

Genesis 39:1-20

### *How To Resist Temptation*

The 19th century playwright, Oscar Wilde wrote, "I can resist every thing except temptation." And, "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it."

Sounds pretty contemporary, doesn't it? Concepts like discipline, self-control, morality aren't exactly popular. Yielding to temptation sounds a lot more exciting than resisting it, and on the surface it looks like a lot more fun. All around us people are telling us to please ourselves and so many jump at that very appealing message.

And yet, the Bible tells us to *flee youthful lusts; to endure temptation; and to endure hardness as a good soldier.*

There isn't a person who has ever lived, including Jesus Christ, who hasn't faced temptation. And, there's not a single person who has ever lived except Christ, who hasn't yielded to it and suffered its consequences. Unfortunately temptation is inevitable. You can't escape it.

Temptation wears a lot of faces. Material temptation is the desire for things. Personal temptation is the desire for a name, authority, power, and control over others. Sensual temptation is the desire to have our physical wants gratified.

The temptation is there. But God says we can resist it.

In fact, He says not only can we, but we must resist it or pay a heavy price.

One of the key signs of maturity is being able to postpone immediate gratification for long term goals.

A small child or an immature adult says "I want it now" without thinking of the long term effects. Being able to put aside those desires to work toward a goal is an indication of maturity.

Our life goal, if we're a believer in Jesus Christ, should be to glorify God in our body and our spirit. Having that goal is going to make all the difference in the world when it comes to handling temptation.

We can, we must, resist temptation in order to bring glory to God. But is it possible?

This morning we want to look at the man Joseph in Genesis 39 to get an answer for our question.

### **Open to Genesis 39, page 38**

First of all, we need to orient ourselves to what is happening in this chapter by looking at the historical setting.

*I. God Has A Plan For Us Although We Don't Always Understand How It Will Work Out*

#### **Read verse 1**

Joseph, a great, great grandson of Abraham, the favorite son of Jacob, had been sold to a caravan of traders who were heading down to Egypt. He had been sold to them by his own brothers.

Joseph had been told by God that he had an important place in God's program for the world. God had promised Joseph that his parents and his brothers would bow down to him.

I don't know how much Joseph understood about all that God told him but we've already seen that he was a godly young man. It seems clear that he was to take the authority that would normally go to the firstborn son.

This would have been an opportune time then, for Joseph to chuck in the towel and give up on God.

J. B. Phillips writes "like Paul arriving in Rome, Joseph arrived in Egypt in chains, his high hopes shattered, his life in ruins. The taunts of his brothers still ringing in his ears, "Bye, Bye, Joey! Pleasant dreams! What had become of those fine dreams of his? Dreams of power, dreams of position, dreams of the resources and the riches of the world poured into his lap? He was a slave!"

This idea of God's promises not seeming to be fulfilled here is a very important part of understanding temptation.

Any of us can fall for temptation anytime if we're are not careful. We're all vulnerable. But I've noticed that many times it's Christians who are going through a difficult time in their life that end up falling into sin.

And what they say is, "God's promises to me seem to have failed. I see no hope in my situation. God has let me down so I'm not going to make the effort to live for him. He's not doing what I want so I'm not going to do what He wants."

And childishly they try to find happiness in the things the God says to stay away from. The problem is, there is no lasting happiness in yielding to temptation. There's heartache and there's pain and there's brokenness, but there's no lasting happiness.

Joseph, for all the questions he might have had, is an example of not giving in to self, and not giving up on God.

The Holy Spirit doesn't tell us the details of that long hot trek across the Sinai down to Egypt. We can be sure it was a rough one with a lot of walking and little water but finally he comes to Egypt.

Joseph had come to an amazing land with a history stretching back into antiquity. This was an exotic world of the Nile, the pyramids, the Sphinx and religions that worshipped the sun and moon as well as animals.

Joseph was somewhere around 18 years old when he was sold in the slave market to a man named Potiphar. A wealthy, influential, captain of the guard of Pharaoh himself, the ruler of the mightiest nation on earth.

Notice the progressions that we are given in the next few verses.

## **Read verse 2**

The Lord was with Joseph. Joseph wasn't resentful and depressed. He didn't criticize God and waste long hours plotting revenge. The Lord was with Joseph and Joseph had the faith to believe that.

It doesn't make any difference what our circumstances are. If the Lord is with us, we'll always be on top of our circumstances.

Far from being the favorite Son, Joseph had become a slave in a foreign land. But he hadn't taken his eyes off of God, and God was with him.

Every crisis built character into Joseph's life. He didn't allow his captivity to enslave his soul, and spiritually he was a prosperous man.

We're told, "he was a successful man." And notice, he didn't live outback in the slave quarters. He lived "in the house of his master."

Because he was hard worker and was successful at what he did, he was moved into the house.

As a result in verse 3 we discover that soon his master saw that.

### **Read verse 3**

In his daily life, Joseph gave glory to God and Potiphar who had probably never ever heard of Jehovah before, now saw that the God that Joseph worshipped brought blessing into his house.

As you move into verse 4 the result of that is...

### **Read verse 4**

This brings us to one more step in the promotion of God.

### **Read verses 5-6**

Obviously, all of this has taken several years to come about but at the high point Joseph completely managed Potiphar's household. He was the steward of the house. He was so trustworthy that Potiphar let him handle all of his accounts. Except for the bread that was on his table, Potiphar didn't even know his own financial situation. Joseph had come to the point where he had earned his masters complete respect and so he was entrusted with complete authority.

Satan obviously wouldn't leave a man like Joseph alone. He had tried to ruin him through the schemes of his brothers but that hadn't worked.

But the "master of deception" isn't easily sidetracked. And so this time he uses a much more subtle and potentially deadly approach to try and foil God's plan.

- I. God Has A Plan For Us Although We Don't Always Understand How It Will Work Out*
- II. Satan Uses Temptation To Try To Block God's Plan*

**Read verse 7**

Egyptian women as a whole were known for being the most liberated of their time. Potiphar's wife was no exception.

Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. In other words, he was "well built and good looking" and before long he caught the eye of his masters wife who certainly liked the direct approach.

God has promised He will always provide a way of escape when we are faced with temptation. I Corinthians 10:13 promises He'll never allow us to be tempted beyond that point that we can handle.

That means that when we sin there's no one to blame but ourselves. We can't blame our circumstances, we can't blame our past life, and we can't blame God for allowing us to be tempted.

Here was Joseph, a young man with all the same natural desires we have. He's friendless, cast out by his own family, a stranger and a slave in a strange land. What an opportunity to yield to temptation. Who would even know? What would it hurt?

But notice verse 8. It begins with the three most important words in the whole chapter.

**Read verse 8a** But he refused...

How did Joseph do it? How did Joseph deal with what was probably the most critical testing that he had ever gone through? Why did Joseph refuse where so many others have given in ?

Look at the rest of the verse... **Read verse 8b-9**

This is what one writer called Joseph's "blessed inability to sin." He refused on two counts. One, it wouldn't be right to violate his master's trust and two, he couldn't sin against God.

And notice it wasn't "I will not sin against God", it's "I cannot." It was an absolute moral and spiritual impossibility for him to do what she was asking.

Now listen, because this is important. It wasn't impossible for him because he was sinless. It wasn't impossible because God had put an invisible protective shield around him to keep him from sin. It wasn't impossible because he didn't have the normal feelings and desires that we all have.

It was unthinkable for Joseph to sin against his God because his mind was so set on glorifying God that what she suggested was abhorrent to him.

What a way to say "no" to temptation. God was more real to Joseph than anything on earth, even his own passions.

But the woman wouldn't take "no" for an answer.

### **Read verses 10 -12**

The time for debate and argument was past. Joseph did the only thing he could. He ran. He took off.

Romans 13:14 commands a positive and a negative. The positive is *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*. Put on godliness and righteousness and holiness. The negative is *and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts*. Don't make the opportunity for your flesh to fulfill its desires.

I Corinthians 10:13 says God will always make a way of escape and then verse 14 says, *Therefore, my beloved, flee....*

That's not being a coward. That's courage. That's conviction. Get away from that temptation. That about how much temptation could be overcome in our lives if we'd stop making provision for our flesh.

If we continually put into our minds the wrong things that are around us we're going to be effected eventually somehow.

Think about this. Joseph is got to be one of the most godly men in Scripture. He was a man of faith, he was a man of principle, he was a man of commitment. But he didn't let it stop there.

He didn't say, "I'm so spiritual, I can handle any situation that comes my way." He ran and fled outside. He didn't make provision for his own flesh.

None of us can build a wall around ourselves high enough to keep out all temptation. It's not a sin to be tempted.

Jesus Christ was in all points tempted as we are. (Hebrews 4:15) Temptation isn't sin, but yielding to temptations is. Joseph was at a time in his life when his reaction to temptation would have lasting effects. If he had yielded to the temptation of Potiphar's wife, I couldn't even imagine what course history would have taken.

Think about this temptation that Joseph faced.

1. It was totally unexpected. It happened at a time when all was going well. It came from a totally unexpected source.
2. It persisted.
3. The opportunity was right.

But, Joseph said "no" and took off. Listen, this was not some spur of the moment decision Joseph made. His brother Judah was a "spur of the moment" type of guy. Remember he ended up in an incestuous situation with his own daughter-in-law.

Joseph was a man with a long term goal of glorifying God and an attitude of commitment that he had built in over a long period of time.

He didn't have the slightest idea that something like this was going to happen but when it did he was ready. God was real to him. He knew right from wrong. He had committed himself to godliness and holiness so he reacted the way God wanted him to.

He didn't sit down and say, "Gee, what do I want to do in this situation?" He did what he did because he knew it was right, not just because of his feelings.

You give God a back seat on your life, living on your feelings and do what you want to do and I'll guarantee when that unexpected temptation crops up you're going to fall.

So, here we find Joseph dealing with and resisting temptation. A real contrast with the last chapter.

Now, you would think that after such a great moral victory as that that God would have a special blessing in line for Joseph, but things didn't work out that way.

### **Read verses 13 - 15**

In obeying His God, Joseph had spurned Mrs. Potiphar. That was definitely a blow to her ego so she devised a plan. If Joseph wanted to treat her that way then she'd see to it that he suffered. She framed him. Her screams brought the servants running. She probably messed up her hair a little bit, tore her own garment and it was done.

- I. God Has A Plan For Us Although We Don't Always Understand How It Will Work Out*
- II. Satan Uses Temptation To Try To Block God's Plan*
- III. When We Do Life God's Way There's Often Unexpected Results*

### **Read verses 16 - 20**

I wonder if Potiphar really believed his wife at this point. I get the idea that this might have not been the first time something like this happened.

Normally people don't just jump into a situation like this without some prior experience any more than Joseph could have run away without first establishing his walk with God.

If Potiphar had really believed his wife, Joseph would have been tortured to death. To save face since his wife had made a public accusation, he put Joseph into prison. It was almost an acquittal, certainly better than being tortured to death, but it was still prison just the same.

Psalm 105 gives us a little glimpse into what it must have been like. It says: *He sent a man before them-- Joseph--who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. (verses 17-18)*

Once again Joseph could have become very bitter. He could have said, "That's the last time I worry about obeying God. Look where it's got me!"

Think of all the things that happened to him so far.



At home his brothers had taken his coat, which indicated his birthright, and threw him in a pit. Next he went through the experience of being sold as a slave and carried off to Egypt. Now he was falsely accused and made to look like he was living in the squalor of sin rather than seeking to bring glory to Jehovah God. Now he was chained in a dirty Egyptian prison. That's enough to begin to make a person think "First my family casts me off, then my master and now God."

But, that's not what we find about Joseph. He has God's promises. They hadn't been fulfilled yet in his life so he didn't give up hope.

He didn't sulk, or throw a temper tantrum or curse God. And the reason was because Joseph didn't live on feelings. Joseph lived on God's word. His flesh didn't rule him but he was master over his own flesh.

This was just a temporary situation. God was faithful and God was going to bring Joseph out of that prison and place him beside the Pharaoh himself. Joseph didn't know it yet but God was going to use him to save his family from starvation and give them a safe place to grow into the fledgling nation of Israel.

What would have happened if Joseph would have gone along with his master's wife? What would he have lost? We can only imagine.

We have the promises of God's word too.

Hebrews 13:5-6 *I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"*

Do you have that kind of confidence? I'll guarantee you - if you don't have confidence in the living God, you are never going to have victory in temptation. We need come to God and thank Him for salvation. Thank Him that He's given His only begotten son Jesus to die for our sins.

And then we need to pray that God will keep our feet from falling and stumbling off the path He has for us to walk.

That's the kind of prayer I imagine Joseph was praying in prison.

Not, "God I'll be faithful to you if you make life go the way I want it to." That kind of faithfulness won't last long. But, "God keep me straight come what may." You know, Joseph worshipped the same God, was empowered by the same Holy Spirit that we have.

I love the benediction of Hebrews 13:20, 21. It says, *Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

May the same power that raised Christ from the dead work in your lives to strengthen you. That is what is available to us. God's unlimited power.

Maybe you have been battling temptation of some kind in your own life and up until this point it's just seem hopeless.

You've probably realized what we all do in time. That your faith is weak and faltering. That is why we're never called to the confidence in our faith. Instead we are called to have confidence in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul could write, *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* Galatians 2:20

Joseph had passed the test of adversity brought on by his brothers and the test brought on by Potiphar's wife.

But even though he'd been victorious, he became a victim of his brother's hatred and the false accusations made by Potiphar's wife.

The exciting thing though is to see that Joseph realized that he didn't have to sin under any condition. He didn't use the explanation of irresistible temptation to bitterness, to immorality, to doubt of God's promises. And we don't have to yield to temptation either.

We can be morally pure. We can be triumphant over sin no matter what everyone else around us seems to be doing. The one who empowered Joseph. The one that

Joseph walked with in an intimacy that guarded him and gave him the ability to see things clear is the same one who empowers us.

Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today and forever.”

1. Don't be weakened by your situation. Joseph didn't allow bitterness, anger, frustration to weaken him.
2. Don't be deceived in the persuasion. Joseph didn't fall for the wooings of Potiphar's wife. More affairs happen because someone's ego gets stroked.
3. Don't be gentle with your emotions. Joseph just stomped all over his physical desires and ran.
4. Don't be confused by your immediate results. Joseph didn't give up on God or excuse sin in his own life.

What's so significant about sin? The Bible says, Its wages are death. Sin brings separation from a holy God. We all at times fail. We all at times choose our way over God's way. That's sin.

But the good news of the Bible is that God forgives sin through Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16)