

Genesis 39:1-23

Introduction

1. Back in Genesis 37, we learned that Joseph had two dreams which revealed God's plan for his future:
 - a. Both dreams indicated that he would someday rule or reign over his family
 - b. Imagine for a moment if God revealed to you exactly what His plans were for you
 - c. Now, imagine that things don't go exactly as you plan
 - d. How might you respond? What might have happened to your faith?
2. That's exactly what we've seen with Joseph so far:
 - a. His brothers despised him for not only being Jacob's favorite, but for what he revealed in his dreams
 - b. They hated him so much that initially they wanted to kill him, but settled for selling him into slavery
 - c. If we were Joseph, I think we'd be prone to wonder what went wrong and question what happened to God's plan?
 - d. We might become discouraged, and maybe we'd even struggle with your faith
3. What we see in our passage today is that Joseph didn't seem to be phased by what happened:
 - a. I don't mean it didn't bother him, or that he was perfectly fine with being sold into slavery
 - b. What I mean is that even in the unfair and unjust situation he found himself in He chose to serve God faithfully and we see God continue to work in his life
4. I'm going to break our passage for today down into four parts:
 - a. God caused Joseph to prosper in an unfair and unjust situation
 - b. Joseph was tempted in his success, but he resisted the temptation
 - c. Doing the right thing cost Joseph dearly
 - d. But, in spite of the injustice, God remained faithful to Joseph and showed him favor once again

A. God caused Joseph to prosper in an unfair and unjust situation (READ Genesis 39:1-6a)

1. After his brothers sold him to the Ishmaelite traders, they brought him down to Egypt and sold him to an Egyptian named Potiphar:
 - a. We already see God's sovereignty at work here because Potiphar wasn't just any regular citizen
 - b. He was captain of the Pharaoh's bodyguard which means he was a high ranking, and relatively wealthy, Egyptian official

2. Now, Joseph was there unjustly so we might expect him to protest, or fight back, or even try to escape, but instead he committed himself to serving his master and God caused him to prosper at it:
 - a. Twice in this passage it states explicitly that the LORD was with Joseph and caused him to succeed (the word for prosper) at what he did (RE-READ 39:2-3)
 - b. God's hand in Joseph's success was so apparent to Potiphar that he put Joseph in charge of managing everything he owned:
 - 1) V. 3 says that Potiphar "**saw that the LORD was with him**" AND "**how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper**"
 - 2) V. 4 tells us that because of this, Joseph "**found favor in his sight and became his personal servant**"—more literally this reads, "**found favor in his sight and was serving (or ministering to) him**"
 - 3) Potiphar not only made Joseph the overseer (manager) of his household, but entrusted everything he owned—in the house and in the field—to Joseph's care
 - 4) In fact, v. 6 tells us that "**he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate**"

3. Takeaway: God can cause us to succeed at what we do even when our situation or circumstances are unfair or unjust:
 - a. Joseph chose to serve the LORD and Potiphar while he was a slave, and the LORD caused him to succeed in what he did
 - b. This is one of the general principles found in the Bible: God blesses the work of our hands when we faithfully serve Him and those he places over us--you're all familiar with Proverbs 3:5-6 but listen to the entire context (READ Proverbs 3:1-6)
 - 1) Now, this doesn't mean we'll always succeed in each and everything we do (or become wealthy like the Word Faith charlatans and wolves preach)
 - 2) This is why I called it a GENERAL principle: generally speaking, overall, when we faithfully serve God our work will be successful and we see this with Joseph
 - c. But, you know, it's ultimately not about us or our success, but about our witness:
 - 1) To me, the most important thing about this passage is what Potiphar came to realize as a result of Joseph's faithfulness and success
 - 2) Look again at v. 3: "**Now his master saw that Yahweh was with him and how Yahweh caused all that he did to succeed in his hand.**"
 - 3) We should seek to serve God, and those he places in authority over us, faithfully so that we might succeed in what we do and serve as a witness for Him

Choosing to serve Scott when I felt He wronged me and how God used it to bless both me and Scott

B. Joseph was tempted in his success, but he resisted the temptation (READ Genesis 39:6b-10)

1. At the peak of Joseph's success, just as everything was moving along perfectly, temptation came knocking at the door:
 - a. V. 6b says "**Joseph was beautiful in form and beautiful in appearance**"—in other words, he was quite a handsome dude
 - b. His stunning good looks were apparently too much for Potiphar's wife so she tried to seduce him, and she wasn't very subtle about it: she "**looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, 'Lie with me'**" (7)

Realtor who tried to get me to go to Vegas with her...while her husband was right upstairs! She also wasn't very subtle!

2. However, Joseph resisted and refused her advances, not once but repeatedly:
 - a. Three times in these verses the text refers to her as the wife of Joseph's master—so we're talking not just about sexual immorality but adultery
 - 1) As serious as adultery would have been, Joseph also recognized that following through with it would have been a tremendous breach of the faith and trust Potiphar had placed in him (RE-READ 39:8-9)
 - 2) This last statement, however—that it would have been evil and a sin against God—reveals a deeper and more profound motivation for Joseph; it wasn't just a breach of Potiphar's trust, but a sin against God Himself
 - b. Verse 10 tells us that even though she continued trying to seduce Joseph, he continued to resist:
 - 1) I prefer the way the NET translates this verse because it seems to do a better job of capturing the nuance: "**EVEN THROUGH she continued to speak to Joseph day after day, he did not respond to her invitation to have sex with her**"
 - 2) What's being stressed here is that in spite of Potiphar's wife's unrelenting pursuit of Joseph, and her DAILY attempts to seduce him, he repeatedly refused her

You all know I love ice cream, and I can tell you that it's a LOT easier to resist the temptation to eat it every day if it's not sitting in the freezer downstairs begging me to scoop some into a bowl!

3. Takeaway: temptation often comes when we least expect it but remembering God's presence helps us to resist
 - a. Joseph was tempted at the peak of his success, when everything was going great; the last thing he probably expected was for his master's wife to try to seduce him
 - b. What enabled him to resist the temptation, however, was a keen awareness of God's presence; he knew that giving into her advances would have not only been an offense against Potiphar but an evil and sin against God

- c. The same is true of us; often we are most vulnerable to temptation and sin when things are going really well; it's at times like this when we seem to let our guard down
- d. It's also at times like this when remembering God's presence should help us resist temptation just like Joseph
- e. This is the underlying principle when James wrote, **"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded"** (James 4:7-8)

C. Doing the right thing cost Joseph dearly (Genesis 39:11-20)
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1. Potiphar's wife just wasn't getting the message and refused to take no for an answer (READ 39:11-12):
 - a. She wanted what she wanted and was going to get it one way or another
 - b. So, when her begging and pleading day after day didn't work, she resorted to physically accosting him; vs. 11-12 says that one day when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and conveniently when none of the other men were there, she **"seized (lit) him by his garment"** (probably his outer garment or cloak) and demanded, **"Lie with me!"**
 - c. At that point, Joseph did what he had to do:
 - 1) He **"left his garment in her hand"**
 - 2) He **"fled"**: this word refers to running away or escaping
 - 3) He **"went outside"**
 - 4) In other words, he got out of dodge as quickly as he could and didn't care if it meant leaving his cloak behind
2. Unfortunately, Joseph's commitment to doing the right thing and obeying God came with a cost (READ 39:13-20):
 - a. You're all probably familiar with the saying, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned"; it was part of a larger quote penned by William Congreve in his play, *The Mourning Bride* to suggest that there is no deeper hatred or rage than that of a woman who has been rejected by a lover
 - b. It's not clear if that were the wife's motive here or if she fabricated the story to cover her own butt and explain why Joseph's garment was in her possession
 - c. Either way, she portrayed herself as the victim of an attempted rape by Joseph, and even blamed it on her husband:
 - 1) V. 17: **"The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us..."**
 - 2) V. 19: **"This is what your slave did to me..."**
 - d. In spite of everything Potiphar knew about Joseph, he sided with his wife and had Joseph confined to prison (20)
3. This must have been devastating for Joseph, and maybe a bit confusing:

- a. Remember, prior to being sold into slavery God had given him visions revealing His plan for Joseph to one day function as a ruler
 - b. Even though he was a slave in Potiphar's house, he had been given a significant role and responsibility
 - c. It would have been easy for Joseph to interpret this as leading in the right direction to fulfill God's plan
 - d. But all of a sudden, everything comes crashing down; what was God doing???
4. Takeaway: sometimes, even though we do the right thing and obey God, we may still face false accusations and injustice:
- a. In 1 Peter 2:12 we are encouraged to **"keep [our] behavior excellent among the gentiles [i.e. the world], so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation"**
 - b. Three verses later (15) Peter wrote, **"For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men"**
 - c. What this teaches us is that doing the right thing should serve as a form of protection against slander and false accusations, and generally speaking that is true
 - d. However, even when we do the right thing we sometimes face false accusations, unfairness, and injustice
 - e. We've seen that here with Joseph, we saw it with Jesus and the Apostles, and we've seen it for the past 2000 years with Christians all over the world
 - f. To be honest, this would be highly discouraging if it were not for the fact that God sees it and rewards us according to His faithfulness as we see next in the case of Joseph

D. In spite of the injustice, God remained faithful to Joseph and showed him favor once again (READ Genesis 39:21-23)

- 1. Don't you just love the way v. 21 starts out? **"But the LORD..."**:
 - a. Someday I'd like to do a series titled, **"But God"** or **"But the LORD"**
 - b. These two phrases are used over 130 times in the Bible and quite often what follows teaches us something about God and His character and the same is true here
- 2. Once again Joseph found himself facing injustice, simply for doing the right thing; but the LORD didn't abandon him:
 - a. V. 21 says, **"But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer"**
 - 1) The word **"kindness"** here is the Hebrew word *hesed* which I've often suggested refers to God's covenant loyalty or faithfulness to His people
 - 2) The LORD was faithful to Joseph by giving him **"favor (e.g. grace) in the sight of the chief jailer"**

- b. As a result of God's presence with and faithfulness to Joseph, the chief jailer entrusted Joseph with caring for all the other prisoners:
 - 1) V. 22 says whatever was done in the prison was done by Joseph
 - 2) V. 23 even says the chief jailer didn't even supervise anything under Joseph's hand
 - 3) All of this was because God was with him and caused whatever he did to once again succeed
 - 4) This should all sound familiar because we saw the same thing regarding his master, Potiphar

- 3. Takeaway: we may face injustice for doing the right thing, but God will not abandon us:
 - a. Just like Joseph, He will be with us, remain faithful to us, and give us grace
 - b. I am reminded of the last thing the apostle Paul wrote near the end of his life (READ 2 Timothy 4:14-18)