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Genesis 39:1-6, 19-23

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God with us

Hello, everyone! Good morning and Good afternoon! Last month, I shared about Joseph who dreamed of a dream from God. Do you all have a dream from God after that? I pray that you will have a dream from God every day.

When we are successful when everything is going well and we praise God for being with us. At time like that, we think we are grateful for our luck, and the praise comes out naturally. However, it is not so easy to thank God for being there when we are in pain. In 2007(Heisei 15), there was a law revision to increase the punishment for drunk driving. I still remember the words of crime victim's mother that triggered this. The mother lost her perfect son while he was studying at Waseda University because of the perpetrator who was driving under the influence of alcohol. At that time she was screaming in front of the media. "There is no God!" Now, even though I think about it, the sadness of the mother makes me sad. How sad it was! It is a picture of a person who cannot endure the suffering of this world. However, even we Christians who believe in God tend to lose our faith in times of hardship. Have you ever prayed, God, where are you? I pray that you and I will learn about trusting in God in today's message and that you will have a firm faith.

Today we will talk about Joseph's hardship. None of us will have a hard time that beats Joseph's. Looking at Genesis chapter 37 like the message last month, Joseph was hated by his brothers and sold as a slave because he had a dream from God. What terrible things happened to Joseph! People usually want to avoid misery. We all hope that "The demon is outside! Fortune is inside!" (Setsubun, one of the traditional event in Japan) That is why many people need religion to be happy, such as success, no accidents, easy delivery, having many children, health, college pass, and happy marriage and so on.

However, look at chapter 39:1. Joseph is sold to Egypt by his brother's plot. This is definitely 'trafficking'. It was an immeasurable sadness because it was a crime from his

own family. The country where Joseph was sold was Egypt. It is estimated to be around 1700 BC, so Egypt at that time had a great power like the United States today. It was then sold as a slave to the house of Potiphar, an official of the court of Egyptian King Pharaoh. Potiphar was in charge of escorting the king like the chamberlain of Japan and was in charge of managing prisons and prisoners (Study Bible, Japan Bible Society, 2014). It is good to be sold as a slave to a high-ranking house, but after all, the slave is a slave. Joseph is no longer a wealthy family boy. He was a foreigner from Canaan where the small village no one knew, who was deprived of his freedom. He would have wanted to claim the Black Lives Matter. He would have been lonely with no family around him. Every night, Joseph remembered his dad and cried as he saw his swollen legs and his blisters on his fingers.

After some time, it happened the other way around in his life. See verse 2. Joseph became a lucky man because the Lord was with him. And verse 3, his master Potiphar realizes that God is with Joseph and makes him successful. So in verse 4, Potiphar entrusts Joseph with all the property of the house. If he leaves it to Joseph, he doesn't have to worry about embezzlement or fraud. On the contrary, God blessed all the farmland and property, not to mention Potiphar's house. To Potiphar, Joseph was like 'Hiraita Kuchi ni Botaochi'; a peony rice cake with open mouth, which is one of Japanese idiom, that means blessings were brought in one after another through someone. If you leave it to Joseph, everything will go well. Shichi huku jin (the Seven Lucky gods in Japan) are not needed in Potiphar's house. Joseph alone was enough. If Joseph is present today, I would like to entrust him to set up measures against Covid-19.

This reminds us of God's promise to Abraham, as in Genesis 12:1-3. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." This promise will later be fully fulfilled by Jesus Christ, but even it turns out that this promise is steadily fulfilled in Joseph's life also. I pray that each one of us will be blessed by God and that your neighbors will also be blessed because you are there.

Joseph had the blessing of God, was trusted by the people around him and he lived successfully even in the foreign country. However a ridiculous trial came suddenly. Looking at verses 6-18. Potiphar's wife sexually seduced Joseph because he was a good physique and a handsome boy. However Joseph refuses to sin against God with this

temptation. Therefore, Potiphar's wife gets angry with Joseph and puts him in her trap. Suddenly he was framed for sexual crime of attempted rape. The MeToo movement has become a hot topic these days, but Joseph had also experienced it. It was a rainy day for Joseph who decided not to sin before God. What an unreasonable thing! He was trapped in prison, became a prisoner in the status of a slave and experienced double and triple suffering. He was trafficked and imprisoned for false charges. There is no place to fall any more. His life has come to the end.

But look at verse 21. The Lord was with Joseph, giving him grace and winning the heart of the chief of the prison. The prison chief trusted Joseph and let him take care of all the prisoners. The prisoner Joseph came to take control of the other prisoners. See verse 23. It says, "Because the Lord is with him and gave him success in whatever he did." A miracle is happening in Joseph's life. According to one explanation, the crime which has trapped Joseph deserved the death penalty at that time. But God has blessed his life and blessed him in the worst of circumstances.

Stephen in Acts chapter 7 cites Joseph when preaching about the suffering of Jesus. In the lecture by Missionary Pajet Wilks, who was active in Japan, Joseph was detailed explained as a model of Jesus Christ (Genesis Lecture, Buxton Memorial Revelation, 1953). Joseph's story has many graces in the light of Jesus' life. But today, I would like to focus with you on "God is with you."

I had read up to chapter 50 many times about Joseph in Genesis in preparation for a sermon. Because I was wondering where the word "God is with Joseph" appears. However, I checked it many times, but it doesn't appear anywhere except Chapter 39. I checked the Bible with my eyes wide open, thinking that it would come out again at least when he became Prime Minister in Egypt, but after all, it did not say that "God was with Joseph" Curiously, the Bible emphasizes four times that "God was with him" when Joseph fell into the serious suffering. When I realized this, I became very emotional. And I became to know that God will be with us in times of uncontrollable suffering.

When I was in Canada. I left my children to my mom who was sick and worked every day with anxiety without permanent residence. Sometimes I worked hard as caregivers, supermarket cashiers, serving staff of a restaurant and cleaned the toilets at work every day. Also as an embarrassing story, I went to the food bank to cover my food expenses. And I wasn't feeling well because of overwork. Before I got divorced, I had a

satisfying job in Japan and was financially stable, so at that time I was at the bottom of my life. But through today's words, I realized that God was with Joseph at the most difficult time. Surely God was with me also when I was in trouble in Canada. However, at that time, I didn't realize that God was with me and I felt into disbelief. So I don't want you all to make my mistakes. If it's hard now? Are you at a loss now? Please seek God now. Isaiah 58:9 "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here I am." Call God now! Scream to God now! God answer, "Here I am." Around this time, I finally realized this truth. I wondered how good it would have been if I had noticed it when I was having a hard time, and I did not everyone about the failure, but instead give it a try.

We are now learning about God who was with Joseph in the Old Testament era, and God has given us who are living in the present a sign that God is with us. It's a month early, but it's the word about the birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew 1:23. "Behold, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. And they will call him Immanuel- which means, "God with us". Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to the world in human form to atone for sin. It is to be with us. This birth of Jesus Christ is a miracle, a sign of Immanuel, "God is with us" (The Old Testament and the New Testament Theological Dictionary, Shikyo Shuppansya published, 2004) Jesus did not come to this world to increase the number of believers, to make the church bigger, to give goodness, to enhance welfare, and to provide quality education. They of course are very important, but there is the most important purpose is. The reason that Jesus came to this world is to be with us.

When I was 13 years old, I was really surprised when I heard the sermon that Jesus came to the world as Immanuel. God in heaven sent his Son to this sinful world for me individually. At that time, I was being abused by my own father at home almost every day. I thought that I was being beaten for doing something wrong, and I thought I wasn't loved by anyone. My beloved mother was also abused by him, so she couldn't help me. Yet, the Lord in heaven came all the way to this world for me! I am impressed even if I think about it now. Thank you, Jesus!!

Occasionally, there are times when we Christians was in hardship, we came to ask to God, where are you, God? At that time, don't look for it in the distance. Recall that Jesus Christ came to the world about 2000 years ago as Immanuel. This is a historically proven fact, even if it is invisible. We should return to the origin of this grace every day

and proclaim that God is with us!

And another sign that God is with us is that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit after he was resurrected and ascended to heaven. John 14:16 “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit that is always with us. Verse 18, “I am not leaving you as an orphan; I will come to you.” Jesus doesn’t abandon us like an orphan. He will stay with us until the Second Coming of Jesus. The words of this promise are very powerful. The entire Bible is full of the word that God is with us.

Six years ago, right after I returned to Japan, I had an orphan-like experience. The landlord didn’t allow me to rent an apartment because I had no relative in Japan and there was no guarantor when renting an apartment. When I was looking for a job, I didn’t have a guarantor, so I could only get a caregiver job that didn’t require a guarantor. At that time, I experienced the loneliness of the world. But God didn’t abandon me like an orphan. The Holy Spirit was always with me.

There are various testimonies, but today was when I was working as a care giver. One client who named Kiku san (a pseudonym), about 90 years old, had advanced dementia and was violent against her caregivers. Therefore, for her the staff worked hard and took turns taking a bath. I was in charge of every Tuesday. I was kicked, punched, and ranted by her almost every week. I had more blue bruises on my arms and I was so scared that I didn’t want to go to work. Oh, what should I do? To be honest, I wasn’t satisfied with my nursing work, so I didn’t pray to God for my workplace. When I think about it now, I was in deep unbelief. However I was so scared of Kiku san’s violence that I had no choice but to pray. “God! My Father! I’m scared of Kiku san. What should I do? Please help me.” I went to work on Tuesday for the first time praying for work. Then guess what, please be surprised. A miracle happened. Kiku san did not do any violence when she was taking a bath. She just nervously said, “Hayaku Shiteyo! Hurry up!” At that time, I got goose bumps. “Yeah! Did You come to this nursing home where I work? Did You see Kiku san and me? I thought there was something wrong and suspiciously on the next week I saw the same situation. By the way, this was also a miracle. The next week, she just said “Hayaku shiteyo!” And she didn’t hit me at all. I obediently believed that God was with me at that time. The same was true in the following week. In front of God, I repented of the sins that I never pray before. Gradually, I’ve come to realize about God, I was like an orphan but God did not let go of me. I hope you have a lot of experiences like this in your life. Although it is small like this, the

accumulation of experiences where God accompanies us, grows our faith.

Joseph was confident because he believed that God was with him. He was always proud. He was able to walk and only looking ahead without regretting his destiny. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was called at the end of his life saying, "It is the most wonderful thing to be with God together." I pray that you and I will always proclaim and praise that God is with us and have faith so we can thank Him.

Let's pray.

Thank you, my heavenly Father, for the grace of Immanuel for being with us. Give each of us grace so that this grace is not vague and can see definitely in our daily lives by the Holy Spirit. We pray for our beloved brothers and sisters who are suffering from their family and friends, also those who are suffering from relationship and financial hardship, those who are suffering unimaginable loneliness, please give us the grace that God is with us. And fulfill Your plan in our lives. Thank you and we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

