

PM Genesis 39: 1-23 Life of Joseph: Potiphars Wife

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[0 : 00] Good evening friends, welcome to another Sunday evening, another Sunday evening where we're continuing our studies in the life of Joseph, another Sunday evening where we can't of course meet together.

But it's good together to come together and hear from God's Word, it's good to think about God's Word together, it's good to see these studies in the life of Joseph as we continue in the midst of lockdown, albeit perhaps a more eased lockdown.

It's still good to remind ourselves of the covenant faithfulness of God, it's still good to remind ourselves of the love of God and as we come to Joseph this evening, that's what we see, we see the covenant faithfulness of God, we see the covenant love of the Lord for his people.

So we're thinking this evening about this incident with Joseph and Potiphar's wife, it's a very well known incident, it's a very famous incident in the life of Joseph. So please turn with me to Genesis 39, Genesis 39 and we'll think together about this, we'll read it together first, Genesis 39, we'll read the whole of the chapter, Genesis 39.

We're going to read at verse 1, this is the Word of God. Now, Joseph had been brought down to Egypt and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had brought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

[1 : 19] The Lord was with Joseph and he became a successful man and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him and the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

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. 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 in all that he had in house and freedom. 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 and after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, Lie with me. 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.

He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?

[2 : 30] And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house were there in the house, 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. And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled out of the house, she called 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. 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. Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home. 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. But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house. As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, This is the way your servant treated me.

[3 : 39] His anger was kindled. 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. But the Lord was with

Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

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. 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. Amen. Amen. This is the reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let us turn now to the Lord in prayer.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the way that it speaks to us even today, so many years after it was written. We thank you, Father, for the power that it still has.

We thank you for the clarity that it still has. And we pray that as we come to this section now, as we come to consider this next episode in the life of Joseph, we pray that you would give us insight and understanding.

[4 : 45] We pray that you would open our ears, that you would open our eyes, that you would soften our hearts. That the Holy Spirit would minister mightily amongst us even now we ask.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's have this passage open in front of us, please. Genesis 39.

Genesis 39. We're going to consider the whole of the chapter together.

As I said, this very famous incident of Joseph and Potiphar's wife that ultimately ends, of course, with Joseph in prison. There was a challenge put out on Twitter the other day asking what 240-character speech you could remember from TV from your childhood.

The answer that caught my eye was the answer given by the crofter from Aaron Lott, from Sweeney. He quoted, not the entirety, because he couldn't, but he quoted the opening lines of the TV show The A-Team.

I can see the cogs whirring in your brain now trying to remember what the opening lines of The A-Team are, but I've looked them up to save you the bother of trying to remember what they are. They go like this.

[5 : 55] In 1972, a crack commanding unit was sent to prison by a military court for a crime they didn't commit. These men promptly escaped from a maximum security stockade to the Los Angeles underground.

Today, still wanted by the government, they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help you, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire The A-Team.

Now, what was the whole gig with The A-Team? What was the whole point of The A-Team? Well, it's right there in that opening sentence of the credits, isn't it? It's right there in that opening sentence of what we read. In 1972, a crack commanding unit was sent to prison by a military court. Why? For a crime they did not commit. Why do we root for The A-Team? Why do we always want them to win? Why do we consider them to be the good guys?

Because they were sent to prison for a crime they didn't commit. They were the ones who'd suffered great injustice. They were the ones who had suffered at the hands of the state, if you like.

[7 : 02] And so we root for them. We want them to win because they are the good guys. And as we come to Genesis 39 this evening, as we come to this incident with Joseph and Potiphar's wife, we see the same thing, don't we?

We see Joseph suffering unjustly. We see Joseph being sent to prison for a crime that he didn't commit, for a thing that he didn't do. And yet over and against all of that, we see the Lord's faithfulness.

We see the Lord's covenant love to Joseph. He's sent to prison, yes. He suffers unjustly, yes. But he knows the steadfast covenant love of the Lord.

I want to think about three things this evening. See three things from Genesis 39 together. Firstly, we want to think about Joseph being blessed. As we read the opening verses of the chapter, it's impossible to miss the blessing that God is giving to Joseph.

It's impossible to miss the way that God blesses Joseph. Secondly, we want to think about Joseph being badgered by Potiphar's wife. Time and time again, she propositions him.

[8 : 04] Time and time again, she says to him, look, come and lie with me. Come and sleep with me. And then thirdly, finally, we want to think about Joseph being banged up. We see Joseph being put in prison for a crime that he didn't commit.

Blessed, badgered, banged up. So firstly, we want to think about Joseph being blessed. Joseph being blessed. And we see that in verses 1 through 6 of Genesis 39.

Verses 1 through 6a of Genesis 39, we see Joseph being blessed. So remember where we are in the life story of Joseph. Remember where we are in the biography of Joseph last week.

We thought about that very famous incident again, where Joseph is sold by his brothers. They come up initially with this plan to kill him. Reuben, his brother, speaks up on his behalf and says, look, don't kill the boy.

Rather, let's put him in this pit. As time passes, Reuben obviously isn't there. In the end, we see him being sold to a passing caravan of Midianite traitors. And eventually, in verse 36 of chapter 37, we see Joseph being sold into slavery.

[9 : 09] We see Joseph being sold, verse 36 of chapter 37. Meanwhile, the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

And it's there then that the narrative resumes tonight in chapter 39. It's there that the narrative comes back to in chapter 39. Chapter 38 has been an unseemly incident with Judah and Tamar. This chapter has been in between what we read in chapter 37 and what we read in chapter 39. But now we're getting back to the Joseph narrative, if you like. Now we're getting back to the life story of Joseph as we come to verse 1 of chapter 39.

We see that there's almost a recap of where we've got to so far in verse 1. 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.

And notice what's recorded for us in verse 2, that the Lord is with Joseph. That Joseph became a successful man. Now, notice that he's in Potiphar's service.

[10 : 14] Notice that he's a slave of Potiphar, yes. But he becomes a successful man. He's a successful man in his own right. The Lord blesses him. The Lord prospers him. The Lord gives great success to all that Joseph attempts to do.

He's a slave, yes. But he's a successful one. He ultimately works for Potiphar, yes. But, of course, he is successful in what he does. Notice as well, Potiphar's response in verse 3.

He sees that the Lord is with Joseph. He sees that the Lord prospers him. He sees that the Lord blesses him. He sees that the Lord gives great success to everything that Joseph does. And so what does he do? He promotes him.

He finds favour, verse 4, in Potiphar's sight. He puts everything under his control. He sees that the Lord blesses him. He sees that the Lord is with him. And so he gives him more responsibility.

Now, it's a smart move, isn't it? He may not know the God of Israel personally, given what his wife says in a few verses time. It might actually be that he had a fairly low opinion of the Israelites.

[11 : 24] But he sees that God is with Joseph. He sees that the Lord is blessing him. He sees that everything he turns his hand to succeeds. And so he says, right, okay. Let's put everything under his control then.

Let's give everything into his charge then. He's smart enough to realise that God is blessing this young man. He's smart enough to realise that God is with him. So he puts everything under his control.

I feel like I use these illustrations a lot, but it's probably the only source of illustration from the working world that I have. I remember when I worked at Sainsbury's, one of the very worst jobs you could get was trolley duty.

Well, you know, the people who go around collecting all the trolleys, the people can't be annoyed, bringing back to the shop. Some days it was fine. Some days you got nice weather. Some days you got the sunshine.

And it was quite nice to be outside on good days. But other days it was horrendous. Other days when it was lashing with rain or sleet or snow, and you were still expected to be out there getting the trolleys, it was horrendous.

[12 : 26] There were generally, when I was team leader in Sainsbury's, there were about three or four people who did trolley duty. There was one old man and about two or three young lads.

When the older man was on it, I didn't need to worry about it. I knew that he would get on with it. I knew that I could trust him to go and get the trolleys, to not leave the place looking a mess.

When the younger guys were on it, not so much, to be honest. I could leave the older man in charge. I could leave him to get on with it himself. I could put everything to do with the trolleys in his hand and know that it would be done, and know that it would be done well.

And that's exactly where Potiphar finds himself this evening. He's going to leave everything in Joseph's charge. He's going to leave everything under Joseph's care and concern and know that it will succeed, and know that it will be done well.

Joseph rises through the ranks, if you like. We see that in verse 4, that he becomes one of Potiphar's trusted officials. He becomes one of the people who attends Potiphar. He becomes one of his advisors, if you like.

[13 : 31] And from that time on, we're told, verse 5, from the time that Joseph is promoted, from the time that he's made one of his advisors, the Lord blesses Potiphar.

The Lord blesses Potiphar because of Joseph. The Lord makes everything that Potiphar touches succeed because of Joseph. The Lord makes Potiphar's house succeed.

The Lord makes Potiphar's fields succeed. The Lord prospered all that the Egyptian turned his hand to. Now notice why. Notice what the author records for us.

He blessed Potiphar not because of Potiphar's religion. He blessed Potiphar not because Potiphar was seeking God. Not because he was close to the kingdom of God. But he blessed Potiphar and all that he did for the sake of Joseph.

He blessed Potiphar and all that he did for the sake of Joseph, the servant of the Lord. And here we see the blessing of living a consistent, clear Christian life in the presence of others.

[14 : 41] The blessing that can come from living that clear, Christian, consistent life in the presence of others. You see, Joseph could have wallowed in self-pity. He could have wandered around wondering, why has this all happened to me?

But he didn't. Rather, he got on, he worked hard, and the Lord blessed him. Potiphar noticed that the Lord blessed him and he promoted him. Potiphar enjoyed some of the fruits of the blessing in Joseph's life.

Some of the overflow of the blessing in Joseph's life fell on Potiphar. In a sense, that's what we call common grace, isn't it?

The sun shines on the just and the unjust alike. The rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. God's blessing in the life of Joseph results in blessing in the life of Potiphar.

God's blessing in the life of his servant overflows into blessing the life of this Egyptian. Don't we just love verse 6?

[15 : 47] It's a very descriptive verse, isn't it? It's a very clear verse. What do we read? Verse 6.

He, that is, Potiphar, left all that he had in Joseph's charge. And because of him, he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

The image we have here is of Potiphar without a care in the world. Potiphar not worried about anything. Potiphar not concerned about anything. Why? Because he knows Joseph is in control of it.

He knows it's in Joseph's hands. He knows that the Lord is blessing Joseph. And so he says, well, why should I worry? The only thing I'm concerned about is my next meal. The only thing I'm concerned about is what's for dinner tonight.

It's a great testimony for Joseph to have. His master, his employer could rest easy knowing that Joseph was in charge of it. His employer could rest easy knowing that Joseph was in control.

Potiphar didn't need to worry about it. What a wonderful testimony it would be for us as Christians if that was what our employer said about us.

[16 : 53] Deliber bater did not know the little portion of food for us. That whatever was under our care, whatever was in our control didn't need to be worried about. Because they knew we were doing it. They didn't need to worry about the money in the tills because they knew we were in charge of it.

They didn't need to worry about the stationery in the cover because they knew we were in charge of it. They didn't need to worry about keeping tabs on the tea brakes because they knew we were in charge of it.

so what do we see in these opening six verses then well we see the Lord blessing Joseph don't we we see the Lord blessing Joseph with success in his life with success in everything his hand touches we see the Lord blessing Potiphar through the success of Joseph through the life and ministry of Joseph seems to be the start of an upward curve we've seen Joseph being hated we've seen Joseph being almost killed we've seen Joseph being sold into slavery and now finally chapter 39 we seem to be entering an upward curve where the Lord seems to be materially blessing Joseph

he seems to be finally experiencing some good in his life it's the blessing Joseph experienced but secondly then we want to see how Joseph is badgered by Potiphar's wife and we see that in verses 6b through 15 verses 6b through 15 so everything seems to be going well for Joseph or at least everything seems to be going better than it had been for Joseph and we're told verse 6b that Joseph was handsome in form and appearance now of course there's nothing wrong with that we're told in other places in scripture that David was ruddy and handsome but it's then the problem comes in verse 7 verse 6b fine

Joseph is handsome in form and appearance but then verse 7 after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said lie with me now this is where the problem comes it's in verse 7 as the author introduces Potiphar's wife that really our alarm bells should be ringing it's like that moment in Jaws you know when the shark's about to eat someone new and that music starts you hear it and then the shark eats someone and so as we read verse 6b it's fine Joseph is handsome in appearance but then as we read verse 7 and Potiphar's wife's introduced the alarm bells start ringing and say well why suddenly is Potiphar's wife introduced we find out don't we and we see where it's going verse 7 after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said lie with me here is Joseph being propositioned by his boss's wife here is Joseph being tempted by his boss's wife

Joseph tries to reason with her in verse 8 he says look this isn't right my master trusts me my master's given everything into my hands my master's put everything under my control there's no one in this house who's better than I am there's no one in this house who's more trusted than I am there's no one in this house who's more significant than I am the only thing that my master has kept from me is you because you're his wife this is not right this is not good we've said it before and we'll say it again many times the Christian sexual ethic will be one of the things that marks the Christian out as different from the world around us the Christian sexual ethic will be one of the things that shows the world that we follow a different master than they do now why do I say that from this passage because let's assume for a moment this was a soap opera let's assume for a moment this was a novel even if this was a novel if this was a soap opera what would happen

[20 : 50] Potiphar's wife would proposition Joseph she'd say lie with me initially Joseph would refuse initially Joseph would say look it's not right but then eventually Joseph would look into her eyes and say well we can't resist our urges can we we can't fight against our urges can we the Christian sexual ethic will show the world that we follow a different master Joseph here refuses despite the temptation despite the the obvious temptation that it would have been Joseph refuses we live in a world where sex is cheap we live in a world a world where pornography is rife a world where adultery sadly is far far too common perhaps even amongst professing Christians it is the Christian's sexual ethic the Christian's commitment to marriage being between one man and one woman for life that will mark the Christian out as different that will show the world that the Christian follows a different master that it marches to a different beat

Joseph says verse 9 no one's greater than me no one's more significant than me no one's more important than me in this house but I won't abuse that position no one's more significant yes but I'm not going to take advantage of that I can't sin against my master I can't break the trust that he's placed in me I can't do this thing that's so wrong against him and more than that Joseph says verse 10 at the end of verse 9 sorry how can I do this great wickedness and sin against God so that's it Joseph resisted temptation Joseph has overcome this temptation that Potiphar's wife places in his way and yet notice what's recorded for us verse 10 day after day after day she spoke to Joseph and he would not listen to her to lie beside her or to be with her here we notice the righteousness of Joseph over a period of time this wasn't a one time attack this wasn't one time she said lie with me and he refused this was day after day after day this was temptation after temptation after temptation it's a warning to us that resisting temptation once will often not be enough that fleeing from temptation once will often not be an end of the matter rather sanctification rather growth in grace rather growth in gospel rather repentance is a lifelong process it's to be repeated day after day after day think about that example even of the

Lord Jesus Christ himself in the desert remember the devil comes to him and tempts him says look turn these stones into bread and Jesus says no the devil comes to him and says look all of these kingdoms are mine worship me and they shall be yours and Jesus says no he takes him to the temple and says throw yourself off the top of the temple God will surely send his angels and Jesus says no temptation needs to be resisted day after day after day but of course friends we know

ourselves we know that we often give in to temptation we know that we don't resist temptation as we should it doesn't take much to push us over the edge it doesn't take much of a temptation in order for us to succumb but the great reassuring truth tonight is that when we do feel when we do give in to temptation we have an advocate with the father we have a great high priest who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet without sin we have one who pleads our case before God our saviour the lord jesus christ so one day one day after all of the proposition and one day after all this has been going on and on and on day after day after day one day verse 11 joseph goes into the house to do his work he's going about his business he's going about just doing what he always does but notice what's recorded for us none of the men of the house was there in the house now again the alarm bells are ringing again the alarm bells are going off because joseph's in the house alone with this woman she catches him by the garment we're told verse 12 saying again lie with me sleep with me joseph to his credit again turns and flees but the problem this time is that he leaves his garment he leaves his coat behind he hasn't had much luck with coats has he one of them nearly got him killed and this one's going to end up with him in prison potiphar's wife sees the garment she sees her opportunity she sees an opportunity to get back at this man who jilted her this man who's refused her advances time and time again and she says look has this hebrew been brought amongst us to laugh at us he came in to lie with me and I cried out with a loud voice he tried to rape me effectively is what she's saying that's what she's accusing joseph of he came in to lie with me and when i cried out with a loud voice he fled so joseph has been badgered day after day after day joseph has been propositioned by this woman day after day after day he's been falsely accused now as we come to the end of verse 16 he's been falsely accused of rape which leads thirdly then to joseph being banged up banged up and we see that in verses 16 through 23 verses 16 through 23 we see joseph being banged up so the tales relate to potter for as much the same tale that the wife has relayed to the man who came rushing into the house to find out what was wrong she says look this hebrew you brought amongst us tried to rape me this hebrew you brought amongst us tried to lie with me and i cried out and he fled and as soon as potter hears this verse 19 we're told as soon as potter hears the words that his wife spoke to him his anger is kindled against joseph and joseph's taken and put into prison but notice again that the lord is with joseph verse 21 the lord was with joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison joseph's again placed into a position of authority joseph's again placed into a position of responsibility he's the one who's in charge of the people who come into prison he was the one who decided what was going to happen day after day in the prison and again the prison officer didn't pay any attention to what was in joseph's hand because he knew that the lord would make it succeed he knew that joseph would be blessed in all that he did the lord showed steadfast faithful covenant love to joseph throughout this narrative throughout this chapter the lord shows steadfast faithful covenant love to joseph he shows steadfast faithful covenant love to joseph in the opening section where we see joseph being blessed materially where we see joseph progressing in the household of potter he shows steadfast faithful covenant love to joseph even in the midst of trials and temptations and he shows steadfast faithful covenant love to joseph here as we see him in prison what's the lesson for us what's the takeaway for us this evening we shouldn't base our knowledge our feeling of god's love we shouldn't base our experience of god's love on the experiences of our lives when times are hard when difficulties arise we can know the steadfast faithful covenant love of the lord in jesus christ this evening we can know that we are loved with an everlasting love we can feel that love that god has for us we can know the steadfast love of the lord that never changes our circumstances do trials and difficulties arise in life but the steadfast love of the lord never changes and the cross of jesus christ stands as the supreme example of the steadfast love of the lord that as we look at that cross as we see jesus hanging there as we hear those words jesus cries it is finished we know that we are loved by god we know that we are accepted by god through the sacrifice of jesus christ that's the steadfast love that the lord has for his people that's the steadfast covenant love of the lord that will not change the question for you is will you take it will you come and know and experience that love that acceptance that joy will you remain in sin and misery let's pray together heavenly father we thank you this evening that you do indeed love us with that faithful steadfast covenant love we thank you for the way that we see it in the life of joseph as you kept him in prison as you kept him in pot of her service as you kept him from trials and temptations we thank you father that we know the steadfast love of you through your son the lord jesus christ that he came and laid down his life so that we might be forgiven so that we might come to know you help us to look to that steadfast love that covenant love day by day we ask

and may we know your grace and your mercy in jesus name amen