

The LORD is with His Servant-Part2

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Date: 17 May 2020

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[0:00] Well, welcome back. It'd be great if you could grab a Bible if you've not already done so, and hopefully you've grabbed the sermon outline from the website, but it should be on the slides as we go along as well. Can I add my welcome to VJs? It's great you could tune in this morning on this beautiful sunny morning, and hopefully you get a chance to enjoy some of the sun outside, although it is still quite fresh, isn't it? Well, last week I mentioned my daughter's room, which she struggles to keep clean, and for her, cleaning her room was a form of struggling.

You'll be pleased to know that she kept her room clean for two whole days, but I also said last week that she found it easier to clean her room when my wife Michelle was with her to help her, and that was the point of the story. It helps when someone is with us in suffering, and that's what we saw with Joseph last week. God was with him, placing him in Potiphar's house, prospering him there as well, and being conscious that God was with him seems to have helped him both resist temptation and endure suffering. Well, as I showed you last week, today's chapter follows a similar pattern, which is on the next slide, where it starts with God with him, prospering. We see, though, a different incident in today's chapter. There's a new element of dreams and speaking God's word, which prepares Joseph for next week, but it also ends the same way.

And so here's the question then, given that they both end the same way. If God is with him, why is Joseph still suffering? In fact, if Joseph is God's chosen servant, then why doesn't he avoid suffering altogether? Now, we know in part that the answer is God wanted Joseph in Egypt, but why couldn't God just send the whole family and a family holiday down to Egypt? They'd get there the same way, wouldn't they? Why does God allow Joseph to go through all this suffering? It's a question we often ask too, isn't it? Why can't we come back to church? Why do we have to have this virus in our world? Why am I the one to lose my job or take a pay cut? Why am I still going through this suffering?

But it's a question that we'll come back to at the end of the sermon. But for now, we see God is with his servant to bless, like last week. So at point one in your outline, which is on the next slide, and then verse 20 of chapter 39 in your Bibles. Have a look there. It says, but while Joseph was there in prison, the Lord was with him, he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden, so that warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in prison. And he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. Now notice here that the word prison comes up quite a few times in just these few verses, doesn't it? It's a reminder of

Joseph's ongoing suffering. In fact, the word for prison here is actually the same word for house. It's the same Hebrew word. And so he's really gone from Potiphar's house last week to the big house this week, from prison to prison. But apart from this reminder of his suffering, the scene begins similarly with God being with Joseph to bless. Now the word blessing is not used here, but we see it with the word kindness. The word kindness here is significant in the Old Testament. The word is often used to describe God's loving kindness for his people. Here God shows kindness to his person, Joseph, by working in the warden's heart to promote Joseph to be in charge of all the other prisoners.

[4:26] But like last week, God's kindness also extends through Joseph to the jailer, to the warden. Because with Joseph in charge, verse 23, the jailer can just kick back and relax.

For God was with Joseph to give him success, we read. So here is God with his servant Joseph to show kindness or bless. Not just Joseph though, but others through him.

Like last week, through Joseph to Potiphar. This week, through Joseph to the jailer. Or next week, through Joseph to the families of the earth. And given that we'll see that next week, we'll come back to this then and apply it later.

So for now, let's move on to point two, which is on the next slide, where we see God is with his servant, not just to bless, but also to speak his word.

This is the main section of the scene, so it'll be our longest point. Pick it up in verse 1 of chapter 40. Sometime later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master.

[5:38] The king of Egypt, Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined.

The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. So here are two officials, you know, as commonly called the butler and the baker, and they join Joseph in jail.

And it seems they deserve to be there, because we're told in verse 1, they offended, or literally they sinned, against their earthly master, the king. And so the captain of the guard, who outranks the prison warden, puts these two in prison.

And despite Joseph being in charge of all the prisoners, he actually tells Joseph, no, you've got to attend to these two. You have to serve them, just as Joseph attended or served Potiphar last week.

In fact, do you remember who the captain of the guard was last week? It was Potiphar. Though verse 1 does say, some time has passed, so it may not be him this week.

[6:51] Either way, though, this would have been like rubbing salt in the wound for Joseph. For last week, Joseph was put in prison by the captain of the guard when he did not sin.

And now this week, the captain of the guard is telling to look after and serve people who did sin. I remember doing a group assignment at uni one time, and as often happens with group assignments, there's one person who doesn't do their fair share, and so I had to do their work.

But when the marks came back, the tutor actually praised this guy who didn't do his work, when it was actually my work. They talk about rubbing salt in the wound, although it must have been much worse for Joseph.

Of course, God was working through this suffering that Joseph might interpret some dreams. For if we pick it up in verse 6, we read in verse 6, When Joseph came to the two the next morning, he saw that they were dejected.

So he asked Pharaoh's officials, who were in custody with him in his master's house or prison, Why do you look so sad today? We both had dreams, they answered, But there is no one to interpret them.

[8:05] Then Joseph said to them, Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams. Now it's worth pausing here for a moment to point out two things.

First, Joseph rightly acknowledges that he cannot interpret dreams apart from God. Do you notice what he says in verse 8? He says, Interpretations belong to God.

For only God knows and even determines the future. So only God can tell people what is going to happen. It can tell what the dreams really mean.

All Joseph does then is to speak God's interpretation, you see. God's word. Second, interpreting dreams is not something everyone can do.

Verse 7 says, There is no one there to do it. But because Joseph is God's chosen servant, then God gives Joseph the ability to do it.

[9:04] Now the reason it's worth noticing these things is because we're not meant to suddenly be encouraged to interpret our own dreams. You know, reading the tea leaves and so on.

So if we have a dream where we inherit a million dollars or win lotto, then I'm sorry to say, it does not mean that's what your future holds. Or if we have a weird and wonderful dream about, I don't know, hot dogs and ginger beer, we don't suddenly study our dream and assume that in our future there will be a dog with ginger hair or whatever.

No, rather God is giving his chosen servant here the ability to speak God's interpretation, God's word, not his own. And so in verses 9 to 11, the cupbearer tells Joseph his dream.

It's about three vine branches with grapes on them, perhaps a bit like the picture on the next slide. And the cupbearer squeezes the grapes into the cup and gives it back to the Pharaoh.

And then in verse 12, if you pick it up at verse 12, this is what it means, Joseph said to him, the three branches are three days. Within three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position.

[10:20] And you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to when you were his cupbearer. But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness.

Mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews. And even here, I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.

And so here, Joseph speaks God's interpretation, God's word, doesn't he? And it was a word that promised the cupbearer life, life restored with his earthly master, Pharaoh.

It's good news, isn't it? But we also see another reminder of Joseph's suffering here too, don't we? For he may have been spoiled and arrogant, but he certainly didn't deserve this.

It's been 11 years, actually, since his brothers threw him into that cistern and then sold him as a slave. In fact, the word for dungeon in verse 15 here is literally pit.

[11:27] And the same word is used for cistern back in chapter 37. And so he's gone from pit to pit, just like he's gone from Pharaoh, a Potiphar's house to the big house.

It's just one long story of suffering, isn't it? And yet before the cupbearer responds, it seems, about remembering him, the baker wants to get in on the action.

He hears the good report, the good news, and so he can't wait, it seems, to tell his dream. So verse 16, when the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, I too had a dream.

On my head were three baskets of bread. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head. And so here is another set of three, not three branches, but this time three baskets, with birds eating out of the top one, perhaps like on this next slide.

Though I'm pretty sure in the Bible, the birds are only eating out of the top one. But either way, the top basket is filled with all kinds of bread. Apparently, Egyptian bakers, even back then, baked 38 different kinds of cakes, and 57 different types of bread.

[12:46] That's pretty impressive. It's pretty good, isn't it? But what's not so good, is the meaning of the dream. But let me read it to you, from a slightly different translation, to help you see the suspense, and the way it's written.

And so on the next slide, we read this, And Joseph answered and said, This is its interpretation. The three baskets are three days.

In 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.

Now, I know some people don't like me pointing out all these little details, but the reason I do is to help you grow your appreciation for God's Word, and therefore God Himself.

You see, we know these stories so well that we can lose the suspense, can't we? And we can read them so quickly, we can miss the connections. So we don't always appreciate how brilliant God is to work through these human authors in this way, making connections and creating suspense.

[13:57] And here, the poor baker, he would have been nodding his head the whole way, with excitement. Three days? Like the cupbearer? Yep, great, great.

Lift up my head like the cupbearer? Great, great, great. And then Joseph adds, Lift up your head from you. You see how well it's written? But it's certainly bad news for the baker, isn't it?

Pharaoh will literally lift his head off his body, probably decapitation, and then hang his body on a pole for the birds to eat. Apparently, that was a way to prevent his spirit resting in the afterlife.

It's quite gruesome, isn't it? It really is bad news. But this is also God's word that promises the baker death for his sin.

So he, Joseph, speaks, you see, God's word, both of life to the cupbearer and death to the baker. And to prove he really is God's servant who can speak God's word, then it's confirmed for us in verse 20.

[15:05] Have a look at verse 20. Now, the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of all his officials.

He restored the chief cupbearer to his position so that he once again put the cup in Pharaoh's hand, but impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

You see, what Joseph says happens, doesn't it? So Joseph clearly is God's chosen servant who can speak God's interpretation, God's word of life and death.

Of course, like last week, Joseph points us to the chosen servant whose name, as I often say, starts with G's, ends with us. For it's Jesus who speaks God's word perfectly.

In fact, on the next slide, Jesus himself said, on the next slide from John 5, very truly, I tell you, the son can do nothing by himself.

[16:17] He can do only what he sees his father doing. All the words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority. In other words, Jesus speaks God's word and he does so perfectly.

I mean, Jesus is God's word become flesh, isn't he? And to reveal God to us and to speak his word perfectly to us as well.

And so we know that when Jesus speaks, what he says will happen. For he is God's chosen servant, including the word of life and death, like on the next slide from John 3, where whoever believes in him will not perish, will not have eternal death, but have eternal life.

But those who reject the son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. And so the first application on the next slide is, will you listen to God's word spoken by God's servant?

For it promises life and death, and it will happen. In others, will you trust in Jesus for life? So you won't suffer God's wrath, his just anger at our sin, like the baker, but instead like the cupbearer will be restored to life eternal with our heavenly and loving master God.

[17:49] And for us who have believed in Jesus, then will we speak God's word as co-servants with Christ? Will we speak it as we have opportunity, whether to non-Christians that they might hear of Christ, who died our death for our sins and believe in him, be restored with God?

Or even to ourselves as we read the Bible, or perhaps to our fellow Christians as we zoom in for Bible study, or ring one another on the phone, or send each other emails and the like.

Will we speak God's word to one another, so that we might be encouraged to keep trusting Christ? But as we do speak and even read God's word, our job is not to interpret God's word, or come up with further words from our dreams, like some church leaders do, who call themselves apostles and the like.

Rather, our job is to speak God's word, given through the servant, Jesus. And if it's unclear when we read it, then we're not to rely on our own interpretation, or even our culture's interpretation.

Rather, if parts of God's word are unclear, then we need to look at the context of the passage. They say in real estate, real estate always says, what matters is location, location, location.

[19:12] When it comes to reading the Bible, what matters is context, context, context. If it's unclear, look at the context of the passage, what's happening around it. Or look at the context of the book, to try and work it out.

Just like we do when we read a textbook or a novel. And if it's still unclear, then we search the scriptures to help us. We do this so that we let one part of God's word, help us to understand another part of God's word.

And that way, it's all God's word. You see, we're letting God speak. And so the question though is, will we speak God's word of life and death as we have opportunity?

Well, our chapter hasn't quite finished, for it ends with another example of Joseph's suffering, doesn't it? Which God seems to continue to allow. So we're at point three on the next slide there.

And here we read in verse 23, that the chief cup bearer, however, did not remember Joseph. He forgot him.

[20:19] If you notice how our writer says the same thing twice, he did not remember, he forgot. Just to underline the point that Joseph continues to suffer.

But his suffering has been peppered throughout the passage, hasn't it? It's been bubbling away in the background. I've been pointing it out as we've been going along from the end of 30, chapter 39, with the repetition of prison, you know, Potiphar's house to the big house or versus wonderful with the captain of the guard telling him to serve the prisoners who did sin rubbing salt in the wound or verse 14 to 15, where we hear from Joseph's own lips that he did not deserve to be in this dungeon or pit to hear in verse 23, where the scene ends with him being forgotten.

I like happy endings. So this is a bit of a downer for me. So why does the scene end like this? If God is with him, why does he allow Joseph to keep suffering?

Which brings us back to the question we started with. Well, there are a number of reasons why, like one is we live in a fallen world. That's why suffering continues.

And in fact, it's why Jesus came to open a way to a new world where there will be no more suffering or pain or death, only life to the full. But until then, suffering is part of this world.

[21 : 46] When my wife offered to help my daughter clean her room, my daughter's first reply was, yeah, but I still have to do cleaning too. Yes, you do.

Because we live in a fallen world where rooms don't magically clean themselves and stay clean. But she also had to clean her room because it helped her to grow up and be ready to leave home.

I hope. In other words, it was for her good. And it's another reason why we still suffer because God works through our suffering for good, both our good and even the good of others.

And this also seems to be why Joseph still suffers. He may feel forgotten, but in God's timing, his suffering will lead him next week to the right hand of Pharaoh and the saving of many lives.

In fact, it's what Joseph confesses in our key verse for the series on the next slide where he says to his brothers, you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.

[22 : 53] You know, the saving of many lives. I much like in God's timing, God worked through Christ's suffering for our good to save our eternal lives.

But it's not just for the good of others. It's also for Joseph's good. I think you see in chapter 39, the end there, verse 21, we're told that God showed kindness to Joseph.

Do you remember that? That's that loving kindness he has for his people. I know that Joseph could see it because he was promoted over the, all the other prisoners. But then in verse 14, Joseph asked the cup bearer to show him kindness.

And it's the same word. It seems Joseph looks to the cup bearer to act like God. And what's more in verse 14, Joseph asked the cup bearer to remember, which in Genesis is usually what God does.

And I'm giving you some examples on the next slide through Genesis. The point is, Joseph seems to be looking to the cup bearer to act like God, rather than God himself.

[24 : 04] But the cup bearer is not God. He does not show kindness. He does not remember. He forgets, doesn't he? So Joseph's suffering continues in part to help Joseph keep trusting in the one who is God, the one who has shown kindness and the one who will prompt the cup bearer next week to remember.

Now, just in case you think that's my interpretation. Well, we search the scriptures and we read on the next slide from Psalm 105 that Joseph, who was sold as a slave and his feet were hurt with fetters.

His neck was put in a collar of iron. And then it says, until what he had said came to pass, the word of the Lord tested or refined him.

Here's another part of God's word that helps us to make sure we have God's interpretation here, that God was working through Joseph's suffering to test him, to refine him. And like refining of gold, it both strengthens our faith and shows it genuine.

That is, our suffering forces us to exercise our faith muscles. And just like when you exercise your body muscles, you know, they strengthen. So when we exercise our faith muscles, they are strengthened.

[25 : 26] But suffering also forces us to choose whether we will trust God or not. And when we choose to trust God to keep having faith, then that suffering has then shown our faith is real, not fickle, that we give up on God whenever suffering comes along.

And so suffering both strengthens faith and shows faith is genuine. And this is for our good, because our faith is of greater worth than gold.

For faith is the way we receive life eternal and with it, praise, honor, and glory. On the next slide is the reading that we had from one Peter.

Remember what he said now for a little while, you may have to have suffered grief and all kinds of trials, sufferings. These have come so that the proven, the tested genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

And so the third application on the next slide is this. In suffering, take heart and keep trusting, for God is still working for good.

[26 : 47] Whether it's our good or the good of others. In fact, I was visiting a couple yesterday, where the wife found out two weeks ago, I think it was, that she has cancer.

And yet despite this suffering, she is still praising God. In fact, when I saw her yesterday, she even said those words, I praise God. And her husband has said before that we're trusting God.

And everyone who talks to them can see their faith. Their suffering, you see, has shown their faith is genuine. And it will no doubt even give opportunities for their faith to grow.

This suffering has already been for their good. And in fact, it's even given them opportunities, they told me, to talk with their non-Christian family about Christ.

Because in her words, they have to listen to me. I have cancer. You see, God works through suffering for good. both ours and others.

[27 : 49] So, if you are suffering and feeling forgotten, and I know many people are suffering, or even if you're not suffering just yet, then remember to take heart and keep trusting God.

For God is with us, not only to bless, but also to speak his word of life and death, as we have opportunity. And to work for good, both our good and others.

And the words of our next song, when through fiery trials, your pathway shall lead, his grace shall sustain you with all that you need. The flame shall not hurt you.

His only design, your dross to consume, your gold, your faith to refine. Amen. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the reminder this morning, that you are with your servants.

And we in Christ are those servants. Help us to remember that you are with us, that we might speak your word of life and death, as we have opportunity. And help us to remember that you are with us, even in suffering, to work for good, whether it's our good or the good of others.

[29 : 11] Help us to remember these things we pray, so that when we do feel forgotten, we would take heart and keep trusting in you. For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.