

Genesis 39: 1-23; “Joseph Overcoming Temptations”, Sermon # 100 in the series – “Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 22nd, 2019, in the Morning Worship Service.

The lesson that we want to learn from Joseph in this passage is that when we are undergoing our greatest trials that God can still be spiritually prospering us in His sight, even so. Even though Joseph had been taken captive into Egypt, and even though he did not have the influences of any other godly person with him, and even though he did not have any book of the Scriptures to direct him, still the Lord was with him in the most difficult of temptations, to watch over him, and to work all things together for his good.

God did this in order to fulfill His greater purpose in Joseph’s life; to make Joseph a holy man of God, and to prepare him to be the leader of a nation. So the question that we want to ask at this hour is this. In what ways was the Lord with Joseph so that he prospered in everything that he did? Because, even though Joseph was in extremely difficult circumstances, we find that the Lord was with him in certain, very definite ways. Let me give you the 4 ways that I see, that the Lord made Joseph to prosper in all that he did.

1st of all – The Lord was with Joseph in all of his work in Potiphar’s house.

(verses 1-6a)

I think that when we first hear of Joseph’s successes in business matters and his strength in overcoming temptations, that we conclude that this was simply a matter of his being determined to do what was right. And to some extent this certainly was true. He was industrious, and he was resourceful, and God will bless such personal efforts. And, it was no doubt true that the Lord rewarded Joseph’s pursuit of personal righteousness with many blessings because of his faithfulness. But we must ask ourselves, where did his desire to be faithful come from? I would assert to you that it came to Him by the grace of the Lord working in his heart.

You should understand that the greater thing at work here was not Joseph’s faithfulness to God, although his faithfulness certainly is to be commended. But ultimately it was God’s faithfulness to Joseph that led him to want to be faithful to God in everything that he did. Let me demonstrate this to you. God was intending to make Joseph an exalted ruler over many people, and He knew that for Joseph to become a good and godly leader, He must bring him through many trials and testings of his faith to build his faith and to perfect his faith, in order that he might come to have proven character.

In this holy process of sanctifying Joseph, God knew that He must prove His sufficiency to him. It was His purpose to be the strength of Joseph’s heart, so that his faith would not fail, during his time in this new Egyptian culture, and in the lonely position that he was in, so far from home. Indeed, you should note that the reason that Joseph was faithful, the reason that he took holy initiative, was all because God was working in him and with him. This is true in our day as well, for the Bible tells us that, “it is God who is at work in you, both to will, and to do, according to His good pleasure.” This was what enabled Joseph to “work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.”

It was true that Joseph was industrious and diligent, and that he was a young man using godly principles. Proverbs 28: 20 says – “A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.” Joseph was indeed on the lookout to see how he could help his master in the running the household, and he was a man who was being faithful in little things; the details of how he could better help his master’s household to prosper. But it was much more than this, and we should never forget it. We need to take notice of the fact that it was the Lord who had Potiphar purchase Joseph, in the first place, to be his slave.

And then notice as well that it was the Lord who revealed to Potiphar the fact that He was with Joseph. (verse 3) “And his master saw that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord

made all that he did to prosper in his hand.” The Lord did these wonderful things for Joseph in order to fulfill his purpose in regard to the important things that He would bring about, in Joseph’s future exaltation. But Joseph knew nothing of this at that time. He was simply faithful with everything that was set before him when he was in the lowest station. Joseph was faithful because the Lord was showing him that “before honor comes humility”. (Proverbs 15: 33) The first part of that verse says, “The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom.”

God was instructing Joseph’s heart as a disciple. He had no book of the Scriptures to consult. But I am sure that he consulted God in prayer, and he cried to God for wisdom. And so the reason that Joseph prospered was because God’s grace was at work in him, making him satisfied to look out for the interests of his master because he knew that this would be pleasing to God. God gave Joseph this understanding of heart and mind, to look at his position of servitude in this holy way. Let me ask if you have learned this lesson in the presence of your Master, Jesus Christ? Are you content to serve Him, by learning to serve others whether it is your boss at work, or learning to be a servant in your family, or in the church?

Are you seeking for God’s glory and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom in your heart, first? Do you want others to know how powerful and satisfying His grace really is? This is what it means for the Lord to be with you. When the Lord is with you, true, real, and tangible success comes. This does not necessarily mean that you will become rich, but rather it means that the interests of God, and everyone you work for, and associate with, will profit from what you do. Are you interested in being rich toward God, or rich toward yourself? Proverbs 20, verse 6 says, “Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?”

Success in the Christian life does not mean an absence of hardship, or difficulty, or that we will always be surrounded by Christian friends. It does not necessarily mean that we will be popular. But it does mean that as God blesses us with the grace of humility, we come to have a right view of ourselves, and others around us will see the reality and value of God’s work in us. And so, we need to believe that we will be promoted in God’s good time; in the time that he sees that we have learned these lessons which Joseph learned. Verse 4 says – “So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him.” “Then he made him overseer of his house and all that he had, he put under his authority.”

The man who will be a good steward and a good leader is the man who will take the position of a servant. This is what our Lord Jesus Christ did. Philippians 2: 5 and following says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” “Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.”

The true Christian is content to serve in order that God’s name might be glorified and honored. He will only want to be exalted as far as God will deem it wise to exalt him. He will be content with the lowest station in regard to His kingdom. Psalm 84: 11 says – “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside.” “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of My God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” You will find that when you take this godly position of humility that God will see fit to bless others for your sake. Verse 5 says, “So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field.” “Thus he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.”

It is a good thing when people who are over you in authority can trust you with what responsibilities have been given to you. You are not selfishly asserting your own rights and

claims, you are not there simply to get your paycheck and then go home. You are not even looking for the praise and the approval of men. You are simply trying to be faithful and serving others as unto the Lord. Others will see that the Lord is with you. Those over you will see that they can trust you, and they will then entrust you with all the more. Luke 12: 48 says – “And from everyone who been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.” So Joseph was a successful man because the Lord was with him and made all that he did to prosper in His hand.

2nd – The Lord was with Joseph to bring to his mind holy reasoning in the midst of great sexual temptations. (verses 6b-12)

It says, “Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.” “And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’” I hope that you will understand that our God is the One who sovereignly chooses when to bring testings and to permit temptations in our lives. The devil can do nothing to you except what he gains permission from God to do. God is so much greater than he is, that He controls the devil on a long leash, so that all of our God’s righteous purposes are accomplished in regard to us. You and I must remember this when we are in the midst of our greatest difficulties.

There are lessons that we will learn, as believers, which can only be learned in adversity; and there are things that we will become and do only if we are able to pass the test of temptation. With Christ we can do all things. This was certainly one the most bold and daring sexual sins which is recorded in Scripture. Sudden temptations like this are difficult to resist. How, then, did Joseph resist it? We need to know this because we are now living in a time and in a society when because of the developments of technology and the media, sudden temptation can come to us at a moment's notice.

And it is coming to us on a regular and on-going way through our exposure to the television and movies and the internet. What was the reason that Joseph did not succumb to this temptation? It was because the Lord was with him in the thoughts of his mind to fortify him against being overcome by it. Think about this with me. In order to overcome temptations to immoral behavior we must have arguments against any participation in it. And, we must act upon those arguments. Joseph refused her invitation to go to bed with her, and he refused it on the best of grounds.

First, he remembered and he stated it to her; the goal of all that he is doing there in the household. He reminds her of what position of authority and responsibility that her husband had raised him to. He expresses his desire to be faithful to those responsibilities. He would be faithful to her husband to fulfill those household responsibilities. He calls her husband, “my master”. “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.” Let us understand, that whenever sudden sexual temptation comes to us we should immediately think of the word “faithful”. And we should think of it in relation to ourselves in that very situation. Will I being faithful? Lord, let me be faithful.

Sexual sin is a form of great unfaithfulness in your duty to your own wife or husband, or to your future wife or husband if you give yourself to it. And it is a form of unfaithfulness to the other person’s wife or husband. Your resistance to sin must begin here if you are to overcome. A Christian must seriously work at being faithful to keep their own and other people’s chastity. This resistance to sinning can be reinforced by motives of kindness and goodness that have been shown to you by people around you. You can say to yourself – Have I not been shown and taught the right way by my parents? Has it not been of the Lord’s mercies that others have seen my desire to be faithful, and am I now to violate their trust? This I will not do!

Joseph reminds her that her husband has been very good to him, and had “committed all that he had to his hand”. Then secondly, he states that nothing has been kept back from him except her, because “you are his wife”, he says. It is always important during times of

temptation to sexual sins, that you remember to respect the other person's marriage and chastity, even if they do not respect it themselves. It will prove that you know by grace, that God has given you every good thing to enjoy in its proper place; even sex, within the bonds of holy matrimony. But Joseph knew that this advance of hers was sinful, and he said so. It is also good to remind the one tempting you of their duty, to be faithful to their wife or husband.

But the greatest argument of all, to fortify Joseph's mind, came the last of all. And it was the strongest of all. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Committing adultery with this woman would be, in Joseph's mind, "sin" and "great wickedness" against God. I wonder if you have come to see sexual sins in this way? The real problem with our tolerating sexual lusts and desires in our hearts is that we have not considered them in relation to either God or man. God should come first in our thoughts. If we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our strength, how can we even begin to do this great wickedness?

How can we entertain sexual desires for someone that we are not married to, running through our heart and mind? No one else can see your heart and mind, and you may be able to hide it very well. And you may even be able to hide it for many years. But all of that time, it has been something that God has had, before His eyes, in plain view. He sees it all, even much more clearly than you do yourself, and O how it must grieve Him when he sees it in His saints. If the mind is filled with these kinds of thoughts, how shall there be good and lovely and pure and true thoughts that will lead to loving and godly actions in your life at all? How can you be thinking of God when thinking of these things?

This is why the Apostle Paul says in 1st Thessalonians 4, verses 1-8 says – "Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus." "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified." "For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness." "Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit."

So this is your sanctification; to make progress against these lusts and desires and sins of the flesh. Potiphar's wife spoke to Joseph "day after day", it says, in this way. But he did not heed her. So when she finally set a trap to entice him into this sin, he fled from her. The way that you will overcome these sexual temptations is so fear God that you flee from it when it comes to you, even as Joseph did. If you are wise and holy, you will flee because you fear dishonoring Him and disgracing yourself by falling into even one sexual sin. You will fear sinning in your thoughts as well as your actions. Job said in Job 31: 1-4, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?" "For what is the allotment of God from above, and the inheritance of the Almighty from on high?" "Is it not destruction for the wicked, and disaster for the workers of iniquity?" "Does He not see my ways, and count all my steps?"

Some of us here this morning may need to make a covenant with our eyes. We may need to pray to God and say – By your grace, O my great and gracious God, I will not incline my eyes to look lustfully upon any person. Please give me this grace continually so that I might be faithful to you, and to my wife or husband. I want you to notice from verse 7 of our text that this is a sin which begins with the eyes. "His master's wife cast longing eyes upon him." Usually when we think of sexual sins, we think of men being tempted through the eye gate. But it is also a sin that can be found in a woman as well. Make a covenant with your eyes that you will not be unfaithful to God and pursue these vain things that result in disaster. Listen to Job once again. Job 32: 9

– “If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor’s door, then let my wife grind for another and let others bow down over her.” “For that would be wickedness; yes, it would be iniquity deserving of judgment.” “For that would be a fire that consumes to destruction and would root out all my increase.”

O what great wickedness this sin is; against God, and others, and ourselves. It dishonors God in that He is robbed of pure thoughts coming from us. It dishonors our relationship with our wife or husband because it robs them of the thoughts and actions that we owe to them. It dishonors our own bodies because it is a sin which is committed against our own bodies. This is why masturbation, sex with ourselves is wrong. This is why fornication, sex with someone before we are married is wrong. This is why adultery, sex with someone else when we are already married is wrong. This is why sexual lust which is generated by looking upon another person's nakedness is wrong in all of its forms. It “consumes to destruction” our relationship with God, and our relationship with the one we will marry, or are married to.

It is a sin which cannot be allowed to come in to our eyes or our mind. It will defile and it will destroy everything that is good. It will “root out all my increase”. It will prevent me from having fellowship with God and it will cause Him to remove His blessings from me for a time until I confess it as sin and resolve to discontinue it and forsake it. This Joseph believed, and he acted upon it. This is what you must believe if you are to overcome these temptations. The Lord must be with you in the reasonings of your mind. Pray to Him and ask Him not only to forgive you for whatever degree of indulgence that you have tolerated in these things in the past, but pray that the covenant that you make before Him with your eyes would be honored by Him and that He would give you the strength and the grace to resist all such sins.

3rd – The Lord was with Joseph when he was falsely accused of the very sin that he had successfully resisted. (verses 13-20)

It is truly amazing what this sin of Potiphar’s wife led her to. It led her to lying. This is often the case with sexual sins. Either a person gets what they lust after and they have to lie about it to cover up their sin and shame. Or they do not get what they want and they then go about to destroy the reputation of the other person. I like what Matthew Henry says about this. “Joseph’s mistress, having tried in vain to make him a criminal, now endeavors to represent him as one; so to be revenged on him for his virtue.” “Now was her love turned into the utmost rage and malice, and she pretends she cannot endure the sight of him whom a while ago she could not endure out of her sight.” “Chaste and holy love will continue, though slighted; but sinful love, like Amnon’s to Tamar, is easily changed into sinful hatred.”

Well, Joseph had left his garment with her, as a result of his fleeing. She will use that garment as evidence that he had tried to rape her. She claimed that she cried out with a loud voice and that that was the reason why he fled. “So it was when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him saying, ‘Your servant did to me after this manner,’ that his anger was aroused.” “Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined.” “And he was there in the prison.” Now is the hardest test for Joseph. He could have thought to himself – Is this the way that the Lord rewards faithfulness? He could have felt justified in thinking hard thoughts of God.

Surely if there were a God watching over me, He would never permit this!, he might think to Himself. But will you not see that God was with Joseph, even in this; that he was put into the prison where the “king’s prisoners were confined”? This is really a promotion in disguise. For it will be from this vantage point that the Lord will raise him up to be very great; the second in command to Pharaoh in just a few years. Sometimes it is hard for us as God’s people, to understand that the Lord is with us, when we have been demoted for doing what is right. But the Lord never forgets any of your acts of obedience. And he will eventually reward all faithfulness. And so we must trust Him for this, or our obedience will be very incomplete.

And then finally – The Lord was with Joseph when he was in the prison and still made everything he did to prosper. (verses 21-23)

Verse 21 says – “But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” Will you not think about this glorious truth as we close our time together this morning? The Lord is able to turn the heart of any person to show you favor, if that is in accordance with His purpose. This verse states that it was because the Lord purposed to show Joseph mercy, that he had this take place. God will be good to you, faithful to you, and watch over you in love, even in your greatest troubles if you are trusting in him. He will prove himself faithful to you over and over. God works in the hearts of unbelieving people by His common grace, to show us His faithfulness and His love. He will not forget you, even in the worst of your trials, as you keep trusting in Him. His purpose is greater than all of your trials. And He can make you to prosper even in the worst state that you are in, and amidst the lowest of living conditions.

This is why it is always best to be the “Lord’s prisoner”. If you are in a prison of men’s making because of your faithfulness to keep the commandments of the Lord; know that you are even more the Lord’s prisoner, and He will be with you in that most dreaded of places. God so worked together with Joseph in this situation that “the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison”. “Whatever they did there, it was his doing.” “The keeper did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.” This is truly a beautiful way that the Lord showed Joseph that He cared for him, and that He knew that Joseph had been faithful, and that He was rewarding Joseph’s faithfulness. Joseph still had more to learn. The “iron would have to enter into his soul”. But the Lord would be with him in that also. May we see these truths in light of any trials and difficulties and temptations that come to us. And may we each trust in the Lord’s faithfulness as we seek to have a sincere obedience to our God.