

Introduction:

- Does anyone recognize this family? It's the Ten Booms, in a photo from the 1930's.
- How many of you are familiar with the book or the movie "The Hiding Place"?
- The Ten Booms were a Christian family – Corrie standing by her father, Betsie seated at the far right.
- Holland, where they lived, had many thousands of Jews living there when WWII came.
- The Ten Boom family is honored by memorials at the Righteous Among the Nations site in Jerusalem. They hid many Jewish individuals and families in their home during the Nazi occupation. Other members of the Dutch resistance would then help those Jews escape to safety.
- After the Nazis discovered their deception, Corrie and her sister Betsie were taken to Ravensbruck women's prison in Germany.
- Corrie became the famous Ten Boom because she survived the prison and became a well-known writer and speaker in the decades that followed the war. But I wanted to focus on both Corrie and Betsie.
- If you read the book or see the movie, you'll learn that it was Betsie's incredible faith and sacrificial ministry to the other women prisoners that came to my mind as I studied Joseph's life. Betsie's faith, courage, and vision helped strengthen and sustain Corrie as well.
- As Betsie lay dying in that prison camp, her last words to Corrie were "We must tell people that no pit is so deep that God is not deeper still. They will believe us, because we were here." And during their imprisonment He gave them ministry success in extremely difficult circumstances. Betsie died there near the end of the war, but Corrie, like Joseph, went on to touch many people's lives in the years that followed. They fulfilled God's purposes in His power and grace. The Lord **was** with them!
- And that brings us to

My title for the message today – **The LORD was with Joseph (Genesis 39)**

Theme: God's grace, power, and presence are personally available to His people.

I. The Superlative Slave (vv. 1-6a)

Let's jump back a few pages to the very end of chapter 37. The story of Joseph had progressed in chapter 37 to the point where Jacob was in deep distress over the false report of his favorite son's death. **(READ vs 35)** But Joseph's brothers had sold him to Midianite traders who were on their way to Egypt to do business. We see the result of that business transaction in verse 36. **(READ vs 36)** All of a sudden, chapter 38 pauses the story of Joseph to tell us about Judah and his life situations over some years. Jim McCraigh gave us insight into that important chapter last week, but now we hit the resume button on Joseph's story by going to chapter 39. Verse 1..

¹ Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.

Joseph has been forced to emigrate from Canaan to Egypt. He was in a place he had never been before. Let's examine his life situation on the day of his arrival.

His age—17 or 18 years old

His job skills—Shepherd

His knowledge of Egyptian language—None that we know of

His knowledge of Egyptian culture—None that we know of

His knowledge of Egyptian religion—None that we know of

His financial assets or possessions—None that we know of

His friends or family in Egypt—None that we know of

His immigration status in Egypt—a foreigner and a purchased slave

His employment status—a slave, owned by Potiphar, head of the Egyptian Secret Service

His life situation seemed hopeless that day he arrived in Egypt, didn't it? But verse 2 changes the perspective immediately.

² The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

In my list of status items a minute ago, I didn't list his spiritual condition upon his arrival in Egypt – the crucial resource he had brought with him from Canaan. The Lord was with him and would help him. Verse 3—

³ Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.

How did Potiphar respond to what he saw happening? (By the way, scholars say that the name "Potiphar" in Egyptian means "devoted to the sun". That god's name was ra. (Talk to Jim Gustaf if you want more info. He knows a man who is devoted to ra.) So Potiphar's thoughts could have been along the lines of "This slave talks about his God and how that God is helping him. Is his God real and answering his prayers? What else could explain what I see happening?" Well, let's see how the Lord's presence and help affected Joseph's life as a slave in this strange land. Verses 4 through 6a—

⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. ⁵ It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. ⁶ So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Wow! Since Joseph was a young trainee in the slave business, it seems like he was incredibly successful!! How could this radical change have happened so quickly, seemingly overnight? Well, it wasn't overnight. Even though the Lord was with him, Joseph had to do certain things to stay on track with the life situation in which the Lord had placed him.

The first issue facing a normal person would be to deal with the turmoil of thoughts and emotions produced by those events. There may have been anger toward his brothers, frustration over having absolutely no control over what was happening to him, feeling sorry for himself – a whole range of responses were possible. God's Word doesn't give us any insight on those thought life and emotional specifics, but we are told that his situation radically changed over time. In going from verse 1 to verse 6, about 8 years have passed. We know this because we are given his specific age every once in a while as his story unfolds.

So we can presume that as the Lord helped Joseph recover from the initial shock and gradual comprehension of the realities, he began making necessary adjustments.

- While he fulfilled his slave duties, he was gradually learning a new language.
- He observed and learned how an estate with various kinds of property was run.
- He got to know his fellow slaves and what their culture was all about.
- He developed healthy relationships that enabled him to be a successful manager of other slaves as his levels of responsibility increased. Levels of responsibility. Higher and higher.

But we can also infer from the verses we have read that as Potiphar's personal servant, Joseph communicated with the master about his relationship with God and the difference the Lord was making in his life and work. How could Potiphar dispute Joseph's claims? The Lord was blessing him and everything he owned. He never had it so good! His level of trust in Joseph and his God was so strong that he even stopped checking to see if things were being done properly! Joseph was faithful, reliable, and amazingly competent! You don't turn the care of all your assets over to someone unless you completely trust them. John MacArthur commented that you don't create trust unless you prove yourself to be trustworthy over and over and over again. Potiphar's herds must have been growing larger, his crops were abundant, purchases for supplies were proper, no money was missing from the estate's accounts, the household was running smoothly. And look at the end of verse 6. **(READ again)** Even the T-bone steaks he ordered from his kitchen slaves were perfect – thick, hot, tender, and medium-rare. Life was good!

Implication #1: Only the Lord knows the future specifics of your life and my life. In Christ, our lives will continue to be filled with many blessings and various kinds of difficulty. Will we follow Joseph's example and seek the Lord's help to adjust to new situations? Will we continue to be faithful and fruitful by His power and grace, even through the challenging events?

Implication #2: We are called as believers to live our life and fulfill the responsibilities we have with excellence, honoring the Lord along the way. Doors can then open in any relationship to share the hope and peace we have in Christ.

II. The Innocent Target (vv. 6b-12)

A. The Temptation, Phase 1.

Well, this amazing part of Joseph's Egyptian experience was about to come to an end. Let's go to verse 6b.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷ It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

It seems that Mrs. P had developed certain intentions regarding this young slave. If she had been making subtle efforts to attract his attention, they were obviously not working. So she told him exactly what she wanted him to do. Joseph was suddenly in a strange and difficult situation. A slave was expected to do whatever he is told to do by his owner or by his owner's representative.

⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. ⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

Joseph didn't fumble around for his response. First of all, his authority is limited. She is not within the realm of the authority his master has given him. So it would be a violation of the trust Potiphar had placed in him, as well as a violation of the commitment he himself had made. Secondly, his morality is limited. The Lord God is his heavenly Master. He gives Joseph the freedom to make morally right decisions, but He never approves of immorality. To lie with another man's wife would be sin against God. A legitimate question can be asked here: The Mosaic Law hadn't been written yet. How did Joseph know that intimacy with another man's wife would be a sin against God? Henry Morris has a helpful perspective on that. In his book, *The Genesis Record*, he wrote, "[For many men,] it would have been natural to yield to her invitation. But with Joseph there was one consideration which overshadowed all others. He knew that such actions were contrary to God's revealed will. Even though the Mosaic laws were not yet written, there was enough [ancient] knowledge concerning God's purposes for mankind available for him to know beyond question that adultery and fornication were wrong in God's sight. He knew from the account of man's creation that God had ordained the permanence and sanctity of marriage, and that none of man's convenient excuses for breaking this ordinance were justified in God's economy." (Genesis 2:24)

Implication #3: At the point of temptation a Christian might consider the possibility that giving in to temptation may cause the Lord to exercise some level of painful discipline. That is true, but that is how a child thinks. The choice to sin dishonors the One who loves us, died for us, and saved us. It breaks fellowship with Him. Why would we ever want to do that?

B. The Temptation, Phase 2.

¹⁰ As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. ¹¹ Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. ¹² She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

Mrs. P probably hadn't expected a well-reasoned and spiritually sound response to her first effort, but she didn't give up. Day after day she pursued him, but day after day his choice to not respond demonstrated that the God who was with him was giving him the strength of character he needed. So she waited until Joseph was unaware that there were no witnesses in the house, then she grabbed him physically and commanded him. Notice that by running away, Joseph applied Proverbs 22 verse 3 nineteen centuries before Solomon wrote it down – "The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it." As NT believers, we have even more guidance: 1 Cor 10:13 – "No temptation has overtaken you but such is as common to man. God is faithful, and will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape." Joseph found his way of escape, which was "I'm outa here!!!)

Implication #4: We know from James 1: 13-15 that temptation is not sin. Temptation is the first step in a process leading to sin, and that process can and must be interrupted. Mount a counter-attack, which begins in the mind. **(Share about using "No" in Titus 2:12 NIV)** Pray, asking the Lord for strength of mind and will to withstand this demand of your flesh. Call to mind a previously memorized Scripture that deals with this particular weakness. **(Share my experiences with Prov 18:2 and Prov 29:11)** If possible, emulate Joseph and get away from the thing or situation that is stimulating the temptation. Victory can be yours!!

III. The "Criminal" on Trial (vv. 13-20)

¹³ When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. ¹⁵ When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside."

So she calls together the men who were of the household, but not present when the "crime" occurred, and she takes on the role of the prosecuting attorney. She starts out with an accusation against her husband, who brought this evil man into their lives. (We will see in the coming chapters and in Exodus that "Hebrew" became a common word in Egypt, used to describe the descendants of Abraham. Also, to "make sport" means to mock, to laugh at, to ridicule.) She then claimed that Joseph started to commit sexual assault against her. The claim of screams and the coat in her hand was the convicting evidence. She was recruiting these men as her "witnesses".

¹⁶ So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport

of me; ¹⁸ and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

Here comes the judge. Mrs. P’s resentment toward her husband slipped out, even to his face. “You brought this beast into our home”, she wanted to emphasize. At this point, any competent defense attorney would have noticed that her story had changed. There was no mention of “he came in to lie with me”, as reported earlier to the men. Perhaps she didn’t want to raise any suspicion in Potiphar’s mind as to her possible role in the incident. But no matter. Joseph was not called to the witness stand to testify. No slave would have been allowed to contradict the testimony of the wife of an official of the Pharaoh. Joseph, you are guilty as charged.

¹⁹ Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, “This is what your slave did to me,” his anger burned. ²⁰ So Joseph’s master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.

Potiphar’s anger burns. His slave has shamed his wife, and the entire community will surely hear about it. The verdict? Guilty. Off to prison you go, Joseph. This final portion of Potiphar’s role in Joseph’s life raises some interesting questions. Could he have sought the death penalty for a rebellious slave? Since he knew of Joseph’s character and performance as a slave, did he wonder if he was getting the whole story? Was his anger fomented by his wife, not Joseph. No matter. The next chapter of God’s specific plan for Joseph’s life was about to begin.

Implication #4: Even if accusations brought against you or me are false, even if we have lived in true integrity and our conscience is clear, we may still be found guilty in the world’s justice system. The question then becomes – will we follow Joseph’s example by trusting the Lord and faithfully serving Him as He reveals His plan and purpose for our life? Or will we slide into resentment, angrily desiring revenge for the wrong done to us? May it never be!

IV. The Perfect Prisoner (vv. 21-23)

²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

Verse 21 begins with what should be one of our favorite first words in Scripture! “But”. That word usually indicates that something different or unusual is about to happen, especially if God is involved. For me, it quickly brings to mind Eph 2:4 – “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.” This statement in verse 21 is the third time in this chapter that we have been reminded of God’s care of Joseph. Now this prison wouldn’t have been nice like the white-collar, low security federal prisons we have here in America, but the jailer was responsible for the well-being of prisoners put there by the Pharaoh. As we’ll see in the next chapter, some prisoners could be pardoned, so the environment and treatment needed to keep them alive and well.

22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*.

A very unusual thing happened after Joseph arrived in this jail. This verse is mind-boggling. God's kindness, Joseph's attitude, ability, and perhaps his reputation of success with Potiphar, resulted in an unusual opportunity. The chief jailer would have been directly responsible to Pharaoh or one of his officials. If he failed to do his job properly, he would likely become one of the inmates. But the final verse of this chapter emphasizes, for the fourth time, the title of this message

23 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

The results of Joseph's time in jail were the same as they were when he worked on Potiphar's estate. Whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. I like Derek Kidner's comment on Joseph's early Egyptian experience – "The good seed is buried even deeper, still to push upward; the servant, faithful in a little, trains for authority in much." (See Luke 16:10) "Faithful in a little"? Like in being an excellent servant in slavery or prison? "Training for authority in much"? Like becoming second in command over the entire nation of Egypt? Something supernatural was happening in that Egyptian prison so long ago. The vast majority of human beings have believed, do believe, and will believe that supernatural things can happen. Many people try to make supernatural things happen. Back in the day, you could buy rabbit's foot key chains. (Not lucky for the rabbit, to be sure!) Some athletes always wear certain clothing items if they want to do their best. ("Where are my lucky socks?") We have sayings like "See a penny and pick it up, and" **(elicit response)** Why do people do this? They are trying to be like Joseph, experiencing success in life – avoiding bad things happening, having good things happen. But human efforts will fail. You can't have the supernatural advantages Joseph had unless the Lord is with you. Before Jesus ascended to be with God the Father, he said this to His disciples: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Most of us here have turned from sinful lives and trusted Jesus for forgiveness of sins and receiving eternal life. He is with each one of us, by His Spirit. But if you have never given your life to Him – at some point being willing to turn from sin and trust Him for forgiveness, the Lord is not with you. You don't have the presence and power and promises of God available to help you every day in every life situation you face. I urge you to come to Him today, and give Him your life.