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[Video of Pastor Sal Sberna introducing this morning's guest speaker:]

Hey, we are so privileged this morning to have my good friend Pete Wilson who'll be bringing today's message that'll be going to our Cypress campus, here at our *Jones Road Campus*, and obviously over the Internet and all the people [who] listen to us worldwide.

Pete is the author of *Plan B*, [a] great book which will be on sale outside there in the Atrium area; be sure you pick up a copy. I love Pete Wilson. I've had the opportunity and privilege (because I'm just a tad older than he is) of watching:

- His ministry from the time he started his church to the multi-site church that it's become
- The spiritual depth that's developed in Pete (and)
- Just a tremendous communicator

So I just want to say: Pete, thank you so much for being with us and we gladly hear what God has to say through you to us today. Let's let him know how much we appreciate and welcome Pete Wilson here to Houston, Texas, to The MET at Cypress and right here in Houston. [Demonstrates applause] God bless you, Pete. Thank you so much for being with us, my friend.

[Pete Wilson begins at the video's conclusion:]

Thank you, guys, so much. My name's Pete Wilson and I'm a pastor in Nashville, Tennessee. I've had the opportunity to know your pastor for quite awhile. There [are] a lot of things I could say about Sal. I hang out with him for a lot of different reasons, but the fact that he is crazy is right at the top of my list of (just) reasons I want to be around him. But he is an incredible man and this is an incredible church.

I know sometimes when you're a part of a movement—like what's going on here at The MET—that it's very easy for you to (just kind of) grow accustomed to what's happening here. My prayer for you guys is that you'll never forget—first of all—the incredible pastor that God has given you here in Sal and the way that God's working through him, not only here but around the world. I pray that you will never forget what an incredible movement of God that you're part of here at The MET—what an unbelievable place this is. And I (just) can't wait to just watch what continues to happen to this place.

So I'm so glad that you guys are here. I also would like to say a special good morning to the Cypress campus. We're glad that you guys are with us as well.

If everybody—all of our campuses—will turn to *Genesis, chapter 37*. *Genesis 37*: you're in a series— of (kind of) this throw-back series, this old-school series—where you're looking at characters out of the *Old Testament*. When I think about the *Old Testament* I think about (just) different characters that have formed and really shaped my life. At the top of that list for me

would be this guy by the name of Joseph. His life: there's something about the life of Joseph that—it's so much like my life that I (just) really identify with it. And I think that you guys [will] too.

So here's what I want to do. I want you guys to help me start to tell this story. So here's what we're going to do—it's kind of tricky. (All right?) But I'm going to split this room here in half. (Okay?) Cypress campus, I can't see your room, so you've got to split—you guys are smart; you can do this—split your room in half on your own. (Okay?) So right down the middle of the room (all right?) to my left (all right?) everybody—even up there in the [balcony] cheap seats—everybody over here (all right?) you guys are “good news.” (All right?) So when I point toward my left, you guys are going to respond by saying: Good news. (All right?) Now, everybody here and at Cypress campus to my right (okay?) that means you guys are “bad news.” (Okay?) Sorry about that, but when I point at you, you say: Bad news. (All right?)

We're going to walk through (just quickly) this story of Joseph, because I want you to begin to see this rhythm that happens in his life. Because I think this rhythm is a whole lot like my rhythm (and a lot like your rhythm) in life. And so—

- When we (kind of) open up the Scripture and we read about Joseph, what we discover right off the bat is that he's Daddy's favorite. (All right?) That would be—what? [Pointing to his left—congregation response: Good news]—that's good news; you're right.
- But we also read that his brothers are jealous of him and hate him; that would be? [Pointing to his right—congregational response: Bad news.] That's right; it would be bad news. I mean it's horrible. (I mean) your brothers hate you and they're jealous of you.
- But his daddy gives him a coat, which would be? [Point to his left—congregational response: Good news.]—be very good news. (All right?)
- But his brothers strip him of his coat, beat him up, throw him in a pit, and sell him into slavery. That would be? [Pointing to his right—congregational response: Bad news.] It would be bad news. (Right?) At Cypress, you'd better be playing along—I'm serious. (All right?)
- Then we read (though) that he goes to work for a guy by the name of Potiphar, who is a high-ranking Egyptian official; and he does really well, so he (kind of) goes up through the ranks. And we're also told in Scripture that Joseph is a good-looking man. (Kind of like Keith Urban, who my wife thinks is incredibly good looking. But in reality—because he lives in Nashville and I know this—he's actually one inch shorter than I am.) That would be—what? [Pointing to his left—congregational response: Good news.] Yes, it would! Yes, it would.
- But Potiphar's wife (because he's so good looking) tries to seduce him and rape him. That would be? [Pointing to his right—congregational response: Bad news.] Some of you

all looked a little confused for a second. I'm not messing with you; that's bad news. (All right?)

So (I mean) I could go on and on (all right?)—I could go on and on—but this is his life. (All right?) This is what happens to him. This is what he struggles with. (Okay?) His whole life: something good happens to him and then something bad happens to him, something good happens to him and then something bad happens to him. He gets (just) stuck up in this (kind of) rhythm of this.

So the question that I really want us to wrestle with today is: What are we supposed to do as Christians—what are we supposed to do as believers—when we're caught in the middle of one of these bad-news times? (I mean) what do you do when you go from everything's going great—things (you know) could not be any better; nothing could go wrong in your life—to then all of a sudden the wheels start to fall off? What is our response to be as believers and as Christians?

That's what I want us to (kind of) look at in this story of Joseph. And there's a question now I want to leave you with today. I want you to start thinking about this question and I hope you'll leave here today thinking about this question. The question is this: What would you do in your life right now if you were absolutely confident that God was with you?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENT GOD WAS WITH YOU?

(All right?)

- What would you do right now in your marriage?
- What would you do in your finances?
- What would you do with your kids?
- What would you do in your career?

What would you do if you were absolutely confident that God was with you?

(All right) so let's (kind of) dive into this story and (just kind of) see where it goes. *Genesis, chapter 37*—let's skip down and start in *verse 3*—it says:

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. ⁴ When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Genesis 37:3-4 (NIV)

So we're set up for conflict right off the bat. (Right? I mean) I'm not a therapist, but you can (kind of) tell here:

- You've got jealous brothers
- You've got a dad who's showing (you know just) special treatment to one son
- He's kind of a brat

(I mean) they are set up to go on *Jerry Springer*; that's where they're headed. (All right?) It's (kind of) this mess, right from the get-go. So we keep reading in *verse 23*:

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing—²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

Genesis 37:23-24 (NIV)

(All right now) this is (kind of) a key moment. (All right?) This is a key moment in Joseph's life, because up to this point everything had been great. (All right?) Up to this point—no problems; no stress—everything's (just) falling in place the way he wanted it to fall in place. Now all of a sudden:

- His brothers have beaten him up (and)
- They've thrown him into a pit (and)
- He's at the bottom of the pit (and)

He's like banging his head up against the wall saying: God, why me? Why am I going through this?

(You know) most of us tend to view life—do you guys remember those marionette puppets? (Like) they had the little strings on them—(You know) I could never get those things to work. [Pantomimes manipulating the strings of a marionette] But you could (you know) make them do (kind of) things. We view life like that and you think:

- You have a string that runs to your marriage (and you think)
- You have a string that runs to your finances (and you think)
- You have a string that runs to your career (and)
- You have a string that runs to your kids (and)

You can (kind of) at will manipulate that and manipulate those things to do what you want them to do. In fact, some of you have convinced yourselves that you control the outcomes in your life.

THE GREATEST OF ALL ILLUSIONS IS THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

When you wake up one day and something happens in your life and you realize that you really don't control outcomes in your life—that you really don't have the control of your life that you thought that you had—it's like welcoming yourself into a whole new nightmare, because you thought you had control.

That's where Joseph's at. It's all beginning to (kind of) unravel for him.

You've been there. (I mean) not like at the bottom of the pit, but you've been in that place in your life before. You've been to that place in your life where you were (just) praying; you were saying: God, I don't get this. You've been in that place before where you've (just kind of) laid there in bed and you (just) stared up to the ceiling and you say:

- God, why me?
- Why our family?

- Why our marriage?
- Why our finances?
- Why my health?
- God, why am I going through this?
- Why aren't You here?
- Why aren't You listening?
- Why have You abandoned me?

There's this thing that happens to most of us—most of us as Christians—when life doesn't turn out the way you thought life was going to turn out, you almost always assume that God has abandoned you. But let me tell you the truth of Scripture and you'll see it all the way through this story and you'll see it all the way through the Bible. Here's the truth—if you don't get anything else today, I pray that you get this:

GOD IS MOST POWERFULLY PRESENT EVEN WHEN HE SEEMS TO BE MOST APPARENTLY ABSENT

- He is there (and)
- He is working in your life (and)
- He is working in your circumstances

If you will see Him [and] if you will surrender to Him, He can work in your life in a powerful way. He's always working.

So back to Joseph—*chapter 39, verse 1*—we read:

¹ Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. {This is the first time we see this phrase but we'll see it a couple more times.}

² The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

Genesis 39:1-2 (NIV)

The Lord was with Joseph? Really? Seriously? Because—

- I thought (you just told me) that he got beat up.
- I thought he just got thrown into a pit.
- I thought he just got sold into slavery.

The Lord is with Joseph?

See, that'll mess with you. (Right?) Because don't a lot of us assume that if the Lord is with you, this means things are going great. (Right?) I mean—

- If the Lord's with you, you meet the guy/girl—the dream guy, the dream girl. (Right?)
- If the Lord's with you, you get the house that you wanted to live in.

- If the Lord's with you, you get the corner office. (Right?)
- If the Lord's with you, all the charts of your life are going up and to the right.

At least that's what we think a lot of times—(Right?)—we think that's somehow what God (maybe, kind of) promised us. That's not what Scripture teaches though, is it?

Verse 3—it says:

³ When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ Joseph 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.

Genesis 39:3-4 (NIV)

So, the master notices something different about this kid; it's like: What's up with Joseph? What's up with the great attitude?

See, this is really important. Please, please make sure you get this—lean in a little bit—make sure you understand this: (that) the way that you respond to your shattered dreams in your life—(okay?) the way that you respond when you find yourself in the midst of a Plan B—the way you respond really matters. (All right?) People take notice.

And so you have this group of people here (Right?)

- You have his boss, Potiphar
- You have people in his kingdom
- [You have] people who aren't even God-followers

—who all of a sudden are taking notice at this kid's life. You see, Joseph could have been bitter. He could have been angry. He could have been upset. He could have said: This is ridiculous (you know); weeks ago I owned slaves and now today I am a slave. I shouldn't be going through this. He could have had an attitude, but he doesn't. He just serves and he works, and he does what he thinks he needs to do.

Do you know what he does? He just does what anyone would do, [who] is absolutely confident that God is with him. You see—

- Joseph may have been stripped of his coat, but he was not stripped of his identity.
- His family may have abandoned him, but he never stopped depending on his God.

Even though his life was certainly not turning out the way he thought his life was going to turn out, he continues every day to get up, take one step forward, and just do what anyone would do [who] is absolutely confident that God is with him.

Verse 6, it says:

⁶ So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, {kind of like Keith Urban}
⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said,
"Come to bed with me!"

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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?"

Genesis 39:6-9 (NIV)

Now listen, this situation alone makes Joseph (like) an unbelievable hero in my book. (I mean) do you get this? Do you see what he just said no to? Do you get this? I mean,

- This is Joseph, with (like) no accountability group
- This is Joseph before there were churches
- This is Joseph before *Promise Keepers*
- This is Joseph (right?) before the Ten Commandments (right?)

What does he say? He says: How could I do this and sin against my God, Who—by the way—has not done a whole lot for me lately? (Right? I mean) how does he do this? There is a very, very important lesson embedded in the life of this man and it is this: Don't ever abandon your God-given values in the pursuit of your God-given dreams. Don't do it.

DON'T ABANDON YOUR GOD-GIVEN VALUES IN THE PURSUIT OF YOUR GOD-GIVEN DREAMS

See, my guess is that—here right now and at Cypress—there are some of you who have these unbelievable, God-given dreams in your life. Maybe you've had them for years. Maybe there's (just) something inside of you—it's very tempting for you—to want to abandon your God-given values in the pursuit of those God-given dreams. You want to take a short cut, you want to give up on following Him, and it's very tempting.

(I mean) think about Joseph—think about what was going through his mind. Don't you think that (like) for just a moment (that) he probably thought in his mind: Hey, you know what? If I were to sleep with her, then maybe I would have the leverage that I need to get out of being a slave. Couldn't he have thought: Hey, if I sleep with my boss's wife, maybe I can use that against her; I could trap her and she'll have to let me go and I can be free again.

See, there [are] going to be times in your life where you think you can abandon your God-given values—

- So that you can get ahead financially
- So you can get ahead in your career
- So you can get ahead in your work

Trust me. Look at the life of Joseph—don't do it—don't abandon your God-given values. It would be the greatest mistake of your life. Because your dreams—as good as they might be—always make lousy gods; they always do.

All right, let's keep going. Look at this next verse—*verse 10*—it says:

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

Genesis 39:10 (NIV)

Did you get this? Listen, don't fool yourself into thinking that just because you say no to temptation once, that it's going to stop right there. (Okay?) It's not (it's not). What's [going to] happen—it's going to be relentless. It says, "day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her."

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² 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.

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.

Genesis 39:11-14 (NIV)

(Now) you know what happens? Joseph is framed and he's sentenced to prison for the exact same thing he had the courage to say no to. Is this not when you want to throw up your hands and say:

- Why am I even a Christian?
- Why do we even pray?
- Why do I go to church?
- Why do I try to do all the right things if I'm going to do them and then it all (kind of) falls apart anyway?

See, it's confusing to us to understand that—

- We're called to be faithful to God, even when it seems like He hasn't been faithful to us.
- We are called to love Him, even when it feels like He's abandoned us.
- We're called to serve Him, even in the midst of the darkness.
- We're called to worship Him, even through the tears.

I've got three boys at home in Nashville. They are 9, 6 and 4—Jett, Gage and Brewer. They're (just kind of like just) the focus of my life these days; I love hanging out with these boys. But they're wild (I mean) they are (just)—they're all over the place. (You know?) Some of you [who] are parents—you'll know this—(like) you'll be out in public playing with your kids, and other adults will come up to you and be like:

- Your kids are (like) so well-behaved. (Like)
- What have you guys done? (Like)
- What secrets do you have?

I've never had that conversation—with anybody—it's (just) never happened (I mean) never happened. (Right?)

And so, this is a couple of weeks ago: I had to speak in DC—we were in DC—and I had my oldest son with me because I thought it would be cool for him to see DC. We flew from DC to Maine—where we had to be—and my wife and other two boys met us in Maine. And so we were in Maine; and then we were flying back from Maine to Nashville. This was going to be the first time we've all flown (all of us together) as a family. (Right?)

We're (like) in that terminal and I can see it in my boys' eyes—I mean) they know there's very little we can do to them on a plane. (Okay?) And so I can see it kind of bubbling up. And I'm looking around this terminal and I'm (just) wondering: Who in this terminal has so much sin in their life that God is going to put them next to my boys on this plane—(all right, I mean)—who is it? And they did okay on that particular flight.

I was watching my three boys the other day. My two oldest boys, they really are good; but my youngest son, Brewer, not so much. I don't know what is the matter with him, but something's not right. He's (just) like—sometimes (I'm serious) I (like) watch him and I'm like: I understand why some species of animals eat their young—I get it; I understand it. So I'm watching him. My wife's out on a girl's night. I have all three of the boys—danger anyway. I am feeding him these fruit snacks. If you're a parent you know about these little fruit snacks that have no fruit in them, but they're in the shape of fruit; and that makes you feel better. And so, I'm feeding him those (all right? I mean) one after another, after another. I'm not even going to confess how many packs I let him eat, because he was happy.

But at some point I realize this has to stop. (Right? I mean) this has to end—even as a very laid-back parent like myself—this has to end. And so I cut him off and he starts to throw this fit. (I mean) he is on the ground and he's screaming and crying, and I pick him up and he's doing that whole arch-back thing (you know) trying to get away from me. And I pull him close into me—not like embracing him in love, but like—constraining him, and I'm (like) holding him tightly and he starts screaming: I want my mommy! I want my mommy! I'm like: Yeah, I want your mommy too (you know) right now! And, he's (just) screaming this. And while he's screaming this I realize: You know what? He doesn't really want his mommy, does he? He wants what he thinks his mommy might give him.

I literally—in that very painful moment—felt God (just kind of) tap me on the shoulder and say: Hey, Pete, doesn't that (kind of like) so describe our relationship? (Like) so much of your prayer, so much of your so-called worship, so much of you're crying out to Me really isn't about Me, is it? It's about what you think I might give you.

I realized, (just) so much in my life, that I think so many times (and I bet some of you can identify with this)—I think that:

- I've taken religion (and)
- I've taken certain hoops that I try to jump through
- Try to do the right things (and)
- Say the right things (and)

I've thought that over time—what I've done is I've created this currency. (Okay?) And I view God like this cosmic-vending-machine. So if I do all these right things and say all these right things, I earn this currency that I can then use in the cosmic-vending-machine and I can get from Him what it is that I want.

I'm trying to get to this place in my life where I really believe down to the very core of my being that if God doesn't give me one single more thing, I still owe Him everything. Everything!

So, we keep going in this story. (I mean) there's (just) so much that we learn from it. *Verse 20*, it says:

²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison {—here we go again—} ²¹ the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

Genesis 39:20-21 (NIV)

In this one, again you would say: How about You don't be with me anymore, God? (Right?) Because since You've been with me, I've been beat up, I've been thrown into a pit, I've been sold into slavery, and now I'm in prison for doing nothing. How about You go be with my brothers for awhile, all right? Love on them—(you know) show them some of Your mighty stuff—(right? You know) don't be with me anymore. *Verse 22*, it says:

²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all of those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.
²³ 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.

Genesis 39:22-23 (NIV)

Genesis chapter 40—let me kind of sum up this story—we'll start wrapping it up: Joseph makes a couple friends while he's in prison. There is a chief cupbearer and there's a baker. Joseph has this really cool talent where he can (like) interpret people's dreams through God's power. (And so) these guys find this out, they have dreams, and they come to him. They're like: Hey, we had these dreams; will you help interpret these for us? The baker's dream—it is kind of jacked up—it's a long story. We won't talk about it right now because we don't have time. But the chief cupbearer has this really cool dream. Joseph interprets it and says: Oh this is amazing, dude. In three days you're going to get out of here—

- You're going to be set free.
- You are going to be restored.
- You're going to have your power back.
- It's going to be a wonderful thing.

We pick up in *verse 14*—this is Joseph talking to the chief cupbearer; he says:

¹⁴ But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.

¹⁵ For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.

Genesis 40:14-15 (NIV)

So, Joseph is like: Hey, hey, could you just do me this one thing—just do me this one favor? (Just) like: Hey, when you get out, (just) don't forget about me; because you'll have the power to get me out of here (Right?) And I'm sure that the chief cupbearer was like: Yeah. Sure man, I'll remember you; don't worry, yeah.

Have you ever been at that place in your life where you were like:

- God, just this one thing (like) God, please (like) I really need this one thing. God, (like) would You just heal our marriage? (Like) God, if You'd (just)—somehow if you could make him love me like he used to love me. (Like) just this one thing?
- God (like) just this one time. (Like) You know our finances are so messed up and (like) You could do something. (Like) You could change the numbers at the bank and nobody would ever even know (right? I mean) You could do that, (right?) God, just this one thing.
- God, just this one thing: (like) if You would heal me of this cancer. God, I promise, if You heal me of this cancer, and I'm going to live my life full-on for You and I'm going to tell everybody about Your glory and Your power. Just this one thing.
- God, just one thing: (like) if You'd just bring my kids back to You. (Like) I raised them to follow You and they are making horrible decisions. Just this one thing.
- God, if You would just help us get pregnant. We want to have a child so bad; just this one thing.

When we had had our first son Jett, we were pregnant with our second child. We had complications almost from the beginning. We were told that this was going to be a complicated pregnancy. So every week we had to go in for ultrasounds. We would go in—it became very much routine. Every week we'd go in. They'd do the ultrasound. They'd measure (like):

- The length of his arms (and)
- The length of his hand (and they'd measure you know)
- The length of his legs (they'd always measure)
- The circumference of his head

I never really understood what all of that was for; but they were (just) looking for abnormalities that could be forming because of his condition. And so, it's (just) every week (kind of) going in there. It almost (kind of) became humorous. We'd often go in there and (just) make jokes about all the different measurements that they were doing.

We were in there one day and I could really tell that the nurse doing the ultrasound was pretty disturbed. I just kept pushing her and asking her questions. And she really wasn't supposed to be telling us anything. I just kept pushing harder and harder. She said: Listen, I'm having a hard time finding the baby's heartbeat, but sometimes this happens. She said: Sometimes it's just the way the baby's turned and stuff; so I'm going to go get the doctor and I'll be right back.

The moment she walked out, I just started that prayer: God, just this one thing. Please, God, (like) I know, I know that You can do this; I know that You can heal this baby. God, just this one thing, just this one thing, this one time; (like) I know that You have the power to do it. I know about how You resurrected Jesus from the dead after three days. I know about what You did with Lazarus. I know about all the people that You healed throughout the Bible. I completely believe—I've seen it with my own eyes God—I know that You can heal this baby. I know that You can breathe life into this baby; I know You can. I just prayed it over and over and over and over.

And the doctor comes in and within two minutes, he looks at us and says: I'm sorry, but your baby has no heartbeat. And it was a crushing blow to us in that moment. As a husband, to look into your wife's eyes and to see all of the hurt is almost too much to bear. We walked out of the room that day bitter and confused and—in that moment—very angry and just trying to figure out: Why would this happen? (You know?) How can God allow this? There weren't any simple answers to our difficult questions. (And) How am I going to go back to my church and explain to them what's happened? Because they've all been praying; and I thought this was going to be this big God-miracle and everybody was going to (you know) just be super excited about what God had done.

I think that this is important; it's an important topic to talk about. Let me show you in *verse 23* what happens here in this story, because it's (like) the most depressing verse in the Bible. (Like I mean) nobody's memorizing this verse. You don't have this up on your fridge at home (okay?) but it's there (right?) and there's truth in it. *Verse 23*, it says:

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Genesis 40:23 (NIV)

Can you imagine Joseph in that moment? He spends two more years in prison because he is forgotten. Don't you think for a second Joseph had to be like: Are you kidding me? After all of this, God, after all—I've been so faithful to You. I have fought back against the temptation. I've had faith in every step of this way. I've trusted in You, even though it didn't seem like You were there, I chose to believe that You were there. And now, the chief cupbearer—I ask for this one thing—he can't even remember me? It is like:

- God, what are You doing?
- God, why are You allowing this?
- God, do You even hear me anymore?

And this is so important because I think some of you today—if you're really honest with yourself—you would have to admit that deep down inside, you're (kind of) haunted, because God could have done something and He didn't. You think in your heart:

- God could have saved our marriage.
- God could have saved our child.
- God could have healed me of cancer.
- God could have done that.

He could have done it, but He didn't. This is a really important crossroads (I think) in our faith. It's one we don't talk about a whole lot, because when you get to that crossroads (right?)—when you get to that time when you feel like you're praying but your prayers are just bouncing right off the ceiling and coming back at you—one of two things generally happens (right) to most people. This is what I have observed:

- Either, number one, when they get to that place, they walk away from their faith because they cannot deal with this idea. They can't reconcile the two seemingly unmixable components of a God Who is all loving and all powerful, and a world that's still full of pain and hurt and misery. They can't reconcile those two things so they (just) walk away.
- Or, the other thing that generally happens (and this has probably happened to a lot of you): you've had pain and you've had hurt in your life—things that you dealt with—but what you did is that you just swept it under the carpet. You pretended that you weren't angry with God. You pretended like you weren't sad. You (just) went with some (kind of) cliché religious phrase. You (just) swept it under the carpet. And so, you still go to church and you still sing the songs and you do the whole deal. But if you're really honest, your relationship with God is very superficial. You're really not growing—you're stunted in your spiritual growth—because you never dealt with the key issue.

Here's the key issue for all of us, it comes down to this—and I don't mean to over simplify it, but for time let's just say this: You have to make a choice between—

- Are you going to put your faith in God's activity? —Or—
- Are you going to put your faith in God's identity?

YOU HAVE TO DECIDE IF YOU'RE GOING TO PUT YOUR FAITH IN GOD'S IDENTITY OR HIS ACTIVITY

There's a big difference. Because God's circumstances or the circumstances of your life—

- What you see
- What you observe
- The pain
- The hurt
- The different things that you've gone through

If your faith is in God's circumstances, in your life (the circumstances of your life), when things go bad and when things get difficult, your faith (just) plummets with it; because your faith is wrapped around your life and your circumstances.

If your faith is in God's identity, it's a whole different deal. Because now what you're saying is: My faith is in God and Who He says that He is. So when you experience a Plan B—when you experience a shattered dream—if you're here in this moment (where you say, "My faith is in God's identity")—

- Even though you feel like God has abandoned you
- Even though you don't understand why these things are happening to you

You make this choice and you say: I choose to believe; I don't get this (I don't understand this) but I choose to believe that my faith is in God's identity and Who He says that He is.

- He says that He is a Father to the fatherless.
- He says that He will never leave me nor forsake me.

So I choose to believe that even though I don't see God in my circumstances. I choose to believe that there is a God and it's not me.

Why are you going through what you're going through right now? I have no idea. How long is this going to go on? I have no clue. Will how you respond to it make a difference? Yeah, more than you could ever imagine. So I'm praying that—

- In the midst of your hurt (and)
- In the midst of your pain
- In the midst of your unanswered questions

—that you can make a choice to put your faith in God's identity and Who He says that He is.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, we gather here today as human beings who desperately need You. We need to be reminded of Your love and Your grace, because we're a group of people here who need healing, every one of us:

- Some of us are going through something right now that's (just) rocking our world.
- Others of us have been through things over the past couple years that rocked our world and we're still dealing with the pain and the fallout of that.
- God, I believe there [are] probably some people that are here today—at (just) one of The MET campuses—God, who is really struggling with even knowing You are their personal Lord and Savior. Maybe today for the very first time they would open up their heart to You and say: With as much as I understand, I want to invite Jesus Christ in my life. I want to ask Him to come into my life and forgive me of my sins. I believe what He did on the Cross and I want that to be applied to my life.
- God there [are] others of us here who have already made that step and Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Savior; but we are still at a place where we're frustrated and we're angry and we don't

understand why these things are happening. God today we (just) need to be reminded of Your love and Your grace. We need to be reminded, God, that You do have a plan. We do need to be reminded that You are with us even though it feels like You've abandoned us. We need to be reminded, God, that You are most powerfully present even when it seems like You're most apparently absent [and] that You are working in our life.

So, God, may this be (just) one of those days where some of us drive a stake in the ground and we say, God, that we will choose to put our faith in Your identity and Who you are. Even though we don't understand our circumstances and we don't understand our pain and our suffering, we choose to believe, God, that through the cross of Jesus Christ—

- You make everything new (that)
- You renew us (that)
- You form us (that)
- You shape us (and that)
- There will be a day, God, where all things are made new and all of this makes sense once again.

But until then, God, may we rest in Your hope.

God, we thank You for what You're doing in our lives. God, we thank You for what You're doing in this amazing Church. We give You all the glory and all the credit. For it's in Your holy and Your precious Name that we pray. Amen.

Guest Speaker: Pete Wilson

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**Strategic planning is the key to warfare;
to win, you need a lot of good counsel.**

Proverbs 24:6
(*THE MESSAGE*)

Legend:

(**words in parentheses**) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[**words in square brackets**] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{**words in curly brackets within indented quote**} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*