

Genesis Chapter 39 – The life of Joseph, part two.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. ²The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority. ⁵So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. ⁶Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." ⁸But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹*There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" ¹⁰So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her. ¹¹But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house *was* inside, ¹²that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. ¹³And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, ¹⁴that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside." ¹⁶So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. ¹⁷Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; ¹⁸so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside." ¹⁹So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused. ²⁰Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners *were* confined. And he was there in the prison. ²¹But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²²And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. ²³The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph's* authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made *it* prosper.

Introduction

Last week we covered Genesis Chapter 38 which appeared to be an unwanted interruption into the life story of Joseph.

However, as we discovered, the chapter had much to teach us about God's sovereign grace in the life of Judah and Tamar.

We now pick up the story of the life of Joseph in Genesis chapter 39.

Joseph arrived safely in Egypt.

It was probably a long and dusty journey through the desert.

The only thing that may have kept Joseph from being angry and bitter about his condition was the fact that he sincerely believed that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had spoken to him in a dream and revealed to him that one day, his brothers and even his father would bow down to him.

This could mean only one thing to Joseph.

The meaning to Joseph was, that at some future time in his life, he would be in a very high position of authority. He would even have authority over his parents.

In a Jewish culture this would never happen.

At the present moment Joseph could not see how God could possibly transform his life, but nevertheless, Joseph trusted in God, in spite of any positive evidence in his circumstances.

When Joseph arrived in Egypt he would have been placed on a platform with a large number of other slaves.

They used to hold regular slave markets in those days, where young men and women were sold to the highest bidder.

We know that Joseph was a fit and handsome young man who would have attracted lots of attention from prospective buyers.

The person who purchased Joseph was a man called Potiphar.

He was in charge of all the guards in the royal palace.

Potiphar's name in Egyptian means "He whom "Ra" the Sun God has given"

The ancient Egyptians worshipped the sun god, "Ra" as the supreme deity.

They believed that "Ra" created himself and subsequently he created all the other gods, goddesses, humans and animals.

"Ra" was sometimes referred to as the "father of gods".

He was portrayed in picture form as a falcon with a human body and a golden disk on his head which portrayed the sun.

(Put up slide of "Ra")

The reason I mention this is because Egypt was full of lots of different gods who were worshipped for different purposes.

In fact, the King of Egypt, Pharaoh, was regarded as divine, and recognised as a god himself.

The mind-set of the people of that day in Egypt is similar to the mind-set of many Japanese people in their religious thinking.

The Egyptians were "polytheistic", they believed in many gods.

So through no fault of his own, Joseph found himself in a foreign country, with lots of foreign gods.

We now come to the first section of Chapter 39.

1. God blesses Joseph as he remains faithful to the Hebrew God – v. 1-6.

It did not take very long for Potiphar to recognise that Joseph had the character and the practical ability to run his household business.

The only thing that he did not allow Joseph to be responsible for was his food.

This may have been for religious reasons or just a security issue.

The question that we need to ask is, "why was Joseph so successful?"

The answer is in the text.

Notice verse 3.

³ And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.

Potiphar noticed that it was Joseph's God that helped him to be successful.

This implies that Potiphar knew about Joseph's religious convictions.

It is clear that Joseph had witnessed about his family and about the God whom they worshipped.

You would have expected that a slave, working in a large house, in a country full of foreign gods, would have kept his religious convictions quiet.

However, that was not the case.

Joseph had been very faithful to God, in his witness, even though his circumstances were not very favourable.

We are beginning to see that even as a young man, Joseph had a mature faith.

He recognised that his circumstances were ordained by God and he didn't need to run away from them.

Joseph was making the most of where God had placed him.

Before we move to some application, we need to notice that when Moses wrote this chapter he wanted us to focus upon the word "**Lord**".

Moses wanted to draw our attention to the fact that the **Lord was with Joseph**.

When the word **Lord** is printed in our English translation of the Bible with a capital "L", it translates to God's personal name.

This is God's covenant name.

The Hebrew word for the God of the Bible is "**Yahweh**", which is translated into English by the word "**Jehovah**"

The writer, Moses, wants us to notice very clearly that the almighty God, maker of Heaven and earth, was working His purposes out through the life of Joseph.
Joseph had now entered God's training school.
God was with Joseph every step of the way.
Now for some applications.

Applications

Somebody once said that "the best advertisement for Christianity is a good and godly life, people read us more than they read the Bible."

Joseph was different from the people of Egypt, because he worshipped a Holy God that influenced both his **behaviour and his work ethics.**

Joseph was not afraid to work hard, nor was he afraid to witness clearly about his God.

This brings me to a challenging application.

Q. 1. **Do the people who you work with, know whom you worship?**

Q.2. **Do you witness appropriately at work when you get the opportunity?**

Q.3. **Do you pray for opportunities to witness at your work place?**

Only you can answer these questions "honestly"

If your answer to these questions is "**NO**", you might like to think about praying about how God can help you to say "**YES**" in the future.

Somebody once said "**Wherever Christians are different from the world, they bless the world.**"

If we want to bless the world, we need to be different from the world.

The life of Joseph is an example of this truth.

When God called Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 v. 1-3, He promised to bless those people who were a blessing to him and curse those people who opposed him.

We see this promise being played out in the life of Joseph and Potiphar.

It is an amazing thing to think about, but God can bless the company that you work for, even if you are the only Christian in the company.

The company needs to treat you well, and you need to honour God in your work place.

If these two conditions are in place, then there is no reason why God's blessing should not be upon you, and upon the company that you work for.

The second application is important too.

Every job, or experience in life is a training for the next step in the providence of God, concerning you.

Joseph had the dream and the vision for a great responsibility in the future.

However, God was determined to take him through a process of training that would shape his character, sharpen his faith, and honour God in the process.

It is exactly the same with us.

Where we are NOW, is the training ground for the next step in God's plan for our lives.

Can I encourage you to make the most of where God has placed you for now.

It will not be forever, but knowing that God is training you for his future plan will encourage you to persevere and make the most of your present position.

When I look back over 47 years of my working life, I can see the hand of God, leading and guiding, even in my many mistakes.

Don't let the devil rob you of the "Joy" of your present circumstances, because you are more concerned about the possibilities of any future blessing.

There is a British proverb that is often quoted. It is:

"The grass is always greener on the other side"

Meaning: You use this **proverb** to say that the things **other** people have or their situations **always** look better than your own, even when they are not really so.

God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him, even when His choice does not fit in with our plans and purposes.

Let us now move on to the second part of Chapter 39.

2. Joseph resists sexual temptation - v. 7-12

In verses 7-12 we read the account of Joseph's sexual temptation.

In v. 6 we are told that Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

The phrase "handsome in form and appearance" is only used in one other place in the Bible.

Genesis 29: v. 17.

¹⁷ Leah's eyes *were* delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance.

Q. Who was Rachel?

Genesis 30: v.22-24.

²² Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. ²³ And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach." ²⁴ So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."

Joseph resembled his Mother in beauty and form.

In v. 7 we read that Potiphar's wife lusted after Joseph and invited him to have sex with her.

Joseph refused the offer of sex for two reasons.

Firstly, he said that he had been placed in a very responsible position of trust and that she was married to Potiphar his master.

Joseph didn't want to betray any trust that was given to him.

The second reason Joseph gave Potiphar's wife was that if he had sex with her then he would be committing **a sin against his Holy God.**

Any sexual act with Potiphar's wife would not be in isolation, it would be an offense against the God of the Bible.

In v. 10 we are told that Potiphar's wife was persistent in requesting sex with Joseph. She didn't give up. However, Joseph kept resisting this sexual temptation.

In v. 11-12 we are informed that Potiphar's wife gave the last and final temptation to Joseph to have sex with her.

The house was empty and there were no servants in the house.

If they had sex, nobody would know about it.

Potiphar's wife caught Joseph by his clothing, probably trying to undress him, but Joseph ran away, leaving his outer clothes behind.

Application

There are two clear applications in these verses.

These are; how to resist temptation and the seriousness of sin as it applies to our own personal lives.

First of all, let us look at how we can resist temptation, especially sexual temptation.

The simple answer on how to resist sexual temptation is to follow the example of Joseph. He kept saying NO.

This must be not just saying NO to actions that stimulate our sexual arousal, but also saying No to our thought patterns that tempt us to think about sexual activity.

Potiphar's wife had plenty of thought stimulations that drove her desire to want to have sex with Joseph. This was her problem.

We are told in v.7 that Potiphar's wife "**cast longing eyes on Joseph**".

Her thought patterns about having sex with Joseph were stimulated.

If we don't say "No" to our thought life about inappropriate sexual activity, then it will not be long before the physical act is realized.

This was the problem with David and Bathsheba.

2 Samuel 11: v. 2.

² Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman *was* very beautiful to behold.

So the best way of resisting any inappropriate sexual temptation is to say NO to any thought patterns or to anything physical that arouses your sexual desire.

You may have to keep saying NO for a long period of time.

If the temptations persist you may have to claim the blood of Jesus over your thought life.

Paul informs us that the best way of winning a battle in our mind against Satan is to take every thought captive, to the obedience of Christ.

(2 Cor. 10: v.5)

I think that point is clear now.

The second application is about the seriousness of sin.

We live in a world today that doesn't even want to acknowledge the word "sin"

So let us first of all get a definition of sin.

Here is one definition

Sin is a "known disobedience to a known law which is given to us by the God of the Bible".

The Laws of God are contained in the 10 Commandments.

(Exodus 20: v.1-17)

So therefore if you disobey one of God's Law, that you know to be wrong, then to you and to God it is counted as "Sin".

Sin involves the refusal of humankind to accept its God-given position between the Creator and lower creation.

It flows from decisions to reject God's way, and to steal, curse, and lie simply because that seems more attractive or reasonable.

The Greek word for "sin" is "missing the mark.

It is a term in archery to refer to the "bulls eye" or the center of the target.

God's "bulls eye" is 100% Holiness and we all miss God's target.

(Slide picture of an archery board here)

The reason that the word sin is not popular today is that in the main nobody wants to be accountable to anybody for their moral behavior.

The culture of the day usually decides what is morally acceptable.

People today reject the truth of the Bible for their moral compass.

Joseph wasn't driven by the culture of the day, he was driven by God's word and his family upbringing.

As Christians we should be guided by God's words, as to what is right or wrong, and not what is socially acceptable in today's culture.

The reason that sin is serious is because it separates us from a Holy God, who created us.

The Bible says that the soul who sins shall die.

Death is only in this world because of sin.

Eternal life is only offered to those who have had their sins forgiven.

Jesus is the only one who can forgive your sins.

The reason Jesus can forgive us our sins is that He left Heaven to come to this sin sick world and die on a cross to take the punishment for our sins.

That is how serious sin is to us and to God.

Therefore, we should take sin seriously in our lives too.

3. The deception and lies of Potiphar's wife - v. 13-19.

In v. 13-19 we are informed that Potiphar's wife having had her sexual advances completely rejected, with now, no hope of getting her own way, decided to vent her anger and displacement upon Joseph.

She accused Joseph of attempted rape.

Her only evidence was having Joseph's clothing and also a complete lie about Joseph's behavior.

She called in a few of the servants to support her immediate allegations.

When Potiphar arrived home that evening, his wife repeated the allegations of an attempted rape by Joseph and Potiphar got very angry.

Application

There is an old British saying that says **“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, nor having a rage like love to hatred turned.”**

This comes from a play in 1697 by William Congreve.

Roughly translated into simple English we could say this.

“When a woman’s love is rejected, then her anger is like the fire of hell”.

I am not aware that William Congreve was a Christian but he certainly was correct with his saying.

The point that is important to us is this.

“Doing the right thing in God’s eyes, doesn’t always mean that you avoid difficulties or unfair consequences.”

2 Timothy 3: v. 12 here in N.K.J.

¹²Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

One Bible commentator said “Even a life lived in the presence of God, with the assurance of His care and guidance, is a life lived at great risk.”

As a Christian there is always a risk in your life if you choose to be obedient to God’s word. However, I believe and Joseph believed that it was a risk worth taking.

May God bless you as you take risks in your life to be obedient to God’s word.

4. Injustice with God is better than the pleasures of sin with the devil **(v. 20-23)**

Potiphar took Joseph and put him directly into prison.

I am sure that Potiphar might have suspected that his wife might well have not been completely honest in the situation.

The capital offense for attempted rape at that time was to be executed.

By putting Joseph directly into prison he would have dealt adequately with the situation.

Nevertheless, prisons in Egypt at that time were not nice places to live.

Psalm 105: v.17-18.

¹⁷ He sent a man before them—

Joseph—*who* was sold as a slave.

¹⁸ They hurt his feet with fetters,

He was laid in irons.

Application

I am sure that there are many Christians through the ages that have wondered why they have not been blessed for doing the right thing at work, or in business, or even in sport or other aspects of family life. Some people have lost promotion, been made redundant or even lost their reputation through people lying about them.

In the history of the Church, not all those who chose to do the right thing in God’s eyes saw any visible fruit for their troubles.

Some Christians were even put in prison and ended their lives there.

However, in the case of Joseph who is the most complete “Type of Christ” we can see what God is doing, because we know the whole story.

It is always God’s will to make people like Jesus. There is a pattern here in the life of Joseph. We see exaltation – humiliation – exaltation.

This is like the pattern that we see in the life of Jesus.

Jesus left the glory of Heaven that He shared with the Father, and then humbles himself to take on our humanity and then our sin.

We find Jesus being misrepresented, mistreated, just like Joseph.

Jesus then experienced the punishment for our sin which was undeserved and was separated from the Father.

Jesus was then placed in a grave, and it all seemed such a failure.

But 3 days later Jesus was raised from the dead and returned to the Father in Heaven.

Jesus is now exalted to the Father's right hand of power, with all authority in heaven and earth belonging to Him.

Joseph was a godly man and yet he was persecuted and wrongly accused.

Jesus warned us of such injustices.

Matthew 5: v. 11-12

¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Hebrews 12:3

³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

The writer Moses closes the chapter with an encouragement.

Gen.39: v.23.

²³ The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph's* authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made *it* prosper.

God blesses Joseph, even in prison.

God was determined to bless Joseph in all the places where He providentially allowed him to go.

God can do that for us too.

We need to believe that.

Amen.