

Divine Disappointments

Intro:

We had a great time with Jenn and Jordan in Florida and I apologize if the pictures I posted on FB of us enjoying warm weather and sunshine while you all froze up here with wind chills in temps in the negatives caused you to stumble in any way. But it is good to be back and great to be back with our church family.

We have been on the go for the past two weeks and so this morning I'm going to do something I pretty much never do and that's revisit a message that I preached a few years ago. I had a particular message in mind, but two days ago I felt the Lord bring another message to mind so I am going to trust that the Lord wants to speak to us, and maybe someone here in particular, through this message. It's a message taken from the life of Joseph, so please turn with me to Genesis chapter 40.

We are going to be looking at one particular aspect of God's dealings with Joseph, but before we do, I think it's important to point out that this story is often taught as though the main point of the story of Joseph was to encourage us to have godly character like Joseph or to teach us how to be a success in every situation like Joseph was. There are some very helpful lessons that we can draw from in the Joseph story, but it's important for us to know that the main point of the Joseph story is to point us to Jesus. The story of Joseph is one of the clearest and most beautiful portraits of Jesus Christ in the entire Bible. In God's faithful guidance of all the events of Joseph's life, including his rejection and betrayal at the hands of his brothers, guiding all these events to put Joseph in the place where he can and will save the world from the coming famine we see Jesus, who suffered rejection at the hands of his own people and was betrayed and crucified by the hands of lawless men...but ultimately, it was by the sovereign and loving hand of God in order that Jesus might willingly bear the sins of the world on his shoulders and through his atoning death save all who come to him in faith and believe in his finished work on Calvary.

One of the most touching moments in all the Bible is when the brothers find out that Joseph is alive and rightfully fear for their lives as they expect his judgment to fall on them for their sinful jealousy and betrayal, but instead he falls on their necks weeping with compassion and just pours out forgiveness and mercy and favor on them. That is a picture of how Jesus has treated all of us. We deserve to be rejected for our rebellion against God. We deserve his judgment for our sins. We deserve to hear him say the words, "depart from me". But our Savior has fallen on our necks with compassion and mercy and forgiveness and acceptance and love. So as we look at Joseph we are meant to look beyond and see Jesus and his overwhelming grace and mercy to us.

With that being said, we do find amazing lessons and insights in the Joseph story including how God's invisible but powerful hand is at work in all the events of our lives –and what I want us to look at this morning is how much disappointment Joseph faced in his life. God used disappointment quite a lot in the life of Joseph and He will often use painful disappointments in our lives too. Those times when we can be tempted to wonder, *where is God in this?* God's path for our lives often runs through the valley of disappointment. It did for Joseph. It will for us as well.

The title of the message is *Divine Disappointments*. I'm not so much talking about the little, inconsequential disappointments that life throws at us. I'm talking about the deep and hard to understand disappointments that can knock us off balance and tempt us to doubt God's heart for us. Things that we are trusting God for that don't happen – at least not in the time frame or way we expect. Blessings that we believe are right around the corner but when we turn the corner, they're not there. Deliverances from

trouble that we long for so that we can testify of God's faithfulness to us— but the 11th hour comes and goes and God doesn't seem to come through. There are disappointments that can stagger and test our faith.

In those moments we can find strength and perspective for our faith from the story of God's work in Joseph's life. As we come to chapter 40 Joseph has been in Egypt for 11 years and for those 11 years his life has been a roller coaster of disappointments: first he receives two dreams from God in which he is elevated to such a high position that even his family bows in homage to him. Joseph probably figured it'd be a fast track to greatness, but that hope is cruelly disappointed when his brothers sell him into slavery to an Ishmaelite caravan that carries him bound and chained into Egypt.

But God is with him in Egypt and he is sold to a powerful man named Potiphar and God gives him such success and favor that Potiphar exalts him over his entire house, and his star begins to rise. But once again his hopes – and it would seem the dreams God gave him – are crushed as he is falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and Potiphar throws him into a prison to rot. As he sits in prison Joseph probably thinks that he has finally hit bottom – can't go any lower. But he'd be wrong, as we read chapter 40 we'll see that God has one more heart-sickening disappointment for Joseph to go through.

Gen. 40:1-5 (pray)

Main point: *God uses disappointment to deepen our faith and direct our lives in His perfect plan. Three simple points as we work through this chapter.*

I. Disappointments are often divine appointments in disguise (vv. 1-5)

Years ago it was popular to speak of "divine appointments" but what we see in Joseph's life are a series of divine disappointments. Here he is in prison and suddenly two men are thrown in prison with him. We aren't told what the cupbearer and baker did, but they each committed some offense against the Pharaoh and were imprisoned for it. But look at whose custody the Pharaoh puts them in: the captain of the guard – who, we are told in the previous chapter, is Potiphar! That is no accident! God's hand is all over this – and as these two men who once held such prominent positions in the court of Pharaoh come under Potiphar's jurisdiction, who does he think of to care for them? Joseph.

Here's my suspicion: Potiphar didn't really believe his wife's charges against Joseph. He knew Joseph and he knew his wife. If he had really believed that Joseph attacked Mrs. Potiphar he probably would have had Joseph executed not imprisoned. So here he is saying, in essence, I can't think of a more faithful man to care for these two powerful men (who might at any moment be returned to their positions) than my faithful servant Joseph. God is working through the disappointing circumstances.

And then these two men "happen" to have vivid dreams on the same night. And we're beginning to see that the disappointing circumstances that landed Joseph in this place aren't disappointing at all, they are directed by the loving, wise hand of God. God is sovereign over all things and nothing happens in our lives by accident. That means even our disappointments are filtered through His loving heart and designed with our good in mind.

ILL: when I look back on my life I can see many times where what looked like disappointing situations were really divine appointments in disguise. God has frequently used disappointments to position me where I needed to be. When Janice and I got married, I had a desire to write music and do concerts, but God used the disappointment of those aspirations to open up a direction I really hadn't considered or

even had a desire for: the door opened for me to become a pastor. At first I resisted that direction, but 24 years of pastoring later, I am grateful God disappointed my musical desires.

Twelve years later God used circumstances that seemed very disappointing – crushingly disappointing at the time - to lead me to resign the pastorate at LC and move us off of LI. It was hard but as we look back, those disappointments set a new trajectory for our lives and eventually led our family to come to Corning to plant a church. Disappointments are often divine appointments in disguise.

I share these stories not because they're special but because they're not. You have them too – and if you look back you might see more than you think. We all face disappointments and sometimes they will be hard to understand: You think that young lady will be your wife, you think that young man will be your husband – but she/he ends up marrying someone else. You think that the phone is going to ring with that job offer, but when the call does come, it's to tell you that they gave the job to someone else. You look at a house you think is perfect for you, but it sells out from under you or you can't get financing. Maybe there's a disappointment you are facing right now in your life – you don't need to deny the disappointment, but have faith that God is going to work through that disappointment, either to change it and do what you're hoping for with a different timing, or to change your desire, so that what you end up with is different but far better. Believing that disappointments are often divine appointments in disguise takes faith and that brings me to my second point:

II. Disappointments are used by God to strengthen our faith because they press on our faith in a unique way (vv. 6-8)

Remember that the last time Joseph interpreted a dream, it was a dream of him being exalted to the heights and it had been downhill ever since! After 11 years, it would have been so easy for Joseph to be cynical – “yeah, I tried interpreting a dream once, and God didn't come through for me. My brothers tried to kill me, I was falsely accused of molesting my boss' wife, and I've spent the last who knows how many years here in this pit of a prison. My days of interpreting dreams are over. They don't come true anyway.”

But look at Joseph's immediate response in verse 8: *Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.*” Joseph still believed in God, and he still believed that God spoke to him correct interpretations of dreams. This tells us that Joseph still believed God would fulfill the dreams he had had 11 years ago. His confidence in God was still rock solid even in the face of crushing disappointments.

Disappointments press on our faith in a unique way and here's why: often when we're initially hit by some trial there can be a sense of grace and faith that rises up in our hearts that God is going to deliver us from the trial or use the trial for good and so we begin to walk by faith and pray with faith. But then, instead of things getting better, they get worse. We feel like George Bailey in *It's A Wonderful Life* who has his life turned upside down and finally in a moment of desperation prays for God to help him...and a minute later gets punched in the nose! Sometimes it feels like that: we pray and something else goes wrong and it feels like God's answer to our prayers is a punch in the nose. And it's at that moment that we need to guard our hearts from becoming cynical.

Cynicism is a kind of jaded mistrust and it is often the product of disappointment – when people let us down we can become cynical towards people in general. When God allows disappointment into our lives, if the roots of our faith don't go deep in God's word, we can become cynical towards God: *I tried believing God, and it didn't work.* Cynicism makes us reluctant to trust God again. Here's the order we need to cling to: our trust in God and His promises needs to affect how we interpret everything that happens in our lives, rather than everything that happens in our lives affecting how we interpret trust in

God and His promises. That's what Joseph did. He was hit and hit hard over and over again by disappointment, but there was an unconquerable buoyancy to his faith. He didn't lose confidence in God's promises, he just realigned his understanding of how God was going to fulfill His promises and kept trusting.

When we come to disappointments – even deep disappointments – and God doesn't do what we hoped He would do, we must not jettison our faith, we must not become cynical, we must not think that we tried God and it didn't work. God will be faithful. He may or may not do it the way we're hoping He does it. He may not do it in the timing we're hoping for. We may need to realign our understanding of what God is doing and how He's doing it but we must continue trusting God. I want to encourage you not to locate your confidence in a particular answer or outcome but locate your confidence completely and only in your heavenly Father and His loving faithfulness. He may choose to work in a way you never expected and could never predict, but He will be faithful to you – we have His sure promises on that. And that brings me to my last point:

III. When God doesn't seem to deliver you in the 11th hour, trust God for a new 11th hour (vv. 9-23)

The two men get very different interpretations. Both men had prominent roles in Pharaoh's court and the chief cupbearer is told that his dream means that his head will be lifted up (in honor) and he will be serving the wine to the Pharaoh again in three days. The baker, encouraged by such a positive interpretation, tells Joseph his dream. And Joseph tells him that his head will be lifted up in three days too – right off his shoulders! The ominous image of birds eating the breads that should have gone to Pharaoh are a picture of the birds eating his flesh. Not a happy interpretation.

Joseph asks the cupbearer to simply mention his case to Pharaoh, for he is unjustly imprisoned. But the last verse tells us simply: *Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.*

Joseph must have been so sure this was God's way of delivering him that he started rolling up his sleeping bag every time there was a step in the prison hall. At the end of the first day he probably figured the cupbearer was just too busy – he'd mention Joseph to the Pharaoh the next day for sure. But the next day came and went, and Joseph waited the third day. And a fourth, and a fifth. How many days passed before he realized the cupbearer forgot him? A week? A month? He would spend another two years in prison. Joseph was human, he must have been bitterly disappointed, but he continues to serve God faithfully where God had him.

God is a Deliverer. He delivers His people from bondage, from sin, from trouble, from evil, from judgment, from enemies. Often that deliverance comes at the 11th hour, but God promises it will come. But sometimes God moves the 11th hour beyond what seems possible so that we trust God for a new 11th hour.

There was a widow in Nain, when she lost her husband, she lost her means of livelihood and her respected status in her town, but she still had one consolation and hope: a son. Then one day he died too. Now she had nothing -her 11th hour had come and gone and she had no hope left in the world. But as the funeral procession was heading out of town with the dead boy carried on a mat, Jesus was coming into town, and he stopped the funeral procession and he raised the little boy and gave him back to his mother. She had a new 11th hour.

The disciples saw things going sour as Jesus was arrested and prayed for God to deliver Jesus from their grip. As they followed Jesus who, beaten and whipped and stripped naked was forced to carry his

own cross, all their hopes were in him, and they were watching those hopes die. If God was going to deliver Jesus, now was the 11th hour. But God didn't intervene and they watched Jesus hang on the cross and die. The 11th hour had passed and it was too late. They went back to their homes dejected and hopeless.

But on the third day, Jesus rose triumphantly from the grave – God had moved the 11th hour beyond the grave. And that is true for us today – for some of us our 11th hour will come after the grave. Faith in Jesus means hope that even death can't kill. In the words of Job: *though he slay me, yet will I trust Him!*

Joseph thought the perfect time to free him was immediately, but if that had happened he would just have been released – probably he would have gone home to his father. End of story. But God had a better plan and a better 11th hour. And at just the right time, as the next chapter tells us, God delivered Joseph in such a way that it positioned him to rise to extraordinary power and be in position to save the world and his own family from death. The dreams God gave him would be fulfilled – the disappointments were a path to those fulfillments not obstacles.

God works amazingly good things through disappointment. At the moment that the disciples hung their heads in disappointment and said, "it's over", Jesus bowed his head and said, "it is finished." Our greatest good was accomplished in what seemed to be the darkest hour.

Are there disappointments that have shaken your faith? Maybe it's not one big disappointment but the accumulation of a lot of little disappointments. Have you been tempted to be cynical – to think that you tried trusting God and it didn't work? Are you reluctant to pray with faith? Are you facing an 11th hour – or maybe you feel like the 11th hour has come and gone.

Trust in your heavenly Father. Trust also in Christ. Trust in His sovereign power, trust in His loving heart for you. Trust that He is using that disappointment as a divine appointment to direct you where He wants you. Believe the promises of God in the face of circumstances that seem to contradict those promises. In this we absolutely relate to Joseph: God was faithful to him, and in due season fulfilled all His promises to him. He will be faithful to us as well and every promise He has given us He will fulfill. In Christ every promise is "yes and amen". No one who trusts in Christ will ultimately ever be disappointed but we will be filled with joy and amazement over all that God does for our good and His glory.

As we sing the closing song, I want to give you opportunity to lift any disappointments you are dealing with to God with a new faith. If you want someone to pray for you, just come up front and someone will come and pray with you.