

SOVEREIGN GRACE TEACHES US TO WAIT

Genesis 40:1-23

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

When do you have the hardest time waiting? What has been the hardest thing you have had to wait for?

Waiting is hard for most of us. Yet, being a Christian requires that we wait. God makes the most astounding promises to every person who trusts in Christ, but the complete fulfillment of those promises is in the future, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. The entire premise of the gospel is that the future that God promises us in Christ is infinitely better than all the pleasures this world has to offer. Jesus calls us to stop pursuing our pleasure in the present experiences of sin and to pursue our happiness in the eternal and infinite pleasures of living with him forever. When a Christian gladly waits for the fulfillment of God's promises he or she reveals the greatness of God and of his promises.

The story of Joseph is a real life example of the sufficiency of God enabling a believer to wait patiently and faithfully for the fulfillment of his promises. Joseph's life is nothing like what he was promised it would be. He was promised glory and all he has experienced is suffering and humiliation through no fault of his own. We see in the life of Joseph the pattern that the Lord Jesus followed and that everyone who is a Christian must follow. In chapter 40 we discover that God sovereignly and graciously makes us wait so that his greatness is seen in our patient, faithful waiting for the fulfillment of his promises.

STUDY

1. Compare 37: 2 with 41: 1 & 46. Approximately how many years has Joseph been a slave and in prison when chapter 40 opens?

Joseph has been a slave and in prison for around 10 years.

2. In v. 1 we are told that the cupbearer and the baker "sinned against the king of Egypt" (NIV has "offended the king of Egypt."). Why would Moses want to record that little detail, these two men "sinned against" the king of Egypt and so were thrown into prison? (Hint: see 39:9)

The contrast is intentional. These men are in prison because they are guilty, whereas Joseph is in prison for the sake of righteousness, while being innocent.

3. What becomes Joseph's relationship with these guilty, Egyptian noblemen?

He is made their personal attendant or servant by the captain of the guard, Potiphar. These men are most likely Potiphar's friends. At least they are his peers in the service of the king and so he seeks to make their imprisonment less difficult by assigning this hard-working Hebrew slave/prisoner to take care of them. Joseph works to make their imprisonment less troublesome.

4. Use your imagination, how would you feel if you were falsely imprisoned and then made to take care of people who were in prison for actually committing crimes?

It would not be difficult to imagine becoming very bitter, resentful and full of hatred. It would not be hard to imagine becoming depressed and cynical.

5. How do you think these men treated Joseph? (Remember, these men are Egyptian nobility who view "Hebrews" as racially inferior.)

These men most likely take Joseph's ministrations for granted. They expect him to take care of them. They have no concern for him or his situation. They simply use him and probably abuse him.

6. After many months of imprisonment and Joseph's attending their needs, they both have dreams on the same night. How did they feel about their dreams and why did they feel that way?

They were dejected because they had no one to interpret the meaning of the dreams for them. They obviously believed there was an important “message” in their dreams and yet they could not discern what the message was. This frustrated them, it made them sick with worry.

7. What are the first two things that Joseph does when he comes to serve them on that morning?

He sees they are sad and he asks them why they are sad.

8. Is his seeing and asking at all surprising to you? Why or why not?

Joseph has not grown bitter. He is not full of resentment. He is not full of self-pity. He serves faithfully, every day performing his duties. In addition, he is concerned for the well being of these ungrateful, unsympathetic men. He has compassion on the suffering of others while he suffers in greater ways. He sees that they are discouraged when no one has ever noticed his swollen eyes and tear streaked face as he mourns his imprisonment. He asks why they are sad, when no one has ever asked him how he was doing. Rather than resenting his being taken for granted, he joyfully and effectively meets the needs of others and cares for others while living in a state of sorrow over the suffering in his life.

9. Have you ever been unsympathetic towards the needs of others because you were overwhelmed with your own needs? Have you ever not asked how someone else was doing because you were so consumed with your own trouble?

10. What enables Joseph to show compassion when he has received no compassion from others?

The only way to do this is to live by faith in the promises of God. He knows that God is with him. He knows that he has a glorious future in front of him. He knows that the all wise and infinitely loving God has promised him a great future and though he does not know when or how God will bring his promises to pass, he can live free from bitterness and resentment because he hopes in God and his promises. Joseph is patiently waiting for God to act. Joseph is doing exactly what Peter commands Christians to do in 1 Peter 4:19, “So then, those who suffer

according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”

Sovereign grace delays deliverance so that God’s people will show off God’s sufficiency by exhibiting compassion.

11. How does Joseph respond to the fact they are distressed because there is no one to interpret their dream for them?

He tells them two things. First, only God knows the meaning of dreams. Only God knows what the future holds. He alone is able to reveal the truth that is hidden to finite human beings. Second, he tells them that he knows what God knows. He claims to be the recipient of divine favor. He has the ability to do what only God can do, tell them the meaning of their dreams.

12. How would you respond if a dirty, racially inferior, ex-slave who is now your servant in prison told you that he knows what God knows?

13. In what ways is our position as Christians in the world the same as that of Joseph in the prison with these men?

Here is this dirty, racially inferior, young prisoner telling these two pagan noblemen that they do not need any of their sophisticated religious leaders to discover the truth. He is able to tell them what only God knows because God has revealed the truth to him. This is an audacious claim. It is the claim that every Christian makes as well. We are the recipients of great promises from God. We know the only way for human beings to escape an eternal hell and to gain an eternal heaven. We know what the future holds in store for every human being because God has graciously told us what is coming. When we discover men and women who are despairing over the future we can do what Joseph did here. We can tell them that God has revealed the future and how it is that he is going to determine the eternal destiny of every human being. We can tell them that we know what God knows because God has told us through his Son, by his Spirit, in his Word.

14. Summarize the cupbearers dream and the bakers dream and Joseph’s interpretation of them both.

The cupbearer's dream went like this. He saw a grape vine with three branches. While he watched, the branches budded, and then blossomed and then a cluster of grapes ripened on each branch. He then took the cup of Pharaoh, squeezed the grapes into the cup and put it in Pharaoh's hand. Joseph, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, tells the cupbearer that in three days Pharaoh will lift up his head and will restore him to his former office and power. The baker is impressed with this positive message and so he tells Joseph his dream, expecting to get just as good of news as the cupbearer. In his dream, he is carrying three baskets of baked goods on his head and the birds are eating the food out of the top basket. Joseph tells the baker that in three days Pharaoh will lift up his head and cut it off and then his body will be impaled upon a tree where the birds will eat his rotting flesh.

15. Joseph is not merely describing what will happen to the men but he is declaring God's will for each of these men. Is God fair in dealing with the cupbearer and the baker?

God will graciously, unexpectedly, in spite of the cupbearer's sin against Pharaoh, deliver him and give him a glorious future. God will justly, according to what his sins deserve, destroy the baker. God is not unfair to the baker but he is kind and merciful to the cupbearer.

16. What do we learn from Joseph's proclamation of the meaning of the dreams about the gospel and about our task of proclaiming the gospel of Christ?

This is the message of the gospel. God justly condemns humans for their many sins. But he also, out of his infinite love and mercy, saves some sinful humans from their sins, for their eternal happiness and for his glory. This is the good news/bad news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you do not tell people both of these truths, you are not telling them the truth at all. We cannot tell any individual whether they are going to heaven or hell. However, we can and we must announce to people how it is that God can justly forgive some sinners while justly sending other sinners to hell. We must compassionately and courageously tell all those distressed people who will listen that salvation is reserved only for those who place their faith in the crucified and risen Christ and that hell is the destiny of all who refuse to love this Jesus.

Sovereign grace delays deliverance so that God's people will show off God's sufficiency by speaking the truth in love.

17. According to what Joseph says in vv. 14-15, how does he feel about being a prisoner in Egypt?

The suffering of Joseph is real. He does not like being in prison. He did not like being beaten and betrayed and sold by his brothers. He did not like being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown into prison unjustly. He does not like living in this dank and cruel dungeon. He knows that he is being treated unjustly and it hurts. He wants to get out of this prison.

18. What does the anguish of Joseph tell us about the relationship of living by faith and the experience of suffering? What does his anguish tell us about how we should treat those who are suffering?

What these verses tell us is that we should not expect a pain free life. Living by faith does not mean there is no real sorrow, no tears, no intense pain in your gut. This also tells us that when we are seeking to comfort those who are in the midst of suffering, we should not have the attitude, "Aren't you over this yet? Can't you trust God?" There is a kind of sorrow that is sinful, that is excessive and full of self-pity. However, there is a sorrow that is right and full of faith. It is this sorrow that we see in Joseph. He is not full of self-pity. He is not demanding his rights. He is not resentful of others good fortune. He is not bitter or cynical. He is, however, full of pain and sorrow over the injustice of his circumstances and he yearns for God's deliverance from his imprisonment. His faithful service and joyful love are not a denial of his conditions but a living by faith in spite of his conditions.

19. According to vv. 14-15, how certain is Joseph that what he has just told these men is God's will and therefore will happen?

Joseph is absolutely convinced that what he tells these men is exactly what God is going to do. He knows that cupbearer is going to be in Pharaoh's presence in three days.

20. Why does Joseph ask the cupbearer to remember him, be kind to him and get him out of this prison? (Hint: Remember 37:1-11)

He knows that it is unjust for him to be in prison. He knows it is not God's will for him to remain in prison. Joseph knows that it is God's will that he be delivered from the prison based upon God's promises to him through the

dreams he had when he was 17. He knows that God has a glorious future in store for him. He sees God's hand of providence in these circumstances. He believes that the deliverance of the cupbearer is God's means of delivering him and fulfilling his promises. He is not bargaining with the cupbearer, he is telling the cupbearer to do what he believes God wants him to do. Joseph believes God's promises and sees God's hand at work in his circumstances to fulfill those promises.

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21. What happens three days later?

God confirms the word of his prophet by exactly fulfilling what Joseph said was going to happen. Three days after he interprets the dream, Pharaoh celebrates his birthday. He brings out his imprisoned courtiers, in front of all his servants, in a display of his power and sovereignty, gives the cupbearer back his exalted status, and beheads the baker, impaling his body on a tree where the birds eat his flesh. God always confirms his word.

22. According to v. 23, how does the cupbearer repay God's mercy to him?

The cupbearer does not remember Joseph, he forgets him. We are not told why; we are only told that the cupbearer does not intercede for Joseph to set him free from his prison.

23. Use your imagination to describe what Joseph's experience would have been like after the release of the cupbearer. Be sure to read 41:1 as you reflect on his experience.

He is living in a state of anticipation. His heart is full of joy as he imagines his imminent release. A couple of hours after the cupbearer leaves the door to the prison clangs open and Joseph runs to it, expecting to see Pharaoh's officials coming to set him free and to vindicate his good name. However, there are no officials, only another prisoner being brought in. As the hours trickle by, he tells himself that it takes time for the wheels of the justice system to turn. As the days go by, he tells himself that the cupbearer has many other duties and it takes time to work through the political machinery. As the weeks go by, then the months go by, and there is no word, he realizes that the cupbearer did not act on his behalf or that the Pharaoh was not going to be merciful. For two long years Joseph continues to faithfully serve in the

dungeon and all around him are blessed by God through his faithful and joyful service. Joseph continues to wait for God's deliverance, while doing good. Can you imagine the disappointment that must have gripped his heart? How did hopelessness and despair seek to dominate and destroy him! How vexing it must have been to imagine the cupbearer in the presence of Pharaoh day after day with the power to set Joseph free but unwilling to do anything for him. How tempting to curse the cupbearer and to curse God for not vindicating his good name and setting him free.

24. Why did God make Joseph wait two more years? (Consider the language Joseph uses in v. 14. Compare to Gen. 8:1, 19:29, 30:22 & Psalm 25:6, 74:2 & 78:38-39.)

In v. 14, the language Joseph uses in addressing the cupbearer is the language of prayer. "Remember me and show me kindness", is a phrase that is used to address God. He addresses the cupbearer as if he has the power and authority of God himself. If the cupbearer would have immediately done what Joseph requested, who would have received the gratitude and admiration for Joseph's deliverance? The cupbearer would be praised, not God. This is often the reason that God waits to perform his will, so he alone will be praised.

25. How did Joseph keep living in the face of this crushing disappointment?

He hoped in God alone. His hope was not in escaping prison but in God's love for him, in God's promise to give him a glorious future. "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in his word I put my hope."

26. How do we keep living in the face of crushing disappointments?

God makes us wait, to teach us to hope in him alone. He wants us to live upon him, not upon our hopes for health or wealth or relief from some earthly trial. He has promised a glorious future for every believer in Jesus Christ and he has proven his commitment to those promises by killing his very own Son to guarantee that he will fulfill those promises and by raising him from the dead. We do not need to despair, we can live and love as we wait for him. He will deliver, as he has promised but he will do so in his perfect time so our joy is full and his glory is secured.

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