



Sermon Notes

Term – Summer 2018

Series – Joseph

Gathering & Date – 10 & 5, 19 August

Title – Joseph in Prison

Preacher – Paul Langham

Reading – Genesis 39:1 – 41:1 (my own retelling attached below)

Main message of this talk in one sentence – ‘But even there, God looked after Joseph’: no matter how bad life’s circumstances, we’re never out of God’s sight and care

Main points –

If the ‘conservative’ mindset needs a theology of the miraculous, the ‘charismatic’ mindset needs a theology of suffering ... (see separate pdf accompanying these notes)

Miracle and Misery travel side by side throughout the Bible, and that is our experience too

At some point, like Joseph, each of us must learn how to deal with

- being falsely accused
- life being unfair

Does God cause suffering? No, but he does use it ... when we compare the older Joseph with the younger, he hardly puts a foot wrong – there is no bitterness towards his brothers or towards God. He behaves honourably towards Potiphar’s wife; he uses his God-given gift of dream interpretation to serve others rather than inflate himself.

Whatever gift God has given us, it is for others, not ourselves – e.g. Paul writes about the gift of prophecy

... the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. 1 Corinthians 14:3

For further thought and prayer –

Does your theological template and your spiritual reality incorporate a theology of both the miraculous and suffering?

Have you ever been falsely accused? How did that feel? How did you deal with it? Did you learn anything from the Lord during that time?

How have you dealt with life being unfair? What have you learnt through those times?

Have you ever blamed God for your suffering? The Enemy is delighted when we allow him to convince us that God causes suffering ... not least as that mindset will make it much harder for the Lord to use suffering.

Ask the Lord to give you a biblical attitude towards suffering, as encouraged by James & Paul

¹⁰ Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. James 5

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 5

Genesis 39:1 – 41:1

His brothers may have been doing their best to put Joseph out of their minds, but God had not forgotten him. God ensured that Joseph's master, Potiphar, spotted his potential, and noted his hard work. Before long, Joseph began to rise through the household ranks, firstly becoming Potiphar's personal slave, and then taking charge of the whole household. Joseph's ability and dedication, combined with God's favour meant that Potiphar's life flourished as never before. With all his affairs in Joseph's capable hands, he didn't have to worry about a thing.

However, someone else had their eye on this good-looking young foreigner. In fact, Potiphar's wife couldn't take her eyes off him, and set her heart on getting him into bed with her.

But Joseph turned her advances down point blank. 'Your husband has shown me great trust and favour. He's put me in charge of everything. I can help myself to anything I want, except you, because you are his wife. How could I betray him and my God like that?' But day after day, she continued to tempt him, and so determined was Joseph to resist her advances that he soon began to avoid her whenever possible.

That couldn't go on forever, of course, and one day he found himself alone with her in the house. 'Come to bed with me!' she begged, grabbing hold of his cloak. But Joseph broke free and ran, leaving his cloak in her hands.

Humiliated, Potiphar's wife called her servants. 'Now we see the truth!' she shouted. 'This foreign slave thinks he can treat us as his playthings. He's just tried to seduce me, but I screamed and he ran. Look! Here's his cloak.'

When Potiphar came home that evening, she repeated her accusation to him. 'That Hebrew slave you regard so highly tried to rape me today! Luckily, when I screamed, he ran off. I kept his cloak to show you.'

Potiphar was furious, and threw Joseph into prison.

But even there, God looked after Joseph. This time, it was the prison warden who noticed Joseph; soon, Joseph found himself in charge of the inmates and all the organisation of the prison. Like Potiphar before him, the warden found that, with Joseph in charge, he didn't have to worry about a thing.

Some time later, two new prisoners arrived. One had been Pharaoh's personal baker; the other his private wine steward. Both had offended the king, and both were assigned to Joseph's care.

One night, the two men had troubling dreams, and neither could disguise their anxiety the next day. Joseph could see something was wrong. 'What's the matter?' he asked them. 'You two look as though you've seen a ghost.'

'We each had a dream last night,' they replied. 'Such vivid dreams, they must mean something, but there's no one in here who can interpret them for us.'

'Don't worry!' said Joseph. 'That's one of God's specialities. Tell your dreams to me.'

'In my dream,' said Pharaoh's former wine steward, 'I saw a vine with three branches. As I watched, clusters of grapes ripened before my eyes. I found I was holding Pharaoh's cup, so I pulled off some grapes, squeezed the juice into it, and placed it in Pharaoh's hand.'

'OK,' said Joseph. 'The three branches mean three days. In three days, you'll be out of here, a free man, restored to your former position. You'll soon be pouring drinks for the king again! But listen! When all this comes true, put in a good word to Pharaoh for me. Life has been cruel to me. I'm far from home, sold into slavery, and have done nothing to deserve being locked up in here. Please – don't forget me.'

The baker was impressed, and encouraged too; Joseph's interpretation was not only convincing, it also had a good ending. 'In my dream,' he said, 'I was balancing three baskets on my head; the top one was full of delicacies for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them.'

'The three baskets also mean three days,' Joseph told him. 'But I'm afraid your outlook isn't so good. In three days, Pharaoh will have you beheaded, and your body impaled for the birds to peck away your flesh.'

Three days later, it was Pharaoh's birthday, and he threw a party for his top people. Guess what happened! He had his two former servants brought in and paraded before his guests. He restored his wine steward to his position; but he had the baker executed, just as Joseph had foretold.

The steward, however, forgot all about Joseph ... Two long years passed.

From Paul's own retelling of the book of Genesis