

Suffering for Doing Right

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Preacher: Gordon Reid

[0 : 00] Good evening. How did you get on counting? I reckon most people got the first two and then forgot from then on. If you did keep going, I'll tell you the answer later. Let's just begin by reading that verse that I've put on the sheet that you should have been given and we'll read it together. It's from Galatians chapter 1, early verses. Let's read it together. Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father. Before we start, I want to ask you two questions. I'm really just seeing it if you're awake tonight, if you're on your toes. The first song that we sang, and thanks Andrew for singing this one, it's one of my favorites, talked about the Lion of Judah.

Who is the Lion of Judah? Well done. But is there only one person who knows that? Yeah, do you all agree? Say yes if you agree with Alan. The Lion of Judah is Jesus. We'll come back to that. Secondly, is it right to look at the Old Testament and read Jesus back into it? In other words, to see Jesus in the Old Testament. Now, we've got so many ministers and missionaries here tonight that I don't want any of them to answer. What do you think? Is it right to do that? Is that legitimate? Yeah, I had a minister, I was going to say a minister friend, but I actually never really got to know him. He came to our minister's fraternal, and he made a point of telling us that he never preached from the Old Testament.

In fact, he didn't think that anyone should preach from the Old Testament, because the New Testament had overtaken it. And then he went on to say, in fact, he only preached from the Gospels.

Now, that's a shame, because if he did preach from the Gospels, he should have reached the end of Luke's Gospel, where it says this. Jesus explained to them, this is to two men on the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained to them what was said in the Scriptures about him. Now, the Scriptures are the Old Testament, and Jesus explained to these two men what is said in the Scriptures about him. So, absolutely, it's absolutely right to see Jesus in the Old Testament, and I'm sure that all the learned people here would agree with me. And if not, well, it's unfortunate, take it up with me later. But you won't. I know you won't.

Why I want to say this at the beginning is because we're looking at the story of Joseph, and we're also going to see the parallel with Jesus as we go through this story.

[3 : 32] Now, two weeks ago, Andy started this series, and he described Joseph as God's rescuer, a man sent by God to rescue his people. As we unfold the story, we're also going to see Jesus as God's rescuer, not just the rescuer of one family, but the rescuer of the whole world.

Now, you mentioned again, Martin, the musical. We actually did the musical in my first church. In fact, Evelyn did it. She got a group of people together, and we sang Joseph for about three months, and then three very concentrated evenings in a row, and it went very well. It was great to be with these young people and to be singing through Scripture and be able to talk with them about it as well. It was a very nice family that we were singing about in the musical. It had to be a very nice family because I was Jacob, my son was the narrator, and my daughter was Joseph. So I hope it was a nice family. But the truth is actually a bit different. It's actually the story of a dysfunctional family. Twelve sons who were murderers, wiping out a whole tribe because they insulted their sister. Jacob with four wives, that wouldn't be unusual. But he had a favorite, Rachel, and Rachel's son was Joseph, and Joseph became his favorite son. The other sons were jealous. And eventually, they plot to kill him. I know this has all happened before, but I'm not assuming everybody has been here every Sunday. They became deceivers, deceivers of their own father. It's not a pretty story.

In fact, Moses, who's telling it, is frighteningly honest. Last week, thanks Gordon for taking last week. I'm very pleased not to preach in chapter 38. We see Judah striking out on his own. He wants to go his own way. But in doing so, he ends up marrying. Fair enough. But then as the next generation comes along, he has sex with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, she gives birth to illegitimate sons, I'm cutting the whole story short, called Perez and Zerah. And it's this line of Judah that becomes the line for Israel, the line that ends up with the king of David, King David, and the nation of Israel being formed from this line, from this dysfunctional family and this son who runs away and then commits adultery.

But if King David is from that line, then so is Jesus. And if you look in Luke's gospel, I think it's around about the third chapter, you'll find the genealogy of Jesus. And as you go back through it, you get to the point where it says, son of Perez, son of Jacob. Frighteningly honest. In fact, it's one of the things that I love about the Bible, and I've mentioned this often to people. It's no shining example of humanity. If you're wanting to write a book to complement your beliefs, you wouldn't write this. In fact, it's more like the worst of humanity in many places. But out of this mess comes forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ. So after last week's interlude, Moses returns to the story of Joseph. When Joseph was sold into slavery, his brothers wouldn't have expected to see him ever again. It was goodbye and good riddance. But as we know, things didn't turn out like that. Joseph was bought by Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. And we see these in the opening verses. Let's look at them. Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Israelites who had taken him there.

[8 : 20] It's a sad state to be in, isn't it, for a favorite son who ends up being a slave in Egypt. But, verse 2, the Lord was with Joseph, and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

When his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes, and became his attendant.

Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household, and all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian, because of Joseph.

The blessing of the Lord was in everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left Joseph's care. He left in Joseph's care everything he had.

With Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food that he ate. Right from the start, we discover that Joseph will be blessed, and that he will be a blessing to his master.

[9 : 44] So the first thing I want to say about Joseph, the rescuer, is that he is a blessing rescuer. He comes with blessing.

I've got a friend, Charles Finney, and he'll often end a text to me or an email by saying, be blessed and be a blessing.

And I rather like that. I put it in myself sometimes. But so it is with Joseph. He's a rescuer who blesses, and there's a reason for that. But in verse 2 it says it all.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he prospered. And this becomes a recurring phrase throughout the chapter. If you were counting, the answer is eight.

But the surprising thing is that in the preceding chapter, not 38, but 37, the preceding story of Joseph, there is no mention of the Lord being with him.

[10 : 48] So something has happened to Joseph as he's taken into captivity and taken down to Egypt. One thing is clear, that Joseph didn't lose his identity as one of God's covenant people when he was taken to Egypt.

He continued to trust God, and God was with him. Maybe he was trusting God for the first time. Maybe that's what the situation had done to him, that he had turned to God and put his trust in him. We don't know. But this is interesting. It was obvious. It was obvious. Potiphar could see it. He could see that the Lord was with him.

And it was so obvious that Potiphar wanted a piece of it. He wanted in on the action. And most people are drawn to Christ not by what you say, but I'm sure most of you can argue wonderfully for the gospel, not by what you say, but by what they see in you.

Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph, and so he put Joseph in charge of his affairs. And the Bible says the Lord blessed Potiphar and blessed his household and blessed his fields.

[12 : 12] And the only thing Potiphar needed to bother about was eating. Evelyn says that that's just like our house. Which is not true. I've been bothering about my plum tree in this cold weather as well, not just eating.

Similarly, Jesus brings blessing to his people. He reveals to them the true nature of God, of the Father's love, and person after person throughout the gospels is blessed by Jesus' presence. And that has never stopped. The risen Jesus continues to bless. Whenever people turn to him, he brings change, he brings transformation, he turns lives around, he heals, he rescues us from sin. Jesus is a rescuer who blesses. And not just individuals. There's a wonderful DVD I saw a few years ago called Transformations, which shows the amazing changes that happened in several places when large numbers of people turned to Christ and started caring for their surroundings. And one thing was common to them all. The crime rate plummeted. Jesus transforms. My church in Denfermline saw a bit of this in the last 10 years.

[13 : 41] When we took the gospel to an ex-mining village north of Denfermline, we were a blessing to them. And now 10 years on, the village is a quieter and a safer place.

That's not us who say that. That's the villagers themselves. One villager who's not a Christian said this. It's the church that has changed our village.

It's not the church. We know that, but that's his perception. We know that it's the Lord. We know that God has changed that village. When God's spirit is at work, we will see blessings.

God was with Joseph and Potiphar could see the difference it made. The church, Christ's body here on earth, is here to bless and will bless if, like Joseph, we keep trusting God.

St. Silas is already a blessing and will continue to be a blessing here in the West End of Glasgow. The next thing we see is Joseph, the tempted rescuer.

[14 : 55] Now, we can assume that Joseph has avoided the first set of temptations, which would be to go along with the culture that he's now been taken into. He's surrounded with the might and the splendor of Egypt, the pyramids of past pharaohs, the temples to the sun god Ra, the cult of Osiris, and the luxury of the rulers.

Surely, all of that was much better than anything he'd left behind. The temptation to join in must have been overwhelming. After all, would that not ingratiate him with his new master if he said he would go along with this?

But Joseph remains true to his beliefs. One of the first temptations that Jesus faced was to become popular within the culture.

Turn stones into bread, the devil says to him. Everyone will love you. Think of how they'll listen to you if you turn stones into bread and feed the people. But Jesus resisted.

And it's the same temptation which faces every new Christian. In fact, every Christian. Remain part of the culture. Treat your new belief as an add-on.

[16 : 14] Don't say anything that would make people think you've gone a bit weird or got religion. And so we don't say, I've become a Christian. We might say, I've started to go to church.

And then, of course, we make it sound really good by saying, there's a fabulous band. You should see the young band leader is great and the new minister. Fabulous. You'll love him. But there's nothing as powerful as simply declaring your belief and standing up for it.

Yes, I believe that Jesus rose from the grave. I believe that he's alive and I believe that he's here with us now.

Joseph came through the first temptation to blend in with the culture. What do you call it, Martin? Blender Brenda? But that's why Potiphar could see something different in him, isn't it?

Because he didn't give in. The second temptation happened like this. Let's look at the chapter again. We're at verse 7. Just the last bit of 6.

[17 : 25] Now Joseph was well built and handsome. I think there's only two people in the Bible that are described like that. One's Joseph and one is his mother which is probably why she was Jacob's favorite.

And after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, come to bed with me. But he refused. With me in charge he told her, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house.

Everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you because you're his wife.

How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? And though she spoke to Joseph day after day he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

It's not just once or twice. It's on and on day after day the tempter whispers.

[18 : 35] Why not? Let's do it. Everybody else does. We don't need to tell anyone. Does that sound familiar? Because temptation is common to all of us.

But Joseph has become a young man of integrity and he refuses his mistress every time. And that's what you have to do with temptation. If it just came in one big block and it came when you were feeling strong there wouldn't be a problem.

You simply say no. But the nature of temptation is to nag away at you until finally your defenses weaken and you listen to the culture around you and you say what's wrong with it anyway?

Why shouldn't you? It's your life. Don't you deserve a little bit of fun? Joseph steadfastly refuses to give in and that's a great example to us.

Temptation itself isn't wrong but equally temptation won't go away. We have to deal with it. The temptation to be popular. The temptation to blend in and above all the temptation to put yourself first.

[19 : 51] It started with Adam and Eve and it continues unabated until we get to Jesus. For 40 days Jesus is tempted in the wilderness.

We tend to read that chapter in Luke and say well he was only tempted three times. No he wasn't. He was tempted for 40 days and he remained steadfast. The Bible says he was tempted in every way as we are but he did not sin.

And that's why Jesus is our rescuer. That's why Jesus can change our lives. That's why he can rescue us from our sin.

And as our opening verse said from this present evil age. Like Joseph Jesus stands firm in the face of temptation. Both of them maintain their faith in God the Father.

Let's continue to see where the story goes. Verse 11 one day he went into the house to attend to his duties and none of the household servants was inside.

[21 : 04] She caught him by the cloak and said come to bed with me. But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. when she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house.

She called her household servants look. She said to them that Hebrew that's just to add a wee bit of insult to him. That Hebrew has been brought in has been brought to us to make sport of us.

He came in here to sleep with me but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help he left his cloak beside me and ran into the house she kept his cloak beside her until his master came home.

Then she told him his story. That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me but as soon as I screamed for help he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.

When his master heard the story he was furious. This is how your slave treated me. He burned with anger.

[22 : 11] Joseph's master took him and put him in prison. How do we deal with being falsely accused?

How do we cope when people insult us and say all manner of evil against us? It's not easy. They say it takes ten words of praise to balance out one word of criticism.

criticism. If you've criticized someone recently could you please go back and give them ten words of praise to balance that out? Jesus says if we are falsely accused because of him, because we follow him, because we trust in God, if that's the reason he says what?

You are blessed. You are blessed. blessed. And that's a different way of looking at it, isn't it? If you go to a counselor, they're not going to say that.

In fact, if you go to a Christian for prayer and advice, it's unlikely they'll say that either. They might comfort you, they might pray for justice, but they won't say rejoice and be glad.

[23 : 22] And yet that's what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5. As God's rescuer, Joseph, has been blessed. And he's been a blessing.

He has kept trusting God and resisted temptation. Wouldn't God then protect him? That's how many people think. God is with us, so everything should be great.

If we've given our lives to God, shouldn't things turn out all right? But bad things happen to good people. Being a Christian doesn't insulate you from the world, my friend Jim thought a bit like that, that everything should work out all right because he was a Christian, because he prayed, until his

daughter committed suicide.

And then Jim stopped coming to church. When I spoke to him, he said, why did God allow this to happen? I prayed for God to keep my children safe every morning.

Now I can't trust God any longer. I can't believe in him. Stories like Joseph are in the Bible precisely to help us to keep believing, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

[24 : 42] For Joseph, things are going to get worse. after Potiphar's wife's false accusation, he ends up in jail. He's about to become a humiliated rescuer.

Joseph has already suffered humiliation. He's been put in a pit, he's been sold, he's been bought, possibly at auction, maybe they checked his teeth. Now as we continue the story, he's accused and jailed, but, but, God is still with him.

God is still with him in his troubles. And that's our final lesson from this chapter. Let's look at the last few verses. Joseph's master took him, verse 20, and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, what? The Lord was with him. He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

[26 : 05] And that's our final lesson from this chapter. One of the names of Jesus, we know so well, is Emmanuel, which simply means God is with us.

And our circumstances don't change that. No matter how awful they are, perhaps unbearable at times, God is still with us. Whatever people do to you, whatever they say about you, to your face or behind your back, God remains Emmanuel.

He is with us. Faith asks us to believe that, to believe that God is here all the time. He is faithful.

And therefore, we can put our trust in him.

Jesus asks a question. When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith? I've always liked that. He doesn't ask if we'll find religion, churches, different denominations, ministers, festery members.

He asks, will he find faith? And he's asking, will he find his people trusting him? Even though they are persecuted, thrown into jail, humiliated, will faith and trust remain?

[27 : 31] If you are a Christian, you've already given your life to Christ, he has chosen you. He has loved you.

His Son Jesus has died for you and his Spirit is changing you. And that places you at the center of God's will and circumstances, no matter what they are, do not change this fact.

The only question is, will you keep trusting him when things seem to go wrong will you remain faithful? Often it is only when looking back that you really understand this truth.

Joseph was in the center of God's will, even as he was thrown into jail. Jesus was in the center of God's will, even as he was being betrayed, whipped, spat upon, and crucified.

In Gethsemane with the cross awaiting him, he battles through to that point where he can say, Father, your will be done. Your will be done.

[28 : 43] And the moment you say in your heart, Jesus, you are my Lord, I give you my life, I want to live for you, God takes you into the center of his plan for mankind.

His desire is to bless you and for you to be a blessing. He wants to work with you and in you and through you. And no matter what happens to you, no matter how bad your circumstances, God's rescuer, his son, Emmanuel, is with you always.

Let's pray. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are our rescuer.

You have rescued us from the death of sin and given us new life. Thank you that you bless us. We ask that you would make us a blessing to those around us, to our family, to our friends, to those we work with, to our fellow Christians.

And may you, Lord Jesus, remain the Savior, and master of our lives. Amen.