

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 3, 2013
No. 3657

Joseph's Dysfunctional Family
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear fellow saints in the church of Jesus Christ,

Today we begin a series of messages on the life of Joseph. If you have your Bible with you, we will be looking today at Genesis chapter 37 verses 1 through 11.

The story of Joseph is perhaps one of the most well known and loved in Scripture. I remember as a child being fascinated by the characters and the plot, the crisis and the resolution, in this story. It's an amazing story.

There are three main lessons for us to learn from the life of Joseph.

The first thing we learn is that God is sovereign over all things, including evil, in such a way that He directs all things to serve His purposes and to serve the good of His chosen people. The story of Joseph is, perhaps, the greatest illustration in the Bible of the truth of Romans 8:28, which says that "all things work together for good to them that love God." At the end of this story, in Genesis 50:20, Joseph says to his brothers, "ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive." God is at work here to preserve His people, to produce the nation of Israel, and to fulfill His promise to send the Savior, Jesus Christ.

The second thing we learn from this story is that God in His covenant faithfulness works in families. Earlier God's promise to Abraham was that His covenant would be with Abraham and his seed after them, in their generations. The family of Joseph is, to say the least, dysfunctional. In these verses, there is a seething hatred between family members that erupts in a murderous spirit. And yet, God is pleased to work, in a marvelous way, by His grace, to bring salvation to this family. There is so much for us to learn from this family, for our families. We are going to see that especially today, in this first message.

The third obvious lesson for us in Joseph's life is the lesson of faith and godliness. We learn this from Joseph himself. I do not say that Joseph was perfect or sinless, but there is something extraordinary about him. We are used to seeing the Bible characters, warts and all. Think of Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Eli, David, Solomon, Peter, and many more. The Bible does not hesitate to tell us about their sins. But, when we come to Joseph we have to search the Scriptures very closely to find anything blameworthy. That is even true of these introductory verses in which Joseph reports the evil of his brothers, and shares his dreams with them. Some are very critical of him for this, but the Bible says nothing to indicate that his motives were anything but pure. The sin described here is in Jacob and in Joseph's brothers. And going beyond this passage, we see in Joseph a patience, a trust, a diligence, and a love that is unsurpassed in Scripture. There are lessons for all of us to learn from this, especially for the young, for Joseph was a young man.

The verses that we look at today introduce us to Joseph and his family who are the main players in this history. This family is in crisis. It is dysfunctional. There is a seething hatred between the family members.

Joseph is introduced to us as a 17-year-old boy who is sent out to watch his father's flocks with four of his brothers.

Earlier in Genesis we learn that Joseph is the 11th of twelve sons born to Jacob. These sons are not all from one wife, but from four wives, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah. Of these four wives, Jacob's favorite is Rachel, and for many years while the other wives bear children, Rachel is barren. Then, finally, Rachel gives birth to Joseph, and he becomes his father's pride and joy, his favorite.

The brothers that Joseph works with are the sons of Jacob's concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah, the wives at the bottom of the list. We can be sure that these men see and resent the special place that Joseph has in his father's affection. Besides this, favoritism is never good for any child. Children are sinners, so when they are the objects of special treatment, the result is a sense of superiority, of self-importance, and of self-righteousness. Even if these were not the attitudes of Joseph's heart, we can be sure that his brothers perceived it this way, especially when Joseph reported their evil deeds to father Jacob. "Here is the little favorite, and now he's become Daddy's little tattletale."

Perhaps Joseph can be excused here, for his higher duty of faithfulness to his father, to his brothers, and even to God. His report was true. The brothers were evil. The words, "evil report" in verse 2 indicate that this was a report Joseph heard from others about them. They were renowned for their wickedness. Away from father Jacob, out in the fields and the surrounding villages, they became known as evil men; perhaps thieves and fornicators and partyers and drunkards. Maybe out of concern for them and for the reputation of God's people in Canaan, Joseph reports this to his father.

But Jacob cannot be excused. Though the brothers were also wicked in their hatred of Joseph, Jacob was largely to blame for this. Verse 3 tells us, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children." It is significant that the name used here is Israel, not Jacob. This is his new name from God. Here we have the transformed Jacob, the new man, not wrestling with God but dependent on God. And yet we find he is still a sinner, an indulgent parent.

This favoritism soon shows itself, as it always does when parents do this. Joseph is the son of his old age. These two become constant companions. They're always together, conversing, holding hands, laughing, sharing secrets. And it becomes very obvious to the other children. On top of this, Jacob makes for Joseph a coat of many colors. What exactly this coat was, we don't know, but the word used here seems to indicate two things about this coat. 1. It was not a single piece of cloth, but many pieces of cloth put together, and so it was an expensive coat. 2. It was a long cloak, not the kind that workers or shepherds would use, but the kind that royalty would wear. While his brothers had to "roll up their sleeves and work" Joseph was promoted by his father to management. And again, we do not know anything about Joseph's motives here, but it seems that Joseph was quite willing to wear this coat, even though he knew that it was provocative.

How foolish of Jacob his father. Shouldn't he have known better? Does not any parent know that this kind of thing breeds sibling rivalry? Should not Jacob have learned a lesson from his own childhood, when Esau was his father's favorite, and he was his mother's favorite. Could not he see the dreadful results this brought in his own family?

But you know, is not this exactly what we do, carry sins over from one generation to the next, and we are blind to it? I doubt that Jacob even realized what he was doing here. Probably

he justified it. Yes, my father favored Esau, but that was different. He loved Esau for carnal reasons, because Esau liked the outdoors. I love Joseph because he's a godly young man.

What we learn is that all of us need God's grace to open our eyes to our own failures, and we need God's grace to untwist the wreckage that sin brings. Who of us has a perfect family? Who of us are perfect parents? May God open our eyes to see how deeply sin affects our lives and our homes, so that hostility does not come into our homes. Oh may He work by His grace in our homes and families, and may He do it without the pain that Jacob had to experience.

Joseph's brothers, and now not just the four of them, but the ten of them, observe this favoritism. Verse four tells us that "when they saw that their father loved Joseph more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him." And in the following verses this hatred builds. Four times the word hate is mentioned, and each time it intensifies.

It starts in verse 4. They despise him, simply because of the favoritism and the coat—so much so, that they cannot speak a kind word to him. They cannot greet him in the morning. Literally, when they saw him, they could not bring themselves to say Shalom—peace. This sometimes happens in families. It can happen between a husband and a wife, between children, between grown siblings, between parents and children. Maybe this is true in your family. Sometimes it happens in the family of God, between believers. And very often the cause is hatred in our own hearts—we despise the brother, sister, husband, or wife. And here is a test of your heart: when you see that person, can you say, "Shalom," Peace? If not, then perhaps your heart is not right.

So, first, they hate him because he's favored. But this hatred intensifies. In verse 5, "And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers, and they hated him yet the more." This is how it happened. He comes to the breakfast table, they already cannot stand to see him, and he says, "Listen to my dream. We were working together in the fields, binding sheaves (a sheaf is a bundle of straw), and my sheaf rose and stood upright, and yours gathered around and bowed down to it. That was my dream." He doesn't offer any interpretation, but he does not have to, because the brothers already know what it means. They ask, "What's this, little shaver, you really think you're going to reign over us? You? You're going to have authority and rule over us?"

And their hatred intensifies. At the end of verse 8, they hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words. Now, it is not just because he is favored, but listen to him, he thinks he is something. Or so they reason. You can almost hear them. Later in the chapter (v. 19), they give him a new nickname, "the dreamer." Here comes the dreamer.

Then, maybe it is the next morning, he has another dream (v. 9). And here he comes again, "Listen, I have had another dream. Behold, or amazing, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowed down to me." And after he has told his brothers, he goes to find his father and tells him too. Jacob is angry, and he rebukes his son. Maybe, it is the first time Joseph is rebuked by his father. This is more than Jacob can handle. Understand, this was patriarchal society, and respect for the father figure was built in. Part of why Joseph's brothers hate him so much is that they dare not disrespect their father. Fathers did not bow down to their sons. So, Jacob rebukes his son, "shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? Joseph, don't talk like that!"

And again the hatred of the brothers intensifies (v. 11). His brethren envied him. Envy is a form of hatred that resents and begrudges another. Envy wants the other person out of the way. Get out of my life! I hate you because you have what I want!

Was this hatred justified? Perhaps we want to excuse it, and say, What do you expect? After all, look what has happened? It is what Jacob and Joseph are doing that caused all this. Too often, that is how we will excuse our own sinful behavior in our relationships. “Yes, I’m mad at my wife, but look what she did.” But what another has done against us, even if it is sinful, is never an excuse for our sin. Here, I want to contrast these brothers to Joseph. Later, when their hatred explodes and they sell him, we never read that he despised them or rebelled against God. Jesus says, “If your brother smite you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.” As believers, we must be willing to suffer wrong, following Christ, who when He was reviled, He reviled not again, but gave His back to the smiters. That is the grace we need to be able to live in our families with one another, sinners with sinners.

No, this hatred was not justified, not in the slightest. And what makes that very obvious is that God’s hand is moving, very obviously, in these events. When we look at the life of Joseph, we see nothing miraculous. He does not receive bread from heaven to keep him going, he is not led by a cloud. In many ways it is very ordinary. Joseph perseveres through the unknown.

But here, in these verses, at the very beginning, God speaks. God sends these dreams to Joseph. And when God sends a dream, He does it so that the dream can be announced. Joseph, here, is a prophet, one who receives special revelation from God. These dreams are a testimony against Joseph’s brothers. In verse 8 they hate him for his dreams. That is different than hating him for his coat. The coat came from Jacob, but this, this was from God, it was prophetic. And these brothers are not ready to embrace God’s purposes for them and their family. So their hatred is a rebellion against divine revelation. They despise God, in the end.

Do you know, that whenever we despise another person, we too are really hating God’s purposes for us? God will put people in your life who are difficult for you to love. God puts them there! And He says, Love them. Pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you. It does not matter who that is. God brought them into your life, God caused the paths of your lives to intersect. What are you going to say about God’s purposes? Are you going to hate him for them?

God sent these dreams. These brothers determined evil against Joseph. Later they will remember both the dreams and the evil that they committed against Joseph. What they do here is sin, and it cannot be excused. Neither can ours.

But Jacob sees the hand of God here (v. 11). After he rebukes Joseph, we read that he observed what Joseph had said. He thought about it. Could there possibly be something in this? Has God sent these dreams? Jacob will keep these dreams in his memory, to see what God meant by them.

And so will Joseph. These dreams, the voice of God to him, will be his strength through two decades of silence from heaven. Joseph in faith will cling to them, because he trusts God, and because he knows that God in His sovereign providence has a purpose in all that will befall him. May we, who have received so much greater and clearer revelation, also have that kind of faith in God.

Let us pray. Father, we look forward to digging into the scriptural account of the life of Joseph. We are thankful for the Scriptures and the fullness of the revelation of Jesus Christ in them. Give us hearts to believe, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 10, 2013
No. 3658

Joseph Is Sold into Slavery
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Last week we began a study on the life of Joseph from Genesis 37. In the first eleven verses we were introduced to a family in crisis: a favored son, a doting father, and hate-filled brothers. But God, we saw, was not absent from this story. He sent Joseph's dreams, and, as we will see, He did that with a purpose.

As we go through this narrative, we should remember that there are really three different perspectives. There is first our perspective as readers. We either do not know the story and so are waiting to hear what will happen next or, if we are familiar with it, we know what will happen next. Then there is also the perspective of the inspired writer, Moses. He knows where this story is going and is able to see God's purpose in it. He can see it in retrospect. Both these views are removed from the story. But then there is also the perspective of the participants: Jacob, his sons, and Joseph. They do not see what we see. They really have no idea how God is using these events to accomplish His purpose for them. We should think about this third perspective because it is so real to our lives. This is not only a family in crisis, but a family that will go through some tragic and painful experiences. And yet, God has a purpose in it, for them, and even for us. It is through their suffering, that they are brought to maturity as God's people. Jacob still has a lot to learn. Joseph's brothers have much to learn too. Even Joseph needs to be prepared for the position that God will give him later in the land of Egypt. The painful events of their lives here in Genesis 37 are a part of God's preparing them for what is to come.

It may be that you have some very painful circumstances in your life at present, and maybe you think that God is not aware of what is happening to you, or that He has relinquished His control of your life to some dark forces of evil. You can imagine that Joseph could have thought this way as he was sold into Egypt. But we learn from Joseph's life that God never leaves one of His children. They may be tossed about in the waves and storms of life, but God is always there, and He always has a purpose that He is working through these things, for the good of His people. That purpose is to make us more like Christ. In Romans 8:29, immediately after the beautiful statement that "all things work together for good to them that love God," we read that God's eternal purpose for His people is that they "be conformed to the image of his son." And you see, that is what is happening here in the story of Joseph. All of the members of Jacob's family are being worked on by God, so that they become more Christlike. Whatever you are going through in your life, that is what *God* is doing with you—He is shaping and molding you to be more like His Son. Let us not resist or rebel against His love but, like Joseph, quietly and submissively follow where He leads.

Well, we pick up the story of Joseph today in Genesis 37:12. The hatred of Joseph's brothers, after his dreams, is very hot. Now we see it working out in a horrendous crime committed against Joseph their brother, against Jacob their father, and, ultimately, against God.

We read, "and his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem." Shechem is about 50 miles from Hebron, where Jacob had settled with his family. Because pastures for flocks

were scarce in this region, Jacob sent his sons following the flocks as they moved through the mountains finding their food.

Verse 13. “And Israel (or Jacob) said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send thee unto them. And he [that is, Joseph], said to him, Here am I. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, and see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks, and bring me word again.”

Obviously, the brothers have been gone with the flocks for some time, and they are some distance away. There are unknown dangers and people in these regions, and Jacob’s sons have already had an altercation with the people of Shechem (Gen. 34). So Jacob wants a report on how they are faring.

I read this, and I say, Jacob, Jacob! Do you not remember what happened last time Joseph brought a report of his brothers? It was a bad report, and they hated him for being a tattletale. And now you are sending him again. Have you not learned anything?

Or is Jacob simply blind to what is going on in his family, refusing to see fault in his own sons? Maybe he is so disconnected, so busy with his own life, that he’s not aware of what goes on between his children?

Either of those are common enough in the life of a family, and the results are never good.

A mother who is always defending her children, and never sees their faults, will end up with spoiled and proud children.

A disconnected father, who does not take seriously his own responsibilities for the spiritual welfare of his children, or who has no interest in the day-to-day life of his children, will end up with a brood of children who do not care about him and are bitter against him.

Joseph sets out on foot. It is quite a journey for a 17-year-old boy, traveling alone. The fifty miles to Shechem, and the further 15 miles to Dothan, would take almost a week to walk. There are threats and dangers along the way, thieves and bandits, hunger and thirst, treacherous trails, and so on. It reminds us of Jacob, traveling alone to the house of Laban, when God appeared to him at Bethel, and said, I will go with thee. This same God is with Joseph and brings him safely to his destination in Shechem.

In verses 15 and 16 we read, “And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks.”

Here, Joseph has come to Shechem, but, not finding his brothers, he does not know what to do or where to go from here. Again, God in His providence brings a man to him who knows where his brothers are. “And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan.”

Do we see the hand of God in our lives in small details like this? Maybe you meet someone through an acquaintance, and it leads to a fruitful relationship. Or maybe it is as simple as someone giving you the information you need as you stand in line at the bank. God is busy in all these things, leading us through life. Joseph’s encounter with this fellow in Shechem leads him to his brothers in Dothan.

Verse 18: “And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.” They have been absent from him, and yet the hatred is still

there. Talking together, they come up with a plan (v. 20). They will kill him, throw his body into a pit, and say to their father, some wild beast has devoured him.

What was it that provoked them, so quickly, to this murderous plan? They want him dead! Why? How can it get so bad in a family that the members are ready to kill one another?

There are two things indicated in the passage. First, it is his coat, which is a symbol of Jacob's favoritism. How do they recognize him? By his coat. Here Joseph comes in his supervisory outfit. They hate him for it. And, second, it's his dreams. In verse 19, they say to one another, "Behold, this dreamer cometh," and verse 20, We will kill him, and then "we shall see what will come of his dreams."

They are opposed to Joseph having a position of rule over them—not only that their father would put Joseph over them, but that God would do this. They hate Joseph for the dreams. It is the dreams. How can they stop those dreams from happening? How can they stop the purposes of God? We will kill him, and then these dreams will never come true.

But when Reuben, the oldest brother, hears it, he has a plan to save his brother Joseph (v. 21).

There are two reasons that Reuben would do this. One is that he was the oldest brother, and so held primary responsibility. If Joseph's death would be connected to something the brothers did, then Reuben would be held the most guilty. But also, Reuben at this time was already in serious trouble with his father. Dysfunctional is a word we have used to describe this family. Reuben, around this time, has had physical relations with one of his father Jacob's wives (read about it in Genesis 49:4). There was incest in this family. And so, Reuben is not in a position where he wants also to be guilty of murder.

Reuben's plan is simple (v. 22). He tells his brothers that it would be better for them that they not kill Joseph, but instead leave him to die of thirst and starvation in the pit. At least then, he says, we will not be guilty of his blood. He will die of natural causes, not as a result of murder. This is a trick, because his real plan is to come back to the pit when his brothers are not around, and set Joseph free and send him home safely. It all backfires on him, because his brothers get to the pit when he is not around.

And so (v. 23), Joseph comes and they commit their horrid crime. They grab him, strip him of his coat, and throw him into a nearby pit, in which there was not water. What a horrible and frightful scene this must have been. Joseph, fighting and kicking to get away, swinging his arms, screaming, and then finally crying and pleading, but they do not listen. In Genesis 42:21 we learn that Joseph's behavior here etched itself into their minds, and came back to trouble them. They said "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear."

Back in Genesis 37:25 we get a very vivid picture of that. While Joseph screams and cries for mercy, "they sat down to eat bread." How hardened their hearts were! God has made us so that whenever we are overcome by guilt or grief, it hits us in the stomach. But these men were unfazed. I suppose it would have been the same if they had actually murdered him. We see here the depths of the selfish depravity of the human heart. It defies description. And all, to kill the dream.

Here is the irony in the story—God's irony. Their very efforts to kill the dream ensure that it will take place. While they are eating, they see a company of Ishmaelites, riding their camels,

going down to Egypt to sell spices and ointments. And Judah says (v. 26), “What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him: for, he is our brother and our flesh.” Let us avoid the blood, and make some money at the same time. And the brothers are happy with this plan.

So Joseph is lifted from the pit, and for 20 pieces of silver he is sold to the Ishmaelites. It is the climax of their hatred. They are rid of their brother. This is what hatred will do. They were ready to murder him to get rid of him, but this accomplishes the same thing. He is out of their life.

I wonder, who is it that you hate? You say, I do not hate anyone. Well then, who is it that you would rather not have in your life, or who is it that you have already cut off from your life? And what have you done to get rid of that person? You see, the same hatred that’s in the hearts of these brothers, we find in our hearts, and that hatred is murder. Jesus says that being angry with your brother without a cause, and calling your brother a fool, are equivalent to murder, and place a person in danger of hell fire. We had better not read the story of Joseph’s brothers from a position of superiority and self-righteousness, but with a sorrow and repentance over our own hate-filled, selfish, and depraved hearts. May God bring us to see ourselves, and to repent humbly.

The crime is committed, and now it must be concealed.

While the brothers ate their lunch and sold Joseph, Reuben was watching the flocks. When his brothers come back to the fields, he hurries to the pit to deliver Joseph. But Joseph is gone. Reuben is distraught. What will he do now? What will he tell his father?

The brothers get Reuben to agree with them on the plan of concealment and deception. They take Joseph’s coat of many colors, dip it in the blood of a goat, and bring it to their father with the question, “This have we found: know now whether it be thy son’s coat or no.” The power of suggestion is stronger than an explanation. Father, do you recognize this coat that we found, covered in blood?

And Jacob, seeing it, says, “It is my son’s coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.” The conspiracy is flawless. Jacob tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, and mourns many days for his beloved son, Joseph. He says, “I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.” He is tortured with grief. We can be sure that a part of his grief is guilt for sending his son on this dangerous journey, but Jacob’s grief is unreasonable. He does not grieve in faith and hope with a view to the joyous day when he will be reunited with his apparently dead son, but rather he feels the pain and the loss for himself. Even in this grief, we see his favoritism. Had this been one of his other children, it would not have been so severe. He grieves as one who has no hope, and he does not trust the providential hand of his God as he should. Later, in Genesis 42:36, when it seems he has lost Simeon, and will lose Benjamin, he says, “all these things are against me.” But it was not so, and the child of God should never see it this way, or say such a thing. If God be for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)? Yes, even in death. I Thessalonians 4:13 says that we do not sorrow as those who have no hope, and that is because God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Abraham believed that even if he would sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God, God Himself would raise him from the dead in order to keep His promises. And in death, we should have a similar faith in God. We believe that Jesus, who was put to death, is risen again, and is alive today, and that He will come again to

raise us to live with Him. We sorrow, but we do it in hope. Jacob, in his grief, did not have a faith like that.

But worse yet than Jacob's grief is the hypocrisy of his sons. They fake it at the funeral. In verse 35, "And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him." The daughters here would be the wives of these men. When Jacob grieves, the whole family gets behind him, to support and encourage him. That would be wonderful thing, except for the hypocrisy. How hard are the hearts of these men. All the passion of Jacob, all his weeping and wailing, are not enough to move them to repentance. From day to day they watch the grief they have brought on their father by their crime, and they compound it by attempting to console him.

And meanwhile, Joseph, 17 years old, is strapped to the back of a camel, a prisoner, headed down the road to Egypt, wondering whether his father, Jacob, will come to get him. What were your dreams, and what your desires at 17? A job, a car, a girl, a life? All Joseph's dreams are shattered. This is his worst nightmare coming true.

Where is God in this? Where is justice? It just doesn't seem fair! As we read this story in Genesis from our perspective, and from the perspective of the participants, that seems to be a legitimate question. Where is God? There is no mention of Him here in this entire passage. He seems to have forgotten Joseph.

Maybe you look at your life and ask the same question. It is a shambles, evil men are set against you, you have been wronged, and God seems to be absent. Where is He?

Beloved, God is right here in the middle of the story of Joseph. The invisible hand, guiding these events. Who sent the man to find Joseph in the fields of Shechem? Who sent the brothers to Dothan, right along the trading route to Egypt? Who sent the Midianites to Egypt so that they came by, right at the moment Joseph was in the pit and the brothers were having their lunch? Who sent the dreams that so incited the hatred of the brothers?

It was God who did all this. The last verse of the chapter hints at that: "And the Midianites sold Joseph into Egypt." This verse is an important link in the history of Joseph. At the very same time that the brothers were deceiving their father and pretending to comfort him, something else was going on, far away, that would make sense of all this. God was guiding Joseph, step by step, to Egypt, Potiphar's house, to the prison, to the palace, and to a position of leadership that would end in the repentance and preservation of the family of Jacob.

God has a hand in all this. Psalm 105:17 puts it very bluntly: "God sent Joseph before them into Egypt." God did this. The doting father, the hate-filled brothers, the crime, the concealment, the cries of Joseph—all of it was under God's control, to serve His purpose, for His people. And as He unfolds His covenant promise to send the Christ, He uses these events, to cause a nation to begin from which the Savior will be born, a Savior who will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. This is connected to the coming of Christ.

And so, I finish with this. Let us trust this sovereign God. Let us not question His purposes, as Jacob did. Let us see from this story that God is always at work, in the day and in the night, in prosperity and in adversity, in health and in sickness, in brokenness and in joy. Let us believe that, and, believing it, let us rest in God. Nothing shall ever separate us from His love. That was the promise to Joseph. Though Joseph was far away from his father and his family, in Egypt, God was with him (chap. 39:2). Not only was God in control, but God was with him. Dear child of God, God says to you, no matter how dark your way, I will never, no never, no never leave

thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Let's pray,

Father, thanks for Thy unfailing love, the constant presence, and Thy sovereign, powerful government of all things, for the good and salvation of Thy people. Lord, help us to believe this about Thee, so that we are not afraid when evil and hardship comes our way in this life. For Jesus' sake we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 17, 2013

Joseph's Diligence in a Strange Place and Position

No. 3659 Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

In the last couple of weeks we have begun an in-depth study into the life of Joseph as recorded in the closing chapters of the book of Genesis. So far, we have looked at Genesis chapter 37, where Joseph and his dysfunctional family are introduced to us. There is the doting father Jacob, the dreaming boy Joseph, and the hate-filled brothers. The hatred of the brothers comes especially in response to Joseph's dreams, which are clearly God-sent, and which foretell a time when Joseph will rule over both his brothers and his parents. The brothers want to kill the dreams, and so they make plans to kill the dreamer, Joseph. But, under the guiding hand of God's providence, Joseph's life is spared, and he instead is sold into slavery and transported to Egypt. That is chapter 37, and today we pick up the story of Joseph, in Egypt, from chapter 39.

You will notice, there is a chapter missing here, chapter 38. What happens in Genesis 38? And, how is it connected to the story of Joseph? Before we get to Joseph in Egypt, let us answer those questions.

In Genesis 38 we have the story of Joseph's prosperous brother Judah and his adulterous relationship with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, who is a Canaanite. There are two things in chapter 38 that connect it to the story of Joseph.

The first is the contrast between Judah and Joseph. In prosperity, Judah falls into adultery. In poverty and slavery, Joseph is kept from and resists the same sin. There is an important biblical principle and warning here. Psalm 62:10 puts it this way, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them." Wealth and prosperity and power are not evil in themselves, but they are dangerous; they open up to us added opportunities for temptation. Think of Solomon and how his wealth and power brought him down. And you do not have to look far in our society to see the same thing playing out among the wealthy and famous. There is a warning here, especially for the wealthy and prosperous. Look out, be on your guard, continue in prayer, ask for wisdom, so that your position, power, and prosperity do not become the occasion for a serious fall into sin. That is Judah in chapter 38.

And then in contrast you have Joseph in chapter 39. We are not going to get to this part of the story in today's message, but you are familiar with it. Joseph is a young man, a slave, far from home. His life is extremely difficult. Beyond any of our experiences. And yet, when Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him, he is faithful in temptation. I believe it was through his difficult circumstances that God prepared him for the hour of temptation. His difficult times brought him closer to the Lord, and so he was ready when temptation came.

The second connection to the story of Joseph in chapter 38 is this: the longer Jacob and his family are in Canaan, the more they become like them, and the more absorbed they become into the people of Canaan. God does not want this. He intends to prepare them to be a separate people, a holy nation, set aside to serve Him. And so, Joseph is sent into Egypt as the advance

man, to prepare the way for Jacob and his entire family to come, peaceably and intact, into Egypt, where they will be treated as a distinct people, and where they will grow into a great nation. Judah's sin in chapter 38 threatens the distinctiveness of God's people, and so they must go to Egypt.

Well, so much for chapter 38. Let us move on to chapter 39, where today we will consider just the first six verses. Here we find Joseph in Egypt. Verse 1 tells us that the Ishmaelite slave traders bring him down to Egypt, and there sell him to an Egyptian named Potiphar. We do not know any details of this transaction, but we can be sure that the Ishmaelites made some money on this deal. As a travelling merchant, you want to buy low and sell high, and the fact that Potiphar was their buyer indicates that they sold high. Potiphar is a man of great importance and wealth in Egypt. His occupation as captain of the guard meant that he had a high position in the Egyptian military, working very close to the Pharaoh. It could be compared to the position of the head of the secret service in our day. This position, as we see later in the chapter, took him away from his home for extended periods of time, probably traveling with the king and directing the king's personal bodyguards. Also, Potiphar seems to have a large estate, with a number of slaves to take care of his affairs.

Now, rather than bore you with the details of where Joseph is, I want you to think about Joseph's situation, and imagine yourself in his shoes.

Think of his age. 17 years old. How many parents would let their 17-year-old go off and live away from home. How long would any 17-year-old last before becoming homesick, crying to come home.

Think of his position. Kidnapped, the object of human trafficking, he is now a slave, put to work on menial tasks. Driven, perhaps beaten. And that, after being a favored boy, who rarely left the side of his doting father, and who had a supervisory role in his father's business.

Think of his isolation. After living in a loud and boisterous family, here he is away from it all, in a strange place, with a strange language. How he must have missed his father and his family. And there was no communication. No letters, no email, no texting, no Facebook.

Think of his separation. He had grown up in a believing home, where his parents had taught him to love the Lord, and where there was a rich oral tradition and frequent worship and sacrifice. And now he is surrounded in Egypt by their false religion. Even Potiphar's name means, Gift from the Sun God.

Then, think of the circumstances that had led him here. The hatred of his brothers, the deep pain that must have caused. He had begged for mercy, but they would not hear. And now, there is a cover-up. Will he ever be remembered, will he ever be set free? How he must have longed to escape and to go home.

It makes me think of young men, maybe underage, going off to war, and then being captured by the enemy and put into a POW camp for years, and never hearing from their parents or loved ones, but instead being beaten and tortured.

This is Joseph's situation. Maybe you have experienced loneliness, or separation, or demotion, or beating, but I doubt that many, if any, of our listeners today, have experienced what Joseph went through here. But to understand this passage, and indeed this chapter, we need to think of Joseph's situation.

Verse two tells us that in this situation, the LORD was with Joseph. Those are extremely comforting words—for us, too. In these very difficult circumstances, the LORD was with Joseph.

We noticed in chapter 36, where we were introduced to Joseph, that God is never mentioned directly. It is not that He is absent, but in the experiences of Joseph with his brothers, it *seems* that God is absent. Now we see, in far away Egypt, that God is present with Joseph. Eight times, in this chapter, God is mentioned, and the name used is his personal, covenant name, Jehovah, or LORD in most English translations. Eight times. And then, in contrast again, He is mentioned by that name only once more in the remaining 11 chapters of Genesis.

That's remarkable. The LORD, Jehovah, was with Joseph.

That means, first, that the covenant God who had made the promises to Joseph's father, Jacob, his grandfather Isaac, and his great grandfather Abraham, was with Joseph. The covenant promises, the patriarchal promises, the promise of a land, of a nation, of prosperity, of a seed who would be the Savior, this God went with Joseph. What it means is this, that Joseph knew those covenant promises, and believed them, and knew that God would keep them, also for himself. God was fulfilling those promises, through the difficult circumstances of Joseph's life.

It also means for us, that in the most difficult circumstances of our lives, God never abandons us. He never leaves any of His own people to fend for themselves, He never abandons them to the tyranny of circumstances. No, God is always with us. Jesus' parting promise, one of the most beautiful promises in the whole of the Word of God, was this, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Just as God was with Joseph, so His promise is that He will remain with and be the strength of His people in every age, and in every difficulty. Joseph was not alone. No, the Lord was with him.

Now, how did Joseph know this? How did he know that God was with him?

Back in Genesis 28, when his father Jacob was hated by his brother, and he headed out on his own to Haran, God appeared to him at Bethel in a dream. You remember the ladder from heaven, with the angels ascending and descending, and God said (Gen. 28:15), "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Does Joseph have a vision like that? The answer is, NO. All that Joseph had were the dreams of his own future exaltation, and the story of his father's dream at Bethel. And all alone in Egypt, believing that God was with him, Joseph experienced the gracious, presence of God.

That experience came to Joseph in this way, that God prospered him in the house of Potiphar and that God brought a blessing to the house of Potiphar through him. In verse 2 we read that he was a prosperous man in the house of his master.

Verse 3 tells us that his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. That's remarkable. Joseph did not even have to say anything. Potiphar saw the hand of God in and through the life of Joseph.

Verse 4 continues by saying that Joseph found grace in Potiphar's eyes as he served him. That is, Potiphar liked this man. He could see that Joseph was a diligent and responsible worker. He saw a godliness and faith in Joseph. Joseph did not complain about his wages, he did not try to get the gravy jobs, he was not two-faced with his boss. He simply served him. He had Potiphar's interests and goals as his own. He was not laboring for himself. And the result

was that Potiphar made Joseph the overseer or steward of all that was in his house. He did not have to concern himself with anything now, except to make a choice (v. 6) of what he would eat. All other decisions were left to Joseph.

And, for Joseph's sake, God blessed the house of Potiphar (v. 5). It came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake. And the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field.

Now we should notice, that this verse does not say that God blessed Potiphar, but rather that he blessed his house, for Joseph's sake. God's blessing is not in material things, and God's blessing is not universally distributed to believing and unbelieving homes alike. In fact, Proverbs 3:33 says, "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked."

Here, for Joseph's sake, that is, because Joseph was there, and for Joseph's preservation and preparation, God brought His blessing on this home. Joseph was the unique object of God's grace here. God, as it were, singled him out, and for his sake made it plain that He was with him.

And Joseph himself was prospered by God in a unique way. When God prospered Jacob while he worked for Laban, it was with wealth. But Joseph is not prospered with wealth. All the wealth goes to Potiphar. God prospers Joseph with, not wealth, but wisdom and great skill in management. When Solomon became king, he realized that he would need wisdom, above wealth, to govern so great a nation. That is the gift that God, very obviously, has given here to Joseph. And God uses this, to prepare him for his position, later in life, as governor in Egypt.

So God was with him. Yes, Joseph was still a slave. He was still far from home, and from where he wanted to be. But he knew the presence of God, and he knew that his present circumstances were a part of the purpose of God for him. So he faithfully went about his work, not doing it for the praise of men, or for personal wealth and gain, but as unto the Lord.

There is one feature of this passage that is easy to overlook. It is this, that Joseph had a secular occupation, and that God had specifically called him to this job.

A word or idea that has largely been forgotten in our Christian vocabulary is the word "vocation." It means, simply, calling. It refers to this, that whatever your occupation is, God has called you to it. Every believer has a vocation. In our day, the idea of vocation has been replaced with the idea of "Christian service." Today, instead of teaching a biblical work ethic and godliness in the workplace, churchgoers are being pressured to "do something for the Lord." Instead of seeing themselves as already called to serve God where they are, they are thinking that they need to do something spectacular with their lives if they are really going to serve God.

I want to say a few things about that, because it fits right here in the story of Joseph. There are three things to take note of here.

First, Joseph had a secular occupation. Initially, he was a servant or slave on an estate. Maybe he worked in the fields or in the stables. Later, he had some domestic duties, maybe sweeping floors and making beds. Then, soon, he was promoted to position of overseer. He was in management, and took care of the affairs of the estate of the wealthy Potiphar. Each of those positions was a secular job. That is true, also, of his position, later in life, as ruler in Egypt. Joseph was not a prophet, he was not a priest, and he was not a king and ruler in God's Israel. In fact, Joseph was far away from having any spiritual influence or

recognition with God's people. His was the most secular of all the occupations you'll find in the Bible. Through his work, animals got fed, a house got cleaned, Potiphar got rich, and, later, Egypt, a godless nation, was prepared for a famine. These were his vocations. This was what God called him to do.

But, second, I want you to see that Joseph's secular occupation was important to God and ends up being used by God in ways that Joseph could never have guessed. One of the important themes in the life of Joseph is God's sovereign providence. And what we see is that God uses Joseph's position as a slave to serve His purpose for the salvation of His people. Here is God's man in Egypt, the advance man, sent ahead to prepare the way, and he is working as a slave. Joseph, for the majority of his life, works in the secular arena, but perhaps no one in Genesis is so used by God for the carrying out of His promises and purpose for Israel.

Third, not only was Joseph's occupation important to God, but God was important to Joseph in this occupation. Joseph is working out of faith, and his faith affects how he does his work. Joseph is not working for personal gain, he does not view his work as a necessary evil that he has to do simply to stay alive, he is not out there to win the evil world for the Lord. No, he is simply exercising his gifts and position to the glory of God, and God is with him. He is living for the Lord in the position God has placed him.

What we have here is a superb example of the biblical work ethic. About 80% of our life is spent in the workforce, and these three things about Joseph's work are important for us to remember as we do our work.

Any work that we are called to do, so long as it is not immoral or illegal, is a vocation from God. Yet, so often, in Christian circles, the only vocation we recognize is some sort of call to the ministry, and people who serve in some capacity in the church are elevated so much that if you are not serving in the ministry of the church, you are somehow not serving the Lord. That is absolutely wrong and unbiblical. We have vocations in our families, we have vocations in the workplace, we have vocations in society. What is important is not what we do, but rather what God does through us, and that we do our best to His glory.

What is a mother doing in the home? Let us not judge her calling by the world's standard, but see what God is doing through her. She is providing food for the family, and she is having a massive influence in the lives of her children.

Through farmers God feeds us. Through carpenters God gives us houses. Through policemen and the military, God gives us safety. Through nurses and doctors, God gives us good health. And so on. Just as God was the invisible hand behind Joseph's work, so He works today through every occupation that He calls us to.

This should charge our everyday lives and our mundane activities with a spiritual significance. It should give us a diligence and desire to do our best for God's glory. In the New Testament, it is put this way (Col. 3:22-23): "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

May God help us, whatever our calling, to live for him.

Father, we give thanks for the work we have been given to do, and we are glad to know that no matter how menial it may seem to us, Thy sovereign hand uses it to serve Thy purposes. Help us, Lord, to be diligent in our work, living before Thy face. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 24, 2013

Joseph Resists the Advances of a Seductive Woman

No. 3660 Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

In our broadcast today we will continue with the story of Joseph in Genesis chapter 39, beginning in verse 7. Last week we looked at the first six verses of this chapter, where Joseph is a slave in Potiphar's house. There, God is with him, God prospers him, he gains favor in the sight of his master, and everything in Potiphar's house is committed to his care. If we skip over the middle section of this chapter and look just at the last three verses, where Joseph is unjustly incarcerated, we see that the Scriptures use almost exactly the same language to describe what happens in prison. There, verses 20-23 tell us, the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison, and the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all that happened in the prison, so that he did not have to concern himself with anything, and that all because the Lord was with Joseph and the Lord made everything that Joseph did to prosper.

As we look at this chapter, it is important that we notice that beginning and ending. The Holy Spirit is telling us two things. First, that in everything Joseph went through, God was with him to strengthen him and give him grace, even when it seemed otherwise. And second, that in all the events of Joseph's life, good and evil alike, God was sovereign. Just as God in His providence had seen to it that Joseph was hated by his brothers and sold into Egypt, and just as God in His providence brought Joseph to the house of Potiphar and prospered him there, so God in His providence now leads Joseph through another dark period in his life in which he is sorely tempted, and then because he is faithful in that temptation, he ends up in prison. God brings to him both prosperity and adversity, and God is with him, both in prosperity and adversity.

In the verses we look at today, the wife of Potiphar, Joseph's master, attempts to seduce Joseph, and when Joseph refuses, she lies about him, with the result that Joseph is cast into prison.

The temptation that Joseph had to endure here was real and was powerful.

For a number of years Joseph has been working for Potiphar, and as he matures, probably now in his early to mid 20s, he comes to the attention of his master's wife. Verse 7 tells us that she "cast her eyes upon Joseph," that is, she looked at him with longing eyes, and she said to him, "Lie with me." In the absence of her husband she assumes authority, and she commands Joseph, "come to bed with me, now." What a dreadful abuse of power.

God, I said, brought this temptation to Joseph. What occasioned it, according to verse 6, was that "Joseph was a goodly person, and well favored." That is, he was handsome in appearance,

and pleasant in personality. These two things, good looks and a pleasant personality, were God's gift to Joseph. It was in his genes. The same language is used of his mother, Rachel, to whom Jacob was immediately attracted. And now, because of these, Joseph is put into a tempting situation. Joseph did nothing to encourage it, but rather God in His providence brought him there.

There is something for us to say here. Oftentimes when we are tempted, and think especially sexual temptation, oftentimes it is because we open ourselves up to temptation, we put ourselves in tempting situations. Maybe it is flirtatious behavior, or maybe we go to places or watch things that are inappropriate, or maybe if we are young and unmarried, we are alone with our date. Here, Joseph does none of those things. God simply leads him into a tempting situation.

Now, understand, this was a real and a strong temptation for Joseph. Joseph, like any normal young man, was created with hormones that produced physical desires. And, I have to think, that there was something attractive about Potiphar's wife. Potiphar was, after all, a man who moved among the rich and famous in Egypt. This was not an old lady attempting to seduce Joseph. And then we notice also how persistent she is. Not only is she bold, telling Joseph exactly what she wants from him, but she is persistent. Verse ten tells us that day after day she made this proposal to him, trying to wear him down. No one is around. No one will know. Joseph could have reasoned, I deserve this; here I am, all alone, what other opportunities are there for love here? And she is available.

How similar this is to sexual temptation in our own day and culture. It is all around us, constantly making its offers, readily available, and you can do it in secret—in the privacy of your home, the privacy of Internet and movies. And everyone is told, "This will make you happy, and you deserve it, it's your choice." And it is just as brazen. Our young people find this out when they go to college or are in the workplace. There is no holding back on suggestive comments, crude humor, and men and women alike who make themselves available to you, especially if you, like Joseph, are attractive.

Behind it, is Satan, and, like Potiphar's wife, Satan will work on us to wear us down, day after day. He will work on our eyes and ears, he will work on our thoughts and desires, he will work on our relationships, he will work through the media, he will work through books and literature, and he will not ever give up until he wins. In our society, today, this is the predominant temptation. Satan is working harder with this temptation than with any other. Why is that? It is because Satan knows that if he can destroy the sexual morals of a society, he has destroyed the family. And if he has destroyed families, he has destroyed the church. Just look back to Joseph's own family, and see how the polygamy of his father brought hatred and division, and how his sons Judah and Reuben had fallen into sexual immorality too. All this was a threat to the separate existence of God's people in Canaan. Through sexual immorality the church becomes more and more like the world.

In response to this real and powerful temptation, Joseph says, NO. He resists the temptation. He refuses Potiphar's wife. How did he do that?

We have here, in Joseph, both an example of how to overcome temptation, and a clear testimony to where Joseph found the strength to overcome.

Looking at Genesis 39, we notice several things.

First, Joseph refused immediately. In Ephesians 4:27 we are exhorted not to “give place to the devil.” Joseph gave no room for Satan, or this woman, to tempt him. He, like the godly man in Psalm 1, did not listen to the counsel of the ungodly. He refused the enticements immediately.

Second, Joseph made no excuses for sinning. What others would have used as an excuse for sin, Joseph used as a reason not to sin. In verse 8 he says, “My master doesn’t know what is with me in the house.” Others would say, he does not know, so here is my opportunity. Joseph says, “He doesn’t know because he trusts me, so how can I betray that trust.”

Third, Joseph verbalizes his refusal, and in doing this he takes a stand. He does not say, I’ll think about it, or not today but maybe another time. He does not say, I’m not attracted to you, or you’re too old. No, he flat out says no, and then explains why his answer is no. In verbalizing it, Joseph makes a confession of commitment to remain chaste and not to commit this act.

Fourth, Joseph makes an appeal to the conscience, to his own conscience and the conscience of his seductress. He says to Potiphar’s wife, “My master has kept back nothing from me but you, because you are his wife.” You, Mrs. Potiphar, you are not mine, you don’t belong to me. God has given you to Potiphar. I cannot do this.

Fifth, Joseph calls sin by its proper name. Today this is softened and called an “affair,” making it sound fun and attractive, something you might want to do. Joseph calls it “wickedness” and “sin.” In verse 9, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” This is not the way Mrs. Potiphar saw it, and not the way our culture sees it today. As long as two adults consent, our culture says, Do it. You’re entitled to it. Do not let anyone or anything stop you. But in Joseph’s eyes it is a great wickedness.

Sixth, Joseph was on guard. He took precautions so that he would not be tempted. Verse 10 tells us that as she daily enticed him, he not only refused to listen to her, but he avoided her. He does everything in his power to keep temptation at bay. When she comes in the front door of the house, he goes out the back door. Jesus says we should watch and pray so that we do not enter into temptation. This is what Joseph did. He did not trust himself. He did not say, Well, I’m strong enough, so I can be with her. No, he avoided the very opportunities to sin.

Seventh, he refused her repeatedly. He did not let Satan, or this woman, wear him down. “No!” was his immediate and consistent answer, and he did not waver on that. Pretty soon, she figures this out too. She is not going to wear him down, and so, to get what she wants, she has to resort to forcing him.

And then, eighth, he flees. When she ambushes him in the house, on his own, and grabs him by his coat and demands, “Now, lie with me,” he runs, leaving his coat in her hands. That is bravery and freedom. Potiphar’s wife is a slave to her sinful desire. Joseph, on the other hand, is free to refuse. He fled, and got him out, out of the house, as far away from the temptation as he could. In the New Testament, talking about this very sin, Paul alludes to what Joseph does here by saying, “Flee fornication.” There is such a power to this temptation that it requires a unique response. Other sins we may grapple with and take on in hand-to-hand combat, reasoning with the tempter, but the only proper course of action with this sin is to flee. This sin is like a baited hook; it looks tasty, but, as Proverbs tells us, the end thereof is death. You may meddle with it, but in the end a dart will strike through your heart.

Joseph did not meddle with and so was not taken in by this sin.

How remarkable! Proverbs 7:26 says of this sin, “many strong men have been slain by her.” How true. Some whom we’ve thought were the strongest, the most spiritual, the most godly (David, a man after God’s own heart), have been sucked into this sin, slain by her.

But Joseph resists.

And how remarkable, too, when we consider Joseph’s background. If anyone might have a disposition towards this sin, and might use his family life as an excuse, it would be Joseph. His father had multiple wives, so multiple relationships. His own mother was the beautiful and unspiritual one. His older brother Reuben had slept with one of his father Jacob’s concubines. His brother Judah, in his prosperity, had gone seeking the services of a prostitute, who it turns out was his daughter-in-law. This is the home Joseph was from, and yet he was faithful.

Where did he get his strength?

Answer: The Lord was with him. I said at the beginning that this is the theme and line of thought through this chapter. The Lord was with him. Joseph was faithful to God, because God was faithful to him. God was with him. God had not only led Joseph into this temptation, but God also provided for Joseph a way of escape. Joseph not only experienced the power of this temptation, but also the greater power of the grace and Spirit of God. This was his strength. God was faithful to him and was with him.

There is great encouragement for us here. It may be that you were brought up in a family of bad examples. It may be that your past is peppered with this sin. But in the end, those things don’t matter, and must not be used as an excuse for sexual sin. Whatever our temptations, God is able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think. He is able to keep us from falling. He will provide a way of escape. Whatever the sins of the past, God’s forgiving grace is greater. He has washed us and made us clean of the guilt of sin through the blood of His Son.

These are things that Joseph realized. Despite his background and despite the strength of his temptation and the weakness of his own flesh, Joseph looked to and lived before the face of God. This is his main argument against temptation, his main source of strength, his strongest tool of resistance. In verse 9, he says, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” God was more real to Joseph than anything else. Conscious of the fact that he lives before God, he says, “How can I, I who have been saved, I who have been loved, I who am a child of God, how can I do this to my God.” He did not say, “I might contract an STD.” He did not say, “There may be an unwanted pregnancy.” He did not say, “This may bring the wrath of Potiphar down on me and threaten my job.” No, he said, “How can I do this to my God?” This is the true secret of his strength: he loved God. He had a passion for God that was stronger than any other desire in his life. Joseph did not overcome temptation by simply saying NO, by mere power of the will. No, he loved the Lord and he lived before the Lord.

In Psalm 16:8 David says, “I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” When I am tempted, I shall not be moved, because God is with me. Oh may that be our constant confession and resolve: to live before the face of God.

And then, also, to remember who we are and what God has done for us. In Romans 6:2 Paul asks this important question, “How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” This was in Joseph’s thinking. I may be a slave in Potiphar’s house, but I am not a slave to sin. I have been set free.

And so, remembering who he was, and living before God, Joseph refused and resisted the temptation.

And what was the outcome? The outcome was very promising, this: that God was with him.

Yes, the outcome for Joseph personally, in his experience, and in the circumstances of his life, was horrible. He was lied about, he was made to look like the bad guy, he was slandered, he was racially profiled, he was ganged up on, he was treated unjustly, he lost his job, he was imprisoned. Psalm 105 tells us it was with metal stocks and chains, all because he was faithful in temptation.

And, you know, when we in temptation are faithful to our God, this is exactly how we can expect to be treated by the world and by those who don't know God. A young person who will not join in wild partying, a man on the job who will not laugh at or contribute to crude humor, a woman who is deliberately modest in her dress, can expect to be scorned.

Faithfulness will cost you something.

But God was with Joseph in prison, and prospered him there.

Somehow Joseph's life is spared, and he ends up in the King's prison. In prison, Joseph is blessed with a clear conscience. Potiphar is angry. His wife is guilty. But Joseph is free. He did not have to second-guess what he had done. No, he had confidence that what he had done was right before God. And God is with him in his relationship with the jailer. Somehow, his trustworthiness and godliness make an impression on the keeper of the prison, and he trusts Joseph with the care of all the prisoners and everything that goes on in the prison. Joseph is exalted again.

Do you not see a pattern in his life? Humiliation and exaltation. So often, this is precisely the way God works with His people. He brings us very low, in order to lift us up again, and prepare us in some special way to serve Him. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness before God was ready to use him to lead His people. David was hunted and chased before he was exalted to the throne. And Christ, too, was betrayed, denied, rejected, beaten, nailed to the cross, forsaken of God. It was humiliation with the purpose of exaltation.

It may be that, because of faithfulness to God, you are going through some very difficult and humiliating things in your life. And you do not know why. Joseph did not either. How could he? But God had greater things in mind for Joseph than working in Potiphar's house. And through Joseph's faithfulness and trouble, God would make those things happen. And His purpose was not just Joseph, but the salvation of His church. This is church history.

Because Joseph was faithful, he was cast into prison

Because he was cast into prison, he interpreted the dream of the cupbearer.

Because he interpreted the dream of the cupbearer, he interpreted the dream of Pharaoh.

Because he interpreted the dream of Pharaoh, he became prime minister of Egypt.

Because he became prime minister of Egypt, the Egyptians were saved from starvation in a famine.

Because the Egyptians were saved from starvation, Joseph's own family were also saved from starvation, and brought to Egypt.

And because Joseph's family was saved and brought to Egypt, the Messianic line of Christ could continue.

And because the Messianic line of Christ could continue, Jesus Christ has come to be our Savior.

All because God was with Joseph, and he was faithful in temptation.

When people hurt us, and when God brings trouble and pain in our lives, we must not mope and whine, but know that God is behind it, and God is with us, working sovereignly to accomplish His saving purposes.

This is what we learn from the outcome of this story. God is with Joseph. And that is His promise to us too.

Let us pray.

Father, we give thanks for the grace that enables us to resist temptation. Lord, be with us, and help us to see that Thy sovereign hand directs all things for the salvation of Thy people and church. What a confidence and trust we have. Amen.