

Joseph Fled Sin

HN 18/07/04 pm

Reading: Genesis 39, Proverbs 7

Study: Genesis 39

Psalms: 34:1-7, 34:8-15, 51:1-5, 119:9-12

At the college where we served in India, the students conducted an evangelistic camp each year. I hope we can take some young people from here over next year to join in such a camp. One year the speaker was talking about temptation and sin and he used an interesting illustration. He said you cannot stop the birds flying over your head, but you can stop them nesting in your hair.

The birds were flying very low over Joseph's head as he went about his duty. Potiphar's wife took a liking to him. She cast longing and lustful eyes on Joseph. He was under attack. The adulterous woman was after him and would not give up easily. Would Joseph withstand such temptation?

Moral Danger

Joseph was a long way from home and probably lonely. He was in a foreign culture, among idolatrous and immoral people. He was a young man, barely out of his teens. How would he withstand temptation? Who would help him? His whole environment was against him – except for one thing – God was with him.

Joseph **was handsome in form and appearance**. He took after his mother Rachel it seems. His physical beauty was not his fault – God made him that way. However, it made him attractive to this lustful woman and brought him under attack from this agent of the devil. It is not told that she flattered him but her longing, lust-filled eyes were firmly fixed on him. Many would have welcomed such attention from the opposite sex and taken advantage of their good looks. We see it around us all the time – and those not as handsome as Joseph or Rachel try their utmost to be so. Let our beauty be that *of a gentle and quiet spirit which is very precious in the sight of God* (1 Peter 3:4). Remember physical beauty can be dangerous.

Jacob was **successful** in what he did in Egypt. He was given great responsibility in his master's house. His master trusted him and did not ask questions. Being in charge of the house, he could have told himself this was one of the perks of the job. He was overseer in the house and could do what he liked. What did he have to lose by indulging the flesh and keeping this woman happy at the same time? If he offended his master's wife his career might well be in jeopardy.

David was ready to take such liberty in his position – so he thought. Success can be dangerous. The very gifts of God can be turned into weapons that the devil can use to attack us. Beauty, success, learning, possessions, and even the word of God itself can be used to attack us. The devil quoted Scripture to the author of Scripture itself remember.

She was very **persistent**. Those birds just kept flying as they usually do. He rejected her initial advances but she kept on at him. *She spoke to Joseph day by day. Lie with me* she said. One day when there was just the two of them in the house, she actually grabbed him by his coat and tried to seduce him. He could have said he was not to blame for whatever happened. It was all her fault.

Joseph had many reasons for capitulating to the advances of this woman. In the previous chapter, we saw how his older brother Judah capitulated to the lust of the flesh without any resistance whatsoever. And what about David who lusted after Bathsheba as he saw her bathing. Many have fallen victim to the lust of the flesh without half the enticement that Joseph encountered.

If he had yielded to temptation and sinned, he might have kept his job and avoided prison. He may have been more successful in this world. But what would the cost have been to his soul?

Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding

He who does so destroys his own soul (Proverbs 6:32).

He went after her...as an ox to the slaughter...as a bird hastens to the snare

He did not know it would cost him his life (Proverbs 7:23).

The writer of the Proverbs describes the very situation that Joseph faced here in this house. This is life-saving wisdom. Let us pay heed. Let us be alert to the wiles of the devil and the weakness of our human flesh.

Meeting the Danger – Fear God

How did Joseph face this temptation? How did he overcome? Jacob was alert. He was sober/self controlled and watchful/vigilant – *for your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (I Peter 5:8). Alert and self controlled, having victory over the flesh through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He was alert to his position and responsibilities before the **master of the house Potiphar**. He responded to the lustful advances of the mistress by declaring – *Look, my master...has committed all that he has to my hand* (39:8). His master had placed great responsibility in him and he was conscious of the great responsibility placed upon him. However, the master's wife was out of bounds. By heeding her demands, he would have done wrong to his master – she was his wife.

Was this moral reasoning or for self preservation? If the master had found out that Joseph had gone in to lie with his wife, his punishment would have been severe. He would have lost more than his job – most likely his head. That he was not executed when falsely accused indicates mercy on the part of the master, probably because he was not fully convinced by his wife's accusation against Joseph.

Jealousy is a husband's fury,

Therefore, he will not spare in the day of vengeance

He will accept no recompense,

Nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts (Proverbs 6:34).

Husbands are meant to be jealous for their wives and protect them from adulterers. A fellow I know found out his wife was having an affair. One day he found the two together and with a couple of punches lay the adulterer flat on the ground. This is what Proverbs warned about. This is what the adulterer should expect – even if such a response is frowned upon in our society.

However, with Joseph it was more than just this fear of his master. He wanted to please his master. He respected him and did not want to offend him or bring him harm. Joseph's love for God flowed

on to a love for his neighbour also. If he loved his neighbour, including Potiphar, he would not intentionally cause him harm. Adultery among other things is very, very selfish. Someone always gets hurt. No matter what sociologists and psychologists may say, someone always gets hurt. Declaring no fault divorce did not bring about no hurt divorce.

*Wounds and dishonour he will get
And his reproach will not be wiped away (Proverbs 6:33).*

This is wisdom for man today just as it was in the days of Solomon.

Joseph was alert to his position and responsibilities before **the Lord, the Master of his soul**. If he feared what Potiphar might do to him, he feared God even more. *Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.* (Mat 10:28). He said to this wicked woman, *How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God.* David admitted his adultery as sin against God (Psalm 51).

Joseph knew what God required of him. His father Jacob would have taught him about the true God. He would have taught him that he was special in the eyes of God. That he belonged to the chosen family, the chosen people of God.

Does the covenant of God mean anything to you? Do you know who you are before God? Do you know that you were called to a holy life, separated unto him? *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God* (I Peter 2:9). And in the next verse Peter writes – *Beloved I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul.* As a believer, you are a child of God. You are called to live as such – as a child of the King of Kings.

Paul reminds you that *you are not your own but that you were brought with a price* (I Corinthians 6:20). What was that price? The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, you are exalted; you are lifted up above the lusts of the world. Your body in the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, honour God with your body. Joseph knew that the Lord was with him and that he belonged to God.

The God of Joseph is a holy God. He is a God who cannot look upon evil. Joseph correctly called this proposition a *great wickedness*. He labelled such an action correctly as a sin against God. He spoke in absolute terms not in relative terms of what might be best in this situation. He could have said if I do not lie with her she will get upset and I may be fired. Maybe God wants me to go along with her.

Worldly thinking has so entered the thinking of some church leaders and their followers today that this is what they are willing to conclude. Situational ethics as it is called, allows them to turn their back on absolutes and indulge the flesh – all in the love of God and of fellow man of course! God may call someone to divorce their marriage partner. God will understand a man in Joseph's position yielding to the woman. After all, it would keep the peace in the house and is peace not a great ideal!

Joseph would have none of this reasoning and neither must we. Let us cling to the absolute and clear commands of God without compromise. God is a holy God. He has given us his Holy Spirit.

Therefore, we are to be holy as he is holy. Lust is not love. Lust is lust and will be shown to be that by the word of God. Scripture warns that those who walk according to the flesh *in the lust of uncleanness, and those who despise authority will come under judgment* (II Peter 2:10). At the same time, the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations.

'It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience' writes Matthew Henry. Remember – alert, avoid attacks from the devil. God will deliver you from temptation if you call upon him and heed his word.

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