

Genesis 40 – 41:8-13

The Sin of Forgetting Christ

Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him – Gen. 40:23

The story of Joseph is filled with so many analogies in the realm of redemption that the entire story when viewed on a higher spiritual plane could rightly be called *the drama of redemption*. In the portion we've read this morning we find Joseph in prison thanks to the treachery of his brothers. In their jealousy of him they sold him into slavery. This was their mercy to him. Their original intention was to kill him.

If you know the story of Joseph then you know that he was faithful in all that he did. The time of his affliction was also the time of his prosperity. And so we read of him after he was sold into slavery that *the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. (39:2)*. It's at the end of that chapter that we find Joseph wrongly committed to prison. He doesn't belong there. He's done nothing wrong. He's there because Potipher's wife has falsely accused him of the sin for which she herself was guilty – i.e. infidelity to her husband.

But even in prison we read of Joseph in v. 21 *But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.*

Surely if anyone had cause for depression and despair Joseph had cause. He didn't belong in Egypt. He was unjustly sold for a slave by his brothers. How much less did he deserve prison in Egypt. He had been a faithful steward in his master's house, so faithful in fact that his master entrusted him with everything and made him give account for nothing.

Now prisons, generally speaking, are places for grumbling and complaining. In my own experience of preaching in a city jail while a student at BJ I can tell you that prisoners like to complain. It seems that they are all unjustly in prison if you listen to them. They don't deserve prison. They've just had a few bad breaks for which they are in no way responsible – so they reason.

And just as sure as man's nature is sinful – we can be sure that the prison Joseph visited was no different – it was undoubtedly filled with those who had been given a bum rap so to speak. And yet we can't help but marvel how Joseph stands out in contrast to all this. As I said – even here *he prospered in all that he did (39:23)*. Even here he won the trust of the keeper of the prison who committed all the prisoners into Joseph's hand. Even here he gave no thought to the injustices that had been committed against him – but instead devoted himself to serving others.

All this, of course, would make Joseph stand out as a remarkable man among those prisoners. As prisoners fulfilled their terms and left the prison they would no doubt forget

many things. Indeed many things they would try to forget. But Joseph – how could they forget? How could they forget the one who had befriended them and waited upon them?

Yet this is exactly what the butler did. So we read in Gen. 40:23 *Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.* And he did so against the very request of Joseph Gen. 40:14 *But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house.*

We may marvel at this – and yet there is a sense in which we too often fall prey to the very same sin ourselves. We have a friend in Christ – *one who sticketh closer than a brother* (Prov. 18:24); One who has served us, who has died for us. How can we forget Him? Yet this is what we do – perhaps not in an academic sense or in a formal sense but in a practical sense we forget Him – in the sense that, like the butler, we go on with our daily routines busy about our activities with little or no reference to Christ. The Ephesian church in Rev. 2 demonstrates that forgetfulness. Here was a zealous church – engaged in service; a contending church which could weed out and remove false apostles. Yet it was a forgetful church – one that had forgotten its first love.

We can be thankful this morning that the Lord has anticipated our forgetfulness. He's anticipated it and made provision for it by calling us to His table for the express purpose of remembering Him. This does not make it excusable to forget Him – but it does provide a way for us to make right the wrong of forgetting Him.

It's upon this theme, then, that I want to direct your attention this morning –

The Sin of Forgetting Christ

And if I accomplish my aim this morning, you'll see how terrible a sin this is and you'll be most humbly grateful for the opportunity this table affords you of correcting this wrong. Would you think with me then first of all on:

I. The Faultiness of This Sin -

In 41:9 we read these words of the butler – *I do remember my faults this day.* The word *faults* is most often translated by the word *sin*. He could have said *I remember my sins this day.*

The butler's particular sin was that he had forgotten a friend, one who had shared in his affliction and yet looked upon him with compassion and concern when the butler had been so sad in prison. He had forgotten the one who was able to interpret his dream and who had conveyed to him a message of hope and deliverance.

Well might this sin be called a sin of ingratitude, and ingratitude is a great fault or a heinous sin indeed. In Rom. 1 Paul specifically mentions ingratitude as a contributing cause to a vain imagination and a darkened foolish heart (Rom. 1:21).

You see gratitude must be the fuel that causes our zeal for Christ to burn. When we with Paul can say from our hearts *Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift* (2Cor. 9:15) then we'll have no trouble or fear when it comes to living for Christ, or speaking for Christ. There will be no barriers to keep us back from coming to Christ often in prayer and in the place of prayer we'll ascribe honor and glory to His name. Why is it that so many Christians are prayerless Christians today? Why do we languish in our zeal for the Lord? It's because we allow ourselves to become ungrateful. And this lack of gratitude is traceable to our forgetfulness.

We've forgotten the affliction that our friend Jesus has borne for us. We've forgotten the favors received from this friend – how He preserved our lives when we were on the broad road leading to destruction – How He came to us when our despair from sin nearly overwhelmed us and showed to us His nail-pierced hands and feet and explained how in bearing those marks He bore our sins. Have we forgotten the joy that was once ours when the heavy burden of sin fell off our shoulders and the peace of God that passes understanding filled our hearts?

The sin of forgetting Christ, then, is a sin of ingratitude – but it's also a sin of infidelity – unfaithfulness to the request made from a friend. The butler's words here give us every reason to believe that when Joseph asked the butler to remember him and to speak a word for him – the butler had promised to comply. Ge 40:14 *But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house.* And when we read in v. 23 that the butler did not remember Joseph but forgot him it is no doubt especially with regard to Joseph's request that the butler forgot Joseph.

Now the narrative, if we're not careful, can give us a misimpression. When we read of Joseph becoming the assistant warden – so to speak – we're tempted to think that perhaps his demeanor enabled him to have it easier than the other prisoners. Sometimes details are filled in from outside the story that enables us to have a clearer picture of the story. So in Ps. 105:17,18 we have such a case. *He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron.* How this added detail magnifies the unfaithfulness of the butler in forgetting Joseph.

Now when we forget Christ we are not forgetting One who yet suffers – but we are forgetting One who did suffer great affliction for sinners and who, like Joseph, has desired us to remember Him and desires us to speak to Him and speak for Him.

We see, then, the faultiness of such a sin of forgetfulness – a sin of ingratitude, a sin of infidelity – and may ask ourselves why? How could the butler forget his friend? Indeed how can we forget Christ? We may discover the answers when we think next on:

II. The Causes for This Sin –

Perhaps the chief cause for forgetfulness is revealed in v. 14 – *But think on me when it shall be well with thee.*

The chief butler no doubt had a great deal to do. He had many under servants, and having to wait on the king of Egypt was undoubtedly a daunting task – as his prison experience taught him. It is very possible that the butler became so busy with his work and his gains, and looking after his fellow servants etc. that he forgot poor Joseph. It was now well with him, and the fact that it was well with him made it easy for him to forget.

The Lord knows how prone we are to forget when everything is well. Thus in anticipation of Israel's prosperity in the land of Canaan look at what the Lord says in Deut. 8:11-14:

11 Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: 12 Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; 13 And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; 14 Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

When you read through the book of Judges you discover that following a time of rest and peace the Israelites would stray from the Lord – i.e. they would forget the Lord because of their rest and peace. Is it not possible that this is often times the case with us? We forget the Lord Jesus because all is well with us. And in our prosperity we keep very busy. Our businesses are demanding and our cares are pressing, our bills urgent and our gains so large that we forget the Lord.

Isn't it interesting to read of believers in other nations where there's a price to pay for following Christ that they seem to be flourishing spiritually. They don't have the distractions of worldly affluence and so they're less prone to forget the Lord. But in affluent, fast paced America – it seems that we become too busy for Christ. So there's the cause of worldly well-being that leads to forgetting Christ. Closely connected to this we could say –

There's the cause of pride. Spurgeon suggests that the butler forgot Joseph out of pride. Because he had grown to be such a great man and Joseph was after all just a Hebrew prisoner. So in the case of many a professing believer Spurgeon notes: *When they were little in Israel, when they first professed to have found peace, Oh how they acknowledged Jesus! But they got on in the world and prospered, and then they feel themselves bound to get into a higher class of society...and the poor despised cause of Jesus is beneath them, forgetting as they foolishly do, that the day will come when Christ's cause shall be uppermost; when the world shall go down and the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus shall be princes in this world – reigning with Him; He being King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and they sitting upon His throne and sharing in His royal dignity.*

Oh may the Lord deliver us – each one – from the spirit of this age which leaves no room for Christ and which demands and presses us to forget Christ. So we have the faultiness of the sin of forgetting Christ. We've seen some of the causes for our forgetfulness – Think with me finally on:

III. The Remedy for This Sin –

41:9 – *Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh saying – I do remember my faults this day.*

The first key to overcoming the sin of forgetting Christ is to remember – to remember our faults. The butler remembered his faults when he saw someone in exactly the same predicament he himself had experienced. Now Pharaoh himself had had a dream, just as the butler had had a dream. And there was no one to explain the meaning. All of a sudden the butler remembered that when he was in the same situation he had a friend who had interpreted his dream.

How our memories ought to be jarred to remember Christ when we see those around us who are in the same predicament we once knew – heavy laden with sin, being pressed down by the oppression of sin’s guilt – being driven to despair by sin’s misery. Remember when it was so with you? Indeed Paul tells us to *Remember...that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world* (Eph. 2:11,12). Remember when you see souls in such despair that you met a friend – the God-man Christ Jesus who delivered you from that despair. Remember that He desires of you that you think on Him and make mention of Him to those souls who are in need.

Like the butler, we are so prone to forget. Two whole years transpired before the butler remembered Joseph. The Lord knows how prone we are to forget. It is for this very reason that He has given us special aids to help us remember Him. He has given this day --the Lord's Day in order that we might remember Him.

And in Deuteronomy the command is specifically to *remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy* – i.e. remember all that it entails – remember how it commemorates Christ’s resurrection. WE all know what it is to get caught up in the pace of the world. We know the demands of our occupations – the demands of caring for our homes etc. This day, however, has been given to us by the Lord in order that we might get off the world’s merry-go-round and remember the One who loved us and gave Himself for our sins.

And then the Lord has also given us the Lord’s supper – *This do in remembrance of me* – the Lord said – in order that we might remember His sinless life and His atoning death – in order that we might remember the blood that He shed for the remission of our sins.

The first step, then, in overcoming the sin of forgetting Christ is to remember – remember your faults – bring your minds back to Christ. The next key to overcoming the sin of forgetting Christ is to confess our faults – *I do remember my faults this day* – the butler said. This statement was the butler’s confession. How he should be commended for his confession. Following two long years of forgetfulness he is still willing to humble himself and own up to his sin.

He's to be commended for the personal nature of his confession *I do remember my faults this day*. WE have it seems such sharp memories for storing up other people's faults – Let us this morning keep to ourselves and examine our own hearts.

Then the next step to overcoming this sin of forgetting Christ is to redress this fault as far as we can. When the butler remembered Joseph, remembered his sin of forgetting Joseph, he at once redressed his fault by bringing Joseph's name before Pharaoh. Let us also redress our faults by fulfilling yet the desire Christ has for us that we make mention of His name.

Again the words of Spurgeon: *It is a sad thing that you and I should have done so little; it is a mercy that there is time left for us to do more.*

Before we meet around the Lord's table, then, let's be thankful that even though our memories fail us time and time again especially in spiritual things – the Lord's memory does not fail. He remembers His covenant of grace. So we read in Psalm 106:43-45:

43 Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. 44 Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: 45 And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.

Such is the power of the Lord's memory that He has the omniscience to remember all things – yet He has the power and the grace to willfully remove some things from His memory. So we read in Heb. 10:16,17 *This is the covenant that I will make with them in those days saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

Let us then, this morning remember our faults, gain the victory over them and pray with the Psalmist – *Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy good sake, O Lord* (Ps. 25:6,7).

The testimony of the elements of this table say to us that the Lord will remember His mercy and remember not our sins. What a compelling case these elements make, therefore, for us to remember Christ and to overcome our forgetfulness.