

...Even if it means sacrificing everything

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Genesis 37
Preached On: Sunday, September 16, 2018

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You know, those words we just sang, it's easy to do when you're on the mountaintop of life, isn't it? It's easy to do when everything is going the way you planned, everything's working out just the way you scripted it, but what about when you're walking through those valleys of life? When you hear news you don't want to hear? You walk through journeys you don't want to walk through? You experience an environment that is less than favorable of how you would have planned it or scripted it out? Then that's when that song is more than words, it's the cry of your heart that, "God, you're still good. You're never going to forsake me. You're never going to let me down even if every fiber of my being hurts right now." You know, one of the great heroes of the Bible is a man by the name of Job. Everything was headed the wrong way and he said, "How should I curse God and die? He has been so good to me." He had lost his family. He had lost his fortune. He had lost everything. In just a moment, we're going to be challenged by the life of another man who finds himself in a very similar situation and he was able to say that God was good to him so let me challenge you today, you may not have the story of Job or even Joseph but you've got your story, you've got your scars, you've got your hurts, you've got your pains and very few of us are living the life that we scripted out for us, and so the challenge we have laid before us is that this wouldn't just be lyrics to a song, this would be the cry out of the valley of life, "God, you're never going to let me down. You are good."

Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time where we're challenged by your word, for some of us today maybe even for most of us, this is one of those days where we're going to determine do we really believe what we claim we do or do we just possess a faith of comfortable environment, Lord, help us whether our life looks the way we'd like it to or very contrary to, that our response to your word, our response to you today would be based on who you are and not the world that has surrounded us. Help us, O God, to hear your voice through your word today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you. Open your Bibles to the book of Genesis 39. As you turn to Genesis 39, today we continue if you're a guest or a visitor with us today, we're continuing just as a family of faith of walking through the Scriptures just one or

two chapters a day. Even though it's not the quickest of paces, I oftentimes have to remind myself in the children's book that the tortoise wins the race every time, just remember that, but as we go through it chapter, maybe two chapters a day just with the intent of maybe being more introspective than ever before walking through the Scriptures, you know, as we go through this journey together, we're going to have moments of providence. And by the way, if you're not familiar with that word providence, I know it's a big theological word, it just means basically that God's at work around you whether you're aware of it or not, and things are going to happen and there are going to be times as you walk through the Scriptures that something's going to happen in your life or something's going to be happening and you'll say, "You know, I never thought of that story or I never thought of that character in light of what I'm walking through," and that's just God's providence in your life as he's bringing you passages to light that you needed at that time and for that purpose. But every now and then, there are going to be some bigger, I mean hit you over the head with a 2x4 kind of providential moments, in other words, kind of the plan for our reading. We've mapped it out for years in advance and you and I, none of us have any idea of what's going to happen in the next six days, the next six weeks, the next six months, much less the next two and a half, three years, and there are going to be times where we're going to be reading through a passage of Scripture and we're going to look at the culture at large, we're going to look at the world that we find ourselves in and we're going to see the hand of God take us to passages and stories and characters that completely perfectly fit with the world we find ourselves in today and today is such the case.

In chapter 39 of the book of Genesis, we have a character by the name of Joseph who, in my opinion, could have been the original poster image of a slogan that has gone viral these last days. The statement goes a little something like this: believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything. It's gotten a lot of press. It's gotten a lot of attention these last few days but do you know what's interesting about that statement? I haven't had anybody say they didn't agree with the statement. There's nobody saying, "That's a dumb statement." There's nobody saying, "You know, I don't think that's accurate." In fact, nobody disagrees with the statement, it's everybody is disagreeing with who should represent the statement. Whose values? Whose life? Whose statements? Whose stands should represent that if you believe in something, you ought to be willing to sacrifice everything. Well, in spite of our contemporary culture, I think if we could go back thousands of years, I think today in Genesis 39 we find the perfect character in Scripture to emulate that statement for in just a moment we're going to read about a man by the name of Joseph who believed so strongly in his relationship with the Lord, he wasn't only willing, he allowed himself to sacrifice everything for that relationship.

So today in Genesis 39, we have a challenge before us all: what does it mean to sacrifice everything for whom we believe in? Beginning in verse 1 it says,

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, 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?

Now allow me today to give you kind of the front and the back story here. Joseph was born well in his father's age. He was the beloved of his father, the youngest at this time in his family. He was the one that received the coat of many colors. He was the one that his brothers were so jealous of and their jealousy raged with such an ambition that they contrived this plan to put him into a pit, to fake his death even to their dad with a coat with goat's blood on it, and then eventually out of this well or this pit, he is sold into slavery to the land of Egypt. Here is a young man who found himself at the bottom of a pit who is now in the pit-house of Egypt, but as you read the rest of the story, because Potiphar's wife is going to lie about what took place, he's going to find himself back in prison again. So we see an individual who believes so much in his relationship with the Lord that he was willing to sacrifice everything that he had so as not to sacrifice what meant most.

Let's begin. What was he willing to sacrifice? What was he willing to give up? What was he willing to put to the side of his life? The first thing is this: the pleasure of sin. Now I know some of you may struggle with that and say, "Why would you call it the pleasure of sin?" Because if sin wasn't pleasurable, we wouldn't do it. If sin wasn't fun, we wouldn't pay hundreds of dollars to be a part of it. In fact, one of the things we need to understand about sin is this: that in our flesh it is enjoyable, it is fun, it is pleasurable. That's why we're so attracted to it. And in this story, you see, I mean, just the stereotypical presentation of sin. Did you notice that Joseph did not have to go looking for it? It came to him. Let me give you some advice: you don't have to go find sin, it'll find you. And it came to him and every single day it knocked at his door and sin will knock at your door until one of two things happens: either A, you give in to the temptation, or you're willing to sacrifice something in exchange.

She came. She knocked. She continued to talk to him. The picture I get is with Samson and Delilah, that story where it says that Delilah nagged him to the point of death. Here's

the problem: Samson gave in, Joseph did not. He was not willing to go there which is interesting in our "YouTube world" that we live in. I don't know about you but it seems like everywhere we go there's a camera on all of us watching everything and hearing everything that we do. Notice in this story that all the men of the house were gone, the only people there were Potiphar's wife and Joseph. In his context, nobody would have ever known and nobody could have ever proved it. How many times have you fallen for that lie, "If I go down this path, I experience this sin, it won't affect anything"? It affects everything and he was willing to sacrifice the pleasure of sin. He said, "There's something more important in life than a night with Potiphar's wife. There's something more important in life than going down this path that may be pleasurable for a few moments but will have a lasting negative impact on my life."

The second thing you see that he was willing to sacrifice is he was willing to sacrifice the prosperity of this world. Now think about this for a moment: even though he was sold by the hand of the Ishmaelites into this Egyptian's home, according to what we just read, it said that he was over everything that Potiphar had. In fact, the only thing he did not have privilege to was his wife. Doesn't that sound like the garden of Eden? In the garden of Eden, the Lord said, "Hey, it's all yours but that one tree." Potiphar said, "It's all yours but her." That means he had access to all the food he could ever eat. He had access to all the resources he could ever spend. He had access to all the luxuries of life. Let me put this in our context today: how many times do we fall into the trap of sin or the temptation of sin because we in our own mind, we don't want to sacrifice our reputation or how others perceive us or what they think about us, and yet he was willing to give all of that up. Not only the pleasures of sin but the prosperity that this world offers him. By the way, if you haven't noticed, all that the world offers is very very fleeting. It's here today and it's gone tomorrow.

But we see Joseph, this example to us, that he was willing to sacrifice something for what he believed, the pleasures of sin, the prosperity of this world, but we also see two things he was not willing to sacrifice. I want you to go back to verse 9 and I want you to see this statement that Joseph makes, "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?" Two things that Joseph was not willing to sacrifice: first and foremost, he was not willing to sacrifice his relationship with God. He said, "How can I do this wickedness? How can I sin against God?" Notice his first response here is not, "How can I enjoy this?" It was, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, this will change everything with my relationship with the Lord himself." Very much contrary to a man who marvelous by all other imaginations but a man by the name of King David. I mean, King David is this man who Psalms 1:10 says his throne will be forever. His kingdom stretched further than any other monarch in Israel's history but in 2 Samuel 11, King David in the season that kings go out to war, it says he stayed home and when he stayed home, he couldn't sleep one night so he goes out on the hillside and there in the moonlight was a young Hittite woman by the name of Bathsheba, married to another man, the leader of his army, nonetheless. What did David say in that night? He turned to his guards and said, "Bring her to me." And in the moment of the enjoyment of the

pleasure of sin, not only was fornication that took place, not only was a child conceived, but eventually a husband would be murdered.

I want you to notice the difference between David and Joseph. What did Joseph say? "How can I do this against God?" What did David say? "How can I enjoy this for the moment?" Can I give you some wisdom today? Whenever temptation presents itself to you, whenever the world says, "You've got to try this," take a step back and say, "Hey, what will this do to my relationship with God?" Not how will this feel or what will this do for me or how can I get material possessions or whatever it may be. Joseph had the wherewithal to say, "How is this going to affect my relationship to God?" David didn't ask that question and he got in a world of hurt and trouble.

But the second thing is he wasn't willing to sacrifice his relationship with other people. Notice in this context of the story, it says that Potiphar respected him. He had found favor in his eyes and it says later when he goes into prison, that even the prison guard, he was favored in his eyes. In fact, it says that the Egyptian's house was blessed not because of Potiphar but because of Joseph. You know, the Bible says in Luke 2:52, that Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man, and what we see in Joseph's life is not only was he not willing to sacrifice his relationship with the Lord, he was not willing – hear me clearly – he was not willing to sacrifice his testimony.

You know, 1 John 1:9 says, "If we sin, let us confess our sins for God is faithful and just to forgive us." You do realize there's a huge difference between forgiveness and restoration? A huge difference because the Lord says, "I'll forgive you of whatever," but the world may never forget, and let me ask you: how many times have you seen somebody's testimony ruined because of a night of pleasure? How many times have you seen somebody's testimony ruined because one picture that was posted on social media? You see, what he realized was his impact, his influence made all the difference in the world. He was not willing to sacrifice not only his relationship with God but how that relationship impacted other people.

You know, one of my heroes of the faith is a man by the name of Watchman Nee. Watchman Nee died a martyr's death in 1972 in a mainland China prison. He was a believer for many many years, in fact, many people historically look at his life and his ministry and so influential as kind of the undercurrents of the Christian movement even among communists countries for many many many years, and a lot of the, I guess the work that he laid the groundwork years ago, oftentimes is coming to fruition today. But the reason I share that with you is he spent the last many years of his life in prison and as you look at Watchman Nee's prison experience, it's a most unique one. He was put in solitary confinement because, I mean, he was a traitor to the country because of his Christian belief. He was put in solitary confinement, his testimony was so great that as they spent just a few moments every day passing food back and forth, he would lead one of the guards to the Lord. Once he led one of the guards to the Lord, then they would have him come out of his cell and they would ask him to do Bible studies and such, but what's interesting is you begin to study his life, that as he was, shall we say, let loose in the inner sanctum of the prison where he was allowed to move and have mobility, that

when the Bible study was over or when the time of encouraging somebody with the word was done, he always returned to his cell because he never wanted his testimony compromised. He never wanted anybody to think that somehow he was taking advantage of a friendship or a relationship. He was so guarded by what his testimony could be tainted by that we're still using him as an illustration today.

You know, one of my favorite stories regarding testimonies involves one whom we know as Billy Graham who just recently passed away. Years and years ago as he was doing one of his citywide crusades, he just had a rule that he didn't want a television set in his hotel room. Not the fact that there's anything wrong with watching a ballgame, he just wanted to be focused. So as he went to this one crusade, he told them he didn't want any television service. They said, "No problem, Dr. Graham. We'll take care of you." So he got into his room and he noticed there was a tv set. He called down to the front desk and he said, "You do understand that I've requested there be no tv in my room. I don't want to be distracted. I've got important work to do this week." They said, "Oh, don't worry, Dr. Graham, we've cut it off at the front desk. It doesn't even work." To which he aptly responded, "What I'm about to do, do not charge it to my association, charge it to my personal credit card." He took the tv, ripped it out of the wall and threw it in the hallway. Why? Because he did not want to chance anything infecting or messing up his testimony not only to the Lord but to those who are around him.

And Joseph wasn't willing to do it, he wasn't willing to sacrifice his relationship with God, he wasn't willing to sacrifice his relationship to others in the form of his testimony. What a challenge that if we truly say we believe, what are we willing to sacrifice and what are we willing not to?

But as we kind of continue in this message, one of the things I want you to understand is Joseph is not only a great model for you and I, he's a beautiful perfect picture of Jesus Christ. Now he's what we call a type. Now I want to be real clear, I'm just going to take a step back for a moment. When we say he's a type, Moses was a type, David was a type, Joseph, all these individuals had aspects of their life that picture or foreshadow who Jesus Christ would be, but let me give you some warning: don't interpret Jesus through the type. In other words, Joseph was the beloved of his father, Jesus was the only begotten Son. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, Jesus could do no great work in his own country. Joseph was lied about what he did just like at the trial of Jesus the night before his crucifixion. And Joseph, if you continue to read the story, was willing to redeem his brothers even though they falsely condemned him, just as Jesus is willing to do for us.

So Joseph is a type of, he's a picture of Jesus, so let's look at Jesus Christ in light of this story. What was Jesus Christ willing to sacrifice on our behalf? The first thing was this: he was willing to sacrifice the pleasures of sin. You say, "What do you mean, the pleasures of sin?" Every time you turn around in the Gospel story it says that somebody was tempting him, someone was encouraging him to become famous or have a reputation or to gain great gain and he continued to say no to the temptation. In fact, in Matthew 4, the devil shows up and says, "Hey, Jesus, you can have all the kingdoms of the world. They're yours." Can we just agree that's a whole lot more than one night with Potiphar's

wife? And Jesus says, "Get behind me, for it is written." He was not willing to enjoy the pleasures of sin.

He also was willing to sacrifice what we might call the prosperity of the world. In fact, the Bible says in Philippians 2, he did not think it strange to be equal with God but was willing to be robed with that of a servant. Do you realize Jesus gave up the glories of heaven for the dirt and the dust of this world? He was willing to come and wash our feet even when John the Baptist said that we were not worthy to tie his shoes.

So Jesus sacrificed the opportunity, the pleasures of sin as well as the prosperity that all the universe can give, but I think most importantly just like Joseph, what was Jesus not willing to sacrifice? First and foremost, he was not willing to sacrifice his relationship with the Father. In fact, in John 17, the garden of Gethsemane, the night before his crucifixion he says, "Father, I've done everything you've asked me to do." The parallel passage is in Matthew 26 and we know this somewhat famously because three times Jesus said this statement, "Not my will but yours." In other words Jesus said, "Hey, I am not willing to sacrifice the plan that we have. I'm not willing to sacrifice the opportunity of redemption. I'm not willing to sacrifice this."

But most importantly for you and I today, aren't you grateful that Jesus Christ wasn't willing to sacrifice his relationship with you? You do realize that the only way out of this sin trap, the only way out of the mess that we've made is through the perfect blood sacrifice. That's it. We can't be good enough. We can't get rich enough. We can't put enough trophies on the shelf to fix this problem. We needed a perfect sacrifice and Jesus was willing to do it. In fact, in Hebrews 12, it says for the joy that was set before him. Aren't you grateful today that Jesus Christ wasn't willing to sacrifice his relationship with you? Aren't you grateful that he was willing to live the life he lived and die the death he did and to raise from the dead so you can be forgiven and you can be saved?

So in light of that information, how dare we say, "God, it doesn't matter what I do, I just want to enjoy this life." You see, if we claim we believe in Jesus, ought we not be willing to sacrifice everything? Joseph modeled it and Jesus emulated it, you and I have been called to it.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that individual today, maybe you're that person that for some reason today the proverbial light bulb just, it just turned on and you realized your need for Jesus Christ. Maybe today's the day you realize that you're the problem and that he's the answer. I've got great news for you, the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That means it doesn't matter where you've been, what you've done, who you've done it with, or how many times. It says whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Isaiah 59 says that the Lord's arm is not shortened that he cannot save and he cannot forgive. There is nobody here who somehow, some way has gone beyond the ability of being saved and yet today we need to call out to him. It says whoever calls on him will be saved. Let me just encourage you if you're that person today, just to have a conversation with God. Just call out to him. You don't have to have this conversation out loud, in fact, you don't even

have to say the same words that I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to admit that I'm the problem but I believe that Jesus Christ is the answer. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to pay the price for my sins on Calvary and that three days later he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. And God, today I'm just going to be honest, I don't have all the answers to the problems of life but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem and so in the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if that's the conversation you had with the Lord today, we'd love to have a conversation with you. We just want to celebrate what the Lord's doing in your life. Or maybe today you're that individual who had that conversation with the Lord years ago, in fact, there may be some of you that say, "I had that conversation with the Lord decades ago." Let me ask you a very simple yet profound question: when it comes to the Jesus you believe in, are you sacrificing the world for his behalf or are you sacrificing him for the world's behalf?

Lord, as we come to this time, thank you that no matter where we've been or what we've done, you are a God of second chances. You are a God of reconciliation. You are a God of redemption. You are a God of forgiveness. You're a God of salvation. So God, I pray today that we would not trust in what the world says or promises but in your word and in you alone. Help us, O God, just to respond appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team lead us. Any and all decisions, I'll be right here at the front.