

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. ²² 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. ²³ 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.

It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. ² And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. ³ So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph *was* confined. ⁴ And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while. ⁵ Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night *and* each man's dream with its *own* interpretation. ⁶ And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they *were* sad. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officers who *were* with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look *so* sad today?" ⁸ And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please." ⁹ Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "Behold, in my dream a vine *was* before me, ¹⁰ and in the vine *were* three branches; it *was* as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. ¹¹ Then 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." ¹² And Joseph said to him, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days. ¹³ Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. ¹⁴ But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. ¹⁵ For indeed 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." ¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also *was* in my dream, and there *were* three white baskets on my head. ¹⁷ In the uppermost basket *were* all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head." ¹⁸ So Joseph answered and said, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three baskets *are* three days. ¹⁹ Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you." ²⁰ 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. ²¹ Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. ²² But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³ Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Introduction:

We continue our series on the life of Joseph.

Joseph did all the right things, resisting temptation and honouring God and yet he was thrown into a dirty dark dungeon in a foreign country.

Joseph had two choices, he could either get angry with God and be very bitter about his situation or he could put his trust and hope in God.

Joseph decided to say, O.K. God, what do you want me to do in prison to honour your name?

The pain of unjust suffering is one of the most severe trials we can ever experience.

It may be that we have personally suffered something unjust.

We might have been punished for something we did not do.

Perhaps we genuinely did the right thing in a situation, and it seemed at the time that God did not honour our stand for Him.

There are plenty of examples of Christians down through history who have honoured God, and at the time, it seemed that God had somehow let them down.

William Tyndale was killed by order of the King of England for translating the New Testament part of the Bible into English. Previously it was only available in Latin and therefore the common person couldn't read it.

William Tyndale, before he was burnt to death, cried out in prayer to God.

He prayed, "God change the heart of the King of England".

(Slide of William Tyndale)

A few years later the heart of the King of England was changed in answer to Tyndale's prayer.

The King, through his royal command, ordered that a large copy of the Bible should be placed in every Church in the Land.

The Bible was so popular that it had to be chained to every pulpit in England.

The reason it was chained is that people kept stealing it, it was so popular.

(Slide of this Bible here)

Many years ago, two missionaries were martyred on the sands of the sea shore in Korea.

(The exact place is in N. Korea today) The place where these missionaries were killed was the place where later a great "revival" broke out in Korea.

To some extent that initial work continues today.

Chapter 39:21 tells us that Joseph did not get bitter or angry, the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy.

He gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

He was put in charge of the running of the prison.

It was not the most ideal job but it was the best job in the prison.

We now come to the text in Chapter 40.

The Bible tells us that Pharaoh, king of Egypt was angry with his chief butler and chief baker because they offended him.

The baker and butler were sent to the same prison as Joseph.

By now Joseph was in charge of the welfare of all the prisoners.

In modern day terms, he would be called a "listener".

In U.K. prisons, certain long term prisoners get special concessions.

They have the freedom to roam the prison and support other prisoners in various ways. Some are trained as suicide counsellors.

Joseph definitely had the freedom of the prison but he was not idle.

Joseph worked hard to care for the prisoners.

The new prisoners that arrived were under the care of Joseph.

One morning as Joseph was visiting the prisoners he noticed that the baker and the butler were sad and dejected.

Joseph bothered to enquire into the reason for their sadness.

He was told that they had both had dreams in one night, but there was nobody who could interpret those dreams.

We need to stop here for a moment to consider this cultural context.

It was a common thing in Egypt at this time, for people to take dreams seriously.

People believed that dreams were a way in which the gods of Egypt communicated with humans about the future.

There were professional dream interpreters in that day who were paid well to interpret dreams.

It was a common belief that when dreams came in twos that they must be taken seriously.

We are told in v.8 that the first thing that Joseph did was to witness to these two new prisoners. Joseph told the butler and the baker that interpretations of dreams belong to God.

That was bold of Joseph to put his faith to the test. God now had to honour Joseph's faith.

Joseph interpreted the first dream of the Chief Butler.

In v. 13 we are told that the butler would be restored to his former position within three days.

In v. 14 Joseph requested help from the Chief Butler when he returned to his former position. Joseph went on to explain his whole position of innocence.

In v. 16 we are told that after this interpretation, the baker had confidence to share his dream with Joseph. However, the interpretation of his dream was not so nice.

The Chief Baker would be released from prison in three days and be killed.

The interpretations of the dreams by Joseph were correct. All of the things came to pass. The Chief Butler was restored to his position, and the Chief Baker was killed.

The sad thing that we are told in v. 23 was that the chief butler did not remember Joseph. In other words, he had the opportunity to help Joseph, but he didn't do it.

We are told in chapter 41:v.1 that Joseph had to remain a further two years in this awful prison.

Practical Application

Joseph had the potential for bitterness but he was foreshadowing the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:v. 21-23

²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²² "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; ²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

Just like Joseph we are going to have periods in our life which may be similar to the kind of injustice that Joseph went through.

They are going to be different from what Joseph experienced, nevertheless very painful and real for us.

The issue for us is always how to handle it when it comes. It is not easy but here are some helpful applications.

There are 4 things that will be useful to remember when we face a trial that is similar to the one that Joseph experienced.

1. Don't be surprised by suffering or trials. Usually we are; I am no exception.

The first thing we need to understand is that suffering is not the unusual exception in the Christian life. Peter writes to the Church in 1 Peter 4:12-13 –

¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

The temptation for a lot of Christians is to regard suffering as a strange misfortune, something negative and out of step with God's plan.

Rom. 8:28

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

Some Christians want their lives to be like a cruise ship, but actually it is like a battle ship.

Jesus said "In the world you will have tribulation".

Jesus is the supreme example of somebody who suffered unjustly.

During the trial of Jesus, Pilate repeatedly said, "I find no basis for a charge against Him.

John 18:38, 19:4, 6.

³⁸ Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

⁴ Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."

⁶ Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."

In 1 Peter 2:20 we are told that it is commendable before God if we do good and suffer for it and take it patiently.

²⁰ For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God.

In v. 21 we are exhorted to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

What a challenge.

Joseph took the challenge and eventually got through with God's help.

Q. How about us?

We can't do it without God's help or the help of other brothers and sisters in Christ.

I had lunch with the founding Pastor of OIC, Jack Marshall some time ago.

I remember him recalling some of his trials and challenges.

He said, "When you get to the end of the rope, tie a knot in it and hang on to it".

What he meant in simple English is that when we get so low and so depressed that we can't continue, then hold on to Jesus, He will not let you go.

Jesus said "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13: v.5)

This leads me on to my second point.

2. Don't give up when you suffer

One of the problems with unjust suffering is that there is a big temptation to give up one's stand in personal holiness, throw in the towel and say what's the use, I might as well not bother.

Joseph, when he was in the prison could have complained and said, right that's it, no more doing the right thing, look where it has got me.

We have no record of Joseph complaining.

Meditate on Psalm 73. It is a good Psalm to meditate on.

I will read v. 1-3 and v. 27-28 in the N.L.T.

¹ Truly God is good to Israel,
to those whose hearts are pure.

² But as for me, I almost lost my footing.
My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.

²⁷ Those who desert him will perish,
for you destroy those who abandon you.

²⁸ But as for me, how good it is to be near God!
I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter,
and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.

3. Don't displace your anger when you suffer.

I was trained on a counselling course in London many years ago.

You had to go on this course in order to receive patients from doctors.

It was a Christian Course but I learnt one thing that has been invaluable to me over the years.

The thing that I learnt is that when people are going through a trial or difficult time, or they are angry about something, they nearly always displace their anger by trying to hurt people. By hurting or blaming people it makes them feel a bit better. In counselling language, they call this "Displacement". I have seen this happen many times, both in Christian lives and in non-Christian lives. It shouldn't happen in Christian lives, but to some degree we are all guilty. You can bring this displacement to an absolute minimum by turning to the Psalms, as we will learn at the retreat.

The Apostle Paul tells us how to respond to unjust suffering.
(Romans 12:17-21)

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."
²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Paul says that when we refuse to take revenge and return good instead of evil, God becomes our defender.

Paul gives an example from his own life. He was being slandered in Corinth, but his response was to say 1 Cor. 4 v. 3-4.

³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.

We don't have to keep defending ourselves. God will defend us in due time.

4. Don't miss the opportunity to help other people.

The fourth and final way that we can respond to unjust suffering is to turn it into an opportunity to help others.

We read in Genesis 40: v. 6-7 that Joseph took the opportunity when he saw that the butler and baker were looking sad to ask why they were so downcast.

Joseph need not have taken the trouble to love and support criminals.

The reason that Joseph noticed that the men were so sad is that he was looking out for them.

He took an interest in all the people under his care.

Joseph's circumstances were not exactly ideal, however he rose above his circumstances and took an interest in other people.

I am reading a book at the moment by a famous English writer called Jeffrey Archer. He was put in the worst prison in England for a short period.

What kept him going were two things;

1. He wrote a book about the experience.
2. He helped the murderers and the criminals to be better story writers.

There is a true story about a university professor who went into a deep depression.

He was so depressed that he did not care about anyone or anything. Everything seemed hopeless to him.

One day a visiting friend told him to look back on his life and think of all the people who had been a help to him in his life.

He was asked to select one person from the list and write a letter of gratitude to that person.
He selected an old school teacher who had given him a love of literature.
He wrote a letter to her expressing his thanks for her help.
He received a reply from the elderly woman.

The note said, “Dear William, When I read your letter I was blinded with tears. I remember you as a little boy in my class. You have warmed my old heart. I have been a teacher for 50 years. Yours is the first letter I have ever received from a student with thanks. I will cherish it until I die.”

With that letter came a little light into the depression of the University professor’s life.
He was encouraged to write another thank you note to a significant person in his life.
Then he wrote another letter, then another letter, until he had written 500 notes of gratitude and after that he was fully lifted from his depression.

When you are depressed or discouraged, look towards others and see who you can help and maybe God will lift you up out of your hard time and bless you.

Instead of giving up, consider Jesus, Hebrews 12: v. 1-2.