

**Genesis 40:1-23**  
*Being Faithful in the Little Things*

When I mention the word stewardship, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

- I would guess that many of you may think of money or finances

But stewardship is much more than money

- Stewardship is a great term that embraces many aspects than finances

A steward is someone who is responsible for the resources of someone else

- The Bible says that we are stewards, not owners

This has major ramifications for how we live

- Our money belongs to the Lord, not to us
- Our home and cars belong to the Lord, not to us
- Our spouses belong to the Lord, not to us
- Our children belong to the Lord, not to us
- Our time belongs to the Lord, not to us

The apostle Paul gives a very short statement on the responsibilities of stewardship in 1 Corinthians 4:2, “**it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy**”

- Stewards are required to be faithful

One day, each one of us will be held accountable for our stewardship

- God, the Owner of everything, will determine how faithful we have been with what has been entrusted to us

Faithfulness is not just about the big things in life

- It also encompasses all the little things as well

This morning, let's examine how Joseph was faithful with what he had been entrusted with

- Let's examine Joseph's stewardship

**Let's read Genesis 40:1-23**

In this chapter of Genesis, we learn about the need to be faithful in the little things of life<sup>1</sup>

- Oftentimes, we think that our character is forged and formed in the big events of life
- In reality, we see how faithful we are in the little, seemingly insignificant things of life

Joseph illustrates the need to be faithful in the little things of life

- Be faithful with where you are (40:1-4)
- Be faithful with who you are with (40:5-19)
- Be faithful with how you are treated (40:20-23)

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 379.

Examine your heart this morning, beloved

- Are you being faithful in the little things of life?
- Or are you just concerning yourself with the “big” things?

*Let's look at the life of Joseph to see these truths lived out*

## **I. Be faithful with where you are (40:1-4)**

<sup>1</sup>Then it came about after these things the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.

Verse one opens with a generic reference to time, “**Then it came about after these things**”

- After what things?

As we discovered last week in Genesis 39, Joseph was a faithful man

- He was trustworthy in Potiphar's home
- As a result, Joseph was promoted to be Potiphar's personal servant (39:4)

Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Joseph, day after day

- She was persistent in tempting Joseph

But Joseph was persistent in resisting her temptation

- He had a right awareness that sin with her would be sin against God
- Hence, his reasoning for saying, “No” was based on his relationship with God

One day, Potiphar's wife grabbed Joseph's clothing and demanded that he give in to her proposal

- Joseph was able to break free from her and run out of the home

But Potiphar's wife fabricated a story to make Joseph out to be guilty of attempted rape

- Potiphar threw Joseph into prison based on these false allegations

Joseph, however, continued to excel in his responsibilities

- He was faithful, even in a situation that he didn't like

Four times Genesis 39 told us that the LORD was with Joseph (39:2, 3, 21, 23)

- The presence of the LORD was evidenced in Joseph's life
- Others realized this as well

Genesis 40 picks up the story of Joseph's imprisonment

- We don't know much time elapsed between the end of Genesis 39 and the beginning of Genesis 40

We know from Genesis 37:2 that Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold to Potiphar<sup>2</sup>

- We also know from Genesis 41:46 that Joseph was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh

Look with me at Genesis 41:1, “**Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile**”

- The next chapter picks up two years after the events of Genesis 40

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<sup>2</sup> Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 567.

If Joseph was 30 years old in Genesis 41, then he must be 28 during the events of Genesis 40

- That means that he has spent 11 years in Egypt
  - o Serving Potiphar
  - o Being banished to prison by Potiphar

At some point during Joseph's imprisonment, two high-ranking officials of Pharaoh were incarcerated

- One was a cupbearer and the other was a baker

The cupbearer was a trusted worker who was responsible for tastetesting the king's food and serving wine to the king

- This was to prevent someone from poisoning the king

We know that Nehemiah was a cupbearer (Neh 1:11)

The baker, on the other hand, was responsible for preparing delicacies for the king

- The Egyptian dictionary lists 38 cakes and 57 varieties of bread
- Bakers were oftentimes first-class gourmet chefs
- They were required to prepare masterpieces<sup>3</sup>

Moses tells us that these two individuals had "offended their lord, the king of Egypt"

We are not told what they did

- But it was bad enough that Pharaoh had them thrown into prison

<sup>2</sup> And Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.

Verse 2 tells us the obvious, "Pharaoh was furious with his two officials"

- The offense must have been very serious

<sup>3</sup> So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the same place where Joseph was imprisoned.

But the two officials were not immediately put to death

- Instead, they were thrown into prison, "the same place where Joseph was imprisoned"

God was demonstrating His providential workings here

- These two officials were brought to the same prison where Joseph was being held
- As the chapter unfolds, they would need help from one another

<sup>4</sup> And the captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time.

The end of Genesis 39 told us that Joseph was once again promoted to a position of authority in the prison system

- Even though he was a prisoner himself, he had responsibilities over the other inmates
- Verse 4 tells us that "the captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge" of the cupbearer and the baker

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<sup>3</sup> Wenham, 384.

Who was this “**captain of the bodyguard**”?

- We have been told on two separate occasions that this captain is none other than Potiphar (37:36; 39:1)
- This is who Joseph belonged to!

But the person who was in charge of the prison system told Joseph to take care of the cupbearer and the baker

- Joseph was responsible for them

We are told that “**they were in confinement for some time**”

- We are not told how long

We already know why Joseph is being blessed despite his surroundings

- We were told four times in chapter 39 that “**the LORD was with Joseph**”
- God’s presence was very real to Joseph

No matter where Joseph was, he was faithful

- He was responsible
- He was trustworthy

It didn’t matter where Joseph was, he was faithful

- In his father’s home
- In the field to check on his brothers
- In Potiphar’s home
- In the prison

How about you?

- Are you being faithful with where you are?

Granted, you may not be where you want to be

- But God has obviously placed each one of us in the place where we are for His purposes

It is easy to think that if our circumstances or surroundings changed, we would be more faithful

- But that is wrong thinking

If you aren’t faithful with where God has placed you now, you won’t be faithful if God were to change your circumstances

- “**He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much**” (Lk 16:10)

Be like Joseph

- Wherever you are, be faithful
- As the old adage says, bloom where you are planted

Life is not lived out in a vacuum

- Life is about relationships with others

Joseph was faithful with where he was in life

- But Joseph was also faithful with who he was with
- We will examine how Joseph interacted with those around him

## II. Be faithful with who you are with (40:5-19)

<sup>5</sup> Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his *own* dream *and* each dream with its *own* interpretation.

After some amount of time in prison, the cupbearer and the baker had a dream on the same night

- Each man had his own dream
- Each dream had its own interpretation

<sup>6</sup> When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. <sup>7</sup> And he asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?"

When Joseph came in the morning after the men had had their respective dreams, he noticed that "they were dejected"

- These men were sad
- These men were a little discouraged

So Joseph naturally asks, "Why are your faces so sad today?"

- Joseph was genuinely concerned for those who had been entrusted to him
- He took the time to ask personal questions about their well-being

<sup>8</sup> Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it."

The cupbearer and the baker told Joseph, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it"

- Dreams held a very important role in the life of Egyptian culture at the time

It was believed by the Egyptians that sleep put the individual into direct contact with the gods

- Dreams, therefore, were a way to communicate with the gods<sup>4</sup>

Someone might well have a dream

- However, they needed someone else to interpret it

The cupbearer and the baker, being officials for the king, were used to having the services of the king's professional dream interpreters

- Being in prison, they were cut off from such individuals
- They didn't think anyone could interpret their dreams<sup>5</sup>

Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please."

Joseph speaks up as having the solution to their problem, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please"

- In other words, you don't need a professional interpreter
- On the contrary, God holds the answers to all dreams

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 2*, 382.

<sup>5</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 476.

Joseph's answer is full in concert with the rest of the Scriptures that reject any contact with the occult

- Guidance comes from God's Word, not sorcery or divination<sup>6</sup>

Joseph emerges as a young man in the likeness of Daniel<sup>7</sup>

- Both men had the ability to interpret dreams
- Both men were used to interpret dreams for high-ranking government officials

<sup>9</sup> So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, *there was a vine in front of me;* <sup>10</sup> *and on the vine were three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, and its clusters produced ripe grapes.* <sup>11</sup> *Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand.*"

The cupbearer seems convinced by Joseph's confidence in the ability of God to disclose the interpretation of his dream

- So he begins to tell his dream to Joseph

Thus far in Genesis, we have been exposed to two major types of dreams<sup>8</sup>

- One type is where the voice of God is audible
- Another type is where the voice of God is not audible

The dreams of the cupbearer and the baker are clear examples where God's voice is not audible

- Thus, there is the need for someone to interpret the dream
- Otherwise, the content of the dreams is subjective and open to any type of interpretation

In the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker, there is a focus on the number three

- Three branches on the vine
- Three actions of the branches
- Three actions of the individual in the dream
- Three baskets of bread

The repeated reference to the number three serves as a way to unify the dreams

- They are very similar
- Yet they are also different

We also notice that the objects in the dreams of these two individuals had elements that would have been very common and familiar to them

- The dreams of these two men had elements that were familiar to their jobs

The cupbearer's dream had a vine with three branches

- There were three actions related to the branches
  - o It was budding
  - o The blossoms came out
  - o The clusters of the blossoms produced ripe grapes

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<sup>6</sup> Wenham, 393.

<sup>7</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Genesis, 237.*

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, 477.

The cupbearer also dreamed that he had Pharaoh's cup in his hand

- Three more actions are specified
  - o The cupbearer took the grapes
  - o He squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup
  - o He put the cup into Pharaoh's hand

This dream had some familiar and unfamiliar elements in it

- But the cupbearer needed help sorting out the details
- He needed someone to help interpret the dream

<sup>12</sup> Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; <sup>13</sup> within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer.

Joseph doesn't waste any time interpreting the dream

- There is no mention of him praying for a right interpretation

Joseph tells the cupbearer that "**the three branches are three days**"

- There is no way of knowing this from the dream alone
- The cupbearer had no idea that this was the significance of the three branches

Furthermore, Joseph tells the cupbearer that "**within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office**"

- This is great news!
- The cupbearer won't be in prison much longer
- He would be restored to his official position

<sup>14</sup> Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house.

Knowing that the cupbearer would be restored to his position of influence and contact with Pharaoh, Joseph takes the opportunity to ask a favor

Joseph asks the cupbearer to "**keep me in mind when it goes well with you**"

- In other words, remember me!

Further, Joseph asks this man to "**please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh**"

- As the cupbearer, this man would have many opportunities to speak with the king
- Ancient writings confirm that the cupbearer was oftentimes a very personal and trusted confidant for the king

Why does Joseph want the cupbearer to mention him to the king?

- The end of verse 14 tells us that Joseph wants Pharaoh to "**get me out of this house**"

We have to keep in mind that Joseph is in prison!

- He has some level of responsibility
- But he also had his privileges revoked

<sup>15</sup> For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.”

Joseph continues to talk freely to this cupbearer about his past

- Joseph claims to have been “**kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews**”

This is the first time that Joseph has been his perspective on what happened to him by his own brothers

- In Joseph’s mind, it was nothing short of kidnapping!

Joseph declares his innocence by stating, “**I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon**”

- No specifics about his escape from Potiphar’s wife are given
- Joseph was keeping things light and generic

It is interesting to note Joseph’s perspective of the prison where he was kept

- In verse 14 he called it “**this house**”
- In verse 15 he called it “**the dungeon**”

Both are accurate statements

- But from different perspectives

Joseph’s use of “**dungeon**” is the same word used back in Genesis 37 of the pit into which Joseph’s brothers threw him

- In both instances, Joseph was thrown into some type of confinement
- In both instances, Joseph had not done anything wrong

As Joseph compares the pit with the prison, both are alike in many ways

- He had been unjustly treated
- He didn’t want to be in either place for very long

<sup>16</sup> When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, “I also saw in my dream, and behold, *there were three baskets of white bread on my head;* <sup>17</sup> and in the top basket *there were some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.*”

After seeing how the cupbearer had a favorable interpretation, the baker speaks up

- He wanted his dream interpreted
- I am sure that he expected a good interpretation

In the dream of the baker, he saw three baskets of white bread on his head

- This was a common manner of carrying items, especially in the Egyptian culture

In the top basket, the baker saw “**all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh**”

- In other words, the baker had dreamed that he had prepared all sorts of baked delicacies for the king
- I am sure he had done this hundreds of times in real life

But there was a twist in the baker’s dream

- Verse 17 indicates that “**the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head**”

This was not a good sign for the baker

- Food that was prepared for the king was being consumed by the birds



In Egypt, birds were sacred, so they were protected

- They became a nuisance<sup>9</sup>

But what did all this mean?

- Like the cupbearer, there was a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar elements in his dream

<sup>18</sup> Then Joseph answered and said, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; <sup>19</sup> within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh off you.”

As with the cupbearer, Joseph jumps in and gives a quick interpretation of the dream

The three baskets of bread are three days

- This relates to the three branches in the dream of the cupbearer
- So far so good

Joseph tells the baker, “**within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you**”

- This is a similar statement as Joseph had made regarding the cupbearer

But the next statement would have been painful for the baker, you “**will hang on a tree**”

- The baker would not live
- In three days, the baker would be hanged on a tree

Furthermore, “**the birds will eat your flesh off you**”

- Not a pleasant thought, is it?
- Certainly not a pleasant thought for the baker

The cupbearer had been given a positive interpretation

- But the baker had received a negative interpretation

It was the difference between life and death

- Pretty serious issues for these two men

Joseph is faithful to speak the truth to these two men

- He wasn't afraid to proclaim what was going to happen to these two men

I am sure it would have been very easy to tell both of these men, “Everything will be ok. You will stand before Pharaoh once again in three days.”

- But that would have been a lie

We are faced with a similar temptation

- When was the last time that you were speaking with someone and you knew that you should the truth
- But instead, you gave a very watered-down version of the truth

This could happen as you present the Gospel to someone

- Instead of speaking the truth, you decide to withhold certain facts that are a part of the Gospel presentation

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<sup>9</sup> Morris, 573.

This could happen in the home

- Instead of instructing your children and shepherding them, you take the easy route and skip over a teaching opportunity

But Joseph didn't wimp out

- With confidence in the LORD, he spoke the truth in both situations

Are you faithful like Joseph?

- Do you always speak what needs to be spoken?
- Do you ever temper down the truth for the sake of convenience?
- Do you ever withhold the truth so as not to offend anyone?

I think we have all been there

- Yet Joseph is a tremendous example of faithfulness in the little things
  - o Faithful with where he was (40:1-4)
  - o Faithful with who he was with (40:5-19)
  - o *But there is a third principle of faithfulness...*

### **III. Be faithful with how you are treated (40:20-23)**

<sup>20</sup> Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants;

We skip ahead three days after Joseph gave the interpretations to the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker

- We learn that it is "Pharaoh's birthday"

This was a special occasion

- On some occasions, there would be amnesties granted to criminals

It doesn't surprise us that there was a large feast given for all his servants

- This was a time of celebration

and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. <sup>21</sup> And he restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand; <sup>22</sup> but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.

Pharaoh "lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants"

- This is the third time that this ambiguous phrase has been used in this chapter

I say ambiguous because in some cases, it is a positive statement of restoring someone to his former position

- In other cases, it is a negative statement of capital punishment

Verse 21 tells us that the cupbearer was restored to his office, "he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand"

- Just as his dream had indicated

Verse 22 tells us that the baker was hanged

- Just as his dream had indicated

In both cases, Joseph's interpretation was spot on

- He was exactly right about what would take place in the lives of these two individuals

This is because God was directing Joseph to give a right interpretation of the facts

- Joseph had confidence that God knew the future
- Joseph knew that God could relay the reality of the future, if He so pleased

<sup>23</sup> Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Genesis 40 ends on a sad note

- The baker was hanged

But we are also told that the cupbearer “**did not remember Joseph, but forgot him**”

- Moses underscores the mental lapse of this man by noting two (2) different verbs
  - o He “**did not remember Joseph**”
  - o He “**forgot him**”

How sad this is!

- Joseph had been gracious to interpret the dream of the cupbearer
- Joseph had not withheld anything from his dream

All Joseph asked was that the cupbearer mention his case to Pharaoh

- Joseph didn't like being in the prison
- To him, life in the dungeon was the pits!

Time after time, Joseph seems to be mistreated

- By his brothers
- By Potiphar
- By Potiphar's wife
- By the cupbearer

But there is no note of bitterness or resentment

- I would dare say that most of us would not respond as well as Joseph under the same circumstances

Joseph may have thought that he was all alone

- He may thought that no one remembered his situation

But God was with Joseph

- God had not forgotten his situation
- God would use this situation to deliver the family of Israel

We are so prone to complain and whine about our circumstances

- In reality, we have it made

Sure, we may go through some difficulties

- But they are nothing compared to what Joseph went through

Joseph strikes us as a faithful man

- Be faithful with where he was (40:1-4)
- Be faithful with who he was with (40:5-19)
- Be faithful with how he was treated (40:20-23)

Beloved, these are the tests of our lives as well

- God tests our faithfulness
- God examines our hearts

How much does it take for you to start complaining?

- How much does it take for you to start compromising?
- How much does the fear of man affect you?

Those are questions that only you can answer

- God knows your heart

Jesus told a parable about a man who was going on a long journey (Mt 25:14-30)

- He took his possessions and entrusted them to his three servants
  - o To one he gave five talents
  - o To another he gave two talents
  - o To the other he gave one talent

There was an element of trust that was involved

- The owner entrusted his personal possessions to these three servants
- You could very easily call these servants “stewards”

The servant with five talents went out and invested his allotment, gaining five more talents for his owner

- He started with five and ended up with ten

The servant with two talents went out and invested his allotment, gaining two more talents for his owner

- He started with two and ended up with four

The servant with one talent went out and hid his allotment in the ground

- He started with one and ended up with one

When the owner returned from his trip, he brought his three servants together

- The one entrusted with five had gained another five
- The one entrusted with two had gained another two
- The one entrusted with one had not gained any

In response to the first two servants, the owner exclaimed, “**Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master**” (Mt 25:21, 23)

But to the one who had not invested the owner’s possessions, he had no words of commendation

- Rather, his allotment was taken away from him

We notice that the owner did not reward the man with ten talents more than the man with four talents

- The basis was not how much each had been given
- The basis was how faithful the servants had been

One day in the near future, each believer will stand before God

- Praise God that we won’t stand before Him in judgment
- We are His children because of the finished work of Christ, not our works here on Earth

But there will be a day of accounting

- God, the Owner of everything, will demand an accounting from His servants

For some of you, you have been entrusted with much

- For others of you, you have been entrusted with little

Regardless, we have all been given a stewardship

- The things of this life are not ours
- They belong to God

As we learned early in the message, what is required of stewards?

- Success – no
- Ability – no

“it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” (1 Cor 4:2)

- Faithfulness will be the plumb line by which God examines our earthly lives
  - o Not how much we have
  - o But how faithful we have been

Friend, if you are here and you do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ, you are in deep trouble

- Unless you repent of your sins and trust in Jesus Christ, you will die and be separated from Him forever and ever
- You will suffer in a real, literal lake of fire – forever and ever

You, too, will stand before God

- But not to give an accounting of how faithful you have been

The Bible says that unbelievers will appear before the Great White Throne Judgment

- “And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. <sup>14</sup> And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:11-15)

What an amazing thought

- That all unbelievers will appear before God to be sentenced to an eternity of suffering and separation from God

But you don't have to suffer eternally

- Do you realize that you are a sinner?
  - o The Bible says that all have sinned – including you
- Do you realize that as a sinner, you deserve to face God's wrath?
  - o You don't deserve the blessings of this life
- Do you realize that Jesus Christ came to this Earth to die for sinners?
  - o An innocent man was pronounced guilty so that the sins of guilty humanity might be forgiven

Trust in God today

- Turn to Him today