

God-Confidence

Meant for Good Series Week 3: Genesis 40

9/10/17

Welcome/intro

If you've just joined us in the past couple of weeks you've had the privilege of hearing my fellow pastor Steve Tamayo do the communicating and you might be wondering who this guy is!

We've got two locations, here and up in Northern Chatham at Woods Charter school and what we do is a team teaching approach where I'll be at one location and he'll be at the other and then we'll switch—all totally random

I've been up at Woods for the past couple of weeks and so I'm glad to be back, I've missed being here!

And if you've really come to love Steve and are kind of bummed to be stuck with me today, never fear, we're working on and I think this week we'll have on our web site the ability to listen to either one of our messages each week

So check out our web site, look under messages and you should be able to download and listen to either version of the messages.

This is week 3 in a series of messages called "Meant for Good"—if you're new, let me get you up to speed

We're looking at the crazy life of a guy named Joseph in the Bible—some of the highest highs and lowest lows all wrapped into one life of anyone in the Scriptures

And because Joseph experiences so many different things there's going to be lots of easily relatable things about it: to start with there was family drama and dysfunction, lots of it

Joseph's family was so dysfunctional that week 1 we read a story where his brothers sold him into slavery and faked his death to his father

And by the end of that story week 1 all of us felt much better about our own family dysfunction!

And then last week, just as Joseph was catching his stride and good things were happening to him while he was a slave in Egypt, he gets falsely accused and ends up in jail, which is where we'll pick up this week

Throughout this story where we're going to see two things are true in life:

first, hot mess happens. if we live long enough we're going to experience pain and difficulty in this life, sometimes that happens TO us, we're victims, and sometimes we create or generate the mess

secondly, the good news is that no matter how bad the mess, there's a God who is bigger than the mess who has the power to redeem the mess—who can take your hot mess and my hot mess and work it for good, make it good, bring good out of it

To start with today we're going to ask this question: when your life takes a disappointing turn, how many of you find it rather easy to throw a pity party?

And when you're in the middle of your own little pity party, who is the guest of honor?
YOU are! Your life is miserable, things are hard, and you're not happy about it!

For some of us who are especially gifted at hosting our pity parties, the world could be coming to an end and we wouldn't notice it
we're too much inside of our own situations to be aware of people or situations around us

And on top of that, for those of us for whom following Jesus is a primary consideration in our lives, how easy is it to be aware of what God is up to all around you when you're busy hosting your own pity party?

This morning, we're picking up with Joseph's story and he's in jail in Egypt. And Joseph's life is miserable.

Nothing that has happened to him over the past couple of years that has decided his fate has been what he wanted or dreamed about for himself or his life

Joseph has every reason to throw a giant pity party—he's got way more reasons than most of us here:

Sold into slavery by your own brothers who faked your death and then falsely accused and thrown into jail? Can anyone match that story?

But what we're going to see is that even while Joseph is in an ancient, miserable jail cell, hundreds of miles from home and millions of miles from the life he envisioned for himself

Joseph is not so self-consumed with pity that he misses the people around him or the God who is still at work around him, even when his life is miserable

And in fact, if we're open to pulling the plug on the pity party and looking around at the people and situations and needs around us

we might just discover God's at work in ways that we won't see if we continue to camp out in our pity party

And maybe, just maybe, the key to being delivered from those miserable circumstances is going to be found not in feeling sorry for ourselves but in having our eyes up and looking for what God might be doing all around us

Bible/no Bible/Resource Center: going to start with the end of Genesis 39, what we read last week, just to refresh on the context:

... while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. ²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

This is the second time in Joseph's story where we see this weird combination of things that we don't normally think can or should co-exist:

The Lord is with Joseph, gives him favor, gave him success in everything. That's awesome! We love that, Carolina blue!

But Joseph is in prison, and has a warden to report to! Boo!

And so we see this weird combination of things that we think are mutually exclusive but aren't: God's blessing and our misery can co-exist in the same life at the same time

Joseph is in jail hundreds of miles away from home and he's meeting God in more profound ways than he likely would have if he was merely at home and comfortable in his father's house

And sometimes the same is true for you and me, isn't it?

Sometimes we meet God in more powerful and more profound ways in circumstances that are difficult and that we would not have chosen for ourselves than when we're in place where we're comfortable

And so Joseph here is meeting the Lord, in jail, in Egypt, and God is blessing him! And into this prison story come two new important characters:

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.

When I was in elementary and middle school, I harbored illusory dreams of football glory. Of course, not cracking 100 pounds until sometime around 9th or 10th grade kind of affected all that

But my one real crack at football my freshmen year I played on a team and the coach was a yeller. Any of you ever have a yeller for a coach? Totally stressed me out

And every so often when he got tired of you or frustrated with you, he'd toss you over to the assistant coach to do some other set of drills deal with you

he wasn't the nicest guy in the world but who at least wasn't constantly yelling at us

And so when the coach booted me out of his practice, I was typically RELIEVED to be caught by the assistant coach who would then put me through whatever torture of a drill he contrived

The cupbearer and the baker are booted out into prison in a fit of anger by Pharaoh, maybe they deserved it, maybe they didn't

They likely arrive in prison like most people would arrive in prison: fearful, angry, stressed, anxious

What difference do you think it made to have someone who is full of the presence and blessing of God there to catch them and receive them and care for them, even while they're in prison?

All the difference in the world

My friends, if you're a Jesus-follower here this morning, you need to remember this:

at various points in your life, God is going to position you to catch someone who needs catching and tending to by someone who is full of the blessing and presence of God

At various points in your life, sometimes even at the LOWEST points in your life when you're NOT in the place that you planned on or wanted to be

God is going to send someone or a group of someones your way who have been tossed around

maybe just by life circumstances, maybe tossed around by the system or by their ex-spouse or their ex-employer OR maybe they've landed somewhere due to their own foolishness

And he's going to send them your way so that you might catch them. Love them. Serve them. Help them out in some small or large way.

Is there someone in your life right now who needs someone to catch them who is full of the presence and the blessing and grace and power of the Lord—and that someone is you?

Joseph here is just doing his job in jail. He's just attending to them like he does all the prisoners

But God has set this whole thing up for a little more than merely helping these two guys out during a rough couple of days of transitioning into prison, here's what happens next:

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.

⁶When 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?"

How many of you know people who are super-sensitive to people's moods around them? They pick up on the slightest facial twitch or cue that someone's hurt or angry or upset about something?

How many of you know someone who is utterly clueless about anyone's mood around them whatsoever? Someone could be weeping violently and slobbering all over their shoulder and you might not notice? How many of you are sitting next to that person?

A couple of chapters ago, Joseph seemed to be so utterly self-absorbed and clueless about people's emotional state around him

That he bragged to his brothers about a dream he had where they all worshiped him, as if he had no idea that sharing that dream would drive his brothers crazy!

But here, in the middle of his duties as the de facto prison warden with a long list of things to do

In the middle of a time in his life where Joseph has every reason to be throwing the biggest pity party of anyone that I know

Joseph does something very important and sometimes very hard to do: Joseph **SEES**. He sees that they're feeling dejected and sad

He's not too busy or too self-absorbed to see the emotional state of someone else

Now here's a question:

Have you ever noticed that someone looked a little upset but you didn't want to ask them about it because you didn't have the time or desire to hear the whole story? Me neither! Never!

Joseph here is both able to SEE what's going on around him and is willing to ENGAGE with it, **ask a question**, move into the mess, not away from the mess: 'what's wrong? Why do you look so sad today?'

Let's step back a moment, where are all these guys? Uh, Joseph, it's a JAIL! Everyone looks miserable in jail! Maybe I'm sad because the roast beef was a little overcooked today!

Here's what's so great about what Joseph does here

I once heard an older pastor talk about how this is one of the marks of the people of God: that we move towards the mess, not away from the mess, in order to help redeem the mess if at all possible

This is what God does, we see it most fully in Jesus but all throughout the Scriptures we see God moving towards messy people like Joseph and messy situations to bring redemption and healing and grace here

It's why Christians are often the first ones into situations like Hurricane Harvey and Irma it's why Christians continue to serve and stay long after the media has moved onto other situations.

There are still Christians deliberately in New Orleans continuing to rebuild after Katrina and that was 12 years ago!

That doesn't mean every mess is ours to clean up or fix, nor does it mean that we have to be in dangerous or unhealthy situations, healthy and wise boundaries are important and good

But it does mean that if we're people who have God's Spirit and who are learning from God what it means to be his people, then we're going to be biased towards mess somewhere, somehow, in some way

Joseph steps into the mess in part because this is what the people of God do—he sees a couple of guys looking down and he wants to know what's wrong, let's see what is, indeed, wrong:

***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.”***

So a couple of things here—first dreams play a huge role in this story, from beginning to end

And secondly, Joseph is a bit audacious in his response:

he says that dream interpretations belong to God, and so perhaps a good next step would be to PRAY to GOD about the dreams, right?

Interpretations belong to God, how about you go and pray to God and ask him to interpret it for you

But what does Joseph do instead? “Tell ME your dreams”—implication: I'm so confident that God is with me that I'm pretty sure he can and will give me insight to interpret your dreams for you

I'm going to be the mouthpiece and instrument that God uses to tell you exactly what he wants to say to you

Now let's back up and take a look at this situation one more time.

You've got Joseph who's life is a trainwreck

He is in an Egyptian jail! Sure he's running or managing some portion of it, but it's still an ancient, dirty, disease-infested, no-sewer system, bad-food-having jail!

He's hundreds of miles away from home and at every point there seems to be things that force in directions he does not want to go and would not have voluntarily gone

He has every reason to curl up, throw the pity party, be utterly self-absorbed, and not care a thing about the butcher or the cupbearer or the butcher or the baker or the candlestick maker!

But instead, he remains engaged and open, he's willing to ask these guys what's wrong when they're in jail and everyone looks grumpy in jail!

And when he hears what's wrong, even as he's in jail far from home and far from the life he thought God would give him, he's confident that God is with him and God will speak through him.

And this is because ***Our God-confidence is not circumstance dependent***. It is dependent on a whole set of other things OUTSIDE of circumstances, we'll talk about that here in a minute

But to start with, we have to get this straight.

Because here's how this usually goes: If my life feels good, then God is good. If my life doesn't feel good, I think God's abandoned me. At least, that seems to be my default wiring, maybe you're much more spiritual than me!

And so all week Joseph's been challenging me to embrace this larger reality, that I can and need to be confident in the God who is bigger than any hot mess

Even if he's not moving in clear and mighty ways YET to clean up or redeem that hot mess

And God invites us to be a part of his redemptive work, his healing work, his saving work, during every season of our lives, even when things in our circumstances aren't so great!

Sometimes, we've got a clear and obvious situation that we're asking God to fix or solve or do something about: "God, get me out of this jail!"

"God, make this sickness go away!" or keep my grown kids from doing something stupid or get me out of a very difficult job situation with a boss or a company or fix my marriage or give me direction in my life, I'm at a major crossroads here!"

Sometimes we've got something that we're just praying and praying and praying about or is dominating our emotional and mental landscape because it's just affecting us so much

And sometimes, in the middle of that situation, God sets something completely different in front of us that seems to have absolutely NOTHING to do with what we think the real problem is and says,

"this one is yours. I know things over here aren't perfect, I know that not everything's settled, I know you've got all kinds of other stuff going on

But part of how I'm at work to bring healing and redemption in those situations over there is by calling you to step into THIS situation over there, and watch what I'll do

This morning, in this little statement, Joseph is challenging you and me to move to a new place of faith:

that our confidence in God's goodness and his work in us and around us and even through us might be free from the contingencies of circumstances

"Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell ME your dreams." Joseph is positioning himself to be the instrument of God in this situation, here's how it plays out:

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 [Note: no pause, no prayer and fasting, no waiting at all, he's totally confident that God's given him the interpretation]. "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.

Sounds great! But there's more that Joseph wants and needs to say about this guy the cup-bearer:

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."

This is an important thing for us to note: God has met Joseph in prison, but that doesn't mean that Joseph should just settle in and embrace prison

Joseph is confident that God is with him in jail and he's experiencing the blessing of God while in jail but he's also confident that God's presence and blessing would go WITH him if he got out of jail!

This is important for us because sometimes us religious people can get a little superstitious about how God works and where God works

And if we have an experience where God meets us or works in a powerful way, we sometimes cling to the trappings of the experience rather than clinging confidently to God himself

Good news this morning, God's not superstitious. He's God. And he's not looking at the outward hocus-pocus stuff you do, he's looking at your heart, that's what he cares most about when he hears your prayers

And so Joseph says, “Dude, when you get out of here, remember me and get me out, too.”

Now there’s one more dreamer and one more dream to be interpreted, here’s how this one goes:

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.”

Not quite such a favorable interpretation! Here’s how it all plays out {SUMMARIZE FOR TIME}:

[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].

At the beginning of the story, we had Joseph as the dreamer, now he’s the dream interpreter, the one through whom God is speaking clearly

And Joseph is confident that God is at work even as he’s in jail unjustly and falsely accused, because his God-confidence is not circumstance dependent

And that’s a very, very good thing because here’s how this part of the story concludes: ²³ *The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.*

And spoiler alert for next week: he didn’t just forget him for a few days, he forgot all about him for TWO very, very very long YEARS

And all the while, during a time in his life when most people would have been growing ever increasingly more bitter, more hostile, more angry

What we see is instead Joseph continues to trust in the Lord. He remains confident in the Lord because ***Our God-confidence is not circumstance-dependent***

Here’s what **God-confidence is built on:**

- **God’s Presence:** “the Lord was with Joseph” is repeated over and over again, Jesus gives his followers the promise that he will never leave or forsake them—never, ever, ever
- **God’s Activity:** there will be times when God is teasing something for us to do during the most inconvenient times in our lives.

And sometimes his activity isn't in the area of our lives that we think it should be, he's not solving our presenting problems and issues! God isn't getting Joseph OUT of jail, he's meeting him and doing all kinds of stuff in and around him while he's IN jail, and that can be hard to make peace with sometimes, can't it?

- **Our Awareness (we see it in part because we're looking for it):** like Joseph here, SEEING is a big part of being able to participate in what God's doing, and that requires some work on our part to be looking OUTWARD, not just to our own needs
- **Our Engagement:** are we willing to step into the opportunities when they come our way, asking the question "why are you so dejected and discouraged"—to be a people who move towards the mess rather than run away from it?

When God's not answering our prayer to get us out of jail, are we willing to engage with what he IS doing, this other work, this other situation, even when it's not exactly what we wanted right now?

And of course, what happens when we step into a work that God has prepared in advance for us to do is that we meet him all over again

And we get to participate in the virtuous cycle of experiencing his **PRESENCE** as it gets confirmed and re-confirmed and experienced and re-experienced, which builds in us an even greater God-confidence.

As we meet and experience God in various situations, we exclaim, "God IS here! God IS at work!" Even if it's not in the area that we think is most obvious and we'd most like him to do something about

But Joseph meeting God while he's interpreting a dream in jail is a signal to Joseph that God hasn't forgotten about him.

And when the time is right, much later than Joseph would have preferred but still right, God will indeed act to do something

not just to get him out of jail but to propel him to such heights that in this moment he couldn't even imagine.

Today's TAKE-WITH: What steps might you take to build a God-confidence that is not dependent on your circumstances?

We said God-confidence from this text is built on four key things:

God's Presence, God's Activity, Our Awareness of God's Activity, and Our Engagement—the willingness to lean Into God's activity

Since this whole thing really begins and ends with God's presence and his activity, what if you did some 'with-ness' training for one week.

The Scriptures say that Jesus is always, always, always with his followers, is people.

So a number of years ago I tried to remember that Jesus was with me as many times an hour as I possibly could.

I put my watch on the wrong wrist, I put little reminders everywhere, just trying to call to mind and touch base with the fact that Jesus was with me as many moments of the day as possible.

What if this week you underwent some with-ness training? Between now and next Sunday you're going to find as many ways as possible to remind yourself that Jesus is always, always, always with you

And when the reminder pops up on your phone or you see the post-it note or you feel the watch on the wrong arm, just pick a one-sentence prayer:

Jesus, what are you already doing around me? This question moves us into the place not of casual observer or complainer but into the place of assuming that God's up to something even if it's not what or where we would like for him to be at work!

If you can begin to cultivate this prayer at the center of your soul, they'll start to change you.

You'll start to develop a God-confidence that helps you to orient yourself around something much bigger and deeper than just your circumstances.

This morning, as Joseph manages to keep himself anchored in God even in the midst of one of the worst imaginable circumstances, I want to invite all of us to share in his same God-confidence

a confidence in God's presence and goodness that transcends circumstances and that trusts that he's good and he's at work