

Acts 7: 9 and 10; “But God Was With Joseph”, Sermon #27 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 8th, 2015, In the Morning Worship Service.

It is a part of God’s great and glorious plan, for every one of His elect people, that they come to terms with the way that He leads them; that is, that they would think more about the outworking of His providence in their lives. The way that God leads us is not always the way that we would choose for ourselves to be led. God’s ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts, it says in Isaiah 55: 8. We would like to think that we are the one who is in control of our future. And surely we must say that God certainly does take into consideration the desires of your heart and the decisions that you make. But behind all the decisions that you are making as a Christian, God is evaluating what would be for your good and what will fulfill His own purpose for your life. God has great purposes for every Christian’s life; that you would learn His ways and that you would become useful in service to Him. More particularly, those purposes are related to building your faith and your trust in Him. God is concerned for your obedience to his word and what it will mean for you to become Christ’s faithful disciple.

In order for you to grow up into Christ, God will take you through various testings of your faith. This building of your faith will involve His ordaining that you will go through trials of various sorts; trials that we would rather avoid. What happened to Joseph is a mighty example of the kind of trials that a Christian will sometimes go through. Our text says: “God was with Joseph, and delivered him out of all his troubles.” It will be the same for all those who are trusting in Jesus Christ; those who are looking to God to lead and to guide them. It is this phrase, “God was with Joseph”, we want to explore more thoroughly this morning. How was God with Joseph? And how will He be with you, in all of your trials and triumphs of faith? 1st of all – God was with Joseph in the greatest trial of his life. 2nd – God was with Joseph in the greatest temptation he faced in his life. And 3rd – God was with Joseph in the timing of his deliverance and his promotion to a position of authority. I pray that this message will be instructive and encouraging to everyone here today; listen now, as I speak of God’s faithful watch care over all of His people.

1st of all – We want look at the fact that God was with Joseph in the greatest trial of his life.

Verse 9 says: “And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.” “But God was with him.” Why were the patriarchs envious of Joseph, and why did they sell him into Egypt? Well turn with me over to Genesis 37, verse 1. “Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was stranger, in the land of Canaan.” “This is the history of Jacob.” “Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers.” “And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.” “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all of his children, because he was the son of his old age.” “Also he made him a tunic of many colors.” “But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him” “Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more.” “So he said to them, ‘Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field.’ “Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.” “And his brothers said to him, ‘Shall you indeed reign over us?’ “O shall you indeed have dominion over us?”

“So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.” “Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘Look, I have dreamed another dream.’ “And this time, the sun, the moon and the eleven stars bowed down to me.” “So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have

dreamed?” “Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before You?” “And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.” Now, you can see here that everyone in this story had sinful problems. Israel loved Joseph more than all his other children; so much so that he made him a coat of many colors to distinguish him favorably from all of his other sons. Joseph brought back a bad report about his brothers. Perhaps Joseph would be called a tattle-tale in our day. But perhaps he was justified in bringing this bad report. Perhaps they were trying to do things which were not good when they were out from under Jacob’s sight. And Joseph thought that Jacob ought to know.

Truly, in many ways Joseph was an ideal son. You can see how this favoritism of Israel for Joseph was no doubt enhanced by the report that he gave. “At least I have one good son”, he probably thought to himself. This favoritism was not a good thing in Jacob, for it further estranged him from his sons. For when the brothers saw that Jacob loved Joseph more than all of them, it bred a resentment in them against Joseph that would not be easily quenched. It says that they “hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.” What is worse, Joseph seems to have had a problem with pride because of the dreams that God had given to him. The reason that I say that God had given him these dreams was that they were prophetic dreams; it was most certainly true, that they would surely come to pass. But Joseph could not keep his dreams to himself; he had to share them with his brothers, conveying these dreams to them in a sort of proud way. They indignantly say to him: Shall you indeed have dominion over us; shall you really reign over us? They hated him more for his dreams than for his words. Who did he think that he was anyway?

Children and young people; when God gives you some great gift, see to it that you do not become proud over it. Do not think that you are superior to others in your family, or others around you. See to it that you learn, early on, to keep some things to yourself. Sometimes you should keep your dreams to yourself, or only share them with those who will understand. It is very necessary, by the grace of God, that you as a young person, will have a humble spirit in relation to whatever good gifts and abilities that God has given you. If you flaunt your own abilities, and think of yourself too highly, others may become envious and hateful toward you for it. You are provoking them to act against you when you tell them of how blessed you are in some way that they are not, and how you believe that you will be raised to a position higher than they are, because somehow it has been revealed to you that you that it will be so. They are not right to react in anger, but if you are proud of your knowledge, and if you act in a superior way or say things to convey your supposed superiority, it will bring down upon you, some very sad consequences. It surely did in this case. Joseph’s brothers hated him, and yet they envied him. And yet we must ask ourselves: Did God providentially ordain that these things come to pass? He most surely did, and yet he was not the author of any of their sins.

God knows how to order all things providentially, using even the evil which people perpetrate against each other, to overrule it for their good. And so, their worst sins, although they can never be justified, would eventually be caused by God, to be used as a part of His purpose, to bring about great good for them in the years to come. It would be for their salvation physically in the time of famine. And it would be for their salvation spiritually from their sins, and eternal death, and the wrath of God which burns against all unrighteousness. All because God was with Joseph. Let’s look at what happened to Joseph. Did things get better right away? Not at all. In fact it lead to the greatest trial of his life. One day Jacob sent Joseph down to where his brothers were, feeding the flock in Shechem, and he told him to go check on them to see if they were doing well. So Joseph went and found them in Dothan, and when he approached them, it says in Genesis 37: 19 – “Look, this dreamer is coming!” “Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, ‘Some wild beast has devoured him.’” “We shall see what shall become of his dreams.” Verse 24 – “Then they took him and cast him into a pit.” “And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.” “And they sat down to eat a meal.” “Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and

myrrh, on their way to Egypt.” “So Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?’ ‘Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.’ “And his brothers listened.”

I hope that you can see that Joseph was a type of Christ; and the reason that he was so, was because God ordained that Joseph be sold into slavery in Egypt for the eventual good and salvation of all of the family. God was with him in this greatest trial of his life. He was with him in the midst of his suffering under the oppression, persecution, and intended harm that his own brothers would do to him. Let us remember that the Lord Jesus was envied by the scribes and Pharisees and leaders of Israel because He claimed to be His Father’s Son, and because His ministry was so successful. Joseph would suffer at the hands of his brothers because of their envy of his dreams and his relationship with their father. Joseph was thrown into the pit, and Jesus was crucified by the approval of His own brethren. Joseph would be sold for 20 pieces of silver, and Jesus would be sold for 30 pieces of silver.

Joseph would be brought up out of this pit and Jesus would be raised from the dead. God would eventually lead all of these brothers to repentance over what they had done in selling Joseph down into Egypt. He would show them mercy and grace and favor where they did not deserve it at all. They had hated Joseph, but God would so work that He would eventually bring salvation to all in the family. Eventually they would love the man whom they had formerly hated. They would come looking for grain and bow down to him, even as he had dreamed. When you come to Christ looking for truth and salvation and wisdom and guidance, He will give it. Let me ask you now whether you as a Christian believe that God is working everything for your good in your present circumstances, even though you may feel yourself to be in some sort of a pit of affliction. Are you experiencing doubt or fear in your mind and heart in relation to the outcome of your afflictions? If you are, I would have you to remember Joseph, that God was with him, even then.

2nd – We will look at the fact that God was with Joseph to prosper him and to guard him in the greatest temptation he faced in his life.

Look at Genesis 39, verse 1 with me. “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt.” “And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.” “The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.” “And his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand.” “So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him.” “Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.” “So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field.” “Thus he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.”

Notice how much emphasis is placed on the fact that the Lord was with Joseph in this, his position of being a servant. You do not have to hold a high position in this world for God to be with you. Indeed, in a coming day, it says in Psalm 138, verse 4 – “All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord, when they hear the words of Your mouth.” “Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.” “Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar.” The Lord regards you if you are in a lowly position and trusting Him for grace and strength, and wisdom and help in the peculiar and particular situation that you may be in. You can see from these verses that I just read to you about Joseph that the Lord was with him and he found favor in the sight of the captain of the guard Potiphar; the man who had bought him from the Ishmaelites. It says that since the Lord was with him, he was successful. Even Potiphar saw that he was being blessed because the Lord was with Joseph, and so he found favor in his sight and he was able to serve him as an overseer in this man’s house.

I hope that you will see that all of this was of the Lord’s appointment. The Lord made sure that Joseph was such a blessing to this man that everything that he had in the house or in the field was

blessed. You see, don't you, that it is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich and He adds no sorrow to it. (Proverbs 10: 22) The Lord can bless you greatly even while you are in a position of servitude or subservience. He can make everything you do to prosper and to be a great blessing to people around you. God can raise you up to whatever position that He wants you to be in. I think that the real question is, whether we have the faith to accept, that the position that He has placed us in, is the position that He wants us to be in for the present, even though we may not be in the position or life situation that we might want to be in. Often we think, if I was only in this certain position, I could serve the Lord.

That was not Joseph's attitude. His attitude was: I will serve the Lord by serving Potiphar to the best of my ability. And the Lord blessed that attitude abundantly; crowned his labors with success and acceptance and favor. Do what you can where you are. Develop your ministry right here and right now, and do not think that you have to go to the mission field to serve God there. You have a mission field right here. It is only the fool's eyes that are on the end of the earth," it says in Proverbs 17: 24. "Wisdom is in the sight of him who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth." Is it wrong to think of the ends of the earth and needs of the heathen there? No, not unless you are neglecting to serve God right here where you are. Ask yourself now – "Am I serving God right here in my church; right here in my job and my family?"

But you should know that as a Christian, that God will test your faith, and Satan will tempt you sometimes to see whether you really want to do things God's way. God ordains this testing, and He permits Satan to tempt sometimes, to see whether you will look to him for the grace that you need in the midst of that temptation. What is it that God has called us to? He has called us to holiness. What is your sanctification? 1st Thessalonians Chapter 4, verse 3 says: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God." Verse 7 then says: "For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness." Oh, how many sexual temptations come to the hearts of men and women; and God expects the Christian to learn to overcome them in order that He might be glorified and that you might make progress in knowing what is truly good and delightful. Flee youthful lusts, and pursue godliness is what the Scriptures teach.

Look at Genesis 39: 6 – "Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance." "And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, 'Lie with me.'" "But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.'" "There is no one greater in this house than I, or has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife." "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Now I want you to notice how Joseph handles this temptation righteously. He does not focus on Potiphar's wife or the possible pleasure of sin; he focuses on two things. He focuses on his immediate responsibility in his job, and then he brings out his greatest reason why he cannot comply with her sinful request. My master, your husband, has put all things into my hand, he does not know what is going on here. He has kept nothing back from me except you, because you are his wife. Why should I be unfaithful to his trust? Why should I spoil all the good that the Lord has done for him, and for me in placing me in this job situation? God has been so generous and gracious, I will not violate your husband's trust in me.

But his most powerful reasoning to himself and to Potiphar's wife comes when he brings this question to his own heart and mind in the presence of this seductress. "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God." He calls sin what it is, but He is even more concerned about what God would think of it, more than what any woman or man would think of it. This is the attitude of mind that we should adopt during times of temptation. How can I sin against my God? To think this way takes grace; it takes God's being with us, and our cultivating that relationship that we have with Him to the point where it will be more important to us to be faithful to him than

our experiencing the passing pleasures of sin for a season. Will you not consider dear Christian that purity of heart and mind are worth more than all the world? The pure in heart shall see God. They shall enjoy Him forever. Why not be in the enjoyment of Him now, rather than thinking that sin has anything to offer you? God was with Joseph, will He not be with you?

3rd – God was with Joseph in the timing of his deliverance and his promotion to a position of authority.

Timing is everything we say; and so it is with God. Joseph resisted the temptation to lie with Potiphar's wife, and what happened to him? He went to prison. Little did he know that this would set the stage for a great promotion that God intended for him. He might have been tempted to think, "Is this the way that God rewards my obedience to Him, and my supreme love to Him?" But we read nothing of this. This does not mean that there were not things to learn there, or do there in the prison. It says in chapter 39, verse 21 – "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison." "And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing." "The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper." What a wonderful testimony to Joseph's faith and diligence; what a wonderful testimony to God's faithful watch-care over Joseph's life.

I haven't time to read to you all that happened to Joseph there in prison, but let me give you the overview. Joseph's particular gift given to him by God, was the ability to interpret dreams. And two men "happened" to be confined in the prison, not too long after Joseph was placed there. These 2 men were the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt. They were confined there, and each of them had a dream on the same night; each man's dream with its own interpretation it says. Joseph came in, in the morning, and he saw that they were sad. He asked them why they were looking so sad. They told him, "We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" "Tell them to me please." They told him and Joseph told the chief butler that his dream meant that he would be raised up within 3 days, restored to his place as before. And Joseph told him to remember him and make mention of him to Pharaoh, so that he would be able to get out of the prison. For, he said, "I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon." The other man, the baker, also told Joseph his dream, but its interpretation was not so good for him. His dream meant that he would be hanged within 3 days. Notice that the interpretations belonged to God, but they were given to Joseph to give to them.

We should understand that there is a precise timing in everything that God does in the fulfillment of his purposes, whether it is in relation to the salvation and deliverance of righteous believing men, or whether it is in the condemnation and judgment of sinful unbelieving men. So too, there would be a precise timing for Joseph's release from prison. But it was not to be in the time that he had hoped for. In Genesis 40, verse 20, that it says, "Now it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." "But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them." "Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." Now we have to pause and wonder about this, do we not? You would think that God knew that Joseph had suffered enough, and that he had learned enough. But in God's mind, he had not. And this is the lesson that we too must learn by faith. God knows how long we should remain, being held in our prison of difficulty. God knows what He wants to teach us and what He wants to do in relation to us. In Genesis 41: 1 it says: "Then it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold he stood by the river." Why two full years? Why did the butler forget Joseph? All of these things were ordained by God in his precise timing.

Look over with me at Psalm 105, verse 16 – “Moreover He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread.” “He sent a man before them—Joseph—who was sold as a slave.” “They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons.” “Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.” “The king sent and released him, the ruler of the people let him go free.” “He made him lord of his house and ruler of all his possessions, to bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom.” This is very precious truth, although it was so difficult for Joseph. In verse 18 it says: “They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons.” Why so long? Why so much suffering? In the margin of verse 18 we find what God was looking for in Joseph. It says there that they hurt his feet with fetters “until the iron came into his soul.” That was what God was looking for.

God knew what pain and disappointment that Joseph was feeling. He also knew that this prison experience would try him and refine him to the place where he could be most useful to Him. Spurgeon says: “God has his times, and his children must wait till his “until” is fulfilled.” “Joseph was tried as in a furnace, until the Lord's assaying work was fully accomplished.” “The word of the chief butler was nothing, he had to wait until God's word came, and meanwhile “the word of the Lord tried him.” He believed the promise, but his faith was sorely exercised.” “A delayed blessing tests men, and proves their metal, whether their faith is of that precious kind which can endure the fire.” “Of many a choice promise we may say with Daniel “the thing was true, but the time appointed was long.” “If the vision tarry it is good to wait for it with patience. John Gill says: “He was laid in iron: or “the iron” (or, as the Targum, “the iron chain”) “went into his Soul”; his body; it ate into him, and gave him great pain: or rather, as it is in the king's Bible, “his soul went into the iron chain.” “In all this he was a type of Christ, whose soul was made exceeding sorrowful unto death: he was seized by the Jews, led bound to the high priest, fastened to the cursed tree, pierced with nails, and more so with the sins of his people he bore; and was laid in the prison of the grave; from whence and from judgment he was brought, Isaiah 53: 8.” (end of quote)

I hope that you will see, dear Christians, that God's timing for Joseph was wise and perfect. His timing in the sending of Christ was perfect. And His timing in terms of your trials and your triumphs of faith is also perfect. He knows when the iron enters your soul, and when He has accomplished His purpose. He knows and He can see clearly when it is that your faith is fixed on him alone. And he knows when you have learned that all of your hope is only from Him. This is how He teaches us how to trust in Him at all times. He teaches us in this way so that we can learn to glorify Him in any situation into which He leads us. Joseph did come out of prison in God's time. The Lord so worked that Pharaoh released Joseph to interpret his dreams of the 7 fat cows and 7 lean cows coming out the Nile. Joseph knew the interpretation, and he was able to give Pharaoh the sound advice of storing up grain during the seven years of plenty, that in the lean years, all of Egypt would have food. And this set the stage for God's plan of bringing Jacob's sinful sons down to Egypt to obtain grain; to the place where they would meet their brother again, and both God and Joseph could deal with them. Joseph would deal with them not only in regard to their physical hunger, but also in relation to their past sins against himself. He knew that they needed what He had; the knowledge of God and grace unto salvation. God's plans are so much greater than our own personal life. And it is when we learn these lessons of faith that we are then equipped to be able to truly help others.