

Imprisoned innocent

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[0:00] Let's start looking at Genesis 39. And I want to see if you can remember where we were as Ben left us two weeks ago.

! And can you imagine yourself, because I think it's quite useful to get some of the applications out. Imagine you were Joseph, as you are reminded of some of these details. You've been nearly killed by your brothers.

Reuben, one of your brothers, had other ideas. And Judah proposes getting you sold. But nevertheless, most of the brothers just wanted you dead. Your father thinks you're dead. And Joseph has been sold to the Midianites, or Ishmaelites. And he's been taken to Egypt. Unlikely to see his father again, you'd have thought, humanly speaking.

And I've given you a map there to give you some idea. There's a little work on here. Oops, that's not what I want to do. Yeah. So Jacob, I think, is around here.

[1:09] And do you remember that he was sent off to look for them by Shechem, where his brothers were looking after the sheep? And they directed him on to Dothan.

And so this is where it all went wrong. And this is the route a long way from home towards Egypt that Joseph has taken on. A place where they don't really know the living God.

And Joseph is on his own. A long way from home. So we are just looking directly at the way the passage splits up.

It's very interesting to see. It's so unexpected, really. We see time and again in here about Joseph. God was with him.

But God's presence and his blessing of Joseph in Potiphar's house. And then we have this issue of a sexual temptation he has to resist.

[2:11] And then we have him being wrongly accused and put in prison. But still, after all that, again, at the end of our chapter, God's presence with him.

And I want us to learn some lessons from what we look at. So, starting with Joseph in Potiphar's house. So he's been bought.

And you see some of the signs of God's providence here. He's been bought by a wealthy Egyptian, Potiphar, who is the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Now, this is quite an important guy in Egypt.

And we read in verse 2, Now, don't skim over that, because can you just remember for a minute that Potiphar didn't know anything about the living God.

But this godly young man had just come into his house. And Potiphar saw, it says, that the Lord was with him. So, even if you're just thinking about yourself living in a non-Christian world, here's something to aspire to, that your non-Christian bosses can see that the Lord is with you.

[3:54] And they see that you're able to work hard and give him success. So, that in itself is just remarkable, that the Lord's presence was noticed by this guy.

Potiphar, if you're interested in Egyptian, his name means dedicated to Ra. They may not have known the living God, but they did worship the sun god, Ra.

So, that's Potiphar. He's dedicated to Ra, but he noticed the Lord was with Joseph. So, he's put in charge of Potiphar's household. And it's also quite unusual that it did say there, did you notice that he lived in the house?

And again, they'd normally just be in the slave quarters, really. But this is something to do with the favor that Joseph had. And I found these pictures, not so much of slave quarters and house, but I think the one on the left is a bit more like a typical farmhouse in Egypt, which has nothing to do with

where they would be.

He'd probably be in something like this one on the right, a pretty important looking home. And it says in verses 5 to 6a, it's worth reading this again, from the time he put him in charge of his household and all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.

[5:24] The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care.

With Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. So we move on, and the next bit is a bit more difficult to, well, it's a more difficult area, isn't it, this whole thing about Joseph being tempted.

And we read these telling words that Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, come to bed with me.

And it's very interesting, isn't it, how did Joseph respond? Think for a minute, this man who is so far from home, if you remember those maps, so far from his family, no one would really notice, probably feeling pretty miserable.

It would have been quite easy with no one to, as it were, find out. But how did he respond?

[6:36] I'm just reading these next few verses, because typically, I think, when we think about how we might respond to sexual temptation, the biggest problem is that we're thinking of ourselves only, and of an immediate pleasure.

But notice how important it was that Joseph does three other things, doesn't he? He says three things. He says, he refused, verse eight, with me in charge, he told her, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house.

So he's thinking of his master. No one is greater in this house than I am. So he has some awareness, I think, of his dignity, just of the fact that he's not, he's been entrusted and built up in that way.

And his master has withheld nothing from him, except his wife. But then also, he remembered in the second half of verse nine, he remembered his God. My master has withheld nothing from me.

How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? So he remembered those things rather than just jump in with what might have been a pleasure.

[7:57] He refused. And we hear that it wasn't just once she came at him. She spoke to Joseph, it says in verse 10, day after day.

So that means she must have found him sometimes when he was more tired. At all times, you know, he was still having to have the strength to refuse.

But then, this comes to a climax when one day he went into the house, and I'm just reading bits from verse 11 here, to attend to his duties. And this time, actually, no one was in the house at all. None of the servants. And so she caught him by the cloak, said, come to bed with me. And he ran. But because she had a hold of his cloak, he ran and went away a bit more half naked, I suppose. But she had the cloak in her hand. And what does she then do? Well, she starts a lying escapade as we move on to this bit of being wrongly accused.

[9:07] Verses 13 onwards, when she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called to her household servants.

Look, she said to them, this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us. He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. And when he heard me scream, he ran, and look, he's left his cloak. So it would be quite unusual, really, for this very important woman to gather the servants together to try and get them on side like witnesses. But that's what she's doing here.

She's telling lies, and she's gathering witnesses that are, to try and compound it. And then she waits, doesn't she? Verse 16 onwards, she kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. And then she told him this same story. Look, this Hebrew came to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed, and this is verse 17, 18, for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.

[10:17] And it says, in verse 19, when his master heard the story, his wife told him, saying, this is how your slave treated me, he burned with anger.

It's not immediately clear. You might think it's absolutely obvious he knew Joseph was guilty and his anger is directed there. But it's not explicitly said why he was angry.

Just that he burned with anger. And Joseph's master took him and put him into prison. He's got a bit shorter hair in that picture, but there's a person in prison for you. It is interesting, a lot of the commentators think that if Potiphar had genuinely believed that Joseph was trying to rape his wife, he wouldn't have been put in prison.

He would have just been killed. So, if you read in between the lines there, I think Potiphar was in a difficult position with Joseph only having the status of a slave, he had no way of really siding with Joseph.

And this was perhaps the best he could do for Joseph. But it's probably the case that he was in prison for some ten years or so.

[11:39] Because I think he was seventeen when he was sold as a slave. And later on in the whole story, he's about thirty when he gets appointed before Pharaoh and elevated.

And so there's thirteen years we're accounting for. He's early in that time, comes into Potiphar's house, but it's not completely clear, but it's a significant time he is in prison.

And it is interesting, although he only had the status of a slave, I think it is interesting that do you see any attempts from Joseph to run out and defend himself?

And I think that leads to other people we know who also learned not to defend themselves or knew not to.

And Jesus, we know, was falsely accused. And I'm reading in 1 Peter, when they held insults at him, he did not retaliate when he suffered. He made no threats.

[12:42] Instead, he trusted himself to him who judges justly. And you'll know these bits in Isaiah 53. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. And it's very interesting here that even the Son of God is not rushing forward to defend himself.

There's another example of perhaps the lesson of how it's better if someone else is raised up to defend you. But do you remember the confusion at Pentecost?

Well, it wasn't confusion, but some people thought it was. When the Spirit came, people were supernaturally helped to declare the wonders of God in different tongues. But some people made fun of them and said, they've had too much wine.

Did those people stop and defend themselves? God raised up Peter in this case. And Peter stands up and he says, fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let me explain.

[13:54] These people are not drunk. So I'm just picking that point that if, by and large, if someone needs defending, God will raise up someone to do it.

Certainly, when you are wronged, I don't think you need to be rushing at it. There may be a case, if you've really thought humbly about everything going on, there may be a case on occasions where there is something to be said.

But by and large, Jesus and others and Joseph, they're not going out of their way to defend themselves. And then we go on to the later bit of the passage where he's in prison.

And again, we find, and I'm in verse 20b, but while Joseph was there in prison, and this is such a reminder of where we were at the start of the chapter, the Lord was with him.

He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. Do you remember at the start of the chapter, he was finding favor in the eyes of his master?

[15:12] So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison and he was made responsible for all that was done there.

The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

So, I've been through the story, but I now just want to, it's a slight recap, but I just want to draw out perhaps the obvious lessons that come from this.

Number one is this, don't allow bitterness to linger. Think of Joseph, think of you in that situation, and imagine how easy it would be to go every night just thinking, does God really know what he's

doing?

Is he really there? Does he really care? He's forgotten about me. And you could just feel, and you could remember your brothers who have been so hard on you, you could remember Potiphar's wife who was one, it would seem, in getting him thrown into prison.

[16:35] But do not allow bitterness to linger. And it's worth thinking hard, because I think a lot of believers are actually held back from moving on with God, because there is something, some hardship that's been done in the past, and they just cannot get rid of the fact that they're just thinking that, you know, it's a bitter thing, and it just gnaws there, and it needs to be got rid of.

And in Ephesians 4 and verse 30, there's just a little quote there, do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and the reminder to get rid of all bitterness. I pass over it, but that is not an easy thing, and you might need help from friends sometimes to ask, you know, is there something that I'm hanging on to here that I just can't get free from, but there is evidence that Joseph, who had plenty of reason to feel bitter, I mean, we read these, it just quickly goes into these words, the Lord was with Joseph, but how, why?

Probably because he was free from this sort of bitterness. The second lesson is about forgiving those who have wronged you.

the consequence of not doing this is that you don't end up with a close walk with God. Do you feel in any incident when someone has wronged you that you can't start to forgive other people until they've come to you and said sorry?

Because I don't think that's how this works, because sometimes they don't. But nevertheless, there are various people who have done awful things to Joseph, and if you were thinking one day when I see my brothers, I'm gonna, yeah?

[18:30] But it seems very clear that Joseph had learned to forgive all of these and others, people who had given him hardship. it. And I don't want to spoil the thunder of others coming later, but if you look ahead to Genesis 45, although it's sort of implied but not stated that the Lord is with him and things, but it does say, I am your brother Joseph.

This is when he's first disclosing himself to his brothers. I am the one who's, I'm your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt. And look at this for an amazing, gracious concern.

Do not be distressed and angry with yourselves because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. So I'm spoiling someone else's thunder later, but that's just an example of the fact that although there was awful wrongs going on, he had learned, certainly by then, he had learned to forgive those who had wronged him.

Number three, how to react to sexual temptation. And we touched on it as we went through it, but one thing he did towards the end of verse nine, he considered the consequences of the sin for his relationship with God because he said, how then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?

God. And remember David after he was caught in the sin of adultery with Bathsheba and he's found out and he's exploring his pain with God, just these brief words in Psalm 51, against you, you only have I sinned is what David is saying to God.

[20:25] So that's got to be the primary thing when you are tempted to consider the effect on your relationship with God. But consider also the consequences of sexual sin for relationships with others.

Now this isn't directly in the passage here, I'm just trying to think, bringing it up to date with the temptations and the problems that we have these days. With the proliferation of pornography on the internet, we invite people to have their private fantasies.

And it sounds easy, doesn't it? There's an immediate pleasure and you don't have to be involved with the person. What's the end result of that? You make, perhaps I'm thinking just for the men, you're making the woman into an object.

And if you linger there, then when you have a relationship, this is caused damage. And you've got to undo that. So it has consequences to relationships.

people who, it's very clear in the Bible, sex is for marriage, not for outside marriage. Masses of peer pressure on young people to become sexually active before they should.

[21:50] And yet, I will read you just one thing from a woman who perhaps gave in to that pressure. mother. And she said, one consequence of lust can be emotional stress.

Having premarital sex was the most horrifying experience of my life. It wasn't all the emotionally satisfying experience the world deceived me into believing.

I felt as if my insides were being exposed and my heart left unattended. I dread the day I have to tell the man I truly love and wish to marry that he is not the only one, though I wish he were.

So, people get trapped in these things. And then adultery. Sometimes it's not discovered, but often it is.

And if it is, in all of these areas there is a deceit going on. Someone has deceived you to think that the immediate pleasure is worth it and that the long-term consequences are bad.

[22:54] But with adultery, when it's found out, usually, more often than not, a marriage breaks down. And we've all seen it.

Some of our own parents have split up, haven't we, over this or other things. The consequences in relationships of falling into this deceit are immense.

so the other obvious lesson about sexual temptation is don't go where you know you will be tempted.

And although it was a very short word in the passage we read, know when to run. Just before it could have got too much for Joseph to handle, he ran.

He ran. two more lessons and then I'm done. When someone wrongs you, don't be quick to defend yourself.

[23:52] Now, that doesn't come very naturally to us. We want to get back at people. We think no one else is going to stand up and do the defending, especially if someone's completely out of order and it's not true.

there's a lovely quote here from A.W. Tozer. I'll read you. Whoever defends himself will have himself for defense and he will have no other.

But let him come defenseless before the Lord and he will have for his defender no less than God himself. So again, we gloss over it, but think about the times when you, whether it's in a work situation or something else, someone's accused you and your instant reaction is to defend yourself. Think again about how you might be able to honor God if you just withdraw. Maybe you're being criticized and there's a lot of wisdom in thinking, okay, this is coming from a very unfair angle, but is there a grain of truth in this?

Can I humble myself over it and not think, right, he's got something on me and I'm going to get something back on them. But then when God's hand is very heavy against you, and I think this is perhaps the strongest lesson I'm sensing in this passage, Joseph, a long way from home, terribly treated, so tempted to think God has forgotten me, he doesn't care, there is no justice, justice, and then I want to finish where I started in Psalm 73.

[25:37] Listen to Asaph here in Psalm 73. This is what the wicked are like, always free of care and amassing wealth.

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply, till I entered the sanctuary of God.

Then I understood their final destiny, and then later in that Psalm in verse 25, whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you.

So in these severely trying circumstances, the Lord was with Joseph. Whatever we are going through, can the same be said of us.

That's all I want to say. Thank you.