

# FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL TO EGYPTIAN JAIL: WHEN INJUSTICE CAN'T IMPRISON GOD'S PURPOSE!

GENESIS 39:20-23

DR. DARRYL T.  
CANADY

RODMAN STREET CHURCH

**BAPTIST MINISTERS CONFERENCE**  
**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. SERVICE**

1.19.26

# **FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL TO EGYPTIAN JAIL: WHEN INJUSTICE CAN'T IMPRISON GOD'S PURPOSE!**

## **GENESIS 39:20-23**

**DR. DARRYL T. CANADY**

**1.19.26**

**Title:** From Birmingham Jail to Egyptian Jail: When Injustice Cannot Imprison God's Purpose

### **Sermon Summary:**

This powerful message bridges two moments of unjust imprisonment separated by millennia: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham jail in 1963 and Joseph's Egyptian prison in Genesis 39, demonstrating that injustice cannot cancel God's plan. Both men faced systemic injustice, false accusations, and confinement, yet neither allowed their circumstances to imprison God's purpose for their lives.

The central revelation is this: injustice does not cancel God's presence, promises, or power. When we read that 'the Lord was with Joseph' even in prison, we discover that God doesn't wait for perfect conditions to show up in our lives. He walks into our darkest cells, our most unfair situations, our most broken systems.

The scripture teaches us that Joseph wasn't in prison because he sinned—he was there because he did the right thing. This challenges our assumption that obedience always leads to immediate blessing. Sometimes faithfulness leads to isolation, truth-telling costs us our freedom, and integrity lands us in difficult places. Yet that word 'but' changes everything: 'But the Lord was with him.' This isn't just historical

encouragement; it's a present-day declaration for anyone facing racism, sexism, classism, educational inequity, economic injustice, or systemic barriers. We learn that God's power transformed Joseph from prisoner to governor, not after he was released, but while he was still confined. The jail became his classroom, injustice became his internship, and the setback became God's setup.

Pastor Canady personally connects his Morehouse College experience and Dr. King's legacy to the contemporary mission of LIFE Male STEAM Academy in Pittsburgh. The message challenges the church to move from cautious comfort to courageous action, addressing modern injustices including educational inequities, mass incarceration, and systemic racism. Through Joseph's story, believers are reminded that God remains present in our darkest moments, His promises stand firm despite circumstances, and His power transforms broken systems. The sermon culminates in a call to build hope through practical ministry, like mentoring young men, and refusing to let injustice define God's people or their destiny. This means we don't have to wait for everything to line up before we step out in faith. If we have a Word from God, that's all we need.



## **Chapters**

### **Chapter 1: Two Jails, One Purpose**

We examine the parallel between Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham jail and Joseph's Egyptian prison, exploring how both faced injustice yet remained within God's purpose.

### **Chapter 2: Building Hope in the Face of Injustice**

We discover how the call to save boys led to the creation of LIFE Male STEAM Academy as a response to systemic injustice and a pathway from school to college and career.

### **Chapter 3: Injustice Cannot Cancel God's Presence**

We learn that God's presence remains with us even in unjust circumstances, just as He was with Joseph in prison and Martin Luther King Jr. in Birmingham jail.

### **Chapter 4: Injustice Cannot Cancel God's Promises**

We discover that God's promises remain intact regardless of injustice, as Joseph's calling preceded his confinement and God's Word is stronger than any system.

### **Chapter 5: Injustice Cannot Cancel God's Power**

We see that God's power transforms broken systems into testimonies, turning prison cells into platforms and enabling us to continue building despite opposition.

**OBSTACLES  
ARE PUT IN YOUR WAY  
TO SEE IF WHAT YOU WANT  
IS REALLY WORTH  
FIGHTING FOR**

**Key Points:**

- Injustice does not cancel God's presence - God was with Joseph in prison just as He is with us in our struggles
- Injustice does not cancel God's promises - What God speaks over you is stronger than what the system tries to do to you
- Injustice does not cancel God's power - God displays His power in the midst of broken systems and unjust circumstances
- The church must be courageous rather than cautious, actively building solutions instead of remaining silent

- LIFE Male STEAM Academy represents a practical response to systemic injustice, teaching boys they are Kings with unlimited potential
- Modern injustices mirror historical ones: educational inequities, school-to-prison pipeline, mass incarceration, economic deserts, and fatherlessness
- The enemy targets males because destroying the male destroys the entire race, as seen in Moses' and Jesus' time
- God's motto: "For unto whom much is given, much is required" - blessing comes with responsibility to help others
- We cannot wait for perfect conditions to see God move; He shows up in imperfect systems to produce eternal purposes
- The place the enemy uses to break you becomes the place God uses to build you

### **Scripture Reference:**

- Genesis 39:20-23 (Primary text focusing on Joseph in prison)
- Luke 12:48 (For unto whom much is given, much is required)
- References to Exodus (Pharaoh killing Hebrew boys)
- References to Matthew 2 (Herod killing boys after Jesus' birth)
- Romans 8:37 (More than conquerors)

### **Stories:**

- Martin Luther King Jr.'s imprisonment in Birmingham jail in 1963 and his letter written in response to clergymen criticizing the civil rights movement

- Joseph's imprisonment in Egypt after being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, yet finding favor with the prison warden
- The pastor's personal journey attending Morehouse College, walking the same campus as Dr. King, learning from professors who taught King, and hearing Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays' influence
- The founding vision of LIFE Male STEAM Academy on September 11, 2014, when God spoke to the pastor saying "you got to save the boys"
- The pastor's conversation with another pastor who warned him about the dangers of his bold ministry, comparing it to the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X
- Historical narrative of Pharaoh ordering the killing of Hebrew boys during Moses' time
- Historical narrative of King Herod ordering the killing of boys three years and younger after Jesus' birth
- Dr. King's transformation of a Birmingham jail cell into a "global megaphone" through his letter
- Joseph's transformation from prisoner to governor of Egypt, demonstrating God's power to elevate despite injustice

## Scripture References from the Sermon

### Explicitly Referenced Scriptures:

1. **Genesis 39:20-23** - Primary text about Joseph in prison (read and discussed extensively)
2. **Luke 12:48** - "For unto whom much is given, much is required" (quoted by Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays)

## Alluded to or Quoted Scriptures:

3. **Matthew 2:16** - Herod's order to kill boys three years and younger
4. **Exodus 1:15-22** - Pharaoh's command to kill Hebrew boys while letting girls live
5. **Matthew 1:23** - "Emmanuel, God is with us"
6. **Romans 8:37** - "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (quoted directly)
7. **Romans 10:9** - Belief and confession for salvation (paraphrased in altar call)
8. **Matthew 11:12** - "The kingdom suffered violence, and the violence got to take it by force" (paraphrased)

## Suggested Verses Aligned with Sermon Themes:

### Theme: God's Presence in Trials

- **Psalm 23:4** - "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me"
- **Isaiah 43:2** - "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you"
- **Deuteronomy 31:6** - "He will never leave you nor forsake you"

### Theme: God's Promises Endure

- **Numbers 23:19** - "God is not a man, that he should lie"
- **2 Corinthians 1:20** - "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes"
- **Hebrews 10:23** - "He who promised is faithful"

### Theme: God's Power Over Injustice

- **Romans 8:28** - "All things work together for good"

- **Psalm 37:5-6** - "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act"
- **Isaiah 54:17** - "No weapon formed against you shall prosper"

### **Theme: Purpose Through Suffering**

- **Genesis 50:20** - "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good"
- **James 1:2-4** - "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials"

### **Theme: Building and Service**

- **Nehemiah 2:20** - "The God of heaven will give us success"
- **1 Corinthians 3:9** - "We are God's fellow workers"

### **QUOTES:**

Injustice does not cancel God's purpose. I don't care who's in 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. It does not cancel God's plan.

The enemy knows that if he can destroy the male, he can destroy the entire race. That's why God said to me, you got to save the boys.

God is not obligated to answer a prayer that has not been prayed. When you know what God says and you believe what God says, you obligate God to do what God says.

The place that the enemy used to try to break him was the place where God used to build him. The system that tried to bury him became the system that God used to bless him.

You don't need bitterness to be powerful. You don't need hatred to be effective. You don't need violence to be victorious because God will be with you no matter what the enemy tries to take away from you.

We are not just teaching boys how to code. We are teaching them how to believe. We are not just building engineers. We are building leaders.

Just because we're going through hell does not mean that God is not with us in this hell. The jail can't stop him. The system can't silence him.

## **FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL TO EGYPTIAN JAIL: WHEN INJUSTICE CAN'T IMPRISON GOD'S PURPOSE!**

### **GENESIS 39:20-23**

**DR. DARRYL T. CANADY**

**1.19.26**

#### **5-Day Devotional: When Injustice Cannot Imprison God's Purpose**

##### **Day 1: God's Presence in Prison**

##### **Reading: Genesis 39:20-23**

**Devotional:** Joseph's story reminds us that unjust circumstances do not equal God's absence. When Joseph was wrongfully imprisoned, the text declares, "But the Lord was with him." That word "but" is holy grammar—it interrupts injustice with divine presence. You may be in a tight place today—facing unfair treatment, systemic barriers, or broken promises—but you are not in a God-forsaken place. God doesn't wait for perfect conditions to show up; He walks into the jail cell with you. The prison may have locked Joseph in, but it couldn't lock God out. Whatever confinement you face today, declare: "The Lord is with me." His presence transforms every prison into a place of purpose.

**Reflection:** Where do you feel confined today? How might recognizing God's presence change your perspective on that situation?

## **Day 2: Promises That Survive the Pit**

### **Reading: Genesis 37:5-11; 39:21-23**

**Devotional:** Joseph dreamed before he was chained. God's promises over his life were spoken before false accusations landed him in prison. The pit didn't cancel the promise, and neither did the prison. What God declares over you is stronger than what the system tries to do to you. Your zip code cannot cancel your destiny. Your past cannot revoke your calling. Joseph's setback became God's setup—the very place meant to break him became where God built him. The warden put Joseph in charge because God's Word still stood. Today, remind yourself of what God has spoken over your life. Hit your spiritual rewind button and remember His promises. They haven't expired because of your current circumstances.

**Reflection:** What promises has God spoken over your life? How can you actively remember and stand on them today?

## **Day 3: Power Beyond the Bars**

### **Reading: Genesis 39:23; Psalm 105:17-22**

**Devotional:** Joseph was still in prison, but the prison no longer controlled him. The bars remained, but the blessing was stronger. God's power doesn't wait for freedom to manifest; it operates within confinement. The warden trusted Joseph because God empowered Joseph. When God's power shows up, chains lose their authority. You don't need perfect conditions to see God move. He displays His power in broken systems, tired churches, hurting communities, and forgotten neighborhoods. The cross didn't cancel God's power, the grave didn't cancel it, and your current trial won't cancel it either. God is transforming your broken system into a living testimony. Whatever success you achieve today, recognize it as God's power working through you.

**Reflection:** In what area of limitation do you need to see God's power manifest today?

## **Day 4: Much Given, Much Required**

### **Reading: Luke 12:48; 1 Peter 4:10**

**Devotional:** "For unto whom much is given, much is required." This wasn't just Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays' charge to Morehouse Men—it's God's eternal principle. When God blesses you with more, you're called to reach back and help somebody else. Your education, opportunities, experiences, and even your pain are not just for you—they're for the next generation. Martin Luther King Jr. and Joseph both understood this: their suffering had purpose beyond themselves. Today's injustices—educational inequities, broken systems, fatherlessness—demand courageous builders, not comfortable spectators. God is calling you to translate dreams into action, faith into institutions, and promises into pipelines of hope. What has God given you that He's requiring you to steward for others?

**Reflection:** What resources, experiences, or gifts has God entrusted to you? Who is He calling you to help?

## **Day 5: Building Beyond Birmingham and Egypt**

### **Reading: Nehemiah 2:17-20; Hebrews 11:1**

**Devotional:** Both Martin and Joseph wrote letters—one with a pen, one with his life. Both declared that injustice would not have the final word. Today, God calls us to build beyond the jail. We cannot wait for oppressors to create solutions for the oppressed. We must build ourselves. Faith without works is dead. If everything were already lined up, you wouldn't need faith. Joseph went to jail with nothing but God's Word, and that was enough. You may not have money, platforms, or perfect conditions, but if

you have a Word from Almighty God, that's all you need. The dream needs builders who will educate, mentor, advocate, and innovate. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Rise up and build.

**Reflection:** What is God calling you to build in your community? What first step of faith can you take today, even without perfect conditions?

## **FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL TO EGYPTIAN JAIL: WHEN INJUSTICE CAN'T IMPRISON GOD'S PURPOSE!**

**GENESIS 39:20-23**

**DR. DARRYL T. CANADY**

**1.19.26**

**Small Group Guide: From Birmingham Jail to Egyptian Jail**

**When Injustice Cannot Imprison God's Purpose**

**Sermon Text:** Genesis 39:20-23

---

**Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)**

**Icebreaker Question:** Share a time when you felt stuck or imprisoned by circumstances beyond your control. How did you experience God's presence during that season?

---

## **Key Scripture Reading (5 minutes)**

**Read Genesis 39:20-23 aloud together.** Have different group members read from different translations if available.

---

## **Main Themes & Discussion Questions**

### **Theme 1: Injustice Does Not Cancel God's Presence**

**Key Verse:** "But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him." (Genesis 39:21)

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. The pastor emphasized the word "but" as "holy grammar." Why is this small word so significant in Joseph's story and in our own lives?
2. Joseph was in prison not because he sinned, but because he did the right thing. How does this challenge our understanding of suffering and God's presence?
3. Share a "but God" moment from your own life when God showed up in an unexpected or difficult place.
4. The sermon stated, "You might be in a tight place right now, but you are not in a God-forsaken place." How does this truth change your perspective on current challenges?

---

**Group Activity:** Have each person write down one situation where they need to remember "but the Lord is with me." Share if comfortable.

## **Theme 2: Injustice Does Not Cancel God's Promises**

**Key Verse:** "So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison." (Genesis 39:22)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Joseph dreamed before he was chained. What promises has God spoken over your life that seem delayed or contradicted by your current circumstances?
2. The pastor said, "God is not obligated to answer a prayer that has not been prayed." How does this challenge you to be more intentional in prayer?
3. How can we distinguish between God's delay and God's denial? What does Joseph's story teach us about this?
4. Discuss this statement: "The place that the enemy used to try to break him was the place where God used to build him." Can you identify such a place in your life or community?

**Reflection Exercise:** Take 3-5 minutes of silence for each person to ask God: "What promise have You spoken that I've forgotten or stopped believing?"

---

## **Theme 3: Injustice Does Not Cancel God's Power**

**Key Verse:** "The Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did." (Genesis 39:23)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Joseph experienced God's power while still in prison, not after his release. Why is this significant for how we wait on God?

2. The sermon connected Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham jail experience to Joseph's Egyptian jail. What parallels do you see between historical injustice and current systems?
3. How does the LIFE Male STEAM Academy represent a practical response to injustice in the pastor's community? What injustices exist in your community that need a practical, faith-filled response?
4. The pastor declared, "We will not quit. We will not retreat. We will not be silent." What would it look like for your group to take this stance in your sphere of influence?

**Challenge Question:** Where is God calling you to demonstrate His power in a broken system or difficult situation?

---

## Practical Applications

### Individual Applications:

1. Remember God's Presence: This week, when facing difficulty, pause and declare aloud: "But the Lord is with me."
2. Pray God's Promises: Identify one promise from Scripture that applies to your situation. Pray it back to God daily, reminding Him (and yourself) of what He said.
3. Look for God's Power: Keep a journal this week noting where you see God's power at work in unexpected places.

## Group Applications:

- 1. Support LIFE Male STEAM Academy:** Research the LIFE Male STEAM Academy or similar ministries in your area. Discuss how your group could support, volunteer, or partner with organizations addressing educational inequity. [www.lifesteam.org](http://www.lifesteam.org)
- 2. Mentor or Tutor:** Identify young people in your community who need mentors. Commit as a group to invest in the next generation.
- 3. Prayer Walk:** Organize a prayer walk through an underserved neighborhood, praying against injustice and for God's presence, promises, and power to be manifest.
- 4. Study Civil Rights History:** Read "Letter from Birmingham Jail" together and discuss its relevance to current issues.

---

## Key Takeaways

### Write these on a board or share digitally:

- Injustice does not cancel God's PRESENCE - God is with us even in the jail
- Injustice does not cancel God's PROMISES - What God spoke is stronger than what the system does
- Injustice does not cancel God's POWER - God displays His power in broken systems
- "For unto whom much is given, much is required" - We must respond to what God has given us
- The jail will never have the final word; God will

## **Closing Exercise (10 minutes)**

**Testimonies of Hope:** Go around the circle and have each person complete this sentence:

"Because God is with me, I will not give up on \_\_\_\_\_."

**Commitment Cards:** Provide index cards for each person to write:

- One injustice they will pray about consistently
- One action they will take this month
- One promise of God they will stand on

**Keep these cards and revisit them at your next meeting.**

---

## **Closing Prayer**

**Pray together, incorporating these elements:**

- Thank God for His presence in difficult places
- Ask God to help you remember His promises
- Request His power to work through you in broken systems
- Commit to being builders of hope, not just prayer warriors
- Pray for courage to stand against injustice

**Corporate Declaration: Have the group read together:**

"We declare that injustice does not cancel God's presence, God's promises, or God's power. The jail will never have the final word. The dream will. God is still with us, and we will build, mentor, educate, advocate, and innovate until His Kingdom comes and His will is done. Amen."

---

## Additional Resources

- **Read:** "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- **Watch:** Documentary on the Civil Rights Movement
- **Research:** Educational inequity statistics in your city
- **Connect:** Reach out to local organizations serving at-risk youth
- **Study:** Other biblical figures who experienced injustice (Daniel, Paul, Peter)

---

## Next Week's Preparation

### Encourage group members to:

1. Journal about their "but God" moments this week
2. Research one way they can personally combat injustice
3. Come prepared to share how God showed His presence, kept His promises, or displayed His power in their lives

---

**Group Leader Note:** This sermon is deeply personal and may bring up painful experiences with injustice, racism, or systemic oppression. Create a safe space for honest conversation. Be prepared to sit with discomfort, validate experiences, and move toward action, not just discussion.

## ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does Joseph's experience in prison challenge our understanding of God's presence during times of injustice and suffering in our own lives?
2. In what ways might the church today be 'more cautious than courageous,' and what would it look like to shift toward greater boldness in addressing systemic injustice?
3. The sermon connects Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham jail experience with Joseph's Egyptian imprisonment. What timeless principles about God's purpose can we draw from comparing these two different historical contexts?
4. How does the statement 'you cannot go to your oppressor and expect the oppressor to give you a plan to help you stop being oppressed' apply to building solutions in marginalized communities today?
5. What does it mean practically that 'injustice does not cancel God's promises,' especially when facing educational inequities, mass incarceration, or economic deserts in our communities?
6. The pastor emphasizes that Joseph was in prison 'because of an assignment' rather than by accident. How might viewing our difficult circumstances as assignments rather than accidents change our response to hardship?
7. How does the biblical pattern of the enemy targeting males (Pharaoh killing Hebrew boys, Herod killing infant boys) inform our responsibility to invest in young men and boys in our communities?
8. What is the difference between waiting passively for perfect conditions versus stepping out in faith with only 'a Word'

from Almighty God,' and how does this distinction apply to addressing injustice?

9. The sermon states that 'the place the enemy used to break him was the place where God used to build him.' Can you identify areas in your life or community where God might be transforming a breaking place into a building place?
10. How does the motto 'for unto whom much is given, much is required' challenge those who have received education, resources, or opportunities to respond to the needs of their community?

Somebody,  
somewhere  
is depending on  
YOU  
to do what God  
called you  
to do.