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Head's Up Genesis 40

Last year at one of our LIFE groups several people were admiring a clock that once sat on my Great Grandmothers mantle, born in 1877. I just had it refurbished and mentioned from the living room how well it did keeping time, rarely losing a minute during the week. It wasn't until later after our guests had left I looked more closely at the clock and realized why my remark was answered in uncomfortable silence. The clock was way off, 6 hours wrong. The night before some kids had been sleeping out in the living room and the tick-tock of the clock was keeping them awake and so they stopped the clock. It had become a clock that showed the correct time...only twice a day. Now that's not a problem if it happens to be 12:15 but not so great at any other time of day. For that clock, time was put on hold.

Do you ever feel like that sometime? Does it ever feel like God's clock at least as far as you're concerned, is standing still, never moving. Do you ever feel like God and you were having a very nice conversation but at some point he said, "hey, could you hold on just a minute", and now it seems you have been sitting there on hold...indefinitely? Perhaps in the back of your mind you know that God wants to use you to make a difference, you know that he has crafted you with a purpose, and you're doing most of the right things and living for Him and walking in obedience and being faithful even when its hard, but your life seems to get put on hold. No direction. No movement. Seemingly, nothing from God. Perhaps not only is God strangely silent, but in the middle of trying to do all the right things, life goes wrong. Life goes unfair. You get mistreated, maybe rejected, perhaps even falsely accused, excluded coupled with the loneliness that comes with it. You are sacrificing to do

right and be faithful to what God has called you to do, but then its no longer easy, disappointment, adversity. It seems God is blatantly tardy in His intervention to move and rescue us.

Most of us, at some point in our lives have had something done to us that we feel isn't fair. Perhaps it was a family member, a friend from school, an employer, a parent, a child. Perhaps it was something that happened at church or in your neighborhood, or on the sports field. It could have involved some words of rejection, a rumor, false accusations, exclusion, unjust criticism. Maybe you simply felt used, taken for granted, minimalized and set aside. It may have just been your perception of what happened, but it was painful. You are wondering why God has not stepped in to make a difference. You did the right things but it didn't turn out very well. Anybody ever felt like that? So the question on the table this morning is this. ***How will I choose to respond well when I've done right, but life has gone wrong?***

Turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 40. If there is any one Bible character that could empathize with us in this area its Joseph. He is a guy that was treated very poorly by his brothers, sold into slavery at a teenager of 17. Continually hounded with temptation by his employers wife, but he stood strong in the face of that sexual temptation, only to be falsely accused of rape by her and thown into prison. How can I possibly choose to respond well when I've done right, but life has gone wrong? As I read Genesis 40 I want you to be looking for the presence of God in Joseph's life. Watch how Joseph responds...we can learn from his example. (READ) Genesis 39:20-40:23

How can I possibly respond well when I've done right, but life has gone so very, very wrong? What did Joseph do?

Look for the presence of God in your life

Joseph ends up in prison, but one of the things that keeps him going strong even when his life seems to be going wrong is that the presence of the Lord was with him. V. 21 “the Lord was with Joseph”. V. 23 “the Lord was with him.” It seems like an almost exact parallel to what happened while he was in Potiphars house. The Lord was with him and Potiphar could see that the Lord was with him and so looked on him with favor and entrusted him with responsibility, exactly what happened at Potiphars house.

Chapter 40 tells us that the Pharaoh got furious with two of his high-level cabinet people; the cupbearer and the Baker. It doesn't say why. Perhaps the king had been poisoned and he wasn't sure who was responsible as it was the baker who prepared the food and the cupbearers job was to test the food before the king ate. He tosses them into prison. These two celebrity prisoners, were placed under the care of Joseph. One night they have two perplexing dreams they can't understand. V.7 Joseph asks them why they are so sad. When they reply, its because of their dreams, Joseph defers up to God, Do not interpretations belong to God?”

I love that reflexive response. It tells me a lot about Joseph spiritual heart for God. I think if it were 15 years earlier he would have responded, “I'm pretty good at interpreting dreams, tell me and let me take a shot at interpretation.” No. Joseph, even in the midst of a life that has seemingly gone wrong when he's tried to do right, he acknowledges that only God fulfilled futures. Only God knows what's to come. And only God is the One who is able to reveal such knowledge.

Joseph interprets their dreams. The cupbearer sees three branches coming out of a vine with clusters of grapes and himself squeezing wine into the Pharaohs cup. No problem says Joseph, God revealed to me that in three days time, you will be restored to your former position and your head will be lifted up, or exalted.

The Baker hears such a favorable interpretation, so he shares his own dream. The baker sees three baskets of bread on his head and birds coming to eat the bread out of it. Joseph may not have liked to give this interpretation, but these were God's words not his, so he explained that in three days time, he would be killed and his head would be lifted off of him. Sure enough three days later on Pharaoh's birthday, it happened exactly how Joseph had interpreted it. The cupbearer's head was lifted up and the baker's head was lifted off.

I think the almost instant fulfillment of these two dreams has got to be immensely encouraging for Joseph. He interpreted two dreams and in three days time both came about exactly as he said they would. It has been at least some 13 years since his own two dreams. These dreams described his brothers grain sheaves bowing down to him, and a second dream where 11 stars and the moon and sun bowed down to his star, and yet he must have been encouraged by God to know that if God has said He would be lifted up and save his family, then it will come to pass. God had still given him the gift of interpreting dreams. The fulfillment of those dreams must have brought a ray of hope to his own dreams. It may have seemed like God had put him on indefinite hold, but God continued to remind him of His presence.

If you are frustrated now because you are doing right but life is going wrong, look for the presence of God in your life. He will give you some hint, some encouragement, some reminder that He is still active and present. His Word is true, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Joseph was in prison, but the Lord was with him. Look expectantly for God's hand in all of life's circumstance.

Russian writer, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his book the *Gulag Archipelago*, wrote that in the teeth of his loneliness and pain, stuck in a Russian prison God came near. He writes, "...in the intoxication of youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel... It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed

within myself the first stirrings of good... So bless you prison for having been my life.”

The Psalmist would concur: Psalm 119:71 “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy Statutes.” Joseph, the Psalmist, Solzhenitsyn and perhaps its even been your experience to discover God’s presence most profoundly after spending days, weeks, years in a dungeon. Are you looking for the Lord to be with you? We can only respond well in the face of mistreatment, if we can see the presence of the Lord in our life.

Decide to meet the needs of others.

How can we respond well when we’ve done right, yet life goes wrong? Decide to meet the needs of others. Commit yourself to not only seeing the needs of others but looking for how you might be able to meet their needs. Look at v.7 Joseph notices that his two fellow prisoners have sad faces. In Josephs earlier years he would not have been accused of being Mr. Sensitive. He was quite arrogant with his brothers and shared his dreams not bothering to notice their anger toward him. But God has shaped and honed and chiseled and refined. Joseph has begun to not only see the needs of others but he also moves to meet their needs. He not only noticed others hurts, but he got involved.

Don’t let the hurt and pain and loneliness and rejection and mistreatment and false accusations and difficult discouraging circumstances cause you to keep from seeing and meeting other peoples needs. In fact, the very thing that will give you strength when you are hurting is to go find someone else you can help. By encouraging them a strange thing happens...you yourself become encouraged and strengthened.

Perhaps the very reason you are going through this pain right now is so that you can help others who are suffering. Its very difficult for us

to feel for those who are lonely, until we have experienced loneliness. Its difficult to feel empathy for those who are depressed if we have never experienced depression. When we walk through the mistreatment, false accusation, adversity hard times God may be using those very hard things to help us, help others. Don't let your hurt keep you from meeting the needs of others. God may have given you that hurt in order to see the hurt in others more clearly and help encourage them. II Corinthians 1:2 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction..."

Do you see the shaping of a great leader here? Joseph is turning to God for wisdom, he is sensitive to the needs and hurts of others and humbly acknowledging that God is the One who has all wisdom.

Look at God's clock, it's the slowest clock to always be on time.

How can we respond well when we do right, yet life goes wrong? Look at God's clock...it's the slowest clock to always be right on time. Its tough to wait isn't it. This is wait training. We want God to go, go, go and sometimes God says, wait, wait, wait. We want our life to be run by our own personal Timex and God says my clock is the only one that matters. D Lloyd-Jones says, "Its tragic when a person succeed before he is really ready for it." God knows his best cooking is done in a crock-pot, not a microwave. Wait training is hard.

Joseph had been given this dream 13 years ago that he would be raised up as head of his family and save them. But sold into slavery in far away Egypt, tossed into prison this dream seems so very, very unlikely. But now that this ray of hope, the cupbearer his friend has been restored perhaps he can get out of this prison and back onto the fast track for God. V. 14 "only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, mention me to Pharaoh to get me out of here." I can appreciate that

humanness in Joseph. He knows that who you know in high places can smooth your way. He doesn't want to be in prison. He knows that God is in control, but he is doing everything he can to get out too. Put in a good word for me. But again Joseph is forgotten, v.23 "but the cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." I wonder how long it took for the ray of hope to dim for Joseph. After a week I'm sure he probably thought well, my friend the cupbearer probably had a lot of things to get caught up on and lots of details to handle this first week back on the job. After a month, Joseph might have told himself, perhaps just getting back in the job he needs to be careful what he says around the Pharaoh. After 6 months, a year. It had to be discouraging. I've been forgotten. Verse 1 of chapter 41 says, "it happened at the end of two full years", that Pharaoh had a dream and the cupbearer remembers Joseph. After 13 years in slavery and prison and then two more years, that is some master's level "wait" training.

Do you find yourself put on hold? Have you been forgotten? Have you been doing right but life has gone wrong? Are you willing to wait on God's timing? Patient trust comes only through gut-wrenching trials and delays and disappointments. Our ways are not always God's ways. Isaiah 55 says this. God speaks, "for my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord." If it were up to our way of thinking, we believe that we should always be rewarded right away with success and comfort and ease when we do right. That is not always God's way. God may want to chisel some more, hone some more, refine in the fire some more. God may wait longer for other things to develop and be put into place that we no nothing about. We cannot see all that God sees. Often we demand, "now God!" and God says, "No, wait". Delay may mess up our plans, but delay never thwarts God's purposes; it only polishes God's instrument. His clock is always right on time.

Never let circumstances short-circuit your relationship with God.

Joseph had every reason in the world to become bitter and angry. He had been abused by his family, falsely accused, innocent yet punished, forgotten, used and abandoned. All of us at one time or another will be unjustly treated by others, and it will be painful. It may have been by a parent or leader that ought to know better. We cannot allow those hurts to let angry and bitterness grow toward others, because bitterness that is let fester toward people eventually gets directed toward God. They blame God for allowing it to happen. Joseph was terribly mistreated for doing right, but Joseph never let the circumstances of life short-circuit his relationship with God. I'm sure there were times he was tempted to blame God. I'm sure there were times when he cried out to God and even had strong words with God. Read the psalms David poured out his hurt and disappointment and anger toward God. But he didn't allow that temptation to settle into sinful attitudes and bitterness. When someone mistreats us the biggest temptation is to get back at them. We want them to feel the same hurt we felt. But God says, "leave the revenge to me. Vengeance is Mine says the Lord I will repay." We say OK God but can't I at least watch and do it NOW!!!

Perhaps you are right where Joseph was; doing right but life is going wrong. Ask yourself, "Have I allowed bitterness toward another, toward God to creep into my life, because someone has treated me unjustly?" When unjustly treated by others, Chuck Swindoll says we have two choices. 1. Become bitter and look for ways to revenge. Or 2. we can see that adversity as an opportunity to put our faith and trust in God. Here is the progression. Someone mistreats us so we get bitter toward people. That leads toward bitterness toward God. The cause is due to putting ones complete trust and hope in people. Putting leaders, parents, coach, pastor, friends, on a pedestal of perfection and finding security in them alone. That person then takes the place of God when

you put your trust in one person. When their feet of clay crumble, disillusionment sets in and bring cynicism with it.

So what's the cure? The cure is to put our complete hope and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every pain is an opportunity to put our faith in God.

Christian Reger lived this out. He was a member of the Confessing Church that Dietrick Bonhoeffer led in Germany 1930-40's, that stood for truth and took a stand against Hitler. This man, Christian Reger was turned into the Nazis by the organist of his local church. He spent four years in the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau. I've visited Dachau. I've seen the ovens, the gas chambers, the pictures of hollow faces and piles of shoes and hair. Phillip Yancy tells the story of Christian Reger in his book "Where is God when it hurts". He writes; Reger will tell you of the horror stories of Dauchau if you ask, but he will never stop there. He will always tell about how at Dachau he was visited by a God who loves. "Nietzsche said a man can undergo torture if he knows the why of his life, but here at Dachau I learned something far greater. I learned to know the Who of my life. He was enough to sustain me then and is enough to sustain me still."

For those who have been mistreated, falsely accused, stabbed in the back by friends, lonely, abandoned; for those who feel like they have been put on hold by God, please know that God has many things to teach you and give you during this time. Will you see His presence? Will you choose to step out beyond your own hurt and see the needs of others? Will you trust that God knows best and His timing is perfect, even though its not your timing? Will put your trust in God alone?

Perhaps you might pray something like this: God I need your help right now. I'm very discouraged. I feel like those people I have trusted have let me down. I'm in a prison. I feel very, very lonely. I have been mistreated by those who I was once close to. I feel like my life has been put on indefinite pause. Help me see your presence in my darkness. Help

me see even a glimpse of your working in my life as you refine and chisel.
Help me turn this trial into deeper trust in you. Amen.