

Sermon Text Genesis 39:6–21

6 So he left Joseph in charge of everything that he owned; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

7 And it came about after these events that his master's wife had her eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Sleep with me."

8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put me in charge of all that he owns.

9 There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?"

10 Though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the people of the household was there inside.

12 So she grabbed him by his garment, saying, "Sleep with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside,

14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make fun of us; he came in to me to sleep with me, and I screamed.

15 When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside."

16 So she left his garment beside her until his master came home.

17 Then she spoke to him with these words: "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make fun of me;

18 but when I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

19 Now when his master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned.

20 So Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the prison.

21 But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the warden of the prison.

Profiles In Discipleship—Joseph

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A missionary once brought some pastors to the United States for a big meeting. During their free time, these pastors wanted to go shopping. The visiting pastors were from a rural area and the missionary knew there was a chance one of them might have some difficulty finding their way around or get lost. So, the missionary gave each pastor his phone number in case of an emergency. In less than an hour, the missionary's phone rang, and one of the pastors said, "I am lost." The missionary replied, "Go to the street corner, find out the names of the two streets, and tell me." In a minute or two, the lost pastor reported, "I am at the corner of 'Walk' and 'Don't Walk.'"

Like the visiting pastors, the trials of life sometimes make us feel lost and unstable. We can feel directionless, not knowing which way to turn. Sometimes, it even seems that there are no good options. But God often allows trials in our lives so we will learn to rely on Him, grow in our walk with Him, and develop our character and abilities.

Abraham and Sarah had one son, Isaac. Isaac and his wife Rebekah had the twins Jacob and Esau. God's promise to make Abraham the father of a great nation was fulfilled through Isaac and Jacob's 12 sons, who became the 12 patriarchs of the nation of Israel. You will recall that Jacob was named Israel by God, and thus, Jacob's family became the nation of Israel. Our hope for salvation comes through Jesus the Messiah, long promised by the Scriptures and prophets of Israel. One of Jacob's sons demonstrated exemplary character and was used by God to preserve and raise up the nation of Israel. Of course, I am speaking of Jacob's son, Joseph.

To get to the points I want to make, I need to give you a mini-biography of Joseph, who was sold into slavery, falsely accused of rape, and suffered for years in prison during some of the best years of his life, yet lived on to save his nation that would bring forth the Messiah. Apart from the actions of Joseph, sustained by God, there would have been no Messiah, and you would not be here or have any hope of eternal salvation. Joseph is a critical link in the genealogy that leads to the Messiah.

Joseph is a very interesting character who some Bible scholars would call a type of Christ. A type in the Old Testament foreshadows something in the New Testament. For example, in OT times, animal sacrifices were made for the sins of the people, and in the NT, Christ sacrificed on the cross for the sins of humanity. Similarly, Joseph foreshadows elements of Jesus' life. Joseph was beloved by his father, and Jesus was beloved by His Father. Joseph suffered to save his family, and Jesus suffered for humanity. Every knee in Egypt bowed before Joseph, and one day, every knee will bow before Christ. Joseph was exalted at the right hand of Pharaoh; Jesus now sits at the right hand of His Father in heaven. Joseph is one of the few characters in the Bible that almost nothing bad can be said about. He seems to have lived an upright and exemplary life.

Joseph was the 11th and favorite son of Jacob, born to his beloved wife, Rachel. Joseph loved the sons of his old age, and he made a multi-colored tunic for Joseph. Joseph's preferential treatment by his father, Jacob, led to jealousy, and thus, Joseph was hated by his brothers. Then Joseph began to have dreams that seemed to indicate that Joseph's older brothers would bow before him. His brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us?" In another dream, Joseph saw the Sun and the Moon and eleven stars bowing before him, seemingly indicating that his father, mother, 10 older brothers, and one younger brother would bow before him. It got to the point where his father rebuked him, but years in the future, they would see that Joseph's dreams were prophetic and that they would come true. That is the true story of Joseph up to the end of our Scripture reading.

The jealousy of Joseph's brothers reached a peak, and they desired to kill him. Joseph's family, like many of the Jews, tended flocks of livestock. Jacob, who God renamed Israel, instructed Joseph to go and check on the welfare of his brothers and the flock they were tending in Shechem. Joseph's family lived in Hebron. At the time, Joseph was 17 years old and his father was sending him to Shechem, about 50 miles away, and on foot. That was quite a journey for a young man when there were all kinds of predatory animals roaming about. As a

boy, I climbed Mount Washington to the summit from the Pinkham Notch base camp on foot three times with my scout troop before I was 16. But that seems trivial compared to Joseph's assigned task. When Joseph reached Shechem, he encountered a man who told him that his brothers had moved the flock about 15 miles further north to Dothan. It was quite a journey for young Joseph from his home.

When Joseph finally approaches his brothers, they see him in the distance and say, "Here comes the dreamer," and at the very moment, the text tells us they plotted to kill him. They wanted to kill him and throw him in the pits that were there and later tell their father that he had been devoured by wild animals. Reuben dissuaded them from their evil plot, telling them to throw him into a pit but not to shed his blood. Reuben hoped to rescue Joseph from them later. When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped him of his multi-colored tunic, threw him into the pit as Reuben suggested, and then took a lunch break. Tired and hungry, it appears, from their murderous plots and evil intent, they sat down for a meal.

After their meal, Judah saw a caravan of Ishmaelites (descendants of Abraham's first son, Ishmael) and they got the bright idea to sell Joseph to them for profit as a slave. Meanwhile, Midianite traders (another clan of traders descended from Abraham) discovered Joseph, lifted him out of the pit and sold him for 20 shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who then sold Joseph in Egypt as a slave.

When Reuben returned to the pit, Joseph was gone, and he tore his clothes out of grief for what had happened to Joseph. The brothers needed to make up a story to tell their Father, so they slaughtered a goat, dipped Joseph's multicolored tunic in it, and presented it to their father as evidence that a wild beast had devoured Joseph. Jacob, recognized the tunic to be the one he had made for Joseph. In grief, he tore his clothes and mourned inconsolably in sackcloth for many days.

Meanwhile, Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. While it seemed bleak for Joseph, we learn in Genesis 39:3 that the Lord was with Joseph and made all that he did prosper. Joseph was successful at everything he did, and his master, Potiphar, made Joseph the master of his household. It is there that we come to our sermon text which reveals a great deal about the character of Joseph.

As our sermon text begins, Joseph is in charge of everything in his master's household, to the point where the master, Potiphar, concerns himself with nothing except his meals. The text tells us Joseph was handsome in appearance, likely in his 20s when the master's wife took an interest in him. It was more than an interest, and she tried to lure him into an illicit affair. But Joseph was a man of faith and morally upright, and so Joseph refused her advances, saying,

"Look, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put me in charge of all that he owns. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Gen 39:7-9)

For a foreign Hebrew slave in Egypt, Joseph had a pretty good deal going and he could not betray his master. Moreover, Joseph recognized adultery as a great evil and a sin against God. So, in our text, we see Joseph's loyalty to his master, faithfulness to his God, and commitment to live according to God's moral code. Surely, Joseph had to be tempted, but time and again he did the right thing and we see that Joseph is the best of us.

We learn in verse 10 that the master's wife persisted day after day, but she could not break Joseph's resolve to obey God's commands. One day, when Joseph went into the master's house to do his work, he found himself alone with the master's wife, who again made advances toward him. She grabbed Joseph by the garment, which prompted Joseph to flee, leaving the garment in her hand. Now, the garment of a male Egyptian slave was probably a loincloth and not that securely attached. There were no zippers or buttons. So, when Joseph fled, his clothing was left behind.

At this, the master's wife called the men of the household and accused Joseph of attempting to sexually assault her, claiming that he fled when she screamed. When Potiphar returned and was told this false accusation by his wife, he burned with anger and had Joseph confined in the prison where Pharaoh's prisoners were kept.

But once again, the Lord was with Joseph and was kind to him and caused the prison warden to look upon him with favor. Soon, Joseph was given responsibility for running the prison by the warden, and the Lord made everything that Joseph did prosper. That takes us to the end of our sermon text so I will summarize the remainder of the story of Jacob revealed in the subsequent chapters.

When Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh's cupbearer and chief baker offended Pharaoh and landed in the same prison as Joseph. Joseph, as a trustee, was put in charge of them. One night, both the cupbearer and chief baker had dreams that they did not understand. They mention the matter to Joseph, who tells them in Genesis 40:8, "Do interpretations not belong to God? Tell it to me, please." God had given Joseph the ability to interpret dreams, and it would prove to be his get-out-of-jail card. When he had heard their dreams, Joseph told the cupbearer that he would be restored to his duties by Pharaoh in three days. Unfortunately for the chief baker, the news was not good. Joseph told the chief baker he would be executed in three days. Sure enough, it turned out exactly as Joseph said, and three days later, the cupbearer was restored to his service of Pharaoh, and the chief baker was executed.

Joseph languished in prison for another two years when Pharaoh had dreams that none of his wise men could interpret. It was then that the cupbearer remembered Joseph. The cupbearer told Pharaoh about Joseph, the Hebrew youth who had interpreted his dream correctly. Pharaoh summoned Joseph and related his two dreams to him. Pharaoh dreamed that seven fat, fine-looking cows came out of the Nile River, followed by seven very ugly, thin cows. The seven ugly cows ate the first seven fine-looking cows. Pharaoh's second dream was similar. In it, Pharaoh sees seven good ears of grain growing on a single stalk, followed by seven withered, thin, scorched ears. And, the withered, thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. Upon hearing this, Joseph responds to Pharaoh in Genesis 41 as follows:

²⁵ ... "Pharaoh's dreams are one *and the same*; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one *and the same*. ²⁷ The seven thin and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind will be seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁹ Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; ³⁰ and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹ So the abundance will be unknown

in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it *will be* very severe. ³² Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, *it means* that the matter is confirmed by God, and God will quickly bring it about.

Joseph gave credit to God, and not only did he tell Pharaoh the correct interpretation of the dreams, but he also told Pharaoh to find a wise and discerning man to manage the collection and storage of food during the seven good years so that Egypt would be supplied during the seven bad years to come. Pharaoh recognized that the hand of God was upon Joseph and that there was no more discerning and wiser individual in Egypt, so he placed Joseph over the whole land to manage food storage, second in command only to Pharaoh.

Joseph was thirty years old at his audience with Pharaoh, and so his 13 years of slavery and imprisonment finally came to an end. It is surely a rags to riches story for the ages. Through it all, Joseph was faithful to God and was sustained by God. In the coming bad years, Joseph was reunited with his family and positioned to provide food for them. Joseph understood God's sovereign hand in the events of his life. As severe famine took hold, Joseph's brothers journeyed to Egypt, looking to buy food. When Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, they were fearful of him, but Joseph said to them in Genesis 50:19–20, "...Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to keep many people alive."

By allowing the evil plans of Joseph's brothers, God preserved Jacob's family, who became the Nation of Israel to whom God provided the Scriptures and Jesus the Messiah to the world. Your salvation is directly linked to Joseph and his faithfulness to God. As followers of Jesus, there is much in Joseph's life for us to consider and emulate. We always want to follow the example of Jesus, but it is also very helpful to see how a mere mortal like Joseph lived his life when faced with evil and unfair treatment. So, let's consider what we learn from Joseph's life and his upright behavior.

First, Joseph's faithfulness to God is a prime example for us. Joseph could have easily reacted in anger against God for allowing him to be sold into slavery. Joseph could have rejected God, like many modern atheists, on the basis that there is evil in the world. However, Joseph knew God, believed in Him, and followed Him faithfully, and in the course of time, God lifted him out of his life of captivity, but even when Joseph was a slave and a prisoner, God was working all things for Joseph's and his family's good. You see, obedience to God shows love for God. Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." If we love God, we will examine our lives and seek God's help to remove sin and things that are displeasing to Him from our lives. Faith is demonstrated by obedience to God. Joseph was blessed by God because He was faithful to God. It is not surprising that Joseph was blessed and sustained by God. It is a promise of Scripture as we read in Proverbs 28:20, "A faithful person will abound in blessings..."

Second, we see that Joseph was steadfast in resisting temptation because he knew that yielding to the temptation he faced, day after day, would be a great sin against God. I see this as one of his most admirable qualities because most people in the same circumstances would have succumbed to lust and broken God's commandment against adultery. Joseph's relationship with God was more important to him than fleeting pleasure, and God blessed him mightily and brought good things to come to pass through him. When we fall into sin, it separates us from God. God says to Israel in Isaiah 59:2, "But your wrongdoings have caused a

separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear.” Thus, when we sin, we need to turn from our sin and repent so that our relationship with God will be restored. So, too, we need to flee from temptation and sin before we succumb to it.

Third, the sovereignty of God was on full display in the life of Joseph, in preserving his family, and in preparing the way for the rise of the Nation of Israel, which ultimately led to the coming of our Savior, Jesus the Messiah, and the birth of the church. God has perfect foreknowledge, so He knew before He created humanity how this would all play out. God used the evil actions of his brothers and Potiphar’s wife to bring about His perfect plan. God could have brought about His plan through anyone, but he used Joseph because of His faithfulness and love for God, and in the end, Joseph was greatly blessed. So, too, God will use us and bless us when we are faithful and obedient to Him.

In the Parable of the Talents, the Master who represents God gives his servants, who represent all Christians, varying amounts of talents, which were worth a great deal. The first servant is given ten talents, and he does business with them and earns ten more. The second servant is given five talents, and he does business with them and earns five more. When the master returned after a long time, he said to those two servants in Matthew 25:23, “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master.” God blesses those who are faithful to Him, and He will bless us when we are faithful to Him.

Next, the story of Joseph is a story of forgiveness. I’ve heard a lot of dysfunctional family stories, but plotting to kill your brother is pretty bad. No doubt, Joseph suffered greatly because of his brother’s actions. He could have engaged in a pity party, letting resentment, hate, and a grudge grow in him. Instead, he showed true compassion and forgiveness to his family, as we see in the chapters after our sermon text. Joseph’s reconciliation with his brothers in Genesis 45 is one of the most touching chapters of the Bible. Joseph was the second most powerful man in Egypt, and he could have had them all put to death, but he dealt kindly with his brothers. When Joseph’s brothers come to Egypt looking for food, there is a tearful reunion where Joseph embraces each of his brothers. He said to them in Genesis 45:4–5, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold to Egypt. Now, do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me ahead of you to save lives.”

During the years of drought, Joseph relocated his entire family to Goshen, including Jacob, his brothers, and all their wives and children. Goshen was part of Egypt in the eastern part of the Nile Delta and adjacent to the promised land. There was plenty of room for their flocks, and Joseph provided food for them during the seven years of famine, or they would have starved to death. In life, we will be wronged, and we will wrong others. In families and in the church, there are sometimes disagreements and hurt feelings. In those times, we need to remember the example of Joseph and his forgiving spirit. For, as Jesus says in Matthew 6:15, “...if you do not forgive *other* people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses.”

Finally, notwithstanding his circumstances, Joseph used his God-given abilities to their best advantage. When life gave him lemons, he made lemonade. He took advantage of the opportunities given to him by God. He was industrious and hard-working, and he did the work that God wanted him to do. He was not just a dreamer; he was also a doer who possessed integrity, honesty, and many other beautiful attributes that we should all cultivate.

I will close with this. In 1799, Conrad Reed discovered a seventeen-pound rock while fishing in Little Meadow Creek. Not knowing what it was made of, his family used it as a doorstep for three years. In 1802, his father, John Reed, took it to a jeweler who identified it as a lump of gold worth about \$3,600, which was a fortune back then. That lump of gold, which was used as a doorstep for three years in North Carolina, is one of the biggest gold nuggets ever found east of the Rockies.¹

Until the composition of the nugget was determined, its value was unknown. Even so, until the composition of our faith is determined, its strength is unknown. God allows trials in our lives not to hurt us but to strengthen and improve us as disciples of Christ. As the Apostle James (1:2–3) instructs us, “Consider it all joy, my brothers *and sisters*, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” Let us keep that in mind as we walk with the Lord in the weeks to come. Amen.

¹ <https://www.mininghalloffame.org/hall-of-fame/conrad-reed>