

### Take Up the Cross!

*Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"*

*But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.*

*One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She 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.*

*She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."*

*... When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. 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, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.*

Have you ever noticed how a stream or river is crooked? Rivers rarely flow in a straight line because they follow the path of least resistance. When a river meets rocks, it will not try to plow through the rock; it will move around the rock through soft soil. Sometimes a path of least resistance is good. If I want to turn left on a busy street, I might instead go down two blocks to the stoplight and turn there because it is easier. Sometimes, though, a path of least resistance is a bad thing. Let's say you are going to fly somewhere. The path of least resistance for an airplane is to fall straight down to earth. That would not be good. You need a lot of resistance in the form of strong turbine engines to keep the plane in the air and to take you safely wherever you are going.

What path does Jesus have for us? You heard it today. Jesus wants you to take the path of most resistance. ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."*** It is a matter of life or death. To take the path of least resistance means to no longer resist the world, but to give in and join them. But if we are to call Jesus Lord and Savior and follow him, it means we resist the world, and it will be hard. But is it worth it? You bet. So, take up your cross and follow Jesus. To help us, we will study the example of someone who did that very thing. His name is Joseph.

#### *I. Taking up your cross means you patiently persevere through suffering.*

When things go badly in your life, how do you react? Joseph had a lot of bad things happen to him. His mother died when he was a small child. His brothers hated his guts. They first were serious about murdering him, but compromised with selling him into slavery. Later he will be thrown in jail for a crime he did not commit. Wouldn't you feel a little bit sorry for yourself if this happened to you? Wouldn't you complain? But Joseph didn't do that. Rather, he was quite the opposite. He accepted his lot in life and made the best he could out of it.

But here is the big question. Why? The bad things in Joseph's life have happened to many people. Some even endured worse. But look at how Joseph handled these bad things. ***"The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, ... the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field."*** Listen at the break table at work. How many people are happy with their jobs? How many grumble and complain and hate their bosses? You would never hear Joseph talk that way. Instead of complaining or dragging his feet, he accepted his position as a slave and worked hard at it. Even when in prison, Joseph worked hard, so much so that the warden trusted him and put him in charge.

What would possess Joseph to do that? It is because Joseph was carrying a cross. He trusted the Lord. You have to remember something about Joseph. God gave him a glimpse of the future. Through a dream he understood that one day his father and brothers would bow down to him. It didn't seem that way when his brothers sold him as a slave. It didn't seem that way when he sat in prison. But Joseph trusted God's promise. Ask him, "How will God keep his word while you are a slave?" "I don't know," Joseph would reply, "but he will."

So Joseph trusted God's promise and if it meant spending many years as a slave and prisoner, so be it. And it showed in how he accepted his lot in life and worked hard even for his master. You have more than Joseph. God hasn't promised that your father and brothers will bow down to you. He has promised you the riches of heaven. If all we have is the world, we will never be satisfied. But if we have heaven, then it doesn't matter what path we travel in this world, whether it be a dead end job or illness. We have a treasure stored up for us in heaven.

Joseph carried a cross. His cross was God and his promises. The cross gives us hope. This cross gets us through suffering. But we learn next that this cross means we suffer more than others because of Christ.

## *II. Carrying a cross mean denying ourselves before the world.*

You know, I think Potiphar was glad Joseph was around. He wasn't the only one. His wife was glad, too. ***"Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused. ... And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her."*** "Day after day," Joseph faced temptation by his boss's wife. A day doesn't go by when you are not tempted. It is difficult to avoid Potiphar wife images on television or phones or in everyday conversation. We are neck deep in temptations whether sexual or greed or revenge or selfishness.

Now we could take the path of least resistance. We could stop resisting temptation and give in. Why not? Everyone else is. And I bet more people will accept you for it. But Joseph didn't take that path. He took the path of most resistance. He chose to follow the Lord's way when confronted by the wife. ***"... 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?"***

So Joseph resisted her. He resisted any urges he may have had. He resisted social norms and said no. He even avoided her at all costs and when she cornered him one day, he resisted to the point of running out of the room.

So Joseph did the right thing in the eyes of God. And how was Joseph rewarded for his good? He got thrown into jail. ***"She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." ... When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined."***

So we ask again, "why?" Why do what God says? Why do good when we may get punished for it? Well, it shows us we are forgiven and saved and going to heaven. In heaven there will be no adultery, no murder, no hatred. It will be holy and perfect. Because Jesus carried his cross to Golgotha where his innocent blood paid for our damning sins, we have an inheritance in that perfect heaven. But we don't want to wait. So we pick up our cross and follow Jesus now. We hate sin. We hate it because it took Jesus' death to forgive us. We hate it so we pray to God for the strength to fight and resist temptation. And the world hates us for it and hurts us. This is what it means to carry a cross. It means we suffer more because of Christ. But this suffering can also do us good.

The Apostle Paul saw and did things the ordinary Christian does not see or do. So what does the Lord do? He gave him a thorn in his flesh. Paul concluded, ***"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me."*** God allowed suffering into his life for his good, so he would not become conceited.

What good is a conceited husband and father in the home? How will a conceited child act before his parents? What would a conceited neighbor do when his neighbor is in need? And how would a conceited person respond to the message of Christ and the cross? So the Lord uses our crosses for our good. They keep us humble.

And finally, our crosses give glory to God. It tells others we are willing to suffer because the Lord is that awesome. It is a public confession that we relish our forgiveness and eternal glory far more than earthly treasures. We are telling the world, "What we have is so precious." We want them to know that so they may ask and we can share our faith in the hopes they may believe, too.

So being a Christian is the easiest thing in the world. It means trusting that Jesus' life and death forgives our sins, promises eternal life and even a resurrection from the dead. But it can also be the hardest thing because the world, even our own desires, resist Christ every step of the way. It is hard to follow Christ. It will hurt following the path of most resistance. But is it worth it? Yes. Amen.