

Scripture Reading: Genesis 39:

“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. 2 Jehovah was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. 3 And his master saw that Jehovah was with him and that Jehovah made all he did to prosper in his hand. 4 So 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. 5 So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that Jehovah blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of Jehovah was on all that he had in the house & in the field. 6 Thus 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. 7 And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.” 8 But 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?” 10 So 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. 11 But 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, 12 that she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. 13 And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, 14 that 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. 15 And 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.” 16 So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. 17 Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, “The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; 18 so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside.” 19 So 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. 20 Then 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.”

“The Rise & Fall of Joseph”

Chapter 39 here in the Book of Beginnings opens with, “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt.”

And thus we pick right up where we left off at the end of chapter 37, remembering that chapter 38 was a parenthetical reminder of the major story like the later Book of Ruth!

As we return to the account of Joseph we must be careful not to get to far ahead of ourselves because we know the story so well...

- Our text ended with Joseph in prison but I think we all know that this was not the end of the story!

BUT I want you to try and set that aside for today so we can focus on two very important lessons we should learn from this portion of the account:

In fact I am going to follow the pattern used in speech classes:

- I am going to tell you about the lessons
- I am going to teach you those lessons
- I am going to tell you what I taught!

So as we move through our text this morning...

- **I first want us to clearly see the importance of our vocations and how God delights to bless our efforts**
- **And secondly, I want us to clearly see that God takes history where He wants it to go even when it is inconvenient or painful for us!**

Now at first glance these might seem a bit contradictory, but they are not and if we learn these lessons well it will help us to be much more content & joyful in our Christian walk.

So Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and taken to Egypt and purchased by a pagan name Potiphar. Certainly, not a calling any of us would chose to have near the top of our list of goals, and yet we then read this:

2 “Jehovah was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. 3 And his master saw that Jehovah was with him and that Jehovah made all he did to prosper in his hand.”

- **So the Lord was with Joseph in the midst of trying circumstances and He brought him success, a success that even his pagan master could see.**

Now I want us all to remember that Potiphar did not hire Joseph as the manager of his entire household, but purchased him as a slave! It was as a slave where God was with Joseph and it was as a slave that the master took notice of his work! And just as we see in the parables of Jesus, when Joseph is faithful in the little things, he is given greater things to work with and in this case we see his responsibilities grow until he is running all of Potiphar’s affairs in his household!

We are not told just what Joseph was first doing as a newly purchased slave but thinking about this reminds me of one of the best lines ever delivered by Hollywood: ‘you can peel a spud to the glory of God if you peel it well!’ In fact I think the portrayal of Eric Liddell in that movie is an example of what we have here with Joseph and how his work was noticed. Eric knew that the calling on his life was to be a missionary in China but he also told his family that God made him fast & when he ran he felt God’s pleasure! So in the plot we have Liddell enjoying his running, contrasted with Abrams who was looking for self-worth in his competition: ‘if I can’t win then I won’t run!’ Both were outstanding runners, but one did so with great contentment and joy, even when he had to miss key races because of convictions about the Lord’s Day, while the other would run with striving and fear, even in winning!

- **Abrams wanted to make people take notice of him through his running, while Liddell had people take notice of his running because he was doing it to the glory of God.**

So if God has placed you in your dream job, or you have just the right home with the right number of children, it is easy to be content in your vocation, right? But remember, Joseph was being faithful and a good witness in the midst of being a slave, taken far from his home and family!

- **Perhaps we should think about this the next time we have minor problems at work or at home, and act like it is the end of the world!**

We should also take comfort from this if we are NOT where we think we should be... A young person is working at that first job, or an older person who was fired and had to take on a different line of work. On the home front, perhaps you are in your first very small apartment or your husband or wife has been taken or left you so you face the challenges of single parenting!

- **It is in these tough cases where we must also ask whether we are following the example of Joseph?**
- **But the bottom line is that whether the situation is good or bad from a human perspective, we must remember Who we are serving and that He can bless us not matter where we are!**

If Joseph was first tasked with peeling spuds in that household, he remembered that he was to peel them to the glory of God and his work ethic and labors were such that even the pagan boss he had took notice!

And as with Liddell's running, we do not do those things to get noticed, but we get noticed as we serve God! I will be speaking a bit more next week about vocations and their importance, but this is the first important lesson: To remember that we are working unto the Lord wherever we are!

So Joseph works hard and is promoted until all that Potiphar had he put under his authority.

- **BUT, Joseph was still a slave in Egypt!**
- **At the end of verse six we are told that Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.**

So, something that our modern world spends billions to achieve is going to prove to be a BIG problem for Joseph! He is a very good looking man and that is something that someone like Potiphar's wife who had 'longing eyes' could not resist and so she works to seduce the young man and here we have a stark contrast with what we saw with Reuben or Judah... Rather than succumb to sexual temptations like these brothers we see Joseph following the council and wisdom in the Book of Proverbs and even helping this errant wife to do the same...

8 "But 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?"

- **Joseph sees her proposal for what it is: Great wickedness which would be done before God even if done in secret!**
- **There are NO secret sins and all sin is against God Almighty!**

Joseph also warned her on a personal and household level: There would be consequences for both of them if they took such actions. Joseph would surely lose his position and Potiphar and his wife would lose the blessings that God had showered on their household because of his presence and work. But such is the case with lust or greed or pride... They are never satisfied and bring much harm to us and others. So our account takes us to the second important lesson when this wife continues on in her sin rather than repenting and being content with the blessings she had in her life.

Even with this ongoing challenge from a lustful wife, I am pretty sure Joseph would be feeling good about the state of affairs, when you consider his time in the pit and being sold into slavery in the not too far distant past.

- **But God was about to use this sinful woman to take Joseph somewhere he would not choose to go, as part of God's greater plan!**

Joseph continues to refuse her advances, but then one day "she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside."

This evil woman, perhaps with a bit of panic and certainly with no regard to the impact on her family, then decides that if she cannot have Joseph she will destroy him. So she gathers up the garment which she had stripped off of him, not unlike what his brothers did with his coat of many colors and calls the household servants saying,

"See, he [meaning her husband] 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. 15 And 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."

Now of course we think that a wife should have more respect for her husband, but they obviously had some serious marital difficulties and now we see a sort of reversal of Adam & Eve when her husband returns to hear her account of what happened...

16 “So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. **17** Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, “The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; **18** so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside.”

- Just as Adam said it was the women God gave him that caused the problem, it is now the husband’s fault for bringing the Hebrew who attacked her into their house.

19 “So 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.”

Perhaps we could speculate just a bit here and argue that the reason there were so many problems in this marriage was the fact that they were both consumed by their passions...

Potiphar’s wife could not control her lust in the face of a handsome man... And now we see Potiphar reacting in anger rather than hearing both sides of what happened.

- What we do know for sure is that these passions lead to major changes in their household and obviously in the life of Joseph.
- Not unlike Laban who lost the blessings from God brought by Joseph’s father Jacob through his many deceptions, we will now see Joseph removed from this family...

20 “Then 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.”

Now it might seem to be a bit of a downer to leave our account at this point, but if we do not then I fear we miss the power of the second lesson we are to learn.

- The truth that God often takes history where He wants it to go even when it is inconvenient or painful for us!
- Put another way, we must remember that God working ALL things together for our good, does not mean that only good things will happen to us in our lives!

Now again we all know this story well enough to know that Joseph is going to respond well...

- And that in the end all things do clearly work out for his good and the good of his family and the nation that God was establishing!
- An important series of events which would one day lead to the coming of Messiah, our Savior Jesus Who would come to save His people from their sins!

BUT here this morning we must remember that Joseph faced a real decision at this point of his life...

- Was his confidence in God going to be dependent on his circumstances or on the faithfulness of God Himself?

Would Joseph remember those dreams and believe that God would take history where he promised or would Joseph have a pity-party and decry how unfair what just happened to him really was!

As we look at it from afar we should see those dreams and his early upbringing as evidences of the truth which the Apostle Paul teaches us in I Corinthians 10:13

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Seen in isolation, these various trials of Joseph might seem unbearable from a human perspective...

- But Joseph, and all of us as God's people, have something far greater than just a human perspective!

Joseph in his early years would have heard many times the accounts of promises made to his father, his grandfather and great grandfather! Joseph would have known that he had a major role to play in the story of redemption through the dreams God had given him to reveal future events which had not yet come to pass.

- And so, we will see Joseph move from slave to prisoner with the same confidence and convictions that he demonstrated when moving from being a favored son to a slave!

As we move forward in Genesis we will see our two important lessons we have been taught today repeated in the life of Joseph just as the truth revealed in his dreams was repeated for emphasis!

And so let us keep them in mind and in practice as we walk with Jesus day by day...

- We saw in this text the importance of our vocations and how God delights to bless our efforts
- We saw in this text that God takes history where He wants it to go even when it is inconvenient or painful for us!

We experience blessings because we serve a loving and merciful Father! We experience trials and tribulations because our world, including us, is a fallen world in need of redemption!

- It is only when we see and understand how these important truths and lessons work together that we can rejoice in how the Apostle James opens his epistle:

James 1: 2 "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

And thus we have studied Potiphar the master and Joseph the slave and as we see the divergent paths these men took we should be reminded of the comforting truths of Psalm 1: "1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.

3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

4 The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Communion Meditation: Psalm 81

"Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!

14 I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries.

15 The haters of Jehovah would pretend submission to Him,
But their fate would endure forever.

16 He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you."