

Joseph & Potiphar's Wife

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Genesis chapter 39. 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.

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 that 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 on all that he had in house and field.

[1 : 31] 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 his house than I am, nor has he kept anything away from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?

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 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 had fled out of the house, she called to the men of their household and said to them, See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us.

[3 : 02] He came in to lie to me and 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 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.

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 favor 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.

[4 : 14] 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. This is the word of the Lord. The waves smashed into the side of the boat.

Lightning flashed all around. Rain pelted the crew from above with individual stinging assaults while the ocean lurched beneath them with a cruel united force.

It was a single faint glow on the horizon, barely discernible but still there, that gave the crew hope. The ship had been thrown off course in a massive storm.

And though they had been pummeled by the waves and utterly disoriented, the distant glow of the lighthouse stayed with them.

[5 : 32] Yes, the light stayed with them. In the midst of the tumult, the light was their steady point of reference. No matter how much they shifted in the waves or their eyes were blurred by the pounding rain, the surety of the lighthouse steadied them and invited them ever nearer.

Then suddenly, out of the dense gray fog, another vessel emerged alongside them. It was a beautiful ship built with both power and majesty in mind.

If there was a ship built to weather such brutal attacks from Mother Nature, this was surely the one to do it. A crew member from that ship called from the deck above the beating of the storm, follow us!

The invitation was warm, but the angle of the friendly ship was facing, was surprising.

It took a hard turn back into the gray, away from the light, and toward the shallows. The shallows that frothed with the ocean foam, churned up by repeated crashing onto the rocks that surely lay just beneath the surface of the water.

[6 : 57] Though the invitation was warm, the end would be an icy, cold embrace. The first ship did not turn toward the shallows.

She centered on the light and stayed the course. The light stayed with them, reaching out with a gentle, yet firm glow to draw the crew ever nearer.

The waves heaved, but the light stayed with them all the way to the safety of the harbor. The light stayed with them.

There are many, seemingly warm invitations in our lives that will not lead us to life. Invitations to pleasure, or success, or security that ultimately will leave us devastated, shipwrecked. However, the story of Joseph and Potiphar's house is intended to help us see that we are not intended to try to navigate life on our own.

[8 : 14] The wonderful truth that this text brings to our attention is that the Lord is with us. The Lord is with us and His presence changes everything.

He changes how we relate to joy and sorrow, success and suffering. We are not on our own. He is our reference point for all of life.

And He delights to bring us life even when we are brought low. I believe that the main point for us this morning is that the Lord is always present with His people even in the midst of adversity.

The Lord is always present with His people even in the midst of adversity. We are going to follow Joseph through the story as we see how the Lord's presence impacted him and how it should shape our lives as well.

We will look at four points as we follow Him. Brought down, given success, tempted and accused, and then finally brought lower still. So brought down, verses 1 and 2.

[9 : 23] If you look down with me, verse 1. Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt. He was away from home.

Far away from home. I know if you're anything like me on a long road trip, there are few things more comforting than to get home and to just to collapse in my own bed.

Are you with me? There is this sense of familiarity and comfort. But Joseph is going the opposite direction from comfort and familiarity.

If you look, the whole verse just seems to roll downhill like a big snowball picking up momentum. He was brought down to Egypt.

The nation of Egypt was at its peak around this time. The infrastructure was booming. Innovation was on the rise with the presence of the Nile River. They had this steady water supply.

[10 : 19] So even when other nations experienced drought and famine, they were good to go. The nation was flourishing in every respect possible. It was a powerful kingdom. It was a powerful pagan kingdom.

Egypt had thousands of gods. However, Yahweh, the God of Joseph, was not known. And now Joseph was brought down into Egypt.

A world that seemed to be absolutely thriving apart from his God. And I can't help but wonder if Joseph was in awe as he peered through the bars of the slave wagon at the grandeur of the pyramids and the lush valley teeming with life along the Nile River.

I wonder what thoughts entered his mind as he entered Egypt. Is this what following the Egyptians gods gets you? But he's not just brought down to Egypt generally.

Joseph was brought to a particular Egyptian. He arrived at Potiphar's house, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian.

[11:43] Joseph's future had a face. He had a particular set of afflictions in a particular context.

He has been purchased as a slave in the man whose house this belongs to. His new normal was being engineered without Joseph's input.

And what's more, we're reminded at the end of verse 1, that he had been bought from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. How is it that Joseph arrived down in Egypt?

He was sold as a slave. This was just a stinging reminder of the traumatic events that led to this situation.

Home was the place that betrayed him. He'd been forsaken by those closest to him. His own brothers violently seized him and stripped him not only of his robe but also of his dignity.

[12:56] And now surrounded by discomfort and vulnerability, the only memories of comfort and familiarity from home were tainted by painful betrayal.

Joseph was brought down. He had been brought down by those nearest to him. He'd been brought down against his will. He'd been brought down into subjection to a godless authority.

He'd been brought down into powerlessness, discomfort, unfamiliarity. He'd been brought down to a place where he was always vulnerable, disoriented and feeling alone.

Have you ever been brought down? When you long to be married but another year ticks away?

When the pregnancy tests keep coming back negative? When the prodigal child seems content to stay and eat at the pigsty?

[14:04] When the chronic pain has no clear answer? When you're looking for purpose in the final chapter of your life or when the fallout of past sin seems to just permeate the present?

When you're arising and falling in the turbulent waves of life, when you feel vulnerable, disoriented, powerless, and alone, when you've been brought down, where is God?

Where is God? Where is God? Where is God? Please look down at verse 2. The Lord was with Joseph.

The Lord was with Joseph in all of his going down, down, down.

verse 2 shockingly and wonderfully records that the Lord was with Joseph. And please note that this Lord is all caps, indicating that this is no generic Lord.

[15:17] This is Yahweh, the personal name of God. The personal name is used eight times in this text. Four of those times are in direct reference to his being present with Joseph.

Contrary to any other appearance or interpretation of the circumstances, Joseph is not alone in Egypt. He has been forsaken by his own brothers and has gone down into the belly of a godless superpower, but right there with him all along is Yahweh,!

Yahweh, the Lord! So what difference does that make, you might ask? who cares if he's there? It doesn't look like he's doing anything.

If he's so powerful, then why is Joseph forsaken? Why is he in Egypt? Why does it matter if he's present in my life when I'm brought down?

My friends, the Lord's presence changes so much more than the circumstances? Let's look at point two.

[16:35] Given success. Given success. If you look at verse two, it says this, the Lord was with Joseph and he became a successful man and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

What a jarring sentence. There are three separate phrases here that just seem to clash. Joseph is successful.

Really? Joseph is successful in his slavery to his pagan master. You catching that? Is this the obvious label that you would have put on this circumstance?

this is Joseph. The creator of the universe is with him. He is totally successful. He's a slave.

It pushes against our interpretation of reality, doesn't it? How many times have you heard the phrase it's a God thing when something happens in an unexpectedly easy way?

[17:50] And when something is really hard, not today Satan, but what if, what if everything hard is not necessarily satanic and everything easy is not necessarily godly?

what if you and I go down to Egypt because that's exactly where you need to be in order to learn how to rely on God and realize that he is with you.

Joseph is the slave of a pagan in Egypt, and yet the Lord is with him and he is deemed successful. If someone asks you, are you successful? What would you say? How do you measure that? Joseph becoming a successful man was not based on his circumstances or his station in life. His circumstances, just look, they were riddled with adversity and his station was the lowest of the low. [19 : 18] And yet God had him in a specific place for a specific purpose. What becomes clear is that his success begins with the Lord's presence in his life.

Verse three, it draws our attention to the fact that in spite of the circumstances that brought Joseph to this place, the Lord was with him and the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. Because of the Lord's presence, Joseph was executing all the tasks entrusted to him with excellence. It's the Lord's presence with his people that sets them apart as unique. Moses himself later wrestles with this as he considered life apart from the presence of the Lord. In Exodus 33, he says this, Lord, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not, in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?

[20 : 33] Do you see? Yahweh's presence is the foundation of their very existence. Open the hood, the engine that moves them is the Lord.

You just take the Lord out and they've got nothing. It's the Lord's presence in their life that moves them to action. And when they move, people recognize that it's because of the Lord.

This is, in fact, the effect of verse three. Look at it. His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

The Lord's presence was the engine of Joseph's life. Even in Egypt, even as a slave, he did his work through the power of the Lord and for the Lord.

We see this principle when Paul says in Colossians 1, verse 29, for this I toil, I work, struggling with all his energy.

[21 : 45] I work his energy that he powerfully works within me. The Lord's presence is the engine enabling Paul's work. He is dependent on the Lord.

Then in Colossians 3, 22 and 24, Paul says this, bond servants, slaves, literally, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward, you are serving the Lord Christ.

The Lord's presence gives us a new metric for success. The Lord does not highlight the what of our work.

He underlines the how and the who. In this case, he's talking to a slave. That's the what? Slave.

[22 : 56] He does not emphasize the circumstance or the station of being a slave. Instead, the emphasis is on the how. Working heartily.

How? Working heartily. And the who? As if serving the Lord himself. So when we belong to the Lord, it changes how we work.

It changes the way success is measured. Plug in any job and it is transformed. Do it heartily as if serving the Lord himself.

The kind of success displayed in Joseph's wife is a faithfulness in the task at hand while relying on the Lord's enabling presence.

That's what's happening here. What would it look like to embrace what's before you with that kind of a vision? What would it look like to work the factory job heartily as if serving the Lord himself?

[24 : 03] Imagining that the Lord would come and use the product that you were responsible for? What would it look like to embrace motherhood heartily as if serving the Lord himself?

As if you were washing dishes and folding laundry and preparing meals for Jesus himself? The presence of the Lord transforms how we approach the assignments that we are given.

Regardless of how we got there, we work in dependence on him and for him. And this brings blessing.

It brings blessing on those you serve and it honors the Lord. In verse five, notice that the Lord blessed the Egyptians' house for Joseph's sake.

Oh, friends, this vision for success protects us from a fixation on circumstance and station. And because it operates out of the Lord's power, it protects us from pride.

[25 : 10] When we know to tie our successes to his provision, there is no room for arrogance or for boasting. Without the engine, we wouldn't move.

So, like Joseph, we are not captive to our circumstance or station. We are captive to the Lord. We depend on the Lord.

We aim to please the Lord. No matter the work we've been assigned or the lot that we've been given. Number three, tempted and accused.

In verse six, we experience another wave in Joseph's story. It says, Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

This was the same phrase used of his mother, Rachel, back in chapter 29. Beautiful in form and appearance. Apparently, he had the good looking gene.

[26 : 18] And at least this in part becomes kind of a catalyst for the temptation that happens. His master's wife casts her eyes on him and says, lie with me.

It's sort of a real brash and brutish kind of demand. And it appears that she may have been the kind of woman who had all things at her disposal.

But Joseph refuses her advance. And we'll get back to that shortly. But notice the variety of forms the temptation takes in verse 10.

She spoke to Joseph day after day. Like a Chinese water torture. Drip, drip, drip. In other words, this was a consistent, persistent presence in Joseph's life.

In response, however, he, it says that Joseph would not listen to her, lie beside her, or be with her. You can almost hear the invitation.

[27 : 21] That she's lodging to him. You don't have to sleep with me. Why not just lie beside me? Or why not just be with me? That's not too much, is it?

What could that hurt? Isn't this the insidious nature of temptation? So often, all that's needed is just a little bit of compromise to be nudged off course.

in C.S. Lewis's famous book, *The Screwtape Letters*, a senior devil writes to an apprentice about the art of temptation. He says this, it does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the nothing.

life. But look at the shocking response from Joseph in verse 9. He says, how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?

Sin against God. Do you see? all of Joseph's life is being lived in relation to the presence of the Lord.

[28 : 47] Some things the Lord's presence enables Joseph to do, other things the Lord's presence enabled Joseph not to do. Derek Kidner helpfully wrote, by giving the proposition its right name of wickedness, he made truth his ally.

And by relating all to God, he rooted his loyalty to his master deep enough to hold. So much of the temptation war is fought on the battle ground of belief.

What we actually believe is at stake shapes how we respond to situations. There's often in our hearts ambiguity about the deadliness of sin.

there's an overconfidence in our own resilience. And what's more, we often fail to make a battle plan before stepping out onto the battlefield.

Where do you see temptation surfacing in your life? Is it one more look? One more bite? One more dollar?

[30 : 03] one more drink? One more job? One more round of applause? One more concession? I want to invite you to identify a battle plan for temptation and bring a friend with you.

Like Brian, confess, bring a friend with you. And for another time-tested strategy, take a look at verse 11 and 12. He went into the house, no one else was there, she grabbed his garment, he ran. He ran. This is good stuff. Be prepared to run. Don't wait around and try to be polite.

Get up and run! Run! Run! Are you prepared to run? Look at verse 17 for the accusation.

Notice how she phrases the accusation. The Hebrew servant whom you have brought came in to laugh at me. Well, not only is she indicting Joseph, but she's also placing blame on her husband at the same time.

[31 : 24] After all, he's the one who brought Joseph into the house. What we see here echoes from Genesis 3, remember? When Adam shifts the blame for his own actions to both the woman and ultimately to God.

The woman you gave me, if I remember correctly. Verse 19 says, as soon as his master heard, his anger was kindled.

Now, it does not indicate whom his anger was kindled toward. Notice that. Attempted rape was a capital offense, especially when involving a slave.

So Potiphar could have easily had Joseph executed immediately. Instead, he sends Joseph to prison, where the king's prisoners were confined.

So this indicates, and I'm in agreement with this, that Potiphar did not altogether believe his wife. She might have already had a reputation, the way things were going.

[32 : 35] This may have been the way for the wife to save face in the context of public disgrace. So what should we make of temptation and accusation?

temptation. Well, in the story, Joseph wonderfully resists temptation, and we certainly can draw help from his example. But what about when we succumb to temptation and the accusation is true? What if we failed? How does the Lord's presence come to bear on us then? My friends, if you are in Christ, the Lord loves you too much to leave you where you are.

We have a path forward in forgiveness through confession and repentance. These are an ongoing expression of faith.

Not just a one-time thing. These are an ongoing expression of faith and dependence on the Lord.

That's why it says in 1 John 1, 9, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[33 : 59] So in one sense, yes, if you place your trust in Jesus Christ, you are definitively forgiven. You are justified by faith.

You have been released from the penalty of sin in your life. However, however, we continue to battle the presence of sin until the day that we die.

When we succumb to temptation, we are still righteous before God on the basis of Christ's finished work alone. But we grieve the Lord.

we break fellowship with the Lord. And we experience the consequences of our sin. As John Piper helpfully said, confessing is not a payment.

It is simply an agreement for the Christian. It is simply an agreement with God that this was an ugly and unworthy thing for me to do and I'm ashamed of it.

[35 : 06] I'm sorry for it and I turn from it. I embrace the finished, complete, perfect, once for all work of Christ afresh and I rest in it.

It's wonderful freedom. It's help. But we're also not doomed simply to keep repeating again and again and again.

We can grow in our dependence on the Lord. We can learn to fight His grace not only forgives us but empowers us to change.

Very recently we went on a walk around a trail. It was completely covered in snow and ice and we were sliding all over the place. My youngest son, Arlo, who's three, slipped, landed flat on his back and he cried and he stared up at me.

I reached out my hand to him and asked, do you want me to help you? He laid up on his back, hands flat by his side and replied, I can't!

[36 : 17] Like that. I didn't ask if he could do it. I asked if he wanted help because he depended, if he depended on my strength, he could do it.

That's Christian repentance. It's turning away from self-reliance and toward God-reliance. So even, hear this, even our failure is transformed by the Lord's presence.

There's hope for you in the Lord. point three, brought lower still. Lastly, we see in verse 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.

just when things were looking up, the false accusation landed him in prison. Are you kidding me? It seems that he has been brought lower still. Look at the injustice. Look at all that has happened and now he's going even lower?

[37 : 51] Has God really, truly abandoned him now? Verse 21. In prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love.

The Lord is still with him and yet he's going lower still. lower still.

Still. But here we see an additional note. The Lord is not simply a lighthouse that gives him light to guide.

The Lord is with him in prison showing steadfast love. Steadfast love.

This is personal affectional attention. This is God's covenant love. Don't miss what this text is highlighting all along.

[39 : 08] The accent all the way through from top to bottom is on the Lord accomplishing his purposes through his people even in the midst of adversity.

Joseph is brought lower and lower but it is all headed somewhere. It is all headed somewhere. In Joseph we see a shadow of what was to come.

He was the favored son of the father. He was sent to his brothers. He was betrayed and forsaken. Yet he faithfully served to bring blessing and honor to God. But he was stripped and he was laid bare and falsely accused but he was not done.

He would be brought lower still. It was through his enslavement that life itself would be preserved. God's people grew and waited for the promise in the fullness of time God sent forth his son.

[40 : 20] He sent forth his son. He came down from heaven. He was born to a poor family in a lowly manger in the small town of Bethlehem but he would be brought lower still.

He touched untouchables. He ate with the most sinful of sinners. He spent time with nobodies. He came to serve the servants but he would still be brought lower still.

He was tempted yet without sin. He was forsaken and sold by his brothers. He was accused without a fair trial and he was stripped of his robe.

But this son would be brought lower still. He was nailed to a criminal's tree and unlike Joseph he was forsaken by God as he endured the wrath of sin so that we might never be forsaken by God. But he would be brought lower still. He entered the prison of death and was buried in the earth like a seed. Like a seed.

[41 : 35] On the third day he was raised from death to life, from the cross to the crown, so that all who place their trust in him might be rescued from the tyranny of sin.

He left us with this promise that he will be with us to the end of the age, with you, with us forever, to the end, no matter what the circumstance is.

And one day, every tongue will confess and every knee will be brought lower still before the high and exalted one, Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

Joseph is pointing us to the reality that God's promise stands for you in Jesus Christ. There is nothing that can separate us from the steadfast covenant love of Christ.

No adversity, no temptation, no suffering, no circumstance. The Lord is always present with his people, even in the midst of adversity. He is God with you.

[42 : 45] Let's go to him and pray. Oh Lord, we praise you, we thank you that you have not left us on our own. Your presence makes all the difference in our lives.

We throw ourselves to you knowing we can't change anything. But it's because of your promise and your power that we have hope, we have life. It is your presence that guides us.

And we know that in any affliction we can cling to you as our shepherd, the one who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. We give you all the praise.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at Trinity Grace Athens dot com. Amen. Amen.