

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Till He Appears
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The Obedience of Joseph | Advent Week 3

Genesis 37-50

Harris Creek, how we doing? Let's go. Let's go. Excited to jump into God's word with you. We own the lot behind our house, and it's kind of just like a bunch of brush if you will. And I noticed, I walked back there actually when I tore my calf - that's where I was walking was back there, and I noticed there's all these little mesquite trees growing up. And so, they're like these thorny bushes growing up everywhere. And I was like 'Man we got to do something about that.' But that's when I was injured, and I was like 'Man what do we do?' And I was like you know what, this is going to be like a coming-of-age thing for Weston. And we're going to go get a machete and I'm going to send him back there. And so sure enough, we go to Ace Hardware, get us a machete, and I'm telling him what he is going to do. I say "Hey, I want you to cut down every little bush, every tree, that is smaller than your thumb. Just whack it with the machete." And so, I was kind of walking him through this. And I just send him down there. You kind of have to go down a hill and then you walk in this back area. And so, he's back there. I'm in a meeting on the patio, our back patio, with someone, and we're just hearing him just going to town. I mean he sounds like a lawnmower back there just whack, whack, whack. I mean, in fact, several times we just stopped and we're like "Man, Weston's really getting after it back there." And I'm like "Yes he is." You know this is awesome. He's doing work.

And so he was down there for about 45 minutes and then he comes back up. He does that walk back up the hill, and he's just, you know, he's just standing there. And I look and the machetes all mangled up. It's all bent and twisted and I'm like that's a bummer, but you know small price to pay, okay. You know one-use, one-time use, okay. And I'm like "Hey buddy, did you get it done?" And he's like "Yeah sort of." I'm like wait "What do you mean? Did you cut down all the all the trees? Did you cut them down? Did you put them on the pile like I said?" And he goes "I got a couple of them." And I'm like "Like how many did you get? and he goes "Uh 2." And I said "Two? I'm so confused you were down there for like 45, I heard you! Like I heard you just going to town down there. What were you doing?" He's like "I don't know, you know." And I was like "Well let's go look." And so he and I walked down there. And I'm walking around and sure enough, there's still these little trees everywhere. And I'm like "What in the world were you doing? There's the two that you cut down and put on a pile." I'm like "But Weston, I don't- I heard you. I don't understand." And then I walk up on this log. It's about this big around (shows crowd with hands) and it's been struck by lightning. It's hard as a rock you know. And it's just laying there, and it's got hundreds of little cuts in it. I'm like "Weston why would you do this? Like why didn't you cut down the trees I asked you too?" And he goes "It was hard and it kind of hurt." And I was like "But I'm sure this hurt. Hitting this rock-hard log with that machete I'm sure hurt your hand. Like I'm sure this hurt. You used the same amount of energy to do this that you would have used if you would have just been obedient. If you would have just done what I asked you to do, you know."

And as I think about that, God used that to minister to me. And as I think about all of you and us, I think that sometimes things happen to us, and we have to figure out what to do with that. And to deal with it causes more hurt, more pain, more challenges. And so we're at a choice. We can go through life, and we can stuff that, and we can be impacted by that, and we can hide that, and we can ignore that. Or, we can turn into it and deal with it, and heal from it, and have God use it. And the reason we don't do this is because it's hard and it hurts. But what I've realized in doing this for years and years and years and years and years is, it's actually harder to do this over here - to carry this with you. To hide it. To ignore it. To stuff it and to be impacted by it is actually more difficult. And a lot of times it would take the same amount of energy and effort, but just be more productive if we turned into it.

And I'm not in any way, I'm going to say this up front, and I really need you to hear me clearly, at no time over the next 30 minutes am I intending in any way to belittle your experience, things that you've gone through. I have done this long enough and I have talked to enough people to know that there are all kinds of circumstances in the room. And I know how the enemy pulls up a chair beside you to try to convince you that you're the only one, and that no one will understand the family that you came from, and what happened to you, and all of the things, and all of the lies that he says. And what I want you to know is the beauty of the church is when we begin to deal with those things together, in community, experience healing, finding a path forward, God takes those things that the enemy meant for evil and he begins to use them for good. And I'm telling you, he just does. I see it all the time. And there's an opportunity for you, an opportunity for obedience for you in that, and we're going to look at a story that's an incredible story in the scripture. If you've been in church long you've probably heard it, but it's one of those that just keeps giving. As you read it over and over it will keep giving to you.

And so, the subject today is just that obedience in opposition leads to extraordinary opportunities. And by opposition you could replace that word with hurts, or you know hardships, trauma, abuse, there's a lot of words that we could replace that word with. And what I'm saying is there's an opportunity for obedience in that, that leads to just extraordinary opportunities for us.

We're in this series "Till He Appears," really marching through the Old Testament looking at stories that point us to Jesus. And so far- Christmas is next week. We've made it, we're still in Genesis (crowd laughs). We're still in book one of the Bible and looking at stories that point us to Jesus. And so, the first week we talked about the undoing of Adam. That Jesus was the second Adam. That Adam ushered sin into the world, Adam and Eve, and that Jesus shows up on the scene to provide for us a solution to the curse that we're under.

And then, week two, we looked at the faithfulness of Abraham. That Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his son on a hill, and how this all points to another sacrifice that was to come thousands of years later that would be the one and done for all, the substitutionary atonement. Not the ram and the thicket, but the man with the thorns around his head. Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac had two sons - Jacob and Esau. Jacob had twelve sons, one of those sons was Joseph. Joseph is the story that we're looking at today. The story of Joseph. And I'm going to give you the punch line up front, how the story of Joseph, before you leave here this morning, how the story of Joseph points to the story of Jesus, the story of Christmas, the story of the

Savior that you and I worship. And as I've said now several times, it's a pretty incredible story that just puts God's sovereignty - meaning that God is *the* deity, *the* God of all gods - in complete control. And it puts his sovereignty on full display for us all to see it, even in our sufferings. Which is hard.

It's a difficult concept to embrace that God is still in control when we're sitting in something that just seems really cruel. Really cruel. And in fact, there's two responses to that and I see it all the time. One is 'Well if you're going to let this happen to me, I don't want anything to do with you.' And the other is 'If you're going to let this happen to me, you're the only one that can show me through it and so I'm going to lean into you.' And it's the two responses, and listen, I'm telling you that up front because we got a few minutes to wrestle with that, and I hope you carry it with you and continue to wrestle, but we're going to look at the story and it's undeniable in the text.

And so I want to ask you what would it look like if God's hand was on you? God was with you? I think sometimes we think 'Well man if God was with me, you know, and his hand was on me, it's just going to look like blessings and the desires of my heart and all the things I want materialized before me.' You're going to see a man- God's hand is on him. He has the favor of God. And in fact, the text goes out of its way to show you that God is with him. And he's betrayed by his family. They want to kill him. They sell him into slavery. He's in shackles and chains. He serves faithfully yet again only to wind up in prison. And he serves faithfully again only to be forgotten. God's hand is on him, and he faithfully served in the midst of that.

So the story of Joseph. The story of Joseph. Sometimes the path of faithfulness is a roller coaster. And I don't like that sentence. I'm going to change it and make it more accurate. All the time, for the rest of your life, the path of faithfulness is a roller coaster. Full of ups and downs. And I'm going to ask you, do you trust God in the downs? We're going to start in Genesis chapter 37. We're going to end in Genesis chapter 50. If you're good at math that's 14 chapters. No problem. I'll tell you the story up front. You are going to have to follow closely, this isn't the time to doze off. I'm going to give it to you all up front and then we'll dive into it, okay?

Jacob, also called Israel, two names in case it wasn't already confusing enough. Jacob has twelve sons. One of those sons Joseph he loves and shows extreme favoritism toward, buys him a colorful coat that stands out. And Joseph is kind of the teacher's pet. The goody two shoes. He tells on his brothers, who are all about trouble. He rats on them and so they hate him. They despise him. And in fact, one time they're working in the field and Joseph comes to see them and they plot to kill him. Like this is some really deep disdain. They're going to kill him. But instead of just murdering him, they said you know what, we should profit from him. So instead of killing him, we're going to sell him into slavery so that we get something in exchange for him, and then we'll lie to our dad and say that an animal, you know, came and destroyed him.

So, they sell him into slavery. Some people come and get him as property and take him to Egypt where he works in Potiphar's house. Two people not to be confused, Potiphar and Pharaoh. Potiphar works for Pharaoh. Pharaoh is like the king, the emperor, the most powerful man in the land. Potiphar is the military leader. He leads Pharaoh's military. So, Joseph is working in his house, and he does a great job, so he ends up being over the entire estate. He gets to work in Potiphar's house, and the text tells us that Joseph is a good-looking guy. He's got a lot going for

him. Well Potiphar's wife likes Joseph, and so she invites him to sleep with her. But when he says no, she screams and says that he tried to sleep with her. That he wanted to sleep with her. And so Potiphar shows up and says "Man what are you doing? I trust you with all this. To prison you go."

So Joseph now ends up in prison. Kind of a prison for Pharaoh's guys, and he's really faithful in prison. He serves well there. So, guess what, faithfulness, God's faithfulness, the warden over the prison takes Joseph and elevates him, and says now you're over the entire prison. You're in charge. You're a prisoner but you're kind of in charge under my authority. Well, there's two guys there that worked in Pharaoh's court that had a dream, they both had dreams. Joseph has this supernatural ability to interpret these dreams and he tells the cupbearer you're going to be released. That's what your dream means. And when you're released, remember your boy - that I'm in here. That you know I helped you out. Well cupbearer is released, two years go by, he forgets about Joseph. But then Pharaoh has dreams. And Pharaoh is like "Can anybody interpret these dreams?" Cupbearer's like "Oh yeah, there's this dude in prison he can tell you what it means."

They go and they get Joseph. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams and says "Hey you're going to have seven years of prosperity but then you're going to have seven years of severe famine. The whole land is going to be destroyed, and so God is trying to tell you that you need to prepare for this." And Pharaoh is like "But how? How do I prepare for it?" And Joseph is like "Alright, here's what we do. I've got a plan." He gets on the whiteboard starts drawing it up and Pharaoh is like "Oh you're so wise!" And Joseph's like "Oh thank you." And he goes "I tell you what, why don't I put you in charge of everything." So now Joseph, out of prison, is the second most powerful man in the empire. And so, lo and behold, his family lives in Canaan. And they're like "We have nothing to eat. Man, we got to go to Egypt to get some food." So they go to Egypt to get some food. And lo and behold they stand before Joseph. But guess how long? Two decades have passed- twenty years - so he looks different, he's dressed like an Egyptian, they don't recognize him, and they're like "Alright, hey, we just need some food. We're starving." Joe's like "Dude these are my siblings man. This is wild." And they're like "Can you help us?" and he's like "Oh probably." And then he reveals who he is to them. "Hey I'm your brother." And they're like "Oh we're terrified you're going to kill us." He's like "No, I'm not going to kill you. I'm going to forgive you and I'm going to give you an inheritance. I'm going to give you a land. I'm going to give you a place to live." Okay that's the story of Joseph in a nutshell, let's dive in.

We'll start in chapter 37 verse 3. I'm going to jump around. ³ **Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons...** ⁴ **When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him.** Verse 18, ¹⁸ **But they saw him in the distance,** so Joseph is coming to his brothers out in the field, ¹⁸ **But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.** Verse 28, instead of killing him they say "Hey, we're going to sell him into slavery." ²⁸ **So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.**

Okay easy to read. I want to remind you, not legend, this story is unbelievable. It's almost like some creative Disney writer wrote it. No this is history. It happened, it's captured, it's recounting

history, and this guy's got some serious wounds and trauma, okay. Like his brothers tried to murder him but instead they sold him into slavery. You know, he sits down with the therapist. His wounds, the whole thing starts with- the therapist is like "What are you here to talk about?" He's like "Well, so my daddy loved me you know more than any of the other guys." Like that really creates a problem. Which is generational sin because as you remember, if you know the story, Isaac showed a lot of favoritism toward Esau. Well Jacob carries that wound with him and now projects it on his own family. And now he's like "Hey Joe's my favorite. Joe's my boy." And the brothers are like "Joe's your boy? We're going to kill him." You know, and then they're like "Well you know instead- hey instead of killing him, why don't we profit from him?" So Joe's sitting with the therapist and he's like "Man I'm in a world of hurt man. You don't understand the family I came from."

And so the scene change here is that it's really spelled out in Psalm 105 and says ¹⁷ **and he sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave.** ¹⁸ **They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons.** So the whole Bible kind of gives us a bigger picture that this is crazy man, these guys did some cruel stuff. So Joe said to the therapist right like "Hey, there's no hope for me right because I came from a really jacked up family, so God can't use me right?" No!

1. *Family of origin doesn't limit our opportunity for obedience.*

Point one, family of origin doesn't limit our opportunity for obedience. Family of origin doesn't limit our opportunity for obedience because I see that all the time. People are like "Oh man like there's so much back there. So much back, like oh man! My mom, my dad, my brothers, my sister. I didn't even know! And this happened..." And then it is like "No, listen, your past, your past does not disqualify your future." And God can use you, and in fact, if I may be so bold to say that the best pastors, the best ministers I've ever seen, minister out of their pain. The best leaders I've ever served under walk with a limp. They walk with it. They're like I got scars man. I've got wounds and they minister out of those wounds. And I can't deny that there's just these two responses to it - I'm either going to use it for good or I'm going to be debilitated by it. And I don't say that to provoke you. I don't say that to provoke you, I say that to encourage you, to put courage in you. To say hey, you're not disqualified and there is hope, and in fact, all of the things that you think disqualify you could be the very things that qualify you when you bring them to God and say 'I need your help. What do you want to do with this? What do you want to do with this?'

And so this is the story. We have betrayal, abuse, attempted murder, serious trauma, and there's more problems coming for him. And it's really big stuff, and so you think 'Why doesn't he just give up? Why doesn't he feel sorry for himself and quit?' But he keeps going and the favor of God is on him, but the favor of God doesn't keep him out of a pit. It sees him through that. And our theology has to be consistent with that. That God is not going to keep the problems from me, he's going to be enough to get me through the problems when I lean into him in the problems. Because if he's a good God, and I believe he is, it seems like he would give us a heads up. This book does not teach, in case you've believed a lie, it does not teach trust in Christ and have a Strawberry Shortcake life. You know, trust in Christ and it's all gravy thereafter. That's not what it says. He goes "In this world you will have trouble." And I think this is missing from our gospel presentation. Oh man it's awesome you just prayed to receive Christ. That's amazing you

trusted in the cross, his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins. You have a giant target on your back now. You need to know that okay. You have everything you need to get through the challenges that are coming for you, but challenges are coming for you. That's the truth and I think sometimes that gets dropped off on the brochure. Like we cut that out of the brochure.

Have you seen these races that people do, some people- I don't know- like the Tough Mudder, that kind of stuff? There are others - what are they called? I don't even know. Spartan Race is one of them for the super wild people. Others there's like some, I don't know, warrior something or other. Like come and die thing. I don't know it's like Hunger Games. I don't know what it's called. Like there was a part of it that has running and I'm like dude I'm out. I'm out. I'm done. I got to get my heart rate up? No way. But could you imagine if a friend, like you're a runner, and a friend was like "Hey come do this race with me!" And you're like "Oh yeah what is it, a 5K? Kind of like a 5K?" You know, and you show up and there's barbed wire, and electric fence you know? And you're like "Dude this is not- like why didn't you tell me? Like why didn't you tell me?" You know, and I think like people do those like willingly. Like this is crazy guys. This is crazy. They like read the brochure you know and like oh barbed wire, electric fence, okay I'm in. I mean sign me up how much is it? One hundred and fifty bucks? Okay, I'm in. You know - take my money! Right? I'm like what in the world?! You know, but no, and those people, they don't get in it and like get to the barbed wire and are like "Oh no one told me barbed wire, I'm out." You know. It's like no, they're like "Oh let's go!" You know, right. And it's because it's like they know it's coming; they signed up for that. They signed up for that.

And then there's these moments I think sometimes in our walk we're like "Dude hey, I didn't sign up for this. No, I didn't sign up for that." And he's like "Hey, I got you." And you're like "I don't know if I got you." I don't know. Seems cruel. You've got to ask right now - Can he make good from it? And you have to answer that. Is it in the realm of possibility that if he controls all things, that he can put a good on the other side of this, that's so good that I might even have the audacity to say it was worth it. I think it's going to be even better than that. I believe, I hope, I've banked my life on, it's going to be even better than that. Again, I'm not trying to make light of your suffering. That's not my intention. I know that some of you have endured things worse than Joseph. I know that. God can make good of it. I know that.

And so Joseph has every reason to be bitter, but it seems, like as you read the text, he just gets better. I'm not trying to be trite, but he could go through life and be a victim and everyone would say "Man I am so, so sorry. I am so, so sorry." And he could just stay there, but instead he just walks in a victory. And you see it. You're just like "Whoa what keeps this guy going?" Chapter 39 verse 2, **²The Lord was with Joseph**, underline it **²The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.** **³When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did,** **⁴Joseph 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.**

So, he's risen to the top now over all of Potiphar's household. The text tells us he's handsome and Potiphar's wife takes a liking to him. And so in verse 11 it says **¹¹One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.** **¹²She caught**

him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. Super faithful, he 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 this thing. He fled sexual immorality right. God has a prize for him right. He did the right thing. What do I get, what do I get? ¹³ **When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house,** ¹⁴ **she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed.** And he left. Verse 20, ²⁰ **Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison,** ²¹ **the Lord was with him; underline it, he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.** ²² **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.**

Okay now he’s risen to the top again, he’s over the prison. Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker both have dreams. In chapter 40, verse eight, it says ⁸ **“We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”** And he tells them that the cupbearer is going to be set free. But Joseph was faithful and his faithfulness got him into prison. Which I think would cause a lot of us to say - Was I faithful? What did I do to deserve this God? Right? And that’s my second point - you cannot determine obedience by the outcome.

2. *You cannot determine obedience by the outcome.*

This is such an important message for us where we learn critical thinking, logic, problem solving. We look at a situation, we deduct what we think the outcome is going to be and we make decisions based on that. But the problem with that is this book, and the Holy Spirit, that says sometimes you are to do things in faithfulness that will have really negative outcomes. Well, if I do that I’m going to go to prison. And God is like, and I want you to do that. Well, if I have that conversation, it’s not going to go well. And God is like, and I want you to have that conversation that’s not going to go well. That sometimes the outcome of the obedience is disconnected from the obedience itself, meaning it doesn’t define whether you did what was right or wrong. Like we got to get that. Like we must understand that the Lord gives us instructions sometimes that are disconnected. Like he tells us to do something, and it doesn’t go well, at least in the moment, because where you end up is not always fair. But there’s always an opportunity for obedience there. Where you end up is not always fair, but there is always an opportunity for obedience there.

So I feel like I should get the promotion, but you didn’t. You got laid off. That’s not fair. There’s a path of obedience there. I should have made varsity, but you didn’t. You made JV, or freshman, and God has something for you in that. We should have an amazing marriage, you just got left and you are faced with a really difficult decision. And I’m running through those things fast, and some, they are not, one is not like the other. Like some of those are really heavy things. I should be married. I feel forgotten, forsaken, like the Lord has overlooked me. We should be pregnant by now. Like it’s very possible that you’re sitting in something that’s just not fair. You got to say “God what do you have for me in this?” And the short message on a Sunday morning, it feels so trite. I’m tiptoeing around cliches. And I know there’s heavy, heavy things in the room. And for the rest of our lives, we have to ask God “What do you have for me here? It’s a really powerful

question, “What do you have for me here? What is the path of obedience? What do you want to accomplish? Like what do you want to do here?”

I am like chief offender. Something doesn't go my way and I'm like ‘Oh the Lord's favor has left me.’ You know. ‘You've forsaken me.’ I mean whatever it is it's just like “Man God, why oh why have you forsaken me?” And we're taught comparison is bad. There is a comparison that I have found to be helpful. And so it's like when I get in those situations where I just feel totally slighted by God, you know, I meet people like Nick Voychich. If you don't know Nick, he was born with no arms and no legs. He has a torso and a neck and a head. And I think I'd have a really hard time with God in that situation. Like you were in control of this, and you let this happen to me – Why? How am I supposed to trust that you're good? And Nick went through that season. He went through a season of suicidal thoughts and a lot of darkness, but he got to a place where he overcame that and said, “Okay if the Lord's going to entrust this to me, he has a purpose in it.” And now he uses that to leverage, to create a platform for himself where he proclaims the gospel. And there's lots of people going to be in heaven because the way that Nick used the absence of his arms and legs. And I look at that and I'm like “Okay well if he can find joy in that situation, I can find joy in mine.” And there's lots of them.

Another one would be Joni Erickson-Tada. Seventeen years old, she's attractive, she's popular, she's got everything going for herself. And she's just at a day at the lake with friends, and she dives in thinking it's much deeper than it is, she hits the bottom, she breaks her neck, and she's a quadriplegic. But not just a quadriplegic- in talking with her, she has chronic pain every single day of her life. Listen, I get a headache and I'm like ‘God doesn't love me anymore.’ You know, it's like what am I going to do? She lives with it every single day. And what is true about both of those people, is just this unbelievable, authentic joy that just bleeds from their lives. And I'm like ‘Well if they can experience joy why can't I?’ And it challenges me. It spurs me on.

And so Joseph, he continues to be faithful in the midst of this. It says in Genesis 39,
²**The Lord was with Joseph** in verse two, and then in verse three it says **the Lord was with him**, and then in verse 21 it says ²¹**the Lord was with him**, and then again in verse 23 it says **the Lord was with Joseph**. And just repeated over and over. I think that's put in that chapter more than four times to say “Hey, in the prison, in prison guys, I want you to see God was with him. In prison God was with him.’ And I think we also, we often determine the proximity of God based on our circumstance, based on the gifts that we have. We determine God's presence by his presents, or the gifts that we have. If we have gifts we like, we think well God's close to us. If we have gifts we don't like, we think well God must be far. That's not what the Bible teaches. It's inconsistent with the scriptures. And in fact, the scripture goes out of its way that no, it's in the fire, it's in the pit with the lions, it's when you're sold to slavery, it's in the prison, that God is the closest to you. Or at least feels the closest to you. That's the truth. God allowed Joseph to go to prison and he was with him there.

And so if we go back into the text, the cupbearer gets out, you think he'll tell Pharaoh, but two years go by. And then Pharaoh has a dream and he's reminded “Oh yeah there's an interpreter.” In chapter 41 it says ¹⁵**Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.”** ¹⁶**“I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he**

desires.” He's always redirecting to God. He's like “No it's not me, it's the Lord.” And so Pharaoh tells him the dreams, and he says here's the deal, you're going to have seven years of prosperity and there's going to be seven years of severe famine coming after that. Like this is what God is trying to give you a heads up on. And it says in verse 39 ³⁹ **Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders.** And in a moment, he's out of the prison, he's in the palace, and he's in charge of everything. Like not just the estate, he's in charge of the country and extended countries. Like the whole entire empire, Joseph is now in charge. And so my third and final point is ordinary obedience leads to extraordinary opportunities.

3. Ordinary obedience leads to extraordinary opportunities.

Ordinary obedience leads to extraordinary opportunities. And that doesn't contradict point 2 because the extraordinary opportunities could come out of outcomes that we perceive to be good or bad, but there's still opportunities there. Still opportunities for obedience there. And so Joseph's faithfulness in prison has now put him in the palace. He goes from the pit to Potiphar's estate, from prison to the palace - there's the roller coaster. There's the ups and downs. Do you trust God in the downs? And this is a master class, young friends. Young, young, young friends listen, master class on bloom where you're planted. Whatever task you are given, do it as an act of worship to the creator of the heavens and the earth. Be amazing at it. If you write an e-mail, write the best e-mail that's ever been written. If you're asked to clean the floors of the palace, clean them as clean as they've ever been. You know, if you're asked to watch over the prison, then make sure the prison has a peace that has never been there before. Titus 2:10 “Work in such a way that would make the teachings of God our Savior attractive.” That it opens the door wide. Who is your God? What's different about this person? Proverbs 22 says “See a person skilled in their labor, they will not stand before obscure people, they will stand before kings.” That's what's happening with Joseph.

My mentor said all the time, Pharaoh never misses his Joseph. He said that maybe more than anything else, Pharaoh never misses his Joseph. Pharaoh never misses his Joseph. What he means in that is what you see is Pharaoh is like “Wait! What's happening back there in the pasture? Why is everything so good? Who's in charge?” Oh it's Joseph, that makes sense. “But what about here in the palace? Why is everything so orderly here? Everybody seems happy. It's a great culture.” Oh, hey Joseph. Okay that makes sense. “What about in the front yard?” Joseph got it. “What about in the backyard?” Joseph. Pharaoh never misses his Joseph.

And to my young friends I would tell you, it's a really easy time to stand out. Show up early, stay late, get the work done better than it's expected. You know it's a master class on bloom where you're planted. Joseph sees everything as an opportunity for faithfulness under God's sovereignty. What does he have for me in this?

And so what happens is, Joseph's family runs out of food. So his brothers make the trek to Egypt. They stand before him, and you know 20 years have passed. At first they don't recognize him but then Joseph reveals himself. And he says in chapter 45 verse four ⁴ **Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph,**

the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. He said God sent him. How did God send him? In shackles. Psalm 105 says ¹⁶ **He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food; ¹⁷ and he sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave.** And then Genesis 50 verse 20, ²⁰ **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.** And this is the point. That God is at work in the betrayal. That God is at work in the pit. That God is at work in the slavery. That God is at work in the false accusation. That God is at work in the imprisonment. And we could keep going. God is at work in your prodigal. And God is at work in your broken relationship. And God is at work in your layoff. And God is at work in your financial problems. And God is at work in- insert your situation, your past history, things done to you. God is at work even in that when you bring it to him. And I know it's heavy. I don't say it flippantly. I know I woke up this morning knowing that I was going to have to say those words right now, and it's heavy. I feel the weight of it, but it doesn't make it not true.

What does he have for me in this? And if there's a temptation to say "Man I just don't know. Does God really work that way?" Can you think of another story that includes betrayal, innocence, false accusation, a really harsh punishment, and salvation? The story of Joseph is the story of Jesus. Joseph was favored, the favorite son of Jacob. Jesus is God's beloved son. Joseph was sold into slavery for 20 pieces of silver. Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Joseph faced false accusations and imprisonment. Jesus endured false accusations and crucifixion. Joseph rose to prominence as a ruler in Egypt. Jesus ascended to the right hand of God. Joseph was the savior of Egypt and surrounding nations. Jesus is the ultimate Savior of the world. Joseph's brothers offered themselves as slaves, but Joseph set them free. And when we become slaves to Jesus, he offers us true freedom. Joseph forgave his brothers who betrayed him and is reconciled to them. And Jesus offers forgiveness and reconciliation between God and sinners through his sacrifice.

I think your unjust circumstances are your greatest opportunities to display the gospel. Use them. It will help you. It's hard and it hurts, but there's a freedom available that is unimaginable to you right now. If you're in the middle of it, we're here to support you. It's not a hurry up let's use the story. No, it's like let's sit in this for a minute, let's weep with you, let's mourn with you, let's grieve with you. And then there is a time to turn forward and to say "Okay God, what do you want to do in this?"

In summary, family of origin doesn't limit our opportunity for obedience, you cannot determine obedience by the outcome, and ordinary obedience leads to extraordinary opportunities. I'll finish with a story that I just tripped over of Fanny Crosby. You guys know that name, Fanny Crosby? She wrote over 9000 hymns sung in almost every single Christian denomination. Many of them the most popular hymns still to this day. Fanny Crosby was not born blind; she was born with sight. She had an eye infection, and her doctor was out of town, so they went to a charlatan, a guy pretending to be a doctor for profit, who gave her a bogus remedy that caused her permanent blindness. Her sickness healed 2 weeks later, but her blindness sat there forever. A well-meaning preacher said "Wow it's so discouraging that God didn't remove your blindness when he's given you so many gifts. It seems like he would heal your sight." And she said, "Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition it would have been that I was born

blind,” said the poet. “Because when I get to heaven the first face that I would see ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.” She goes on to say, “It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow, I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.” There is a faith that I see in people that just spurs me on because I don't want to be blind. I want my arms and legs. And I certainly don't want chronic pain. I don't know that I have the faith to steward that toward the worship of our Savior. And I hope that if it happens tomorrow, next day, next week, or 20 years, that I don't go “Aahh you did this to me!” That I go “Hey, you're the only one. You're the only one that can get me through this. What can you do with it? What can you do with it? What can you do with it? How do you want to use it? Help me to be faithful. Help me to do the hard. Help me to minister out of the hurt. Help me to heal. If not myself, others. If you're not going to heal me, use me to heal others.”

Let's pray. Father, would you use us to heal others. Would you use us to heal others. What's the thing that you need to bring before him right now? Just go in your mind's eye. Don't worry about your neighbor. Everybody's doing it. Nobody's thinking about your thing, they're thinking about their thing. What is it you got to bring before God and say how can you use this? I didn't think you could use this. I didn't even want to use this, and I certainly don't want to be thinking about it right now. What is the path of obedience in it? Might be a thing that you said you're never going to speak out loud. It might be a thing that you can't speak out loud candidly, I see that sometimes. It may be so locked in a box and barricaded that it's like you know it's there, but you can't even find it. You lost the key. What's the thing that you can set before him and say God how do you want to use this? What good do you have for me in this very, very, very bad? Father as we lay that before you, would you do more than we could ever ask for or imagine. Help us to learn from the story of Joseph and to learn from the story of Jesus, that those worst moments are sometimes the greatest opportunities. Would you convince us of that even as we sing of your sovereignty. In Jesus name, amen.