

Genesis Chapter 39

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Date: 23 February 2020

Preacher: Andrew Carter

- [0 : 00] Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
- [2 : 30] Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you. Thank you.
- [5 : 30] Let's pray together.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
- [7 : 59] Thank you.
 Thank you.
 The reading is Genesis and chapter 39.

 All that was done there.
- [12 : 59] Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
- [15 : 29] Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you.
 Thank you. Thank you.
- [18 : 29] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[21 : 29] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[23 : 59] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[26 : 59] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[29 : 44] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. So that's my second point.

When nothing seems to make sense, don't seek comfort in illicit things. My third point is that when nothing seems to make sense, don't fail to be faithful.

You know, with Joseph, what you never seem to find him doing in his dungeon days is sitting and sulking. He serves the Lord in the best way that he can.

You know, life had treated Joseph very badly in one sense. But, you know, the thing that characterizes Joseph was that he wasn't full of grievances. He was going to do what he could to serve other people.

And he demonstrates that. So in Puttapha's house, he demonstrates his integrity and that he can be trusted. That couldn't have happened if he'd been sulking in a corner and nursing his own self-pities.

[31 : 29] It's impossible that he would have been noticed for his integrity and trustworthiness if that had happened. How many people spend a lot of their lives nursing their grievances and full of self-pity, feeling sorry for themselves?

And then later on, of course, in the life of Joseph, you find him ministering to other people by interpreting the dreams that come to the cupbearer and the baker and later on to Pharaoh.

You see, Joseph didn't fail to be faithful. He kept serving the Lord in difficult circumstances. And there's a lesson for us here. Because often in the life of the church, you find good men and women stop serving when things go wrong.

When the darkness enfolds them and difficulties come, they stop serving other people. People who were once givers with their time and their money and their kindness and their hospitality, they kind of duck out when things become difficult.

And the lesson of Joseph is, don't do it. Keep serving the Lord, even in the difficult days. I knew a pastor in Manchester of a church and he was a good man.

[32 : 46] And the church, some people in the church rose up against him and criticised him very heavily. It was very difficult for him. And you know, with criticism, there's always some truth in what people say about you. We all have to face that, don't we?

It wasn't, I don't think it was the whole story, but he got a lot of criticism. And he was, he became a man full of anger. And I remember going for a walk with him one day and he said to me, how could they treat me like this after all I've done for them?

And I remember thinking, and I wish I'd said it to him, I thought about it later, what he should have said to me was, they've treated me badly, but everything I did was for Jesus.

It wasn't for them. Of course we serve other people. But you know, we're serving Christ, aren't we? He should have said, how could they treat me like this in spite of all I've done for Jesus?

And if you serve Jesus Christ, you don't get too upset when people treat you badly. You know, Jesus Christ has so loved us that we have a debt to the whole of God's creation to love them.

[33 : 56] And our motivation is not because people treat us well in return. If you live like that, you will stumble. So that's my third point.

I'm going quickly because of time. But when nothing seems to make sense, keep serving the Lord. Keep giving to other people. Don't become a taker. And fourthly, when nothing seems to make sense, don't become bitter.

You know, one of the things that strikes you again about Joseph is that there is not a hint of bitterness about this man. Even when his brothers meet him at the end, remember those brothers who wanted to kill him? They sold him into slavery.

He wasn't bitter against them. He never sought to punish them. There are some people who when they're wrong, they seek to punish that person all their life in the way that they behave. You find wives and husbands who try to punish each other for years because they think they've been treated badly.

Emotionally, I'm talking about. Joseph was not bitter. He recognized that even though his brothers had been evil, that somehow God took it up in his purposes and used it for good.

[35 : 06] And it saved half the world from starvation. Did the plan that he was involved in. And I think of that verse in Hebrews 12. It says, See to it that no one falls short of the grave.

Grace of God. And that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. You know, that root of bitterness is a fascinating scripture, isn't it? Because we can allow a root of bitterness just to kind of take root.

A root of bitterness to take root. But it kind of gets traction in our lives. And then, if we're not careful, we kind of put lots of strong fertilizer on it. Because we think we're entitled to that root of bitterness.

And we let it grow and it starts to control us. And self-pity and bitterness can become an addiction that we actually like. I think of that, I think it's in John 4 where Jesus said, maybe John 5, Jesus said to that man who was beside the pool, do you want to be made well?

You know, he had to get in the water to be healed, didn't he? And Jesus said, do you want to be made well? And I've often thought about that. Why wouldn't you want to be made well? But you know, some people like being ill and like their disability because it gives them a license to feel sorry for themselves all their lives.

[36 : 17] What would they do with themselves if they couldn't feel sorry for themselves? There are people like that. It's a sad situation, but it's true, isn't it? Self-pity can become an addiction.

We think we're entitled to our bitternesses and our self-pities. And, but the problem with bitterness is it poisons everything, doesn't it? And it poisons all those around us. Bitter people are never nice to be around.

The greatest test of all in life is that when, is this, when you're doing right things and you're doing well and you're doing good to other people that you get punished for it.

How do you respond? What do you do? I knew a man. His name was Geoffrey Bingham and he was a preacher in Australia.

He became a very good friend of mine. He died at the age of 19, 2009. But he'd been a prisoner of the Japanese and he'd had his leg shot to pieces in battle and then he was a prisoner for three and a half years.

[37 : 25] And he was treated as cruelly as all the British and Australian and Dutch prisoners of war were treated in those awful POW camps. And he said to me one day, I've forgiven all those men who treated me so badly.

And he said, as a sign that I forgave the nation of Japan, I went to Japan to preach the gospel there in churches to demonstrate I'd forgiven these people. And he spent a lot of his life in Australia ministering to men who burned with anger against the Japanese for how they'd been treated.

And you can understand why. But he said to me, I went to see him in 2003 with Julie, my wife, who went out there. He said to me, I've come to see that the love of God dissolves all bitterness.

The love of God dissolves all bitterness. And he used to say to me, he used to say, often when he was preaching, keep a soft heart. It's the most important thing you'll ever do is to keep a soft heart towards God and towards other people.

Don't get hard and suspicious about everything and everybody. So when nothing seems to make sense, don't become bitter.

[38 : 43] Fifthly, be patient in suffering. And God will bring you out of your suffering at a time that is right for him.

There was a man called Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Some of you will know him or know of him. He was a Soviet dissident in the days, the dark days of the Soviet Union. And he wrote something that offended Stalin and he was put into one of the gulags in Siberia.

He had back-breaking work to do. He didn't know if anybody knew he was in that awful place in Siberia in freezing cold conditions in his underwear.

Minus 30. I don't know how he survived. And he decided he was going to kill himself. He read about this in one of his books. But he was a Christian and he decided that it wouldn't be right to kill himself.

So he decided he'd run away and let the guards shoot him to death as he did so. His kind of mind got twisted. But just before he was about to do that one of this other prisoner came over to him with a stick and he'd never seen this man before and this man drew a cross in the sand.

[39 : 56] And he turned away from deciding he was going to die. But what he didn't know was that his books had been smuggled out into America and into the West and there were negotiations going up between the American government and the Soviet Union about getting this man out.

And what he didn't know was that within three days he would be taken out of that camp taken to Moscow and flown on a plane to Switzerland and he was a free man in Switzerland.

God took him out at the right time. Be patient in suffering. Number six I'm going to finish in a second. Number six don't let your dreams die in days of darkness.

Joseph was a man of destiny. I don't know whether he knew that his gift to interpret dreams would one day save the world from starvation but I think he may have had an inkling that God had given him an incredible gift and in those dark days I don't think his dream ever died.

Don't let your dreams die in days of darkness. You know the only way that you can live like this is that you have an ingredient in your life that saturates your whole being and it's this it's hope.

[41 : 14] It's hope of resurrection from the grave because Jesus walked out of his grave and lives forever. You too if you're a believer in Jesus will one day walk out of your grave and live forever.

A friend of mine in Cambridge said to me recently he said you know we're talking about the despair about our land and it's godlessness and he said you know we Christians in spite of all the darkness of today we will win and I said why is that?

He said because we have something that our world does not have. We have hope and in the end that will change a nation. It might be in 100 years it might be in 200 years time but we have hope. You know what the opposite of hope is?

Cynicism and our nation is characterised by cynicism the mocking the sneering the seeing through everything that's good. You know what you believe about the future must change how you fundamentally experience the present.

I'll just read another Russian Doskyosti can't say his name he wrote these words I believe I'll finish with this I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage that in the world's finale there's going to be a great finale at the end of history organised by Christ himself in the world's finale at the moment of eternal harmony something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice it will comfort all resentments it will atone for all the crimes of humanity for all the blood that has been shed that it will not only be possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened do you believe that?

[43 : 06] it's an incredible thing to believe you know at the end of the Lord of the Rings if you've seen the film Sam the Hobbit is in despair at everything that's gone wrong and he falls asleep but then he wakes up and he sees Gandalf the wizard and Sam says to him I thought you were dead I thought I was dead is everything sad going to come untrue?

is everything sad going to come untrue? and that's the Christians hope that there will be resurrection and all that is sad will come untrue in the glory of a world reborn you know you have to believe that because in life there are all these bitter cups you've got to swallow God gives a remedy for every problem that we can encounter he's a giving God so if we're lost he offers us truth this morning if we want to receive that if we're guilty he offers us forgiveness if we're unclean he offers us sanctification if we're angry he soothes our hearts and he brings our hearts to peace if we're cynical he gives us hope if we're resentful towards others he commands us to love others and in that our resentments can disappear because God is a giving God and he wants us to live in freedom and that's his offer to us will we believe his gospel and live let's just pray and then we'll sing

I've gone over time Father we thank you for the life of Joseph the lessons we can learn are profound and we don't want to be a people who are locked into our self-pities and our bitternesses and our resentments in the midst of darkness we want to remember the things that we've learned in the light and I pray that what we've learned this morning might be part of that light that will take us through the darkness and I pray for everyone here if there are people with grievances and angers and rages and disappointments all the things that are the lot of human beings that you would heal those things that you would restore souls people here who need a new start will you heal every heart that in freedom we might live every one of us

Amen Amen Thank you.