

(Genesis) Genesis 39:11-40:23

by Joe Focht

The sermon explores Joseph's trials in Egypt, emphasizing his integrity and God's unwavering presence in his life despite injustice.

Duration: 53:06

Scripture: Genesis 39:20-23, Genesis 40:13-15, Genesis 40:23, Genesis 45:5, Psalm 105:16, Acts 23:11

Topics: "Genesis"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the sorrows and challenges of life, particularly for boys who bring sorrow to their mothers. However, the speaker believes that there is another world beyond this one, where one can experience joy and fulfillment. The speaker relates this belief to the story of Joseph from the Bible, who went through trials and ended up becoming a ruler. The speaker emphasizes the importance of being prisoners of Christ and His grace, rather than prisoners of the world and its emptiness.

Transcript

We have Joseph in Egypt. All the right ingredients are there for sin. He is around 17 years old.

His hormones are peaking. Potiphar's wife is beautiful. She has him alone in the house.

No one would ever know. You know those things that maybe some of you do when you're alone in the house and no one sees. And you know, Joseph again would have had an excuse.

Just imagine this kid describing his life, his troubles, his woes to a psychiatrist. Imagine him telling about, you know, a psychiatrist, now tell me about your mom. Well, there were four moms in our family.

Well, I mean the one your dad was married to. Well, he had four wives. Great big dysfunctional family.

First thing I remember is my Uncle Laban chasing us, trying to kill us, and running, and my mother hiding and stealing the family gods from my Uncle Laban. And my father settling with Laban, thinking we were going to die and then being afraid all night because we had a big hairy uncle who was coming and we were thinking he was going to kill us. And my dad was sending us ahead with the animals and dividing us into companies so that if he killed everybody in one company, the other company could flee.

Imagine a little kid with his eyes wide open at night hearing these stories of Uncle Harry, you know. And then coming to Shechem and there my sister Dinah was raped. And my two older brothers, Simeon and

Levi, went and slaughtered an entire town, tricked them into circumcising themselves, blasphemous thing.

And then slaughtered them all. And then the Canaanites were pursuing us. And my father was afraid and was yelling at the family and said that we were now stinking in the nostrils of the Canaanites.

And we were fleeing to Bethel, hoping God would keep us safe. And on the way, Deborah, my nursemaid, died on the side of the road. And then from there, my mother, Rachel, in travail, screaming, giving birth to my brother, Benjamin, hemorrhaged and died in front of my eyes on the side of the road.

And we finally came to Hebron and settled. My older brother still involved with idolatry, worshiping other gods, hating my guts, throwing me into a pit, selling me to the Ishmaelites. I came to Egypt and they put me on the auction block and sold me as a slave.

People were bidding on me. And here I am in Potiphar's house and I do my best. And now his wife is chasing me.

By now the psychiatrist would have jumped out the window. You know, this is a kid with excuses, you know. I mean, we have somebody like this in the church that sins and we sit around with the pastoral staff and say, well, you know, they really have a lot of baggage.

I mean, they're really struggling. You know, look at Joseph. I mean, he doesn't have a New Testament.

He doesn't have a church that he goes to on Sundays and Wednesdays. He doesn't have all of the benefit that we have. And yet he says, how can I do this great evil and sin against Potiphar and sin against God? It is a great evil because it's a sin against the human beings that are involved whose lives are attached to this.

And it is a sin against God. And he takes away all of our excuses. For every single guy in this church that comes to me and says, oh, lust is such a struggle and I keep falling, I can produce hundreds of single guys who are committed to Jesus, who are not compromising.

For every husband or wife that comes in here griping about their partner, I can produce families that have cancer. There's tremendous suffering that are faithful to Jesus, that are enduring. For every selfish, self-centered, sinning believer, we can produce, thank God, hundreds and hundreds that are committed to Jesus, enduring their hardship.

We have no excuses. It is great evil, sexual sin. It is a sin against God.

And it is a sin against the human beings that are involved. Joseph said, how can I do this great wickedness, verse 9, and sin against God? It came to pass as she spake to Joseph day by day, she was trying to wear him down, that he hearkened not unto her to lie with her, and notice this, not even to be with her in the house. Now, let me tell you something.

Here's the clue. If you have a problem with alcohol, don't go into the bar. I mean, just kind of think about this.

Work it out in your mind. You know, if you have a problem with pornography, do not go into the magazine store or, you know, just don't go there. If you have a problem with a particular thing, don't put yourself in the environment.

In fact, if you think you don't have a problem, then definitely don't put yourself in the environment, because the Bible says, take heed when you think you stand, lest you fall. Joseph wasn't even putting himself in the environment even to lie with her or to be with her. But it came to pass about this time that Joseph went into the house, probably looked around, see if she was there, to do his business, and there was none of the men of the house there within.

No doubt she had sent them all out. And she caught him by his garment, saying, lie with me. And he left his garment in her hand and fled and got him out of there.

That is good advice. Sometimes the best thing you can do is run. You know, sometimes if you think, because here's the problem.

Sometimes if we play with sin in our heart, what we do is we rehearse it and we rehearse it and we rehearse it. And the idolatry is already there. And all of a sudden we find ourselves in this situation.

We really don't have to think. All we do is act out what we've been rehearsing in our minds. Someone has gotten you angry and you're bitter at them, and you think, if I ever get that guy alone, you know, and in your mind you think, ah, boom, ah, two left hooks, you know, on the ground, I'll jump on them, you know.

And you rehearse it, rehearse it, rehearse it. And then when you get in the confrontation, you don't have to do much thinking because you've already rehearsed it over and over again. And it was sin then.

Sometimes the best thing to do is turn around and run. Put one foot in front of the other. The Bible says, flee youthful lusts without leaving a forwarding address.

And that's what Joseph does. He gets himself out of there. But it came to pass when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled forth, that she called unto the men of the house and spake unto them, saying, See, he, now she's speaking a part of her husband in a very derogatory sense.

So we get an idea of how much she respects him and how she treats him. He hath brought in a Hebrew, a Hebrew, the Egyptians detested shepherds, a Hebrew unto us to mock us. He came into me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice.

And it came to pass when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried that he left his garment with me, and he fled and got him out of here. You know, this is an interesting hell hath no fury like a woman's scorn. She is mad.

She has tried to seduce him and seduce him and seduce him and seduce him. Finally, she thinks she's got him. She's got the setup.

The guys are out of the house. She grabs him by that little Egyptian skirt they used to wear, and Joseph is out of the skirt, and she's there holding this little thing in his hand. I don't know what he had on, but he is out of there.

And she's angry. Nobody turns me off like that. And it came to pass when he heard that I lifted up my voice, Joseph, verse 15, she says, heard me screaming, that he left his garment with me and fled and got him out of here.

And she laid up his garment by her until his Lord, till Potiphar came home. And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant which thou hast brought unto us came in unto me

to mock me. And it came to pass as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me and fled out.

And it came to pass when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me, that his wrath was kindled. Now, it doesn't tell us against who. I get the feeling that he may be mad at his wife, mad at the situation.

He is the head executioner, and if you try to rape the head executioner's wife, you normally end up with your head cut off. But he will take Joseph and put him in the king's prison, not a regular dungeon. And Joseph ends up being the head running everything that is there.

And when the chief baker and the butler are brought from Pharaoh, it says the captain of the guard, look down in verse 4, in the next chapter, chapter 40, see where it says the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them? We'll look back in 39 verse 1. Joseph was brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's notice, and captain of the guard. So the captain of the guard that gives Joseph a place of responsibility in prison is Potiphar. And I think Potiphar realized the way his wife was.

I don't think this was a surprise to him. If you've got a partner that is unfaithful and being unfaithful, you know it in your heart. I mean, the sad thing is we'll see couples, and they know it, but because they want to think the best, they overlook some earmark of infidelity.

And then it goes a little further, and then they overlook, and then they overlook. And finally when it erupts and it comes into the light, usually the innocent party says, I feel so stupid all along. You know, I saw this, and I saw that, but I was giving them the benefit of the doubt.

I think Potiphar knew his wife well. I think he was angry at the entire situation because he lost the best servant he had ever had, and God, it says, was blessing his house and his field because of Joseph. So his wrath is kindled, and Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place, notice, where the king's prisoners were bound, and he was there in the prison.

But notice, but the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy. I'd be thinking by now, enough mercy already, you know, 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 with him in the prison, and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.

The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand, because the Lord was with Joseph, with him, and that which he did, Joseph did, the Lord made it to prosper. So Joseph now finds himself in the exact same situation he was in Potiphar's house. There he was faithful, Potiphar saw the Lord was blessing him, and Potiphar knew nothing that was in his hand.

He committed everything to Joseph, except the food that he did eat. Now we have the keeper of the guard of the prison doing exactly the same thing. He trusts Joseph, he sees the Lord is with him, and once again he's committed everything to Joseph.

But Joseph now, you know, is going to face a dilemma, because before, when he was sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites and brought down to Egypt and sold on the auction block, he found himself a slave in Potiphar's house, and in that circumstance he could look to his ten older brothers and say, those guys are louses, you know, they really stabbed me in the back, they sold me, you know, and just say, you know, Lord, are you getting those? What about when I get out? Lord, you know, I get back to my dad, and you

know, they probably made up some story. He doesn't know what they said. They probably made up some story and told my dad, and you know, Lord, you know, but now, because he serves the Lord and does what's right, he now is thrown into prison for doing what's right, not for doing what's wrong, for doing what's right.

And now in this circumstance, he can no longer say, it was my brother's fault. Now he has to look to heaven and say, Lord, this is your fault. I did what was right.

I refused sexual sin, and she was beautiful, Lord, and she chased me day after day after day after day, and I fled out of the situation, and Lord, now I get thrown in prison? It's unfair, isn't it? And I think there are times that we struggle with this concept of unfair, because we have this general consensus, this general philosophy, and I think it's generally a good way to live, that if we do what's right and we serve God, that we will be blessed, and that evil people, people who do what's wrong, will suffer the consequences. But when life throws us a curveball, and we do what's right and we serve God, and then we end up suffering for it, then we're sitting around thinking, this is not fair, and we want to take God to the courthouse in the sky called fairness, and we're going to bring him before the bench, and we're going to accuse him before the judge there, and say, this is not fair. God is a fair God, but he's doing in my life what is not fair, and somebody needs to talk to him about it.

Because of that, I am in prison. And again, all of us are prisoners. Before we were saved, we were prisoners to darkness, to Satan, and to the world, to emptiness.

We thought we were making up our own mind, that we were open-minded individuals, that we were making our own choices, not realizing that everything that was handed to us was handed to us on the menu. Maybe we had five choices, but we didn't make up the menu. You can be like this, you can be in the rap music, you can be in alternative music, you can be in this music, you can do this, you can do that, you can take this drug, this drug, or that drug, you can go to clubs, you can do this, you can do that, you can wear these clothes, you can wear these clothes, you can like sports, you can do this.

We were eating off the menu. The styles were being set for us by outside forces, the morals were being set for us by outside forces. We were prisoners of the world and of the emptiness that is there and of the futility of it.

So it's much better now to be the prisoners of Christ, prisoners of His grace and of His love, prisoners of His sovereignty and His plan for our life, even if we don't understand it all the time, than it was to be prisoners of Satan and of the world. Paul, remember again, saying that in Ephesians 3.1 and Ephesians 4.1 and 1 Timothy chapter 1 around verse 8, that he was the prisoner of Christ. He didn't consider himself ever the prisoner of Rome, ever.

He considered Rome his prisoner. Paul thought that all of Rome was chained to his hand. He said, this is great, they can't get away from me.

I have a captive audience. I preach the gospel to guards every six hours. They bring in a new guy and I share Christ with them and he can't get away from me.

It's a preacher's dream. And his perspective of life was Rome is chained to me and can't get away. I'm the prisoner of Christ, not the prisoner of Rome.

And the Philippians, he says, don't worry about me. I'm here in Caesar's palace. I'm in his household.

And some are preaching the gospel out of contention, some out of strife, some out of sincerity. Why do I care as long as the gospel gets preached? And as he signs off again in Philippians, he says, the saints here in Philippi greet you, or the saints here in Rome greet you, especially those of Caesar's household, the new converts here, right in the palace. The guards that have been chained to me, the people here in the palace, they greet you.

Joseph somehow, and I'm not sure how, as I study his life and it's a joy for me to come back and to, you know, spend less time maybe with the commentaries, just more time sitting with scripture, looking at this man's life, how remarkable that he endures this seemingly great injustice, where probably many people say, well, this is what I get for serving God? Forget it. Why should I ever care about serving God? This is what I get. I say no to a beautiful woman, I get thrown in prison for something I didn't do.

Forget it. There's none of that with him. Remarkably, even in prison, he is faithful.

He is faithful to meet his responsibilities. They notice that God is with him, that he's a good steward, and they give him responsibility there. Came to pass after these things, chapter 40, that the butler of the king of Egypt, now this is the cup bearer.

This is a guy who was close to Pharaoh because he would taste all of the wine, and let me say this, it was primarily beer in Egypt, he would taste all of the beer and food that Pharaoh would eat. And Pharaoh would let him taste first to see if it was poison. If he fell over dead, then Pharaoh knew he shouldn't eat it.

So when you have a guy that lays his life on the line for you a couple times a day, your meals, you get close to this guy. We have uncovered hieroglyphics from Egypt of a professor in the University of Egypt who says, my students are good for nothing. All they do is carouse and drink beer.

So things haven't changed. They could have been written this week. Of course, and then they had brewmasters, it was warm, there was no ice or anything, but this cup bearer was involved in that.

Somehow he may have been a brewmaster, he was the one who tasted the food before Pharaoh ate. And his baker, the one who was cooking in the palace, they had offended their lord, the king of Egypt. There's some offense.

One of them, evidently something's going on, somebody's told Pharaoh there's some kind of a clandestine operation here, there's some kind of a scheme to take your life, we're not sure who's involved, so he throws them both into prison. Pharaoh was wroth against the two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, that is his cup bearer, and against the chief of the bakers. He put them inward into the house of the captain of the guard into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound.

And the captain of the guard, that's Potiphar, charged Joseph with them, very important prisoners, political prisoners. And Joseph served them and they continued a season inward in the prison. And they dreamed a dream, both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker, the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison.

And Joseph came in unto them in the morning and looked upon them, and behold, they were sad. And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him inward in his lord's house, saying, why do you look so sad today? Now this is a strange question to ask people in prison, by the way. But why do you look so sad today? You know, Joseph saying, don't be filled with self-pity, we're prisoners.

I don't know, this guy's pretty remarkable. They said to him, well, we have dreamed a dream, and there's no interpreter. I mean, Joseph could have said, poor babies, you mean you're bummed out because you dreamed a dream and nobody can interpret.

Let me tell you my story. You think you got reason to be depressed? Listen to this. No, he doesn't do any of that.

We did dream the dream, there's nobody to interpret it. Joseph says to them, do not interpretations belong to God, not to astrologers or to God. Tell me them, I pray you.

Now Joseph could have said dreams, forget it. The last time I interpreted dreams, I got sold by my brother, that's why I'm in Egypt, I got involved with dreams. Don't talk to me about dreams, I don't hear nothing about dreams.

Isn't it remarkable that his relationship with God is current? Somehow, remarkably, again, he's prayed up, somehow remarkably he is trusting God. And I believe, by the way, Joseph is struggling. I believe there's bitterness.

I believe there's bitterness in the circumstance. I don't believe he's bitter at God, but I do believe he's feeling the bitterness of the circumstance because he hasn't seen his father now for 7, 8, 10 years, we don't know how long. And by the way, now as he interprets these dreams, he's right up against 13 years since he's been sold and carried away from Canaan.

13 years, now he's wondering, is my dad still alive? Are my brothers still alive? Who's still alive back home? Imagine, imagine, I have four kids and a wife that I love with all my heart. I can't imagine governments changing and someone coming and just taking me away and locking me in a dungeon. And 13 years never seeing to them, never calling, never talking to them.

13 years wondering, are they grown? You know, Joanna would be 31 years old. Mikey would be 28 years old. My kids, what are they like? Are they alive? Have they died in all of this too? What is going on? You have to imagine that is a bitter, bitter circumstance.

And it says that he was the son of his father's old age. He loved Jacob. 13 years.

And I believe he's a little downhearted. And now these two men come with these dreams. Joseph says, tell me the dreams.

Interpretations belong to God. And the chief butler told his dream that Joseph said to him, in my dream, behold, a vine was before me. In the vine there were three branches.

And it was as though it budded and her blossoms shot forth and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes. And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand. And I took the grapes and I pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

And Joseph said unto him, well, this is the interpretation of that God chose him. The three branches are three days. Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head and restore thee to thy place and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand after the former manner when thou wast a butler.

But think on me when it shall be well with thee and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me and make mention of me unto Pharaoh and bring me out of this house. I think it's literally whole. Bring me out of this holy

dungeon.

Bring me out of this place. For indeed, I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews. And here also have I done nothing that they should put me in the dungeon.

Now notice this. In verse 15 he doesn't say anything about his lousy brothers. He just says I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews.

He doesn't bad mouth his brothers. And here also have I done nothing that they should put me in the dungeon. He doesn't bad mouth Potiphar's wife.

It's remarkable that Joseph is still kind of in awe looking at the circumstances saying, okay, Lord, why did you let this happen to me? Why is this happening? Recognizing God's sovereignty. It's not his brother's fault now that he is in this second imprisonment as it were. When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, I was in my dream also.

Behold, I had three white busses on my head. Now this is what's happening. They believed in Egypt that if someone had the power to interpret a dream that he was then in charge of or had the power over that interpretation becoming a reality in your life.

And because he heard Joseph interpret the cupbearer's dream and it was a good interpretation, now the baker says, oh, this guy is saying good stuff. So he says, well, let me tell you my dream too. You can give me the interpretation of it.

So he said, I had three white baskets on my head. And the uppermost basket, there was all kinds of baked foods for Pharaoh. And the birds did eat them out of the basket that was on my head.

And Joseph answered and said, well, this is the interpretation of your dream. The three baskets again are three days. Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head, notice he adds, from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree, and the birds shall eat thy flesh.

Thanks. You know, he could have said, oh, this is great news for you too, but remember to get me out of here. I mean, he doesn't, he's not trying to please man even at this point in time.

God's given him the interpretation. He doesn't twist it. He doesn't maneuver it.

There's no manipulation with this kid. He just tells him the truth. He speaks it right out.

Tells him. He's going to hang you on a tree, and the birds are going to eat your flesh from off of thee. Now, we don't know what this guy did to Pharaoh.

Maybe he made him a Caesar salad. We're not sure what he did. I'm going to tell him here.

Some of you will take a while. You get that. And it came to pass that the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants, and he lifted up the head of the chief butler, his cup bearer, and of the chief baker.

The idea is he brings them up out of prison among his servants. Evidently, he lets them eat first at the feast. And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again, and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

Just unbelievable. Just as Joseph had said. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

And then, incredibly, yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him. Now, you know, I look at this, and I think, let me read it. Why don't you turn to Psalm 105.

You study the life of Joseph. This is an important part of it. Psalm 105.

To the right. Only the table of contents is to the left. Psalm 105, verse 16, speaking of Joseph, it says that God called for a famine upon the land.

He broke the entire staff of bread. Notice, he sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold as a servant, as a slave. This is a 13-year trip, at least.

You know, it doesn't say that his brothers hijacked him and sold him as a slave. It says God sent Joseph before them into Egypt. And it's going to say to preserve life.

You know, doesn't God have a different perspective on things than we do? Gee, God, thanks for sending me here. You know, I think of Paul, when he finally got back to Jerusalem, and he preached there, and a riot started. And he's in the prison, and he's depressed that night, and it says Jesus comes and appears to him and stands with him.

And it says, Paul, don't sweat it. You gave a great testimony. And Paul says, I started a riot, you know.

He's depressed, thought he blew his opportunity. He said, no, you gave a good testimony. Cheer up.

And now I'm sending you to Rome. Man, you know, we have mission trips this summer to Ireland. How would you feel if Jesus spoke to your heart and said, I'm sending you to Rome? You'd imagine Swiss Air, the Hilton in Rome.

God's sending me to Rome. You know, the Bible says Paul went through a Eurocliden. That's a big storm.

He goes into a hurricane in the Mediterranean. He gets shipwrecked. This is God sending him to Rome.

Swimming to an island, floating on boards, getting there, oh, God is sending me to Rome, freezing. He goes up by the fire to get warm, and a snake jumps out of the fire and bites his hand. Ah, this is God sending me to Rome, you know.

Well, this was God sending Joseph to Egypt. God's just got a different perspective of what happens along the way. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold as a servant.

Now notice, whose feet they hurt with fetters. The Septuagint translates this, whose feet they humbled with fetters. Even, and he was laid in iron.

If you have a note in your column there, it says his soul came into iron. I like the old English prayer book because it says that he put iron into his soul. You know, the beautiful, the picture that we're getting, developing here is that God is fast at work on the man because God had showed him this dream initially, that his twelve brothers and his father bowing down before him, gave him the twelve shocks of grain, and then the sun and the moon and the stars.

But there's a difference between the man that God tells will have others do obeisance to him, and the man that's finally ready to have people do obeisance to him. There's a big difference between David, who's anointed to be king of Israel, and when David finally is the anointed king of Israel. Years and years of preparation.

And Joseph now is humbled in fetters, iron put into his soul, until the time that his word came. Now, this is the interpretation of Joseph's dream. The word that God had spoken to him.

That's the way the grammar is. Until the time that the word that came to Joseph became a reality, it says, the word of the Lord tried him. That's a word that means to fuse metal, to refine it, or to purge it, to put it into the kiln.

Until the time that, remember this vision that God had given to Joseph, and put it in his heart. Until the time that that became a reality, that word of God, it says, refined him and tried him. Because here was Joseph in the prison thinking, how does this relate? In Potiphar's house, how does this relate? God, you showed me this, you have this wonderful plan for my life, and I didn't ask for it.

And here I saw my brothers bowing down before me. You showed me, I thought it was the place of the firstborn. I didn't understand what it was, but Lord, there was something there.

Something drew my heart to heaven. Something drew my heart to the divine purposes of your power that surround me. And Lord, how does all of this fit into this? Now here I am in prison.

And it says, until that word came, or became a reality, that that word was trying him and refining him. The king sent and loosed him, even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord over his house, and ruler over all his substance, to bind his princes at his pleasure, and to teach his servants wisdom.

So Joseph now in this circumstance, we read it here in Genesis, but we're told in the Psalms that he was being humbled, that his feet were hurt with fetters, that there was a very difficult point in all of this. But that the truth was that God had sent him. The truth was that he was not his brother's prisoner, or Potiphar's prisoner, or he wasn't a prisoner in this prison house in Egypt.

He was God's prisoner. Like Paul was God's prisoner. Like John was God's prisoner on Patmos.

And like Daniel was God's prisoner carried away to Babylon. And like Ezekiel was God's prisoner by the river Chebar in Babylon. And like David was God's prisoner fleeing from Saul all those years.

And like Elijah was God's prisoner sitting by the brook Kareth and being fed by the ravens. And like Moses was God's prisoner for forty years on the backside of the desert. The divine hand of God was upon him refining him, turning him into the man that would be able to fulfill the vision that God gave to him.

And I think we need to understand, and again, God's sovereignty never removes our responsibility. You know both of them are in the Bible. If you take a position, you've left God something.

But it's wonderful when we're in difficulty and we don't understand what God is doing, to fall back and realize God is sovereign. All of this is under his control. And that he does love me and he does care for me.

You know as we read through again the Gospel, Jesus, Father I came to do thy will. Well, we read through there and Judas is the one who betrays him into the hand of the rulers. Jesus when he prays in Gethsemane, he says Father let this cup pass that you're giving to me.

On the human side, Judas betrayed him. On the divine side, it was a cup the Father was giving to him. It was the priests and the scribes and Pilate that gave him up to be crucified.

Acts chapter 2 says it was by the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God that he was offered. And yes, there were injustices by Joseph's brother, by Potiphar's wife, all of that is true, but it tells us here it was God that sent him. And I think we have to remember that if you are in prison and we are all in prison to something, an injury that took place in our hearts as we were a child, sexually abused or alcoholic parents or we're in prison to cancer now or to illness or to a divorce or to a depression or despondency.

We are all prisoners of one thing or another as it were, but you can do one of two things. You can either realize in that situation that Jesus is still Lord. He has not fallen off the throne because of the difficulty of our circumstance.

So we can either be His prisoner in the circumstance or we can be the prisoner of the circumstance and be bitter for the rest of our lives and be wrangling and if God loves me, why is this happening? The idea is all of us, all of us are charged to take up our cross and follow Christ. That means execution. Paul said, I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live.

Not yet I, not yet I, but Christ lives in me. In the life that I now live in the flesh, I live in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself to me. Paul said, I don't have my life.

My life is not my own. He says you're not your own, you're bought with a price. If you've given your life up, who cares what's happening to you? If your life is hidden Christ with God and you've given your life up and it's blood bought, I'm blood bought, I'm not my own, and if you've relinquished everything to him, then you're his prisoner.

But what better place to be than the prisoner of Jesus? Prisoner of his love and prisoner of his power and prisoner of his forgiveness and his sovereignty. Prisoner of his shepherding care. Prisoner of his ability to see the future and to work on your behalf and to console and to lead you or be prisoner of all the injustices in life.

Joseph now is in this situation where he's looking around thinking, I can't believe this. This Chief Butler interpreted his dream for him. Where is he? But I believe that there's another dynamic taking place and that's this.

Look, Joseph back in chapter 37, remember he had those visions. And I think God touched his heart and God really put something supernatural into him that was keeping him. I think probably about this time when he's in prison and he's getting a little bit depressed, lo and behold, here comes the cupbearer of Pharaoh and his chief cook and they come to Joseph and say, we've had these two dreams.

Can you interpret them? God gives Joseph the interpretation of the dreams. Joseph sees before his eyes those dreams come to pass just the way God told him they would. And then Joseph is reminded, Lord, if you have brought these two dreams to pass exactly the way you told me they would come to pass, certainly you will bring to pass the two dreams you gave to me those many years ago exactly as you told me they would be fulfilled.

I think there was a great encouragement in one sense at this time for Joseph. I think it probably troubled him that he could tell the chief cook and the chief butler what would happen to them in the next three days and he didn't know what would happen in the next three days in his own life. God wasn't telling him what would happen next week in his life.

But he had a vision. He had something in his heart. And yet it says now the chief butler didn't remember Joseph, he forgot him.

And it came to pass at the end of two full years. Now imagine this. The guy gets let out of prison.

Joseph is thinking this is it. Made friends with the cupbearer. He's restored.

He's next to Pharaoh. And every time he hears the prison door go eh-h-h, this is it. I am out of here.

Say goodbye to me. I'm out of here. I'm getting out of here.

The cupbearer, he's my buddy. I interpreted his dream. He's next to Pharaoh.

He's telling Pharaoh, you're not going to see me tomorrow. I'm not going to be here. This must have gone on day after day after day.

Two years. I'm sure these were the hardest two years that Joseph experienced. Because it's bad enough when somebody who doesn't like you does something to you, but when you help someone and then they forget about you, that really causes a hajjadah.

Let me tell you something. If Joseph had been released from prison right after this butler got out, you know he'd have gone home to Canaan. And the famine would have come and destroyed the known world.

And there would be no Israel. There would be no tribe of Judah. There would be no Messiah.

There would be no church. There would be no Calvary Chapel in Philadelphia. I think that God caused the butler to forget Joseph.

Now you need to cook that around in your head a little bit. Because if you're mad at somebody in your life who's forgotten about you, you need to realize there is the outside chance that God made them forget about you. They may be walking around thinking, you know, I feel like I'm forgetting something.

I don't know what it is. Maybe God has just kind of zapped those cells that you were in there in the memory bank because he's wanting you alone a little longer. Maybe he's doing something in your life.

And that person, though they had good intention, when they said, hey, anytime you need me, just let me know. Thanks for doing this. I owe you one.

And you're thinking you owe me three. And then they leave and they're gone. They don't get no calls.

And you're thinking, I can't believe this. There is the possibility that God has caused them to forget about you. Because by waiting two years, first of all, Joseph knows it isn't by his political conniving that he's getting released.

God wants his hands off of this completely. It's not by his maneuvering that he will get out of prison. It's not because he's asked a favor.

It's because God in his time is raising up a man to save the known world. And because Joseph is raised up, Israel is preserved. And because Israel is preserved, Judah, the tribe, continues.

And because the tribe continues, the Messiah is born. And because the Messiah is born, we're here this evening. I'm glad God waited two years.

Joseph wasn't happy. I'm glad. You know, and let me tell you something.

We think that God, you know, we get in a situation, and I don't know where you are this evening. Maybe you think he's forgotten about you. Maybe you think you get to the place where God doesn't forget about anybody, but you are the exception to the rule.

I know it says in the Bible, you know, he never leaves a verse of Exodus, but he wrote that before I was born. You know, I know, we get those feelings. No, wherever we are, and I was reminded of this story.

I'm going to read this to you. And it just is a reminder to me that God will reach us wherever we are. I read it in the morning services.

Some of you heard it. Chuck Missler, by the way, got a hold of this letter from a ministry called Compass Direct. It was written by a dying prisoner in the Chinese Logai prison system.

The letter was written to this man's mother, but he refused to mail it because he thought the censors would tear it up. So he gave it to a friend of his who was a prisoner who had four more years to serve, and at the end of those four years, they didn't release that prisoner. So he gave it to a guard that he had become friendly with.

The guard gave it to a friend of his that was a soldier that came past the prison. The soldier carried the letter to Tibet and gave it to his mother, and his mother got it to the mother of the prisoner who wrote it five years after it was written and three years after the prisoner died. This is the letter.

O my mother, my dear mother, I have not been a good son. I have brought disgrace upon you and all the family. I hope that you can forgive me.

I am dying. You brought me up to be a good boy. You gave me food, love, and affection.

What did I do to repay you? I painted an anti-government slogan on the wall, and I got life imprisonment. Life imprisonment when my life was only eighteen years old. You raised me for more than this, and I am sorry.

And now your son is thirty-one. He will not live past thirty-three. I have cancer of the intestines, and my jailers will not pay for an operation.

Now, instead of working underground in the mine, I mined a tiny storage shed full of rusty tins and tools. I fetch them all day long. No one comes near, but at least I can look out over the desert and watch the shifting of the sands.

For eight years I never saw sunlight. I was taken from the barracks through a tunnel into the mine. A room and a corridor and a shaft were all the world that I had.

And now my world is bigger, but it is coming to an end. There is no hope. And so I have sat on my stool and thought for many hours.

I have cried many tears, mostly for the things that I never did and can never do. I have never kissed a woman. I have never some other woman much as owned a toothbrush.

I have never received a paycheck, never ate a gourmet meal, never built a kite for an excited child. Above all that, I never said how much I owed you, never said how sorry I am to grieve you until now. Boys are not meant to bring their mothers such sorrow, otherwise no one would have them.

I have come to two conclusions. One is this, that this is not the only world there is. I cannot believe that I went through the miracle of birth to live a life like this and to die a death like this.

I believe that there is another world where there is a table that I can choose to sit at and I can sip the finest wines and I can eat until my heart is content. I can make friends with whomsoever I please and I can speak without fear and not be marched off when the half-hour gong is sounded. And I also believe there is someone there who is also here who sits at the head of that table.

A fellow prisoner told me of such a one who said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light. I do not know all that that means. All I can say is that when I heard the words I felt a great relief that my death was not the end of my life." So my dying charge to you, Mother, is to find out who spoke those words so that we may dine together again with him.

There is nobody outside of God's reach. There is nobody who is outside the ministry of a spirit in whatever prison we may be in. There is no human life that he uses or takes for granted.

I think of Golda Meir and how God raised her up to be part of the reestablishment of the nation of Israel. In the meantime there was a doctor in Europe, a famous neurologist who was in a bad car accident. He got amnesia, lost his practice, lost his mind for a time and somewhere in the process he became a born-again Christian and God began to restore his mind and his practice, Dr. Larry Samuels.

He was called to the bedside of Golda Meir before she died and shared Jesus Christ with her. At her funeral, Menachem Begin and Dr. Larry Samuels stood by her coffin. I hope he writes a book someday.

He has been asked and he said, "I won't say yet what you want me to say, but let me say this." She had a dramatic spiritual experience before she died. God is faithful. There are times when certainly we don't know what he's doing.

Let's end in Job chapter 23. It's to the right. It's a passage that you should know.

We shared it this morning. Job chapter 23, "And Job answered and said, 'Even today is my complaint bitter.'" I think Job's complaint was bitter. I don't think he was bitter at God, but I think it was a bitter circumstance.

"My stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his throne, his seat. I would order my cause before him and fill my mouth with arguments, with reasonings.

I would know the words which he would answer me and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No, but he would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him.

So should I be delivered forever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him.

He hideth himself on the right hand, and I cannot see him, but he knoweth the way that I take. And when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept and not declined.

Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips. I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But he is in one mind, the idea is, he is the one who chooses.

And who can turn him? And what his soul desires, even that he does. Interesting. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me.

And many such things are with him. Job says, you know, I don't understand what he's doing right now. I've kind of lost track of him.

It's hard for me to reconcile his goodness and his love with the pain that's in my life. I move forward, and I don't sense him there. I move backward.

I don't sense his presence. I don't perceive him. I see his work happening on my left hand, but him I can't find, and on my right hand.

And yet I can't discover his presence. I'm in this quandary. And yet I know that when I am tried, I'll come forth as gold.

I've kept his word. I haven't turned away from his ordinances, esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. He's the one who decides.

No one can turn him from that. And I know that he is keeping me in the way that is appointed for me. Many such things are with him.

Isn't it remarkable? Though we may not perceive him, though we might not understand, Job says, I know he's in front of me. I know he's alongside me. I know he's behind me.

But I also know that he will keep me. Yes, right now I don't understand what he's doing. But I know that he loves me.

And I'm falling back on what I do know. And I know there's an appointed way for me. And I know that I'm never in prison, because I'm always on that journey.

I'm never trapped. I'm always moving. I'm always on a path.

I encourage you tonight, whatever your heartache is, he hasn't forgotten you. Men may forget you. God cannot forget.

I am thankful that he can choose not to remember. That's much different than forgetting. Because he has chosen to remember our sins and our iniquities no more.

He never forgets us. But he has chosen never to remember our sins and iniquities again. So he sets his affection on us fully.

He sees us in Christ. Justified, sanctified, glorified, finished. And he never forsakes us.

He never leaves us. It is the great difficulty on our end sometimes to harmonize why a God of love would allow some of the difficulties that are in our lives to come. And no doubt there will be some unanswered questions in all of our lives.

That is the purpose of faith. The greatest unanswered question is why would he ever give his son for us? That's the greatest unanswered question. Why would he ever set his love upon us? All other unanswered questions are lesser.

But there will be those no doubt that we bear, that we carry, because he gives us strength, because we believe.

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