

Sovereign Grace that Preserves

Grace from the Patriarchs

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Bible Text: Genesis 37

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Our annual theme is "Finding Grace" and we have been thinking particularly about this theme verse of Hebrews 4:16, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." That's a great and precious passage where the Lord encourages us to come boldly before the throne of grace because he wants to give it to us. The answer is yes. Don't you love those answers? He says, "Come to me because the answer is already yes." Well, this summer we've been thinking about that particular theme of finding grace through the grid of the patriarchs and what we have seen is that God's grace has been showing up in some rather messy, sinful situations. I mean, after all, Abraham gives up his wife twice, tries to fulfill the promise through Hagar, and God's grace was there every step of the way. As Abraham's faith was growing and maturing, God's grace was there every step of the way. We saw that was true in Isaac as well as God provides a special wife for him, protects him and his family from famine and keeps his marriage intact despite the fact that he gives his wife away just like his daddy did. Now we have seen it in Jacob, how despite his trickery which often came back on his own head, the fact of the matter is the Lord continued to work in his life and to fulfill the promises that he had established. Now we're going to turn our attention to the last patriarch and that is Joseph and unlike the stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob where their sinfulness was very clearly seen, the faults of Joseph are not so easily seen and the encouragement that that is that it's going to give us the picture of God's grace not only operating in the midst of our sinful decisions but also in the midst of our innocent suffering and that is, we're going to be thinking about this morning grace that preserves, specifically through the grid of innocent suffering.

With that in mind, please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 37. That is in the very first book of the Bible in the chair in front of you. Genesis 37. I'm going to be reading an extended portion of the word this morning as I want you to have a copy of the Bible in front of you so that you can follow along as I read. We're going to actually read all of chapter 37 and all of chapter 39 in order to get the picture of what's happening as the Joseph story begins to unfold. So Genesis 37:1,

1 Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan. 2 These are the records of the generations of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age,

Make note of that. He is 17 years old. Think about what's going to happen now in light of being 17.

was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

Keep note of that for a minute.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. 4 His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. 5 Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; 7 for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to reign over us?"

There's the ancient version of like, "Seriously?"

So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. 9 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"

Answer: in due time, yes.

11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. 12 Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem. 13 Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "I will go." 14 Then he said to him, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?" 16 He said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock." 17 Then the

man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. 18 When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! 20 "Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" 21 But Reuben,

Remember, Reuben is the firstborn,

Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." 22 Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him" - that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. 23 So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; 24 and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it. 25 Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum

I guess that's the ancient version of breath mints,

and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt. 26 Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 "Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh."

Yeah, like killing him is really bad. Let's just sell him instead. Right, I mean, we can live with that. I mean, let's just take the 20 shekels and we'll have a party. We'll drink our memories away and it will all be over. I mean, how they come up with this plan is interesting.

And his brothers listened to him. 28 Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt. 29 Now Reuben [who apparently was gone for a period of time,] returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. 30 He returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?"

Picture oldest brother responsibility there for a second.

31 So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; 32 and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this;

Yeah, that's how it went down, didn't it?

"We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic or not." 33 Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" 34 So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. 35 Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him. 36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

Now, chapter 38 takes a bit of an aside which we're not going to cover this morning. Go to 39,

1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. 3 Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. 5 It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. 6 So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7 It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. 9 "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" 10 As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. 11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. 12 She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, 14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to

me to lie with me, and I screamed. 15 "When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." 16 So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, [it's your fault.] came in to me to make sport of me; 18 and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

19 Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned. 20 So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. 23 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

Now, with our time remaining, I would like us to think about 2 acceptable attitudes towards God's work in the midst of innocent, notice that, innocent suffering. So we're not talking about paying the natural consequences for our choices, we're talking now about innocent suffering and I first would like us to consider this point: to embrace the fact that God's sovereignty allows for innocent suffering. That God's sovereignty on the one hand and innocent suffering on the other can actually go together. Wouldn't you agree that innocent suffering and God's sovereignty at times stand at odds against one another or at least seem to? I mean, there was a famous book written that argued that God could either be good or he could be sovereign. One of the 2 but he can't be both and he can't be both because look at all the innocent suffering that's in the world. I think this passage of Scripture is going to say, "No, God can be both. He can be good and he can be sovereign at the exact same time." What God has in mind is a bigger plan and a bigger picture than what many of us are willing to acknowledge and that is certainly going to be true in the life of Joseph.

I would like to sketch throughout this passage several ways in which we see Joseph actually innocently suffering. The first one is Jacob's favoritism partially, at least partially, resulted in Joseph's brothers hating him. Verse 3 of chapter 37 says, "Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons." Now, you would think that Jacob would have learned that lesson from his own childhood, wouldn't you? I mean, after all, the rivalry that occurred between him and Esau should have been an indicator that, "You know, maybe I shouldn't go down the favoritism route," and yet that's exactly what he does. Not only does he go down that route but he made him a varicolored tunic. In other words, he had a visible representation for Joseph being different. His father loved him more than all the others and his brothers hated him and could not speak on friendly terms with him because of it. You see, Jacob is distinguishing Joseph among the others, not only through the coat of many colors which was, in essence, whenever Joseph was around a visible

sign that, Dad loves you more. Yeah, I get it. Okay, Dad loves you more. All right, I get it. Dad loves you more. Okay, I got it. Don't rub it in my face.

But then he gives him a position of power and think about this notion, this position of power. When you read verse 2 that Joseph brought a bad report against his brothers, there is a temptation to think that Joseph is the younger brother who is always calling out, "Mom, Dad, Judah is doing it again. Simeon is messing with me. Reuben hit me. Levi is calling me names." Right, I mean, that's the sense you get when you first read the text. But if you keep reading, verse 14, you find this, Jacob actually says to Joseph, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and," do what? "Bring word back to me." In other words, Jacob puts Joseph in the position of power. He says, "Hey, I want you to go and check on your brothers." I mean, can you just imagine those conversations? "Yes, Joseph, we're doing it. Okay? Go tell Dad that everything is fine." I mean, one of those. Right? I mean, that's just the sense you get. Jacob has given Joseph a position of power. He is the one who is supposed to check on his brothers and then report to dad on how they are doing. They didn't like him because of that. They didn't really enjoy the fact that Joseph has this position of power and that Joseph is given this favoritism.

Then, not only is he favored and that favoritism has blessing from Jacob, of course, but consequences from the brothers, innocent suffering there. But then notice this: Joseph's dreams provided an occasion for the brothers' hatred to grow. And who is the one responsible for the dreams? That would be the Lord, right? The Lord is the one giving him these dreams. Joseph didn't ask for them, he just gets them. And his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

Now, I know that some commentators have been a little bit hard on Joseph right about now. They viewed him as the spoiled brat who was kind of walking in and saying, "Do you know what? You all can either bow down now or you can bow down later but I figured you might as well just get started practicing right now." I'm not convinced that's actually the right interpretation. Joseph's motives are not described in this passage and I think I can argue this, have you ever had a dream? Have you ever had a dream? So if you've had a dream, what was the first thing you did after you woke up? You told somebody about it. "Hey Hon, you wouldn't believe this dream that I had. I mean, it was crazy. I mean, we were like running from a bear and we had to like hop in a car and drive away. It ate somebody else. You know, thankfully we were faster than that guy over there." You know, I mean, that's the kind of stuff you just talk about your dream, right? Well, Joseph explains his dream and says, "Here's what happened. Here's what I dreamed." Whether or not he had pride in his heart, there is no question that the brothers hated him for this.

Now, after he has the second dream, it's interesting that his brothers were jealous of him but his father kept the saying in mind. In other words he thinks, "You know, maybe, just maybe, this is going to give some explanation for what's going to happen in the future. I

don't understand it but maybe God is up to something." The brothers, however, were not so nearly convinced.

Jacob's favoritism, Joseph dreams given by God provide the setting for innocent suffering. But then Joseph is assigned to check on his brothers in Shechem. Now, if you caught the geography here, Hebron to Shechem is about 30 to 40 miles and when he gets there, he encounters a man. I mean, when you read this aren't you thinking, "Like, seriously? I mean, is this really how it went down?" Here is a man who finds Joseph wandering in the fields and here's what he says, "A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, 'What are you looking for?' He said, 'I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock.' Then the man said, 'They have moved from here; for I heard them say, "Let us go to Dothan."'" I mean, don't you sit there and think, "Really? Really?" I mean, Joseph goes. Goes into the land of Shechem which, by the way, was the location where his 2 older brothers had killed every man several years before, read Genesis 34 if you don't catch that exchange. He goes to Shechem, a place of danger by itself, and he meets a man wandering in the fields. You would think that Joseph at this point would be thinking, "You know, dad told me that I've got a time limit here. I've got to go and search for him for 4 days and then if I don't find him, I'm going to go home." And yet what happens is God provides a person who is going to tell Joseph where they are and you think, "Wait a minute. What's the significance of that?" Remember that being home with Jacob is the place of protection. It's the place of security because daddy loves him best anyway. But send him to the brothers without dad there and he is now in what? Danger. And God has thrust him into that danger. He finds a man wandering in the fields who happens to overhear the conversation with the brothers? I mean, is that not a picture of God's sovereignty or what? I mean, of everybody who is wandering around, hanging out, this dude overhears a comment made by the brothers? That is why some commentaries actually believe that this was like an angel showing up. I mean, the odds of this happening are unbelievably small. Yet, what does God do? God pushes Joseph further and further from the place of protection and further and further closer to the hands of the brothers who hate him and know that he is coming to check on them.

Well, when the brothers see him coming, they immediately plan to take his life. Reuben, as the oldest son, has a lucid moment and decides, "Do you know what? Let's create a little plan here." And the plan is, "Let's throw him in a pit and then I've got to go and do some stuff. I've got to run some errands. And then after I get done with my errands, then I'm going to come back and I'm going to take him to daddy." That's the plan, right? It's very clear in the text. Here's the problem: Reuben's plan backfires because he is AWOL when the traders come. Again, if we can't see God's sovereign hand in this, it's just amazing how God puts all of this together because, again, notice what happens: the brothers sit down for a meal so they are having their lamb chops or whatever. Joseph is in a pit. And they raise their eyes and behold. Wow, isn't this amazing? A caravan of Ishmaelites are on the way over, coming from Gilead with camels bearing breath mints and balm and myrrh on their way to Egypt. And Judah then says to his brothers, "Well, what profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? I mean, how are we going to make any money on that? I mean, for crying out loud, this is an opportunity

here. I mean, we can't kill him because that would be like bad but let's make some money while we're at it. So let's sell him." So that's exactly what they decide to do.

So they lift him out on the pit, right? This is the pit where Reuben suggested that they store him so that he can then go back later and get him. And he is brought to Egypt. So here it happens. Joseph is in this cistern that normally holds water but is dry at this particular moment and Reuben encourages them to send him in there and then he's going to go and get him later. But while he's gone, here is a caravan of Ishmaelites. Think like third cousins twice removed, right? I mean, that's who these people are. Remember Abraham had 2 sons: Isaac and Ishmael. They are going to be at war against one another forever which is why there is still war going on in the Middle East today. Here they're at war and in the midst of their war, now one side of the family, the Isaac side of the family, decides to sell the grandson to great uncle's grandkids. Like third cousins twice removed. So here they are selling Joseph to the other side of the family line.

Joseph has become the favored son, given a distinguished garment, given a position of power and he is now sold into slavery by his brothers. And how old is he? 17. Can you imagine the fear? Can you imagine the challenge? Can you imagine the amount of suffering that's going on in his heart and life right now? He turns around and all of a sudden he is on his way and, by the way, if he was north, where is he going to go by? Home. Can you imagine that? Here you are, you're stocked, you're chained up and there is home, like right over there. And he's on his way to Egypt to be sold as a slave and what has happened? How has this been orchestrated? God has done it. God has been orchestrating these events. God has been pushing Joseph every step of the way, providing even people like this who overheard the conversation. Providing Reuben to have to make a few errands before he comes back. All of a sudden there are some Ishmaelites who just happen to appear, who are going to sell Joseph to the Egyptians. This is unbelievable. God is orchestrating every single event.

Then think about this: Potiphar's wife refuses to take no for an answer. I mean, after Joseph is sold to Potiphar he enjoys a little bit of success and so you might be thinking, you know, after a period of time, here he is a slave, he has to learn a new language, he has to learn a series of jobs, finally gets into somewhat of a position of power and influence and somewhat of care and now what happens? "Oh great, the master's wife is hot for me. Oh great." Right, that's exactly what's going on here, right? So he then argues, "Hey look, I can't do this. This would be a sin against God. This would be a sin against your husband. I'm not interested in doing this." And she refuses to take no for an answer. You think she'd be like, "Okay, fine. You reject me, alright fine." Wrong. She is after him day after day after day. Notice how the text says, "She spoke to Joseph day after day." So here he does, goes to work every day and he's going to get propositioned. That's his day at the job house. I mean, seriously? She refuses to take no for an answer. Imagine how challenging that would be.

Then, in this great moment, she catches him. Again, it's the one day when nobody else is in the house and he goes in to do his duty like he normally does and boom, she grabs him. He has no choice but to leave his garment. So what does she do? She stores it. Think

about that for a minute: do you think Joseph knew that he was going to be in trouble? Do you think Joseph knew that Potiphar's wife actually had one of his garments? I mean, imagine going into work the next day. "Is today going to be the day I die? I wonder how he's going to choose to kill me? Is he going to beat me to death? Is he going to cut off my head? Is he going to make it quick or am I going to have to endure this for a long time?" So he has to wait and wait and wait and wait. Then finally Potiphar makes his way home and here's what his wife says, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us. It's your fault, dude. Came into me to make sport of me; and I raised my voice and I screamed and he left his garment beside me and fled outside." Now, is that what happened? Not exactly, right? So when his master heard these words, his anger burned. His anger burned. She has him exactly where she wants him.

Now, let's catch our breath for a minute and begin to think about where we've been. Jacob puts his son in a position to be hated by his brothers. A man shows up out of nowhere who actually hears a conversation that sends Joseph right into harm's way. Joseph is then sold to his family, extended family, for the purpose of being sold into slavery. The woman of the house lies about him in order to get him in trouble. I mean, it's like really? Did this seriously just happen by chance or is God sovereignly working behind the scenes? Directing the paths? Orchestrating the events? What I would like to submit to you is that God has been in control from moment one and that is part of the way the Lord works. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in a place where every time something seems to happen it's bad? Then there's a good moment and then right after the good moment, again there's something else that's bad or hard? Time and time and time again. Have you ever been at the place where you are suffering innocently? Have you been at the place where it's just life is hard? I want to suggest to you before we get upset about that, before we get angry at God, we have to realize that without innocent suffering, there would be no salvation. We have to recognize that without innocent suffering, you would still be a part of the kingdom of darkness and you would have to pay for your sin yourself. Do you realize that the greatest single example of innocent suffering is the coming of Jesus Christ?

Notice the words, in 2 Corinthians 5:21, it says, "He made Him," and that is referring to Jesus, "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf," for what purpose? "So that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." 1 Peter says it this way, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God." It may be, friends, that God has orchestrated a series of events to bring you here today because today needs to be the day of your salvation. Maybe you have felt like an innocent sufferer that one thing after another has just happened and happened and happened and you don't know how to explain it. Maybe part of the answer is God wanted you to see that that's exactly what he did to his Son for the purpose of helping you to repent of your sin and to trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Maybe the reason that you are here this morning was to recognize that innocent suffering actually is the pathway to salvation through Christ and that what you need to do is to confess your sin and trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for your salvation. Or maybe you say, "Well, I'm not sure I'm ready to do that but I would be willing to talk to someone." Take that connection card, fill it out and say, "I want to meet with a pastor." Turn it in at the visitor

tent or turn it in at the Welcome Center and someone would be happy to meet with you right away for the purpose of explaining to you how you can know Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Christian friend, it may be that your world has been a bit rocked by innocent suffering yourself and it's been a challenge to put God's sovereignty and innocent suffering together into one package. What God wants you to see is that that's how sometimes he works for a larger purpose and I want to encourage you to embrace it knowing that God does have a sovereign plan for you. There is something in store for you. And maybe the purpose of being here this morning was to have your theology expanded just a little bit, to have your picture of God expanded a little bit, that innocent suffering is part of the pathway that he uses to grow us to be more mature.

Now, here's the second point: to trust that God is present in the midst of innocent suffering. You see, it's one thing to suffer, it's another thing to suffer alone. And while God has orchestrated these events and ensured that Joseph was sold to Potiphar, there is something else that God has been doing and that has been walking with Joseph every step of the way. Now, there is no question that Joseph did not have his friends; he didn't have a cell phone to call home; he didn't have any access to people that he had before. He is on his own, humanly speaking, but God has not left him. Yes, he's in the Egyptian house. Can you imagine going to sleep every night after you were sold into slavery? Where you don't understand what anybody is saying because they speak a different language than you do? And all of a sudden you have to learn it. You have to catch on. You've got to catch on fast. And then you go to bed at night and you just weep over your circumstances. You weep over what is happening here. And it would be so easy to get mad at God in that moment. But what Joseph does is says, "Do you know what? God is with me. I don't have my dad. I don't have my mom. I don't have anybody that I can trust around me. But I do have a sovereign, loving, caring God and I can trust him." We, as believers post-cross, are encouraged to hold fast our confession because we have a high priest who can actually sympathize with our weakness. Who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin.

The Lord was with Joseph, that's one of the key phrases of this section of the story and we're going to see several ways in which God actually does that. Does he lead Joseph to suffering? Absolutely. Does he leave him to suffer all by himself? Absolutely not. First of all, do you know the Lord limits Joseph's suffering according to his plan? It may be more than what we would like, that's for sure, but it's not all the way. What was the brothers' first plan of action? To kill him and yet that's not what happens. God is orchestrating something else here. He has put together a new plan. When Potiphar finds out that his slave apparently has been propositioning his wife, he doesn't kill him. He sends him to prison. Remember that when Joseph was sold, he could have been sold to practically anyone and yet he is not just sold to any rich Egyptian, he is sold to the captain of Pharaoh's guard. That's going to be a really important part of the story come next week.

Then we also find that God blesses the work of Joseph's hands in Potiphar's house. Yes, he is sold as a slave. Yes, you can only imagine how long it would have taken to get the

language and understand what he needs to do to get his job going. But at some point, the master saw that the Lord was with him. Maybe that was a year, maybe that was 2 years, maybe that was 5 years. But at some point, the master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. According to verse 6, "he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate." I mean, this line right here just cracks me up. I mean, he was so confident that really his only concern was whether or not he was having steak or chicken for dinner. "Should I have 2 portions are just one? Do I need to watch my figure or am I all good?" I mean, that's the only thing that Potiphar is concerned about because everything else is in Joseph's care, as a slave.

Then God gives Joseph unusual spiritual strength. Unusual spiritual strength. One of the reasons why I love this story is because it illustrates that you do what is right even if you suffer for it. You do what's right even if you suffer for it and in particular Joseph does exactly that. How long did it take before he attracted the attention of Potiphar's wife? We don't know. Maybe a couple of years. So here he is, late teens, early 20s possibly, and Potiphar's wife is now interested in him and here's Joseph's response, "There is no one greater in this house than I, and my master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" I find that amazing. I mean, it's not like Joseph was getting his weekly dose of the word and worship at the local Baptist Church. That's not what was happening. He's on his own. Where is he getting worship? Where is he getting the word? You know, he didn't have a copy of the Bible at that point? Where is he getting his strength? Where is he getting his encouragement? He's getting it directly from God in order to respond with this kind of attitude. I mean, put yourself in these shoes. Wouldn't you be like, "Do you know what? What have I got to lose? I'm already a slave. I'm a foreigner in a land. I'm probably going to die here. I mean, what have I got to lose? Why not?" Yet, that's not Joseph's attitude at all. His attitude is, "Do you know what? I want to do what's right before God even if it costs me. Even if I have to pay for it, I want to do what is right before God."

Then Joseph is sent to the prison rather than to the executioner. He is sent to the prison rather than to the executioner. In fact, he's not just sent to any prison, he is sent to where the king's prisoners were confined. A really important part of the story, huh, in Genesis 40 and 41 and 42? Then surprisingly God, in fact, blesses Joseph even in prison. We're told, "But the LORD was with Joseph," again, in prison. Remember those early days. You're shipped off to prison. That's probably not a very exciting time of life. You know, you don't know what's going to happen. You don't know whether this is going to be it. "Am I going to die here?" And if you've ever seen old prisons, I have occasionally had the opportunity to travel and seen old prisons. You know, they really weren't the way they are today. They didn't really have nice cots and temperature controlled areas. They were like pits and so you lived in this pit. It was horrible. And yet what happens? God blesses Joseph again, so much so that the chief jailer does exactly what Potiphar did and that was give Joseph responsibility for all of it.

Friends, can I just suggest that God could be doing the same things for us? That God could actually be encouraging us in the midst of suffering that he is with us and he is

wanting us to trust him particularly with the struggles that we're facing? I realize that it is possible in the midst of innocent suffering to think that God's presence has been removed. David himself cried out in a time of despair, "How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?" But by the time that Psalm ends, David says these words, "I have trusted in your loving kindness. My heart will rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has been good to me." Joseph came to the conclusion that he could trust God even in the midst of his innocent suffering and I want to encourage you that you can do the same. 1 Peter says this, "For we have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in his mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but," instead he did this, he "kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously," and because he did that, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

Friends, innocent suffering does not have to shake our faith. Instead it may be that that is how God is going to orchestrate a bigger plan in our lives. It will be my joy to say, "Your will, your way always." Are we sure? Are we sure? May God give us the grace to be able to say that last word, always.

Let's pray.

Father, we want to thank you that you are such a gracious and compassionate God. I pray specifically for those who are experiencing innocent suffering, not the kind that comes from the consequences of making sinful choices but the kind that simply comes from living for Christ, from your sovereign plan, thrusting us into a place of suffering. Lord, I pray that you would help us to trust you in the midst of it. I pray that you would help us to recognize that you are there with us. I pray that you would help us to embrace it rather than to fight against it. I ask, Lord, that you would help those of us who are not in that position, who are frankly enjoying many blessings, to be an encouragement and a comfort to those who are. Lord, we ask that you would please help us to live for Christ even if it costs us something, to be like Joseph who said, "How can I do this great evil and sin against God," even though that word, that choice would result in further consequences. So we ask, Lord, for your help in Jesus' name. Amen.