

Genesis 39 | Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

¹¹ But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹² she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. ¹³ And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵ And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." ¹⁶ Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house." ¹⁹ As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. ²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. ²¹ But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³ The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

Genesis 39 | Joseph in Potiphar's House

Last week we saw a catalogue of sexual immorality in the story of Judah and Tamar. Judah, under no compulsion, and enjoying his own freedom, descends into sinful patterns which expose his unrighteousness to the world. Here in Joseph's story, enslaved, outside of his own household, and directly tempted, Joseph remains righteous. Joseph shines bright in the dark.

1. Peace in Potiphar's House

Genesis 39:1-2 | Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

Last week's story began with Judah of his own accord descending south. But Joseph is brought down to Egypt. Egypt in the Genesis geography is the furthest south kingdom. It is a movement downward, a descent that might as well be subterranean. Joseph is buried. He is purchased by an officer of Pharaoh named Potiphar. A man with something of an important title. Joseph is exiled. No home and no people. But there is a strange double movement throughout Joseph's story where at one level the descents go from bad to worse, Ishmaelites to Egyptians (so to speak), but upon a closer inspection Joseph is doing, well, kind of great. All because of this consistent refrain through Joseph's life, the Lord was with him.

Genesis 39:2 | The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

The initial descriptions of Joseph's life in Egypt are almost serene. The Lord is with Joseph and that is recognized by his master, Potiphar. So Potiphar places him in charge of more and more in his house and sees that his whole house becomes blessed by Joseph's work. The Lord blesses Potiphar's house for Joseph's sake.

Genesis 39:5-6 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field.
⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

For Potiphar, Joseph was like the salt of the earth. His very presence upheld Potiphar's world. And this is what the people of God are in the world. They are a preservative force and a force of blessing in the world. We've seen in Genesis that God has stated that entire cities will be spared for sake of a righteous few. And apparently households will be blessed by their presence. The pillars of the earth might be hidden among you. Quiet hidden lives of prayer responsible for all the flourishing you enjoy. So Potiphar only worries about what he will eat next. The word for that type of life is, not bad.

2. Joseph & Potiphar's Wife

Genesis 39:6-7 | Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.
⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me."

Let us try and understand this interaction. Joseph is owned by Potiphar's wife. He is her slave. Master's don't make requests of slaves, and slaves don't say no to their masters. We can't interpret this interaction without understanding the factor of ownership. Joseph is admirable, he is handsome to look at, his work is successful and beneficial to Potiphar's wife. It is not wrong to admire such things. How could it be wrong to admire the admirable? But her desire is possession. And not a limited possession but a full possession. You see there is a sense in which she has every aspect of Joseph's life already, except for one.

Masculine sexual immorality tends towards tyranny. You see the true man should only have sex with one whom he would place his very name upon. But feminine sexual immorality tends towards possession. A removal of the man's name from himself. The proverbs speak of this woman.

Proverbs 5:3-4 | For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, ⁴ but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

You can see why the speech would be smooth of the forbidden woman. Because it is in a sense a perfect appeal to the man's desires. You can have me and won't be required to place your name upon me. She is irresponsible sex, the promise of tyranny is no repercussions. Now listen closely to the warning of the proverbs.

Proverbs 5:8-11 | Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, ⁹ lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless, ¹⁰ lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner, ¹¹ and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed,

The forbidden woman is a devouring woman. You see the deal is, you will not place your name upon me, you will take no responsibility for me, and the hidden motive is a complete ownership of the man. Your life will prove fruitless. Joseph embodies the advice of the proverbs in his response to Potiphar's wife. Look at Joseph's reasons.

Genesis 39:8-9 | But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

Joseph's reasons are that his master has put him in charge of everything, and because of him his master does not worry about anything. And that he is equal to his master in every way except for one, which is in regards to her. You see to a lesser man these would all be reasons to lie with Potiphar's wife. It is Adam and Eve who are given everything in the Garden except for one thing. Even for Potiphar's wife, does she not have all of Joseph's

life except for one aspect? Yet Joseph is oriented rightly to the Lord, and he sees it would be a greater wickedness *because* of the privileges he has been afforded and ultimately the sin is against God.

Genesis 39:11-12 | But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹² she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

Joseph does just precisely the right thing in this instance, it is not weakness or not being courageous to flee from this situation. We are called to flee sexual immorality. In Joseph’s very flight, he is stripped of his clothes. This is Genesis we’re reading, remember clothes in the garden? Those things which cover our shame. Joseph is willing to flee from sin even if it further shames him. Even at immediate cost to himself Joseph is willing to flee from sin. Oh the depth of the integrity of Joseph. It is precisely the opposite of Judah, whose only moral compass was avoiding the laughter and condemnation of others, Joseph stood naked and unashamed before the Lord!

There are two levels at which I want to talk about Joseph’s integrity. The first is in his initial resistance he shows his heart is rightly oriented to be surveying the goodness of the Lord and to cause his heart to hold fast to the Lord. Secondly Joseph is willing to be strategic about preserving his integrity. We ought to do the same. What strategies can you put in your life to flee from sexual immorality. Can we get creative? The internet has a lot of sexual immorality on it. So get creative about putting some clothes on your phone! Covenant eyes, Screen-time, Content blockers. Here’s my thought, in 1987 men struggled with purity. I don’t think their struggle was less valid than ours. So put some clothes on your phone.

Genesis 39:16-18 | Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.”

The evidence of Joseph’s righteousness, becomes the evidence of Joseph’s shame. It is absolutely upside down in Egypt.

3. Peace in Prison

Genesis 39:19-20 | As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. ²⁰ And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

Joseph once again get's buried. He is stripped and thrown into a pit at the beginning of this story and hear again he is stripped and thrown into a pit. But there is some strangeness here. Joseph should have been killed. Yet his master only places him in the king's jail. And the story of his time in Jail doesn't end here, in fact it ends more like where it started, a description might be something like, serene and free.

Genesis 39:21-23 But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³ The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

It is an almost beat for beat revisiting of Joseph's success in Potiphar's house. You see there are two levels to assess Joseph's story. One is the betrayed brother, sold into slavery, only to be betrayed again by his master and his wife, only to wind up in prison. That is true. But what is also true is that in the midst of all of this, almost hidden, is the work of God ever present in Joseph's story. Joseph's integrity, is an expression of faith in God's story. It is how we grow in that faith.