

Joseph's Faithfulness in Temptation

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We read of some of that history that we just sang about. We turn in our scriptures to Genesis 39. Genesis 39 and we read this in connection with Lord's Day 41 of the Catechism which we began to consider last week and we continue looking at this morning on the 7th Commandment and this morning we look at Joseph and how he was a glorious example of one who was serious about keeping the 7th Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Genesis 39,

1 And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither. 2 And the LORD was with Joseph,

Notice that in verse 2 and we'll read at the end of the chapter as well. This is something the Lord emphasizes in this chapter.

2 And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. 3 And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. 4 And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. 5 And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. 6 And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured. 7 And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. 8 But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; 9 There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? 10 And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her. 11 And it

came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. 12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out. 13 And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, 14 That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice: 15 And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out. 16 And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. 17 And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: 18 And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out. 19 And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled. 20 And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22 And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. 23 The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

So on the basis of this passage of scripture, and on the basis of many passages that we have, the teaching of Lord's Day, 41 of the Heidelberg Catechism found on page 23 in the back of the Psalter. Lord's Day 41,

Q. 108. What doth the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That all uncleanness is accursed of God; and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately [that means with self-control] whether in holy wedlock or in single life.

Q. 109. Doth God forbid in this commandment only adultery and such like gross sins?

A. Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, He commands us to preserve them pure and holy; therefore He forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are in the third section of the Heidelberg Catechism. So far in the Catechism we have seen how great our sin and misery is. We have also seen how God by his sovereign grace has delivered us from our sin and misery through Jesus Christ, through his shed blood on the cross saving us from the guilt of our sins and through his Holy Spirit saving us even right now from the corruption of our sin. And now in this third section of the Catechism, we are looking at how we are to show our thankfulness to God for such a great deliverance and that's our perspective as we go through these 10 Commandments, we want to know how to show God our thankfulness for the so great salvation he has given us through Jesus Christ.

Well, this morning, as we look again at the Catechism's treatment of the 7th Commandment, we take a little bit of a different approach than what we did last week. Last week, remember we looked at the 7th Commandment, we looked at what marriage is, and then we were able to define what adultery is, and then we spent some time applying this, especially to the young people and the young adults in their dating relationships. This week as we look at the 7th Commandment, we want to look at a positive example, we want to look at an example even of a young adult who took this commandment seriously and who shows us what the keeping of this commandment might look like for us in our daily living. This morning, we want to look at Joseph in the house of Potiphar and there are a few things about this passage that should stand out to us. I have three things to point out briefly. First of all, this passage, and really when you look at the whole life of Joseph, you have a beautiful picture of the believer who is faithful under fire. That's who Joseph is in this passage and when you look at the life of Joseph, that's who Joseph is, he is a picture for us of the life of the believer. He's a picture of the believer who is living faithfully in the midst of very difficult circumstances. In fact, Joseph is not just a picture of the believer, he's a picture of the young person and the young adult who is in the Lord because here in Genesis 39, Joseph is only around 20 to 22 years old, maybe even his late teens. He's older than 17 so he's about in his early 20s in this passage. So he's an example of the believing young adult. Second of all, this passage shows us the kind of hardship, the kind of cost that might be involved for God's people in living and pursuing a chaste and temperate life. Joseph had his whole future ahead of him and he refused to fornicate, he refused to sin against God, and as a result he was thrown into prison. He was falsely accused. He was slandered. He lost his job, well, he was even a slave at this point, and it looked like he was going to spend his entire life in prison, all because as a young man he wanted to obey God's commands. And these experiences in Joseph's life show us what the cost of discipleship looks like sometimes for God's people and for Christian young adults who are resolved to be faithful in the battle for sexual purity. And then third of all, what this passage shows us is that God was with Joseph. You see that at the beginning and at the end of the chapter, God was with Joseph, God took care of Joseph and God was faithful to Joseph in everything Joseph experienced. And that's what we must remember, too, all of us as believers, when we are faced with the temptation to sin and even specifically the temptation to sin against the 7th Commandment. God is with us and God, who will be faithful to his people as they battle valiantly to keep themselves chaste for him. God honors those who honor him, and God honors the young adult who honors him by choosing to live a chaste and temperate life. That's what we look at this morning. In fact, these three things I just mentioned are the

three points of the sermon this morning. We have an example of the believer; we have an examination of the hardship and the cost involved; and we have the assurance that God is with us. That's the three points for the sermon.

We take as our theme Joseph's faithfulness in temptation. First, we look at Joseph's faithfulness; second, Joseph's suffering; and then third, Joseph's strength, the Lord is with him. First, we want to see that Joseph was faithful. Joseph was faithful in resisting severe, powerful temptations against the 7th Commandment. I think all of us know the story of Joseph. Right, children, you know the story too. When Joseph was only 17 years old, his brothers sold him to slave traders, Midianite merchant men who were traveling down to Egypt. Brought down to Egypt, Joseph is purchased by Potiphar, a high-ranking official in Egypt's government, and Joseph is made to work as a slave in his house. And Joseph is very diligent as a slave in Potiphar's house. Joseph does his work as unto the Lord and not unto men, even as a slave. He knows this is the Lord's calling for him, and the Lord blesses Joseph in his diligent labors. In fact, the Lord so blesses Joseph's work that Joseph is eventually given the responsibility of taking care of everything in Potiphar's house. We read in verse 6 that Joseph was given such control and such responsibility over Potiphar's house that Potiphar didn't even know everything that he had, except for the food that was on the table. And it's at this time that Joseph now begins to receive the attention of Potiphar's wife, and although Joseph is but a mere Hebrew slave, Potiphar's wife begins to notice Joseph and starts looking at Joseph as more than a slave. Verse 7 says that she casts her eyes upon Joseph, that means she begins to look upon Joseph with longing eyes. She allows her eyes to settle upon Joseph in lust. She's already a married woman but this woman is an ungodly woman, and gradually bringing to expression the thoughts of a totally depraved heart, this married woman starts working to tempt this godly young man so that he might sin with her. And in the way that she behaves towards Joseph, Potiphar's wife is really no different than the strange woman that we read of in Proverbs 5. She tempts him and she tempts him and she tempts him to commit adultery, to break the 7th Commandment and to give up the battle for sexual purity.

And what we need to appreciate about this whole event is that this was a very real, powerful and persistent temptation. This was no fleeting thing that Joseph had to battle with just one day for five minutes. No, this was something that Joseph had to endure for days and for weeks, and perhaps even months on end. And it was a difficult thing. Just consider the following things that make this a very hard and difficult temptation. First of all, we should remember that Joseph himself was a very handsome young man. That's what the end of verse 6 points out, we read, "And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favored." What does that mean? Well, it means, first, that Joseph was very handsome in his physical appearance, he was a goodly person, and it means that Joseph had a very pleasant personality, he was, well favored. And of course, he was handsome. After all, Joseph was the son of his beautiful mother Rachel. He was the grandson of beautiful Rebekah. He was the great grandson of beautiful Sarah. Joseph must have been a very handsome man indeed. And not only that, but as I already said, Joseph had a very likable personality. He was a godly, polite, and honorable young man. He probably had a certain confidence about him that was attractive to people. Although not proud, he was a man who was sure of himself. And besides all this, Joseph is evidently a very intelligent and

gifted young man, because, as part of his wife sees, everything that he does prospers. And the point is, it would have been very easy for Joseph who's just like you and me, to become proud in his handsome good looks, to forget his God and to start using his appearance and his likable personality to serve his own sinful desires. Joseph could have easily become flattered by all the attention of Potiphar's wife and used what the Lord has given him to indulge himself. But as a godly, upright young man, he shuns all these things and he avoids them.

So just those circumstances would have made this a challenging temptation. Second, we should remember that Joseph was still a young man at this time. He was in his early to mid 20s and like any normal young man, Joseph was created with hormones that produced physical desires. And combined with that, you would suppose that Potiphar's wife herself was no unattractive woman. After all, Potiphar himself was a high-ranking official and Potiphar's wife was very bold in presenting herself to Joseph. Evidently, this was a woman who must have thought to herself that she was attractive. These are realities in life that make sin appealing to the flesh and that make resisting temptation a hard thing.

Third of all, just think of all the different excuses that Joseph could have made for himself as an excuse to indulge in this sin. Joseph could have said to himself, "Here I am in Egypt all alone and I have no opportunity to meet and to date a Christian woman. Here I am working as a slave in this house all day long every day. What opportunities do I have to find love? And now this woman is showing a real interest in me. Yes, she's ungodly. Yes, spiritually, we have nothing in common. Yes, she doesn't go to church. But she's rich, she's powerful, and she's probably attractive." Or Joseph could have said to himself, "Doesn't God want me to be happy? After all, God's the one who's put me in this difficult situation. I didn't bring myself into this situation. Pursuing a relationship with this woman would make me happy in my flesh, at least. Maybe God can even save this woman through my sinful relationship with her. And besides, Potiphar isn't the kind of husband that she deserves. He's barely home. She deserves someone better, someone like me." Or Joseph could have said to himself, "Maybe if I go with this woman, we can conspire together against Potiphar and get rid of Potiphar. And then maybe I can get my freedom back so I don't have to be a slave for the rest of my life. This might, in fact, be God's way for me to get me out of slavery." Or Joseph could have said to himself, and I think maybe this would have been one of the biggest temptations, one of the biggest excuses, "If I keep resisting the advances of this woman, she might get angry at me and she might get all up in a rage and try to ruin my life even more, or try to have me put to death. I might as well try to keep her happy so that I can stay in this comfortable position in Potiphar's house." The point is, if Joseph had wanted to give himself over to the advances of Potiphar's wife, he had enough excuses available to him to do it.

And then in addition to all of this, what we need to remember is that this seduction took place over a lengthy period of time. Every day, as Joseph showed up for work and he entered his master's house, there was Potiphar's wife trying to seduce him. And there it was, in the way she was dressing immodestly, in the way she was winking at him, in the perfume she wore when he was around her. And it's not as if Joseph can up and quit his

job and move. He's a slave and just as with any temptation, the longer you face the temptation, the harder it becomes to resist the temptation oftentimes. And what was perhaps the hardest part of all was this: Joseph had no one with him, no friends who could help him and encourage him, and to be a counsel to him, to encourage him in the right way. He had no family to go to. He had no church family on Sundays or throughout the week, people he could call up to help him through these challenges, to give him accountability. He was all alone in Egypt. It was a real temptation.

Well, we look at ourselves, beloved, and we should see today, there's nothing new under the sun, is there? The same temptations that God's people faced in the Old Testament are the exact same things we face today. We live in a culture that is saturated with sexual things. The temptation to sexual sins are very real. You can't walk through the mall but you're presented with it. There are very real, powerful, persistent temptations. You can hardly go on the internet and it's there on Yahoo, on the news. And this is what our young people can often experience at college or at the workplace. And if you are attractive as a young man or a young woman, there are other attractive young adults who will gladly make themselves available to you. And Satan knows how to put charming, even seductive people on our path. Yes, maybe they're not Christians, maybe they don't go to church, but they're attractive. They're likeable. I'm spending time with them in our group project. They sit beside me in class. They're charming and they're willing to give me attention and it feels nice. But people don't even need to go to college or to the workplace to experience this kind of thing. As I said, it's on TV, it's on Netflix, it's on DIRECTV, charming, seductive people. Satan knows how to put these people on our path.

Or maybe it comes in more sinister and evil ways, different kinds of challenges. Just for one example, think of a man who has divorced his wife and he's with another woman, and now he wants everyone else to start calling this woman his girlfriend. No, that's not a girlfriend, that's the strange woman of Proverbs 5. And that man himself is utterly deceiving himself. He's acting like the foolish man and then he wants you to condone his own wickedness and foolishness. And the temptation we are suddenly faced with is to not be so biblical, not be so open and honest with calling sin for what it is, to compromise maybe for the sake of family peace. And behind it all is Satan working hard day after day, week after week, even months after months, to wear us down with these burdensome temptations so that we eventually give in to his way of thinking. And Satan knows if he can get the church, if he can get the church to adopt the world's standard of sexual immorality, then it won't be very long before there's no difference at all between the church and the world. And if the young people, right, if the young people can adopt the world's standards and compromise and give ground, give place to the devil, then it won't be very long before the next generation, half a generation later, the church is no different than the world.

That would have been true in Joseph's case as well. Think of Joseph. Already a large part of Joseph's own family was mired in sexual sin. Think of what Reuben had done. Think of what Simeon and Levi had done. These things had happened already. And if Joseph had given himself over as well to sexual sin at this time, it would have been devastating to the church. What would have happened to the church when those seven years of

famine came and there was no one that was there to think upon the church? It would have been devastating but, beloved, as strong as the temptation was, Joseph did not fall into this real and powerful temptation but in response, Joseph says, "No." Joseph says, "No," and we need to appreciate just how Joseph said, "No." First, Joseph said no immediately. He did not give place to the devil. His answer was emphatic. Potiphar's wife knew where Joseph stood. Joseph never made any excuses for himself. No compromises, ever. He probably devoted himself even more to his work so that he could keep away from her. And one thing that stands out about Joseph's entire life is this, that Joseph never fell into feeling sorry for himself in his hard circumstances because how often can't that be what allows us to excuse our sins? No, he simply stuck to what God required of him. It doesn't mean he never grieve or he never felt lonely, but he never fell into this self-centered pitying that would excuse him to indulge the flesh with Potiphar's wife.

That's part of the beauty of Joseph's character. He simply stuck to what God required of him and then, second, Joseph kept before his eyes the reality of things. He did not let this temptation to blur and cloud his thinking. Verses 8 and 9 show us that very clearly. We read verses 8 and 9, "But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not," knoweth not, "what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Just in passing, that makes me think of David too. Remember what God said to David, "I gave you everything and still you sinned by committing that sin using Bathsheba to commit adultery and murder. I gave you everything. I gave you the thousand sheep and you went and stole your neighbors only lamb." But Joseph keeps his thinking straight here, doesn't he? "Look at what God has given me? Yes, I'm a slave but God is so good to me right here and and Pharaoh has highly honored me. How can I dishonor Pharaoh?" Even just neighborly love. Potiphar, I said, Pharaoh, "Potiphar trusts me. He's honored me greatly. How can I betray that trust?" It's striking when what others would use maybe as an opportunity to sin, Potiphar trusts him so much, Joseph says, "No, if I'm thinking correctly, this is a reason even more not to commit this sin. In addition, just consider this woman we're talking about, this is a married woman. God has not given this woman to me. God has given this woman to Potiphar. I may not do this." And then third, Joseph says, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? Yes, above everything else, this is the great reality, this is sin against God should I do this. Yes, I'm a slave but God is so good to me. He's given me the promises of salvation, the promise of the Messiah."

And even the suggestion to sin was offensive to Joseph's heart because Joseph was living so strongly out of the new man, and it's remarkable he didn't have anyone else, he didn't have the scriptures, but the Lord made him strong and Joseph's love for God was stronger than any other desire in his life. God was the great reality of Joseph's life. We looked at that in young adults with Daniel. Daniel didn't have scriptures too. What did he have but every day morning, noon and evening, he maintained, the Lord maintains but Daniel maintained his prayer life and was jealous over his relationship with the Lord. God was the great reality in Joseph's life. You know, it wasn't even just that Joseph said, "I may not do this because I might get an STD or she might get pregnant and we might get found

out." Or, "I might lose my job or lose my life. No," Joseph says, "this would be a sin against God. This is not an affair. This is adultery. This will be not only to sin against my neighbor, hating my neighbor, but this would be to hate God, the God whom I love, who's given me so, so much."

And then third of all, Joseph flees. That's how he resists the temptation, he flees. When this strange woman ambushes Joseph in the house and grabs him by the coat and demands, "Lie with me," he runs. He runs as fast as he can without any hesitation, and you can be sure because we all have that sinful nature, hhe's not just running away from her, but you can imagine he's running trying to run away from his sinful nature, right? "I need to get away from this. This is a dangerous place right now. This is a bad place. I may not be here anymore. I must run and forsake this place and go as far away from the temptation as I can."

All of these things are things we need to appreciate and applied to our own lives today. Young man, young woman, Joseph is a beautiful and powerful example that you must take up and use for your own life. And what I would especially emphasize is this: when we are tempted to sin, we need to think about God and think about what sin is in God's eyes. The reasons we must use to avoid fornication are not, "I might get an STD. I don't know this other person's sexual background." That's not what we should say. We should not say, "We might get pregnant and get found out." We ought not to say, "I might go to jail." The reason we must use to avoid fornication is this, "How then shall I commit this great wickedness and sin against God? God, Jehovah, who has saved me from my sins, who saved me from the pit of hell and the kingdom of darkness, God himself who came in the flesh, who died on the cross bearing my punishment, who became a curse that I might be made the righteousness of God and have eternal life, how shall I do this great thing and great wickedness and sin against him?"

And really, that's where Satan tempts us, isn't it? Because so often the real temptation that we have is this: to put God out of the picture. That's where the temptation starts. Yes, I'm a Christian. I know I'm a Christian. I love God. I know God is there. But now am I going to make decisions that are in harmony with that? Or am I going to start making provisions for the flesh so that it's easier to forget about God when all the provisions for the flesh have been prepared, right? Whether it's with the television show I'm watching or the website I'm on and I make sure no one's around or I make sure I'm in a room by myself and I've made those preparations, right, then it's easier to forget about God. Or I'm with the girlfriend and this great temptation is before me, just put God out of the picture for this moment, forget who you are as a Christian and make provision for the flesh. You know, whether we're 25, whether we're 15, whether we're 55, that's always the same temptation, put God away for just a moment, and what we need to be doing is bringing ourselves to live before the face of God. That's what Joseph was doing even in these words. It's almost like he had to say it to himself, "How shall I commit this great wickedness and sin against," not Potiphar, "sin against God?" Let's bring God into the equation. Whether at college or at work or with family members, bring God into the picture. And we always have to bring his word, right, put myself under the authority of his word. I confess it. Do I do it? Whether other people will acknowledge God or not, I

may never leave him out. This is my calling and personal responsibility, ut myself under his word.

And then sometimes, especially with this temptation against the 7th Commandment, the only thing you can do sometimes is flee, right? There are some sins that we have to grapple with in hand-to-hand combat, but it's striking that with this sin, even the Apostle Paul himself says flee fornication. That's what the Spirit says, flee. Maybe it's not even the same situation like the one Joseph was in, maybe it's something else to go back to a dating relationship, maybe we know it's getting late out and there comes that point where you need to say, "I need to go home. This date needs to be over, right? We've got the curfew. Our parents are looking out for us. This date needs to be over, not because we don't like each other, not because I don't still like you, because right now in our dating relationship we are about to entice each other into temptation and this is not where we want to be. And we need to take a stand for what is right and pleasing to the Lord as Christians." That's what Joseph did. He was taking care of his soul. He fled from Potiphar's wife. He was faithful in the midst of temptation.

Well, we might say after looking at all these things, well, now it's going to be very well for Joseph, right? He did the right thing. He overcame temptation and now God will bless Joseph and reward him. Well, that's true from one point of view. God was with Joseph in everything that followed this event. God was even honoring Joseph. But that didn't mean Joseph's life would suddenly become easy and comfortable from an earthly point of view. Rather, Joseph had to go through many more struggles before he would be delivered from prison. When Potiphar's wife realized that Joseph would not sin with her, she decided to make his life miserable. She lies about him. She slanders him. She even racially profiles him, right? Referring to him as "this Hebrew." And what happens? Is Potiphar going to take Joseph's side in all of this? Of course not. Whatever he believes, whatever he knows, he kind of has to take his wife's side, right, against a Hebrew slave? And so Joseph is thrown into prison and that's the cost Joseph had to pay in his battle for sexual purity. And he would have known that this was a real possibility.

So not only was he a slave, but now he's a slave in prison and at anytime he could easily be put to death. His life is worthless. He's a slave. And when you see what Potiphar's wife does to Joseph in this whole episode, then you also get to see the true nature of the strange woman as well. She's not tempting you to sin because she loves you but because she is selfish and wicked and vile, and she wants you to serve her. That's the strange woman. That's also the strange man, right? We understand that too. But the point is, this is what faithfulness to God's commandments required of Joseph. That's how it is. When you are faithful to God's commandments, this is also how you can expect to be treated by the world and by those who don't know God. Faithfulness to God brings reproach and scorn and suffering. A young person who will not join in the drinking and partying, he's a misfit. A woman who is deliberately modest in her dress, she's boring. A man who will not laugh at or contribute to the crude jokes at work, he is self-righteous. Sadly, these kinds of things even come from those who call themselves Christians, and they're the ones calling others misfits, and boring and self-righteous.

It will cost you something. It will cost the church something. For the church of Jesus Christ to take a clear, uncompromising stand on what adultery is, she will face mockery and scorn. She will be called self-righteous, legalistic, maybe even bigoted, or perhaps even hypocritical. And it will cost every believer something as well in various forms, whether with family members or friends, or with the circumstances of your own life, and and your own struggle maybe with loneliness, self-denial. Again, just looking at Joseph, he was thrown into prison. Perhaps he's going to be left there for the rest of his life to rot away and die. And look at him, he's got his whole life ahead of him. He's a young adult. He's a godly, stalwart young man and his whole life is going to be wasted in jail? What heartache. What suffering.

But in the midst of his sufferings, what did Joseph have? What Joseph had was this: a good conscience, a sense of God's approval and a close relationship with his God. He knew who God was as his God, and that God was with him, and God communicates that to Joseph even in the blessings that God gives him. In prison, again, "God's favor is upon you, Joseph. You're doing what's right and pleasing to me." Joseph did not have to second guess what he had done. He did not have to wonder whether God had something against him. He wasn't wracked with a guilty conscience, how burdensome that guilty conscience can be. But no, even in prison in that lowly dark corner in prison, he had that comforting sense that God was with him and would take care of him. And that's true for us as well, beloved, how important it is to have a good conscience, to have that sense, that enjoyment of God's approval, because that's what's essential to our lives, isn't it, my relationship with God, my relationship to my bridegroom, Jesus Christ. It may be that even right now, because of faithfulness to God, you are going through some very difficult things that are humiliating, perhaps, or vexing, and you don't know why you're going through these things. Why does it have to be this difficult? Why does it have to be this way? Well, Joseph didn't know why either. We know how it ends. He didn't know how it would end. Yet even in the moment, how blessed is the man who knows that he is doing what is right and pleasing to the Lord, who does not stand with the wicked, nor sit in the seat of the scornful or walk in the way of the ungodly. He is happy. He is blessed because he's with the Lord. That's where my joy is found and that's true whether I'm single or whether I'm married. What is essential, what is so vitally important is this: knowing I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and I am living faithfully in that marriage relationship by his grace strengthening me.

That's what Joseph had even in prison in the midst of the loneliness and sorrow of prison, and just consider what would have happened if Joseph, a child of God all alone, apart from the church in the most insignificant place as far as the church goes, you might think, what would have happened if Joseph had not been faithful in temptation and he had succumbed to the seduction of Potiphar's wife? What, even as far away from the church as he was, what damage would have been inflicted upon the church of Joseph's day? Right, the church itself in Joseph's day was weak enough as it was, all kinds of sexual sin, all kinds of infighting. If Joseph had not remained faithful, it would have been a devastating blow to God's church. As I said, what would have happened when those seven years of famine came and there is Joseph, who knows where, off with Potiphar's wife living in sin and the church and the whole world goes through famine? What would

have happened to the church? Would much people be kept alive, God's people, the church, because Joseph's nowhere to be seen?

But now consider the flip side. What happened as a result of Joseph's faithfulness? Well, Joseph did go through much physical suffering and sorrow, but God's purposes with Joseph even then were for Joseph's good. He was even using Joseph's time in prison to prepare the way for Joseph to be second in command in all of Egypt. And God would use all of this, of course, to provide food for his people during the famine. And not only that, but because there was bread in Egypt, right, the line of Jesus Christ through Judah would continue. Through Joseph's faithfulness and temptation, God would continue to pave the way for the preservation of the line of Jesus Christ. All Joseph knew was that he needed to be sexually pure and faithful, walking in God's ways, and God would use that for his glory and for the good of his people and for the good of my soul.

Wasn't this also Jesus' attitude in his difficult temptations and trials as he even was being led to the cross? Jesus knew he needed to do his Father's will and doing his Father's will, not turning to the right, not turning to the left, he also knew that doing his Father's will would serve for the prosperity and blessedness of the church of God's people whom Jesus loved so much. And for Joseph, how happy he could be at the end of his life when he saw how God so, so wondrously worked it all together for good and how God was faithful in every single moment, so that Joseph says to his brothers later on, "You thought evil against me, many people thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good." And that's the blessedness that is ours when we resist temptation and we walk in the ways of God's word. We know God means this for good, and God gives us that sense and we see God's faithfulness in beautiful and striking ways that we would not see otherwise if it were not for the way God led us.

That leads us to consider where Joseph's strength was in this entire temptation. Where was Joseph's strength? How did Joseph withstand the temptations of Potiphar's wife? Well, it wasn't through the godly examples of his father and his brothers, although what a blessing that is when you have those godly examples going before you. Joseph's strength wasn't found in himself either. That's why he had to run, flee. Ultimately, the explanation for Joseph's strength is this: the Lord was with him. You see that at the beginning and at the end of the chapter, the Lord was with Joseph through all the events of this chapter. God not only led Joseph into the temptation, but with the temptation God also made a way of escape. And what was that way of escape for Joseph? That way of escape was going to prison. Think about it from that point of view. Prison must have been a reprieve for Joseph from the onslaughts of Potiphar's wife's seductions. So God gave Joseph a way of escape, "Go to prison and be safe there. You've done well in this battle against this temptation." And then, you know, there's other things to further sanctify God's people.

God was Joseph's strength, and again, that's where we are in the Catechism, beloved. Where are we, what's the perspective for us? We know who we are as the redeemed blood-bought children of God. We've been delivered from our sin and misery. Jesus has shed his blood for us. He sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts. He's regenerated us. He's raised us to a new and glorious life. We've been brought into the church of Jesus Christ

and grafted as members into the church to enjoy the love of God and to live faithfully in this relationship of friendship with our God who is glorious. You are saints, beloved, holy and beloved of God, and the calling that comes to you is this: live out of Jesus Christ and show the Lord your thankfulness.

How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? That's what Joseph's thinking was. "I may be a slave in Potiphar's house, but I am no slave to sin. I have been set free." And so it is with you, child of God. You have been set free and Jesus is your unfailing strength. Live out of Jesus Christ. Pray more for God's grace and his Spirit and God will show you he is your strength and portion and he will show you, he will cause you to know that he is with you. And where we need accountability in our life, get that accountability. You are not by yourself in Egypt. You are in the midst of the church. God has given us friends, family and accountability. There is that help. Let us also be diligent to use that too and the blessings God has provided us in the midst of his church. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for giving us examples for our instruction, and we thank thee for the time we could spend looking at Joseph, and we thank thee for Jesus, the one through whom Joseph could live faithfully, and we thank thee for giving us that same Jesus to be our strength. And we pray, Father, give us the grace to live out of him, to give thee our praise in a life of holiness and devotion to thee. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.