, met Eric, became the teacher of New Beginnings, which ultimately led to Renew Bible Church which has been one of the most meaningful, and significant ministries in my life