

## “Joseph: Lose Materialism”

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bible to two places; the first is the Book of Genesis, chapter 37, the first book of the Old Testament and the first book of the Bible. The second place is actually the first book of the New Testament, the book of Matthew, chapter 6. If you are a first time guest or visitor with us, we continue on a journey through the Old Testament going chronologically through some of the most famous characters in all of the Bible; from Adam and Eve, to Job, to Abraham, to Esau. And today we come to one of the most famous, a man by the name of Joseph. We will study in future days David, Solomon, Esther, Ruth and some of the great men and women of the Old Testament.

The whole purpose of this fall is to look at the concept of “being a loser.” I understand in our world today that is not the greatest affirmation you can give somebody – that you need to be a loser. But what we recognize from God’s Word this fall is that God has a purpose and He has a plan for our lives. And He has desires for our lives and what He wants us to look like, be like, act like and speak like. And oftentimes we have things that are keeping us from being all that He desires us to be. Sometimes, we need to lose self-reliance. Sometimes, like today, we need to lose materialism.

And today is an exciting day for me because oftentimes the characters we’re studying give us a negative example, almost as if do not be like them. If you were here last week with the character of Esau, it was an example of what not to do and what attitude not to have. Today is one of the great ones. This is one of the great characters of the Bible, a man by the name of Joseph who is going to model for us what happens in our lives, how does God bless us? And a word we’re going to use today is how does God prosper us and we’re going to speak to what the Biblical definition of that word is when we are who He calls us to be and when we do what He calls us to do.

In Genesis, chapter 37 we begin the story of a man by the name of Joseph. As we go through his life, we're going to see that there are different defining areas, different dilemmas and decisions. But I want you to hang in there with me because when we get to the end of his life what we're going to see is that Joseph had something that almost everybody, if not everybody I've ever spoken to, wants to possess but most people have no idea of how to have it. It is the idea of having a legacy; a life that goes beyond our physical years and a life that goes beyond even our own immediate family, a life that truly makes a difference. And if there is one character in the Old Testament who gives us an example of what that looks like, it is the person of Joseph.

In chapter 37 we pick up with the first concept that I want to address this morning. By the way, we're going to cover a lot of chapters, chapters 37 and 39, so we're not going to just read one huge portion of scripture; we're actually going to go into the story. But the first thing we need to understand about who Joseph was and what made him who he became with God's grace and provision is that he was a man who lived a very defined life. And what I mean by that is because of what we are about to address, there are certain things that define him for who he was and who he is as an illustration to us. The first thing we need to realize about his life, and this is kind of a background to comprehend his struggle that we'll deal with in chapter 39, is that he was his dad's favorite child.

Now that is one of the hardest questions that people ask anybody who have multiple children. And I can't stand it because people will come up and ask me, "Which one of your children is your favorite?" You can't answer that. It's like asking you, "Which one of your grandchildren is your favorite?" But here we have a definitive answer beginning in Genesis 37:1. By the way, Jacob, who becomes Israel, is the father of the twelve tribes.

"1And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. 2These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being

seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. 3Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, (there it is in black and white) because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors."

Why was he his dad's favorite? He actually was not the youngest in the family; there is another child by the name of Benjamin who is the youngest. We know him best because of the twelve tribes of Israel. It was the tribe of Benjamin that the Apostle Paul was actually descended from and he brags about that in his testimony. But here is the father of the twelve tribes.

Let me give you a little history. There is Father Abraham whom we studied a couple of weeks ago, who goes to a land that he knows not. Abraham has two sons. He has Isaac, the son of promise, but first he had Ishmael and we're going to deal with that in just a moment. After Isaac comes Jacob or Israel. So when we speak of the twelve tribes (who by the way, Joseph is not one of the twelve tribes but he actually becomes one of the twelve tribes in the Book of Revelation, chapter 7 that we studied this summer), we are dealing with the great-grandchild of Father Abraham. Now that's a big deal. This is the fourth generation, but it's a bigger deal than that because it said he is his father's favorite, "He was the son of his old age." Notice the text said he was about seventeen years of age. To the best of our recollection and don't panic about this, most likely, Israel or Jacob was about 91 years old when Joseph was conceived. He is about 108 years old when this story takes place.

More importantly than that, why else is he his dad's favorite? Notice it says he goes out and he tattles on his older brothers; he gives Jacob the evil report. Chapter 38 is all about his brother by the name of Judah. I know they're the twelve tribes and I realize they're the descendants of Abraham, but if you will just study your Old Testament, those guys were up to no good most of the time and Joseph was the goody-two-shoes. He was the one who always did what he was supposed to do, and when

you're the only one doing what you're supposed to do, your siblings don't like you at all which is the point we're going to get to in a moment.

But it says that Jacob made him a coat of many colors. I know there has been a Broadway show based on this whole concept but what we see there is his dad, rather than paying attention to the first-born or even the second-born, goes all the way down to a young teenager by the name of Joseph. And Jacob says this is the one I'm going to lavish my love on, this is the one I'm going to lavish my attention on and even my financial resources on, this is my beloved.

When that is how your dad sees you, let me tell you how your brothers see you. He was his dad's favorite but second of all, he was feared by his brothers. Why? Because he told his dad everything they were up to. They feared the fact that he was the connoisseur of information; they feared the fact that if their dad had to choose, he would choose Joseph. They feared the fact that they knew if anybody was going to have access to the financial resources it was going to be Joseph.

And that caused them to have a unique response to him. Notice in verse 4: "4And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. 5And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. 6And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: 7For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obedience to my sheaf. 8And his brethren said to him, Shall thou indeed reign over us? or shall thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words." In four verses they are hating him three times. They do not like their little brother. Look in verse 11. "11And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying."

Go on down to verse 18. "18And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him." Their fear of Joseph was so great; they were so jealous and envious and

hated him so much that they came up with a plot that only older brothers can come up with. “Let’s sell him into slavery but make Dad think he’s dead.” In other words, let’s not actually commit the crime but let our Dad think it happened. But they put him in a pit literally for dead, and according to verse 27, they come across a bunch of Ishmaelites.

Now if you don’t pick up the connotation there, just go home and watch the news tonight: it is the descendants of Isaac and the descendants of Ishmael that are still fighting in the Middle East today. That’s the battle between the Jewish people and the Arab people, that’s how we collectively know them.

Do you realize we’re only three generations into that battle here? These are cousins, second and third cousins and I have a funny feeling that they did not like each other. So let’s tell Dad he’s dead but let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites. And their fear was so great they sold him to the Ishmaelites, their enemies, their cousins whom they couldn’t stand. He is brought out of the pit and he is sold via the Midianites into Egypt to a man by the name of Potiphar. And that is how chapter 37 ends. He is in Egypt, the enemy of Israel, in the King’s palace, sold by his own brothers, yet he is still his dad’s favorite.

He’s his dad’s favorite. He’s feared by his brothers. But there’s this last thing we have to understand to truly grasp who Joseph was. He was favored by God. To understand that, you’ve got to go over to chapter 39. He’s in Potiphar’s house; he’s been sold into slavery. His dad thinks he is dead; his brothers have no clue where he is and they’re scared, to be honest with you.

Genesis 39:1-3. “1And 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 Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither. 2And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. 3And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.”

When I say that he was favored of God, he had the favor of God in his life. There are two things he possessed in chapter 39 that truly show that we have the favor of God in our lives. The first one is this: it says very clearly that he was prosperous. Now let me make clear what that means. It does not mean what is oftentimes preached from pulpits all across America and unfortunately all around the world. We have equated today prosperity with access to wealth and riches. We've called it the "prosperity gospel." Let me redefine it: it's not the prosperity gospel; it's actually the "materialism gospel." What that means is I'm going to do whatever I can to get as much I can. And they will argue and say but doesn't it say he was a prosperous man? After all, he was in the bottom of a well and now he's in the captain of the guard's house. In Egypt he has a palace at his disposal as we will see in a moment. He is basically number two in charge; he has access to the bank accounts and to everything. This is good.

But let me define prosperity for you because as we will see in just a moment, there is an incident with Potiphar's wife. He is accused of a crime he did not do. He finds himself in prison: the bottom of a dungeon, dirty clothes, lack-luster food, no money, no resources, and nothing fancy. Look in verse 23. "23The 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." Do you realize that according to the Bible prosperity has nothing to do with the amount of money in your bank account? It has everything to do with the hand of God having favoritism with you as an individual.

And what I want you to hear from the very beginning today is when we talk about this battle of materialism and losing materialism and looking to Joseph as an example that is the antithesis to that, the decision we have to make is are we going to be consumers or are we going to be people of character? And what we find out with the life of Joseph is that prosperity means we have the favor of God in our lives and that we have the character of God in our lives. He was a prospered man and it had nothing to do with finances.

But also, he was a privileged man. He was sold as a slave in verse 1; in verse 2 he's the assistant to the master of the house. How did his resume work that up? His resume had nothing to do with that; his education had nothing to do with that; his background had nothing to do with that. All he was was a rival country's slave. In other words, when God's favor is upon us, when His hand is upon us He prospers us and that has nothing to do directly with finances and He privileges us which means He allows things to occur in our lives that you cannot orchestrate with your own gifts and/or abilities. And that's the difference between prosperity and materialism. Materialism is conniving or conspiring our own means to get more when the favor of God is allowing God to have total control of our lives. That's the background of who Joseph is and was in this story.

That leads us to the second point: the dilemma or the decision that Joseph had to make in relationship to materialism. Many of you are familiar with the story we are about to allude to. Potiphar's wife conspires. She has a certain liking to Joseph. She likes what he looks like; she likes what he smells like; she likes what he sounds like. She literally goes day by day trying to pursue him to have an intimate relationship with him and he continues to say no. Why? He's prospered of God; he's a man of character. He does not need to consume that which is not his. So finally she forces herself upon him and he makes the decision not to concede. It's a story of infidelity; it's a story of physical intimacy; it's a story of righteousness and godliness.

You may be saying how is this a story about stuff? How is this a story about materialism? Let me share with you before we get to the decisions he made. When he was propositioned by Potiphar's wife, he had access to the finances, he had access to the palace, he had everything at his beck and call. Had he conceded to her wishes, he could have kept it but because he chose to go against her wishes he lost it. Yes, it is about godliness; yes, it is about character; yes, it is about righteousness and infidelity. But it's also a story of a man having to make a decision between the character of God in his life and just having stuff in his life. And Joseph decided it was more

important to have the character of God than to consume the stuff of this world.

Picking up in verse 7 it says, “7And it came to pass after these things, that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. 8But he refused, and said unto his master’s wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand; 9There is none greater in this house than I; neither has 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? 10And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her. 11And 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. 12And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out. 13And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, 14That she called unto the men of her house, and spoke unto them, saying, See, he has 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:”

I realize there are all kinds of dynamics here but just in the issue of a man who possessed everything, he said it wasn’t worth it to have it if he was not a man of godliness. In relationship to materialism, there are three things I think Joseph demonstrates for us. The first one is the lure of materialism. Just like a fishing lure, the fact that it is out there and it presents itself to us gradually makes it more enticing and more tempting.

You notice in the beginning of the story he catches her fancy; she’s looking at him and talking to him. But later on in the story it says in verse 10 day by day. In other words, materialism starts innocently. It starts with something that’s needed, something that’s desired, something that’s wanted. And what happens in materialism is we don’t realize that we’ve gotten into the trap of materialism until it’s already got us. In fact in verse 12, what happened day by day, in just a few words and a few actions, we find



ourselves in a situation where an incredible choice has got to be made.

I want to demonstrate to you an example or an illustration something that seems a little backward but we'll get to the point in just a moment. Before I lived in the state of Georgia, I had a friend in another state who I did not know was a lost man. I did not know him before he came to know Jesus but based on his testimony and based on what his friends told me, he was an unbelievably ruthless, vile, mean, horrible man. He was in capital investments; his job was to raise a lot of money. He was one of those guys that when you watch television and they say, "Well, the investors say . . .," he was one of those guys, whoever "they" are. So he was a very wealthy, very rich, very powerful man.

But in his late thirties, early forties, somewhere in that time period, he came to know Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. He realized that he was a sinner; he realized that he needed to be forgiven; he realized he needed salvation. When he got saved, that fish that was so dirty started getting cleaned up. And he noticed there were some things in his life, like his attitude and his relationships that needed to change, and one of those things was his attitude toward stuff. Now remember, this was a very wealthy man.

And one of my favorite conversations I've had with anybody in my life because I was just so bum-fuddled by it was this. The day I had a conversation with him, he said, "Jeff, you're not going to believe what God is doing in my life! He's doing an unbelievable work! He's molding me and shaping me to become more like Him!" I said, "How do you know that?" He said, "I traded in my Ferrari for a Porsche." Okay! I'm thinking so you gave up the \$250,000 to \$300,000 car for the \$100,000 to \$150,000 car. In my mind, I couldn't relate to either one; but in his world - what a step, what a difference.

A couple of years later, we were having a conversation. He was gleaming and he said, "Jeff, you're not going to believe what God is doing in my life, it's incredible!" I asked, "What is it?" He said, "I traded the Porsche for a Lexus!" Okay! Once again, seeing how he viewed the stuff in his life in

opposition to his relationship with God. By the time I left the state of Texas, he was driving a Ford Expedition. From Ferrari to Expedition; it was a process.

I know you hear that story and think how does that relate to us? We don't have special Ferrari parking out in the church parking lot! Let me ask you an honest, sincere question. How many of you are driving Ford Expeditions and all you want is the Lexus? How many of you are driving a Lexus and all you want is the Porsche? How many of you have the Porsche and want the Ferrari? We can laugh at that guy's story but we find ourselves getting caught in the lure because whatever we have is not enough. We've got to have something else; "if I only possess this." By the way, those of you who know me, I am not against nice cars - I like nice cars! There's nothing wrong with a nice car; there's nothing wrong with a nice house; there's nothing wrong with nice stuff. It's the attitude toward that. Let me ask you how many of us are just wanting more of "something," whatever that "something" may be. That's the lure of materialism.

But it doesn't just lure, there is actually a lie of materialism. In this passage of scripture, it says in verse 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." Now he is at a very crucial point in his life; he has a decision to make. He either "lies with her" and keeps all his stuff and nobody finds out, but he loses his godliness, his character, his integrity; or he flees. Let me tell you the lie of materialism: that you can have both. The lie of materialism is that you can have one foot in godliness and one foot in worldliness; the lie of materialism is that you can have both.

I want to share with you a passage from the mouth of Jesus in Matthew, chapter 6. This is in the famous Sermon of the Mount and He is giving us a perspective of material items, a perspective of "stuff" in our lives. Matthew 6 beginning in verse 19. "19Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,

where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Now look at verse 24. “No man can serve two masters: (There’s the lie of materialism: “You can do it. If there was anybody who could pull off this dance, it’s you.”), for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” How much clearer do we have to have it from the mouth of Jesus? Jesus said you just cannot do this, it is impossible.

This is the lie of materialism and I’ve got a great example for you. A little over ten years ago, my wife and I began Baby Step 2. For those of you who went through Project Freedom, that is the part where we eliminate consumer credit debt in our lives. We started with the credit cards. And we were eliminating the credit cards and still had some other things to get rid of but we were knocking it out. This was in our “DINK” days: double income, no kids.

I’ll never forget when we paid off our last credit card. I sent them a check; it was in our opinion a very large sum of money. I was thinking we’ve got no more credit card debt; this is great – we’re out from under this beast! It wasn’t a week later when I got a call from the credit card company. “Sir, did you realize that you paid off your entire balance?” I said, “Yes, I’m aware of that.” She said, “With all of our current proposals and offers, why would you not want to have a line of credit with us?” And I began to explain to her that we were getting out of debt; that we weren’t going to play this game anymore. The lady on the phone did not like my perspective. Listen to what her offer was; this is what she said to me. “How about we send back the check and give you that amount of credit for six months, no interest?” In other words, play both games. I said, “Ma’am, I hate to inform you but we’ve made a decision in our lives and we’re just not going to go there.” Then she said some very colorful words to me that I will not repeat in a church service!

But is that not the lie of materialism: that we can do both? I’m going to tell you something though: there is a liability to materialism

because unlike other things you've got to make a hard decision. You've got to make that decision like Joseph did: "I'm out of this."

In verse 12 it said that she took his garment. Let me give you a picture of what this really looks like. Remember Joseph was seventeen when he was caught in slavery. We don't know how much time has passed but he is probably an older teenager or maybe in his early twenties. He is in the best shape of his life; he is the second in command of guard's house. This man is young; he is strong. And this woman most likely was not and let me tell you why. In the Middle East in those days and even in some respect today, a woman of honor, wealth, prestige for lack of better terms was a little more on the plump side because she had other people to wash her clothes, other people to do her errands, she did not have to lift a finger. And one of the privileges of being wealthy in those days was she had the opportunity to eat the best food, never exercise it off and get really large. Why is that significant? It says that she literally took his clothes off his body. How did she pull that off? There are only two choices: either she pinned him up against a wall or tackled him from behind on the floor! I don't know which it was but remember it said he did everything he could to get away from her. I don't know what she did but whatever it was, it was quick, it was slick and it reminded me of a middle linebacker.

He had to make a stark decision at that point: either go forward or retreat. And it says he left naked. When you leave materialism, when you allow materialism to be out of your life, it doesn't mean you sell everything you've got but your attitude is "God, it's all yours. I don't need it anymore. I give it over to You."

That leads us to our final point about Joseph. Yes, he had a very determined life. Yes, he had a decision to make. Yes, he had a dilemma. But he had a destiny and it's a destiny of legacy. That's one of those key word in our society that I think everybody is gravitating toward: I want to have a legacy, I want it to go beyond just who I am. What was the legacy that Joseph had?

We're about to go past chapter 39 now. By the way, Joseph goes all the way to the end of the Book of Genesis, and in fact he is referenced all the way through the Bible. But the first thing about his legacy, his destiny is this: it was one of significance; he's one of the most significant characters in all the Bible. Remember the dream he had about his brothers? He gets sold into Potiphar's house; he becomes basically number two in the kingdom after he gets out of prison. When he becomes number two in the kingdom he has a dream from God that correlates with this other thing: we're going to have a drought and there's not going to be any food. So we need to store up food for the next six years because in the seventh year we're not going to have any food. It was at that time when all the world was in desperate need of food, the Egyptians had food and his brothers, the twelve tribes, come all the way from Israel begging the foreign country of Egypt, "Can you give us some food?" If you're not familiar with the story, who was it that had the ability to say yes or no? It was Joseph.

If it had not been for Joseph and his significant life, the twelve tribes of Israel would have died out. They would have died of starvation. The Israelites as we know today might have literally gone into extinction. What made him a man of significance? Was it because he had gotten so much and consumed so much stuff? No, let me tell you what made him significant. He had gotten to a point in his life where he realized he needed to give to those who didn't. Significance isn't what we get; it's what we're able to give. And he saw that these people are hurting, these people have made bad decisions, these people are my brothers and I'm going to help them. He not only gave to the Egyptians, he gave to the Jewish people. He had an entire life that is marked by this one quality: he gave. That's a very significant legacy.

But his legacy goes even beyond just significance; he has a very storied legacy. What I mean by storied is that it went beyond just his generation; it went beyond just his brothers. In fact, it went for hundreds and hundreds of years. And I think down deep every one of us wants to make an impact. I think down deep every one of us wants a life that long after we're gone, long

after your funeral service you want to be talked about, spoken about and to make an impact and a difference. The first step of significant life is a life not of just getting but of giving. The second is a storied life. The Bible records that when the Israelites went into slavery, into Egypt, that there arose a Pharaoh that “knew not Joseph.” For multiple Pharaohs they did not enslave the Jewish people because it was Joseph who saved us, Joseph who provided for us, Joseph who gave to us. He was one of “them” but do not hurt “them.”

But a Pharaoh rose up who did not know Joseph and the Bible says for four hundred years the Israelites were enslaved to the Egyptians. Then a man rose up who we are going to study next week; a man by the name of Moses, taken out of the water, and crosses the Red Sea with the Israelites. Do you know that when they crossed the Red Sea, when they came out of captivity, after the plagues, after the Passover and all those famous events, I don't know about you but I would be wanting to get out of town as quickly as possible. After all, the Egyptians are running after you; they've got chariots and weapons and you don't. Do you know what they took with them across the Red Sea? The bones of Joseph; they said we cannot go into freedom without his bones. Hundreds of years earlier his life had made such an impact that generations later they said our prosperity, our privilege is because of this man's significance. That is a storied legacy.

You know what materialism teaches you? It's all about the here and now: what can I get now, what can I consume now, what can I do now so as to fulfill this thing called life? The antithesis in Joseph's life was what can I do to make a difference now and to make a difference later? But it wasn't just a legacy that was significant and storied. It was a legacy that had to do with salvation.

Joseph is a unique character in the Old Testament. Over 150 things in his life are in direct parallel to the person of Jesus Christ. He was the beloved of his father; Jesus was the beloved of our Heavenly Father. He was hated by his brethren; Jesus was hated by His brethren. He was left to die; Jesus was put on a cross. Joseph redeemed and bought his

brothers back; Jesus redeems us and buys us back. It's an amazing story. Throughout the life of Joseph you can see this picture of who Jesus is in our lives when we allow Him to be our Savior. Why is that so important? When we reject materialism, when we say, "Okay God, everything is Yours, it's not all about what I get," not only do we make a big difference now, not only do we get to make a huge difference for generations to come, but we actually picture Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world.

Let me tell you what the world's motto is right now: "he who dies with the most toys wins." If you do not know the antithesis to that it is he who dies with the most toys still dies. The question is as God has prospered you and privileged you, whatever that may look like, what is your attitude toward that? As I mentioned earlier, it doesn't matter what car you're driving – what are you looking for? It doesn't matter what you're living in – what are you looking for? It doesn't matter what you're wearing – what are you looking for? The difference with Joseph is that it wasn't about what else he could have; it was what else could he give? One of the most storied stories in the Old Testament comes from his life. I don't know about you but that's a life that I would like to be spoken of generations from now. And the way that occurs is we've got to lose materialism because as Jesus told us in Matthew, chapter 6, eventually moths eat it and rust wears it away. Let's pray.