

## Introduction

I still haven't gotten tired of that video. I just want you all to know that. We're getting closer to the end of our Joseph series entitled "It's Always Something"... talking about the seasons when we walk through difficulty in life. If you have a Bible with you today, and I hope that you do, I want to invite you at this time to take it out with me, and open it up to the Book of Genesis chapter 40. Maybe you don't have a physical Bible with you but you have a device... that's fine as well. If you don't have access to either one of those things, if you look right there at the chair in front of you, right down there at the bottom there's a tray, and it has a Bible in it. We would love for you to open that up with us. If you don't have a Bible of your own, feel free to take that with you. That's our gift to you today. We're going to be looking at the Book of Genesis, chapter 40. It's the very first Book of the Bible. If you don't feel comfortable doing any of that, don't freak out; it's going to be okay. The Bible passage we're going to be studying is going to be right here on both of these screens to the side. Anytime that we open up the Bible, it's good for us to understand that the Bible is divided into two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament talks about the record of God's work with His people. He chooses a people and then He demonstrates the fact that those people are kind of messed up apart from Him and they need a Rescuer. The New Testament is the story of that Rescuer, and that Rescuer is Jesus. We call Him Jesus Christ: Christ means the "Chosen One." So the New Testament is all about His story: His birth (we believe that He is God in flesh), His death on a cross (instead of you dying or me dying for our sin, He died for our sin), and then His resurrection. The rest of the New Testament talks about the people who followed Him. We call those people the Church. So, the people today who gather in churches on a regular basis are people who have decided to follow Jesus, this Rescuer that God sent.

Today we're in the Old Testament, in the Book of Genesis. Joseph is one of God's chosen people. He is going through a pretty difficult time. In fact, whenever this story began, Joseph was a favored son... the very favorite son of his dad Jacob, also known as Israel. But the story went on: his brothers were jealous, they actually faked his death and then threw him into a pit, and then they sold him into slavery. As if that wasn't bad enough, after he was sold into slavery, he was falsely accused by a woman who tried to seduce him, so now he has been thrown into prison. So where we find Joseph today is him living in prison, having gone from favored son status now all the way down to prison inmate. So that's where we are today, in Genesis chapter 40. I hope you'll follow along with me as we read this here today.

*"Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.*

*"And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation. When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, 'Why are your faces downcast today?' They said to him, 'We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.' And Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.'*

*"So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, 'In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the*

*clusters ripened into grapes. 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.'*

Now, if you don't know what a cupbearer is—a cupbearer is a person that would hang out with the king, and any time the king wanted to drink wine, the cupbearer drank it first. If he didn't die, they knew the wine wasn't poisoned, so then he would give it to the king. Kind of a risk-reward type of job.

(Verse 12) *"Then Joseph said to him, 'This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.'*

*"When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, 'I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.'* And Joseph answered and said, *'This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you.'*

*"On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."*

"Lord, many of us have come here today for many different reasons, but we desperately need to hear from You. Many of us, like Joseph, feel as if we're in a prison of sorts, as if our life is not going the way that we intended it to go. Some of us feel, as Joseph feels at the very end of this chapter, as if the people who were supposed to help us and get us out of our turmoil have actually forgotten us. Lord, remind us today that You never forget us, that You never leave us, and that You see us. I pray this, Lord, in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

You know, sometimes you go through those seasons where it's almost funny the kind of stuff that keeps going wrong. Right? Last week Joy and I were driving back from San Antonio. We had gotten away for a couple of days and didn't have any kids; we were excited about it. Driving back, a gravel truck was in the other lane... you see where this is headed... a rock popped up off the road and BAM! The windshield cracked all the way across. "That kind of stinks; I've got to fix that." As if to add insult to injury, the very next day the front end on my car went out... bad, bad news. As we were kind of figuring all that stuff out, Joy actually called me. She said, "Hey... I had a flat tire. The tire is slashed." That's pretty bad. And then later on that evening, we came home to do some laundry, and our washing machine started smelling like smoke. The boys actually literally hollered back and said, "Hey... we're trying to play video games in here, and the TV won't turn on anymore." We have a record player because we wanted to be really old-school and cool and have a record player in our house. So we have this record player and we went to turn it on, since we couldn't do anything else, so we turned that on. The record player made about eight or ten revolutions, and then it stopped working too. In the meantime, because of this heart stuff that I have... I don't know if you know this, but heart disease and gout are sometimes linked... and my gout... I know that's weird to say, "Are you old enough to have gout?" I know, it's weird... but I do and my foot started swelling up and hurting. And then we spent too much time in the sun, and Joy's lips got sunburned and

started swelling up really big... We were looking around at each other going, "Wow... this is kind of funny! What's happening?" All that happened in about 72 hours, by the way. (Laughter) You kind of have those moments where you have to laugh because all this stuff keeps happening. You're like, "What else is going to happen? What's going to happen next?" In those situations you can laugh because, even though those circumstances are bad, you're still going to have a moment where they're all going to pass, your ankle is going to feel better, and some of that stuff is just stuff, and if you can't get a TV or a record player right now, it's going to be okay. Apparently people can survive without those things. We're going to make it, and it's going to be alright.

But then there's other times, right? There are other times in life when it's not something that it's as easy to laugh at. There are other times which are more like "Shadow of the valley of death"-type thing.... Psalm 23-type moments where you are walking through a season in life, and it's not something you feel like you can laugh at. It's a season where things are so dark and so oppressive that you feel as if you are being weighed down because of a variety of circumstances in your life. You reach that moment and you say, I just don't know if it's going to get any better. You think about David writing, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..."* Maybe we're not afraid but we're certainly not comforted. We're anxious. We're wondering, "What is going to happen next? When is the other shoe going to fall? When is the next bad thing going to happen?"

Sometimes I talk to people and they've struggled with depression for years. They say, "Steve, you just don't understand. It's like I pray and my prayers don't even seem to get past the ceiling, and I've been in this funk for so long. It's like it never gets any better." Maybe there are people who have a disease that's struck their body and its afflicting them and they say, "This is so painful, so bad... I don't know how it's going to get any better. I've been praying and asking God to heal me, but for whatever reason, He hasn't chosen to do that." Maybe the person that you love dearly has died and maybe you're even comforted by the fact that they're spending eternity with the Father, but you miss them and the hole in your heart is painful. Maybe you've walked through a divorce or maybe you're in an abusive situation and you try to avoid these people and you try to stay away from them, but they keep finding ways to isolate you or peel you off from the crown and do horrible, horrible things and say terrible, terrible things. And you say, "You know, this seems more like a dark season, and I can't see the expiration date." I read that last verse in chapter 40 and I see Joseph and I think about the fact that he felt forgotten. In fact, he had been forgotten by Pharaoh's cupbearer, that he was completely by himself.

## The Valley Of Trouble Makes Most People Ask:

### 1. What Did You Do?

Whenever you go through those kinds of seasons, when those sorts of oppressive circumstances are pressing down on you, sometimes we'll share those things with people and we'll say, "These are the things that I'm walking through right now." Typically, there are two theological responses that people tend to have, and I've written those there on the back of your worship guide. You can read those there if you want to. The first one of those is this... "What did you do to bring this on you?" You see, historically people have responded in such a way as to say, "If this sort of bad thing is happening to you, then you must have done something so that you must be punished by God's hand."

This sort of thinking has a long tradition. In fact, many scholars would say that the oldest Book in the Bible is the Book of Job. And this is what happens to Job: Job, a man who is completely upright, completely

innocent, in chapter 1 has a great family, a great house, plenty of possessions, and suddenly he is stricken. He is stricken in such a way that everything is taken away from him; all of his "friends" surround him, and the way that they address this is they say to him, "What did you do for God to punish you like this?" They assume guilt.

John 9... kind of a similar response is given as well. Jesus sees a man who the Bible tells us has been blind ever since he has been born, and Jesus is planning to heal him, but a question is posed to Him by the scribes and the pharisees. This is what the question is. They say, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would go through this?" There was a theological assumption that this man was born blind because someone in his family must have sinned for God to allow a circumstance this terrible in his life.

But as best as we can tell, Joseph hasn't done anything. In fact, in chapter 39 he maintains his integrity. Here in chapter 40, he faithfully gives credit to God in interpreting these dreams. In doing those things, nevertheless, he is still faced with the fact that bad things have happened to him and continue to happen to him and yet now he is even forgotten in prison. He has gone from being a favorite son now to being forgotten in prison. When these sorts of things happen, the unspoken implication is that if this takes place, then you must be guilty. Now that sort of theological assumption is actually opposite of what the New Testament teaches. The New Testament teaches us, in fact, that while there may be bad things that will happen... in fact, there will be bad things that will happen to us... our sin has already been dealt with and punished on the cross of Jesus Christ. If you believe... if you have placed your faith in Jesus, your sin has already been punished. Let me put that in super-clear language. When bad circumstances happen to you, they are not to punish you for your sin. There may be consequences of a bad decision, there may be consequences of sin that you've chosen, but they are not there to punish you. They may just be the way that the world is wired because your sin has already been expressly punished and dealt with on the cross. Nevertheless, we still walk through those things.

## 2. Where is Your God?

So there's this one theological response: "Well, you've got to be guilty..." Then there's another theological response out there which sort of goes in the opposite way. This is the question that typically religious people ask. Religious people would say this: "What did you do to make that happen?" Irreligious people... people who don't believe... those people are on this side and those people would say, "Well, if there's really a God, why is that kind of stuff happening to you?" If there truly is a God, there wouldn't be this amount of evil taking place to you. You're supposed to be someone who actually believes in God. These sorts of bad things wouldn't happen. This is also an ancient response. Psalm 42:10... a text that is literally thousands of years old, we read this that David writes: *"As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, 'Where is your God?'"*

For generations, people who do not have faith have ridiculed those who do have faith by saying, "If you truly have a God, why would these things happen to you? This is the common response of those in the new atheist camp... individuals like Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris... they love to throw those sort of accusations: "How could there be this much evil in the world?" One of those individuals is a man by the name of Bart Ehrman: He's a scholar of the New Testament, but he does not profess faith in Jesus Christ. He lives out of North Carolina, and Ehrman has actually said that his faith was done away with whenever he was studying the text and seeing this nature of a God who is supposed to be loving but yet he is looking out into the world and seeing all of the evil and he said, "There can't be a God if there's this kind of evil out there in the world." In responding to Ehrman, a writer by the name of Dinesh D'Souza

actually wrote a response. In his response in his book "God Forsaken," this is what he said to Ehrman and other individuals who are members of the new atheist movement and addressing this sort of thinking. He said this: "There is something a little off-key about Western academics saying, 'I have lost my faith because of the suffering of the Rwandans' while at the same time Rwandans are saying, 'Our faith draws us closer to the only One who can console and protect us which is God.'" It is interesting, isn't it, that oftentimes the people that say there can't be a God are the very ones who have been immensely blessed, while those who are under deep oppression or are walking through circumstances that we would deem to be unfair are the ones who are clinging onto God.

Philip Yancey wrote a book; his book is entitled "What Good Is God?" In that book he details those in the Chinese church; one of those pastors is a pastor by the name of Yuan. He says that that pastor tells him that he was thrown in prison for ten years in solitary confinement, wasn't allowed contact with another individual for ten years. Even during the midst of that darkness, his faith was rekindled. He would remember words, Yancey says, to the song 'The Old Rugged Cross' and alone, in solitary confinement in his cell, he would sing it, and those words would bring him comfort." After he was released from prison, in this interview, Yancey said that this Chinese pastor said, "Isn't it amazing that the country that was determined to stamp out Christianity through atheist and communistic means, now has the possibility of having the single largest Christian population in the world within its borders." Even though the country was destined to stamp it out, the Church has spread like wildfire.

You see, over and over and over, many people in the West have decide that there cannot be a God if there's evil in the world, but those who live in circumstances where there's deep oppression and persecution have actually often said, "I cling to God"...that when it is darkest, the light of the Gospel and the light of God shines the brightest because it's there that they have experienced His fullness.

So as we get to the end of chapter 40 and we see the statement where the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph but forgot him, and if we were to read the very first verse of chapter 41, we would see that Joseph was forgotten for two years, just sitting there. What would we do? How would we respond?

### **But What If We Instead Ask:**

#### **1. "Am I Being Squeezed?"**

How could we find another theological response instead of "What did you do?" or "Where is your God?" How could we find a different way to respond theologically? Well, perhaps there is another way to respond theologically. You see, in the Bible we see over and over that God is given a name and that name is "the Lord." It is a transliteration of the Hebrew name "Yahweh." A name that was so holy that those who were Israelites or Jewish refused to even speak the name. There would be qualities that would be attached to that. So in the Book of Genesis, for instance, He would be called "The God Who Sees." He always sees. At the end of Ezekiel, the Lord is there... "The God Who Is There." There are other places where He is Jehovah Jireh, "The God Who Provides." There are these qualities that are given to describe who God is... to describe His character.

Over and over, we also read additionally in Scripture that this God never forgets but He remembers. For instance:

Exodus 2:24: *"And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob."* He remembered.

Luke 1:54-55: *"He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendents forever."*

You see, many of us have assumed that if God could see the trouble, the circumstances that we are walking through, then He would be bound to intercede and to stop those circumstances. Now I want to stop for just a moment. I believe that we cry out to God and that we pray and that God will oftentimes choose to step into our circumstances, to heal, to rescue. But I also think there might be another response whenever He chooses not to do so, besides "Where is your God?" and "What did you do?" What is that response?

So... here's my toothpaste. This is Arm and Hammer Advanced White. Controversially, I do not use Crest or Colgate. I know... big decision. Baking soda for the win. So now, if I were to take the cap off of this tube of toothpaste, and if I were to squeeze it onto my toothbrush, what would you assume would come out of this tube? Toothpaste... right. What if I squeezed it and motor oil came out? Would I brush my teeth with that? Probably not. I would have to be pretty desperate, and I don't even really know why I would do that in the first place. But you see, even though we think that there's toothpaste in here, we actually can't see it can we? The only way that we know if there's toothpaste inside this tube, we actually have to take the cap off and squeeze it and see what comes out.

The longer that I walk with the Lord, I'm beginning to understand something. I'm beginning to see that there are moments when perhaps we have circumstances that have entered our life that the Lord chooses not to intercede with... not because He is bad but actually because He is quite good and because He knows the toothpaste test... that we need to be squeezed because the only way we can see what's on the inside is when life squeezes us tight.

You see, the truth of the matter is that sometimes, whenever we are squeezed, what comes out of us ought to be a gracious response to a loving God who has rescued us and said, "I am enough." But sometimes, whenever I am squeezed, if I'm honest, that is not what comes out. Oftentimes whenever I am squeezed, something very different comes out. It's outrage or anger or frustration or refusal to trust. What if, indeed, the better scriptural response, theologically, is not that God has forgotten us or that we are guilty but instead that God wants to expose our hearts, not to the rest of the world, per se, but instead to expose our hearts to us? I don't know about you but sometimes I am completely disingenuous with myself when it comes to my spiritual nature. I think that I'm in a great place with God and then when something bad comes along and squeezes me, I go, "That is ugly. I can't believe that's on the inside." The Bible would call those "tests." The Bible would also call this "discipline." Hebrews 12:5 and following says this: *"Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?"* Listen... *"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves..."* The Lord disciplines the one He loves. *"...and He chastises every son whom He receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"*

If I do not discipline my sons, then I actually do not love them, because if I let them live however they want to live, I am doing them a disservice. One day, whenever they leave my house and they go into the world, if they have not learned discipline, if they have not learned behavior, if they have not learned self-control, then they will fall flat on their face and they will fail. If God's desire is to grow us up, to raise us up so that other people can see Jesus in us so that we can savor God's presence, if that is God's desire, might He sometimes squeeze us, expose our hearts to us, and say, "Do you see that? That ain't good. Maybe it's time to change."

Romans 8:18 says this: *"For I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* In other words, Paul says, "The stuff we are going through now, actually will be way out-shadowed by what we will see one day whenever Jesus demonstrates how we have been perfected."

Romans 5:3-5 says this: *"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."* We rejoice in our sufferings because suffering is the thing that allows us to hope more in God instead of ourselves.

James 1:2-3: *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."*

If you believe in God, then you have to believe in His Word, the Bible. And His Bible says that there are times when we will walk through deep and long valleys so that He might change things, not out there with our circumstances but first-and-foremost in here... in the way that we relate to Him.

I cannot understand why He chooses certain people to go through certain things. I wish I did. I talk to people who have had family members commit suicide. I talk to people who have lost loved ones at far too young of an age... people who have lost children... and I look at them and I think, "God, why have I been spared that sort of pain in my life?" I don't know the answer. I don't know why some of us, it seems, get squeezed to a far-lesser degree. I don't know if it's because the Lord is choosing some of us to be His vessels in a very specific way, or if God is working out spiritual disease in some of us that others of us don't have. I just don't know. I couldn't even begin to pretend, so I won't even speculate, but I do know this... that the God who does so is not doing so out of vindictiveness. He is doing so, Scripture says over and over, because He wants to discipline us, He wants to grow us, He wants to make us into the people who first-and-foremost grab Him, and we declare that He is good enough. You see, the thing that is often tempting for us is to believe that He has forgotten us, that He has left us, that He has abandoned us, that He is not good, that He is not great. But instead, what if the greatest mission that God has in this life is to expose His glory to the world by allowing us to be squeezed so that when we are squeezed we see the yuck that comes out and we repent and we change and we grow. And one day when we are squeezed and we're in a situation where our house is stricken and bad things happen and we are squeezed, and the only thing that pours from us is Jesus and grace. And when that happens, people who do not believe in God, they say this: "Maybe God is real because look at the way that she responded." "Look at the way that that man responded." "God must be real because they are responding with grace."

You see, truthfully, we may never understand why this happens. Matt Rogers says this, after coming out of a season of struggling with depression, "I will have to relinquish my demands to know why a God who does not always explain Himself and to trust that in the end it will be worth it." Sometimes we don't know specifically what the purpose is, but we do know that ultimately it's so that we'll be changed so that God can be glorified and we can lift Him up. The thing that I'm beginning to understand as we walk through these sorts of things, over and over, is the fact that God sometimes allows people to forget us or people to abandon us because the truth of the matter is that sometimes we take those things for granted and we hold onto them too tightly, and we love them more than we love the God who gave them to us. And sometimes He allows us to be stripped or allows us to be alone for just a moment or a season or a decade so that

we'll go, "He is enough... He is more than enough... and my Father will supply all of my needs through the glory of the riches of Jesus Christ."

## **2. Am I Being Stricken?"**

But there's another possibility. It's not just about maybe about being squeezed. Sometimes I think that maybe it actually is that we are being stricken. Now I want to be very careful here, theologically, to make a distinction between being stricken versus the idea of our sin being punished. As I've already said, it's clear in Scripture that our sin has been punished already on the cross, so it's not that. But I do think, as I read through Scripture, that I see plenty of times where God strikes people to get their attention. Think about the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. How many times does God have to strike them to get their attention? Think about the kings worshipping other gods. How many times does God have to strike them to get their attention? The people putting other customs before the Lord... how many times does God have to strike them to get their attention? It's not about, necessarily, punishing their sin. It's instead to say... (knocking) ... "Hey... I'm here; don't forget about Me."

I've got a couple of sons, and one of the things that dads do with their sons... I don't know, maybe they do it with their daughters too... I don't know; I've never had daughters. But one of the things that we do is we wrestle. You know, sometimes you just clear it all out in the middle of the living room... I'm here to exert and demonstrate my dominance. Right? So you just do that. Whenever they were five... it was easy. But now I've got a 15-year-old and a 12-year-old, and I'm not going to lie... when they take their shirt off, it's a lot more impressive than when I take my shirt off now. (Laughter) I see those muscles sometimes... Lately, whenever we wrestle, I have to use a little more effort than I used to have to use. I mean, I have to basically say, "There will be a day when you will beat me... Today is not that day." That day will come, but I have to try a lot harder. One of my sons... I won't tell you which one because I don't want to embarrass him... but one of my sons really struggles with the fact that he is not as strong as me yet, and he does not like to lose. I'll be holding him down on the ground, and he has to kick and scream; he'll sometimes even resort to all kinds of dirty tricks... trying to lick me... spit at me... (Laughter) these kinds of things... before finally he'll say, "Okay, you're stronger; you win." I tell you that because I'm amazed about this. You would think that after living with me and doing this multiple times that they would understand my physical bounds because I certainly know that I've understood their physical bounds, and that they would go, "Hey, I know kind of where the boundaries are on this and how far I can press this... but, for whatever reason, sometimes as we're growing, we forget about that."

I'm reminded of the fact that spiritually, sometimes we're growing and we're walking with the Lord and He is saying, "Here come... let Me show you these things." Do you know what we do? We get a stiff neck and a hard heart and we say, "I don't want to do that." He says, "No, no, no... this is the way that we're going to go, and I want to show you these things and this is what we're going to do. I need you to surrender to Me because I'm going to walk you this way, I'm going to show you these things..." And we go, "I don't want to do that." So He grabs us a little bit tightly and He says, "You don't understand... we have to do this because the way that you're going to be formed and the way that you need to be formed is that we have to go this way and you need to do these things..." Then you say, "I don't want to do those things..." Then He has to say, "Oh... I see. You've forgotten which one of us is stronger. Let's take it to the mat."

You see, I think that there are many of us here today who are actually being stricken... not because of guilt of sin... but we're being stricken today because we are refusing to receive the discipline of the Lord. And because we won't receive it, we are what the Bible calls "stiff-necked." That's a fancy way of saying "hard-

headed." And He has got you pinned right now, and He is pressing hard, and some of us are saying, "I'm not going to give up." And He is there to say, "I can do this all day."

Some of us today have actually mistaken who God is. And we have forgotten that what God wants to give us is not necessarily a comfortable life, but what God desires to give us is His very presence. You see, the Gospel... the Good News... is this: It's that God became flesh in Jesus, that Jesus died on the cross because every one of us had rebelled... He died for that sin... and then resurrected... defeated death. He did that so that we could have eternal life with Him. So that even if we place our faith in Him today, we would have His presence in our life. That's why God did those things. He wants you to know that His presence is the deepest gift that you could ever have. He wants you to know that His presence is the greatest thing that He could ever give you. That's why, in Exodus 33, Moses says, "I will not leave here if Your presence will not go with us because we are no different than any other people if we do not have Your presence. I've got to have it." And there are people today that, for some reason, are more enamored with the blessings that God gives than the greatest blessing which is Him... Himself. Today He will say, "I will pin you to the mat, I will take everything away from you until you finally wake up and surrender and say, "I don't want the stuff... I just want Jesus. "What I want you to understand is this: He does that, not because He is evil, not because He is vindictive but because He is good and He is loving and He wants you to have the best. The way that you get the best is when you finally surrender and you stop saying, "I'll do it my way" but instead you say, "King Jesus, Your way or no way." That is how it works.

You see, Joseph is forgotten in prison, and some of us here today feel as if we have been forgotten. Some of us perhaps are being squeezed. But others of us maybe what's happening right now is that we have been forgotten because God is saying, "I'm going to take you to the mat, and I'm going to squeeze until finally say, 'You win.'" Some of us today are here right now, and today is the day where you finally surrender, and you say, "I'm not that strong." The Bible calls Jesus "King"... Kings do not operate by democracy. There is no referendum. There is simply their will, and those who obey it live pleasurably with the king, and those who disobey it do not. Today, King Jesus... There are some of us who are squeezed so that we will see how we ought to grow, repent, and better serve Him. And others of us... He's saying, "It's time for you to say this: "You're the King... not me." Our Lord has never left us; our Lord has never forsaken us...

Perry Noble, a pastor in South Carolina, puts it this way: "Are we going to allow circumstances to determine our belief in God, or are we going to allow our belief in God to reign over our circumstances?"

Let's pray. I want to pray today, and I want to ask first for any individual who is here in this room... nobody looking around... and you would say, "Hey, Steve... do you know what? I think I'm getting squeezed. I want to just ask that you would let us pray for you. Would you raise your hand if you say, "Hey, I think I'm getting squeezed right now and I need prayer." Just raise them up high for me for just a second so that I can see them. There's a lot of people raising them up. This is what I want to do. I'm going to ask that if you are raising your hand right now, we don't want to embarrass you, but we would love to pray for you, if you would do us this honor. I'm going to ask that you would just stand where you are right now... would you do that? If you feel comfortable... just stand up right now. What we're going to do is we're going to pray for you. okay. If you've been raising your hand, just stand up; we want to pray for you. Several are standing right now. If that's you, you can go ahead and stand too. I want to give everybody an opportunity to respond who wants to. Okay, many are standing right now."

[End of recording]