

Genesis

By Dr. Joel Beeke

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Announcer: Have you ever felt forgotten by God? Some of God's most faithful servants have been forgotten and forsaken by men and for times, it would seem, even by God yet God remembers his servants. Welcome to "Doctrine for Life" with Dr. Joel Beeke. In our last broadcast, we heard Dr. Beeke talk about how God was working in Joseph's life during his years in prison even by causing him to meet the butler and baker of the king of Egypt. In the second part of this message, Dr. Beeke shows us how God remembers his servants even when they seem forgotten by all. As you listen, may the Spirit give you ears to hear and a heart to believe the words of eternal life.

Dr. Joel Beeke: But thirdly, Joseph is being prepared by God for better usefulness also by the forgetful butler. You see, all of this should have made an indelible impression upon the butler. He was being saved from a terrible fate. His companion is decapitated on a pole and hung for shame but the butler is restored to his position. His companion was told that the birds would eat his flesh which, by the way, was the ultimate horror to the Egyptian man as religion required mummification in a magnificent tomb and yet we're told in verse 23 the chief butler forgot Joseph. Actually we're told the chief butler did not remember Joseph but forgot him. It's repetitive but it's not redundant. The double phrasing here is deliberate. It stresses the pathos, the ingratitude of this man forgetting Joseph for two long years. Joseph had said to him, "I just ask you one thing, remember me," and the man didn't. I suppose the next morning Joseph was at the gates of the prison looking out, "Is there going to be a messenger from Pharaoh coming? Get me out of this place. I don't deserve to be here. Surely the butler didn't forget me." But a week passes. A month passes. Gradually it dawns on Joseph, "I'm a forgotten man. Forgotten even by the butler."

Now I don't mean to sound cynical here and I hope I'm not but this still happens today, congregation, that when you do something for people, there are people who will be grateful but there are also people that will forget. They'll forget and how painful it can be when people forget what you've done for them and at the first opportunity, come against you as if you never befriended them or gone out of your way for them. It's painful, isn't it? David said, "My own familiar friend has lifted up his heel against me." There are many today like this forgetful butler and perhaps you know, perhaps you know what it means to feel forgotten, to feel hurt when you feel forgotten but how should we respond

to that situation? Well, should we accuse the one who has forgotten us? Should we become angry? Is that what Joseph did? Do we shut out that person, then, for life and become bitter and internalize the bitterness and fret and fume?

Well, that's certainly not the answer. Really there are three courses of action that are much better. First, we should remember to continue to love and to give to others. Like Joseph, we should respond unselfishly but continuing to make ourselves vulnerable. Elizabeth Elliot has a book called "Love has a price tag," and what basically the theme of the book is, the more you love people, the more you make yourself vulnerable and it's risky because you're going to be burnt but love and being burned is worth the risk. The way to respond to rejection is not to crawl in a shell, not to become bitter, but to continue to love.

But secondly, we should respond by remembering how forgetful we are to others. Look at yourself a moment. Don't be so quick to criticize this butler. Sometimes aren't we guilty of the same thing? We're forgetful. We're ungrateful. We're especially ungrateful and forgetful to the Lord, our gracious Savior. He actually has to remind us every Lord's Supper, "This is my body and my blood. This do in remembrance of me." As if the very word "remembrance" says, "You're prone to forget me so I want to put visual things in front of you. You're forgetters." And what a shame that we even need that word "remembrance." How could we ever forget the Savior who has come down from heaven for us and loved us and given himself for us and died for us and poured out his blood for us? The thought of forgetting Christ ought to overwhelm us and yet we can do it so easily, can't we? For days. Maybe weeks. Worse than that, we can even deliberately forget him.

Isn't every sin a deliberate forgetting of Jesus Christ? If we remembered what Christ has done to pay for our sin, if that was really before us in our mind, how could we sin? Every sin is a pushing away, a forgetting, a purposeful forgetting of Jesus Christ. You see, there weren't nine lepers that returned thankful, there was one. There was one that remembered. Nine forgot. And by nature and even after we receive grace, we're prone to be in that nine rather than among the one. We need to remember that so when someone forgets us and we feel hurt and rejected, we ought to say, "This is nothing. This is nothing compared to what I've done to my Lord and I'm still doing to him."

Thirdly, we need to remember our forgiving Savior who never forgets us. Who never forgets us. That's actually my fourth point this morning, what a blessing to work for a Master who doesn't forget us, who's always remembering us at the Father's right hand through his constant intercessions. He's always remembering and even graciously rewarding the smallest good deed you've ever done. He says, "Even if you give a cup of cold water to someone, I will reward you if you do it in my name." You see, though we live in a world of forgetful butlers, we ought to encourage ourselves that we also live in a world in which our Savior never forgets us and if we have his remembrance, it's really more than enough. You know, if you have a very loving marriage, your spouse will say to you sometime, "Well, if I have your approval, that's all I need. If I have your smile, that's all I need. If I have your love, that's all I need." And that's how a believer feels, "If I have

Jesus' remembrance. Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. Today thou shalt be with me." If the Lord remembers us we have what we need and all that other bitterness can just roll away.

But now suddenly, suddenly, two years later, the butler remembers Joseph. It's remarkable, remarkable because even the amnesia of the cup-bearer for two years is overruled by God. "How so," you say. Well, simply this way: if the butler had remembered Joseph right away, what would Pharaoh have done? He probably would have smiled and said, "That's a nice story." Or maybe he would have, at very best if he had been in a good mood I suppose, said, "Okay, take him out of prison and put him back as a servant somewhere." But he never would have promoted him to be lord over Egypt. So God is even behind the amnesia of the cup-bearer, preparing Joseph, guiding Joseph, using these two years as two more years of, shall I say, seminary training to prepare Joseph for the position of leadership in the palace of the king.

So when Pharaoh has his dreams two years later and is troubled by those dreams and no one can interpret them, the butler remembers Joseph just at the time of Pharaoh's need and Joseph is called out of the place of darkness and punishment, remembered. What a parallel there is here between Joseph, don't you think, and the greater Joseph, Jesus Christ? Joseph had two others with him in prison. Jesus Christ on the cross had one on each side of him. You work out the parallels for yourself but think it through this way: God's servant speaks to these two other men and he infallibly declares that one of them is going to be saved and one is going to perish. One is going to be brought to the right hand of the king, one is going to be hung. Death for one, life for the other. "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

But of course, there is this huge difference here, isn't there? In Genesis, it's the innocent prophet who asked the man to remember him and the man has every reason to do so, but at Calvary it's the other way around. It's a guilty sinner that asked to be remembered and he has no grounds to be remembered at all and the Savior does so. In Genesis, the innocent servant of God says to a mere man, "Remember me," but he forgets. But a poor sinner says to the King of kings, "Remember me," and he does. That's the way your Savior is, dear child of God. Even though you're a sinner, he delights to remember you, to lift you up. "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee." So how can we not forgive others when they forget us when we have such a glorious, forgiving, remembering Savior who remembers us in the heavenly paradise from moment to moment when we, his ungrateful people, forget him days without number? How forgiving he is even of our forgetfulness.

You see, God is training Joseph in all these ways for greater usefulness, but also there's one more way that's often forgotten and that is this forgotten baker is also used to train Joseph, but that's our fifth thought. In verse 20 we read that Pharaoh has a birthday and on his birthday he lifts up the head of the chief butler and the chief baker, that is to say he brings them into his presence. Lifting up the head is simply an ancient expression of an ancient ritual in which a king would bring people before him and speak to them in

decisive moments in their lives to determine their future. So he brings these two men before him. You can imagine both with bated breath. Will Joseph's interpretation of the dream come true? Then we read, "he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand: But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them." You see, God's prophet was vindicated.

And in these two men, I think there's a symbolism that we can easily miss. It's almost like Abel and Cain revisited again. The butler and the baker brought different offerings, didn't they? Concerning the butler's dream, we read back in verse 9, "behold, a vine was before me." It's almost resonant of John 15 where Jesus said, "I am the true vine." The vine is fruitful. Christ is a glorious vine, a glorious person. The butler in his dream has a cup in his hand, Pharaoh's cup. He takes the grapes and presses them into Pharaoh's cup. The fruit of the vine is a symbol, isn't it, of Christ's blood and in his dream he presents that to Pharaoh. Just as a sinner, we sinners must present the bloody righteousness of Jesus Christ to God for our salvation.

The butler is told that his head will be lifted up; that he'll be received back into the king's favor; he would again serve Pharaoh. But the baker, interestingly, in his dream offers nothing but the works of his own hands, much like Cain, the fruit of his own field. He does all this baking. Baked goods, there's an ancient writing that speaks about bakers in Egyptian times that prepared 57 different kinds of food. The baker did all kinds of work and he put it all in white baskets. He presents it, almost as if he's saying, "Look at my work and my righteousness." But of course, our works count for nothing for our justification, less than worthless. Not the labor of my hands can fulfill the law's demands. Judgment overtakes the baker.

Two men, two men begin in the same place but they have two different destinies: one of life, and the other of death. The symbolism here is unmistakable. God comes to us today through the greater Joseph and says, "To some it is life, and to others it is death. To those who come with the precious blood of Jesus and present it back to me as their only hope for salvation, there is life. But to those who come with all their own like baskets and their own baked goods, there is death." Abel brought the blood of the lamb and he was accepted. Cain brought his own fruits of the field, he was rejected. Both men were put into prison, both men were put into ward, as we read. They were both shut up, as it were, the way that sinners, all of us by nature are shut up in unbelief by nature, but there's a way of life for the butler through the wine, through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now whether he realized that for his own soul, I would not dare to say, but the symbolism here allows us to take that step across the bridge to apply it to the New Testament era. This is what we need in essence, you see. We, too, no matter who we are, we're sinners awaiting punishment, awaiting the judgment of the great day, and when Jesus Christ comes, he shall lift up our heads from the grave and he shall present us all before himself and there shall be many in that crowd, that great crowd of all human beings, who shall come with their own like baskets and their own baked goods and say, "Lord, Lord, have we not done this in thy name? Have we not done that? Lord, we attended church faithfully every Sunday. We made confession of faith. We sat around the

Lord's Table." And he will say, "I have never known you. Depart from me for you did not truly live by the blood of Christ, you lived by your own baked goods, your own religion. You didn't really know by experience, for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of works, lest any man should boast."

Oh, dear congregation, are you putting your faith alone in Jesus Christ and presenting God's Son back to God as the only ground of your salvation? That's what we need. If you don't have that, everything else is empty. The baker and the butler are one step away from eternity. God brings one to life and the other to a self-chosen death. What a lesson for us.

You know, as pastors today, we're often beside deathbeds and we come into this very situation, don't we? There are those who like the butler when they are about to die, they're offering God the wine of the blood of his own Son. You can hear it in their talk. Relatives stand around when they can't talk anymore and the relatives say, "Well, we have one comfort, and a glorious comfort it is, that our dear father or our dear child or our dear grandmother, their only hope is based on the blood of Jesus Christ so we know that all is well and the fruits of their life show that they loved Jesus with all their heart in sincerity."

What a difference when you're around that deathbed from when you're around a deathbed which is described so poignantly in Ecclesiastes 8 where the wise man says, "Then there are the wicked who go back and forth to the holy place and have forgotten where they have so done." These are people who went to church all their life but never grasped the Gospel, never clothed with Christ, never repented and bent the knee before the greater Joseph. What a tragedy. And what happens then when you're around the deathbed? Nobody knows what to say. Someone tries something feeble, "Well," they say, "he went to church all the time. Never missed church." As a pastor you're nodding but you don't know what to say because, you see, this loved one never said a word about Jesus Christ to any of his relatives. The only time they ever heard his name was at the end of his prayer when he said, "For Jesus' sake." His prayers weren't filled with Christ. His thoughts weren't filled with Christ. His life wasn't filled with Christ. There's nothing to say but he went back and forth to the holy place and eventually he'll be forgotten.

Do you know what struck me so powerfully 22-23 years ago when I first came here and I went around to all of your homes? The thing I remember most vividly from home to home to home was that when you spoke to me about your distant relatives who had passed away, the ones you spoke about were the ones who knew what it means to rest in the finished blood of Jesus Christ. And the others you didn't mention to me. They were forgotten.

You see, dear congregation, it's painful to be forgotten as we've seen in Joseph's case, but one day if you don't repent and you don't believe the Gospel and you don't surrender to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ doesn't become your life and Jesus Christ doesn't become your hope and Jesus Christ doesn't become your righteousness, one day God is going to forget you and what a tragedy that will be when you stand before him and say, "But Lord, I went to church. I went to confession of faith class. I did all these things. I've got white baskets." And God will say, "You've shunned my way of salvation that I brought to you

for decades every single Sunday from the pulpit. You kept making excuses of why you stayed away from Jesus Christ, why you're unconverted, why you were staying away from the Lord's Supper, why you did not believe and repent and turn to me. Now I forget you." What a tragedy.

Our greatest sorrow as pastors in that great day will be to see you on the wrong side of Christ. I beg you, my friend, for your own soul, do like Christian, do like Christian in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," no matter what other people say to you, you need to be saved. You must be born again. Put your fingers in your ears and run in the way to Zion and say, "Life, life, eternal life!" And when all those voices come from behind you, voices of neighbors and friends and maybe even church members who say, "But you can't do anything or you can't save yourself or you can't do this or you can't do that. You've just got to wait for the Lord. You can't do anything." You put your fingers in your ears and you run and you say, "I must be saved. O Lord, save me!" Don't go on your way like the baker knowing you're going to be hanged in the pit of hell in a short time and not cry out for the Lord and not ask him for the grace to repent and to believe.

Oh, I think for Joseph the awful fate of the baker was an amazing preparatory ground for the throne of Egypt. You know, Joseph easily could have thought much of himself on the throne of Egypt. He could easily become proud. He would become the number one world man in the world, but do you know one thing that kept him humble, I think, was remembering the baker. Remembering the baker. There but for the grace of God, go I. Who makes me to differ from the baker? It is all grace. If you've found Christ, it is all grace and you know it.

Announcer: Thank you for listening to "Doctrine for Life" with Dr. Joel Beeke. If you would like to get more information about these broadcasts, to download free booklets, or to support this ministry, please visit our website at gospeltrumpet.weebly.com. William Ames said, "Theology is the doctrine of living to God." May God write the doctrines of the Bible upon your heart so that you may truly live.