



## Preserved For a Purpose

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David prayed, "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust" (Psalm 16:1). The Hebrew word that David uses for "preserve" in this verse is packed with meaning. It says, in essence, "Put a hedge around me, a wall of protective thorns. Guard me and keep me. Observe my every move, all my comings and goings."

David fully believed that God preserves the righteous. And Scripture says David was helped and preserved in all his ways. This blessed man declared, "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper...thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul" (Psalm 121:4-7).

The same Hebrew word for preserve appears in this passage also. Once again, David is speaking of God's divine hedge, the supernatural wall of protection. He's assuring us, "God keeps his eye on you everywhere you go."

Indeed, the Lord is with us in all places: at work, at church, while we're shopping. He's with us in our cars, on buses, on subways. And all the while, David says, God is preserving us from evil. He's keeping us safe from thieves, gangs, murderers, rapists, terrorists. He's protecting us from anthrax, smallpox, every conceivable kind of germ warfare. In short, our God has every base covered. He has promised to thwart every possible weapon formed against his children.

Maybe you've been worried in recent weeks, about a surprise terrorist attack or the spread of a deadly disease. God's Word gives us sure promises even for these things:

"Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man...continually are they gathered together for war. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips...Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked...who have purposed to overthrow my goings. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me..."

"Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked...as for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again. Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him."

"I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor. Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence" (Psalm 140:1-13).

At the beginning of this Psalm, David calls on God to preserve him against violent men. The word that David uses for preserve here is different. It means to protect from what is concealed, hidden, secret. God is telling us, "I've got every area of your life covered, even things you can't see. You can surely rest in me."

Do you believe you're being preserved by the Lord? Do you accept that he's protecting you from the schemes of proud, violent, evil men? Such men may be bent on destroying you. They may devise poisonous plans against you. But you don't have to fear any evil. As David prays, "Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again" (140:10).

If you have trouble accepting God's desire to preserve you, read Psalm 37:

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful...and his seed is blessed...for the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever...the Lord will not leave him...nor condemn him when he is judged..."

"When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them...he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him" (Psalm 37:23-28, 33-40).

Even Job in his agony testified of God's preserving power. I have never known any person who faced everything Job endured. This man lost his family, his possessions, his health, his good name. Who could argue with such a battered man's experience? Yet Job addressed God as "thou preserver of men" (Job 7:20).

Time after time, our God has proved himself a preserver to his people. Yet, for what purpose? Why is the Lord so intent on preserving us? We find a clue in Moses' words: "The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day" (Deuteronomy 6:24). Moses says God gave them the commandments for one reason: to preserve and keep them. But for what? For the same reason God wants to save and protect us.

Think of all the ways God preserved his chosen people, Israel. He protected them from the ten plagues in Egypt. He delivered them from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. He healed them from deadly snakebites in the desert. And the people testified of God's preserving

power, to their children and grandchildren: "The Lord delivered us from all our enemies. He gave us food and water, and kept our clothes from wearing out. He has preserved Israel through everything."

But is that all there was to Israel's testimony? Were these people preserved and protected just to end up dying in the wilderness? Were God's deliverance's meant only to keep them safe and well-fed throughout their lives? Surely there had to be a reason God preserved them.

### **Israel Was Preserved to Fulfill God's Plan for Their Lives.**

Moses stated, "He brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers" (Deuteronomy 6:23). Moses was telling Israel, "Look at all the miraculous ways God has brought you out of bondage. What do you think that was all about? Why do you think he chose you and marked you as special from the foundation of the world? Why did he deliver you from slavery? Why did he bless you when you deserved to be abandoned?"

"He didn't do it just so you could say, 'God supplied all my needs.' He didn't do it so you could sit around the campfire and tell your grandchildren stories of past miracles. Those are all wonderful things. But they're not the limit of God's plan for you. The Lord has preserved you so he can take you someplace. He wants to accomplish something in your lives beyond all the miracles."

I believe every Christian who has walked with the Lord for just a few years could write a book on the wilderness he's been through. In fact, our ministry has just published such a book, *Triumph Through Tragedy*. It's filled with incredible testimonies from believers who have endured excruciating trials. Yet, what about you? What testings have you endured? How many times have you faced disaster, perhaps even death?

As you look back at those things, ask yourself: "What does all this mean? Why did God preserve me? Why am I not a drug addict or alcoholic? Why am I not living on the street, out of my senses and barely alive? And why do I have God's peace instead? Why has the Lord been so good to me?"

The Lord preserved the Israelites and put a wall around them for a specific purpose: to bring them into a place of usefulness. He was leading them to the Promised Land, a place of destiny where they could lie down at night knowing their battles counted for something.

God had already sworn to judge the wicked nations living in Canaan. And when he preserved Israel, it was to prepare them for warfare with those nations. Even before Israel entered Canaan, God promised to send plagues of hornets ahead of them: "I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee" (Exodus 23:28). God wanted every Israelite to know, "You were preserved all these years to be warriors in a time of crisis. You're meant to live as victors and to die fulfilled. I have saved you to be useful, winning great battles to the end."

Jesus also was preserved by the Father for a purpose. Isaiah prophesied that Christ would be despised and threatened. But there was a purpose behind it all: "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages" (Isaiah 49:8).

We know from the Gospels that God's almighty, preserving Spirit watched over Christ every day of his life. And he faithfully delivered Jesus from harm, time after time. Think of how often the religious leaders tried to kill God's Son. They once took him to a hill-top to throw him over a cliff, but the Spirit intervened. Likewise, Satan tried luring Jesus to throw himself off a temple precipice. But the Spirit again preserved Christ, giving him strength to resist temptation and sending angels to minister to him.

And it was all for a purpose. Isaiah adds, "That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them" (49:9-10).

Jesus had answered the Father, "I'll go. I'll reach those in darkness, and show the lost the way back to you." All of Christ's deliverances were meant for this very purpose: to break the power of Satan, set people free, deliver those in bondage, and bring light into darkness. By the Spirit's preserving power, Jesus accomplished all of these things.

### **Joseph Is One of the Most Notable Examples of a Man Preserved for a Purpose.**

Joseph had a vision that his life would be used mightily by God. But that vision seemed like a pipe dream after his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. The following years of Joseph's life were filled with hardship and injustice. Then, when Joseph seemed to get back on his feet, he was falsely accused of attempted rape and sent to prison.

Yet, all this time, God was watching over Joseph's life. And finally, after years of turmoil, Joseph ended up serving in Pharaoh's house. Pharaoh eventually appointed Joseph ruler over all of Egypt.

It was during this time of great blessing and fulfillment that Joseph came face to face with his brothers again. A famine had struck the land, and they'd come to Egypt seeking grain. When Joseph saw them, "he wept aloud...and Joseph said unto his brethren...I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt" (Genesis 45:2, 4).

Joseph might have wanted revenge on his brothers. But listen to his words: "Be not grieved, nor angry for yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (45:5). Joseph was saying, "Even though you did me wrong, I had to go through this. The Lord was preparing me to save you."

Beloved, that's how God works: he was preparing a man to save a remnant. Indeed, in every generation, the Lord raises up a Joseph Company. He takes these devoted servants through years of trouble and trials, to prove and strengthen their faith. And he delivers them from many satanic snares. But the Joseph Company is tested in ways that few others experience. They face tormenting doubts, pressing fears, fierce temptations. And, perhaps most painfully of all, they're tried by God's Word.

What does this mean? Scripture says it's what Joseph endured: "He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him" (Psalm 105:17-19).

How was Joseph tried by God's Word? He knew, all through his sufferings, that he was a righteous man. He knew he had a heart for

God. And that only made his trials more baffling. He must have thought, "Lord, all these troubles don't make sense. They don't match up with your word to me. You said I would be mightily used by you. But here I am in chains. This goes against everything I heard you speak."

Joseph's greatest test wasn't being betrayed by his brothers. It wasn't being unjustly imprisoned. It wasn't being forgotten by his fellow prisoners, whom he helped. No, by far Joseph's worst trial was his confusion over God's word to him.

Only years later, when his brothers came back on the scene, did Joseph get a full glimpse of God's purpose. As he looked back over his journey, he realized, "I see now the Lord was in it all. And that makes everything I suffered, every painful, lonely moment, worth it." Joseph made peace with his past, because he saw God's hand in it.

The Lord also has a Joseph Company today. These are godly men and women he has touched and called. They don't seek fame or fortune. All they want is to live and die fulfilling the calling God has placed on them. And the Lord has promised their lives will count for his kingdom.

Yet many of these Christians are in the same dark dungeon as Joseph. Their lives are filled with trouble on all sides. And they don't understand their trials. Like Joseph, they plead, "Lord, why is this happening? It doesn't make sense. All I've ever wanted is to serve you. You've promised my life would be used for your glory. I've been fasting and praying for such a long time, wanting more of you. This can't be your will for me."

I know this kind of anguish. For years, our home has been plagued by cancer after cancer. And I know what it's like to endure assault after assault of accusations from hell. Often, as I've prayed during such times, heaven has seemed like brass. After years of walking with the Lord, I see his hand clearly in these trials. And I can testify that what Satan meant for evil, the Lord has turned to good.

Like Joseph, many in God's holy company today are in irons. They're imprisoned in what seems like a hopeless situation. They're being sorely tempted and tested, and their faith seems not to work. They get the feeling God's promises don't work for them. Worst of all, the Word they so love seems to be trying their souls.

Painfully, these servants may stay in irons until the appointed time when God calls them forth. For now, they utter Joseph's own cry: "Think on me...and shew kindness, I pray thee...and bring me out of this house [prison]...I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon" (Genesis 40:14-15). They're crying, "Lord, I'm chained here in an awful dungeon of despair. Don't forget about me. Show me mercy and deliver me from this trouble. I only want to serve you, to be a living sacrifice."

If you know nothing of this kind of cry, then you're not in the Joseph Company.

### **Joseph Saw That God Had Preserved Him for a Purpose.**

Joseph told his brothers, "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:7-8).

Joseph could look back over his years of suffering and testify, "God sent me on this journey. He had a purpose in taking me through all these hardships. I see now that everything I've endured has led up to this moment. Brothers, the Lord has been preparing me to minister to you. He orchestrated all of these things, to bring you under his preserving grace, as he did with me."

What an incredible revelation for Joseph. Yet, what's the lesson here for God's people today? It is this: our Lord has preserved us in the past. He will preserve us in the days ahead. And, most important of all, he has an eternal purpose behind it all.

Think of the recent calamities that have come upon our nation. Ever since September 11, 2001, our society has been engulfed in fear. People have begun calling on God as never before. And once-lukewarm Christians have begun holding onto God's promises of protection. They're praying, "Lord, put your hedge around me. Walk with me today, guard me, keep your eye on all my steps." And God is doing just that.

Now think of your own journey. Look back at your life, from the day Christ came in and changed you. I'm sure you could write a book about all the ways God has delivered you: from over-whelming crises, satanic snares, powerful temptations. How often were you ready to give up the struggle? How many times did you teeter on the edge of giving in to lust or despair?

Talk about terrorist attacks. You've been under assault for years, from the world's most vicious, wicked, powerful terrorist: Satan himself. At times you've done hand-to-hand combat with him. Yet he has never succeeded in pulling you away from Christ. Each time, the Lord has rescued and preserved you. And today you have a powerful testimony to his keeping power:

"My Father set me on this journey. And he has had his hand on me the whole time. He saved me when I deserved to be ruined. So, if Satan hasn't been able to destroy me, what can some Muslim terrorist do? My God is utterly faithful to preserve me."

Let me ask you: why did God choose to keep you, when so many around you have fallen? Everywhere you look, you see devastated lives, broken homes, shattered dreams. Yet here you stand, delivered and free. Why did the Lord preserve you? Why weren't your sins exposed to the world? Why did God keep you from ruin and shame? He preserved you because he has a purpose for you. He has laid out a divine work ahead of you. And only a tried, tested, proven believer can accomplish it.

### **I Believe We're Witnessing the Days Jesus Said Would Come.**

Take a look at the current condition of our nation and the world. What do you see? I see Christ's prophecy being fulfilled before our very eyes: "Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity...men's heart failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

Paul also speaks of this time: "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Paul is describing a people who live smugly and securely, boasting, "We've achieved peace." Yet, at the very moment these people feel most secure, destruction comes. Suddenly, the peace they cherished vanishes. And overnight the society is overwhelmed by fear.

Americans know the kind of sudden destruction Paul is talking about. For generations, our nation has enjoyed incredible safety from foreign attack. Yet, as Paul adds, "They shall not escape" (5:3). We're now seeing the days Jesus and Paul described. It's a day I never thought I would live to see.

Yet we are not to fear. Our Lord has preserved a Joseph Company for just such a time. Paul told the Thessalonians they were being preserved in spirit, soul and body (see 5:23). And here was God's purpose behind it all: to "fulfill...the work of faith with power" (2 Thessalonians 1:11). Paul was saying, "You're being called to fulfill a work of faith. And I don't mean a silent faith, but one that demonstrates the power of Christ."

### **The Time Has Come for All Preserved Believers to Rise Up In "Faith With Power," as Paul Declares.**

This is not a time for timid faith. It's a time when every Christian who has endured great testings must step forward. Our Captain is calling us to stand up amidst a fearful society and engage in "power faith." We're to make the Joseph Declaration: "God sent me before you...to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:7).

Our Lord wasn't surprised by the September 11 attacks. All along, he has been preparing his Joseph Company for this very moment. He has brought them through fires, floods, sicknesses, sorrows, temptations, fears. And their faith has emerged with power. Even as hell releases its terrorist hordes, God's Spirit is gathering this army of preserved saints. And he's sending them forth with confidence, knowing they're called to deliver others. They were born and preserved for this day, a time of great crisis. And each of them has been given a personal ministry, with God's power to change lives.

When the world is reeling from disasters, with sorrows mounting on all sides, God will be calling forth faithful soldiers who've been trained for battle. These devoted men and women have endured great trials and emerged with a sure faith. And the power of God rests on them. Such power may not be seen on a grand scale. It may only be seen in simple ways: a quiet spirit, a smile amidst a sea of frowns, a rest of soul, mind and body as others tremble.

My wife, Gwen, has spent a lifetime battling cancer. She has had numerous operations, and we're thankful the Lord has delivered her each time. Readers of my messages have known about Gwen's ordeals over the years, and many have written of having similar battles.

One day, Gwen decided to write a short note of love and encouragement to each woman who had written of having cancer. Her ministry is a quiet work, but it is endued with power, because it was born in trial and suffering. Soon Gwen was receiving letters back, saying, "Thank you for your note. You've put great faith in my heart."

Gwen and I knew all along she was being preserved for a purpose. And now, hundreds of women are witnessing the fulfillment of God's purpose in her battles.

The world's needs are great right now. So, dear saint, what is God's purpose for you? As you look back over your journey, what battles has God brought you through? What trials has he given you victory over? That may be a clue to your personal ministry. The Lord may want to use you in the very area you've battled for so long.

Be reminded, all ministry comes from communion. Seek the Lord in prayer. Ask him, "Lord, what does all this mean?" He will show you. He has preserved you for a purpose. And he has called you forth as a member of his Joseph Company, for such a time as this.

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