

32. Why God?

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Every day children are kidnapped, abused, molested, killed and aborted. Women get raped, battered and abused. Spouses are abandoned by unfaithful partners. Drunk drivers maim and kill innocent bystanders or other drivers, yet they survive without a scratch. Gossip and slander ruin hard-earned reputations. Fanatic religious terrorists kill and blow up people in the name of their false gods. The list can go on.

The pain of unjust suffering is one of the severest trials we can enter into.

During this fiery trial that is allowed by God, some walk away from God, because they become bitter toward Him and their lives turn into ashes. Others run to God and seek His face and find strength and shelter in Him with a tempered, unshakable faith.

It has been said that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

We cannot control whether we will be treated fairly today or tomorrow. But we can choose how we will respond. Our attitude is something we can control. Resentment, hostility, bitterness, revenge – these are the common attitudes people choose when they're mistreated. God, however, has a different choice in mind for His children.

A. WHEN YOU THINK THAT IT CAN NOT GO ANY WORSE, IT GETS WORSE

Joseph did what was right, and he suffered for it. He refused Mrs. Potiphar's sexual advances, so she concocted a wild lie of rape that sent him to prison. From free man to slave, and now to prisoner, Joseph's freedom was progressively stripped away. Everything about his circumstances seemed to indicate that he had been forgotten by both God and people. Now Joseph faced the greatest test. He had to exercise the only freedom left to him – the freedom to choose his attitude.

We all experience three basic kinds of mistreatment:

1) Undeserved treatment from family

Even in the best of families you won't escape pain, because parents aren't perfect and neither are brothers and sisters.

2) Unexpected restrictions from circumstances

Mistreatment confines us either physically or emotionally. We may be in a situation where we can't fight back or change things. And these unexpected restrictions are painful.

3) Untrue accusations from people

We all know how painful it is when we are the ones who are in the receiving end of vicious gossip. In one day its careless, untrue statements can completely destroy a reputation that has taken years to build.

If you ever wondered whether the Bible deals with real-life situations, the story of Joseph should remove any doubts. So far, Joseph's life contains all three categories

of mistreatment: his brothers hated him and sold him into slavery, he was sold to Mr. Potiphar as a slave and he was falsely accused by his master's wife with a rape charge. Once again Joseph was thrown from a privileged position into a pit – only this time, instead of a dry well in Dothan, it was a dark dungeon in Egypt without knowing any date of release.

After all what Joseph has done, he was imprisoned and seemed like he was forgotten by God. He could have said, "Why God? What have I done, why are you punishing me for doing right thing for You? Where is God in all of this?"

B. A GOD'S PROVIDENCE TO JOSEPH'S LIFE

Genesis 40:1-4 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.

It is usually easy to see God in the good things that happen to us. But what about when something unfair happens? As we have noticed in last study, the Lord was with Joseph and blessed him with kindness even in the jail. The keeper of the prison also noticed the hand of God was upon Joseph that he left everything on him. I wouldn't be surprised if Joseph carried all the keys of the prison even though he was a prisoner.

First and foremost in Joseph's life is his trust in God. And if God has chosen to allow him to be put in prison, Joseph sees that as His sovereign right. He doesn't argue with God or take it bitterly. Instead, he recognizes that God's hand is in it and humbly approaches his new restriction as another opportunity for God to work in his life. Because of that, God is able to use him providentially in the lives of two men in the prison.

C. AN OTHER-CENTERED LIFE BY JOSEPH

Genesis 40:5-8 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."

It would be easy for Joseph to think that because of all the wrong done against him, he could be careless about others and cynical to everyone and everything. Instead, he extended his kindness to the butler and the baker.

Note that Joseph was not taking the credit of interpretation of their dreams. He put the credit to where it belongs – God.

God may certainly speak through dreams. However, not every dream is a revelation from God. Too much pizza or bad Enchilada can cause weird dreams. We must be careful about putting too much weight on dreams.

Ecclesiastes 5:7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.

D. JOSEPH'S INTERPRETATION OF THEIR DREAMS

Genesis 40:9-15 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."

No doubt this is exciting news for the butler.

And Joseph see the possibility of something good in it for himself too. Verse 14 and 15 remind us that Joseph was a real flesh-and-blood human being, not some pristine saint whose feet never touched the ground.

Genesis 40:16-19 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."

Joseph was just as faithful to deliver the horrifying interpretation as he was to deliver the good one.

This is the mark of a godly preacher, who does not fail to bring the whole counsel of God. How many there are who are willing to preach the butler's sermon but are not willing to preach the baker's sermon nowadays!

If you are looking for a church that preach from the Word of God, look for a preacher who is willing to teach the whole counsel of God, not just feel-good messages. The problem is not what they say, it is what they don't say.

E. THE DREAMS CAME TRUE, BUT...

Genesis 40:20-23 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.

Three days later everything happens just as Joseph has said. The butler goes back to serving Pharaoh, and the baker becomes food for the birds. This brought some hopeful expectations in Joseph's mind. In his daydreams he can probably see the

butler convincing Pharaoh to free him. Mentally, Joseph has his bags packed and is ready to go. I am sure that before the butler left the prison, he shook a hand with Joseph and promised to him, "I will talk to Pharaoh and get you out of this joint soon."

There is only one problem though. The butler has a short memory.

God was ultimately going to use the butler's short memory to deliver Joseph, but the right time had not yet come. The butler forgot Joseph, but God did not forget him!

There are two important observations we should mention here about Joseph's situation:

1) He was abandoned by a friend.

If an enemy abandons you, you expect it. But when it is a friend, it is a completely different story.

Some of you may go through this kind of abandonment from someone you cared and loved dearly. Once you wanted to share your life with that person and you pour out everything into that person's life. But now you are staring at empty space because that person took off with someone else. Or maybe you started a business with a partner, someone you trusted, only to find out this person has been siphoning off the company's profits and took off and left you high and dry with a gigantic debt.

What that person has done cut you deeply and hurts you exceedingly. You may think that the wound is never going to heal and you will never go back to be normal or be loved by someone again.

Take a heart in God. Because He knows what is going on in your life exactly. He is going to use this hurt and wound to bring you up to where He wants. He will strengthen you and help you and give you peace beyond your wildest imagination.

2) The abandonment was for a lengthy period of time.

Sometimes we get upset when we're neglected even for a minute. According to what we just have read, Joseph was abandoned for two long years.

Our natural response to this kind of an experience is to feel disillusioned, betrayed – first with the person who abandoned us, then with God. If we keep replaying those scenes, they will begin to harden our hearts with bitterness.

Jesus understands what we go through. Because He experienced the ultimate abandonment by His own Father when He took all of our sins upon Himself on the cross. He did it, so that we may never have to be abandoned by our God because of our own rejection of Him.

It's true, everything can be taken from us except that one precious freedom to choose our attitude. Because the basis of our attitude is a trustworthy God. With God on our side, all the mistreatment the world can not reduce our hope in God to the ashes of disillusionment.

F. APPLICATION

1) The next time you feel forgotten, forsaken or disillusioned, remember that there is One who is trustworthy. That is Jesus. He will never leave you, nor forsake you.

It has been said, "God cannot use someone greatly unless He first breaks him thoroughly."

Here are some verses for you to write them down for a further study:

Deuteronomy 31:6	Isaiah 42:16
Psalms 37:3-6, 28	Matthew 28:20b
Psalms 118:5-9	Hebrews 13:5
Proverbs 3:5-6	1 Peter 5:6-7

If any of you are going through this kind of difficult time, we'd like to pray for you. You might not want to be noticed. But it is OK. We don't have to know what you are going through. We just want to pray for you and be there for you if you ever need us. If you want us to pray for you, please raise your hand from right where you are.

Now, those who are around these precious people, please lay your hands on them and pray to the Lord for their strength, peace and guidance through this difficult time.