



DATE: February 1, 2009

TEXT: Genesis 40: 1-3, 9-23

TITLE: "Genesis XXIV: The Working of God III"

We again this morning turn our attention to Joseph. We are seeing the process of God taking an individual and molding that person to a servant of God. We have seen that the process is not always easy. Joseph made a righteous decision. Joseph refused the advances of his master wife. Joseph refused to hurt his master and his Lord. The result of this righteous decision was imprisonment. But through this all we read the words "The Lord was with him." Through the times in prison the Lord was with Joseph and the Lord blessed Joseph. This morning I want to look at three lessons Joseph learned while in prison.

Lesson # 1 Joseph learned the necessity of overcoming selfishness during times of struggle. *Genesis 40:6-7 states...*

When Joseph came to (the baker and the cupbearer) 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 are your faces so sad today?"

Every person faces hard times. Joseph was in prison. We do not know how long Joseph was in prison. We know Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold as a slave to Potiphar and

that he was 30 years old when he was released from prison. It is probable that Joseph spent many years in jail. Here is the amazing truth we see throughout the Joseph story... when he was facing hard times he did not become self-centered. He remained concerned for others. We saw this when he was a slave in the house of Potiphar and we see it in our text this morning. I believe we know this is a very difficult thing to do. When we face struggles in life..... whether they be physical health.... or relational breakdowns.... or emotional depression.... often we become very self-centered. Everything becomes about me. Self centeredness is the great temptation of Satan.

It is never God's will. Hear this great text from *James 1:27*

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 27Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Don't you love the book of James..... so very practical. What is the "pollution" of the world? I believe it is self-centeredness. I believe it is the temptation to believe everything is about me. Christian maturity understands that the world is not about ourselves.

I love going on hospital visits and spending most of the time talking and praying for other

people. I am asked how is so and so... and what about so and so. And how is this going at the church.... and how is your family doing. And then we pray for the church and for others in need of prayer. In our times of struggle, let us remain focused on others. This was the great lesson taught to us by Joseph.

Lesson # 2 While in prison Joseph continued to learn discernment of God's will. Joseph was able to interpret the dreams of the baker and the cupbearer. We do not know why these servants of Pharaoh were in prison. Possibly Pharaoh became very ill... possibly poisoned... from a meal. He was unsure what caused it... the food or the wine... so both were sent to jail. It is probable that later it was discovered that it was the food and the baker was put to death.

Both men had a dream. Joseph was able to interpret the dream and discern the will of God for both these men. Joseph was clear... the interpretation of dreams in a gift from God. *Verse 8 of our text says....* **"Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."**

Discernment comes from God. Maturity in faith requires discernment... discovering the

will of God for our lives. I took a course in seminary on dream interpretation. Here are some basic lesson I learned in this class.

1. Most dreams are random and meaningless. There is no deep hidden meaning in most dreams
2. Repetitive dreams can have some hidden meaning
3. Most dream therapy and interpretation is hogwash.
4. Occasionally a hidden fear or repressed memory may be revealed in repetitive dreams.

Joseph had the ability to discern God speaking to individual through dreams. It was a gift of discernment. Again let me say Christian maturity involves discovering the will of God for our lives. I have good news.... we do not have to depend upon dreams to discover the will of God. I believe there are 5 potential sources given to us to help in the process of discernment.

1. There is the Word of God written... The bible. Truthfully I believe this is the primary source of truth given to us as Christian. It is the comprehensive tool of God to reveal Himself to us and to reveal His will for our lives. I do see my role, as I preach is to try to give you understanding and application of God's Word in you life.
2. There is prayer. I believe at times the still small voice of God does speak to us in prayer. It may be to bring a bible verse to our mind. It may be to challenge us.... it may be to convict us... but God does indeed speak to His children.
3. There is the church. I do believe God uses the church to speak to us. The church is given authority by God to understand scripture and to teach truth.
4. There are brothers and sisters in Christ. Each person here needs fellow Christians to teach and to guide our lives. We need Christian Sunday school teachers and bible study leaders. We need spouses that we can pray with and talk to. We need good friends that can be confidants and Christian advisors. They, at times, give to us the discernment of God
5. Upon occasion, God may perform a miracle in your life. I do believe in present day miracles.

I do believe, upon occasion, God works in a miraculous way. This is not the normal process of God. It is never for the purpose of personal gain... it is for the gain of the community of Christ. It is for the purpose to reveal God to His people.

Joseph was able to discern the will of God... and so are we. God speaks to his Children.

We need to develop ears to hear. Allow me to make one additional quote on the process of

discernment. I am quoting *Gary Maeder in his book God's will For Your Life*

The will of God is frequently approached from the “program” angle: What college does God want me to attend? What occupation does he want me to enter? Who should I marry? These are valid questions, but God’s will for you is not fundamentally a college, a vocation. Or spouse but is rather a personal, growing relationship with Him. In short, it’s not what you do; it’s what you are. The will of God concerning the formation of our characters is universal: we are to be conformed to Jesus Christ and be led by, and display the fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control) of the Holy Spirit.

Joseph was discovering the character God was placing within him. We too must walk in obedience to God and be the men and women God call us to be.

Finally, Lesson # 3 We discover that we are never forgotten by God. The theme of being forgotten is central to our text. *Genesis 40:14 and Genesis 40:23 state this...*

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 For 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."..... 23 The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him

Allow me to let *Beth Moore* to make this point.

Feeling forgotten by someone often feels worse than being scorned. At least the scorner knows we're alive! Feeling forgotten can force a bruising blow to one of our most innate human needs: feeling significant. Noticed. Alive. Feeling forgotten makes us feel invisible. Imagine every day from the time of the cupbearer's release Joseph waited for word. The echo of two more birthday celebrations must have mocked him as he sat inside those prison walls. Know this, God knows exactly how you feel. Over and over in His Word he speaks of being forgotten by His people.

There have been times in my life I have felt forgotten. There have been times in my life I have felt abandoned. In each of those times, as I persevered in God's Word... as I persevered in God's worship.... as I persevered in God's fellowship with other believers, God has assured me of His presence. God never forgets his children.

Don't you love the parable, taught by Jesus, of the lost sheep? This is found in *Matt 18*

"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

At times each of us is the lost sheep. We feel forgotten. We feel helpless. We feel alone.

The Good news is this... our heavenly Father sends out a search team of us. He finds us. He rescues us. He comforts us. Joseph was never alone in that prison. We are never alone in all of our lives.

God molded Joseph into a great servant. God is molding us into servants. We must learn to overcome selfishness. We must learn to discern the will of God. And we must realize we are never, ever forgotten

AMEN