

## ***JOSEPH: DEALING WITH INJUSTICE , GEN40***

Salt & Light #1

◆**Intro:** There has been plenty of perceived injustice in 2020. Amy Comy Barret has been slammed for being Christian during the confirmation hearings for her Supreme Court appointment. Such attacks are explicitly against the law. Police officer, keepers of the peace, have been ambushed and killed in open daylight. And some lawmen have carelessly and unnecessarily taken the lives of citizens. Big Tech companies have been removing from personal postings any views about our presidential election that don't fit their ideology. The Me Too movement encourages women to speak out, stand up, and be a light. But in reality, the movement supports legalizing prostitution and killing unborn girls in the womb. Schools are teaching gender and sexual confusion, but it's illegal to aid someone who wants out of such confusion. Injustice is all around us.

◆Now admittedly, there are places in the world right now suffering far more devastating injustices that we are. But we should not be surprised if things get worse where we live as well, for God's ways are ever at odds with the world. How do we handle it? What is our role? Let's take Joseph as a model as we begin a short series looking at God-followers who were salt and light in their cultures.

◆If you know the story of Joseph, you'll recall that he suffered many injustices in his life. To begin, his father showed favoritism to Joseph over his 11 other brothers, which caused great hurt among the brothers, such that they actually sold him as a slave

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to a passing caravan! He lands in Egypt and gets bought by the Kings captain of the guard. He's a slave in an Egyptian mansion, a foreign country where it's likely he doesn't yet even know the language. Joseph is 17, the age of a high school junior or senior. In Chapter 39, a story worth investigating all by itself, Joe runs into sexual temptation. Remember, he's a High School boy! But ruggedly handsome. And have you heard of hormones? Potiphar's wife is rich, bored, and since the Egyptians prized it so highly, she's probably very attractive. She invites him to the bedroom, starts pulling his shirt off, but Joseph runs before it's too late. Nevertheless, embarrassed, Mrs. Potiphar claims attempted rape, Mr. Pot gets mad and throws Joseph in the royal jail.

◆ Do you feel the injustice here? He was such a good slave that Potiphar put him second in command! He was in charge of everything on the estate! He even does the right thing and refuses sexual advances he could have easily given in to. But it lands him in jail. Here's one thing we learn:

### ◆ **1. Godly integrity calls for my best even in the worst.**

Joseph works hard. He's industrious, even though he's a slave and it's probably not going to change. Have you ever heard the phrase "good enough for government work"? That's what people say when they don't want to do good work, but just enough to get by. You can get by with the government jobs because the government usually doesn't have a close personal face. It's not

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the owner's house you're working on, it's a government building. There is no particular owner who will come after you and tell you to do it better. But that's not God's way and it's not the way of a God-follower either. Godly people do their best even when no one is looking.

◆ *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men... live as servants of God... submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. 1Pet 2:13-19*

◆ Did you catch the reason why God's people do good even when they suffer? They are "conscious of God." That's exactly what Joseph was. When Mrs.P invited him to bed day after day after day, his response was this:

◆ *My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" Gen 39:9*

◆ Later, when the Butler and the Baker say they had bad dreams, Joseph responds that dreams belong to God! When Pharaoh later

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asks if he can interpret his dream, Joseph says no, but that God can.

◆ Conscious of God, right? Paul says the same thing in his letter to the Church in Colossia.

◆ *Colossians 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.*

◆ There it is again: “reverence for the Lord”, “or conscious of God.” Peter’s letter goes on to explain that what we are doing is imitating Christ, who did not retaliate, who did not threaten, but who absorbed sin, even ours, to end it for us. That, friends, is what Christians are to do in the face of civil injustice. We speak the truth. We stand for causes. We vote. We even argue politics, but we don’t resort to evil. Not only that, but we don’t merely slough off on the job not giving our best. No we work for the Lord more than for our pay, or our employer.

◆ When we were in Israel, we saw the temple wall in Jerusalem, the wailing wall, the only part of the old temple still standing after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD by the Romans. The stones are so precise you can’t fit anything between them. Our guide explained that they’ve dug down to the foundation stones deep in the earth and they’re just as perfect where no one sees. Add to that, the OT law allowed for no sound of hammer or chisel in the temple

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area, so they were carved perfectly before they were on location! Know why? Jews did their work “conscious of God” who deserves nothing but their best.

◆ That’s how Christians are to work. That’s how Christians contribute on the playing field, or the basketball court. We do our best even when we have reason not to. WHY? Because that’s what God is like. That’s what God did and does for us. We sin daily. We blow it repeatedly. And does God grow hateful, and impatient, and destructive. Does he half-heartedly keep the cosmos operating? The very fact that you and I are still breathing right now is pure grace, and we need to know it! God pursued us as Hound of Heaven even when we were not interested. God sent his son for people who couldn’t measure up and didn’t want to! He gave his best when all logic pointed out we were at our worst. (Rom5:8)

◆ What else?

◆ **2. My suffering of injustice must not defeat my compassion.** Most of the time our suffering makes us angry, because anger is the cover emotion for our hurt, fear, and frustration. So when things feel unjust, people easily get mad. And angry people become hateful people. All you have to do is look at all the rioting that has been going on across the country during the Covid-19 pandemic. So far, the year 2020 has seen riots (looting, arson, and violence) in **Atlanta, Saint Louis, Seattle, New York City, Minneapolis, Chicago, Oakland, Denver,**

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Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Trenton, Atlantic City, Boston, Louisville, Bakersfield, Columbus, Dallas, Des Moines, Detroit, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Phoenix, San Jose, Kenosha, and more.

Residents of Portland have endured 100 straight nights of protest on the streets, nearly 20 riots declared over the past 3 months."

These are illustrations of suffering that has then defeated compassion. Suffering turned into hate and revenge, which is antithetical to the Christian faith. Here's how Paul puts it in Roman chapter 12:

◆ *"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, ...Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...Live in harmony with one another...Do not repay anyone evil for evil... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge,...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

◆ But did you notice that in Joseph? His compassion remains. When the two royal prisoners, Egyptians, look downcast Joseph notices and inquires! His suffering has not made him ugly. How about you? Is there anywhere where your suffering is making you hateful? Does your disagreement on a political position cause you to think poorly of someone you know? Do foul terms come to mind when you think of them? Look again at Joseph. He's now in Potiphar's prison (40:3 Who is the "captian of the guard"? Potiphar!) so we know that Potiphar probably didn't believe his wife's story completely. Ordinarily such a sexual offense would

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end in execution. But Joseph is not executed. He's confined to the royal prison, tending to royal officials, and again he's been put in charge! And he is looking out for others.

### **◆3. My suffering is my opportunity to learn trust I**

**otherwise would not have.** What possible responses might you or I have had after being unjustly thrown in prison for not abusing Mrs Potiphar? "This stinks. God has left me. God doesn't really care about what happens to us. God's not fair. I'm not bothering with God because when I push his vending machine button I don't get the candy bar I wanted." Joe could've thought any of these!

◆Remember, God has twice promised Joseph in his childhood that he would hold dominion, be a ruler, a leader, someone others bowed down to! But by the time he runs into the Chief Butler and Baker, it's been 11 years since he became a slave. It would be 2 more before the restored Butler would remember him to Pharaoh! He must have prayed Psalm 13 many times!

◆How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Ps.13:1-2 (Actually, Ps.13 wouldn't be written for another 800 years!)

◆And here's what Joseph was learning, and here's what you and I are supposed to learn. John Calvin puts it:

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- ◆ God led Joseph around in circuitous paths, ...to manifest by the mode of his deliverance, that he has wonderful methods of working, hidden from our view. He does this that we may learn not to measure, by our own sense, the salvation which he has promised us.
- ◆ In other words, God does things in round-about ways to make us absolutely sure that he knows what he's doing and has our best interest in mind at all times.
- ◆ Anyone remember any of these phrases? "Wax on, wax off." "Show me paint-the-fence." "Daniel-san, show me sand the floor." That's right, Karate Kid, back in the 80's. Daniel thinks Miyagi is taking advantage of him making him wax cars in precise fashion, paint fences in exact ways, and sand floors with certain movements. But he discovers that he's really been building muscle memory for karate moves and all the time he didn't know it. After that he trusts Mr. Miyagi completely! And that's what God is doing with us as well.
- ◆ Listen, No matter how bad it gets, the Lord will not abandon you. Your destiny is secure if you belong to Christ. This is one of the primary things Moses records for us in Joseph's story. Over and over he reminds his readers that "the Lord was with Joseph". (39:1,3,5, 21,23). But don't miss this: though the Lord was with Joseph, it didn't always mean success as we might measure it. Alfred Eedersheim notes that "It is a common mistake to suppose that earnest faith and uprightness must necessarily be attended



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by success in this world. God does not withhold good from his own, but success may not always be a good thing for them." God shows us in injustice that he is still a God and we can trust him anyway.

◆**Conclusion:** The future is still a frightening thing to many. What will happen if so-and-so gets in office. What will happen if so-and-so does not? Listen, Joseph learned that everything in his past had been of God, the good, bad, ugly, and beautiful. And therefore everything in the future was surely in the same hand. So Joseph learned peace in a world he really didn't intend to be in, or for that matter want to be in. [You know, Joseph was never at home in Egypt no matter how powerful he was. He gives his two sons Hebrew name and makes his brothers promise that, hundreds of years later, when they leave Egypt as God promised they would, they take his bones along, back to Canaan.] Do as Joseph did: entrust your life to Jesus. Face the future with surety and in peace. Jesus said we'd face trouble in this world (Jn. 16:33) But he added, "Fear not. I have overcome this world!"