

Joseph's Rise

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! And they fed in the reed grass.

And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile.

And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time.

And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind.

[1 : 0 9] And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke. And behold, it was a dream.

So in the morning his spirit was troubled and he sent and called all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

Verse 9. And then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, I remember my offenses today. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard.

We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard.

When we told him, he interpreted our dream to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. And he interpreted to us, as he interpreted to us, so it came about.

[2 : 1 8] I was restored to my office and the baker was hanged. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph. And they quickly brought him up out of the pit.

And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have had a dream and there is no one who can interpret it.

I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it. Joseph answered Pharaoh, it is not in me.

God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer. After Pharaoh shared his dreams, look in verse 25. Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, the dreams of Pharaoh are one.

God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years and the seven good ears are seven years.

[3 : 1 9] The dreams are one. The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years. And the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine.

It is, as I told Pharaoh, God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt.

But after them there will arise seven years of famine. And all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land. And the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow.

For it will be very severe. And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God. And God will shortly bring it about.

Now, therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years.

[4 : 30] And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities and let them keep it.

That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt so that the land may not perish through famine.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. You know, when he was shot down over North Vietnam in September of 1965, Admiral John Stockdale knew he was in trouble.

He lands in a small village where he's beaten and taken to the infamous Hanoi Hilton. Not because it's a part of the chain.

He is the highest ranking United States military official to be kept in the Hualo prison. But there he will remain for eight years and be brutally tortured 20 times.

[5 : 43] Once Admiral Stockdale arrives, he's forced to face the brutal facts. He is a prisoner of war.

And an enemy that's not going to play by the United Nations games. He has no rights, no parole, no certainty of release, no promise of seeing his loved ones again.

But still, he has a decision to make. Will he just let whatever is going to happen, happen? Or will he continue to fight the war behind bars?

He must face the brutal facts, but he chooses to keep fighting anyway. He looks around at his fellow prisoners and does whatever he can to keep them from being broken.

He exchanges secret intelligence with his wife through letters home at the risk of torture and death. He institutes rules for facing torture so that helping the prisoners gauge how many hours this goes on, what information you can slowly leak out because no one can make it through torture without saying anything.

[7 : 01] He establishes a way for the prisoners to communicate with one another through a complex system of tapping on the bars. He keeps fighting.

He keeps believing that the war can be won. The North Vietnam, the Viet Cong army would send videos back to America of well-trained prisoners.

But Stockdale refused to participate. One time he beat himself with a stool, completely disfiguring his body so that he could not be in the images of a well-treated soldier.

He disfigured his face with a razor blade. This guy is intense. After his release, unsurprisingly, he receives a Congressional Medal of Honor. When asked years later how he made it through the agonizing confinement and torture, he said, I never lost faith in the end of the story.

I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end. Well, this morning in our passage, Joseph must face the brutal facts.

[8 : 13] He's been in prison for likely 10 years now. Now, he must have begun to wonder, whatever happened to those dreams? Whatever happened to the promise that he would be lifted up, that everyone would bow down to him?

He couldn't be brought lower. No one could bow to him there. Was it all just a dream? Has God forgotten him? The days come and go.

The years come and go. But nothing changes. Now, we all know the end of the story. We know that Joseph is just passing through prison, but that's not what he knows.

Nevertheless, Joseph does not just let happen whatever's going to happen. He doesn't say, *que sera, sera*. What will be, will be. He doesn't let the providence of God shrivel into some sort of unstoppable fatalism.

Joseph refuses to lose faith in the end of the story and refuses to stop taking and acting in faith. God's calling us to not confuse the providence of God with letting whatever's going to happen, happen.

[9 : 29] In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins calls all business leaders to face the brutal facts of their company. And each of us is called to face the brutal facts in our lives.

Some of us most acutely. Don't be deceived. Things are quite bad. Your dreams may still be untrue.

Your questions still unanswered. Your wounds still unhealed. Your longings still unmet.

Your conflicts with a growing number of people unresolved. Worse still, you've begun to settle. Life's gotten busier.

And you've begun to say little more than it is what it is. But God wants to say to you this morning, my good purposes have not changed. And God wants to urge you to act in faith.

[10 : 30] Where we're going in a word. The good purposes of God's providence cannot be stopped. But you must not just watch and wait. The good purposes of God cannot be stopped.

But you must not just watch and wait. And break this out. Three points. First is Joseph is in the pit. But is patient.

Now chapter 40 begins with Joseph still in prison. Look in verse 1. It says sometime after this. Now we know he was tempted by Potiphar's wife. Falsely accused by her.

And then thrown into prison by her husband. It's likely been 8 to 10 years. But God is on the move. As he recounted a few moments ago.

Or as the official recounted a few moments ago. Two officials arrive in the prison where Joseph is. The chief cup bearer and the chief baker. The idea is a king is always afraid of being poisoned in some way.

[11 : 28] So he needed to have the people that served him the food. Be trusted people. And so something has happened. And they are thrown into prison. But these guys are uncommon prisoners.

They are high ranking officials. And so Joseph is assigned to watch after them. Look in 40 verse 4. It says at the end they continued for some time in custody.

So he is there for some time. Then they arrive for some time. The author Moses is leaving it unspecific. Then one night they both dream.

Dreams as we remember. As we've seen throughout the book of Genesis. Are divine communication. God is speaking. God is revealing something. And they always come in pairs.

In the life of Joseph. And so they come same night. To the cup bearer and to the baker. They both have a dream. They both have a dream.

[12 : 32] With as it points out. Its own interpretation. Now up to this point. It's clear that Joseph is an incredibly gifted man. We saw some of that last week.

He has 11 brothers. But quickly he sets himself apart. As the top of the heap. He's sold into slavery in Egypt. But he quickly rises through the ranks.

And succeeds. Oversees people. He oversees these prisoners that arrive. These distinguished prisoners. If we could put it that way.

He's a man of great administrative and leadership gifting. What's not so clear. Is Joseph a godly man? It doesn't seem so.

God has brought him down to the pit to change it. God's brought him down to help him realize that his circumstances are divinely arranged. Jeremiah Burroughs helpfully says. When God brings down a man's circumstances.

[13 : 37] He does not so much labor to raise up his circumstances. As to bring his heart down to his circumstances. That is indeed what God is doing in the life of Joseph.

These 8 to 10 years. He's not so much working to raise Joseph up again. As he's working to bring Joseph down. Sometimes we're brought down. And we spend all our energy trying to get back up.

But never asking the question. Why are we down? But wonderfully. It appears that Joseph is learning in prison. Look at his interactions with the prisoners.

Look at verse 6. They both dreamed. And then in verse 6. When Joseph came to them in the morning. He saw that they were troubled. He asked them.

Why are your faces downcast today? Notice Joseph's care and concern.

[14 : 40] His quick concern is telling us. There's more to him now than gifts and talents. There's a new habit of mind and heart.

He no longer thinks me first. Tattling around to his brothers. Announcing the dreams that put him first of all. He's beginning to change.

He begins to care genuinely for others. Look what happens next. Then they said to him. We have had dreams.

And there's no one to interpret them. Now I find this so fascinating. They say we have had dreams. And we've got no one to interpret. What they mean by that. We've got no access to pharaoh's magicians and scientists to interpret these dreams.

That's what they mean. They're in prison. They have no access to those things. But Joseph must have been tempted to say dreams. I'll tell you about dreams. I'll tell you what dreams will get you.

[15 : 39] I dream that I would receive power and promise. But look where I am. I'll tell you what dreams get you. Nothing. Nothing. Right?

Isn't that what we're tempted to say when someone walks in with a baby when we've been dreaming to have one? We throw our hands up.

But Joseph doesn't do that at all. He's beginning to entrust his dreams and the timing of them to God. He's beginning to see his circumstances as providentially arranged.

He says, do not interpretations belong to God. He hasn't lost his faith in God. He's learned patience.

He's learned to trust in the hand of providence and to leave it, as the hymn says, to God to order and provide. As Samuel Rutherford says, there are some graces that grow best in winter.

[16 : 41] And that's what's going on in Joseph's life. Grace is growing in winter. But he's also learned that trusting God is not about watching and waiting.

He's called to be active. So he immediately says to them, please tell me your dreams. And so they tell him their dreams. The chief cupbearer dreams of three vines that immediately become ripe with plump grapes.

And he dreams of himself in the presence of the king, holding them in a cup and mashing them down so the king can see the whole process and make sure no one's poisoning him. And mashing them down so that he can hand it to the king.

And Joseph immediately and confidently interprets his dream. He says, in three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head. The idea, not literally lifting, but he'll restore you to a place of honor.

Your rightful place of honor. And you'll stand there and return to your duty. The chief baker tells his dream. His dream is that he has three cake baskets on his head.

[17 : 51] The top cake basket is food for the king. But there's birds coming down and eating out of that cake basket. And he's doing nothing about it.

Well, Joseph immediately and confidently interprets his dream. He says, in three days, Pharaoh will lift your head from your body. In three days, you will die.

In three days, it all happened. Just as Joseph said, the king lifted up the chief cupbearer. And the king lifted up the head of the chief baker and killed him.

But Joseph does not merely interpret their dreams. He advocates for himself. Look at verse 14 of 40. He says, only remembering me when it's well with you.

And please do to me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of Hebrews. And here also I've done nothing that they should put me in this pit.

[18 : 58] You know, he's wonderfully confident that all this is going to happen. All this, everything's going to happen just as he said. He says, when it is well with you. When you're restored to that place. And then he tells the cupbearer his story.

He tells him, I'm not here. Because I went into bankruptcy and had to sell myself into prison or something like that. I'm here because I was a victim.

I'm here because of this injustice. I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews and thrown into this prison. He's defending himself. Now, God has brought him to the pit to bring his heart down.

Not so he would settle down and stay there. Now, notice this. What the unstoppable providence works out in such a mysterious way. What Joseph has come to believe is that his circumstances are divinely arranged.

But he does not believe he shouldn't try to change them. So he believes that he is there. He's learning what he needs to learn in winter. But he does not believe that even though these circumstances are divinely arranged.

[20 : 03] That he shouldn't try to change them. And so, he appeals to us in so many ways. The unstoppable providence works out in mysterious ways.

Such that your circumstances will not change if you only watch and wait. Appealing to us to put our faith to work.

Nevertheless, though, everything happens. Just as Joseph said, the chief cupbearer does not remember him. Look in verse 23 of chapter 40.

He says, Yet the chief cupbearer, after he was restored, did not remember Joseph but forgot him. The point is not merely that he fails to recall him.

But that he fails to do what is right. To follow through. To act on his duty. Point two. Joseph is on the rise. But is humble.

[21 : 04] Joseph's on the rise. But is humble. More time passes. Look in verse 41. After two whole years. Literally two years of days.

Though the chief cupbearer forgets him, God sends two more dreams. This time, Pharaoh dreams two dreams. He dreams of seven healthy, fat cows coming out of the Nile.

And they're eaten by seven thin, ugly cows. Now we know sevens are important. So that might be getting towards what the meaning is. And he wakes up.

He falls asleep. Again. And dreams again. And he dreams of seven healthy, fat ears of grain. And they sprout up.

And they're eaten by seven diseased ears of grain. A little intense. He wakes up. His heart is pounding. He's anxious. He calls all those magicians that I was talking about.

[22 : 07] All those wise men. But there's no one that comes up with a good interpretation. We don't know the length of time that it took after they tried to discuss these dreams.

And tried to interpret them. Finally, the cupbearer remembers Jacob. He says, I remember my offenses today. Tells a story about being in prison.

He and the chief cupbearer and the chief baker being in prison and dreaming dreams. And then there's this man. This man of the Hebrews. This Hebrew man. A servant of the captain of the guard that interpreted the dreams.

So Pharaoh immediately calls him. Look in verse 14. Then Pharaoh sent and called Jacob. And they quickly brought him out of the pit.

What have you been waiting for? For 13 years. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to stand before the king. For Pharaoh himself.

[23 : 12] For Pharaoh himself. Look at verse 15. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have had a dream. There's no one that can interpret it. Now three times the text underlines there's no one that can do it.

No one can interpret the dream. Then he says to Pharaoh, I've heard. Or says to Joseph, I've heard that you can interpret dreams. Look at his response.

Joseph answers Pharaoh, it is not in me. Though he's on the rise.

Though he's standing before the king. Though he's had quite the string of successes. He abruptly says, it's not in me. If Joseph was trying to get a job by the rules of our culture, he has just failed.

He's too modest. Too self-effacing. Too bashful. Too humble. Contrary to popular opinion, I recently read about the CEO of the financial investment company, Charles Schwab.

[24 : 18] And how, not Mr. Schwab, but Walt Bettinger. And how he interviews candidates to work in his company. He invites a candidate to breakfast.

Now the candidate must be thinking, this is a cool place to work. You know, great place to get an interview. He said, Mr. Bettinger says he gets there early. He pulls the manager of the restaurant aside and says, I want you to mess up the order of the person eating with me.

He said, trust me, it'll be okay. I'll give you a great tip, but mess up his order. So the candidate arrives and receives his food, whatever he ordered, and receives it messed up in some way.

You can see Bettinger's, the reason he would do this is a situation ripe for frustration. I can only imagine how folks responded in the interview. They're immediately on their heels. You know, you're putting your best foot forward.

You're immediately on your heels. I can't have avocado. I break out in hives. Or something like that. They're flustered, tempted to complain, tempted to become frustrated. What kind of boss would do such a thing?

[25 : 31] And Bettinger said, and I quote, it's just another way to look inside their heart rather than their head. Well, if you will, when Pharaoh calls up Joseph, his first answer is a way for us to look into his heart and not into his head.

Despite his track record, despite his successes, despite that he had received these dreams, he points away from himself to God. He doesn't grasp like Jacob.

That's what we're meant to see, an important contrast. He doesn't take things into his own hands, steal the promise. He's learned humility.

God is the giver of dreams. God is the revealer. God alone reveals deep and hidden things. God alone gives light. It's amazing.

This pompous little tattletale is now pointing away the Lord. Nevertheless, though trusting God has taught him to reject self-confidence, he's still confident in God.

[26 : 43] He says, it is not in me, but God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer. Then he tells Pharaoh his dreams, the seven cows and the seven grain.

Now, cows and grain are well-known symbols of food. So he's telling something about food. And the repetition of seven indicates there's a perfect amount of time.

And so he announces what his dreams mean. The seven good cows and the seven good ears of grain mean seven years of plenty. After that, the seven bad cows, the thin, ugly cows, and the seven blighted grain indicate years of want, years of famine.

And so he's telling him to get ready. There's a warning of a famine. He says, though, look in verse 25, the dreams of Pharaoh are one. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he's about to do.

Four times in this text, he underlines that God is speaking. In verse 25, God has revealed to Pharaoh what he's about to do. Verse 28, it is, as I told Pharaoh, God has shown to Pharaoh what he's about to do.

[27 : 56] Again, verse 32, and the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God. And God will surely bring it about. The doubling means that God is speaking.

God is revealing. Numbers 23, 19 says, God is not a man that he should lie or the son of man that he should change his mind. Has he said and will he not do it?

Has he spoken and will he not fulfill it? So God is revealing his plans to Pharaoh. Now, I've got to think that Joseph must have been thinking about his own dreams and the doubling of his own dreams in this moment, realizing that his own dreams were doubled for a reason to reveal that God is sticking to his plan, that the providence of God is unstoppable.

Unstoppable. And so he speaks out these dreams, but he doesn't just stop with an interpretation. He calls Pharaoh to act.

That's what's threading through these passages. The unstoppable providence of God is just going to march forward. But we're called not to wrestle with these providences, and not just to watch and wait, but to press on in faith.

[29 : 04] He emphasizes the certainty of the famine and the imminence, the nearness of the famine to urge Pharaoh to do something. What's God doing?

God's saving the world. He's urging Pharaoh to act, to prepare for the famine, for the good of the people and the good of the world. He's warning of a famine so that they'll act.

You know, if he was threatening judgment, he would be calling the people to repent. But he's warning of a famine to call the people to work. Do you see? It's not merely about knowing the plans of providence.

He's calling us to act on them. Then Joseph goes a step further and tells Pharaoh how he should prepare.

Verse 33, now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man. Verse 34, let Pharaoh proceed to appoint a man.

[30 : 05] He presents a plan to Pharaoh to get a wise and discerning man. Put him in a position to prepare for this famine, to take one-fifth of the produce in the plentiful years, store it up so that you might have something to share with all the land of Egypt.

He's making a bold move now. He's not just letting whatever's going to happen, happen. He's saying to Pharaoh, you know, and I know, there's only one man that can do this job, and I am he.

Now, throughout these chapters, there's no reference to the Lord being with Joseph. There's no reference to the Lord causing him to succeed.

Remember, last week is littered throughout chapter 39. Where is God? We know for sure, though, it's even more clear than chapter 39.

The chief cupbearer forgets, but God remembers. Just as he did with Abraham, Noah, Rachel, and the people of Egypt.

[31 : 13] When God remembers, he begins to act. He's remembering Joseph, raises him from the pit. He's remembering Joseph, giving him the interpretation he needs to put him in the place to rescue the world.

And he'll soon set him on high. Point 3, Joseph is set on high, but he is serving. He's serving. He's set on high, but he's serving as it has been throughout his time in prison.

Joseph succeeds. Pharaoh says, where can we find a man like this? In whom is the Spirit of God? Not talking about the Spirit like we would talk about, but a man that's clearly endowed with superior gifting and powers.

He must have realized, as he was asking the question, he immediately says to Pharaoh, why don't you do it? Look at verse 39. He says, since God has shown you all this, there's none so discerning and wise as you are.

You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.

[32 : 37] This is an amazing rags-to-riches story. Pharaoh gives Joseph authority over all the land of Egypt, all the people of Egypt. He gives him the ring, the seal, so he can seal documents and seal letters on behalf of the king.

He gives him fine linen. He puts a gold chain around his neck. He's made to ride in the second chariot. Look in verse 43.

Made him ride in the second chariot, right behind Pharaoh. And they called out before him, bow the knee. Bow the knee. He must have immediately thought of his dreams where his brothers were bowing before him, and the moon and the sun and the stars were bowing before him.

God does not lie. What he has said will come to pass. It's as sure and certain as anything in this universe. It's more certain.

The heaven and the earth will fall away, but not a word, not an iota of what God has said. He's overwhelmed with joy. He's married. He has two boys.

[33 : 47] Everything's in two in this story. Two officers. Two dreams. Two years. Two more dreams. And two boys. Gives all the glory to God. He names his first son Manasseh.

Because God has made him forget all the trouble. Names his second son Ephraim. Because God has made him fruitful.

He's not forgetting about his dad and writing him out of the book of life, so to speak, or something like that. But God has swallowed up all that sorrow.

There's a song that I've grown to like, and even last night I was playing it, my kids were singing along by Brandi Carlisle. It's a love song of a girl who had her heart broken.

A song doesn't tell a story. It just tells years later what's going on in her heart.

[34 : 57] I find the chorus very provoking. She says, by the way, I forgive you. After all, maybe I should thank you for giving me what I've found.

Because without you around, I'd be doing just fine. What's she saying? That's what's going on with Joseph. Brothers, maybe I should thank you.

Because it's through your lying and cheating and stealing and selling that God has positioned me now to serve the world. It's amazing. In so many ways, it's what God wants us to repurpose, the thing that hurt in our life, to think like that.

God is working down in the pit, and so God raises Joseph up. But I love this. He's not done. We're not done. We're seeing all that we need to see.

Many young men long for the providence of God to bring them power and prominence. But it's only for them. Isn't that what was going on with Joseph?

[36 : 02] He wanted that. He runs around. No one runs around telling the story of everyone bowing to them unless it's what they crave. But he's different now.

Look in verse 46. Joseph was 30 years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

He's been set on high. It's been 13 years since he had those dreams. But he's learned. He's been set on high not to serve himself, but to serve, to lay down his life.

That's what he does. He goes through all the land. He gathers up all the food in the plentiful years. Look in verse 49.

Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea. It's covenant language. Until he ceased to measure it.

[37 : 08] For it could not be measured. Look at the last two verses. 56. So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold the Egyptians.

For the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain. Because the famine was severe over all the earth.

Something like 15 or 16 times that absolute all runs through this passage. To say God had raised the man who would rescue the world.

Rescue the people of Israel. Joseph's gone from the pit to the second most powerful place in the land. As our Lord has taught us, whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

But whoever humbles himself will be exalted. It's the pattern of the Bible. Wonderfully, it's the pattern that's woven in this passage. Whoever exalts himself will be brought low. Adam exalted himself and was brought low.

[38 : 19] Pharaoh exalted himself. Hardened his heart. The Israelites exalted themselves. And humbling and grumbling. I mean grumbling and complaining. Saul exalted himself. Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, and was struck down.

They're all brought low. Whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Abraham's exalted. David's exalted. Rahab's exalted. Ruth, Solomon.

It's the pattern of the Bible because it's the pattern of the gospel. What this is telling us, Joseph is picturing for us how God is going to rescue the world. He's not going to go for a man sitting on the throne of Rome.

He's going to go for a man from the little town from which nothing good should come. The town of Bethlehem to raise up. Why? Because this son of God didn't begin there.

He's the God through whom all things were made. Yet entered humanity. Humbled himself. Being obedient to the point of death. Even death on a cross. Not for his sins. But for our sins.

[39 : 15] And he took up the cross. Dured the hostility and wrath of God for sin. All the humiliation rose from the dead. And so anybody that wants to be exalted with him has to be humbled alongside him.

Martin Luther once said, everyone must duck their head to come into the kingdom of God. That's the truth of the Bible. If you'll duck your head.

If you'll bow down and realize, you know what I deserve? I deserve the wrath and fury that was poured out on him. I deserve worse than the pit of Joseph. I deserve the pit of hell.

The truth of the gospel. If you believe in him. If you believe God raised him from the dead. You will be saved. Everyone who believes in the Lord will be saved.

That's the truth of the gospel. Humble yourself for the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you. First or James. Or first Peter actually.

[40 : 25] In conclusion. Years later, Admiral John Stockdale sits down for an interview with Jim Collins. Who wrote the book Good to Great. Collins says Stockdale enters the room still limping.

From the torture. That he has never recovered from. After a few moments of silence, Collins says, who didn't make it out?

He said, the optimist. Collins said, the optimist? I don't understand. The optimist. What do you mean? Stockdale said, the optimist.

They're the ones who said, we'll be out by Christmas. We're just going to wait it out. Christmas comes and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, we're going to be out by Easter. And we're just going to wait it out.

Easter would come and Easter would go. And so they died of a broken heart. They gave up. They just watched and waited. He said, it's a very important lesson for us all.

[41 : 29] Must never confuse faith. That you will prevail in the end with the discipline to confront the brutal facts. And to press on. That's what this text is in the Bible for, I believe.

The good purposes of God's providence cannot be stopped. But you must not just watch and wait. You want your life to change? Let's change it today. Let's trust God. Let's step forward.

Let's not reject the acts of faith. Put your faith to work, is what James would tell you. You want your marriage to be different? Put your faith to work. Put your soul to be different?

Put your faith to work. Your home to be different. Your life, you want to be known for something else? Put your faith to work. One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the thief on the cross.

He's there. Crucified. Right next to our Lord. Two people. He's crucified in between two thieves. And he says to Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[42 : 38] One little act and forever. What he's known for is change forever. Put his faith to work and trust it in Jesus Christ. While the other thief is known just as that.

May God help us. Father in heaven, we cast ourselves onto you. Thank you for the privilege of sitting under your word. Thank you for speaking to us and encouraging us.

Lord, may your word not return void. Accomplish the purpose for which you sent it. All the words that are helpful direct our hearts to the steadfastness of Christ. Anything unhelpful be completely forgotten.

For your glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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