

# The Mysterious Mercy of God's Presence

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Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] And now we're going to turn to our Bible reading for this evening. Willie Philip, our senior minister, is going to be preaching God's Word to us shortly, and he's continuing in Genesis.

Do grab a Bible. If you don't have one, there are plenty spread around the auditorium. Or wave your hand, and someone in the welcome team would love to grab one for you. And we're going to be reading this evening Genesis chapter 39 and Genesis chapter 40.

We're going to read in two parts. So once we finish, do keep your finger in your Bible so you can turn again quickly to these verses.

So first, Genesis chapter 39, beginning at verse 1, page 33 in the Visitor's Bible. Now, Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guards, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

[ 1 : 21 ] So Joseph found fever in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.

The blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now, Joseph was handsome in form and appearance, and after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, Lie with me. But he refused and said to his master's wife, Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge.

He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?

And as she spoke to Joseph, day after day he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. But one day, when he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment saying, Lie with me.

[ 2 : 51 ] But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of her household and said to them, See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us.

He came into me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house. Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home. And she told him the same story saying, The Hebrew servant whom you have brought among us came in to laugh at me.

But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house. As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, This is the way your servant treated me.

His anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in prison.

[ 4 : 01 ] But the Lord was with Joseph and shewed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison.

Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him.

And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. Sometime after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord, the king of Egypt.

And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. And he put them in the custody of the captain of the guard in the prison where Joseph was confined.

The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody. And one night they both dreamed.

[ 5 : 07 ] The cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt who were confined in the prison. Each his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation. When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled.

So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, why are your faces downcast today? They said to him, we have had dreams and there's no one to interpret them. And Joseph said to them, do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me. So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, in my dream there was a vine before me and on the vine there were three branches.

As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth and the clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

Then Joseph said to him, this is its interpretation. The three branches are three days. In three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly when you are his cupbearer.

[ 6 : 26 ] Only remember me when it is well with you and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of Hebrews and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, I also had a dream. There were three cake baskets on my head and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh.

But the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head. 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. On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.

He restored the chief cupbearer to his position and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them.

[ 7 : 41 ] Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. Amen. This is God's word and we'll return to it shortly.

Genesis chapter 39 and 40. Let me start with a question. How do we expect the answer to look when we pray a very common prayer?

Lord, please be with me. Lord, please be with them and bless them. Well, here I think are two chapters that give a great deal of insight into the way of God's presence and God's blessing in the lives of his servants that he loves greatly.

Although God's presence with his people is always a merciful presence, the truth is often it is also a very mysterious presence and sometimes it can be very perplexing and even deeply painful.

One thing we can't miss, I think, if we read these chapters is that God was with Joseph. His presence in blessing overflowed all around Joseph.

[ 9 : 05 ] And each scene that we've read together in these two chapters begins by shouting that so loudly we can't possibly miss it. Verses 1 to 6 of chapter 39 tell us repeatedly God was manifestly with Joseph as he served Potiphar.

Six times we're told. In verse 21 to 23 where the second scene begins. Again, we're told equally God was with Joseph as he served in prison.

Look at verse 2. The Lord was with Joseph. In verse 3 his master saw it and the Lord caused all that he did to succeed. Great blessing.

Again, verse 5 the Lord blessed the Egyptians' house for Joseph's sake. Look down to verse 21 which introduces the events in prison. This is one of these places where the chapter divisions in the wrong place should be after verse 20.

But once again we're told plainly, aren't they? The Lord was with Joseph. He showed steadfast love. That's covenant love and loyalty. And exactly the same blessings abound. Verse 23 The prison keeper just like Potiphar gives everything into his hand.

[10:12] Why? Because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did the Lord gave him success. Are we getting the point? The Lord was with this man blessing him.

He really is in the midst and his blessings are flowing through this man and all around this man. So why do we need to be told that so many times? Well of course because if we look into the events in the story and each story that follows the story of Joseph in Potiphar's house and then the story of Joseph in prison then it appears to be the exact opposite is happening doesn't it?

Nothing like blessing at all. Joseph is unjustly treated he's cruelly punished he ends up forsaken and totally forgotten. And in each account terrible things happen and yet we're told about the powerful presence of God's blessing.

Yet when you look up close and personal in each case it looks like the very very opposite. What Joseph sees is just perplexing pain. Far from being blessed by God he looks to all the world as though he's being cursed by God.

Now imagine these chapters were here without verses 1 to 6 and without verses 21 to 23 and we read these accounts of what happened to Joseph. We would naturally look and say well look God has surely abandoned this man.

[11:42] But no you see these paragraphs at the beginning of each tell us that that is not so. So what on earth is going on? Well remember this story is not just Joseph's story but it's the story of Israel of Jacob's whole family the chosen people of God to bless the world and we've seen what a mess they're in and yet God is going to save them and two of Jacob's sons are going to be instrumental in that.

Joseph but also Judah. Very different men but both will become great saviors for God's people. So last time in chapter 38 Judah well he learned the cost of disobedience.

God had to humble him didn't he for his service to come in God's plan. God broke him and transformed him for his service. But here what we see is God also preparing Joseph training him for his service as he also is greatly humbled and as he learns the costliness of obedience to God and as he is proved as a faithful servant of God and a faithful saviour of his people.

So let's look at the story and try and make sense of what it's here to teach us to understand something more of the mysterious mercy of God's presence at work in the lives of everyone every single one that he calls to serve him and to serve his kingdom purposes.

First of all let's just look at the text itself and what these two chapters recount for us and what they show us with aching clarity with great pathos is the pain of a faithful slave.

[13:26] It is a story of fearful pain and it reveals the mystery of God's ways. God was certainly with Joseph and yet it seemed to all the world and no doubt often to Joseph himself that God had actually forsaken him and forgotten him.

So as a slave to Potiphar Joseph is faithful to both God and man in his life and he proves competent and constant and chaste and yet his reward is to be forsaken by all and sent to prison. And as a slave in prison Joseph is faithful again to both God and man on his lips he's deeply compassionate he's consistent he's courageous in speaking God's word and yet what is his reward?

To be forgotten and left languishing in prison. Look at the first story in verses 1 to 20 there. We're reminded at the beginning how Joseph got to Potiphar's house he was sold as a slave by his merciless brothers he was alone he was isolated in a foreign land and yet verse 2 the Lord was with him in that dreadful place.

Don't focus here at all on Joseph's feelings we didn't learn anything of that either did we in chapter 37 later on we learn from his brother's own lips in chapter 42 how distressed Joseph was when they put him in the pit and when they sold him and how he cried out to them pleading for mercy and that's just a reminder isn't it that Joseph wasn't Superman no servants of the Lord are he was devastated naturally by his situation and yet God gave him strength to adapt in his situation and God's blessings abounded as he did he began to learn I think what the apostle Paul also learned in prison do you remember to be content with whatever situation he found himself in and it's a reminder isn't it that there are no ideal circumstances in which to serve God that we to wait for no there's there's opportunity always always to serve God faithfully anyway

[ 15 : 34 ] I can do all things through him who strengthens me said Paul whether I've got plenty or whether I'm hungry whether I'm in abundance or whether I'm in need and I think that was Joseph here I wonder if Joseph was clinging on to those promises that God gave him remember years before in his dreams promising him a great place a future in God's plan at any rate certainly it's obvious here that he hadn't given up his trust in God because clearly his master saw not just his competence and his constancy but Joseph must have spoken about his God to him because Potiphar clearly attributed the blessings to the personal God of Joseph look at verse 3 he saw that the Lord was with him Yahweh Israel's God in everything he did and of course he was a businessman he didn't want to waste any time he harnessed this very profitable manager just as Laban had done to Joseph's father many years before do you remember and so Joseph rose naturally to a place of real eminence in everything in his affairs apart from the food he ate he was in charge that means just his most personal affairs were not in Joseph's hands so everything now seemed like success and verse 7 he was handsome he had good looks too what could be better but that's the thing isn't it it's never easy to live with success even even God-given success people in that position become a target don't they because people are often envious and people who are specially gifted by God specially blessed in God's service very often become a great target for enemies a great target for the enemy her father used to quote an old saying he who stands closest to his captain is a sure target for the archers and what we see in verses 7 to 18 is Joseph in the firing line he's a target for the enemy and the enemy comes in the form of Potiphar's wife it seems she was a woman of a certain age who's either sexually frustrated in her marriage or perhaps she's just voracious in her appetite but at any rate she lusts after Joseph she tries to seduce him like a scene out of

The Graduate isn't it Mrs. Robinson well actually her words are not so much enticing in verse 7 they're commanding aren't they lie with me he is a slave after all but Joseph Joseph shows total faithfulness not only to his earthly master notice but to God the great contrast isn't there to his brother Judah in the previous chapter surely that's deliberate no he says I cannot betray Potiphar's trust in me but nor verse 9 can I abuse the sanctity of marriage because you're his wife and above all he says I cannot sin against God so despite increasingly difficult pressure verse 10 day after day he wouldn't listen to her please for this illicit affair that's extraordinary pressure isn't it when temptation comes again and again day after day very tempting isn't it to make the thing more plausible you begin to think of all sorts of reasons why maybe it isn't such a bad thing after all she does seem such a needy woman after all her husband really doesn't give her much attention much affection maybe I can give her the emotional support that she needs that's all well many a well-meaning man has ended up in an adulterous affair beginning that way trying to help someone he perceives to be a needy woman or you could say well she's the master's wife after all I ought to do what she wants I'm a slave she's responsible anyway it's not me I'm just a junior who am I to say that she doesn't know best sure there's an element of that every time somebody who's very young gets involved with somebody who's much older a teacher at school perhaps well then he could have self-pity couldn't he well I've had such a terrible life think of the abuse that I've suffered the hands of my own family here's someone who seems to love me here's someone who appreciates me and cares for me and wants me me who everybody else has rejected maybe God has put this person here just for me Joseph could have rationalized all kinds of ways couldn't he just as we can do often it is about a romantic relationship which God says is wrong but then we want to feel must be right perhaps with somebody else's spouse or someone of the same sex perhaps that we're attracted to or someone who's not a fellow believer doesn't share our love for the Lord but seems to be falling in love with us countless ways to rationalize but Joseph didn't do that he kept absolutely clear didn't he that whatever his feelings said whatever his heart might want to say and and however much he might lose by crossing this woman who obviously had great power over him and he must have feared mustn't he that she would seek revenge but he would not do it because ultimately it was a sin against

God he would not grieve the Lord his God even if even if no one else find out anything about it or knew anything about it at all it's the very opposite isn't it of that scene at the beginning of the Bible in Eden because just like the first humans Joseph was given everything nothing was kept back from him in all Potiphar's house except this one thing Potiphar's wife but instead of grasping for that one forbidden thing he obeyed God and we could talk endlessly couldn't we about how not to fall into temptation but in the end the only real power to overcome temptation is love for the Lord our God

love that makes us delight in him and makes us grieve at the very thought of dishonoring him if you love his presence more than any other thing that is the power against temptation the Lord was with Joseph we're told repeatedly and Joseph therefore would rather lose with God than lose his God I wonder if that's true of you wonder if it's true of me it's a question isn't it we need to ask ourselves well as they say hell hath no fury like a woman scorn and so one day verse 12 Mrs. Potiphar thought I'm going to have him and if not I'm going to destroy him and that's what happened I read the story and Joseph has no option but to flee out of her clutches so first of all in verse 14 she spins the story to maximum effect with all the other slaves no doubt they were very envious of Joseph and were easy to be taken in because people often hate an honest worker a diligent worker so often they're shown up by comparison aren't they so they love to pull down somebody in authority somebody who's been raised up above them somebody who's eclipsed them we all know that and she whips up a tirade against this Hebrew notice who laughs at us Egyptians and then in verse 17 she spins it again to her husband with a particular dig at him notice this Hebrew you brought in among us came into laugh came into sport with me she waves

[ 23 : 35 ] Joseph's garment at him accusingly this Hebrew Jew hating is as old as it's ugly isn't it and once again do you notice Joseph's garment is used as a focus of attack on him great writing and verse 19 says Potiphar was angry interestingly it's rather ambiguous we're not told who he's most angry with I'm sure he knows his own wife very well don't you think and he may very well doubt her story he also knew Joseph very well trusted him very very greatly I suspect Potiphar knew but here's the thing when people are forced to choose between people like this it very often happens doesn't it that even good men are proven weak and they'll do just the most expedient thing because for Potiphar to challenge his wife to take Joseph's side would be very difficult wouldn't it very socially awkward so he sticks to the establishment way of doing things closes ranks and despite losing his most able servant we're told he puts Joseph in prison although again that fact might actually belie his true belief about the situation because normally you'd expect the man to be put to death immediately but no he put him in the royal prison where he is the captain of the guard and actual ultimate charge so he keeps

Joseph in his employment but to Joseph what a terrible blow that prison door slamming shut must have felt like he was right back in the bottom of that pit in Dothan don't you think in fact chapter 40 verse 15 that is exactly what he calls the prison do you notice this pit the Lord was with him the Lord's blessing is surrounding him he's been righteous he's been faithful to God in fact heroically so man and woman have dealt absolutely wickedly with him again and again and again and yet verse 20 Joseph is flung into prison and he was there he remained in prison while Potiphar's wife lay on her couch smiling and wondering who the next manager of the house was going to be that she could throw herself at you can imagine Joseph in the prison can't you reciting the words of Psalm 73

I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked and when I see my own agony here in prison and I expect many of us at times have felt exactly that haven't we about our own lives or others when we've said the same thing why Lord why this is so unjust well time passed and verse 1 of chapter 40 tells us probably several years later because by now Joseph's been in prison in Egypt for more than 10 years time passes and another story unfolds and Joseph is now faithfully serving the captain of the guard most likely still Potiphar but this time not in his house but in prison and again do you see how we read the narrative is preceded by another loud reminder in verses 21 to 23 don't be mistaken about what's happening the Lord is still with this man God is still showing covenant love and loyalty to Joseph God has not abandoned him still verse 23 whatever he does the Lord makes it succeed because the Lord is with him why does he blast that out again because we'd never guess otherwise would we would we well look what happens Joseph shows extraordinary courage he's first sold as a slave he endures terrible injustice as an innocent man and verse 15 I think in chapter 40 gives us just a glimpse of the agonies that he must have been tormented with I'm still in a pit he says I've done nothing to deserve it and that would be enough wouldn't it to break many men most of us I would think it takes huge courage to survive in a situation like that and only Joseph's hope and trust in God's word of promise sustained him and he hadn't lost that as verse 8 makes clear look he knows that revelation comes from God and he knew that God had spoken to him all those years ago in those dreams revealing that he would have a great place in God's covenant story the story of the promise given to his fathers but along with his courage in sticking to that in faith I think we see he's a man of great compassion so

he's assigned these high profile prisoners and he obviously cares about them verse 7 he sees their trouble he wants to help them and here's a man think about this here's a man who's got every possible excuse to become utterly hardened utterly bitter don't you think but he hasn't it seems that his suffering hasn't hardened him it's softened his heart towards other people because like Paul in prison he's accepted God's hand and he's yielded to God in everything that's happened he's learned another old saying that out of the presses of pain comes the soul's best wine and it's a great picture

[ 29 : 18 ] I think here of how to witness to people in trouble Joseph is genuinely caring of these men he's the epitome of godly charity and yet he clearly is a quiet witness isn't he to God to the Lord he's not afraid to confront their wrong ideas no no interpretation of dreams doesn't belong to magicians it doesn't belong to any men verse 8 it belongs to God God alone and he's willing to bear witness to them he's willing to bring God's truth into their lives don't have to repeat the story again you know it very well the cup bearer is going to be restored notice Joseph is totally confident that what he tells him will happen because verse 14 that's why he says to him remember me to Pharaoh when you get out I'm sure Joseph felt that at last this was perhaps the answer to his prayers about to be about to come but notice how faithful he also is he he doesn't duck the necessary negatives with a baker does he

John Calvin comments all love to be flattered hence the majority of teachers in desiring to yield to the corrupt wishes of the world adulterate the word of God now that's true isn't it but the true witness of God must be prepared to give hard words unpalatable words wounding words even however much they might make you unpopular or scorned or hated that's not easy is it but Joseph did I'm sure verse 19 he spoke these words with great sadness don't you think but he did speak them he was faithful to God utterly with his lips in prison even as he had been faithful to God utterly with his life always so surely now at last he will be restored and rewarded because verse 21 the cupbearer is restored just as Joseph said and I'm sure Joseph heard about it and rejoiced and he was just waiting waiting for the good news of his own release every day listening for the sound of a messenger coming and the day went on to days and the days turned to weeks and the weeks to months and the months to years but still no message no release verse 23 the cupbearer did not remember

Joseph he forgot him and wasn't Joseph singing how long oh Lord will you forget me forever how long will you hide your face from me and wasn't everybody else singing oh he trusted in God let God deliver him he blessed others haha can't bless himself and I suspect his former friends and associates were ashamed of him disassociated themselves ashamed of his chains it's extraordinary you know Joseph's situation clearly God has completely withdrawn his presence from him he remained in prison forgotten and forsaken and that's where the scene ends so perhaps our text actually has been adulterated maybe verses 1 to 6 and verses 21 to 23 of chapter 39 should be cut out because then we can make much more sense of

Joseph's flight couldn't we we just say well we're being told God has clearly withdrawn his blessing from this man and we should learn a lesson it could happen to us and that is sometimes isn't it what we conclude in our own lives or in our own church life if there seems to be nothing but pain upon pain or disappointment after disappointment bereavement after bereavement maybe God has abandoned us removed his blessing or when you stand in the burnt out ruins of your church parts of north India today surrounded by dead bodies surrounded by burnt bibles and a jeering crowd and you think surely God has abandoned us and maybe there was no God we've been wrong all this time there are many other situations where it seems as though that is the reality to the world and even to ourselves but you see the scripture is here to teach us a different answer because the truth of this story is that in the pain of this faithful slave

God was present and God was blessing in the proving of his faithful savior it's a story isn't it of God's faithful proving revealing the mercy of his ways both in Joseph and through Joseph he's not forsaken by God but instead he's being forged by God he's not being punished by God but he's being prepared by God as a true savior for his people and we know this because we have the rest of the story playing out and we'll see it but just turn with me to one cross reference that helps us to see it so clearly Psalm 105 page 504 if you have one of the visitors Bibles just three verses in the middle of this Psalm give us an inspired interpretation of Joseph's whole experience of suffering in Egypt verses 17 to 19 the Psalm is telling us of the whole story of God's covenant people from Abraham right down through the Exodus and in verse 16 we're told about the famine that took Israel

to Egypt and verse 17 says

[ 35 : 04 ] God sent a man ahead of them Joseph who was sold as a slave the man through whom they would come to prosper greatly and multiply and be blessed in Egypt and verse 18 says his feet were hurt with fetters his neck was put into a collar of iron and there's no word collar there and a better translation would be his feet were humiliated as in shackles his soul came into iron his soul came into iron what does that mean well there's a clue many references to this word iron elsewhere in the Old Testament and every time it's associated with Egypt just one of them is Deuteronomy 4 verse 20 you can have a look at it later and there are others and God talks about bringing Israel out of Egypt out of the iron furnace the iron smelting furnace Egypt was the furnace of affliction for God's people Israel and Egypt was the furnace of affliction for Joseph who went before them as their savior and what this psalm is really focused on isn't so much the shackles on Joseph's flesh but on what was going on in his soul in his whole being

Joseph was humbled he was bowed low every part of him became like iron in a furnace to be smelted until notice verse 19 until the word of the Lord tested him proved him true as A.N. IV puts it and again that word proved true or tested means to refine in the smelter to purge away the dross until all that is left is pure bright gleaming and valuable metal and that was the cost to Joseph that this family of wanderers who came to Egypt to be made as verse 24 of the psalm says to be made fruitful and numerous and stronger than their enemies that was the cost to him that that should happen Joseph's experience in these fires of affliction was integral to the saving of his brothers to the saving of all God's people to fulfill their destiny as the chosen people the holy nation of people belonging to the Lord their God his humiliation his brokenness his obedience and faithfulness in the face of great temptation and trial his experience in God's iron smelting furnace is where he learned the cost of obedience which proved him true as God's faithful savior and that's what God was doing for the saving of many lives for the transgressions of his own people he was stricken it was the Lord's will to crush him and to cause him to suffer you see just as the prophet Isaiah centuries later spoke about another servant to come for the saving of many lives it rings bells doesn't it because we think inevitably of another beloved son who trod the path of darkness and forsaken this alone and who as a servant learned the costliness of deep obedience to God for the saving of many lives to bring many brothers to glory and to an inheritance that they never deserved what does the letter to Hebrews say although Jesus was a son he learned obedience from what he suffered and being made perfect became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him his feet were humbled he was brought low bodily his soul was as iron in the furnace of affliction until what he foretold came to pass the word of the Lord proved him true until as Matthew chapter 2 reminds us out of Egypt out of the furnace God called forth his son and his great exodus the great exodus for the saving of many lives from the darkness of sin and of death and the curse in this world look to all the world didn't it that Jesus was abandoned by God unblessed forsaken forgotten the crowds mocked Jesus and said oh he he has been abandoned by God his own disciples abandoned him even Jesus himself cried out on the cross my God why have you forsaken me as those clouds of darkness gathered around him as he were in the pit and yet in all that he was proved a faithful savior and through his suffering at the hands of evil men God meant for good what was accomplished the salvation of countless numbers see friends it's the life of

[ 40 : 17 ] Jesus isn't it and above all it is the death and resurrection of Jesus that sheds light on the heart of this story way back in Genesis it's the life of Jesus that explains all the mystery of the pain of Joseph's life but not just of Joseph's life of all the lives of all who are true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ because you see what we see in Joseph's story here thirdly is the pattern of all faithful servants this is a story with such a familiar pattern just because it enfleshes in Joseph's life and his experience the mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ it's the shape of his experience that will always shape the lives of those who are truly his Smith who

It's the pattern of Calvary that's embedded in the lives of every single believer who is a true follower united to the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why, you see, when you read the Bible from beginning to end, you find this pattern again and again and again.

Joseph in the fires of affliction rejected by his brothers. Moses later on sent as a savior and a deliverer rejected by his own people.

David again and again, read the agonies of his enemies, read the Psalms, all the prophets, not least Jeremiah, who was literally put in a pit just like Joseph. And on and on it goes. Read

Stephen's account in Acts chapter 7.

It's a persistent pattern for all God's true servants. And that is because all true servants of Jesus are saved into a life that mirrors his own.

[ 42 : 27 ] It shouldn't surprise us. Every page of Scripture testifies to it. That's why Jesus said to the disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, Don't you understand? Everything in the law and the prophets must be fulfilled in me.

That the Christ, the servant of the Lord, who embodies all of these, must suffer and then enter his glory. And it shouldn't shock us either, should it, when Christ's apostle tell us that through many tribulations, you must enter the kingdom of God.

And that we are to share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. Notice, not through the punishment of God, but by the power of God.

Because that is the blessing that we share as true servants of Jesus. As the people that he is present with in order to bless.

That's what it means for God to be with us and to bless us. Still want to pray that? There is real cost, isn't there?

[ 43 : 39 ] Cost Joseph to play his part in fruitful service. You meant it for evil and it was painful. Deeply painful. But God purposed it for good, for great salvation.

Cost Paul to play his part in faithful service. Death is at work in us. He said, so that life can be at work in you. These are the words of men whose lives are conformed to the pattern of Christ.

They're shaped by the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it will cost each of us to be faithful servants, to be fruitful servants of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus himself tells us, he prunes every branch that will bear fruit. And pruning is painful. When we face misunderstanding. When we face mockery, perhaps.

Because of our faith. We're friends. Maybe even family will turn against us. Because we take a stand for Jesus. Because there are things we say, no, we cannot do. Because of our love for Jesus. Or the things that we must do because of our love for Jesus.

[ 44 : 46 ] And sometimes the greatest pain can be inflicted from others within the professing family of faith. Within the church.

Like Joseph. Who was betrayed by his own family. His own brothers. Who was let down by his master. Who was forgotten by the very ones he ministered to so wonderfully in that prison.

See friends, the Bible doesn't whitewash. It doesn't hide the real truth. It tells us that loyalty to Jesus as your Savior and your Lord will be very, very hard.

It can be very, very harrowing. Because it is a pattern of crucifixion. There is a cost. And if this story teaches us anything, it teaches us also that all true servants of Christ need great courage to bear that cost.

God's presence with us to bless us can be very mysterious and very painful. And it can go on being very painful for a very long time. It was 13 years before what God had said to Joseph in his dreams would come to pass.

[ 45 : 55 ] His exaltation. 13 years. Before it did come to pass. And all that time the word of the Lord proved him true through deep and perplexing mystery and pain.

As God was with him to bless in the iron furnace. The furnace of affliction. And we may sometimes face long times when the world thinks that we're in disgrace with God too.

And that's hard. But as John Calvin says, this story points us to Joseph. And it says, have courage. Be clothed with that same spirit of fortitude which not even the iron hardness of the wicked shall be able to break.

Hold God's judgment alone in view, he says. Which casts all the perverse judgments of the world into the shade. And submit to any disgrace. And submit to any disgrace.

Rather than decline from the path of duty as true servants of Christ. It will cost. And we do need courage. God's presence is mysterious.

[ 47 : 01 ] It can be very painful. But we do also have real comfort. Because as the Lord was with Joseph. So he has promised to be with and to never leave or forsake anyone who is his.

Everyone who loves him and obeys his voice. Them that honor me, I will honor, says the Lord. The Lord was with Joseph.

The Lord showed him steadfast covenant love. And the Lord will stand with us. Always. In just the same way.

If we also are faithful to him. There is cost. We need courage. But we do have this great, unassailable comfort.

Let's pray. He has said, I will never leave you. Nor forsake you.

[ 48 : 08 ] So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? Our Father, we thank you.

That it is being granted to us. Not only to believe in Jesus, your son. But also to suffer for his sake. Sharing. In the life.

Of redeeming grace. And wonderful mercy. For the saving of many lives. So help us, Lord. In whatever circumstance we find ourselves.

To have courage. And to take great comfort in all your promises to us. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.