

JOSEPH

Part 2

Genesis 39:1-23

Intro: Last Sunday we began looking into the life of the last major person whose story is given to us in the book of Genesis. I am speaking of Joseph, the son of Jacob, the grandson of Isaac, and the great grandson of Abraham. But the Spirit of God, in leading Moses to write this book, caused him to do something that ought to raise questions as to why we are told so much about Joseph when Judah, not Joseph, was the one through whom the Messiah would eventually be born. Of course, the Spirit of God owes us no explanation why the book of Genesis was organized like it is, but a break in the order was certainly to attract special attention to Joseph.

I suggested that one reason may be that Joseph is such an amazing type of the Lord Jesus Christ. Another reason may be that the life of Joseph is such an amazing testimony of the sovereignty of God, not only in the lives of those of us who are His people, but even over the nations of the earth. We saw in Genesis 37 that God gave Joseph two dreams which were prophetic in nature. I mean by that, that Joseph was told in both of those dreams that he would be exalted to a position of royalty, and that the time would come when the members of his family would bow down before him, paying homage to him. Humanly speaking such an idea was ridiculous, and Joseph's brothers thought it was ridiculous because it was. But while those dreams which God gave to Joseph appeared to be totally beyond the realm of possibility, yet they were revelations from God to Joseph of God's will for Joseph's life.

Joseph's brothers already hated him, and when he told them his dreams, they hated him even more. Let me remind you of why they disliked Joseph so much that it could only be described as hatred.

I. THE FIRST SEVENTEEN YEARS OF JOSEPH'S LIFE.

Joseph was born into a very unhappy situation. He was the firstborn son of his father's favorite wife. Joseph's mother was Rachel. She had died when her second son, Benjamin, was born. That probably endeared Joseph to his father, Jacob, even more. Since no mention is made of Rachel in Genesis 37 or later, I think we must assume that Rachel had already died.

Now you probably noticed that I said that Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife. Actually he had four women from whom he had children. Actually he was only married to two of them, Rachel and her older sister, Leah. Leah was the first to have children. When Rachel realized that she was not going to have children, she gave her handmaiden, Bilhah, to Jacob, and she gave him two sons. When Leah stopped bearing children, she gave her handmaiden, Zilpah, to Jacob, and he had two more sons by Zilpah. Then Leah had two more sons before she finally had a daughter. Then after all of this, the Lord finally gave Rachel a son, and that is when Joseph was born.

So ten sons were born to Jacob before Joseph was born. So Joseph had ten half-brothers, but he was not fully related to any of them.

Now Jacob made the same mistake that his father, Isaac, had made before him. He had a favorite. Jacob loved Joseph the most because he was the son of the wife he loved the most. And Joseph's brothers knew that their father loved Joseph more than he loved them. An added aggravation was when Jacob made a special coat for Jacob, but did not do the same for his other sons. Then Joseph's dreams added fuel to a fire that was already inflamed in the hearts of his brothers. As we saw last week, his brothers "envied him," and that is why they wanted to kill him.

So we see that Joseph was raised in a very divided home, a home where his father in reality had four wives. Plus it was a home where Jacob actually did not hesitate to show that he loved the youngest of them all, Joseph, and openly manifested that he loved Joseph the most. So Joseph was raised in most unfortunate circumstances. And it was only a matter of time until things would go from bad to worse. And they did! But notice that when Joseph went to check on his brothers, he was doing exactly what his father wanted him to do. He was an obedient, faithful son. And he must have known that it was not the safest thing to do, to go to be with his brothers by himself.

But he went. And when his brothers saw him coming, they knew immediately that this was a perfect opportunity for them to do away with Joseph. And you remember what they decided to do – first, to kill him; and then to sell him, which they did. And Joseph soon found himself in Egypt. Genesis 37:36 gives us the record. And the story is picked up in the first verse of chapter 39. And so we come to:

II. PHASE TWO IN JOSEPH'S LIFE (Gen. 39:1-6).

Joseph, still a teenager, was taken out of his native land, Canaan, into a foreign land, whose language he did not know. And he went from being a shepherd boy to being a household servant in the home of the captain of the royal guard, a military man. His father did not know where he was. His brothers had no way of telling what had happened to him. Joseph was totally alone as far as family and friends were concerned. It could have been a time of total despair for him, except for one thing. And that is stated in verses 2 and 3, the results of which are stated in verses 4, 5, and 6. (Read.)

We are not told what Joseph was thinking, what was going through his mind as far as his dreams were concerned. But from a human perspective, he must have had a great deal of trouble putting the pieces of his life together. But he only knew one thing to do, and that was to serve his master with the greatest possible faithfulness.

He began to do the work which Potiphar assigned to him. He did it so well that it wasn't long before Potiphar made Joseph his overseer. The Lord began to bless Potiphar's house "for Joseph's sake," and somehow Potiphar knew that there was special blessing in their home that had not been there until Joseph came. And so Potiphar left all of his personal affairs in Joseph's hands to the extent that he didn't really know what he had. Joseph didn't waste his time being sorry for himself. He did what he was told to do. He did it cheerfully, and he did it accurately. Not a single word is recorded about anything that Joseph told Potiphar. He simply went about his work faithfully every day, and the evidence was very clear that God made Joseph an instrument of blessing to Potiphar and his whole family.

But it apparently was not long before trouble surfaced. Let's call it:

III. THE TEMPTATION TO SIN (Gen. 39:7-20).

We learn from the last part of verse 6 that Joseph was a very handsome young man. And it is most probable that Potiphar's wife was a very beautiful woman. As Joseph worked for her husband day after day, it was inevitable that the two of them would have had many opportunities to get acquainted. Finally, one day she sought to seduce him. But notice how he answered her in verses 8 and 9. (Read.) He knew that what she was

tempting him to do was sin, not primarily sin against her husband, Potiphar, *but sin against GOD!* And you will notice that he called it a “great wickedness.”

But Potiphar’s wife refused to take “no” for an answer, and so she kept after him day after day. Finally, one day when they were alone together in the house, she tried to force him to do what he had steadfastly refused to do. She took a hold of him, and was not going to let him get away. But he slipped out of his coat, and ran away. He didn’t try to talk her out of it, nor did he try to reason with her; he simply and quickly ran out of the house.

Now think for a moment about the situation. He was away from his family and all that would have been supportive of his action. He was in another country where such behavior was very common. The opportunity was there with a very beautiful woman who was very eager to have a relationship with him. But Joseph was very conscious of the presence of one Person about Whom Potiphar’s wife knew nothing, and had no interest in knowing. That Person was the Lord. And Joseph was more concerned about pleasing the Lord than he was about pleasing himself or anyone else if it meant displeasing the Lord. Or shall I call it what it really is – *sinning against the Lord!*

Years later when the Apostle Paul was writing to another young man about this same kind of a situation, he said, “Flee youthful lusts.” There are times when the wisest thing to do is to get out, and run! But with Joseph, and with Paul, it was not just a matter of running away from the bad, but it was also a matter of pursuing other things, like “righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). Young people, remember, and let us all remember, that what has been sin in past days still is sin. Everybody may be doing it, but that is no reason why anybody should be doing it. It may not carry the stigma to it that it once did, but it is still sin in God’s sight, and it is still true that God punishes sin. He may not punish sin while you are doing it, or right after you do it, (and I am talking about all sin), but God judges sin! That is a fact of history, and it is clearly taught in Scripture. Ignore it, and you will pay a price, and sometimes it is a far greater price than you ever expected to pay. If you and I don’t learn anything else from the life of Joseph, be sure to learn what he did about sin. Solomon wrote years after this a truth that Joseph clearly understood. It is this: that “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good”

(Prov. 15:3). And if you think that what you do in the dark is what God cannot see, remember this verse, and also Psalm 139:12:

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

But if the Devil can't bring true charges against us before the Lord, he will not hesitate to tell lies about us. And that is what Potiphar's wife did. Her attraction to Joseph turned to hatred, and so she told a lie about him that could easily have cost him his life. She said that Joseph had made advances toward her while no one was around, and when she screamed, he ran out leaving his coat behind. This was what she told her husband when he came in, and he in anger took Joseph and put him in a prison where the king's prisoners were kept. Potiphar had the authority to put Joseph to death. Why he didn't can only be explained in terms of the providence of God. I am inclined to feel that from Potiphar's standpoint, the reason he didn't have Joseph put to death was because, down in his heart, he had serious questions about the truthfulness of what his wife had told him.

But now we come to:

IV. THE THIRD PHASE OF JOSEPH'S LIFE (Gen. 39:21-23).

Joseph must have been well into his twenties by now. And it surely would have seemed to him at this time that he was farther than ever from the fulfillment of the dreams the Lord had given to him. It seems to me that what had happened to Joseph from the time his brothers sold him until he landed in an Egyptian jail, must have seemed to him like *steps down and away* from what he thought was God's will for his life. How much farther can you get away from a throne than to be in prison? It surely looked like people were having more of an impact upon his life than God was. But at each step along the way, although Joseph could not see it, the Lord was moving him closer and closer to his ultimate position of great authority. We know that now because we all know the story of Joseph and what finally happened. So we can read his story feeling very comfortable about everything. *But Joseph had no idea what God was doing in his life, if anything!*

But what did Joseph do in prison? He did exactly what he had done when he was sold to Potiphar. He became a model prisoner because "the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight

of the keeper of the prison” (Gen. 39:21). The keeper of the prison was so impressed with Joseph that he trusted Joseph to the very limit. Potiphar had trusted Joseph with all that he owned; the jailor trusted Joseph with his very life because in those days, if any prisoner escaped, the jailor was put to death. The words, “whatsoever he doeth shall prosper,” found in Psalm 1:3, are a commentary on the life of Joseph. Whether he was at home with his father, or in Egypt in the house of Potiphar the captain of the guard, or in prison under false charges, Joseph was the same faithful man. His faithfulness did not depend upon his circumstances, or the story of his life would have been completely different. His faithfulness was the result of his relationship with God, and his assurance, which his great grandfather had, expressed in Romans 4:19 through 21 by the Apostle Paul who had learned the same lesson that Abraham had learned. And who knows, perhaps it was the life of Abraham that was used by the Lord to keep Joseph trusting Him when outwardly things never looked worse than when he was in prison.

But to Joseph it must have seemed that, in spite of the ways he had sought to be faithful to the Lord, the Lord must have forgotten those dreams, or maybe he, Joseph, had mistaken their meaning, or maybe the Lord had been so busy with other things that He had not had time to help him, Joseph. But gradually the Lord was revealing Himself more and more to Joseph, that Joseph might learn that when he could not rejoice in his circumstances, he could always rejoice in the Lord.

You know, there is a terrible perversion of the Gospel and of God’s ways with us, His people. It is the teaching that if you trust Christ, and walk with Him, you will be wealthier, and healthier, and happier than ever before, and all of the time. But reality does not tally with such teaching, and neither do the Scriptures. And such teaching is being received because we don’t read our Bibles as carefully as we should. Would you say that Joseph wanted to please the Lord? Of course he did. That is what he sought to do whether at home, or in Egypt at Potiphar’s house, or in an Egyptian prison. But did such living mean that he would escape troubles? If you think that, your Bible reads differently from mine. The Lord led Joseph through deep waters. In fact, they seemed to get deeper all of the time. If a godly life was meant to spare him from trouble, then something went tragically wrong. If godliness was intended to keep him out of trouble, then something went wrong. But if God was using troubles to perfect him, to enrich his fellowship with the Lord, to prepare him for greater usefulness, then we can see that his life was right on

course. God works in our lives in such a way that we will be drawn to Him, that we will learn to know Him better, that we will come to a greater distrust of ourselves in order that we might find our rest in Him. But the lessons do not stop when we reach a certain place in our fellowship with the Lord; they go on until we enter into heaven, and always with the same purpose, that we may know Him, our Lord and our God. I know what it is like to feel forsaken by the Lord. But I hope also that I am learning not to go on my feelings. Every place that Joseph was forced to go, he sought diligently to please the Lord, but still he went deeper and deeper into trouble – up to a certain point. But getting there was tough, really tough! Don't minimize for a moment the difficulty that Joseph had with each new step in his life.

One of the best books I ever read was James Packer's book, *Knowing God*. It was given to me back in 1975 by my younger brother, Dr. Miles Custis, just two years before the Lord took him to heaven. I have read it twice from start to finish, and many times I have pulled it off of the shelf to read individual parts of it. He has a chapter in that book to which he has given the title, *These Inward Trials*. At the close of the chapter he quotes the words of a hymn written by John Newton. While we are thinking about Joseph, I want to read that hymn to you, because Joseph could have written it. I have read it before in messages I have brought, and so if this is repetition for you, I hope it will mean more to you this time than when you read it or hear it before. I am not going to sing it, just read it. Listen with your ears, but also with your heart.

I asked the Lord, that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

I hoped that in some favored hour
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

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Yea, more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

“Lord, why is this?” I trembling cried,
“Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?”
“‘Tis is this way,” the Lord replied,
“I answer prayer for grace and faith.

“These inward trials I employ
“From self and pride to set thee free;
“And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
“That thou may’st seek thy all in Me.”

The Lord’s purpose in giving us the story of Joseph, is not just that we might see the struggles he experienced in His walk with the Lord, but it is that we might understand that the trials and testings that we experience, and are experiencing, are not to destroy our faith (as it sometimes may seem to be the purpose to us), but it is that we might know our Lord the better, and that we might trust Him as He works, as the Scriptures say, “to perfect that which concerns us.” God doesn’t forget us, ever, but He is working to perfect us, possibly for greater usefulness, but always for the coming glory.