

January 4, 2015

Rick Myatt

## WHEN YOU GET BEEF LIVER

Genesis 40

In the fall of 2012 the Psychic Friends Network released its investor presentation as part of a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission. This is a publicly traded company that had previously gone out of business and was now seeking to re-launch. It promised to “leverage an iconic brand name using new technologies and social media to re-establish Psychic Friends Network as the industry leader for daily horoscopes and psychic advice.” The company website proclaims, “We all want to know what our future holds...For centuries great leaders have sought and found the vital psychic edge. And now, so can you!”

The company is boldly forecasting it will have \$64 million in net income in 2015. However, the investor presentation included this caution: “Undue reliance should not be placed on the forward-looking statements because Psychic Friends Network can give no assurance that they will prove to be correct.” Um, excuse me but doesn’t that seem hysterically ironic to you? They say you can know what the future holds, but don’t rely too much on their projections because they can give no assurance that they will prove to be correct?

Their website says we all want to know what our future holds. I’m not sure that’s true. There probably are some things we’d rather not know because the specter of them looming over us might well be worse than simply dealing with them when they happen. Apprehension and anticipation of something bad can be worse than the thing itself. However, most of us do long for some sense of certainty in life. Uncertainty causes us to feel anxious and out of control.

Some Dutch researchers did an experiment in which they put subjects in two different groups. The first group was told they would be intensely shocked 20 times. The second group was told they would also be shocked 20 times, but that 17 of them would be very mild and 3 would be intense. They would not know when the 3 strong shocks would come. The researchers found that the subjects in the second group sweated more and experienced faster heart beats than the first group. In other words, uncertainty caused them to be more anxious and stressed. Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert says, “An uncertain future leaves us stranded in an unhappy present with nothing to do but wait.”

This is unfortunate because as the Psychic Friends Network had to admit, the future cannot be known. It is uncertain. Sometimes life goes the way we think it will. Prior to the recent NFL season I looked at the Chargers' schedule for the season. I told Toby I believed they would win 9 games and lose 7 and miss the playoffs once again. Those who follow such things will know that is exactly what they did. But life doesn't usually turn out to be that predictable. At the same time the Chargers were stumbling to the sad end of their season the San Diego Padres actually made a series of startling trades that will bring 4 legitimate Major League players here. They actually will have some hitters on their team that could play for other Major League teams. In other words, for the first time probably since 1998 we will have an actual Major League team here rather than a minor league team masquerading as one. No one saw that coming. The Padres had made it clear they were out to upgrade so most people expected they might make one trade. But no one figured they would make 4 blockbuster deals like they did.

What will 2015 hold for us? Laurie and I have dealt with some totally unforeseen events in the past couple of years, and I am sure all of you could say the same is true for you. So as we are just embarking on the journey through a new year we must ask how we can deal with the uncertainty. How will we negotiate the rapids our little rafts will encounter in the coming 12 months? For some perspective on this most relevant of questions we'll turn this morning to an incident in Genesis 40.

#### JOSEPH HAD EXPERIENCED DISAPPOINTMENT

You are probably familiar with the story of Joseph, but to review remember that he had 11 brothers who were alienated from him. In his youthful enthusiasm he had irritated them by telling them that God had given him dreams that they would all eventually serve him. The alienation was exacerbated by the fact that their father Jacob clearly favored him over the rest of his brothers. It got so bad that they decided to fix him for good. They sold him to some slave traders and told their dad that he had been mauled by a wild animal and killed.

I think we could all agree that being sold into slavery by your own brothers would be more than a little disappointing and painful. Joseph was eventually taken by the slave traders to Egypt and sold to a rich man named Potiphar. He made the best of the situation, working hard and becoming the most trusted of all of Potiphar's slaves. Unfortunately Potiphar was married to one of the main characters of *Desperate Housewives*. She decided she wanted to have an affair with Joseph, but he wanted no part of that. When he rejected her Potiphar's wife vented her spite against him by telling her husband that Joseph had tried to rape her. What a current

story this is, since sexual assault is frequently on the front page of the newspaper. In his anger Potiphar had Joseph thrown into prison.

Can you envision how hard this was for Joseph? God had given him a picture of how his life was going to go. He was going to be a great ruler, so great that even his own brothers would bow down before him. That's what he expected. Instead, he ended up a slave, then followed that up by being unfairly thrown into prison on the basis of false accusations trumped up by a frustrated woman. Can you imagine how he felt?

Joseph was not given a short sentence. Genesis 39:21 says Joseph was in the "place where the king's prisoners were confined." In other words, this was where they kept political prisoners. Political prisoners usually are just tossed in a prison with no idea how long they will be there. This was a stay in prison until either Potiphar decides you've suffered enough or until you rot, whichever comes first kind of sentence. There was no guarantee that Joseph would ever come out of that prison.

Genesis 39:22 tells us "The warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there." Joseph became the top trustee prisoner who actually oversaw everything that went on in the prison. How long do you suppose it took for him to gain that position? I feel quite safe in asserting that it took years. So poor Joseph, who expected that he would be blessed by God since God told him that was the case, who anticipated that he would have a great future, finds himself unfairly jailed, watching as year after year passed. He did rise to a level of responsibility in the prison, but that was hardly what he thought was going to be his life.

Joseph was quite human. Don't you think he had to have some long nights when he questioned and doubted? Don't you think he had some fears that this would be the sum total of his life and that he would die in that jail? Don't you think he must have cried out to God in anguish, asking why he had abandoned him? Let's be clear that for years Joseph had nothing but hopeless, bitter circumstances. There was little evidence that God would ever fulfill the dream he had given Joseph. Joseph's story is recorded in part to encourage us, because we are going to experience situations that cause us to wonder if maybe we're kidding ourselves about this whole God thing, or at least if maybe he's abandoned us.

#### **JOSEPH RECEIVED MORE OF THE SAME**

Two of Pharaoh's officials landed in the political prison along with Joseph. We don't know what they did that got them on Pharaoh's bad side, but somehow the

chief cupbearer and the chief baker found themselves in prison. Neither of those positions sounds like a big deal to us. It would be considered an important job to be the White House baker I guess, but it's not exactly like the Secretary of State or the National Security Advisor. However, in ancient Egypt these were necessarily people who were close and trusted aides to Pharaoh because they were responsible for what he drank and much of what he ate. We elect a President every 4 years. The candidates for that office lately seem to do a lot of assassinating each other's character and record, but that's all the assassinating that goes on. In ancient kingdoms like Egypt it wasn't character that was attacked. The transfer of power frequently happened through literal assassination. But back in that day guns were extremely difficult to come by. This was not due to effective gun control, but because they hadn't been invented yet. Killing people was a trickier proposition back then. Therefore poison was always a popular method of doing away with a king. That meant a king had to have absolute confidence in the people who made his food and brought him whatever he would drink.

Both of those two former members of the administration had vivid dreams. This was a big deal in ancient Egypt. French Bible scholar J. Vergote in his book, *Joseph In Egypt*, wrote that Egyptians believed "sleep puts us in real and direct contact with the other world where not only the dead but also the gods dwell. Dreams therefore are a gift from the gods."

The cupbearer dreamed of a vine with 3 branches that ripened and produced grapes. He used the grapes to make juice he gave to Pharaoh. Joseph interpreted his dream for him. It meant in 3 days he would be released and go back to his previous job with Pharaoh. The baker dreamed there were 3 baskets of bread on his head and birds were eating the bread out of them. No doubt he figured his dream meant the same as the other guy's. Sadly Joseph said it was not so. His dream meant Pharaoh would execute him 3 days later. Everything happened just as Joseph said it would.

This was great news for Joseph. He now had an ally who was one of Pharaoh's closest aides. In verse 14 Joseph said to the royal cupbearer, "when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison." He now anticipated that was exactly what was going to happen. He saw it all. These awful things had happened, but God had answered his prayer and sent the cupbearer into the prison just so Joseph could interpret his dream for him. How cool that God engineered that situation just to get Joseph out. I suspect Joseph was excited and was praising God for his wise plan.

But look at the last verse of the chapter. “The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.” After getting his hopes up and being sure this was a God thing, because after all, God gave him the correct interpretation of the dreams, his hopes were crushed. He stayed in jail and was left wondering what had gone wrong. Chapter 41 opens with these words: “When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream.” Joseph stayed in prison another two years after he thought he might be set free. Think about how long that is. Another 24 months, another 104 weeks, another 730 days of prison life. All Joseph did was be faithful to God, and his reward was to watch his life pass by from inside a prison.

Do you remember the old *Peanuts* cartoon strip? In one Lucy, who had a crush on Schroeder, the piano player, says to him, “If you don’t tell me that you love me, you know what I’m going to do? I’m going to hold my breath until I pass out.” Schroeder looks up from his piano and says, “Breath holding in children is an interesting phenomenon. It could indicate a metabolic disorder. A 40 milligram dose of vitamin B6 twice a day might be helpful. I think that’s probably it. You need vitamin B6. You might consider eating more bananas, avocados and beef liver.” As he returns to playing the piano a dejected Lucy sighs and says, “I ask for love and all I get is beef liver.”

Poor Joseph asked for love and got beef liver. In 2015 you may ask for love and get it in abundance. But it is also possible that you may ask for love repeatedly and get nothing but beef liver just like he did. It has happened to many of God’s people in the past. God promised Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son. But decade after decade went by with no sign of a baby. Israel spend 4 centuries in Egypt, much of it as slaves crying out to God with no indication whatsoever that he heard or cared. God promised David that he would be the next king of Israel, but for years he lived as a fugitive, unfairly accused of treason by King Saul and hunted relentlessly. Paul spent years in prison after being unfairly accused of violating the Jewish law against bringing Gentiles into the Temple in Jerusalem.

My guess is whatever happens this year it won’t be as difficult as any of those situations, but it can still be trying and confusing when God seems not to hear your pleas. That could happen to any of us.

#### JOSEPH CONTINUED TO TRUST

Unfortunately the biblical accounts are often quite brief. The author does not tell us what Joseph’s mental and spiritual state was. However, the account gives us enough of a glimpse of his mindset to know what he was thinking for the most part. I am sure he had some hard days. No doubt he had times of real

disappointment and discouragement. But what he did not do was quit believing that God was at work in his life. Notice in verse 8 when the cupbearer mentioned his dream to Joseph, he replied, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” This tells us that Joseph was still trusting that God was very real and was active in his life. He believed that God could and would give him the correct interpretation of these dreams.

Even after the further disappointment of this chapter, after he had been left to languish in prison for two more years, Joseph continued to trust God. In chapter 41 Pharaoh has a couple of deeply disturbing dreams. He wants someone to interpret them for him, but no one could help. Finally the cupbearer gets enough courage to mention Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams. Pharaoh has Joseph brought to him and asks him if he can interpret his dream. In verse 16 Joseph said, “I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”

Even after all that had happened to him Joseph was still trusting that God was there and that he would act in Joseph’s situation. He was still honoring God even though from his perspective it was impossible to see why God would let these things happen to him. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

It is so easy when life goes sideways to say, “I don’t understand.” Why would God let this happen to me? Why wouldn’t God demonstrate his love and care for me? Listen to what Proverbs 3:5 said. Don’t lean on your own understanding. God doesn’t ask me to understand. The reason is I can’t understand. He asks me to trust. In his book, *Ruthless Trust*, Brennan Manning wrote, “The splendor of a human heart that trusts it is loved unconditionally gives God more pleasure than Westminster Cathedral, the Sistine Chapel, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers,” the sight of 10,000 butterflies in flight or the scent of a million orchids in bloom. Trust is our gift back to God, and he finds it so enchanting Jesus died for love of it.”

Laurie and I recently went to Disneyland. Among other rides we went on the Indiana Jones ride. The line for that ride used to be mostly inside where you can see the handiwork of Disney’s imagineers. But now the line is mostly outside. When you actually enter the building you walk quite briskly to the area where you board the cars. This has an interesting effect. When standing in that long line inside where it is dark and scary kids had lots of opportunity to decide they wanted no part of it. As we were getting on the ride a family with three boys, two of them

were in the 7 to 9 age range, were in front of us. As they were about to board those two balked. It was too scary. The mom and the two younger boys walked on to the car and continued right on, getting off on the other side. Only the dad and the older boy rode. Behind us was a family with a boy of maybe 4. He screamed all the way through the ride and continued all the way out the long exit. The poor kid appeared to be traumatized for life. What do you think would have happened if either of those sets of parents had said to their kids, "I'm sorry, but this ride is not for you. We are going to have to skip it because it is too scary." Major unhappiness. Why would parents be so unkind, so controlling? The kids would not understand why parents might do something like that. The parents would be looking out for their good but they don't know enough to understand that. They would simply have to trust.

## IMPLICATIONS

### TRUST IS THE BASIS OF PEACE

Isaiah 26:3-4 says to God, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal. Romans 15:13 says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him." The key to being filled with peace, not just to have some modicum of peace but to be filled with it, is trusting God.

In his book, *The Holy Wild*, Mark Buchanan told the story of a time when they discovered that a female snake had found its way into their basement and had babies there. He came home from a meeting at church one evening to find his wife Cheryl, as he says, "wide eyed and pale." "We have snakes," she said, hissing and writhing, snake like herself. What followed was a slapstick snake hunt, that ended somewhat successfully as they found the mother. But they continued to find snakes for the next few days. Buchanan wrote, "Here's the thing. Ever since it's been hard for me to rest in that room." He says he may never sleep in the hide a bed where they found the snake again. On hot stifling nights they used to sleep in the basement where it is cool, but no more. "Instead, we now suffer upstairs, suffer all night long. There we lie, listless and restless, prickly and sweating, longing for relief. On the worst of these nights I almost give in, slip downstairs, open the hide a bed and crawl in. But I know it's no good. Every time I shut my eyes I would see them, thousands of them...twining, coiling, darting, hissing, squirming...resting and trusting are near synonyms; I rest where I can trust."

He's right. We only rest where we can trust, where we feel safe. In life we will only be at peace when we are confident that God loves us, that he is active in our lives and powerful enough to bring about his will, that he cares about us and is

working continually to bring about our good. When we are certain of these truths we can rest assured.

### **ZOOM OUT IN ORDER TO TRUST**

Joseph really had no idea what God had in store for him. I do not believe that he could foresee what God was doing. He just wanted out of jail. But God was maneuvering him into a position where he would play a role larger than any he ever imagined. Had he not been betrayed and sold as a slave he never would have been accused by Potiphar's wife of sexual assault. Had he not been falsely accused he never would have been thrown in prison. Had he not been in prison he would never have been in place to interpret the chief cupbearer's dream. That event was the key to his introduction to Pharaoh, which led to him becoming the second most powerful man in Egypt, and in that position rescuing his own family.

This was the case of several terrible wrongs adding up to make an astounding right. But Joseph did not know where all this was going. And at no point in his life did he see the really big picture. He did not know that all this happened so that he could save his family, which would become the nation of Israel, which would ultimately produce the Messiah who would be the Savior of the whole world. God had a plan working that Joseph never completely understood, but it was the ultimate good.

We need to step back and see the big picture. Somehow in ways we cannot perceive because our knowledge and vision are too limited, God is working his good plans and purposes in our lives. We tend to get focused on the hard thing we are going through this instant. Some day we will see the timeless plan God was working and like Joseph be able to say, "Wow, that was brilliant." So even now step back, zoom out and look at the bigger picture.

Laurie and I just saw the movie *Unbroken*. I have previously read the best selling book from which it was taken. The book and movie tell the story of Louis Zamperini, an American Olympic athlete who enlisted in the Army Air Corps at the beginning of World War II. His plane crashed into the Pacific Ocean in 1943 and he survived more than 6 weeks in a life raft lost at sea. Then the Japanese found him and sent him to a prisoner of war camp where he endured relentless cruelty and horrific abuse. He survived for two years. The horror of his circumstances was almost unfathomable. How is a person going through such privation and trial supposed to see God at work in his life? When the war ended Zamperini came home a deeply wounded man, sick at heart. His soul was full of bitterness and rage at those who had treated him and his fellow prisoners so terribly. He suffered from awful nightmares. Trying to escape the pain he sought



relief from alcohol and his life unraveled. Finally his wife convinced him to go hear a young preacher named Billy Graham. The message of grace in Jesus Christ got through. He put his faith in Jesus and immediately found peace. He was radically changed and instead of desiring revenge he eventually returned to Japan to offer forgiveness to his former tormentors.

What he did not and could not foresee as he was going through unimaginably awful circumstances that those terrible things were the key to turning him to Jesus Christ. The pain of those events was what God used to cause him to see his need for grace and forgiveness. Not only that but they also are the reason he would eventually have a world wide stage to tell his story. As he languished in that prison camp he had no idea that because of that experience there would eventually be a best selling book about him and a successful movie based on his life. We cannot see the big picture, but we must always remember that it is there.

#### THE KEY TO TRUST IS CHARACTER NOT CIRCUMSTANCE

Our problem most of the time is that we want to gauge whether we can trust God by whether circumstances go the way we desire. If they don't we begin questioning God. Never forget that the key to trust is not circumstances because we can't always see the big picture and we don't usually understand what God is doing. The key to trust is the character of God.

Psalm 9:10 says "Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you." To know God's name means to know his character. When we do we trust him. In Psalm 13 David asked "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?" The whole Psalm is about David feeling abandoned by God. But in verse 5 he says, "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation." The evidence of his circumstances shouted abandonment, but the evidence of God's character, of his unfailing love, shouted salvation.

Laurie and I enjoy watching the television show *Castle*. The lead characters are a mystery writer named Richard Castle and a homicide detective named Kate Beckett. In one episode several years back as they investigated a murder the police, including Beckett, found seemingly irrefutable evidence that pointed to Castle as the killer. One piece of evidence after another as discovered confirmed this to be the case. Beckett, who by this time had a romantic relationship with Castle, found herself in an impossible situation. In the end she refused to believe it and helped unravel what was an intricate and ingenious plot to frame him for the murder. On the basis of the evidence she could only conclude he was a murderer. But what

saved the say was that she went not on the basis of the evidence but on her trust in his character.

Our God has proven himself to be wise, kind, merciful, faithful, trustworthy and good. And above all he has proven that he loves us beyond our ability to comprehend. He loves us unconditionally and eternally. We trust not because we know why things happen, but because we know his character.