

"WHEN GOD IS WITH US"

I. Introduction

- A. The key element in this chapter is emphasized by the repeated use of the phrase, "The LORD was with Joseph."
- B. While Joseph was separated from God's people because of his brothers' jealousy and hatred, God continued to be with him.
- C. And even though Joseph was subjected to more unjust treatment when he was taken to Egypt, the Lord preserved him and made him prosper.
- D. As we study this passage today, we will consider what it teaches us about the difference that God's presence makes in the lives of his people.

II. We May Find a Measure of Earthly Success

- A. In the first part of our text, Joseph's experience shows us that God's presence with his people can result in our finding a measure of earthly success.
 - 1. Moses tells us that when Potiphar saw that the Lord was with Joseph, he put him in charge of all of his affairs.
 - 2. This doesn't mean Potiphar started worshipping Israel's God.
 - 3. It simply means he was able to see how Joseph's faith in the Lord had made him into a man of high moral character.
 - 4. Potiphar concluded that Joseph was a capable man whom he could trust.
 - 5. As the story unfolds, we see that he was right about this.

- B. People who cultivate a close communion with God reflect the character of God.
1. And because the divine character is made known to all people through the light of nature, unbelievers are able to recognize and admire the virtues that God cultivates in the lives of his people.
 2. On some occasions, this results in believers being placed in positions of influence in the world.
 3. This is what happened to the prophet Daniel when he was taken into captivity in Babylon.
 4. The Babylonian officials recognized him as “skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace.” (Dan. 1:4)
 5. This resulted in Daniel being chosen to serve in King Nebuchadnezzar’s court.
 6. For a variety of reasons, orthodox Protestants rarely gain entrance into the elite circles of our society today.
 7. But this does not mean that we should not strive for excellence.
 8. It is true that we have to contend with the fact that there may be some discrimination against us if we do not belong to a favored identity group.
 9. Nevertheless, it is still the case that in many respects, opportunities for advancement often come down to a person’s merits.
 10. And Christians have the most noble of motives for pursuing excellence in everything we do.
 11. Our chief end is not to secure fortune, fame, or power for ourselves, but to glorify the God who sent his eternal Son to bear the

punishment our sins deserve in order to secure our salvation.

- C. Of course, believers who strive to walk in integrity with the Lord do not always find that their piety leads to worldly success.
1. Sometimes the exact opposite is the case.
 2. Sometimes Christians are penalized for holding views that run contrary to cultural orthodoxies, even when they do not go out of their way to advertise their views.
 3. Aaron Renn's new book *Life in the Negative World* points out how this has become more common in contemporary society.
 4. He opens the book by citing the example of the Benham brothers, two Christians who had their home rehab show *Flip It Forward* cancelled after activists called attention to their traditional Christian beliefs.
 5. As Renn explains, these sorts of things are taking place because, "for the first time in the history of our country, orthodox Christianity is viewed negatively by secular society, especially by its elite domains." [xv]
 6. We need to be aware of this reality so that we can be prepared to suffer for our faith if we are ever called to do so.
 7. At the same time, we can take heart in the fact that this world is still *God's* world.
 8. Because it is, godly character runs with the grain of reality and contributes to human flourishing.
 9. This sets Christians apart from those who hold to trendy ideologies that reject reality and seek to bring the world into conformity with human imaginings.

10. No matter how popular secular ideologies get, the one thing they always have against them is that they don't work.
11. Being on "Team Reality" gives Christians an opportunity to distinguish ourselves from the ideologues, and this may very well enable us to find a measure of success in this world.

III. We Have Power to Resist Temptation

- A. The next thing we see in our text is that the Lord's presence with his people empowers us to resist temptation.
 1. The fact that God was with Joseph did not exempt him from being tempted.
 2. God permits his people to be exposed to temptation.
 3. He has a variety of reasons for doing this.
 4. He uses our temptations to humble us, to remind us of our dependence on him, and to test and strengthen our faith.
 5. But he also promises that he will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear.
 6. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 10, "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (v. 13)
 7. It is important to remember this whenever you are faced with temptation.
 8. As a Christian, there is no time in your life when you are doomed to give in to temptation.

9. The reigning power of sin has been broken for you.
 10. Christ has fully paid the debt you owe for your sin, setting you free from fear of condemnation and assuring you that God fully accepts and loves you.
- B. In spite of this, there will be times when you yield to temptation.
1. And when you do, the devil will throw your failures in your face and goad you to give up.
 2. But you always need to remember that you serve a gracious God who has fully provided for your salvation.
 3. Part of this provision is power to resist temptation.
 4. The way to avail yourself of that provision is to believe God when he tells you that he always provides a way of escape, to look for that way of escape, and to take hold of it.
 5. This is what we see Joseph doing in our text.
- C. There are several things we can learn about resisting temptation from Joseph's example.
1. For one thing, we should note that Joseph sees that he is being tempted to do something that would grieve the God he loves.
 2. He says, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"
 3. Though his master placed great trust in him, Joseph does not focus on the fact that it would be wrong for him to sin against Potiphar.
 4. He knows that *God* is ultimately the one who has put him in his privileged position.

5. If he gives in to this temptation, he will not merely be offending his master.
 6. He will be offending the God who has been so good to him.
 7. Joseph sees this even though he has been sold as a slave.
 8. He might have looked upon his suffering as an excuse for indulging in sin.
 9. But he rejects the temptation because he believes that God is still caring for him.
 10. This shows us why it is so important for us to be focusing our attention not upon all of the bad things that happen to us, but upon the many ways we can see God's goodness to us, even when things are not going well.
- D. Another thing we can learn from Joseph's response to this temptation is that he speaks the truth about it.
1. He calls what his master's wife is proposing what it really is.
 2. It is wicked and it is an offense against God.
 3. As Derek Kidner points out, "By giving the proposition its right name of *wickedness* (9) he made truth his ally, and by relating all to God (9c) he rooted his loyalty to his master deep enough to hold." [190]
 4. We need to be truthful in the way we speak of things.
 5. This is especially important in light of our society's increasing tendency to alter terminology for ideological purposes.

6. Words that carry moral stigmas are being replaced by terms that invoke notions of victimhood and entitlement.
 7. The murder of the unborn is now described as “reproductive rights” and as a matter of “women’s healthcare.”
 8. Sexual deviancy has been recast by using the phrase “love is love” and the category of “sexual minorities.”
 9. By using these and other linguistic distortions, immoral and irresponsible behavior is being normalized, and opposition to such behavior is being framed as uncaring, irrational, and bigoted.
 10. In such a cultural context, we need to be especially careful about the language we use.
 11. We need to be intentional about calling things what they are.
- E. One other lesson we learn from Joseph’s response to this temptation is that he does not entertain it.
1. Though Potiphar’s wife kept trying to seduce him day after day, he refused to listen to her or even be near her.
 2. And when she was so bold as to grab hold of him one day, Joseph simply took flight.
 3. He was determined not to let this woman ensnare him.
 4. This brings to mind this quip from Charles Spurgeon: “the best antidote to a temptation is very often a good pair of legs and the king’s highway.”
 5. Think of what you would do if you were inside a building that started to go up in flames.

6. At that moment, your first priority would be to get yourself out of that building.
7. That is a picture of how to deal with temptation of any kind, including temptations toward sexual immorality.
8. Don't entertain any kind of temptation for a moment.
9. Run from temptations, and redirect your attention and energies to things that are honorable and pure.

IV. We May Be Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

- A. This brings us to the last part of our passage, where we see that those who enjoy the blessing of living in the presence of God may be persecuted for righteousness' sake.
 1. Joseph did the right thing in resisting the seduction of Potiphar's wife, but he was not immediately rewarded for doing so.
 2. On the contrary, he was thrown into prison.
 3. He was punished for shunning evil.
 4. The Bible is up front about the fact that this is a part of normal Christian experience.
 5. Jesus told his disciples that if the world hated him, it will hate them also. (Jn. 15:18-19)
 6. And the apostle Paul told Timothy that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Tim. 3:12)
 7. Of course, we should try to live at peace with everyone as far as it depends on us. (see Rom. 12:18)

8. But the fact that we owe our ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ means there will be times when conflict with the world is inevitable.
 9. As John Calvin said, "To be at peace with everybody we would have to turn our backs on God." [*Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 60]
- B. While Joseph may not have seen it at the time, the form of punishment he received was a further indicator that the Lord was with him.
1. Normally, a slave accused of this sort of thing would be put to death.
 2. It may be that Joseph was shown leniency because of the respect that he had won.
 3. Or perhaps Potiphar was not entirely convinced by his wife's account of what had transpired.
 4. Either way, it was ultimately the Lord who saw to it that Joseph's life was spared.
- C. Though Joseph was once again subjected to injustice, he did not respond by sulking or losing his faith in the Lord.
1. Instead, he made the most of his situation, and God blessed his efforts.
 2. God was still with Joseph.
 3. This becomes evident at the end of the passage, where we are told that Joseph found favor with the keeper of the prison.
 4. Once again, he won the respect of an unbeliever and was placed in a position of significant responsibility and influence.

- D. Unbeknownst to Joseph at the time, God was working through these circumstances to set the stage for how Joseph would be used to deliver the covenant people from a severe famine.
 - 1. Joseph was not sent to the common prison, but to the one reserved for the king's prisoners.
 - 2. This would eventually lead to Joseph coming under the notice of the king.
 - 3. This episode reminds us that, even when our faithfulness to the Lord brings negative consequences upon us, we can trust that God is continuing to advance his redemptive plan.

V. Conclusion

- A. Joseph did not obtain the blessing of having God with him by living an upright and productive life.
- B. It was the other way around.
- C. God's presence with him trained him to use his gifts and graces to make himself useful.
- D. God's presence with him empowered him to resist temptation.
- E. And God's presence with him enabled him to persevere in the face of injustice.
- F. If we look to Christ in faith, we too have constant communion with God.
- G. This means the things that were true for Joseph are just as true for us.
- H. As the psalmist declares: "Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you." (Ps. 128:1-2)