

The Story In Context

This morning, I've titled this message "The Story in Context". And this is just a thought that's been going through my head recently and so just to give you the overarching message.

In life, no matter who you are, where you're from, what you do, life is not always a linear profile. Life has up and it has downs. So at some point in this walk of life you'll probably find yourself in a low season, in a not so great place. And I really believe this message is relatable just because everyone goes through them. Everyone has moments where they begin to lose hope, or moments where it seems that heaven is silent and God is simply watching your situation and not doing anything about it. And it's a hard place to be in.

Now, if I say the name Mary to you, Mary the mother of Jesus. The connotations and characteristics we attribute towards her are mostly if not only positive. Today she is virtually worshipped, Why? Because she birthed the saviour of the universe. Our shared opinion of her is largely very positive would you agree? She's a biblical figure held in very high esteem.

But it's easy for us to say that when we can see the complete story in the context of 2000 years. And in fact, the context of the beginning of humanity to now.

Do you think the opinion of her was largely positive when it was found that she was pregnant before she was to be married? Do you think she was looked kindly upon by Joseph, who before being told by the Holy Spirit would probably have believed that his wife slept with someone, to the point of wanting an annulment? Do you think that it was easy for her to carry a baby for 9 months, to bear the opinions and supposed shame placed on her? Bear in mind she was told once at the very beginning of her pregnancy who the baby was, do you think at some point in the 9 months she ever doubted who the baby was? She ever asked God for another confirmation, as we sometimes do when we know God's promised us something or put a dream on our hearts? Do you think she ever asked the question 'why me?'

I'm sure, albeit Mary was the mother of God, she was still human and had these thoughts at some point or another.

Ultimately, we know that for her, God was faithful and that the son she bore was to save humanity. But as I said, it's easy for us to say that now. We live in a post- death and resurrection era and have the benefit of having access to the bible when and wherever we want. We can open it up and say "oh see yeh God promised it here once and if we just flip over a few chapters, we can see that he was true to his promises. As he always is." But when it's us in that seat, when we're living in the moment where there seems to be this massive

difference between the promise or the dream and your current reality, is it easy then to say *“God is true to his promises and always will be”*?

My encouragement to you today is that, if that is you. If you are currently going through something, or something in your situation hasn't shifted as quickly as you would have hoped, or the promise that God made to you still hasn't come to pass and you're in the waiting, and you feel stuck in the endless cycle. Let me tell you that this moment is simply one story, one chapter in a much greater context. God's not done bringing this glorious masterpiece that is his perfect will to pass in your life yet and I encourage you, don't write yourself off from the miracle too soon.

With this theme or topic, the story of Joseph is a classic example of someone who by know fault of his own ended un in pretty bad circumstances. He was someone who had to spend time in places he did not understand why he was in and eventually was brought out of where he was into the promise that God had made all that time ago. So to quickly paraphrase the story.

Joseph Son of Jacob had 2 dreams:

1. Stacks of wheat in the the field, yours bowed to mine.
2. Sun moon and eleven stars bowed to me.

Brother weren't happy, throw him in a well, then sold him off.

Ends up a slave in Potiphar's house. Works his way up, put in charge of the household. Potiphar's wife takes liking to Joseph, accuses him of trying to sleep with her and so gets thrown in jail. In jail for some time, he meets two of the Pharaoh's servants who have dreams. He interprets them and the dreams both come true. Chief cupbearer is restored to his position and the baker is executed.

Later on, after a few years, the Pharaoh has 2 dreams, cows out the river, stacks of grain. No one knew what it meant. The cup bearer remembers Joseph and so Joseph is called upon to interpret the dreams, which mean 7 years of fruitfulness and 7 years of intense famine. Joseph is placed in charge of overseeing the harvesting and rationing over this 14-year period and is given all authority in Egypt second only to Pharaoh himself. Eventually the famine sweeps through the land and hits Joseph's family where his brothers are. His brother then makes the journey out to Egypt to collect food and when they arrive at Joseph's house they bow low before him, not realising who he is. By the end of the story, Joseph's whole family including his father are in Egypt where Joseph is Ruler and so God's promise made to him as a young boy is finally fulfilled.

That's the outline of the story of Joseph, quite a well-known story and very relatable. I just want to home in on a few things that I think we can take away from the journey of Joseph.

First Point: You gotta go down to go up

Don't you think it's interesting how God, who knew what Joseph was like, gave him a glimpse of his future knowing that he'd tell his brothers. God knew Joseph had a mouth on him and didn't realise the displeasure he was causing his brothers when sharing his dream about them bowing down. Reading it you're thinking "Don't do that, you'll get yourself thrown into a well. You Muppet" But that's because we can see the whole story.

In my mind, as a bloke, as a regular human being, I ask myself the question of *"Alright God, If you promised great power one day, to the point where his whole family are bowing to him. Why wouldn't you just tell him at a later stage and bring it about some other way? God of all power and all things, surely there must've been another way where Joseph didn't have to be thrown into a well or in prison."* A perfectly valid question.

But would have Joseph been the kind of leader God wanted him to be when he eventually got there?

I saw a post on Instagram a couple weeks ago and it just said *"The valleys teach you the lessons you can't learn on the mountain tops"*

Look at this.

Genesis 39:20 Joseph was placed in the King's prison. Where Pharaoh's prisoners were kept. And the King's prisoners were often men of position Who had offended Pharaoh, or gotten complacent. In some way offended him.

The 2 accounts we're given of who Joseph talked to on the inside were the Chief Baker and Chief cup bearer. If that's representative, then then I'd say safe to assume there were others.

Joseph in future, unbeknownst to him is going to lead Egypt through a time of great abundance. An over flow of the harvest and all the crops will be plentiful. And then a time of extreme famine.

Where better to learn the inner and outer workings of Egypt?

Where better to learn of how not to offend Pharaoh?

Where better to be warned of the dangers of complacency in the long seasons?

Who better to be warned of the value of stewardship?

Where else would Joseph, a Hebrew slave have gotten better one on one contact time with the men of influence of Egypt. ?

However, these lessons could only have been learnt in the prison.

A move of God is often preceded by discomfort/difficulty. And that's because of the moulding of God. If we look at the progression of Joseph, we see this. He starts second youngest in his family. Only responsible of 1 brother, Benjamin. That's all the power he had in that family. He was then put in the well, sold into slavery and placed in Potiphar's house. He was elevated in Potiphar's house to second in command, running his whole household. He was put in the King's prison (my mum often called this the King of the Donkeys). He then got out of prison and Governed all of Israel through the famine.

If you're going through something painful, don't worry its just God working on you, **Pain precedes the promise.**

This process was also done over years. Some here may feel like they've been in this "prison", in this low point, in this struggle for ages.

In order to go up, he had to go down first because the lessons God wanted to teach him couldn't be learnt at the top.

Beat Feeling with Faith

Video of Glass bridge 1,108meters above valley...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bjtxOwrOfw>

That video did actually make me laugh, I know it's bad because those people are absolutely terrified, but I couldn't help myself.

See there in that video, those poor poor people are trying to walk across the famous glass bridge in China. Situated hundreds of metres off the ground. I'd be lying if I said that I could walk over that bridge without any hesitation.

Just imagine the amount of raw emotion going through their minds at that point. Every fibre of their being is screaming at them to get off the bridge. Their reflex has just kicked into survival and it is telling them to cling to whatever they can around them. Nowadays they say the when faced with imminent danger, it used to be fight or flight, but they've introduced frozen now too. So, it's fight, flight or start singing frozen. (Bad Joke)

Classic case of their perception of their situation dictating how they feel. And that's natural. That's what we as humans do, completely normal. It's alright to feel by the way. In all this when I speak of beating feeling I'm not saying numb yourself to them. To deny ourselves the fact that we feel is just not sustainable.

If we look at Psalms, they're literally David processing life. A third of Psalms is David lamenting about whatever he's going through at the time. Yet today we know him as a man after God's own heart. See David's Psalms never stay as just "woe unto me",

Right here the people on the bridge are thinking:

I'm thousands of feet above the ground, and I'm standing on glass. I can literally see the drop to my death. Did anyone know glass is known for being brittle? I can't even see where this bridge ends. How can I take the next step when I don't know where this goes? How can I take the next step if I don't even know this bridge can hold me?

Act out...: Looking down and Closing eyes. Useless.

Don't close your eyes, fix them on something new. !

Often that has to be done by your confession. **Your confession will lift your eyes.**

You see David's Psalms don't just end with "*my life is in utter disrepair....*"

They acknowledge what he feels, they acknowledge that it's kind of crap but they always resolve with "*The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear*"

Or "*I look to the hills, from where does my help come, it comes from the Lord*"

Or "*Ye though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Death, I will fear no evil. For your rod and staff comfort me.*" It's alright to feel. You don't have to deny how you feel, you just have to fix your eyes on something new, on God. One way is bring it back to the Bible.

And I say that because, When we've in a rut for quite some time. When the present challenge seems unrelenting or that there just doesn't seem to be an end. That's when things really get tough. When it seems like it's make or break, and all the odds are stacked towards break is when it really becomes hard to maintain vision. Is when you find it hard to fix your eyes.

If the people on the bridge had known.... If they had been shown the manual/working out behind the bridge, all the case studies and tests that went into building it and if they could see that time and time again when that glass was tested it always was able to sustain their weight and even much more than their weight then I'm sure they could walk onto that bridge a lot more confidently.

Wait a second... *Holds up Bible* You might not be able to see where this journey ends but look at my track record.

In the moments where it feels impossible, can you still take the next step in faith. When it seems like you've been in the same place and you can't even see where the journey ends. can you still take the next step in faith? When you're down, when things aren't going your way, when you're in the prison that Joseph was in, can you

When how you feel says I don't want to go on any more? Can you still walk with God?

And for those of you who feel like you're in your valley, who feel like you're in a low season. You're asking the questions of when God will shift whatever this situation is in your life, When God will bring the relevant people into it, when God will bless you finances, when God will bless your business, When God will deliver the healing, When is salvation going to come to my friends and family. And it seems that you've been waiting on God and waiting on God and waiting on God and waiting and waiting and waiting.

Let me encourage you!

THIS IS NOT THE LAST CHAPTER IN YOUR STORY. WHERE YOU ARE IS NOT WHERE YOU WILL STAY.

Far into the future you will look back and see the journey you've come on and say "If I'd known this is where I'd be now I wouldn't have every doubted or made a big deal out of that rough patch BUT IT HAD TO HAPPEN. IT HAD TO HAPPEN. GOD WANTS TO ELEVATE YOU, GOD WANTS TO MOVE IN YOUR LIFE AND HE WILL **BUT FIRST HE WANTS YOUR FAITH**. HE WANTS TO SEE, CAN YOU PRAISE ME IN THE VALLEYS AND CAN YOU PRAISE ME ON THE MOUNTAIN TOPS, CAN YOU SERVE ME IN THE VALLEYS AND CAN YOU SERVE ME ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP.

When you can't feel his goodness can you still declare it?

When you can't see a way out can you still know that he is the God of the impossible?

When you don't know what's true can you still cling to the truth of the Word of God?

When the evidence is not seen, can you still actively hope for the things to come

Can you still put your trust in the character of who God is?

Romans 8:28 For we know that all things work together for the good of those who love him and who are called according to his purpose.

Habakkuk 2:3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

God will always ultimately move in your life and elevate you to where he wants you to be. But in the waiting, can you override what you feel, with what faith says you should know. Feelings cannot get you to the promises of God. That's why it's called a faith journey.

Stand and close eyes

God has never left you, God never turned his sights away from you. He hasn't forgotten about you

Sometimes we read that The Lord was with Joseph and so he was successful. Then we look around our own lives and, because we don't feel very successful or we can't see his hand moving in our lives, we ask the question: Where are you God? There isn't a lot about my situation that looks great, so God must not be with me.

Let me tell you again God has never left you, God not taken his eyes off you for one second, He is always with you.

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV) Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

If you don't know this God, let me assure you. He wants the best for you. He has only good things planned for your life. Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Joseph was faithful in whatever was in his hand/position he was in.

One thing I love about Joseph, was that not matter where he was placed, he always gave his best at that moment to what was in front of him and because of that managed to always be promoted to higher rank. It says that when in *Genesis 39:2-4 when Joseph is made a slave in Potiphar's house: "2 The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. 3 And his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did [a]to prosper in his hand. 4 So Joseph found favour in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put]under his authority."*

And also in *Genesis 39:21 "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave[a] him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison."*

At every point in his life Joseph served and brought his best. Now note that his best at each point may have looked different. But that didn't stop him from bringing it. His best in Potiphar's house may have looked different to when he was in prison, but that didn't stop him from putting his hands to work in prison and bringing what he believed excellence looked like where he was. He could've very easily said "I was second in command in the captain of the Guard's household and now I'm in prison. I was Up here but now I've hit rock bottom, and it wasn't even my fault. So now that I'm down here, I don't owe anyone

anything.” And he would have humanly had every right to say that. He’d been dealt a really bad hand.

But no instead he makes the choice, whatever up here or down there he’s gonna bring his A game to the table and serve.

Joseph comes out and still praises/attributes God

It’s ok to question, I’m not trivialising how you feel. It’s ok question, to wrestle. Psalms is an acknowledgement of how David feels.

Who knows the lessons Joseph would have learnt along the way. Who knows in what way God was sharpening him and moulding him into the man he wished to use in future. What lessons could he have learnt in the well?

If I put myself in Joseph’s shoes, I’ve just been thrown into a well by my own brother, the first lesson is self-awareness. Having the wisdom to know what is appropriate to say and in front of what audience. A lesson that would take him far in the house of political powers. Over a really long period of time, maybe it was the painful learning of how to forgive. If you can forgive the betrayal of your very own family, forgive you own blood for giving you up, then you can forgive just about anyone. What lessons would Joseph have learnt in prison?

Joseph was placed with the King’s Prisoners, bear in mind he was a servant to the captain, not the King. And the accounts we have of who Joseph talked to in prison are the Chief cupbearer and the head chef. Two very highly esteemed positions in the house of Pharaoh. And if you read Genesis, those who had position in his house lacked nothing, they would have had the finest clothes, jewellery, everything. They would’ve lived in abundance and wanted for nothing.

We don’t know what it is they did, it says that they offended Pharaoh and they could have done this in a number of ways. They could have stolen from him, they could have got complacent and stopped doing a good job, they could have made a mistake that cost Pharaoh something. It could have been anything. But in my mind, these were men who had positions of responsibility, who had everything but made a mistake that caused them to be in prison and who very much regret what they did or didn’t do.