

Patience in Prison (5)

The Life of Joseph

By Rev. Garrett Eriks

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Genesis 39:21-40; Genesis 39:23

Preached on: Sunday, May 11, 2014

Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church

5101 Beechtree Street

Hudsonville, MI 49426

Website: www.hudsonvilleprc.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/hudsonvilleprc

Continuing our series on the life of Joseph, we turn in God's word tonight to Genesis 39 and 40. We begin reading at Genesis 39, verse 21. We'll read through chapter 40 and all of that will be the text for tonight. Remember that Joseph was thrown into prison by Potiphar because Potiphar's wife lied and said that she came or that he came in unto her, and the opposite was true, and Potiphar then threw Joseph into prison. And we pick it up in verse 21 of Genesis 39,

21 But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22 And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. 23 The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.

1 And it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. 2 And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. 3 And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound. 4 And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward. 5 And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison. 6 And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad. 7 And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day? 8 And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you. 9 And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; 10 And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes:

11 And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. 12 And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days: 13 Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler. 14 But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: 15 For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon. 16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, I also was in my dream, and, behold, I had three white baskets on my head: 17 And in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head. 18 And Joseph answered and said, This is the interpretation thereof: The three baskets are three days: 19 Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee. 20 And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. 21 And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand: 22 But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23 Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Thus far we read God's word.

Let's pray now and ask God's blessing on the preaching.

Father in heaven, as we look at the life of Joseph tonight, we pray that we would see application of the cross to our lives. We pray that through the working of the Holy Spirit we would see Christ in this history but also that we would learn how we are to respond to the hardships and struggles that are found in our own lives. We're thankful for the life of Joseph, for the work of thy grace in his life, for thy presence with him that we may learn of how it is that thou art present with us working in our hearts and in our lives. May thy name be glorified in praise through this word tonight. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

One of the hardest and most difficult sufferings or hardships we have in this life is the hardship of being mistreated, of being shown injustice, especially by someone who is close to us. Have you ever been on the receiving end of that injustice, mistreatment, abuse, not just physical but maybe verbal? Or receiving even the silent treatment by someone? You've done nothing wrong but they treat you wrongly. Maybe you've experienced that, or maybe your kids have experienced that on the playground at school. Someone's mean to you for no reason. Maybe as adults, we remember times when we were treated that way in our youth. Maybe we've been on the receiving end of that from a

spouse. Maybe we've been on the receiving end of that from a parent. Maybe we've been on the receiving end of that from a friend. Maybe we've been on the receiving end of that from a boss or from someone else in the workplace. Maybe it was you were doing the right thing and because you were doing the right thing, they became angry with you and they mistreated you. It is one of the worst and the hardest things to endure in this life. The hurt of that lasts so long, the scars can be so tender and painful and sensitive as well, but the question for us in all of those things is how do we respond? How do we respond? So often when we're going through that kind of mistreatment, that kind of suffering, we're focused on what others are doing and not so much ourselves, but the word of God that we consider tonight points us not to all the mistreatment and injustice but to the way we respond. How are we to respond?

It's striking that in Genesis 40, as we look at this time in Joseph's life when he's in prison and they are the dreams of this baker and butler, our focus is not those dreams per se, our focus instead in this passage, and rightly so, is on how Joseph responds to the mistreatment and injustice and abuse that he experienced in his own life. The injustices, the mistreatment continues. He experienced that in his home where he was living under the roof of his father Jacob, and he experienced that from his own brothers, and we've seen what a dysfunctional family there was there, and also the abuse that Joseph took from his own brothers thrown down in a pit. They're ready to kill him, but then they decide, "No, we'll just sell him as a slave into Egypt." There's where the injustice is experienced by Joseph, especially from his own brothers. Then he's sold as a slave to Potiphar. But he works diligently and faithfully in Potiphar's home. He works hard there, and Potiphar trusts him with everything that's found in his home. And then more injustice. It just doesn't stop with his family and his being in Egypt, but now Potiphar's wife who's trying to seduce him now turns on him, lies about him, says that he was after her, tells that to Potiphar, shows him the coat that she's holding, makes up that lie and the result of that is that Joseph is in prison. So think of that. Joseph's in prison now. This is the culmination of all the mistreatment and injustice. It's hard to even put ourselves in that place in this far off land, nowhere near his family, separated from the church and now he's in prison and doesn't know if he'll ever see the light of day again. How does he respond?

What we see tonight is that Joseph responds with patience in the prison. We see here that Joseph is learning patience in his life. We see here that Joseph is learning through this suffering, through the injustice, through the mistreatment, through the abuse, he's learning to trust in God. He learns that in the confidence that the Lord is with him. His focus is on God. So in this passage we learn as well how we are to respond to the sufferings that we experience in life, and now the reason that this is applicatory tonight is because our response to the suffering in life that we go through, that response must be focused on Jesus Christ if there's going to be a right response. You see, in the life of Joseph we have a shadow of Jesus Christ. We want to see that in the text again. We want to see how the text points us to Christ, but also how we are then to live out of Christ. There's suffering and hardship in life but we learn to respond rightly when our focus in all of our suffering is not on the suffering itself but when our focus is on Christ. So as we continue our series on the life of Joseph, we look at tonight "Patience in Prison." We

notice, first, the inmates' dreams, so we have here the context of this; secondly, the patient response of Joseph; and then finally, the continued imprisonment.

While Joseph was in prison, the butler and the baker of Pharaoh became new inmates in a cellblock there in the prison. We know of course, that Joseph was unjustly imprisoned. He was imprisoned because of the lie of Potiphar's wife, as I said in the introduction. But what we want to take notice of is that Joseph, while he was in prison, he experienced that the Lord was with him. That's what we read in verse 21 of chapter 39, "But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison." Even here in prison, the Lord had not abandoned Joseph and Joseph knew it. Joseph knew that the Lord was with him there in the prison. He believes this, and that's evident from what Joseph is doing. He's not sitting in his own private cell sulking. He's not sitting in his own cell feeling sorry for himself. If he were, you and I could sympathize with him. We wouldn't blame him for doing that. Probably every one of us here has done that at one time or another in our own lives, sat and felt sorry for ourselves. You can hear Joseph almost saying, "Well, here we go again. It just never ends. It just keeps coming. It just keeps coming. As if it wasn't bad enough that my brothers sold me as a slave into Egypt, now I do all the right things and where did that get me? Here in prison. No use trying anymore." That's not what Joseph does. He works diligently and faithfully in the service of the Lord because he knows that the Lord is with him.

God blessed Joseph there in the prison. He was blessed, and that's evident from the fact that he was liked by the keeper of the prison, just like Potiphar once liked him and trusted in him. The prison head guard entrusted to Joseph all of the care of the other prisoners. Just think of that. These other prisoners are locked up in their cells, but Joseph has free reign within the prison. It's almost unimaginable that a prisoner would be given those responsibilities and those duties but yet that prison guard sees something in Joseph and God works so that Joseph finds such favor in the eyes of this captain of the prison.

Now, after Joseph was in prison for some time, maybe it is even a few years, the king's butler and baker were thrown into prison because they displeased Pharaoh in some way. We need to understand who the butler and the baker were. The butler and baker really had important positions in Pharaoh's palace. They weren't just some slaves, servants there in Pharaoh's palace. Not only did these men prepare food and drink for the king, but they were men who the king confided in. He trusted in these men. These men gave advice. They were part of his inner circle, part of his his cabinet, as it were. They gave advice to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

And we don't know exactly why the butler and the baker were thrown into prison but for whatever reason, Pharaoh had them arrested and thrown into the dungeon of the kingdom. Maybe they had broken his trust in some way. Maybe it was something small. Maybe the king got sick from food or from something that he drank and he blamed those men for it. Or maybe he thought that they were involved in some assassination plot. It appears even that the baker was guilty of some great offense against Pharaoh, because in the end he was put to death by Pharaoh. That was his sentence, so you'd think it wasn't something very minor.

But anyway, the butler and the baker, they were thrown into prison, and when they were thrown into prison, they were put under the care of Joseph, and notice who puts the butler and baker of Pharaoh under Joseph's care. It's the captain of the guard. Who is the captain of the guard? Well, we learn in Genesis 39 that that's Potiphar. Potiphar himself puts these men under the care of Joseph. Again, we're not told why. Maybe Potiphar sees that he's blessed of the Lord there in the prison again. Maybe Potiphar regains some trust in Joseph, but there's no way for him to get him out of the prison. But for whatever reason, Potiphar puts the butler and the baker under the care of Joseph. We see, of course, the sovereignty of God in all of this.

Now the butler and the baker had dreams while they were in prison, and the butler and the baker both took notice of these dreams. Now that's striking too. In our day, if we have a dream during the night and we even wake up and we remember it momentarily, we don't give too much thought about those dreams. We may wake up scared from something scary that happens in our dreams, but after a while we forget it and we don't think much about it. We realize that it's just a dream. We don't try to figure out the meaning of our dreams. But these men had dreams that stood out so much so that they were bothered by them. They were worried about these dreams that they had.

Why did they take notice of these dreams? Well, there's a few things that show us why these men took notice of them. First of all, in Egyptian culture, dreams were very important as evident from the fact that they had certain men who had the occupation of being interpreters of dreams. So in Egypt, dreams were significant and people paid attention to those dreams. Secondly, these dreams came together. The butler and the baker wake up in the morning and they talk to each other about the dreams that they had, and they realize that both of them had significant memorable dreams during the night, so that causes them to take notice of these dreams. And then, thirdly, these dreams were memorable. These dreams stuck out. They couldn't forget these dreams. They couldn't put these dreams out of their minds. There is something different about these dreams. They're not like the dreams that we soon forget about after we wake up in the morning. These dreams stuck with them. God gave them no peace as they thought about these dreams. These dreams haunted the men.

So it was obvious to them that there was something special in those dreams and remember the importance of dreams in this history. God was revealing things through dreams to Joseph, now to the baker and the butler, and then as well to Pharaoh. Remember just briefly what those dreams were. First, the butler, he has a dream and he tells Joseph what that dream was. He saw a vine with three branches and on those branches were grapes, and in the dream, the butler picked those grapes and he made wine from those grapes, and then he brought wine to Pharaoh again. Joseph gave the interpretation of that dream. The interpretation was that in three days he would be restored to his position of serving wine to Pharaoh. Well, the baker after he heard that interpretation, couldn't wait to hear the interpretation of his dream. So right after Joseph has finished talking to the butler, right away the baker goes and he explains to Joseph the dream that he had. There were three white baskets on his head, in the top basket there

were all kinds of baked goods and there were birds that came down then and grabbed those baked goods out of that top basket and ate them. Joseph gave the interpretation. Not a good interpretation according to a human point of view. In three days the baker would be beheaded, his body would be hanged on a tree, and the birds would come and pick the flesh off his dead body.

Those are the dreams, but now what we want to focus on tonight is the significance. What's the significance of these dreams? Like I said in the introduction, our sermon tonight is not a close examination of these dreams. That's not why they're here. There's two purposes for these dreams. The first is, the bigger picture is that we see the sovereignty of God in these dreams. God's accomplishing his purpose through these dreams. You see the sovereignty of God in all of this. God had put Joseph here in the prison. He's trusted by the prison captain, the head of the prison, guard. He's in this important position taking care of the other prisoners. Now the butler and baker enter into the cellblock of the prison. They have dreams all under the control of God, and then Joseph interprets those dreams. God has a purpose for that. In the sovereign control of God, that's going to lead to the point, we know the rest of the story, when Pharaoh has a dream, then the butler remembers Joseph in prison, Joseph goes before Pharaoh, speaks to him about God and the interpretation of his dreams, that results in his high position in the land of Egypt, and then that results in Jacob and his family coming down and seeing the change that takes place in his brothers, and the people of Israel then grow up in the land of Egypt, and God delivers them, brings them to the land of Canaan, and all of this for the coming of Jesus Christ.

So these two dreams of the butler and baker are part of that bigger plan of God for the salvation of his church. We see Christ in that, but also, and this is what we focus on tonight, these dreams are the occasion to show us God's work in Joseph. These dreams are the occasion for us to see how it was that God was with Joseph here in the prison so that because of God's presence with Joseph, Joseph responds to injustice and hardship in the right way, and we see in this a shadow of Jesus Christ who responds rightly, of course, to suffering in his own life, the suffering by which he paid for our sins. So that's our focus, the patient response of Joseph.

Joseph responds to injustice, to mistreatment, to abuse with patience. What is patience? Well, patience is waiting on God knowing that he has a sovereign purpose for what he is doing. That's Joseph. He's waiting on God. He's patient there in prison knowing that God has a purpose for what he's going through, and so he's trusting in God. Patience is an aspect of faith. We see Joseph trusting in God here in the prison as he's there because of injustice, not because of anything that he has done wrongly.

There are three ways in the text that we see this patient response of Joseph. The first is this: Joseph does not respond to this mistreatment and abuse with self-pity or a sinful self-focus. Joseph does not respond to the suffering that he's going through with the narcissism that we find in our own day. When I say the narcissism found in our own day, I'm talking about that falling into self-pity where someone who's going through a hard time would maybe in response to that put a selfie of themselves on Facebook with a

pouty face, and then write maybe #feelingblue or #feelingsad. That's narcissism. That's the narcissism of our day, people feeling sorry for themselves because of all that they've gone through thinking they have the right to sit there and sulk and feel sorry for themselves.

That's not Joseph. How do we know that? Because when he goes on that morning after the butler and baker had their dreams, what does he notice right away? He notices that the butler and the banker are sad. Someone who's totally into himself does not notice the feelings of others. He's not self-focused here. He notices what they're going through. In addition, when they talk to him about their dreams that they had and the worries that they had, he doesn't say to them, "Well, if you guys think you have it bad, let me tell you about my story." He's not focused on himself. That's not the first thing he does. He doesn't go into his story. He does tell them what happens, we'll see that in a moment why he does that, but it's not because he's feeling sorry for himself. He's not comparing himself to them. Sometimes we can do that in our suffering, too. We compare our suffering to others and, "Well, you know, I don't have it as bad as So-and-so, but I do have it worse than So-and-so." No, it's not about comparison. Again, that would be an indication of focusing on himself. In contrast to these inmates who are sad because of their plight, Joseph is not but instead he has joy in his heart.

He reflects here the truth that is found in James 1:2 and 3. James 1:2 and 3, two very important verses. We read there, James writing, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," the temptations there are trials, sufferings, hardships. Count it all joy when you experience these things. Why? "Knowing this," he writes in verse 3, "that the trying of your faith worketh patience." That's what we're talking about here. Joseph exhibits patience in his suffering. In his trial, he's not sad, he's not focused on himself, he's not falling into self-pity, but he sees and understands that God has a sovereign purpose for that which he is going through and that's what his focus is on. He sees and understands that God is strengthening his faith, and that's exactly what God is doing. He's preparing Joseph. You see, Joseph in not that long a time is going to be second in command in the land of Egypt. That's a dangerous position to be in to have power, to have riches, to have it all. God's preparing him for that through the suffering that was going on in his life, either preparing to respond in a right way to his brothers when his brothers come back to Egypt. Joseph doesn't know all that but he believes that God has a purpose for this suffering. That's why he doesn't fall into this self-pity and self-focus.

Secondly, we see that Joseph here is patiently waiting upon God in the fact that instead of being self-focused he is focused on God. Joseph is living out his theology in the prison, and that's evident from the fact that when these inmates come to him with their dreams, his focus is on God. He speaks to them about God. He teaches them, as it were, theology. Notice that in verse 8 of Genesis 40. Joseph said in response to their having dreams and that they had no interpreter, he doesn't talk about himself and his ability. He says, "Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them. I pray you." That's quite a statement because remember in Egypt there were men who have the profession of being dream interpreters, and in contrast to all of that, Joseph said to these men, "It's not a man, it's not that I'm a

professional interpreter, God is the interpreter of dreams and I'll help you because God has given me this ability." So we have a short phrase there. Certainly Joseph speaks more to them about God. He teaches theology. What's the theology he's teaching? He's teaching that there is a God who is sovereign over all things. He's teaching that there is a God who knows all things, even their dreams, and that he is the one who has the interpretation for those dreams. He's saying to these men that all of life must be seen through the lenses of theology, right theology, that there is a God, a God who is ruling over all things. Joseph here points them to the one true and living God.

Now think about what that means for Joseph. We see God's presence with Joseph here in that Joseph has not lost his faith in God. He's not angry with God for all of his suffering, and that's evident from the fact that he's not angry with others. He's not living in anger. His faith isn't shaken. He's not saying at this point, "What's the use with it all? I try to do what's right and look how it turns out. I'm in Egypt, I'm far away from my family and I'm in prison and I don't know if I'm going to get out." That's not Joseph. He's trusting in God. His life is rooted in truth theology and he's strong in that. He holds on to the truth of God's word while there.

Now that's the work of God. We see that work of God. So he's not focused on himself. He's focused on God and because of that, here's the third thing we see, seeing that the faith and the patience of Joseph, Joseph serves others. Because he's not focused on himself and he is focused on God, the result of that is he serves these men, the butler and the baker. If he were self-focused, as I said, he would have sat in a corner. He wouldn't have been involved in the work in prison and he wouldn't have been involved in the lives of the butler and the baker of Pharaoh. We see Joseph's patience in his servant heart. Joseph has a servant heart. If Joseph weren't focused on God and he heard these men tell him about their dreams, he wouldn't have touched it with a 10 foot pole. "Dreams? You had dreams? Dreams got me into a lot of trouble in my past. I'm not going to talk about dreams." No, that's not Joseph.

He's serving these men. He serves them by focusing on God. He serves them by speaking truth. That couldn't be an easy thing. The butler is one thing, the baker is all excited. "What's the interpretation of my dream?" "Well, here it is. You're going to be beheaded, your body hung on a tree, and the birds are going to eat your flesh in three days. You'd better get ready to die." Yet in his love, he speaks truth. Although 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 4 had not yet been written, Joseph lives that out. 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 4, we read there, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Joseph understands that part of the reason for his suffering, his mistreatment, was so that he could speak to others about the comfort that he had come to know in his own life and he does that. He notices their grief and sorrow and has compassion on them. He uses his experience of suffering not to be bitter, not to be resentful, not to be angry, but he uses his experience of suffering to minister to these men, even though they are wicked men of king Pharaoh. They don't repay him the same

favor, at least the butler didn't. Joseph doesn't know that. He simply wants to serve God and he serves God by serving these men.

Beloved, as we look at this passage, we learn how we are to respond to suffering and hardship in our own lives, particularly the suffering of being mistreated and abused by others, and we see that this suffering in life is not easy. We see that in Joseph's life. This was not easy for Joseph. Sometimes we can look at Joseph and think, you know, it's hard for me to relate to Joseph because it seems that Joseph has it all together. Someone said to me just recently about the life of Joseph, that's what's striking about it too, you don't find a great sin in Joseph's life. You know, there's David, the man after God's own heart, that he committed some horrible sins too. Where in Joseph's life do you find something like that? You don't. And so sometimes you look at Joseph and you might think the bar is so high. It seems like he doesn't struggle at all with any of these things. He just keeps on going strong in faith without any struggle. Well, the text shows us tonight that's not true. There was struggle for Joseph and it was a hard struggle. He's battling. We get to see how Joseph comes out of that but there's a period there where we don't see and understand what it is that Joseph is thinking.

He's struggling and that comes out in verses 14 and 15 of the passage. Remember, we said his focus isn't on himself, but he does relate to the butler his own circumstances. It's not for the butler to feel sorry for himself but Joseph understands, "Maybe this is the way that I'm going to get out of prison. Maybe this is the way of escape that God has for me." And so he tells the butler about his situation, "But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." That tells us that Joseph struggled. His circumstances weren't easy and he felt the pain and injustice of his sufferings. It hurt him and the pain that he went through was a real pain, and it was a struggle for him to be patient. It was a struggle for him to trust in God. Right here, too, he's got his hopes up. "Maybe this is the way that I'm going to escape from this prison." But even with all of that, we see in Joseph's life, by the grace of God he overcame evil with good.

He trusts God. He doesn't allow bitterness, anger and resentment to overcome him. He understood that he had a choice to make, how he was going to respond to these circumstances, and by the grace of God he chooses to respond rightly. This is what we must understand, too, in the sufferings of our life. The sufferings we face are real. We should never think that they're not going to be painful. Sometimes we just like to run from the pain. "I don't want to face the pain." We wish that with some of the pain that we experience, our own souls if there was a pill for that, we had painkillers that can dull pain that we experience, we like to find painkillers to dull the pain of our own souls. But really, there's no painkiller for that. We go through that, we experience that pain, but the struggle is this: we're learning to trust in God. And so that's how we're called to respond. The pain is real, the hurt is real, but we must learn to respond by trusting in God, being focused on him, not ourselves. When we're focused on him then we're serving others as well. That indicates patience. That indicates faith that is growing and becoming stronger.

So the question for us is: how do we respond in our lives to injustices? Injustices long ago or injustices that took place yesterday. Injustices by family members. Injustices by friends. Injustices that take place at home. Injustices that take place on the playground. Injustices that take place at work or even in the church. How do we respond? Well, this is how we are to respond: patiently trusting in the Lord. We learn to keep our focus on God and not ourselves. But now, as I say that, what does that mean exactly? That means we have to keep, first of all, our focus on Christ. On Christ. As I said, in this life of Joseph we have a shadow of Jesus Christ. You can't escape that. Oh, Joseph himself is not a particular type of Christ identified in the New Testament, what we do see in the life of Joseph is these injustices not only committed against him but that point ahead to the injustices committed against our Savior, Jesus Christ. Now all of that was part of the suffering that he went through to pay for our sins, but as he went through that notice how he responded. He overcame evil with good. He prayed even as he was going to the cross and be nailed to the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That wasn't for everybody there, but for his people who at that moment were against him and they were walking in sin, he's praying that God would forgive them on the basis of what he would do on the cross. Can you imagine such a thing? Would that be our prayer? Would that be our prayer as we're being hurt and attacked by someone else for no good reason, "Father, forgive him, forgive her. More than anything else, I want this person to know your forgiveness." Is that our attitude? Is that our response? That was Jesus.

We have to see Jesus in all of this, but also we see the application of knowing God's love in Jesus Christ for the sufferings and injustices of our lives. When suffering takes place, we often think we have the right to our anger and that the way to respond to it is to vent. We know we probably shouldn't do something against that person so I'll take my aggression, my anger out in some other way. What does God say about that? "No," he says, "don't be angry. Be angry and sin not in that anger." Just because you don't do something to that person doesn't give you the right to hold onto that anger because what happens is that anger grows to bitterness and resentment, and then it turns into hatred itself. The word of God says, no, we must not live in that way. No, we are to see Christ and we are to see how he responds and learn to respond in the same way, focused on God, focused on his sovereign purposes that we don't know ourselves, trusting that God is our strength and trusting his covenant love in Jesus Christ. Trusting the love that we saw this morning as the bread pointed us to the broken body of Jesus Christ and all that he did for us as a pledge of his love, unfailing love for us. We're reconciled to God. We're loved by the living God and that motivates all, all of our responses.

Suffering in life is not about the suffering, it's about how we respond. Joseph responded with patience and trust but we see also that even though he responded with patience and trust at this time, his imprisonment continued. Everything happened as Joseph said it would. Pharaoh held a celebration for his birthday and at that time he called before him the butler and the baker. The butler at that time was restored to his position of serving wine to Pharaoh. The baker, however, he was beheaded, his body hung on a tree, and the birds ate his flesh just as Joseph said. In fact, this is what shows that Joseph is a true prophet of God, a true servant of God; the outcome authenticates the word. But now you

would think that the butler would repay the kindness of Joseph, but he doesn't. Verse 23 at the end of the chapter we read he forgets. Well, he forgets because, "Hey, what's the use?" The butler, no doubt, shows that he's not a child of God, he's not been converted by the witness of Joseph. He goes on being selfish, thinking only of himself. He's got his position back. He's not thinking about anything else or anyone else. That's in stark contrast to Joseph.

But just think of Joseph in the prison hoping, maybe even expecting that the guard is going to come anytime. He waits a day. Another day. A week. A month. And then two years. He's waiting for that guard to come so he can at least have a hearing before Pharaoh, that Pharaoh would hear his case, or so that he could be pardoned and released from the prison. That's his hope but that doesn't happen. In all of this time, we can be sure that because the Lord was with him, that Joseph continued to wait patiently upon God.

It must have been a lonely time for Joseph there in the prison not only far away from family and friends but separated from the church. He had many opportunities to talk to people because his position in the prison. He got to know the prisoners just as he got to know the butler and the baker of Pharaoh. But who there in the prison wanted to have a spiritual conversation? Who there wanted to hear about the sovereignty of God? Who there was able to encourage Joseph in his walk with God? Maybe there were some that God changed and converted there in the prison, and no doubt, a great struggle for Joseph as well.

It's one of the great struggles of life for one to be separated from family and church what God teaches through such trials and difficulties and that's what you see here too. What we learn about them is that often they're long. Joseph had it now for a period of years and it didn't get better but it got worse. And even after being freed from prison, we would think, "Oh, then it got better." But as we look ahead to the history that he got out of prison and that he's second in command in Pharaoh's kingdom does not mean it got better. It got harder, all the harder for Joseph to be a man of God in that wicked kingdom. But Joseph was learning patience. He was learning to trust in God. He was not filled with anxiety. He was not in his loneliness filled with depression. But instead he was trusting in God. He was hoping in God. That Psalm 42, the beautiful truth of Psalm 42. The psalmist speaks of that, the hardship is his life. "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" Then the psalmist speaks to himself, "When I felt cast down, O my soul, why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God."

God was with Joseph so he could say that he hoped in God. God is with us to give us the ability in our sufferings to say, "Hope thou in God." He's sovereign. He is the God who loves us. Let us live in this patience in our own lives. Amen.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we are thankful for this word of the gospel tonight, that we could hear how we are to live in relationship to Jesus Christ, trusting in him, trusting that suffering accomplishes good. May we then not be focused on ourselves and fall into the great sin

of self-pity, but instead may we keep focused on thee and the greatness of thee, our God. May your theology live not only in our heads but in our hearts so that we live out of the truth that thou art sovereign and the God who loves us in Jesus Christ. So give us strength in this new week to live out of the truth of thy word. In Jesus' name do we pray. Amen.

Introduction

- I. How do we respond to injustice or mistreatment?
- II. As we continue our study of the life of Joseph, we continue to notice how he responds to the injustices committed against him.

**The Life of Joseph
(5) Patience In Prison**

- I. **The Inmates' Dreams**
 - A. While Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh's butler and baker were new inmates in the cell block.

B. The butler and the baker had dreams while they were in prison.

- II. **The Patient Response**

- A. Patience is waiting on God, knowing that He has a sovereign purpose for what He is doing. This is seen in three ways in Joseph's responses.

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

- B. We learn from the passage how to respond to suffering and hardship in our own lives.

- III. **The Continued Imprisonment**

- A. Joseph remained in prison. Why?

- B. In all of this time, Joseph continued to wait patiently upon God.