

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

4. God's Presence – God's Power - God's Purposes – God's Prisoner Genesis 39:10-40:1

Last week we looked the life of one of the most important characters in the whole of the Bible — Joseph; the youngest of eleven brothers. The Holy Spirit introduces us to him at the age of 17. As a young man Joseph was caught in a hurricane of moral chaos. His 10 brothers were filled with murderous envy towards Joseph because their father had given their youngest brother pre-eminence over them, **and** because the Lord had given Joseph two dreams in which his 10 older brothers AND his father and mother were bowing before him! For that Joseph's brothers threw him into an empty cistern and were going to leave him to die there but they changed their minds when they saw they could get rid of him AND earn some money by selling Joseph to caravan.

*Genesis 37:28; 36 (ESV) ²⁸Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt...
³⁶Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.*

Our big take away from last week is that God is not absent in the moral chaos of life in a broken world.

This morning we're going to see that truth developed as we pick up the narrative of this young man's life in **Genesis 39**.

Genesis 39:1 Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt

There was much more happening here than human trafficking! In the midst of the complete moral chaos of **Genesis 37** — where all of that sin abounded — God's grace would super-abound!

God was at work in and through the injustice and suffering that Joseph endured to overwhelm and overrule evil In the face of all the things that seemed to make no sense — God was at work — arranging things for the

salvation of this family. And by preserving the descendants of Abraham He was ultimately preserving His saving plans and purposes for you and me — because God had promised that the savior of the world would come through that family.

THIS IS SO HUGE — The Gospel has a history! The Gospel is the record of what God has done. If you are saved and on your way to heaven it is because GOD DID SOMETHING! He promised to save the very world that had rejected Him — and in the pages of the Old Testament we see the relentless faithfulness of God to fulfill His promise. He was at work **in** human history to save us. He was at work in and through the history of this one small family; at work in and through the history of this one young man 1,500 years before the coming of Jesus! He was **arranging** and **overruling** the wickedness of this very real human history so He might save us. And 1,500 years after these chapters in the book of **Genesis** God Himself stepped into human history with all its chaos and brokenness to save us. He lived a sinless life and died as a sacrifice for our sins and three days later conquered the grave! The Gospel has a history! God DID something!

Here are three verses in Genesis 39 that our study will be tethered to this morning

Genesis 39:2 (ESV) **²The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master..... ²¹But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²²And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.**

The Lord was with Joseph is a single-sentence biography of Joseph. EVERYTHING about Joseph flowed out of that relationship. More to say on that in while.

The life of Joseph makes something very clear to us, and it runs right against the grain of how most church-goers think life should look like if God is with them. The life of Joseph teaches us that “God with you” does not make you immune from problems. ¹. The fact that the Lord was with Joseph did not

guarantee Joseph a life free from hatred. ² The fact that the Lord was with Joseph did not shield him from SLANDER. ³ The fact that the Lord was with Joseph did not shield him from temptation. ⁴ The fact that the Lord was with Joseph did not shield him from emotional pain and disappointment.

Jesus said, *In the world you shall have tribulation (John 16:33).*

YOU — Jesus was speaking to those closest to Him — to His followers

SHALL HAVE — That is Jesus, the truth teller in a world of lies, promising difficulty for those who love, trust and serve Him in this broken world. Yet we almost always think it strange when we face it, don't we? *"WHAT is happening?"*

1 Pet. 4:12 KJV Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

THIS IS HUGE — The DIFFERENCE between the believer and the unbeliever is this: In the midst of the TRIBULATION and FIERY TRIALS of life the believer IS NOT ALONE. The Lord is WITH the believer as He was with Joseph. And the one with us had this to say about Himself:

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Joseph was a SLAVE in a foreign land — and we are told that the Lord was WITH Him and the Lord PROSPERED him.

Genesis 39:5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field.

What a great lesson for us — We see an idol worshipping culture benefiting from the presence of God in the life of a godly individual! We see the same thing happening in the life of another godly young man — Daniel. In the Sermon on the Mount (the manifesto of the Kingdom) Jesus said that those

in His Kingdom were the *salt of the earth*. Salt adds FLAVOR and acts as a PRESERVATIVE.

Genesis 39:6- Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. ⁹He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" ¹⁰And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. ¹¹But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹²she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

There is SO much in those verses for us. For time's sake this morning we are going to focus on a few strategic slices of it.

FIRST — This moment in the life of Joseph was not a moment of weakness. This moment in the life of Joseph was a mark of great spiritual STRENGTH and COURAGE. It would have been much EASIER for Joseph to stay. It is always harder to resist temptation than to give in to it.

RESISTING temptation is a mark of true spiritual life

QUOTE — *Any dead fish can float down stream — it takes a live one to swim upstream*

In Ephesians 2 we're told that before meeting Jesus we are "*dead in trespasses and sin.*" Like dead fish — we just float along downstream with the current of the world's standards (If it feels good do it — Sex before marriage is O.K. — Adultery is O.K. — Everyone is doing it... etc.). But the moment you believe with your heart on the Lord Jesus you are **born again**. **BORN AGAIN** is not some cliché. It is the essential reality of becoming a Christian — there is a new PRINCIPLE of life that governs us!

Philippians 2:13 NLT For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

When we are “dead” in trespasses and sin we are **powerless** to please God and we have **no desire** to please God. Our lives are just little kingdoms of one and all we want is our way — our will — to be done for our kingdom and our glory. But when you believe with your heart on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us — He makes us alive to God — and connects us to the very life of God. And we begin to have new desires — we begin to desire what God desires. And, not only new desires — but the enabling of God — the very power of God — to live out those desires — to do what pleases God!

It is most definitely harder to stand with God — and stand for God — when the rest of the world isn’t.

It is most definitely harder to stand up for righteousness and purity when the rest of the world is floating along downstream in the exact opposite direction.

Joseph teaches us that in the battle against sin — and in this context, particularly sexual sin — running can be the wisest and bravest thing to do. Joseph is a real life illustration of New Testament truth.

2 Timothy 2:22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

When the pressure is on, when you’re slipping and weakening — FLEE! Get while you can still think because there comes a point in sexual temptation when you aren’t THINKING anymore — you are just FEELING. That is the point where you can't stop — don't want to stop! When you *flee youthful lusts* you are made of the same stuff as Joseph

Genesis 39:13-15 And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to

laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.” ¹⁶Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. ¹⁸But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.” ¹⁹As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. ²⁰And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. ²¹But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

So there was Joseph — Not only hated by his brothers, but Sold out by his brothers; falsely accused; thrown into what would have been the most miserable prison with an indefinite sentence.

BUT — *the Lord was with Joseph*. **That** is the story of Joseph.

I need you to hear me. **That** is the story of every true believer in Jesus. WHEN everyone else turns against you, when circumstances turn rotten, *when* everyone else fails — *THE LORD IS WITH YOU!*

Here’s what faith looks like: Faith is not *feeling* as though God is with you in every circumstance. It’s LIVING AS THOUGH God is with you despite what you feel. Faith is putting one foot in front of the other — making your decisions — ordering your thoughts — in such a way that **you demonstrate** that you truly believe that in ANY circumstance **the Lord is with you**. The Bible tells us that we are *justified by faith* in Jesus (*Romans 3:8; 5:1*) — brought into a right relationship with God by faith in Jesus. The Bible tells us that *the just shall live by faith* (*Habbakuk 2:4; Romans 1:17*). But faith doesn’t stop there. Faith is the BEGINNING of our relationship with Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus is LIVED by faith in Jesus.

Galatians 2:20 (ESV) ²⁰.... And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

AND SHOWED HIM STEADFAST LOVE

There is a CRUCIAL INSIGHT laid before us here in the life of this young man!

We think that a “mountain top experience” is the place where we experience the presence of God and the steadfast love of God. But as we read the Bible here’s what we discover: The DARKEST moments are so often the times when the Lord makes His presence known in the most radical of ways. Think of the disciples in the boat in the midst of a storm that they are sure is going to kill them. It was THERE that they discovered that the guy in the boat with them is the one who possesses absolute authority over the forces of nature! Think of Mary and Martha weeping at the tomb of their brother Lazarus. It was then that Jesus came near to them and revealed Himself as the one who possesses power over death itself.

It is in the DARKEST moments of life that Jesus is present in a way that leaves us forever changed. In the darkest moments of life we discover that His steadfast love is more than the theme of a good worship song. We discover that His love for us **really is** relentless, unfailing and never ceasing!

HERE’S THE DEAL — We will never know the strength and depth of God’s love until His love has supported us in deep waters! We will never know how DEEP God’s love and mercy is UNTIL He has lifted us up from some great depth. Here’s how Billy Graham put it.

"Mountaintops are for views and inspiration, but fruit is grown in the valleys."

Genesis 39:22-23 And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³The keeper of the prison paid no attention to

anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

DON'T MISS THIS — GOOD stuff happened in a DUNGEON **because** Joseph was there — and **because the Lord was with him** there!

We live in a world that is in the most real way a giant prison! Everyone in it is imprisoned by the power of sin and death! It is populated by men and women in bondage to the power and penalty of sin.

Jesus stepped into this world to rescue us from that bondage by dying in our place for our sins! When you place your trust in Jesus you are set free from that bondage. But God doesn't save us and immediately remove us from this penitentiary plant! He wants us to **live in it** as those set free. And He wants to be WITH US in it — because He desires to bring something of the Kingdom of Heaven into the dungeon!

He wants to be WITH US in it so that those yet living as prisoners to sin and death can meet the One who set **us** free. ***Evangelism** is telling a world full of prisoners that you used to be one too — and then tell them about the One who set you free!*

HERE'S THE DEAL — There are times that Jesus will let us end up in places that, from a human vantage point, we don't deserve to be in.

There are times that Jesus will let us end up in places we would never choose to be in. And in ALL of it — Jesus will be WITH US — even as He was with Joseph. And by way of His presence in our life — bring life and light to those we otherwise would never be near. You see, that is what moved Jesus to leave heaven and step into our world

***Matthew 4:13-14; 16** ¹³And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:.... ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."*

CHRISTIANS — LET ME ASK YOU: Are you in a place or in circumstances you don't deserve to be in? Are you in a place or in circumstances you didn't choose to be in? I pray that seeing how the Lord was with Joseph in prison will encourage you and me to see a heavenly purpose in it all and cause you and me to look at those around us!

CHAPTER 40

Genesis 40:1-3 Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. ²And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined.

These were IMPORTANT men in the kingdom of Egypt.

Genesis 40:4-7 The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.⁵And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. ⁶When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?"

I read this and think — What an **odd** question to ask men IN PRISON! Picture yourself in prison — and some guy comes to you and asks that question. *Ummm – BECAUSE I'M IN PRISON!!*

Before we go on let's just make note of how Joseph was not curled up in a corner drowning in self-pity. He was actually aware of the condition of men around him in prison who were without God!

Genesis 40:8 And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said to them,

Before we read what Joseph said — think of what he **could have** said; or what you and I might have said if we were in Joseph's sandals.

*Oh — well of course you're bummed out — You had a bad dream and you don't know what it mean! **Ya big babies** — How about you TRY MY LIFE ON FOR SIZE!!!*

He could have said

DREAMS!!! — Don't talk to me about dreams! Dreams are what got me into this mess to begin with!

And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.”

Here is a man that **could have been consumed** with SELF-pity and SELF-comfort. But he was looking at these **other** men that appeared so sad. Joseph's attitude and action was the result of RELATIONSHIP with God — NEARNESS to the heart of God. **Serving others is a matter of nearness to the heart of God**

***Philippians 2:3-5** Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,:*

Joseph had been **sold into slavery** by his own brothers; **thrown in jail** for trying to live a holy life — and yet Joseph's relationship with the Lord was CURRENT. Somehow he's prayed up! Somehow he's ready to go seek the Lord for the interpretation of these dreams — BELIEVING that God will give it.

And I do believe — that Joseph was truly struggling with the BITTER FEELINGS of his circumstances. NOT BITTER against God — but knowing the BITTERNESS of being a young man alienated from his brothers — so far away from his home and his dad.

⁹So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, ¹⁰and on the vine there were three

branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." ¹²Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. ¹³In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.

AMAZING — He says NOTHING of his lousy brothers. He doesn't bad mouth his brothers — nor does he bad mouth Potiphar's wife. In the deepest place in his heart — **he concedes** the hand of God in all of this.

¹⁶When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, ¹⁷and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head." ¹⁸And Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. ¹⁹In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you."

THANKS A LOT!

DON'T MISS THIS — He is NOT trying to please man. God has given him the truth — and he doesn't compromise the message for the hope of getting a favor.

²⁰On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. ²²But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Remember Psalm 105

Psalm 105:16-24 NLT He called for a famine on the land of Canaan, cutting off its food supply. ¹⁷ Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them -- Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

The Lord's perspective is very different than ours! **In the book of Acts** Paul the apostle was in prison in Jerusalem — and Jesus appeared to him and said, *Don't be afraid Paul – I'm SENDING you to Rome.* When we think of going to Rome on a missions trip we think jumbo jet, dinner and espresso on a sidewalk café! Paul went to Rome as a prisoner — through a hurricane — shipwrecked — bitten by a viper!

Psalm 105:18 KJV Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron:

Psalm 105:19 NLT Until the time came to fulfill his word, the LORD tested Joseph's character.

There is a BIG difference between the man who is **SHOWN** all that the Lord is going to do through him and the man who is **READY** for the Lord to do great things through him.

There was a BIG difference between the David who was anointed as the one who would be king over Israel — and the David who finally was seated on the throne as king after being persecuted and pursued by king Saul for years!

Until the time the Joseph's dreams became a reality — he was being humbled — His feet were hurt with fetters. But the truth is that **God** had **sent** him. The truth is that he was GOD'S prisoner! **Like David was** all those years hiding from Saul. **Like Moses was** for 40 years on the back side of the desert. **Like Paul was** — *Ephesians 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,*

HERE'S THE POINT — **We MUST fall back on the sovereignty of God.** The Bible is very clear on this. God's sovereignty does NOT take away our RESPONSIBILITY.

We are ALL prisoners in some sense. Prisoners of our past. Prisoners of some present difficulty.

We can do **one** of **two** things: We can blame all of the human and circumstantial agencies, or we can cast ourselves upon the Lord. We can trust HIM — Be HIS prisoner, or we can be a prisoner of man's cruelty and injustice.

LET'S CLOSE WITH THIS

Joseph was FORGOTTEN! But God sent those two guys to Joseph at just the time Joseph NEEDED to be encouraged. Even though he was forgotten by man — the very fulfillment of those two dreams assured Joseph that God had not forgotten him, and that God would indeed fulfill the dreams that were given to him as a child in Canaan.

BY THE WAY — It might have troubled Joseph that he could tell these guys what was going to happen to them in the next few days — but he had **no idea WHEN** God would fulfill the dreams concerning himself.

I want to leave you with the opening words of **Genesis 41**

Genesis 41:1 KJV And it came to pass at the end of two full years,

IMAGINE that! If I were Joseph I would have been thinking that any DAY after the butler was released that I'd be summoned out of the prison. Every time I heard the prison door creak open I would be thinking: THIS IS IT! — I'M OUT OF HERE! But the DAYS turn to WEEKS; the WEEKS to MONTHS; the MONTHS to a YEAR; a YEAR into TWO YEARS!

It is bad enough when someone who doesn't like you causes you trouble. But when you've HELPED someone — and they let you down THAT causes your head and your gut to get twisted.

THIS IS RADICAL GUYS: IF Joseph had gotten out after a day or two he would have almost certainly gone right back home. The famine would have

come and his family would have starved to death. There would be NO nation of Israel; NO tribe of Judah and NO Messiah. And we wouldn't be here this morning — and we wouldn't be on our way to heaven.

I believe that GOD caused the butler to FORGET Joseph. Think on that for a little bit!

HERE'S THE DEAL — IF you think someone you have blessed has forgotten you — you need to bare in mind the very distinct possibility that God isn't letting them remember you — for some really great Divine reason!

Maybe that person is forgetting you **because** God wants you to be alone with Him in order to learn something about Him.

God left Joseph in prison those 2 years **so that** Joseph would learn that he got out of prison — NOT because he asked a favor of an influential man — but because GOD — in HIS TIME — was going to release him from prison and raise him up as a deliverer.

Joseph might have been unhappy — but I'M GLAD — because here we are today — redeemed by the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!!

MAYBE YOU think that God has forgotten about you. You might theologically agree that God doesn't forget about anybody – but in your heart you feel like YOU are the exception!

God **is** faithful! There is **NO** human that He forgets. There are times when we surely don't know what He is doing — but he is faithful!

We had such an amazing time in our ROUTE 66 study in the book of Job. It was a game-changer! We looked at how Job didn't know what the Lord was doing. In chapter 23 Job says

I move forward — and I don't sense Him there. I move backward — and I don't sense Him there. I see His work — but I can't seem to find Him. YET

I KNOW that when I am tried I will come out like gold. He is the one who decides. No one can stop His plans.

HERE'S THE POINT — Though we might not **perceive** Him — He IS there — and He does PRESERVE us.

Man might forget you — but He CAN NOT!!

HERE'S WHAT'S SO AWESOME — He **NEVER** forgets **US** — but He has **CHOSEN** to **NEVER REMEMBER our sins!** The great difficulty on our end is to reconcile why a God of love will allow difficulties to come into our lives. There WILL BE unanswered questions in life — but **THAT** is the essence of faith.

THE great unanswered question is this: **WHY** would He ever give His Son for us? That He DID give Him is a **FACT**. The **WHY** of that is something beyond human comprehension. It is something we have to take by faith.

All other unanswered questions are lesser and subordinate to the greatest one.

Becoming a Christian means that you **trust** that God loves fallen man with a love that is unlike any love ever found in the heart of man

"Behold what other worldly kind of love the Lord has bestowed upon us that we might be called the sons of God"

Being a Christian means that you live by faith in the Son of God who loves you and gave Himself for you! **That means that you live as though** God loves YOU with a love that is unlike any love ever found in the heart of man