

Winning the War for Purity

Joseph's victory with Potiphar's wife

Text: Genesis 39:7-12

Introduction:

1. Context & background
 - Joseph has been kidnapped and sold as a slave to Ishmaelite merchants headed to Egypt for trade (Gen. 37)
 - Judah's moral impurity documented in Gen. 38, preceding the account of Joseph's purity in Gen. 39. Seems the Holy Spirit orders the narrative this way to show the contrast between Judah and Joseph.
2. Joseph is sold to Potiphar who is a high-ranking officer of Pharaoh as captain of his personal bodyguard. Potiphar oversees a special prison for political prisoners where Joseph will later be incarcerated (40:3).
3. Joseph was 30 years old when he was elevated to ruler of Egypt by Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46). It was two years prior to that point that he had helped the butler and baker interpret their dreams in prison (41:1). Assuming Joseph had already been in prison for approx. 1-2 years, this would make him around 26 or 27 at the time of this temptation.
4. This chapter records what would arguably be the greatest test of Joseph's life, a temptation that would test the very depth of his walk with God and the moral fabric of his inner life. Even David, under much less difficult conditions, succumbed to moral seduction as a man after God's own heart (Prov. 7:26). In this lesson we want to look at how Joseph came out the other side of this temptation victorious, winning the battle with the strange woman.

I. The Timing of the Temptation (Vs. 7a)

Vs. 7 says it was "after these things". When did this temptation come to Joseph?

A. At a time of Adversity (Vs. 1; Gen. 37)

1. Joseph had just experienced the pain and bitterness of being mistreated by his brethren.
2. Joseph had any number of excuses he could have used to support an indulgence in pleasure.

B. At a time of Vulnerability (Vs. 1)

1. The vulnerability of his stage of life
 - a. He was a young, unmarried man, with all the natural passions of youth.
 - b. The temptation would appeal to masculine pride.
2. The vulnerability of his circumstances

- a. He was alone, a long way from home in a strange country with no oversight from family and little accountability. The true character of your Christian walk will be manifest when you are alone.
- b. He was in a society where immorality was rife and culturally acceptable.
 - i. Egyptian paintings portray a nation of adulterers (Berg)
 - ii. We get a hint at the sort of sensual sins which were prevalent in Egypt from God's instructions to Israel in Lev. 18 – "*After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do...*" (Vs. 3) The catalogue of sexual sins includes incest (Vs. 6-18), adultery (Vs. 20), sodomy (Vs. 22) and bestiality (Vs. 23).

C. At a Time of Prosperity (Vs. 2-6)

- 1. Favoured in his position (Vs. 2-6a)
 - a. Promotion from God
 - b. Recognition from Potiphar
- 2. Favoured in his physique (Vs. 6b)

II. The Traits of the Temptation (Vs. 7, 10-12)

Note four key characteristics of this temptation which will help us understand how temptation tends to operate in our lives:

A. The Focus of the Temptation (Vs. 7)

- 1. It appealed to the powerful, God-given drive of procreation. The one flesh union between a man and a woman was designed by God to be experienced only within the confines of marriage (Gen. 1:31) "Impurity is the using of a perfectly proper, holy function in a way not intended." (S.D. Gordan) Temptation simply tries to get us to fulfil an appetite, which in itself is not sinful, in an ungodly way.
- 2. It appealed to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes (1 John. 2:16)
- 3. It appealed to the pride of life (1 John 2:16). To be propositioned by a woman of such high standing would be flattering to Joseph's ego since his good looks and poise as an individual were the cause of his mistress' infatuation with him (Vs. 6)
- 4. "It is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only the sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also two much deeper lying tendencies – the craving for loving recognition, and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion...a large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry." (Marcus Dods)

B. The Forthrightness of the Temptation (Vs. 7)

1. Mrs Potiphar was bold and unashamed in her approach to Joseph. Not the feature of a woman of character or even a natural trait of womankind.
2. We are living in a day when there is no shame in this area. We are bombarded with an in your face, bold invitation to immorality. Men are pressured to be playboys and women are pressured to lower themselves to the level of a woman of the street.

C. The Frequency of the Temptation (Vs. 10)

1. "day by day" = this temptation wasn't just a once off, it came again and again and again over a period of time. Some Hebrews commentators from the first and second centuries suggest this went on for a year according to oral tradition (Jim Berg sermon)
2. It was persistent and relentless. This is the nature of temptation. Wholesome opportunity often only knocks on our life's door once but temptation pounds it repeatedly.
3. Luke 4:13 *"And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him **for a season.**"*
4. *"For in that he himself hath **suffered being tempted**, he is able to succour them that are tempted."* (Heb. 2:18)

D. The Forcefulness of the Temptation (Vs. 11-12)

1. It came as Joseph was doing his duty
2. It came in an environment of secrecy and privacy. Sin of this nature thrives in such an environment. It would seem that Mrs Potiphar had calculated and planned this. *"...the adulteress will hunt for the precious life."* (Prov. 6:26)
3. It came with enticing pressure

III. The Triumph over the Temptation (Vs. 8-12)

The odds were stacked against Joseph but he came out victorious! What was the secret to his victory?

A. He Refused the Temptation (Vs. 8-10)

1. The Perspective (reasons) for his refusal (Vs. 8-9)

Joseph's reply to Mrs Potiphar's advances give us a window into Joseph's heart, his inner thoughts and the godly convictions that kept him from yielding to this sin.

 - a. Joseph believed in honesty and integrity
 - i. He was governed by a sense of responsibility despite the fact he wasn't being watched. "We tend to do what's inspected, not what's expected."
 - ii. His actions were governed by higher motives than the fear of being caught.
 - b. Joseph believed in the sanctity of the marriage bond

- i. Remember that Joseph didn't have a copy of the 10 commandments or even the Book of Genesis!
 - ii. Joseph's had the light of the creation account (orally taught) and the light of a conscience sharpened by his close walk with God.
- c. Joseph feared God and saw sin from His perspective
 - i. "great wickedness" = he recognized the magnitude of this sin. A sin of this nature is in the category of a 'great' sin in the eyes of God. See 1 Cor. 6:13-20; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3-8. Joseph did not allow his morality to be shaped by the culture of his day or the bad example of his siblings (e.g. Gen. 38)
 - ii. "sin against God" = he recognized that sin is ultimately against God. Joseph was gripped by the fear of God. Not a fear like that of a pagan deity, but a sense of awe, respect, and honour for the God He knew, loved and served. This was the highest motivation for Joseph above all else.
 - iii. "He who has learned to call the sin to which he is tempted, "This great wickedness," has already won half the battle." (J.R. Bailey)
 - iv. Illustration: Teenage girl invited by friends to a dance
- 2. The Persistence of his refusal (Vs. 10)
 - a. Joseph did not meet the repeated attempts of temptation with a passive, half hearted refusal. Fierce temptation must be met with fierce resistance! No doublemindedness!
 - b. Joseph was like Daniel who "...purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself..." (Dan. 1:8)
- 3. The Power behind his refusal (Vs. 2, 3, 21)
 - 1. God's hand was upon Joseph and Joseph was clearly a man who walked with God.
 - 2. Joseph drew on the power of God to resist this temptation.

B. He Retreated from the Temptation (Vs. 11-12)

- 1. The sacrifice in his retreat – "he left his garment in her hand" "He lost his coat but he didn't lose his character" We need to get our priorities right! There are some things worth losing to keep your purity!
- 2. The speed of his retreat – "and fled, and got him out."
 - a. Joseph lived out the truth of 2 Tim. 2:22 ***"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart:"*** This was not passive response to temptation.
 - b. Joseph took the way of escape God provided. 1 Cor. 10:13 *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to*

*man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation **also make a way to escape**, that ye may be able to bear it.”*

- c. One of the best weapons against temptation is to **GET OUT!**

When temptation comes your way, get out! When the band begins to play, then get out! When at work the party starts, grab your Bible and depart, God will bless you for opting out but get out! When immodesty you see, turn your head in victory, trust the Lord for purity and get out! When at school the swearing starts and dirty stories assail your heart, end the chat and go out back, just get out! When she comes with wily tongue, saying let's go and have some fun, say a prayer, turn and run and get out! When he says his love for you means to wait, he will not do, tell him no and turn and go and get out!

A useful tool a smartphone may be but unguarded it feeds iniquity, choose the right and make it tight, please get out! Television your life will ruin with its promotion of perversion, make your home a holy haven and get it out! The internet can be a tool, but it is also a porn-filled pool, hence the need to be accountable, so get out!

Joseph's life to us doth speak, inspiring us sin to defeat; from temptation we must flee, this is how God gives victory. So, learn this lesson tried and true, it will work for you to, learn to run and to retreat and get out, get out, get out!

- d. “It is dangerous to drive restive horses near the edge of a precipice; it is dangerous to bring gunpowder near the fire; it is dangerous to come near an adder's fang; and it is equally so with these fallen natures of ours to approach temptation. Therefore, ‘avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away’ (Prov. 4:15)” (William M. Taylor).

Conclusion:

1. Christ can redeem and rescue you from a sinful, immoral lifestyle. *“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”* (1 Cor. 6:9-11)
2. Christ can cleanse you as a Christian if you, like David have fallen morally. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9; Psalm 51)
3. Challenge to young people: Resolve before the Lord that with his help you will keep yourself pure for the spouse of God's choosing.
4. Challenge to married couples: Guard your marriage!
5. Challenge to parents: Be aware of what your young people are facing and help eliminate safe spaces for sin and temptation in their lives.