



**Oadby Evangelical Free Church**

North Memorial Hall, Stoughton Road, Oadby, LE2 4FL

OEFC is on the web  
at [www.oefc.org.uk](http://www.oefc.org.uk)

**SUNDAY, 9 MAY 2021**

## **SATURDAY MORNING PRAYER**

Please join with us this Saturday morning at 09h30, via Zoom, to pray.

There are so many reasons why we can and should give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name and and make known His deeds. Some of these are listed for us in **Psalm 105:1-11**, which provides us with a useful focus for praise before we come to pray for such topics as are given on the last page below.

## **SUNDAY SERVICES**

We invite you to join us on Sunday morning at **10h30** via Zoom, on YouTube or in person. Please note, however, that if you want to join us in person you must *book a place by noon on Saturday* by contacting [stuart@oefc.co.uk](mailto:stuart@oefc.co.uk).

The service will be led by Stuart Glover, and he will preach the next in our sermon series on the life of Joseph. This week, we consider **Genesis 41:1-32** and, under the heading *A dream assignment*, we shall draw lessons from what happened when Pharaoh was troubled by a linked pair of vivid dreams.

In our more informal afternoon service at **16h00**, available on Zoom, there will be recorded singing, a talk for children, and a short devotional message on the question, "Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God's Word?"

## **MIDWEEK ACTIVITIES**

At present, two groups meet electronically twice a month for an informal time of Bible Study and Prayer. You are welcome to join either group:

**Monday, 20h00** contact Paul Whalley Paul@oefc.co.uk

**Thursday, 20h00** contact Luke Carter-Whittle Luke@oefc.co.uk

This week also sees us begin our twenty-minute prayer meetings taking us **from Ascension to Pentecost** – that is, from Thursday, 13 May to Whitsunday on 23 May. To prepare for these 'ten days of waiting prayer', we recommend the short talk on YouTube presented by David McClay, the Anglican bishop of Down and Dromore. Full details of our daily prayer meetings, with links both to them and to the Bishop's talk, are being sent out separately with this edition of the *Bulletin*.

## **THANKS**

We are grateful for your continued financial support, and for your generous contributions to our special Easter Offering. In relation to the latter, and including Gift Aid reclaims, we shall be able to send a little over £1,600 to UFM to support the work of the Nelson family and, particularly, help towards the costs associated with their forthcoming move to the USA.

As Covid-related restrictions ease, many of us may be thinking of where to go on holiday and what to do when we get there.

Remarkably, there are places now very firmly on the tourist map that once were strenuously to be avoided. Popular trips take visitors from San Francisco to Alcatraz Island, and from Cape Town to Robben Island. Closer to home, the Victorian building known locally as ‘The Crum’ is a five-star attraction on the Crumlin Road in Belfast, a similar building at Beaumaris on the Isle of Anglesey welcomes tens of thousands of visitors each year, and the Tower of London routinely tops the list of the most-visited tourist destinations in Britain. These places have in common the fact that they are (or, rather, were) secure prisons. Now clean, safe and places of interest, they were formerly squalid, dangerous and places of horror. People now enter them very willingly and pay to get in, whereas once people entered them very unwillingly and could not pay to get out. It was there that thousands of people lost their dignity, their freedom, their hope and, in many cases, their lives.

Even worse than prisons in the modern world were the prisons of the ancient world, in days when life was very cheap and prisoners had no rights. And yet it was in just such a place, in the land of Egypt, that once was to be found one of the greatest men of ancient history, for “Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.” (Genesis 39:20) Joseph was imprisoned in the prime of life, in his twenties, and he remained in prison for more than – perhaps much more than – two years (Gen 41:1a).

Joseph, once a cherished son in a large family, was now a convicted slave in a foreign country. He had no local family to support him or loyal friends to speak up for him; he had no rights as a prisoner; having summarily lost his freedom, he could just as suddenly have lost his life without almost anyone being the wiser or mourning the loss. But why was he in such an awful situation? What had Joseph done to deserve it?

## the life of Joseph

The old saying, that there is ‘no smoke without fire’, might suggest that there must have been good reasons for Joseph’s imprisonment. Yet none is to be found in the Biblical record. The remarkable early biography of Joseph is this:

- Joseph was the eleventh of the twelve sons of patriarch Jacob, known also as Israel, and undisguisedly his father’s favourite: “Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colours.” (Gen 37:3) This caused considerable tension in the family, since “when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.” (Gen 37:4)
- At the age of seventeen, when pasturing the flock, Joseph was worried by the behaviour of his brothers: maybe they were careless or cruel with the animals; maybe they robbed passing merchants; maybe they traded dishonestly or acted discredibly. Whatever it was they did, “Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.” (Gen 37:2)
- Joseph’s story is punctuated by coordinated pairs of dreams. The first pair, which Joseph himself had, suggested that he would become ascendant over his brothers, and even over his father. But his brothers “hated him even more for his dreams, and for his words” and they “were jealous of him” (Gen 37:5–11).
- Sent by his father to join his brothers, Joseph was an easy prey at distant Dothan. At first his brothers “conspired against him to kill him” but then, deciding not to take his life, sold him to passing Ishmaelites who, in their turn, took him down to Egypt and sold him “to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.” (Gen 37:12–36)
- In Egypt, and unmistakably by the grace of God, Joseph served Potiphar with distinction and was put in charge of all that his master had. The LORD was with Joseph and, moreover, “the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake” (Gen 39:1–6a).

## the hand of God

➤ It was in his master's house that Joseph faced temptation that was unexpected, flattering, persistent and forceful. For there, day after day, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him.

Joseph had *the right attitude*: resolved not to dishonour Potiphar, he knew above all that he could not commit "this great wickedness and sin against God". So consistently he took *the right action*: he explained very clearly to Potiphar's wife why he could not lie with her, refused to be with her and, when eventually she caught him alone and tried to force herself upon him, he fled (Gen 39:6b–12).

Joseph left behind a garment that Potiphar's wife had grabbed, and she used this to claim that he had come to rape her. Potiphar was angry on hearing this and at once committed Joseph to prison (Gen 39:1–20). It may have been then that Joseph's "feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron." (Psalm 105:17b,18)

So what had Joseph done to deserve his imprisonment? Back in Canaan, he had not chosen to be his father's favourite, or to have twin dreams, and his bringing back a bad report on his brothers was probably more to his credit than to his discredit. Perhaps he had rather a superiority complex and spoke of his dreams in less tactful a way than he might have done, but these were scarcely sufficient grounds for the harsh treatment he suffered at the hands of his brothers. Once he was in Egypt, Joseph consistently knew the presence and the blessing of God and was faithful to Him – and to his earthly master – in his work and by refusing to accede to any of the seductive proposals of Potiphar's wife. Joseph declared nothing more than the simple truth when he told his fellow prisoners, "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." (Gen 40:15)

Joseph no more deserved imprisonment than later did Jeremiah (Jeremiah 37:11ff), John the Baptist (Mark 6:17–20), Peter (Acts 12:1–5) or Paul and Silas (Acts 16:19–24; cf Acts 24:27, Philippians 1:12,13 etc.) So why was he there?

If nothing else, the life of Joseph teaches us that *there are no accidents in a world overseen by a living, reigning God*. Joseph knew that and so, at two critical times later in his life – when he made himself known and when, seventeen years later, Jacob died – he allayed his brothers' fears by telling them, "God sent me before you" and "God meant it for good" (Gen 45:4–8, 50:15–21).

Joseph's clear conviction leads to the obvious conclusion that everything that had happened to him occurred because God had planned it so. It is easy to see that with regard to his elevation and period of service as Pharaoh's right-hand man. But it is equally true of his enslavement and subsequent imprisonment: these, too, were a part – indeed, a vital part – of God's plan for him. "If one of Joseph's misfortunes had been omitted, his good fortune would never have come. If his brothers had not hated him, if he had not been sold, if he had not been imprisoned, he would never have ruled Egypt. Not one thread in the tapestry could have been withdrawn without spoiling the pattern." (Maclaren, 1904)

The fact is that *Joseph was in prison because God sent him to prison*. His imprisonment had nothing to do with bad luck, cruel circumstance or sinful behaviour, but all to do with divine providence. And still today there are people of God in prison, both literally and metaphorically, for the same reason: God has put them there for a purpose. We may not always understand that purpose, since the back of a tapestry can be very confusing and messy and give little clue to the beauty of the design seen on the front, but it suffices to know that God most certainly does know what He is doing – as Joseph's life proves.

Perhaps you feel somewhat imprisoned at the moment because of circumstances, not of your own making, that restrict your freedom to live as you would like and serve God as you would want. Whether that is as a result of your age or health, family or finances, colleagues or work – even your local church! – learn from Joseph to look behind men to God and recognise that, in the changing scenes of your life, He is in control.

## prayer points

- Praise God that He is worthy of praise; that He is a God of mighty deeds and wondrous works; that His name is ever holy.

Praise God that “he has granted to us his precious and very great promises” (2 Pet 1:4), not one word of which has failed (Josh 21:45).

Praise God for the Biblical record which confirms all that He did for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and proves that He was in control even when they were in tough circumstances.

- Praise God for answered prayer regarding the development of vaccines, but continue to pray for the vaccination programme and for common sense and great wisdom as the restrictions here and elsewhere are lifted.

Pray for God’s work through VOCM (Valathi Outreach Church Ministries) in Tamil Nadu, particularly since India is struggling so much as a result of widespread Covid infection.

- Pray for the missionaries we support, and their local-church colleagues, at work:

in southern France and mainland Spain;

in Jos, Nigeria, where Lydia King is serving;

in Costa Rica and in Latin America;

in Mandritsara in Madagascar, where plans can now proceed apace to prepare the hospital to become a surgical training centre.

- Pray for revival in our days and in our land. Locally, pray for pastor Joshua Harrison and all the work of Little Hill Church in Wigston.

- Pray for God’s work in OEFC, especially our online and other children’s activities. Pray for our Sunday services, for the next edition of the *Bulletin* and for our prayer meetings – those we hold regularly and our forthcoming ‘ten days of waiting prayer’.

Pray for great wisdom as we look forward to the possibility of our resuming more normal activities, that we shall make the right decisions regarding what to do and when to do it.

Pray for our church survey, a new Treasurer, a new pastor and for all of our people.

## the providence of God

God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill

He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

You fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter  
And He will make it plain.

This hymn by William Cowper (1731–1800) was first published in 1774. The story that he wrote it after being saved from trying to take his own life is apocryphal, but it is true that Cowper – who by then attended the church at Olney in Bucks where the curate was John Newton – suffered severely from depression. The great anchor in his life was his confidence in the God of providence.

### OEFC MOTTO TEXT 2021

*God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.*

PSALM 46:1

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