

Gone But Not Forgotten

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[0 : 00] Our last session ended with Joseph in prison after Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of attempted rape.

! Chapter 39 ended with verses 19 through 23.! So let's look at those verses for review. Chapter 39 verse 19 says, As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, This is the way your servant treated me, his anger was kindled.

And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him.

And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. Tonight we're going to cover all of chapter 40. So let's go ahead and jump right in and read that entire chapter.

[1 : 16] Starting with verse 1, chapter 40 says,

So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches.

As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

Then Joseph said to him, This is its interpretation. The three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer.

Only remember me when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.

[3 : 19] When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, I also had a dream. There were three cake baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.

And Joseph answered and said, This is its interpretation. The three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat the flesh from you.

On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

But he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief baker did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. The storyline of chapter 40 revolves around two dreamers, two dreams, two interpretations, and two vastly different outcomes for the dreamers.

The dreamers, as we saw, are two ranking servants in the royal court, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. Joseph has a new role in this chapter.

[4 : 39] Rather than being the dreamer, as his brothers had called him, he is now the interpreter of the dreams. Despite being focused on the two new prisoners that interact with Joseph, the most significant moment of the chapter comes when Joseph asks the cupbearer to remember him when the cupbearer returns to Pharaoh's service.

Chapter 40 shows us that believers can maintain their faith and serve God even in difficult circumstances. That's the main idea of the chapter. Again, chapter 40 shows that believers can

maintain their faith and serve God even in difficult circumstances.

As we dig deeper into the chapter, we'll see strong evidence that Joseph has maintained his faith in God. If you have the handout from last week, you may have noticed that last week's handout said the title of this lesson would be *Forgotten but Not Gone*.

After studying the chapter more, I flipped the title to be *Gone but Not Forgotten*. That may seem a little strange considering how the chapter ends, because we just saw that chapter 40 ends with this verse.

It says, Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. When we get to the last section of the chapter, we'll see how, despite this verse, the lesson title still can be *Gone but Not Forgotten*.

[6 : 03] We're going to break chapter 40 into three sections. And in verses 1 through 4, we see two dignitaries. So two dignitaries is your first blank tonight.

Let's read verses 1 through 4 again. They say, Sometime after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord, the king of Egypt.

And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. And he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard in the prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody. The two new prisoners we meet in these verses are anything but ordinary prisoners.

The new prisoners are dignitaries or high-ranking officials in Pharaoh's court. In other words, they're Egyptian VIPs. The cupbearer to the king is a sort of butler.

[7 : 10] He's the man responsible for tasting Pharaoh's wine to assure that it's not poison before it touches the king's lips. His frequent access to the throne and confidential nature of his duties give him great influence at court.

You might remember another cupbearer in the Bible, Nehemiah, had that job, and we looked at Nehemiah a few years ago. The same kind of influence can be said for the chief baker as well. He's the man responsible for overseeing the baking of the many varieties of cakes and breads that are eaten at the palace. He's in charge of the whole dining room operation.

So putting it together, these two were responsible for the king's food and drink, and they were often suspects in plots to poison the king.

Whatever the charge was against them, they were placed in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned Joseph to attend them personally, probably with instructions to observe them carefully and find out exactly what they were guilty of.

[8 : 17] So then that could be reported to Pharaoh. We're not told here whether the captain of the guard mentioned in verse 3 is the same captain of the guard we saw in chapter 39, verse 1.

If it is the same person, then the captain of the guard here is Potiphar. So once again, Potiphar could be involved in what Joseph does. Regardless of whether Potiphar was involved in assigning the new prisoners to the same prison, the words, in the same prison where Joseph was confined, are words of providence.

They're words of purpose. They are indications that God is at work. Verse 4 ends by saying, they continued for some time in custody. We don't know how long some time was, but the elapsed time obviously was long enough for Joseph to get to know the cupbearer and the baker well.

We'll move now to the second section of the lesson. It's the largest section and we'll spend most of our time here tonight. In verses 5 through 19, we see two dreams.

So two dreams will be what we look at next. The two dignitaries we just met here each have a dream on the same night. This section does cover all the way to verse 19.

[9 : 36] So let's look at verses 5 through 8 first. Those verses say, one night they both dreamed, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, each his own dream, and each dream with his own interpretation.

When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in the master's house, why are your faces downcast today? They said to him, we have had dreams and there is no one to interpret them. And Joseph said to them, do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.

In the ancient Near East, dreams were often viewed as a medium of divine revelation. But because of their imprisonment, the cupbearer and the baker no longer have access to the magicians and wise men who might have been able to provide an interpretation.

If you look ahead a minute to chapter 41, verse 8, you will see how people in Egypt thought that magicians and wise men were necessary to interpret dreams.

[10:47] Verse 41, 8 happens just after Pharaoh has his dreams and we'll look at Pharaoh's dreams in detail next week. For now though, all I want you to see is just who Pharaoh expects to interpret the dreams.

Genesis 41, 8 says, So in the morning his spirit was troubled and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men.

Pharaoh told them his dreams but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh. If Pharaoh thought magicians and wise men were necessary to interpret dreams, no doubt Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker did too.

So that's why they were disappointed. There weren't any magicians and wise men in the prison cell with them. They just didn't know there was one wiser than those people. Before we look at the actual dreams, let's consider what these verses tell us about Joseph.

The first thing we see about Joseph is that he was focused on others more than himself. He was focused on others more than himself. After what he'd been through, Joseph could easily have been so self-absorbed that he failed to notice that the cupbearer and baker seemed different that morning.

[12:04] Even if he had noticed, we certainly could have understood if Joseph thought, So what if my prison mates seem upset today? I've been through much more than they have. They can deal with their own troubles.

Joseph instead wants to do what he can to help his fellow inmates. And that gives us an indication of why Joseph wins favor with people wherever he goes. He consistently makes the best of difficult circumstances.

The secret to enduring traumatic circumstances is to see the hand of God. Joseph does that in jail. Circumstances are difficult, but Joseph has learned to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

He's a silent servant, a man who hangs in there and keeps ministering to others, even when his own life seems virtually shipwrecked. Joseph seeing the hand of God in these circumstances is the second thing we learn about Joseph.

We see here that he still has his faith in God. Remember the main idea of this chapter. Believers can maintain their faith and serve God even in difficult circumstances.

[13:15] And we do see here that Joseph still has his faith in God. And after what he's been through, maintaining his faith is almost unbelievable. However, we saw last week that God was with Joseph.

And we also saw at the end of chapter 39 that God showed Joseph steadfast love. Joseph, emboldened by God's presence and love, makes quite the statement at the end of verse 8.

Look at that again. It says, Joseph said to them, do not interpretations belong to God. Please tell them to me. Here's the strongest evidence yet that Joseph has maintained his faith in God.

He acknowledges that God is responsible for interpreting dreams. Then by asking the two officials to tell him their dreams, Joseph shows unshakable belief.

Joseph here is claiming access to the mind of God. He understands dream interpretation to be a matter of revelation, not the product of learning or manipulation.

[14:22] And Joseph is confident in his prophetic role. If we could talk to Joseph here, we might be tempted to question why Joseph is so confident. All the way back several years ago in his life, back in chapter 37, Joseph had two dreams that seemed to predict him ruling over his brothers and also his father and stepmother.

Since then, he's been sold as a slave and has been thrown in prison because of a false accusation. We might be tempted to say something like, come on, Joseph, be realistic.

Why do you believe that you still can interpret dreams? Isn't it time you gave up on the notion of knowing what the dreams mean? Because just look at how things have turned out for you since your own dreams happened.

Somehow, though, God has revealed enough to Joseph that Joseph still has confidence in his ability to accurately interpret dreams. He's confident enough to offer to interpret the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker.

Really, this shows the amazing confidence that Joseph places in his God even after about 11 years spent sidelined in slavery and prison. He fully realizes that man's disappointments are God's appointments, that delays are not denials, that nothing can separate him from the love of the Father, and he asks his friends to reveal the visions that they have seen.

[15:49] One sentence of that last statement is important to keep in mind. Joseph realizes that man's disappointments are God's appointments, that delays are not denials, and that nothing can separate him from the love of the Father.

The chief cupbearer immediately accepts Joseph's offer. Look at verses 9 through 11 again. They say, So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, In my dream, there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches.

As soon as it budded, its blossom shot forth, and the clusters ripened in the grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

The cupbearer tells Joseph that in his dream he saw a vine with three branches which budded, then blossomed. Those clusters ripened into grapes, and the grapes he squeezed into Pharaoh's cup, and then that cup he put in Pharaoh's hand.

So even before we hear Joseph's explanation, we can see the cupbearer had some reason for optimism, because the cupbearer's dream shows him doing his job again.

[17:07] That was something that he did routinely every day that he was serving Pharaoh. Sure enough, Joseph quickly confirms a positive explanation. Look at verses 12 and 13.

Then Joseph said to him, This is its interpretation. The three branches are three days. In three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly when you were his cupbearer.

Joseph here was able to discern which elements of the dream were to be taken symbolically, and which were to be taken literally. So talk about good news here.

Can't you just see the cupbearer dancing around in his cell whenever he receives God's message through Joseph? He knows now that he only has three days left in this hole, and then it's back to work as usual.

Obviously, whoever's been investigating the crimes has found that he's not guilty and all is going to be forgiven. Probably, he begins numbering the hours and even minutes until he's released.

[18:17] Between the interpretation of the cupbearer's dream and the baker's dream, we get a glimpse of Joseph's humanity. He makes a heartfelt request in verse 14.

Look what Joseph says there in verse 14. He says, Only remember me when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.

So Joseph's request has four parts to it. Remember me, do me the kindness, mention me, and get me out of here. The word kindness is the Hebrew word *hesed*.

As Joseph uses it here, it carries the idea of a loyalty that's born from their common plight of being victims of a false accusation. Joseph's appealing to the fact that he'd been wrongly accused just as the cupbearer apparently has been wrongly accused.

And on those grounds, Joseph asked for a kindness that would grow out of their common injustice. Even that request shows how Joseph's faith is still solid.

[19:24] Joseph could have said, If it is well with you, instead he says, when it is well with you. The wording of his request reveals just how confident he is in his interpretation of the dream.

Joseph then follows his request with an impassioned appeal. Look at verse 15. He says, For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.

Are Joseph's comments accurate here? Well, his comments are accurate. If anything, he softens what happened to him. Joseph says nothing unkind about his brothers or about Potiphar or even Potiphar's wife.

He refuses to accuse, to smear the reputations of others, even when those things may well be deserved. He's not bitter toward those who've mistreated him.

His response is one of loyalty, silence, and service, even to Potiphar. He only requests that the cupbearer mention him to Pharaoh and recommend his release.

[20 : 36] These verses actually should give us some comfort because we've seen Joseph doing so well in these circumstances. It's nice to know that he really was struggling a little bit too. He wasn't just sitting down there thinking, I'm just wondering what's going to happen next until I start ruling over everybody.

He really wanted to get out of his situation. After hearing the interpretation of the cupbearer's dream, the chief baker decided to let Joseph interpret the baker's dream.

Look at verses 16 and 17. When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, I also had a dream.

There were three cake baskets on my head and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.

Of course, we know how it turns out, so we may be reading this dream knowing what's going to happen, but even from listening to the baker's description, his dream sounds much less promising than the cupbearer's dream.

[21 : 39] The baked goods he carried are eaten by birds before the baker can get them to Pharaoh. Joseph again takes very little time before he confirms the outcome of the dream, but this time it's a bad outcome.

Look at verses 18 and 19. And Joseph answered and said, This is its interpretation. The three baskets are three days. In three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat the flesh from you.

Nobody could misunderstand what Joseph predicted for the baker. The ESV seems to indicate that Joseph may have paused a bit before saying that Pharaoh would lift up the baker's head.

However, instead of lifting up the baker's head to show him honor, like what he did for the cupbearer, Joseph said that the Pharaoh will lift up the baker's head to take it off. Just in case the baker failed to grasp the meaning there, Joseph went on to say that Pharaoh will hang the baker's body and will let the birds eat the flesh.

This is when we might wish that Moses had told us what Joseph said or did next. Given the compassion that we've seen from Joseph earlier, I have a hard time believing that Joseph simply made the harsh pronouncement and then walked away.

[23 : 00] Also remember, we're not told anything about Joseph's tone here. He may have delivered the bad news as gently as he could, but he still had to be true to God's revelation.

Many commentators think that the news Joseph gives to the baker is even worse than it sounds, if that's even possible. From what we can tell, the baker will have no head by the time he's hung on the tree, and if that's the case, then he will be impaled on a stake.

And impaling a dead person on a stake was a common practice in Egypt. Such a death, being deprived of embalming and burial, and instead being impaled on a stake and eaten by birds, was about the worst thing that could happen to an Egyptian, the Egyptians saw that as the equivalent of being deprived of an afterlife.

So the disgrace of the baker's death suggests that he's been found guilty of a heinous crime that demands public censure by a shameful execution. Pharaoh may have been unsure of who had committed a crime against him when he put the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in prison. However, the dreams, assuming they turn out as Joseph predicted, show that Pharaoh has decided which one of the two is guilty. The last section of our lesson quickly shows us whether Joseph's interpretations were accurate.

[24 : 26] We've seen two dignitaries and two dreams. In verses 20 through 23, we see two destinies. So two destinies is the last section.

Look at those verses again. Starting with verse 20, it says, On the third day, which is Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.

He restored the chief cupbearer to his position and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them. The Rosetta Stone records the custom of releasing Pharaoh's prison, but at this party held for his servants, Pharaoh rendered two very different kinds of judgment and we see that in verses 21 and 22.

Verse 21 corresponds to the language Joseph used to predict the cupbearer's restoration, manifesting the accuracy of Joseph's prediction to the letter.

The tension reaches its height at reporting the baker's demise, which came to pass in the same way as Joseph had said. I stopped there at verse 22, but we do have one more verse to cover.

[25 : 45] Verse 23 summarizes another disappointment for Joseph. That says, Yet the cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. That last statement is like a kick in the stomach for Joseph.

Just when it looked like his deliverance has come, the cupbearer forgets him. Later, we'll discover that this really is just a matter of timing, but in the next verse we learn that after two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed.

So for now, this is just another discouraging moment in a series of disappointments that's going to cause Joseph to spend two more years in prison. Obviously, that would cause anybody to despair. However, Joseph does have a glimmer of hope in this section that likely helped him endure the next two years. The significant fact for Joseph was that he was correctly interpreting dreams. He understood God's revelations to him by dreams. He might not have understood his imprisonment yet, but he was encouraged in his faith. Because Joseph correctly interpreted the dreams in this chapter, just maybe he correctly interpreted the two dreams about his own life, even if it has yet to seem like it.

[27 : 03] Joseph's mention of God in connection with dreams surely indicates that he still has a deep confidence in God and he has a confidence that God was behind the dreams and that God would eventually bring them to fulfillment.

We can imagine that he understood his dreams as promises from God that he could rely upon, however little he understood them. So that's why I flipped the lesson title to be Gone but Not Forgotten.

He might have been forgotten by the cupbearer, but he's not forgotten by God and he has evidence here of that. Joseph being encouraged by his faith brings us back to the main idea of the chapter. Chapter 40 shows that believers can maintain their faith and serve God even in difficult circumstances. Prison is not made Joseph self-absorbed. He was able to immerse himself in the difficulties of the other inmates.

He's taken the time to establish relationships with the others that are confined with him. Think about how that's like Jesus who washed the feet and patiently answered the questions of his man in the upper room just hours before his arrest.

[28 : 14] Joseph realizes that the best tonic for sorrow is ministry to others. So what a marvelous attitude that really is. Serving God in the context of slavery or prison does not negate the fact that we're still serving God.

When we understand the bigger picture of God's redemptive purpose, we know that he uses even our slavery, imprisonment, and everything else to bring about his desired ends.

You may have thought I forgot to mention the main point of the book of Genesis that we look at every week. But remember that the main point of the book of Genesis, including chapters 37 through 50, is to show the progression of redemptive history, how God will redeem his people from the curse of sin.

Throughout Genesis, including the account of Joseph, God shows that he's faithful to preserve the line of the seed who will redeem God's people. As we get into chapter 41 next week, God will begin revealing more to Joseph and also to us as we see how the events in Joseph's life were all designed to preserve the line of the seed that will redeem God's people.

In addition to the main idea, we can take some other things from this chapter. The first thing is that God's timing and methods often are different than ours.

[29 : 40] Have you all felt that way before? Have you felt that God's timing and methods often are different than ours? Joseph likely expected to be released from prison shortly after the cup bearer was released.

God's plan required Joseph to be in prison longer than that. The Lord is not at work in Joseph's situation as Joseph expects him to be. The roles the cup bearer and baker play in his eventual release are not exactly the parts that Joseph envisions for them.

God often approaches us in different ways than we anticipate. And we can count on that being the case. Consider a few more examples of that from scripture.

God came to Moses in a burning bush. He came to Jacob on a lonely night in Bethel. He came to Saul while the future king was fetching his father's lost donkeys. He came to Gideon while Gideon was threshing enough grain to keep his family alive. God came to David while he was feeding sheep. And God came to the apostle Paul when Paul walked along the Damascus road.

[30 : 49] In tonight's text, God unexpectedly allowed two Egyptian officials to be placed in the same jail as Joseph. That gave evidence once again of God's sovereign ability to intervene in the affairs of men.

So that gave evidence once again of God's sovereign ability to intervene in the affairs of man. Joseph's request for the cup bearer to kindly remember him provides another example of how God's timing is different than what we would like.

Ironically, Joseph's request will be fulfilled exactly as he asked for, just not immediately. The cup bearer will one day, in an appropriate circumstance two years later, mention Joseph and Joseph will be removed from the prison house.

Genesis 40 stands as a reminder that God is at work even when we cannot see or know what God is doing. When Joseph was on his way to visit his brothers, God had the pit in mind.

When Joseph was in the pit, God had Potiphar in mind. When Joseph was with Potiphar, God had prison in mind. And when Joseph was in prison, God had Pharaoh in mind.

[32 : 05] Eventually, we'll see that even when Joseph is with Pharaoh, God has more than that in mind. The second additional thing we can take from this chapter is something that we have all seen more than once in Joseph's life, and that is that God's people suffer.

God's people suffer. God's people are never promised a life free from suffering. In fact, Scripture assures us of just the opposite. The Apostle James goes so far as to urge us to consider it all joy when we go through trials.

Although God speaks to us through every circumstance, we're often more likely to listen in times of defeat, loss, and pain. Of course, suffering may lead some people to turn against others and become bitter.

It's not what we suffer, but how we respond that determines whether our trials change us for the better. That last sentence is key. It's not what we suffer, but how we respond that determines whether our trials change us for the better.

Joseph's trust in God never faltered. He believed God would remain faithful to his promises. In spite of hardships, Joseph did not allow his heart to become bitter or resentful.

[33 : 26] Instead, Joseph persevered. The third thing we can see, besides the main idea, is like what Joseph did with the two very different dream interpretations, we have an obligation to share both God's good news and God's bad news.

We have an obligation to share both God's good news and God's bad news. As Christians, we stand between individuals who have the choice of death or life.

It's our responsibility as believers to convey the message of the cross to communicate that Christ died for our sins and that only through faith in him can we achieve an eternal relationship with God the Father.

Paul said this in 2 Corinthians 2.15. 2 Corinthians 2.15 says, For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

The baker momentarily dwelt under the false supposition that he would be delivered from death. So too do scores of men and women today who assume that their good works, their church going, or their contributions to charity will earn them a chunk of heaven.

[34 : 40] The Bible though says otherwise. In the words of Jesus, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

And of course that's John 14.6. You also have this quote from Billy Graham in your handout. Billy Graham put it this way, A lot of people talk about hell, use it to tell others where to go, but do not want to be confronted with the thought that it might be their destination.

Hell for them is only where the Hitlers and Stalins should end up, along with murderers, rapists, or child pornographers. But most think that good people who mind their own business, pay their taxes, and put a few dollars in the collection plate will have some eternal rewards.

Unfortunately for the quote good people of whom Billy Graham speaks, they'll never be good enough. We can never, apart from a relationship with Christ, be considered good enough to be

called children of God.

We need to remember that last sentence. we can never, apart from a relationship with Christ, be considered good enough to be called children of God. That's bad news, but that should motivate us to tell people both the bad news and the good news, because you can't really understand why the good news is so good unless you first understand the bad news.

[36 : 09] Jesus' words in John 14 6 may be unpopular in today's culture. However, those words are as true today as when Jesus first said them.

That's where, of course, he said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. With that, let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the reminder of how you're working in Joseph's life, even when it does not really seem that you are. Let that be an encouragement to us that you also work in lives of believers today, like us, even when we may not at first realize it.

Also, let us be more like Joseph, and let us be willing to share both good news and bad news with the people who have yet to trust in you so that they can join us with eternal life.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.