

Providence

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you want to keep your Bibles in front of you, that would be helpful as we walk through the text together. It's already been read to us. For those who didn't catch it before, we're in Genesis 39 and 40.

I think I'm carrying on a series that you've been doing in Genesis. What's this one, the third? Second? Third. So it doesn't matter if you haven't been to the other ones.

This will stand independently, but hopefully fit nicely into what you've been learning through Genesis. Shall we ask for the Lord's help? In this, as we come to look at his word, let's do that now. Father God, we thank you for the words of that hymn, because they remind us that you are a God who is faithful to us.

And when we look back on our lives, we can see just how faithful you've been. The fact that we're standing here today, praising your name still shows that you have preserved us through the ups and downs of life.

And we thank you that he who began a good work and as we'll bring it to completion one day. And we'll always have his hand upon us. And Lord, we thank you that we have your words to look at this evening.

[1 : 0 5] We thank you that it is living and active, Lord. I pray that you'd help us to understand the text we're going to be looking at. I pray for anyone who's feeling particularly tired on this Sunday evening. I pray you give us ears to really listen to what you have to say to us.

And I pray that as I preach, Lord, that I might do it faithfully to you. And that by your spirit, you might speak to each one of us. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So I wonder if you've ever been in a place in your life where you feel like life is just all over the place and you don't know what God is doing. If life's all over the place, you don't know what God is doing.

It might be that something difficult has happened to you. There's some sort of suffering or it might be that you've had a plan in your head and hasn't gone quite as you maybe planned out for it to happen.

It's just like life has hit you right in the face and suddenly it's like, where is God? What's going on? What's he doing? It's like that couple that you've read in the news went up Mount Everest for their honeymoon a few weeks ago and then the earthquake hit.

[2 : 0 8] And suddenly their honeymoon is not so joyous anymore as their camp is filled with snow all around them. Life just hits. Happens to us, doesn't it?

Well, imagine how Joseph felt as he shipped down the road by his brothers. Imagine that. He was daddy's favourite, wasn't he? With the coat. He had these mad dreams about him becoming great.

Life seemed good. Joseph had plans for the future. God's blessing was on his life. God was going to sort him right out going forwards. But as we find ourselves in chapter 39, all those dreams seem crushed, don't they?

I mean, Joseph is a slave in Egypt, the text says. And that would have been a pleasant experience. It's easy to skirt over the details. That would have been difficult for Joseph. I mean, he's away from his family, his place of security.

He's away from the land that God had promised to his ancestors. He's in a pagan country where they literally would worship every god under the sun. And he's a slave in a ruthless society.

[3 : 18] Life has hit him in the face. Life is all over the place for this young teenager. But the key in this text that we see throughout is that although Joseph's life is difficult here, God is with him.

Throughout this chapter, we see that although Joseph goes through very difficult circumstances, God's hand is on Joseph. Just look at verse 2.

It says there, the Lord is with Joseph and he became a successful man and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. And at the end of a chapter, it says, but the Lord was with Joseph and showed his steadfast love and gave him favor.

That's verse 21. So even though Joseph is a slave and then later on he's in prison, the God of the Bible is with him. And the word here for the Lord is the word Yahweh.

Which is his personal name with which he reveals himself to his people. It's his covenant-keeping name. And it's interesting, as you read through Genesis, the word Yahweh hasn't been used for the last 10 chapters.

[4 : 30] Hasn't been used. It's only when he gets down to Egypt in this godless society as a slave that again Yahweh has used this word, his covenant-keeping name.

What does this show us? This shows us that the God of the Bible is with his people in the most difficult and godless situations. When people's lives are all over the place and things are all at sea, God is with his people.

And this is the kind of language that is used throughout the Old Testament and the New. Even just before in Genesis, in Genesis chapter 26, verse 24, God says to Isaac this, I am the God of Abraham, your father.

Fear not, for I am with you. Fear not, for I am with you. A bit later on to his father, Jacob, he says this, Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land for I will not leave until I have done what I have promised you.

That was 28.15 if you're taking notes. And so no matter what we go through in life, in the ups and downs, the lefts and rights, God is with his people. He never leaves them nor does he forsake them.

[5 : 46] And while Joseph is at Potiphar's house as a slave, God's hand is upon him as we see in the text. And it says that he rises through the ranks. God is with him and so he allows his child to prosper.

The text says that Joseph found favor in Potiphar's sight and he made him overseer of the house. He trusted Joseph with everything. Just look at verses 5 and 6. From that time that he made him overseer in the 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. So Potiphar, he left all that he had in Joseph's charge. And because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

That's big, that's amazing, isn't it? He's a slave and he's a foreigner and yet because God's hand is upon him he is put in charge of this house.

How did Potiphar see that God's hand was on him anyway? Well one, Joseph must have been sharing his religious convictions with Potiphar. He must have been telling him about Yahweh and how he'd been leading his people and the promises that he had kept.

[7 : 02] But two, Joseph as we see throughout these chapters is a man of integrity. As we see later on he's a man who is faithful. He's a man who is trustworthy. He's a man who doesn't cut corners.

He works hard for his boss. And if you think again about the circumstances this is an amazing reaction from Joseph, isn't it? I mean, rather than getting bitter, rather than getting depressed with his new surroundings which would have been difficult for him as we've seen, what does Joseph do?

He gets on with the job. He doesn't moan. He doesn't complain. He doesn't sulk. Throughout the next two chapters we see that despite what is thrown at Joseph he's faithful to his God.

That's a challenge to us this evening, isn't it? Because often when things don't go our way we go off in a little huff, don't we? We act like toddlers. We get impatient. We get angry.

We sulk. We get frustrated with God. Oh, it hasn't worked out as I wanted it to. But Joseph shows us what to do in difficult circumstances, does he not? Stay faithful to God.

[8 : 11] Maybe you're in a situation this evening where things haven't worked out as you planned for whatever reason. Maybe you're going through a difficult time in your life as we do.

The key is not to sulk and get bitter with our circumstances but to stay faithful to God. To get on with what God has called us to because he's with us even if it's difficult.

Anyway, things are going well for Joseph and part of his house. He's risen through the ranks and God's hand is upon him but as we see throughout the Bible whenever there's times of prosperity the devil is lurking in the background, isn't he?

He's always trying to tempt and destroy the people of God. It's been like that since the garden and Joseph is no different. The text says that Joseph was a bit of a good looking guy. Look at verse 6b.

The scene shifts slightly, doesn't it? Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. Apparently he was a bit of a Brad Pitt. A few girls like Brad Pitt, I don't know. Good jawline, nice abs.

[9 : 15] Good looking guy. Stephen knows what I'm talking about. Apopha's wife takes a bit of a shine to the young lads. In fact, she is full of lust for him and she ain't shy about it.

The text says that day after day after day she gets him to try and lie in bed with him. Now think about it. The circumstances that we just built up in our heads.

You're Joseph. You're a young man. You're full of testosterone. You're away from home. You're in a foreign land and you have a beautiful lady offering you sex.

What would you do, lads, if you're honest with yourself? Most men would jump straight into bed with her. That's a major bit of temptation that Joseph's facing.

And it would have been easy for him to justify it in his head, wouldn't it? Just a quick one. No harm done. I deserve this little bit of joy after all the difficult things I've been going through.

[10 : 18] I mean, I'm a slave. Or maybe this will help me get ahead even more and fulfill God's plan. It would have been easy for him to justify it in his head. But how does Joseph react?

He's a man of integrity. He's a man of purity. Look at verses 8 and 10. But he refused. He refused. He 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.

He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her to lie beside her or to be with her.

He says, basically, I can't sleep with you because it will dishonor your husband and my master and more importantly, it will dishonor the Lord. God's. He knows that God is with him and he knows that this is a great wickedness.

Reminds us of Psalm 51, isn't it? After David sinned against Bathsheba and he said, only against you. Against you only have I sinned. That's his main thing.

[11 : 31] That's his main drive in life. He wants to honor the Lord. He wants to stay faithful to him as we've seen. And how different is his reaction to us? He says, this is really a great wickedness against you, the Lord.

Often when we want to sin, what do we do? We sweep the seriousness of the sin under the carpet. Push it to the sides. Speak to ourselves, well this sin, it's not that bad.

God won't mind that much if I do this or that. What harm am I doing anyway? I deserve it. But Joseph knows the Bible.

Joseph knows that God is a God of holiness and that he takes sin very, very seriously and so he says no. The thing is with Joseph that I admire, he doesn't just say no once, but day after day she's after him and he says no again and again and again and again and again.

And on that final encounter when she actually pulls his cloak, he runs from her. Reminds us of the New Testament where Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 18, flee. Flee from sexual immorality.

[12 : 45] In other words, run away from sin. That's what we've been called to do as Christians. The problem with us sometimes as Christians is this, we don't run away from sin, we run straight into it.

Sometimes when our hearts going off away from the Lord, we look for it, don't we? We don't guard against sin. In fact, we dishonor the Lord. But if we're going to be people of integrity, we're going to be people who follow like Joseph, then we need to run from temptation, not straight into it.

We need to know the seriousness of sin, the great wickedness that it is against the Lord. Don't sweep under a carpet. Remember that God is the holy, holy, holy God and creator who has called us to holiness as well.

We need to know that our sin leads and has difficult and bad consequences in our lives. It leads to death. A famous guy called John Owen writes this, Do you mortify?

Prosh word for do you kill sin? Do you make it your daily work? Be always at it while you live. Cease not a day from this work. Be killing sin or it will be killing you.

[14 : 00] Be killing sin or it will be killing you. You see, the Bible says run. The Bible says flee. The Bible says kill sin. The Bible says don't play with it.

Don't play with it. Don't be like a dog that constantly returns to its vomit. As the proverb writer says, kill sin or it will literally kill us spiritually.

And it's interesting that as you look at Joseph here in verse 10 that it's the opposite of Adam and Eve in the garden. So in the garden, what does Satan do? He tempts. Then with the one thing they're not allowed.

They've got everything that they could want and need. But God says one thing. Don't eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. What do they do? They disappear with that one thing.

But here, Joseph has been given all things by his master as he says in verse 9. Except that one thing, his wife. And what does he do? He rejects it. He's a man of integrity and he has the honour of the Lord at the forefront of his mind.

[15 : 07] And in his actions, he points forward to the Lord Jesus, doesn't he? Hebrews 4.15 says this, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet is without sin.

I mean, Joseph is faithful to God in this moment. And God uses him to complete his plan of salvation for his people, doesn't he? You know that from a couple of chapters later on.

What did the Lord Jesus do? He resisted temptation against temptation against temptation. He was without sin and he was able to buy our salvation. Joseph points to the better and greater Joseph which is Jesus.

Let me challenge you this evening. Maybe you've been dabbling with sin a little bit in your life. Maybe you're bitter with your circumstances and you've been justifying your little sins. Maybe you haven't been taking sin seriously in your life.

Maybe you've been running to sin and not away from it. Well, the call here is follow Joseph and receive life. Follow Joseph and run away from sin. Leave it behind.

[16 : 18] Leave it behind. Because if you live a half-hearted Christian life, it leads to misery. That's all it leads to. When we walk with the Lord of integrity of heart, we are blessed and we receive great joy.

And know that if you are in sin this evening, that there is great hope for each one of us. And that's through Jesus Christ, isn't it? Because when we run away from sin, we can run into his arms and receive mercy and find grace for our time of need, as the writer of the Hebrews later says.

So what does Joseph get for his troubles of rejecting the temptation? Does he get a nice pat on the back? A little hug from his wife? No, he gets prisoned for his troubles. Pot of his wife, angry at the rejection, she calls rape.

She tells the guards and tells Potiphar himself. She plays on the fact that Joseph is a foreigner. Potiphar is obviously outraged and so he throws Joseph in prison.

Sometimes the reward for a godly life leads to what? Persecution. Look to that. This morning in Nidri, Matthew 5, 8, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[17 : 27] When we stand up for the truth, don't always expect a pat on the back for your troubles, but expect persecution and opposition. People will revile and reject and slander and throw us into prison for our faith in Jesus Christ.

And that's what's happened to Joseph. Man, this is a rollercoaster for him, isn't it? This is a rollercoaster for Joseph. He's in slavery, doesn't know what's going on, but then he rises through the ranks, God's hand is upon him and now he's back at the bottom of the pile again in such a brief amount of time.

In fact, he's even in a worse scenario than he was when he began. I mean, prison would not have been a nice place back in the day in Egypt. It's not like it is in the UK if you've ever visited a prison full of TVs, running hot water, three square meals a day, even if the meals were not that nice.

But this prison would have been dank, this prison would have been dark and full of hunger. Just flick ahead to Psalm 105, gives us a little insight into what Joseph must have been feeling as a psalmist commentates on his life.

Psalm 105, 18 says this, his feet were hurt with fetters, talking about Joseph, his neck was put in a collar of iron.

[18 : 43] That wasn't a hotel he was in when he was in prison. Literally, he was chained by the neck and his feet. And the question is, again, as you're walking through the text and you're walking through Joseph's life, is what is God doing?

How can this man be blessed by God after he had all those dreams? It seems like Joseph is a million miles away from fulfilling the dreams that God gave him all those years ago. It feels like God is not there.

Where is he? Again, as we walk through the text and we walk through Joseph's life, it says in verse 21 again, but the Lord was with Joseph. You see, this is all part of God's plan.

You see, God is going to use this situation as we find out in chapter 40 for Joseph to interpret the dreams of the cupbearer and baker. And the cupbearer will get reinstated at Pharaoh's palace. And when Pharaoh gets dreams later on, the cupbearer will recommend that Joseph interprets them.

And then Joseph is going to interpret the dreams and be made a powerful figure. And his brothers will come along and he will feed them and he will save his family. You see, right now, he doesn't know what God is doing, but when you read a couple of chapters down the line, you know what God is doing.

[19 : 56] God hasn't abandoned his servant Joseph even though he's in prison. God is sovereign and God is working behind the scenes. The question is, as I was thinking through this, why does Joseph have to go through these dark times to get there though?

Why couldn't just God on his bing, bing, bang thing and just got him straight to Pharaoh instead of going through the prison stuff? Well, God is preparing Joseph for the future. God is going to use these circumstances to refine his character back to Psalm 105 briefly.

The psalmist gives us a bit more insight in verse 18 and 19. He says, his feet were hurt with fetters, his neck was put in a collar of iron until what he had said had said come to pass.

The word of the Lord tested him. It's interesting, isn't it? His feet were hurt, he was in collar of iron until what he had said come to pass. The word of the Lord tested him.

You see, God was preparing Joseph for the future through this time of suffering. He was refining his character. I mean, remember, although Joseph was a man of integrity in Pharaoh's life, sorry, in Potiphar's, he was a man of integrity in Potiphar's house.

[21 : 13] Remember that Joseph was cocky. Remember that Joseph was an arrogant young man as we see earlier in Genesis. That's what got sort of into slavery in the first place.

His brothers didn't like his attitude. Yes, they were jealous of him but he didn't help things, did he? And so God wanted to humble him, God wanted to test him and God wanted to change him so he was ready for the future.

That's the same for us today, isn't it? God always uses suffering to humble us and to make us more like Christ. We get this image in 1 Peter 1 verses 6 and 7 where Peter writes this, In this you rejoice, though now for a little while if necessary you've been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, during times of suffering, God refines us like gold. If you know anything about the process of refining gold, it goes like this, they get the gold, they put it in a special pot called a crucible and they heat it up to a very hot temperature and what happens is that the heat melts everything but it brings the impurities to the top and the goldsmith can wipe away what's called the dross, the impurities at the top.

They let it cool down and they do it again, they heat it up to a higher temperature and the dross comes and they wipe it away. And they keep on doing it until the goldsmith can see his face in the actual gold until it's nice and shiny like it has in your rings and your jewellery.

[23 : 07] That's what happens to us, isn't it? It's the heat that gets the impurities out and it's the heat of suffering that humbles us and changes us. What does it do?

It helps us to cling to Christ more clearly. It helps us to not be proud. It shows us our sinful hearts. It changes us, doesn't it, those times of difficulty as the Lord walks with us.

Now let me be clear, I don't want to be trite about people's sufferings this evening. Some of us may be going through very, very difficult times. But in all things we need to know that God is in control and that he's working for our good and his glory.

He is our heavenly Father. Remember, he's our heavenly Father who wants good for us. He's not a cruel God. He's not a distant God. He's a God who is good.

He's a God who is loving. He's a God who is wise. And he knows what he's doing in every season of our lives. And the question for us this evening is this, will we be like Joseph who trusts the Lord through these difficult times and is refined in his character?

[24 : 17] Or will we grow bitter with the circumstances that we face in life? You see, Joseph is an example again of what we do when we go through suffering. We get bitter with his surroundings but he stayed faithful.

He trusted in the Lord and his timing. I mean, he was in prison for a long time and I want us to understand that. Even after he interpreted his fellow prisoners' dreams he had to wait another two years until he got out.

Two years in prison, can you imagine that? I struggle with one day of suffering yet alone two years in prison. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him, it says in chapter 40, after he helped him out.

What did he do? Did he remember him? Look at verse 23 of chapter 40. Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph but he forgot him.

He forgot him. And yet Joseph knew that although everyone else had abandoned him, the Lord had not. He knew from his father Jacob that God does not leave his people.

[25 : 23] He knew that God was a God who is faithful to his people. And when we go through times of suffering, we need to know that as well, don't we?

You see, as Christians, we need to know that God works on a bigger canvas. In a bigger canvas that is way bigger than our lives.

You see, when we suffer, we can only see the small ground level, can't we? But God, God can see into eternity. It's a little bit like going on a journey by a boat.

You're sailing along on the waters and a fog hits you. And you can't see the way forward. That's what it's like during suffering, isn't it? We cannot see what's going on. We don't know what's happening.

We don't know where God is. We can't understand the suffering we're facing and how God could be working. Life seems all over the place. But the thing is, if you're flying on a plane above the fog, then you can see exactly where you're going.

[26 : 25] And that's like God. He knows the future and so we can trust our lives into his hands no matter what the circumstances are. And when we trust in God's total sovereign care, we find comfort in the middle of life's difficulties.

I hope to say it's easy. It never is. We always have to battle to get there. We have to know that God is in control and totally trustworthy.

We have to know that God is a God who never leaves his people nor forsakes his people. We don't know what the future holds, do we? But we know who holds the future.

And God is totally dependable, utterly trustworthy, perfectly good and totally in control over all things. When we get to the end of our lives and we look back on our life, we will see God's hand on every moment.

Guaranteed. Do you know where we can look when we're doubting these things? When we're doubting God's goodness and his wisdom and his sovereignty?

[27 : 36] When we feel that life is all over the place and God is no longer with us? All we have to do is look up at the cross. All we have to do is look at Jesus Christ.

You see, Jesus was in the darkest place in history as he hung on the cross. He was abandoned by his friends, he had all the dark forces of the world unleashed against him and as he hung there he shouted, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He was at death's doors. He was in the darkest place. Even God had turned his back on him. But the good news is that he was forsaken so that no matter how we feel about our relationship with God or the circumstances we're going through we can know that we never, ever, ever will be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen? Let's finish by just reading Romans 8 together. Romans 8, verse 34.

It's a brilliant truth in this passage. Romans 8, verse 34. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that, who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us?

[28 : 58] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword, as it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Now in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor heights nor depth nor anything else nor creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sometimes life does not make sense. Sometimes our heads are battered. Sometimes we feel all over the place. But in those times of suffering we must come back to the cross and remember Jesus.

He is our hope in the day of trouble because He was forsaken so that we will never be forsaken again. Life is difficult but the cross proves that, this, that God is always with His people.

Amen? Shall we pray together? Lord God, we know that there's many troubles in life that we face.

[30 : 15] many difficulties, many ups and downs. Thank you that you are the God who is always with His people. We see this in the life of Joseph as you walk beside him and lead him through slavery and prison.

Lord, I pray for anyone who's maybe going through a difficult time at the moment for whatever reason, maybe there's small things going on, maybe there's big things, feeling confused about the future, Lord.

I pray that they would know that you are with them this evening, you are leading and guiding them. I pray for those who might be going through suffering, Lord, that although it's difficult that you might continue to refine people's characters.

I pray for those maybe who are having a good time at the moment, maybe feel full of joy, don't feel any of this suffering or difficulty. I pray when suffering comes that they might be like Joseph and trust in you.

Thank you for the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ that reminds us that he was forsaken so that we might not be forsaken again. Help us to trust in Christ. Always remember that he is good and loving and wise.

[31 : 22] We are his children and he never puts us through anything unnecessary. Lord, we need your help because we can't do this by ourselves, so send your spirit to lead and guide us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.