

Me and Mrs. Potiphar 1-13-08

Genesis 39

We have been away from our Genesis study for three weeks because of the Christmas and New Year special sermons, so to get back into our current chapter let's briefly review. Jacob had returned to the Promised Land with his four wives. His favorite wife Rachel soon bore his 12th son, Benjamin, but she died in childbirth. Benjamin's older brother, Joseph, was Isaac's favorite. Joseph's brothers envied his position in the family and hated his dreams of grandeur. They plotted to kill him, but seeing a passing caravan, they sold him for a few shekels instead.

In Egypt, the captain of Pharaoh's security purchased Joseph from the Ishmaelite traders. This had to be devastating for Joseph. After having dreams of his brothers and parents bowing before him, this was certainly an unexpected and disappointing predicament. Joseph could have easily given in to self-pity or anger toward his brothers, and who could blame him? He didn't do that. Instead, he apparently put his heart into his work, learned the language, and became a trustworthy servant. (Psalm 91:15)

² *The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.* Our text for today begins and ends with this declaration of YHWH being with Joseph. You've heard me say over and over that believers have one advantage in times of trial, the LORD is with them to see them through. (Psalm 46:7)

Joseph was plunged into a foreign culture much more advanced than his own. He had to quickly learn another language. Temples to gods he never heard of surrounded him. I don't doubt that Joseph struggled a great deal in the transition from prince of the Hebrews to slave in the foreign culture of Egypt, but he worked through it and held on to his faith in the process. It takes time to let go of the anger and accept your present condition. It was probably some time before he could smile again, but he did. It reminds us of the old adage, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." Joseph's attitude and faith were not marred by his circumstances. Is your attitude dependant on conditions in your life? (2Corinthians 5:7) Are you a fair weather Christian? Do you praise God for the good and murmur about what you perceive to be bad?

He put himself into his work, so much so *that*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.* His faithful hard work that was blessed by the LORD elevated him to General Manager of the estate of Potaphar. The text doesn't tell us how many years it took to attain this position, but he did climb right to the top. We could relate to it as going from the mailroom to Vice President of the company in what I would guess to be less than seven years. That's quite a climb. (Joshua 1:7)

Commented [notes1]: Psalms 91:15 (NIV) 15 He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

Commented [notes2]: Psalms 46:7 (NIV) 7 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Commented [notes3]: 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV) 7 We live by faith, not by sight.

Commented [notes4]: Joshua 1:7 (NIV) 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Potiphar made the connection of Joseph being in charge and God blessing his estate. Potiphar never heard, "I will bless those who bless you," but he understood it.

(Genesis 12:3) He could see that the LORD was with him. Sometimes the world is more discerning of those things than believers. God's blessings come because of God's purposes. Do you think they would have come upon Joseph even if he had bitterness in his heart and was angry with God? (Psalm 115:13) We can certainly say that what God is doing is not because Joseph deserved special treatment. But we can also say that God could pick the brother that would have the right attitude, one that was blessable, for this amazing task. Do you have a blessable attitude? If you claim to be a Christian, but you are always whining about how unfair life is, that you once had it better, God's blessing on your life would confuse people. They'd think that God rewards murmuring. (1Corinthians 10:10)

I'm not saying that if you are a godly person that everything will be wonderful, that you'll be healthy and financially well off. I am saying that God can withhold His blessings if your attitude stinks. If you are wondering why God doesn't use you, check your attitude. If there is bitter unforgiveness and anger in your heart, if your mouth overflows with "poor me" expressions, God can find someone who is a better example to work through. I know this is a fine line between grace (unmerited favor) and being fit for a God given task. It's the difference between salvation that is a work of God, and daily living, which is cooperation with the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:25) Joseph was cooperating with the Spirit of God. He was choosing forgiveness over anger and faith over fear.

When you are an example of Godly living, the enemy will be right there to tempt you. A godly person is attractive. (Ecclesiastes 8:1) The smile and uplifting conversation draws people to them. But sometimes those who are drawn want to use you selfishly for their own benefit. They want to harness that joy and peace and use it for their selfish advantage. ^{6b} Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, ⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

Mrs. Potiphar could only see selfish pleasure in Joseph. She didn't make the connection her husband made, that the blessing of God came from God's presence with Joseph. Just like Joseph's godliness brought the blessing of God, her selfishness brought the curse of evil. (Galatians 5:17) It must have been a great temptation for this single young man so far from home and loved ones. He had the same hormones every young man has. 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?"

That is integrity talking! Sexual temptation is at an all time high in our age. The multibillion dollar pornography industry is now chiefly on the World Wide Web. It can invade any home that has a computer on-line. It has ruined many of them. I sometimes hear a flippant attitude toward it, but if you've seen the devastation it has caused in lives, you won't underestimate it. (Proverbs 6:26) Chuck Swindal talked to a hotel manager after one of the nation's largest youth leader conventions. The hotel

Commented [notes5]: Genesis 12:3 (NIV) 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Commented [notes6]: Psalms 115:13 (NIV) 13 he will bless those who fear the LORD-- small and great alike.

Commented [notes7]: 1 Corinthians 10:10 (NIV) 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel.

Commented [notes8]: Galatians 5:25 (NIV) 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Commented [notes9]: Ecclesiastes 8:1 (NIV) 1 Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance.

Commented [notes10]: Galatians 5:17 (MSG) 17 For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are antithetical, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day.

Commented [notes11]: Proverbs 6:26 (NIV) 26 for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life.

had hit an all time high on pornographic channel sales during their stay. That is just an indication of how pervasive this problem is. Ask any person that does professional counseling. It is an epidemic.

Mary Anne Layden, co-director of the [Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program](#) at the [University of Pennsylvania's Center for Cognitive Therapy](#), called porn the "most concerning thing to psychological health that I know of existing today. Pornography addicts have a more difficult time recovering from their addiction than cocaine addicts, since coke users can get the drug out of their system, but pornographic images stay in the brain forever", Layden said.

Once you are addicted, it affects your behavior in every area of life. Sexual relations between a husband and wife are a wonderful gift from God, but the types of perversion that pornography encourages only destroys marriages. Chances are very high that some of us here this morning battle with this temptation. The very best possible thing you can do is just refuse to let it or any other sexual compromise into your life. If you need help, get help. If you need an accountability partner I can direct you to someone who can help you. Married couples that go online, make sure you keep the history of web sites viewed "on" and check it regularly. If you accidentally end up at one of those sites, close it immediately and tell your spouse. If there was a rattlesnake in your house, you wouldn't justify it as a mouse catcher. You'd kill it or have it removed. I'm telling you pornography is just as deadly! Kill it or remove it!

Our culture has so encouraged sex outside of marriage that the church has almost given up trying to stand against it. We just don't get it, that God tells us not to do something because it is harmful to us. (Deuteronomy 5:33) The Apostle Paul warns us that every other sin is outside the body. Sexual sin affects our body, the temple of God. (1 Corinthians 6:18) The commitment of a husband and wife to one another is a picture of our relationship with Jesus. (Ephesians 5:31-32) Where does that leave uncommitted relationships? What picture do they give?

Don't categorize Joseph's temptation as a sexual temptation only. This story could apply to all kinds of temptations, cheating, stealing, lying, being unfaithful, even not doing what is reasonably expected of you. All of those apply to his situation.

Joseph saw the temptation in several ways. He saw it as breaching the trust of his master. He acknowledged the great faith placed in him and how wrong it would be to betray that trust. Though he was a slave, his master had been fair to see his faithful hard work and promote him. One act could completely destroy what it had taken seven years to build (my guess as to the time frame). It probably crossed his mind that he could keep it a secret. That is a lie he didn't fall for. Your sin will find you out. He called such a betrayal of trust "wicked". All sin against man is a sin against God. God has made us in His image. (Genesis 1:27) He values every life. For Joseph to sin against Potiphar was also to sin against God.

God had also invested in Joseph. God had been with him and blessed the work of his hands. His good example was blessed with prosperity. Could he now betray the trust of God? In Hebrew, "sin" is to miss. To miss what? In this case it was to miss going in

Commented [notes12]: Deuteronomy 5:33 (NIV) 33 Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

Commented [notes13]: 1 Corinthians 6:18 (NIV) 18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

Commented [notes14]: Ephesians 5:31-32 (NIV) 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."
32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Commented [notes15]: Genesis 1:27 (NIV) 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

the way he knew was right. It was to miss the will of God and betray God's faithfulness to him. It also means to offend. Why would God be offended? Because God is holy. He was leading Joseph to a special calling. When we turn our back on all God is doing in our life and turn to our own destructive ways, we offend Him.

¹⁰ *And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.* It was a persistent temptation, but Joseph stood his ground by putting some ground between them. Amazing when you consider the story of his brother Judah in the last chapter. When you realize the damage a single failure can cause, you avoid it like you avoid that deadly snake. You don't get close to it. You see, if you test how close you can get, it shows you don't realize the danger. Eventually you'll get bit. The consequences come in like a tidal wave. Joseph had that much wisdom, so he wouldn't even be with her. Whatever you're tempted by, draw the line and stay ten yards back. (Proverbs 3:8)

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.* He did everything he could to be righteous and faithful to his master. At that last second he could have said it wasn't his fault as she threw herself on him. He could have reasoned that Mrs. Potiphar deserved more attention, but he refused to go there. He knew he had to leave at all cost, and it was costly. The cloak was like a long T-shirt. He had to climb out of his cloak to escape, and notice that he ran. (Proverbs 4:15) Smart man! Her lust turned to hatred when she realized she would never have what she wanted, so she made a false accusation.

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.* ¹⁵ *When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."* She played on their natural animosity toward foreigners, and probably their distaste of having a Hebrew as their overseer. No one seems to have asked if anyone heard the scream she claims to have uttered. Perhaps they didn't want to ask.

Sometimes you can do everything right and still suffer because of the sins of others. Potiphar heard the story with a personal twist. *"That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me."* She had a hint of blame toward Potiphar in her accusation. Perhaps that was part of the reason he worked late? He was burning up with anger, but Kent Hughes points out that the text doesn't say who it was directed toward. He could have had Joseph executed, but instead, he had him thrown in the Pharaoh's prison. Did he suspect the charge was false? (1 Peter 3:16)

Prince of the Hebrews, to slave, to inmate and certainly this last humiliation was undeserved. The psalmist said of Joseph ¹⁸ *They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons,* Psalms 105:18 (NIV) If Joseph was ever going to ask, "Why me God?" this was the time. But we don't have a hint of that kind of attitude. Instead, what we see is the same good attitude and lack of bitterness that we saw when he was sold into slavery. How is that possible?

Commented [notes16]: Proverbs 5:8 (NIV) 8 Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house,

Commented [notes17]: Proverbs 4:15 (NIV) 15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.

Commented [notes18]: 1 Peter 3:16 (NIV) 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

First, he surely recognized that God was with him, blessing him. We can endure when we know the all-powerful ever-present God is with us. (Jeremiah 16:19) And if we have His presence, it's impossible to be angry or anxious about your circumstances. His loving presence can see us through any trial life can bring our way. Perhaps that is one reason the text today has the covenant name of God 8 times but never again in the rest of the Joseph story. It is in the trials that we need to know He is near. (Psalm 73:28)

Commented [notes19]: Jeremiah 16:19 (NIV)
19 O LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress, to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good.

Commented [notes20]: Psalms 73:28 (NIV)
28 But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

Secondly, he had confidence in what he had already been told. He had two dreams that he believed were from God. He knew God had destined him for greatness in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. Joseph was a man of faith. Faith pleases God. (Hebrews 11:6) The only reason I can account for his good attitude and hard working persistence is that he knew Almighty God was with him and he believed the dreams were from a God who cannot lie. He was surely taught about the God of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather Abraham. He had heard the stories of their faith and encounters with God. He knew the promises of the inheriting the land and becoming a great nation. He refused to let the circumstances dampen his convictions in a God who reigns over all. He was standing on a rock of conviction that couldn't be shaken by conditions. Conditions change; God doesn't!

Commented [notes21]: Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)
6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

I think we are all living a story similar to this chapter in Joseph's life. We have experienced God's presence in His Son, Jesus, whom we call Immanuel (God with us). We've received the promises in God's word. He calls us His sons and daughters. We are promised a transformation and translation that ends in glory. (see Another New Year sermon 12/30/07) But here we are in this fallen world. Family sells us and employers believe lies about us. We suffer from the sins of others, in addition to our own. Unlike Joseph, most of us have given in to one temptation or another and learned the hard way that God's way is the best way. And, unlike Joseph, we tend to forget the promises of God. That is why we are reading this story, to learn from it.

If we want to step into all that God has for us, if we want to be blessable, we need to have the faith that Joseph had. We need to believe like Joseph did. We need to see the trials as steppingstones to getting where God has promised He will take us, the transformation into the image of His Son. (Romans 8:29) Instead of "Why me, God?" it should be "Why do You bless me, God?" Instead of moaning and groaning about the trial we are in at the moment, the last job demotion, the unfair treatment, we should look at the promises of God and say, "Ok, what's next?" with anticipation and expectation that God is keeping His word.

Commented [notes22]: Romans 8:29 (NIV)
29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Joseph's story is in Scripture to teach us that faith sees beyond present circumstances. It teaches us that circumstances are just steppingstones to all God has called us to do. That is the message of Romans 8:28-29. All things do work together for good to make us more Christ like. The trials are taking us somewhere. Abuse and evil are unfair, but God is using it for our good. So what should our attitude be? What does an attitude of faith declare? In Joseph's case, he knew God was with him and the dreams were coming to pass. Every day is one day closer to them being fulfilled, whether I'm a slave or an inmate. So praise God and put your whole heart into your present opportunities. (1Thessalonians 5:18)

Commented [notes23]: Romans 8:28-29 (NIV)
28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Commented [notes24]: 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)
18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

That is exactly what he did, so ²¹ *the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.* ²² *So the warden put Joseph in charge of all 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.* Joseph clung to his beliefs and kept that blessable attitude, so the LORD kept blessing him with His presence. I ask you again, do you have a blessable attitude of optimistic faith? Or would your attitude better be described as pessimistic fear that God will not bless? Fellow believers, the LORD is with us. He has given us great promises. How is that affecting your attitude? What will you do about it?

God's word challenges us, but please don't go away and forget what you've heard. Let it be incorporated into the way you view life today and every day from here on out. Heed the warning of the author of Hebrews. "We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard lest at any time we let them slip." (Hebrews 11:2) Don't let the lesson of Genesis 39 slip from your life.

Commented [notes25]: Hebrews 2:1 (NIV)
1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.