

*Then Jesus answered and said to them... “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;”*

# “And These Are They Which Testify of Me”

Sermons on Genesis

Living In The Lower Parts

Genesis 39

*With Study Questions*

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# Living In The Lower Parts

*Genesis 39*

## **The Lord with Joseph**

**Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. <sup>2</sup> The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. <sup>3</sup> And his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him (Genesis 39:1-4a).**

Joseph, because of his favored status with his father and prophetic visions, was hated by his brothers. First they conspired to kill him. Instead they decided to sell him into slavery. A young man of seventeen, Joseph now finds himself a slave in the most powerful nation on earth, Egypt.

His owner is Potiphar. Potiphar is the captain of the guard and may, very likely, have been commissioned to protect the Pharaoh himself. Both here, and later when Joseph is in prison, a simple statement is made which is worthy to note, "The Lord was with Joseph." Before we read of the wonderful man, we are told of the wonderful God. Whatever good is found in man is always wrought by God.

## **Good Reason to Grumble**

We are told that Joseph was a successful man. This is not to say that all godly men will find themselves successful in business. As we shall soon see, Joseph's favored status with Potiphar was quite tentative. But as it so happens, Joseph is successful in handling his master's affairs. Once again we are told that this was due to the Lord prospering Joseph's hand.

Joseph finds favor in Potiphar's sight and serves him. Remarkable it is that Joseph continues to be the hero in this story. The only church Joseph ever knew, his family, was about as evil as it could be. Yet Joseph was faithful. We never hear him grumble or murmur. He had never been anything but good and faithful. Here he finds himself entombed in a slavery that, from any earthly vantage point, had no exit. If anyone could have grumbled against the church and against God, it was Joseph. Yet, like Job, he remains faithful. As Paul writes,

**Do all things without grumbling or disputing; <sup>15</sup> that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse**

**generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world (Philippians 2:14, 15).**

### **Good Christian Business**

Joseph would very much be a light in a dark place. We are simply told that he served Potiphar. I have always found it interesting that Joseph's testimony was wrapped up very tightly in his life. We don't read of Joseph seeking to evangelize others, yet Potiphar somehow knew that it was the Lord who had prospered Joseph. A safe assumption is that Joseph brought the message of the Covenant God to Potiphar's attention. If Joseph is to be our example, the ictus (Christian fish-sign) on our cars, or place of business, should be accompanied by a servant who seeks to prosper his client. Too often we hear night-marish stories of Christian business men who use their freedom in Christ as a license for lethargy and shoddy work. Such ought not to be the case.

### **Trusting Potiphar**

**Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority. <sup>5</sup> So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field. <sup>6</sup> Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance (Genesis 39:4b-6).**

These verses seem to provide for us a general understanding of the trust Potiphar had in Joseph. Potiphar had put all under his authority. All Potiphar had to concern himself with was eating his own food.<sup>1</sup> Anyone who has ever owned a business knows how wonderful it is to have a good manager. Everything Joseph touched seemed to turn to gold.

### **For Joseph's Sake**

Yet verse five reveals an interesting, yet profound truth. The Lord blessed the Egyptians house for Joseph's sake. It may be that the Lord blessed Potiphar's house so he would be positively disposed toward Joseph—although this would be short-lived. In any case, it must be observed that even the riches of the pagans have, as their ultimate design, the favor of God's people. Ironic it is that Joseph was causing Potiphar to become richer and more powerful—hence giving Potiphar a greater ability to destroy him in the following sequence of events.

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<sup>1</sup> Some believe this had to do with dietary ritual. It likely was just a way of saying that Joseph was in charge of everything.

Yet it is truly abbreviated thinking which does not take into account the hidden plans of Christ for His bride. May we, like Joseph, trust this to be true.

We are told that Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. Joseph was good looking.

### **No License for Sin**

**And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." <sup>8</sup> But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. <sup>9</sup> There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" <sup>10</sup> So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her (Genesis 39:7-10).**

One of my least favorite shows growing up was MASH, and this for one simple reason. There was a recurring theme in the show that, since they were at war, drunkenness, licentiousness, and adultery were permitted. We tend to think of difficulty as a license for sin—at very least it justifies a shorter fuse. Joseph was cast off by his own church and family, sold into slavery and looking at a lifetime of servitude. Surely he had a right to take some comfort in the arms of this aggressive woman.

### **Joseph's Response**

Joseph has a threefold response to the temptation. First he simply refuses. He doesn't flirt. He doesn't try to witness to her. And he doesn't skirt the issue. He refuses. You can create an environment in your life that leaves open doors that ought to remain shut. An endearing reference about your spouse or children can quickly change the environment of a conversation.

Second, he considers the faith his master has in him. Now Joseph allows his mind to ascend to consideration of the offended parties. One of my greatest joys is the singing and dancing (around the house) of my wife. Heaven forbid I ever do anything to quell that.

Finally his mind ascends to the highest level. For all sins are sins against God. Joseph didn't seem to be evaluating what God had done for him lately. It was an assumption in the mind of Joseph that God was a good God and was to be obeyed. One might say, "But Joseph had a promise from God that he would one day be exalted." Do we not have that same promise?

**But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-6).**

Potiphar's wife was relentless—as was Joseph's faithfulness.

### **Fleeing**

**But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, <sup>12</sup> that she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. <sup>13</sup> And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, <sup>14</sup> that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, “See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. <sup>15</sup> And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside.” <sup>16</sup> So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. <sup>17</sup> Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, “The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; <sup>18</sup> so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside” (Genesis 39:11-18).**

Potiphar's wife now makes her most aggressive move. Joseph responds by fleeing—leaving his garment behind. The obvious exhortation here being, once resistance isn't working, fleeing is the best option—how unlike his brothers who slept with concubines and prostitutes. Her lust turns to hatred, and similar to Joseph's brothers, she conceives of a plan that involves the deceiving of the master. She asserts that Joseph was the aggressor.

### **Tough Religion**

How bad would things have to get before Joseph would figure out that his religion wasn't really working. Was God merely taunting him? Was he to be the eternal kernel of popcorn? It seems that the strength of Joseph lied in his knowledge of God's sovereignty (Genesis 50:20) and God's promise (Genesis 37:5-9).

## **Prison Ministry**

**So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, “Your servant did to me after this manner,” that his anger was aroused. <sup>20</sup> Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison. <sup>21</sup> But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. <sup>22</sup> And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. <sup>23</sup> The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was under Joseph’s authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper (Genesis 39:19-23).***

Potiphar’s wife’s plan succeeds (although there is some debate as to the level of success), and Joseph ends up in prison. But as we read from the very beginning, the Lord was with Joseph. He was a blessing to his owner and now he would be a blessing to the keeper of the prison. We should aspire to be a blessing to all—even to those who would appear to be our enemies.

### **An Environment for Faithfulness?**

It would seem that a good Christian is a good Christian regardless of church, family, past, present, or future. We could argue that Joseph’s faithfulness during his prison sentence was due to an increased opportunity to have a good quiet time, but that would be about as silly as it sounds. Faithfulness does not pine away for the perfect environment; it shines through the darkness.

### **A Veiled Insight to Christ**

Who could miss the obvious comparisons to our Blessed Savior? Rejected by His own brethren, Christ became the servant of all (Matthew 20:28).

Joseph is given free reign over all that is his master’s, save one thing, his wife. Adam is given similar freedom and violates the law by eating from the one thing that was forbidden. Christ, in a much more severe way than Joseph, is tempted in all things, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Before Joseph ascends to the right hand of Pharaoh (the most powerful man on earth) he descends to the lower parts—the king’s prison. Before Christ ascends on high, He descends into the lower parts (Ephesians 4:9).

The pain and passion of Joseph would eventually result in his own exaltation and the physical feeding of many who would otherwise have starved. Jesus endured His passion for the joy that was set before Him and sat down at

the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 12:2). And from that position He exercises His power on behalf of the church.

**And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22).**

It is not merely the benefit of food, but the benefit of life itself—and that eternal life. Let us pray that the passion of Joseph may begin to give us, at least, a veiled insight into the passion of our Savior. To Him be the glory.

## Questions for Study

1. How are we to understand that the Lord was with Joseph (page 1)?
2. What do you suppose kept Joseph from being a grumbler (pages 1, 2)?
3. In what respect was Joseph a light for Potiphar (page 2)?
4. In what respect were all the riches of Potiphar done for the sake of Joseph (page 2, 3)?
5. How did Joseph respond to temptation (pages, 3, 4)?
6. What was Joseph's final response to Potiphar's aggressive wife (page 4)?
7. From where do you suppose Joseph's strength came (page 4)?
8. Discuss a good environment for faithfulness (page 5)?
9. What kind of similarities do we see between Joseph and Jesus (pages 5, 6)?