

The LORD is with His Servant-Part1

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[0 : 00] Well, as Vijay said, we're continuing our series through the book of Genesis, and today we're up to chapter 39. And it's taken a whole week, but finally, yesterday afternoon, she got there.

Who am I talking about? I'm talking about my daughter and cleaning her room. It was a big struggle, but she got there yesterday afternoon. I have two girls, as many of you know, and an old photo will show you on the next slide the difference between the two.

One is happily neat and one is, well, happily messy, I guess. She struggles to clean and keep her room tidy. In fact, when we've asked her to clean her room before, she says, why do you put me through this suffering?

For her, it's real suffering. But with the help of her mother, having her mother with her, helped her to keep her room tidy and get there finally yesterday.

I'm not sure how long it'll last. But today we return to Joseph, and as we do, we'll see that God is also with him in his suffering, which is much more than keeping a room tidy.

[1 : 13] And God being with him will help him through this. But before we get there, let me just give a brief recap and big picture of where we're at.

You remember that God gave Joseph two dreams. Vijay rightly pointed out that this marked Joseph out as God's chosen servant.

He had a special role to play, which is why the narrative about Jacob's family focuses on Joseph. Though I don't think the 17-year-old Joseph was quite the golden boy, my esteemed colleagues suggested.

After all, we're told in chapter 37 that he brought a bad or evil report about his brothers. And the Hebrew word for report is always used of a false report.

So it seems like he actually lied about his brothers. And when he told the brothers his first dream and saw how they reacted, what does he do? Well, he immediately tells them the second dream.

[2 : 12] So he's at the very least naive, I think, and perhaps because of his father's favoritism, a little bit arrogant. But either way, he certainly didn't deserve to be sold as a slave.

Yet this is all part of God's sovereign plan to bring good from evil. And the good that God had in mind has to do with those promises to Abraham that Vijay mentioned last week.

They were back in chapter 12. I know it's been a long time since we looked at them. We're still in the same book of Genesis. Let me quickly remind you again on the next slide. Lob, land, offspring and blessing.

And that blessing would undo the cursing that came into the world because of sin. And what's more, on the next slide from Genesis 12, we read that this blessing will come to all the families of the earth through you, Abraham, through one of your descendants.

And so the account of Jacob is really all about God's sovereign work through Jacob's family and specifically through Joseph at the moment to bring blessing, good despite evil.

[3 : 33] So despite Jacob's dysfunctional family in chapter 37, despite Judah's horrific sin last week in chapter 38 and despite his chosen servants suffering today in 39.

In fact, today's chapter and next week's follow a similar pattern. So on the next slide, both accounts, whether Potiphar's house or in prison, begin with God being with Joseph and then he prospers.

And then there's some incident, whether temptation to sin or speaking God's word through dreams.

And then both accounts end on a downer with Joseph suffering unjustly.

So that's the big picture of how these chapters hang together. But they begin with a reminder of God's suffering servants. Have a look at verse one in your Bibles and we're at point one on the outlines.

So chapter 39, verse one. Now, Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Israelites who had taken him there.

[4 : 48] Now, as Vijay rightly pointed out last week, this verse picks up where we left off in chapter 37 with Joseph. But notice we're told twice how Joseph was taken.

And then we're also told he was bought. He has suffered the loss of his freedom already, hasn't he? And while we might feel like that sometimes when being told when we can and can't leave the house, it's nothing compared to Joseph here.

And yet he's not alone. You see verse two. The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant.

Potiphar put him in charge of his household and entrusted him to his care everything he owned. Did you notice as I was reading, we're told again twice that the Lord was with Joseph.

[5 : 58] This was the reason for Joseph's success. It wasn't Joseph. It was God who prospered him. It was God who put him in Potiphar's house and gave him success.

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

So have a look at verse five. From the time that his Potiphar put him in charge of his household and of 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 in 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 he ate. Now Potiphar obviously recognizes a good investment when he sees one. And so he puts Joseph in charge of everything because he recognizes that the Lord was with Joseph.

[7 : 08] And now all that Potiphar has to worry about is, you know, what to eat. I'll have some Egyptian eggs and bacon today or a kofta or kebab, I think is probably more appropriate.

In fact, one of the top 10 Egyptian dishes from Google is Alexandrian liver and sausages. So there you go. But more to the point, here is a glimpse of God's promise to Abraham to bring blessing to the families of the earth.

Because here is one family being blessed through Abraham's descendant, Joseph. Do you see verse five? The blessing comes because of Joseph, through Joseph, Abraham's descendant.

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

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

[8 : 23] Because in the Bible, as God says on the next slide, 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 the way we look compared to what God thinks?

What about us? How much time do we spend on our looks, whether diets or clothes or whatever, compared to our hearts?

So whenever the Bible mentions a person's good looks, it often is an ominous note. It often leads to trouble, just like here. Because it leads Potiphar's wife to lust and it leads Joseph to be tempted.

So have a look from verse seven, which should really start the new paragraph, the new sentence.

After a while or sometime later, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, Come to bed with me.

[9 : 29] But he refused. With me in charge, he told her, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house. Everything he owns, he has entrusted to my care.

No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?

And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. Here, Potiphar's wife, clearly lusts after Joseph, doesn't she?

And Joseph, it seems, is tempted to sin with her. After all, he is a slave and she is the boss's wife. And she issues, in verse seven, a direct command to sleep with him.

And so he would have felt the pressure, the temptation to obey and sin. What's more, in verse 10, she, we're told, persistently tempts him by speaking to him day after day.

[10:39] No doubt trying to allure him. And while we're not told, I think it's reasonable to assume that she was beautiful too. After all, we are told that Potiphar is the captain of Pharaoh's guards, a royal official.

And in our world, you know, you have to look at the magazines and turn on the news. In our world, men of power often, not always, but often choose women of beauty over women of integrity.

Not that a woman can't have both, I question to add. Either way, Joseph was tempted to sin. But unlike his brother Judah last week, remember Judah slept with his daughter-in-law and thought, thinking she was a prostitute.

Here, Joseph resists. He refuses. Why? Well, first, because he did not want to betray his earthly master.

This is the only time in our chapter when Joseph speaks, actually. And as he does, he speaks about being entrusted with everything and that she is his master's wife.

[11:46] In fact, she's called wife a number of times here to underline the point. And 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.

At the end of verse 9, do you notice what he says? He says, how can I do this wicked thing and sin against Potiphar? No, no. It says God. You see, it seems Joseph is conscious of God, which then helps him to resist.

He is conscious God is with him. After all, if Potiphar could see that God was with him in verse 3, then surely Joseph knows it too. And so he's conscious of who his sin is really offending.

Who it's really against. The Lord who was with him. And I wonder if we sometimes forget that.

Especially with the so-called little sins. You know, an exaggeration of truth here.

An act of selfishness there. It doesn't really matter. It won't cause anyone any great harm.

Forgetting it's not just people our sin offends.

[13:01] It's also God. Or we make sure we don't sin in front of people. Lest they see. Forgetting that when we sin elsewhere, God sees.

If we were more conscious that God was with us, it would help us, I think, to resist temptation, as Joseph does here. And notice how he resists.

At verse 10, did you notice he not only refuses to go to bed with her, but even to spend time with her. You see, he doesn't put himself in compromising situations that makes temptation worse, does he?

That's wise advice, isn't it? And when he suddenly finds himself in a compromising situation, well, verse 11, he flees. 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 house and ran out of the house. It seems as soon as she comes into the room, Joseph starts to leave, so he's not with her.

[14:12] But she catches his cloak, or perhaps shirt, and instead of trying to get it back, he just gets out of there, doesn't he? He flees. Which, again, is wise advice.

But the point here is, knowing that God is with him, it seems to help him resist temptation to sin.

And yet, despite doing the right thing, he still ends up suffering, doesn't he?

Which is the next bit on this point one. Have a look at verse 13. And as I read from verse 13 to 20, notice how much the wife talks compared to Joseph.

So 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 the master came home.

[15:14] 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 said, saying, this is how your slave treated me. He burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison.

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 as a woman scorned, or a man for that matter. And yet Joseph was simply doing the right thing.

Here is unjust suffering. And notice twice he's described in a derogatory way. She says, that Hebrew. Just like people say, oh, those Christians.

[16:16] Yet he remains silent, doesn't he? In fact, his silence seems to be highlighted by Potiphar's wife's lack of it, isn't it? I mean, she's talking all the way through.

She repeatedly talks about screaming or literally lifting up her voice. And we hear her story three times. Verse 14 and 15. Then she repeats it to Potiphar.

Verse 17, 18. And the narrator repeats it again in verse 19. Now, as a slave in the face of a furious master, I doubt Joseph even had a chance to speak.

But even as he's dragged off, we hear nothing from him, do we? It's as though knowing God is with him, he went without a word, entrusting himself to God.

And the scene in Potiphar's house ends. The last bit of the chapter, as I said, belongs to the next scene in the prison, which we'll come back to next week. So what's the point of this scene then, which is point two on the outline?

[17:20] Well, I think it's to show us what it means to be the Lord's chosen servant. Remember, that's what God has done. He's given Joseph the dreams.

He's chosen him for a special role. And this is what it means. 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 God. But as good a servant as Joseph is here, we know he's not the greatest servant of God, is he?

Muhammad Ali made that famous statement, you know, the boxer. He said, I am the greatest. And apparently one time he was catching a flight somewhere and he ignored all the requests to fasten his seatbelt.

And he said to one flight attendant, Superman don't need no seatbelt. Sorry about the accent. And quick as a flash, the flight attendant turned around and said, well, Superman don't need no plane.

[18:27] Buckle up. He might have thought he was the greatest Superman, but he wasn't the true one, was he? Well, so too here with Joseph.

Rather, Joseph points us to the one who is Jesus. And so we see on the slide there that God was with Jesus perfectly.

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

The innocent one for us guilty ones. But Jesus did this willingly so that through his death, God might bless us fully.

Not just one family of the earth, like here in chapter 39, but all families of the earth, all who believe in him. How? Is it with material prosperity like it was for Potiphar?

[19:30] Well, no, it's actually better. This is why we need to go through Christ before we apply the Old Testament to ourselves. Otherwise, we might think, oh, well, God will bless me with spiritual prosperity, just like he did to Potiphar.

Rather, we need to go through Christ. I learned this diagram on the next slide of the hourglass when I was at uni. And at the top, you've got Israel and the Old Testament. And Israel kind of is unfaithful all the way down to the one true faithful Israelite, Jesus.

And in him starts the new Israel, which is why the hourglass winds out at the bottom with the New Testament. And so before we apply the Old Testament at the top to us, the new Israel at the bottom, we have to go through Jesus and the New Testament.

And when we do, we see on the next slide, this from Galatians 3, that scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith. Here is the blessing.

And announce the gospel in advance to Abraham. All nations will be blessed through you. The blessing is to be right with God by faith. For, as it goes on to say, Christ redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to us Gentiles through Christ Jesus, the descendant of

Abraham.

[20 : 56] And that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. You see, the blessing here is to be justified by faith. It's to be made right with God by believing in Jesus.

Just like Abraham was made right with God when Abraham believed in Jesus. So too, God blesses us with a right standing with him when we have faith or belief in Christ.

And to be right with him doesn't sound as impressive as material possessions, does it? Our problem is we sometimes prefer material prosperity like Potiphar got.

But you see, being right with God is worth so much more. For it comes with life eternal. 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 in the new creation, like a new body and a new virus-free world.

[22 : 04] If we have faith or trust in Jesus. So can I ask this morning, do you? Do you trust in Jesus? If you're tuning in from elsewhere, checking us out, and you're not quite there with Jesus, and you want to find out more, then please do email us.

There's contact details on the website or at the end of this service. But for us who do notice at the end of that verse again, if we just go back to that Galatians 3 verse right at the end, 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, the true Superman, if you like, we become fellow little S servants with him.

We receive God's Spirit such that God is also with us. And so that brings us to our final point, point three. And from this passage, as God's little S servants, then there's three points of application.

The first is that God is with us to bring blessing to others too. The blessing of being right with God, with a certain hope in a world whose future is so uncertain.

[23 : 19] This Thursday, the City Bible Forum, as we heard in the announcements, is hosting an online event on that very topic. That's a bit hard to see on the slide on the next screen.

But it's talking about certainty in uncertain times. And so if you're a worker with non-Christian friends, here's a chance to invite them to hear the good news of Jesus.

Contact Dave Chan. He has lots of good ways to try and zoom in together and bring them along. That you might bring God's blessing to them through Jesus.

Or I know of a grandmother of our church who keeps in contact with her non-Christian grandkids, offers to help them when she can. And if anything comes up, she says, oh, can I pray for you about that?

And she does that because she loves them, but also because she's hoping to have a talk with them at some time about Jesus. That God's blessing might come to them through Christ, you see.

[24 : 21] Another guy who goes for rides with his non-Christian friend and given lockdown is on, the cycle paths have never been busier. And so his friend is keen to do riding. And he does that again because he cares for his friend, but also so that he might have opportunities to share God's blessing in Christ to his friend.

It's not easy to do this sort of thing. I know even for me, I'm praying that I have more opportunities with my neighbor at the moment. But we've got to remember that God is with us.

As Jesus says on the next slide there, he says, Make disciples of all nations and adds, I am with you always.

So the Lord's servant has God with them to bring blessing to others. Secondly, the Lord's servant resists temptation, being conscious of God.

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

[25 : 30] And so we are to resist temptation as the Lord's servants do. In fact, like Joseph, we're not to put ourselves in compromising situations. And when we are, we're to flee.

And look at how Paul puts it on the next slide from 1 Corinthians 6. He says, flee from sexual immorality. He says, do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you? God is there with us all the time. You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies. We also read encouragingly a bit later on in 1 Corinthians that God is also faithful.

He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out. So that you can endure it. I don't know what temptations you are facing at the

moment.

But I do know we all face them, don't we? And I also know that for some people, certain temptations are stronger than they are for other people. And during this lockdown time, the temptations might look different, actually.

[26 : 34] For many of us, there's more time to watch TV or surf the internet or read books and magazines and the like. But that can create even more temptations.

And so we need to be conscious that God is with us and not put ourselves in any compromising situations. For example, if you're temptation, if you're particularly tempted to lust and sin with your eyes, then don't watch TV shows or Netflix stuff that has sex scenes all the way through it.

If your temptation is to fantasize about the perfect man, your Mr. Darcy, such that you become bitter with your life as it is, then don't read those fantasy books that tempt you to do that.

Or if your temptation is to envy others, what others have, rather than be content with the house and life you have, then don't read those other magazines, those Better Homes and Gardens magazines, which tempt you to envy rather than be content.

And on it goes, you see. If we struggle with certain temptations, then like Joseph, don't put ourselves in those compromising situations to make it worse.

[27 : 49] And if we get caught in one without realising it, then remember, God always offers us a way out. It's usually called the off button. But take it and flee.

For the Lord's servant resists temptation, conscious of God. But in Christ, we as the Lord's servants always have forgiveness when we fail to resist temptation.

Because God graciously forgives every time we ask. And so that grace ought to also help us resist temptation. But thirdly, as the Lord's servant, we are to also bear unjust suffering, trusting God.

As we heard in our second reading on the next slide, it says, it's commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. And then Peter adds, to this we were called because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps.

And what did he do? He entrusted himself to God who judges justly. We have at our church a magazine called Barnabas Fund.

[29 : 06] And they mentioned a story just a few weeks ago on the 19th of April, where more Christians were killed in Nigeria by Faluni militants. This time on this village, in this village rather, on the next slide.

And then on the next slide is the villagers gathering for the funeral of the four who died. And one of the elders of the village said this on the next slide. 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 about grazing land or farmers and herders fighting over land.

This is specifically targeting Christians. Unjust suffering exists, doesn't it? Closer to home, of course, for us, it usually comes in the form of restrictions, which are only likely to increase for us as Christians.

Like we are no longer allowed to teach scripture during the school timetable. Or, despite, by the way, Christians starting education in Australia.

[30 : 16] And we are no longer allowed to express our views publicly because it's immediately labelled bigotry. Tolerance used to be you could disagree with someone but still respect one another's views.

Tolerance is now you either agree or you shut up. It's changed, hasn't it? And what's more, while people are rightly condemned on social media and in the court for demeaning religious groups like Muslims, and we shouldn't do that, that shouldn't happen, we should love, it seems to be okay to demean Christians.

And there's less of a fuss made about it, isn't there? People like Potiphar's wife say, those Christians, that Hebrew. Yet when this happens, we are not to worry, nor are we to retaliate, but to continue to love and bear that unjust suffering, trusting in God who will judge justly.

And so, this is what it means for us as the Lord's little S servants, to follow in the footsteps of the greatest servant, Jesus.

The one whom God was with perfectly to bring God's blessing to us fully, that we might do the same to others. The one who resisted temptation completely, that we too might follow and resist temptation.

[31 : 45] And the one who bore up under unjust suffering, that we might do the same. May we follow in our servants' footsteps. Let's pray that we would.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning of the Lord's servant, Joseph, who points us to the even greater servant, Jesus.

We thank you, Father, that what it meant for him to serve you was that you were with him to bring blessing to others, to resist temptation, and to bear unjust suffering. And we pray as co-servants with Christ, you would help us to do the same.

For we ask it in his name. Amen.