

## **Lenten Midweek 4 Sermon**

### **Wait for the Lord**

**Text: Genesis 41:9–16, 25–44; Luke 22:52–71**

We're just about at the midpoint of our Lenten journey with Joseph. For the past few Wednesdays, we've been hopping, skipping, and jumping our way through the trials and struggles of Joseph. But the downside of compressing Joseph's life story into a nice, neat seven-part sermon series is that the account is reduced down to a speedy series of events. Time gets telescoped.

Joseph seems to move quickly and seamlessly from tragedy to triumph. He has some really bad days but then, some really good days. He's down and then he's up. And, of course, we know this story. We know how it ends. And we know that the ending is a happy one.

But what this approach to Joseph's life fails to convey is how long he had to wait for the Lord to act, how long he languished in an Egyptian dungeon with nothing and no one to give him hope and encouragement. This evening's reading ends after Joseph has successfully interpreted Pharaoh's dreams about fat cows and skinny cows.

Having proposed a plan to save the world from famine, Joseph becomes the highest-ranking official in the Egyptian empire. Good news, right? But what one might not realize is just how much time had elapsed since Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. That was thirteen years earlier. The brothers sold Joseph at age seventeen, and he entered Pharaoh's service at the age of thirty. And although we don't have an exact timeline for what happened when, Joseph certainly spent the vast majority of those thirteen years in prison.

Joseph teaches us the virtue of waiting, of waiting for the Lord in faith. He is a living, breathing object lesson in the patient waiting that is part and parcel of the Christian life. The Bible is full of such encouragement. From the Psalms, we hear: ***"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, . . . my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning" (Psalm 130:5–6). And from the prophet Isaiah, we have the wonderful promise that "they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength . . . with wings like eagles"*** (Isaiah 40:31). The apostle Paul reminds us that ***"we walk by faith, not by sight"*** (2 Corinthians 5:7).

We base our hope on what will be, not on the way things now appear. We walk and we wait in faith.

Consider how long Joseph had to wait in prison. Joseph spent the prime of his life rotting away behind bars an innocent man among the criminals. He must have been tempted to take matters into his own hands to plot an escape, to incite a riot, or to take advantage of the guards with whom he had curried favor. But no. Joseph just waited; he waited for the Lord and for the Lord's deliverance. From this we can only conclude: Waiting for the Lord is not weakness, but strength. Waiting for the Lord is not an expression of fear, but of faith.

But our sinful flesh doesn't see things that way. Our flesh despises all forms of waiting. Our sinful nature cannot bear to wait. How well do you wait as the freeway traffic inches along? How well do you wait over here at the post office or at the doctor's office? But, of course, all those things are superficial like when the Wi-Fi fails, or we can't get same-day shipping from Amazon. Bummer!

But there's a different kind of waiting a waiting designed by our gracious God to draw us into deeper faith and greater hope. When we are assaulted by false accusations and persecution like Joseph was, we should wait patiently for the Lord. When we face chronic illness or chronic pain, we should wait patiently for the Lord.

When temptation is about to entangle us when our employer lets us go, when our savings drain away, when loved ones leave the church and leave the faith, when life overwhelms and we're just barely treading water, wait. Just wait. Don't despair. Don't take matters into your own hands, but place matters into the nail-scarred hands of Jesus. Wait for the Lord.

Don't do what Peter did. Learn from Peter what not to do. Peter had been so bold and brave as he pledged his loyalty to the Lord: ***"Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death"*** (Luke 22:33). But at the first sign of trouble, Peter quickly distanced himself from Jesus. At the first sign of danger to himself, Peter did a little double-talk to save his own skin: ***"I do not know him"*** (Luke 22:57).

As Jesus was led away to trial and torture at a moment when Peter should have engaged in faithful waiting Peter denied the Lord Jesus three times.

Faithful waiting doesn't come naturally to us. It comes from God himself. For unlike Joseph, we know where things are ultimately headed. We know what God has in store for us. In Joseph's wildest dreams, he could never have imagined he would one day be the most powerful man on the face of the earth that he, with the help of God, would save the world from famine.

The Lord gave Joseph more than he deserved and more than he desired. And we know that too. We know that, for the sake of his dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Lord will also give us more than we deserve, and even more than we desire. We know that our waiting will come to an end one day and that end will not disappoint us.

The source of all our hope and confidence, the foundation of our faithful waiting is Jesus. Like Joseph, Jesus was a true son of Israel. Like Joseph, Jesus sank into the depths and was raised up to new heights of power and authority. Like Joseph, Jesus worked a deliverance for the whole world a deliverance not just from famine, but from the power of sin and death.

In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting our trespasses against us.

Jesus is God's beloved Son, who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven. He made himself nothing, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, an innocent man among the criminals. But now, God has exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Our lives unfold much like Joseph's life not quickly and seamlessly, but sometimes slowly and with much difficulty and tribulation. And so, we wait with faith and with confidence in our Savior. For the foundation of faithful waiting is found in Jesus.

We entrust to God all our days and all our burdens, for through faith in Jesus our sin is atoned for. Our guilt is taken away. Heaven stands open. For now, like Joseph, we have good days and bad days, triumphs, and tragedies.

But we know how our story will end and that the ending will be a joyful one.

When your days in the dungeon of life drag on, wait for the Lord. And what does this waiting look like? Luther summarized it this way: ***he said that in such times we should conclude, "I know that I have been baptized, that I have eaten the body and drunk the blood of the Son of God, that I have been absolved by divine authority, that all my sins have certainly been forgiven me, and that victory over the devil, death, and hell has been promised me. What more should I ask for? That is what Joseph concluded"*** (AE 7:132).

Amen