

The LORD is with His Servant-Part1

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- [0 : 0 0] Gracious Father, we do thank you again for this Mother's Day and for those mothers out there, particularly for those we ask that you be with those who have suffered the loss of their mothers.
- And this morning we pray for us all as we approach your word. Give us minds to understand it, but more than that, hearts that would seek to live in light of it.
- We ask all in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's taken a whole week, but she finally got there yesterday afternoon.
- What am I talking about? I'm talking about my daughter cleaning her room. You see, I have two girls, and as you can see on the next slide, they're very different.
- And one in particular struggles at keeping her room tidy. This is an old photo, and I won't say which one is which. But for one, cleaning and keeping her room tidy is really hard.
- [1 : 0 2] In fact, she said to us one time when we asked her to clean her room, why do you put me through this suffering? That's what she regards it as. In the end, what helped her to get through her suffering was having her mother with her to help her until she finally got there yesterday afternoon.
- I'm not sure how long it'll last. But today, as we return to Joseph, we see that God is with him in his suffering, which was much worse than my daughter's.
- But before we get there, let me just give a brief recap and big picture. You see, you'll remember how God gave Joseph two dreams. Vijay rightly pointed out that this marked Joseph out as God's servant, the one who had a special role to play in God's plan.
- Though I don't think the 17-year-old Joseph was quite the golden boy, my esteemed colleague suggested. After all, we're told in Genesis 37 that he brought a bad or evil report.
- And the word for report in Hebrew is always used of a false report. Plus, when he saw his brothers, how they reacted to his first dream, what does Joseph then do?
- [2 : 2 5] Well, he goes ahead and tells them the second dream. And so at the very least, Joseph is naive. But I suspect his father's favoritism has gone to his head.
- But either way, he certainly didn't deserve to be sold as a slave, did he? And yet this was all part of God's sovereign plan to bring good from evil.
- And the good God had in mind were those promises he made to Abraham back in Genesis 12. I know it's been a long time since we looked at Genesis 12. We're still in the same book. But on the next slide, I summarized those promises as lob, land, offspring and blessing.
- And the blessing particularly would undo the cursing that sin brought in our world. In fact, this blessing would also extend to all the families of the earth.
- And so on the next slide is Genesis 12.3, which talks about how God would bring through Abraham blessing for all the families of the earth.

[3 : 30] And so the account of Jacob is all about God's sovereign work, particularly through one man, Joseph, to bring blessing to bring good despite evil, despite chapter 37, Jacob's dysfunctional family, or chapter 38, despite Judah's sin, or today's chapter, despite Joseph's suffering.

In fact, today's chapter and next week's follow a similar structure. So on the next slide, you can see that both accounts, whether Potiphar's house or the jailer's prison, both begin with God being with Joseph, which leads him to prospering.

And then there's some incident, whether temptation or dreams. And then both accounts end on a downer with unjust suffering. And as we'll see this week, both accounts, sorry, as we'll see next week, both accounts are about preparing Joseph to bring that blessing of God to families of the earth.

So that's the big picture of how these chapters hang together. But they start with a reminder of God's suffering servant. So we're at point one on the outlines and verse one in the Bible, your Bible.

Have a look there. It says, Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, brought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

[5 : 05] Now, as Vijay rightly pointed out last week, this verse picks up where we left off in chapter 37. And you notice how we're told twice that Joseph is taken down or taken.

He's not there by his own free will. And he's bought as a slave. Joseph has suffered the loss of his freedom. And while we may sometimes feel like that, you know, being told when we can and can't leave our house, it's nothing compared to Joseph.

And yet he's not alone. Have a look at verse two. Verse two.

Did you notice twice we're told that the Lord was with Joseph? This was the reason for his success. It wasn't Joseph on his own. No, it was God who placed him in Potiphar's house and who prospered him there.

But this prosperity was not just for Joseph. For we're now also told twice that God brought blessing to this house because of Joseph.

[6 : 37] And look at verse five. From the time he put Joseph in charge of his household and all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.

The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care with Joseph in charge.

He did not concern himself with anything except the food that he ate. Potiphar obviously recognizes a good investment when he sees one. For he recognizes God is with Joseph.

And so he puts him in charge of his whole house. And so all he has to worry about now is what he might eat. I might have some Egyptian eggs and bacon today. Or actually, I think Egyptians, kofta or kebabs.

In fact, on the top 10 Egyptian dishes today is Alexandrian liver and sausages. Didn't know if you knew that. But more to the point, we get a glimpse here of God's promise to Abraham, don't we?

[7 : 45] For here is God's blessing coming to one family of the earth. And notice verse 5, it comes because of or through Joseph, one of Abraham's descendants.

God is with his servant to bring blessing to others, you see. But notice verse 6 ends with a comment about Joseph's looks.

It seems Joseph has inherited his mother Rachel's good looks. Now, while there's nothing wrong with Joseph's good looks or even looking after ourselves, I think it's meant to be an ominous note.

Because in the Bible, God says on the next slide that people look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

And it's true, isn't it? I mean, how obsessed is humanity with how we look? Whether it's diets or clothes or spending time in the mirror and so on or whatever it is, compared to caring about what God thinks.

[8 : 55] How much time do we spend on our looks compared to our hearts before God? And so whenever the Bible mentions a person's good looks, it often leads to trouble, just like it does here.

For it leads Potiphar's wife to lust and Joseph to be tempted. And so the next part of the outline and have a look at verse 7.

Verse 7 should actually start with a new sentence and paragraph. And we read, Here, Potiphar's wife lusts after Joseph, doesn't she?

And Joseph is tempted to sin with her. After all, he is a slave and this is the boss's wife. And so in verse 7, when she issues a direct command, Come to bed with me, he would have no doubt felt the pressure, the temptation to sin.

And what's more, in verse 10, And she persistently tempts him by speaking to him day after day, no doubt trying to allure him. And while we're not told, I think it's reasonable to assume that she was beautiful too.

[10 : 58] After all, we are told that Potiphar is the captain of Pharaoh's guard. He's a man of power. And in our world, men of power, not always, but often, go for women of outward beauty more than inward integrity.

Either way, Joseph was tempted to sin. But unlike his brother Judah, whom we saw last week, slept with his door-in-law, who he thought was a prostitute, Joseph, verse 10, refuses.

He resisted. Why? Well, first, because he did not want to betray his earthly master. This is the only time Joseph speaks in the whole chapter.

And as he does, he speaks about being entrusted with everything and that she is Potiphar's wife. In fact, she is called wife three times here to underline the point.

So to sleep with her would be to betray his earthly master. But secondly, and more importantly, Joseph does not want to betray his heavenly master, God.

[12 : 09] At the end of verse nine, he says, how can he do this wicked thing and sin against, not Potiphar, it says, but God. You see, it seems Joseph is conscious of God being with him and it helps him to resist.

He is conscious. God is not only with him, but therefore, if he, because he is with him to sin in front of God, would be to sin against him.

After all, if Potiphar could see that God was with Joseph back in verse three, then surely Joseph can see it too. And so he's conscious of who his sin really offends.

God, who is with him. And I wonder if we sometimes forget that. Yeah, especially with the so-called little sins, you know, an exaggeration of the truth here, a selfish act there.

It doesn't cause anyone any real harm. Forgetting it's not just people, our sin offends, it's God. Or we make sure we don't sin in front of other people, but then we happily sin by ourselves, forgetting that God is still with us and it's before him.

[13 : 23] But if we were more conscious of God with us, it would help us, I think, to resist temptation, as Joseph does here. And notice how he resists.

In verse 10, did you notice he refuses not only to go to bed with her, but even to be in the same room with her. He doesn't put himself, in other words, in compromising situations, which make the temptation worse.

That's wise advice, is it not? And when he suddenly finds himself in a compromising situation, he flees. Have a look at verse 11. One day, he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.

She caught him by his cloak and said, come to bed with me. But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. It seems as soon as she comes in the room, he's trying to avoid her, but she comes in the room, Joseph starts to leave, and she grabs his cloak, or probably shirt.

And instead of trying to get it back, Joseph just gets out of there, doesn't he? He flees. Which again is wise advice. But the point here is that knowing God is with him, it helps him to resist temptation, to refuse to sin.

[14 : 47] And yet, despite doing the right thing, he still ends up suffering, which is the last part of the chapter. Have a look at verse 13. And as I read 13 to 20, look at how much the wife talks compared to Joseph.

Verse 13, when she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand, and had run out of the house, she called her household servants, look, she said to them, this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us.

He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me, and ran out of the house. She kept his cloak beside her until her master came home.

Then she told him this story, that Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me, and ran out of the house.

When his master heard the story, his wife told him saying, this is how your slave treated me. He burned with anger. Joseph's master took him, and put him in prison.

[15 : 50] The place where the king's prisoners were confined. Joseph goes from prosperity to prison, doesn't he? All because of this wife's lies.

They say, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, or a man for that manner. And yet Joseph was just doing what was right, wasn't he? Here is unjust suffering.

And notice twice, he's described in a derogatory way as well, that Hebrew, you know how sometimes people say, those Christians. Yet he remains silent, doesn't he?

In fact, his silence is highlighted by her lack of silence. You notice how often she speaks. Three times we're told she screams, or literally lifts up her voice.

Three times we have to hear her words, with a verse 14 and 15, or 17 and 18, or then again in 19. Yet, Joseph remains silent.

[16 : 55] Now, as a slave in the face of a furious master, Joseph was unlikely given any chance to speak. And yet, even as he's dragged off, he doesn't kind of call out threats, or say any complaints, does he?

Instead, it seems knowing God is with him, he went without a word, entrusting himself to God, who judges justly. And the scene in Potiphar's house ends.

The last bit of chapter 39 really belongs to the next scene in prison, and we'll come back to that next week. So, what's the point of this scene? Point two on the outline. Well, I think it's to show us what it means to be the Lord's chosen servant.

It means God will be with him to bring blessing to others. It means he will resist temptation conscious of God. And it means he will suffer unjustly, trusting in God.

But as good as a servant as Joseph is here, we know he's not the greatest servant of God, is he? Muhammad Ali made that famous statement, I am the greatest.

[18 : 08] It's quite well known. But apparently one time he was catching a flight somewhere. He ignored all the requests to fasten his seatbelt, saying to one flight attendant, Superman don't need no seatbelt.

And quick as a flash, the flight attendant responded, well, Superman don't need no plane. Buckle up. He might've thought he was greatest Superman, but he wasn't, was he?

Well, so too with Joseph. Rather, Joseph points us to the one who is Jesus. For God was with Jesus perfectly, as it says on the next slide there.

After all, Jesus is God. And Jesus resisted temptation completely. He never sinned. And Jesus suffered unjustly, for he was crucified for our sin.

The innocent and righteous one for us, the guilty and unrighteous ones. And Jesus did this willingly, that through his death, God might bless us fully.

[19 : 19] Not just one family of the earth, but all families of the earth. All who believe in him. How? Is it with material prosperity, like Potiphar got?

Well, no, it's better. This is, by the way, why we need to go to Jesus, but before we apply the Old Testament to ourselves. Otherwise, we might think it's material prosperity.

I learned this when I was at uni, actually, on the next slide. It's like an hourglass. You've got Israel and the Old Testament at the top. God starts with those people, but then they come down to the one faithful Israelite, Jesus.

And then it comes out to the new people of God, the new Israel, which is us in the New Testament. We've got to go through that middle bit of the hourglass, through the cross, and to rightly apply the Old Testament to us.

For Jesus fulfills the Old Testament, which means it sometimes changes its application for us. And so when we do look at the New Testament through the cross, we read on the next slide from Galatians, Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, announce the gospel in advance to Abraham, that all nations will be blessed by being justified through Abraham.

[20 : 44] In fact, it says Christ redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

And the blessing here is to be justified by faith. It's to be made right with God by believing in Jesus, instead of having to earn our way into God's good books.

This is the blessing God gave Abraham when Abraham believed. This is the blessing God gives us when we believe, to be right with him.

And it comes through Abraham's descendant, Jesus, because he's the one who redeems us, pays for our sins. Our problem, of course, is we sometimes prefer material prosperity like Potiphar got.

Well, I think I might have a bit of that rather than being made right with God. But being made right with God is worth so much more, for it comes with life eternal.

[21 : 49] Bill Gates, with all his billions, still cannot buy that. And this life eternal means we have every spiritual blessing now, with every physical blessing to come later, like a new body in a virus-free world.

If we have faith or belief in Jesus, and so do you. Do you believe? And for us who do, notice at the end of that verse again, if we just go back to the Galatians slide, it says that we also receive the promise of the Spirit.

So that like Joseph, God is with us too. You see, by believing in Christ, God's capital S servant, we become God's little S servants too, such that he is with us.

And that has three points of application for us from this passage. It means, firstly, that God is with us to bring blessing to others too. And so we see that on the next part of the slide.

The blessing of being right with God, it means we can offer this blessing to others, so that we might be able to give them a certain hope in a world where it's so uncertain, isn't it?

[23 : 17] We can do this in various ways. I know of a grandmother at our church who keeps praying, keeps being in contact with her non-Christian grandchildren, just phoning them every so often to try and keep the relationship going.

And when bad things come up, she'll say, look, can I pray for you about that? And she's doing that because she loves them, but also because she's hoping to have an opportunity to share with them the good news of Jesus.

She wants to bring God's blessing to others, you see. Or I know of someone else who goes for rides with their non-Christian friend, which given this lockdown, their friend is keen to do even more these days.

And so they go for rides, not only to keep the friendship up, and because this guy from our church cares about his friend, but also that he might have opportunities to share Jesus with him, that he might be able to bring this blessing to others.

It's not easy to do this sort of thing, but God is with us. As Jesus says on the next slide from Matthew 28, he says, go make disciples. And do you remember what he says at the end?

[24 : 26] Surely I am with you always. For the Lord's servant has God's with them to bring blessing to others. Second point of application is the Lord's servant is to resist temptation, conscious of God.

When tempted by Potiphar, Joseph said, how can I sin against God? He was conscious of God. And when Jesus was tempted in the garden, he said, not my will, but yours be done.

And when Joseph saw a way out, he fled. Well, so too should we. Paul puts it like this on the next slide. He says, flee from sexual immorality.

All other sins, a person commits outside the body. But then he goes on to say, do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you?

God is with us. You see, you are not your own. You are bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies. And he goes a bit to say a bit further on in 1 Corinthians, that God is faithful.

[25 : 35] He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can flee and endure temptation.

I don't know what sort of temptations you face, but I do know we all face them. And I do know we sometimes feel some temptations more strongly than other people might feel them.

And I suspect at the moment under lockdown, the temptations might be slightly different. For example, at the moment, many people have more time to watch stuff on TV or the internet or to read certain things.

But as you do, be conscious that God is with you. So don't put yourself in compromising situations. If your temptation is to lust and sin with your eyes, then don't watch those TV shows on Netflix or whatever that have sex scenes in them.

If your temptation is to fantasize about your perfect man, your Mr. Darcy, such that your bits become bitter about your lot in life, then don't read those books that tempt you to fantasize.

[26 : 45] Or if your temptation is to envy rather than be content with your material possessions, the home you'll have, then don't read those magazines, those Better Homes and Gardens magazines that tempt you to envy.

Or if your temptation is to drink too much alcohol, then don't drink at all. If we struggle with certain temptations, then like Joseph, don't put yourself in those compromising situations.

If we get caught in one without realizing it, then remember God always offers a way out. It's usually called the off button. And take it, flee. For the Lord's servant resists temptation conscious of God.

And when we do fail, then remember God is gracious and loves to forgive. And let that grace motivate us to keep resisting temptation.

And thirdly, as the Lord's servant, we are to bear unjust suffering, trusting God. As we heard in our second reading on the next slide, that it is commendable if someone bears up under pain of unjust suffering, because they are conscious of God.

[27 : 59] And Peter goes on to say, you were called to this because Christ gave us an example to follow. When he suffered, he didn't make any threats, but he entrusted himself to God who judges justly.

I mentioned this morning, a magazine called Barnabas Fund, which seeks to support persecuted Christians around the world. And a few weeks ago on the 19th of April, they tell of more Christians being killed in Nigeria by Fulani militants, at this time in a village, which is on the next slide.

And then the next slide is a picture of the villagers who were gathering for the funerals of the four who were killed. And then the leader of the village said this on the next slide.

He says, we are not the only farmers here. Muslims also own farms in villages near us. Why do they not also take over the farms of their fellow Muslims?

This is more than grazing land or farmers and herders fighting over land. This is specifically targeting Christians. There is unjust suffering out there, isn't there?

[29 : 09] And for us closer to home, it's much more subtle. It comes more in the form of restrictions, really, which are only likely to increase, I suspect. Like we are no longer allowed to teach CRE in the school timetable, despite Christians starting education here in Australia.

We're no longer to express our views publicly because that is labeled bigotry. Tolerance used to be disagreeing with each other's views, but still respecting one another.

Now tolerances agree or shut up. And what's more, while people are rightly condemned on social media and in court for demeaning other religious groups like Muslims, whom we should love, apparently it's okay to demean Christians.

There's this double standard. To say, like Potiphar's wife said, that Hebrew, people say, you're those Christians. Yet when this happens, we're not to worry, nor retaliate, but to lovingly bear up under it, entrusting ourselves to God who judges justly.

For that's what God's capital S servant did, Jesus. God was with him to bring blessing to others, to resist temptation conscious of God, and to bear unjust suffering trusting God.

[30 : 30] May we have Christ's mind and follow in Christ's footsteps. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning of your servant, whom Joseph points us to, the Lord Jesus.

We thank you that you were with him to bring us blessing, the blessing of being right with you. Help us to do that too. I thank you for the way that he resisted temptation perfectly.

Help us, we pray, to resist temptation as well. And thank you that he bore up under unjust suffering completely. Help us, we pray, to do that as well.

Conscious of you who blesses us through the Lord Jesus Christ. This we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. You