

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Genesis 39

Introduction:

There are two major characters in the Bible about whom there is nothing negative written. They are Daniel and Joseph. That is not to say that they never sinned or did anything wrong. But the biblical account of their lives focuses on their godly character and the fact that they were committed to God and to doing what is right throughout the entire span of their lives, even though they both lived most of their lives in a very wicked culture.

Last week we looked at some of the background of Joseph's life. He was born into and raised in a family filled with conflict, competitiveness, and controversy. He was favored over his brothers by their father, and he was hated by his brothers because of it. He added fuel to his brothers' anger by telling them of his dreams, which seemed to indicate that he would rule over them and they would bow down to him.

We saw how their hatred got the best of them, and when they had the opportunity they sold Joseph to some traders who were heading down to Egypt where he would be sold as a slave. They believed this would be the end of Joseph and any involvement he might have in their lives. This would put an end to his ridiculous dreams of ruling over them. Then they lied to their father, leading him to believe that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Yet Joseph overcame their treachery by trusting that God had a plan and purpose for his life. We never see Joseph questioning or arguing with God. Nor does he abandon God or his faith in God. One of the things that fascinates me about Joseph and the time in which he lived is the realization that he did not have the same level of knowledge and understanding of God that we have today. People like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph did not have the written Word that we have today, revealing the truth about God. They had a very primitive knowledge, yet were trusting and obedient.

We do know that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all had direct communication from God. He came to them and spoke to them to guide and instruct them. But I cannot find any record in the Scripture of God speaking directly to Joseph. He did give Joseph dreams and also the ability to interpret the dreams of others, but there is no indication that God spoke to Joseph.

Yet, in spite of that, Joseph had a deep and intimate relationship with God that is evident in his response to the treachery of his brothers. He never blamed God for his predicament or turned away from God or used the unfortunate events of his life as an excuse to abandon God or a righteous life.

Today we look at the next stage in Joseph's life, when he again demonstrates his faith and conquering attitude – overcoming temptation.

Joseph in Potiphar's Household

Genesis 39 – *read vv. 1-2.* So Joseph ended up in the home of a wealthy and powerful man. But the key statement in all of this is in verse 2 – “*The Lord was with Joseph...*” Even though Joseph's brothers had turned against him, and he was not in a strange land alone, not knowing the language or the customs, yet God had not abandoned him.

In fact, God's presence in Joseph's life soon made an impact on his new master. *Review the events of vv. 3-6a.*

- All Joseph did succeeded.
- Potiphar noticed his success and promoted him
- Joseph was put in complete control of Potiphar's household – he was probably in charge of all of the other slaves and servants
- Potiphar trusted Joseph with everything in his house

Finally, it seems that things are going right for Joseph. After the treachery he endured at the hands of his brothers he has advanced to a high position managing the household of a wealthy and powerful official in Pharaoh's court.

But you have probably heard of Murphy's Law – Anything that can go wrong will go wrong. And there are several corollaries to that law—

things like: Just when you think things can't get worse, they do; or, if everything seems to be going well, you have probably overlooked something. Well, it is at this point that Joseph runs right into Murphy's Law.

Trouble and further disaster is waiting just around the corner, and it is found in the person of Potiphar's wife. It is here that Joseph is faced with probably the greatest temptation of his young life.

Facing Temptation

Temptation – we all know about temptation. Not one person here can honestly say they have never been tempted to sin. Even Jesus was tempted. Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Matthew and Luke both record a specific period in Jesus' life when he was confronted by Satan with temptations to turn away from the plan the Father had for him, to do the devil's bidding.

Well Joseph found himself facing a powerful test. Theodore Epp calls it the test of the body. And the test came from the wife of his master, Potiphar.

Read vv. 6b-7. Joseph was a handsome young man, well-built, muscular and attractive. The NKJV says that Potiphar's wife "...cast longing eyes on Joseph..." Bill Crowder makes an interesting observation. In the RBC booklet published in 1998, he says,

"She would have been right at home in modern America. A recent McCall's magazine survey polled 60,000 American women, and the results were stunning: 47 percent said that they thought premarital sex was acceptable and 27 percent endorsed extramarital affairs. Potiphar's wife had the same mindset. She was attracted to this young man physically, so she offered herself to him."

Imagine Joseph's situation. He was a strong healthy young man, probably somewhere between 20 and 25 years of age. I am sure that he had all of the sexual desire and passion that any young man would have. And now he has the opportunity to satisfy those desires with a beautiful woman who has offered herself to him. But he refuses.

I think we would do well to examine for a few moments the nature of this temptation and Joseph's response to it.

1. The temptation was unexpected. Things were going well for Joseph. God was blessing Joseph and was blessing his master, Potiphar, because of his faithfulness.
2. The temptation came from an unexpected source. Joseph was simply going about his daily tasks, carrying out his responsibilities in the house of Potiphar, never imagining that he would come face to face with one of his greatest tests. Temptation is seldom predictable. We need to be prepared with the full armor of God at all times, because we never know when or where Satan will attack with his devious temptations.
3. The temptation was difficult because Potiphar's wife did not give up. The temptation was persistent. Verse 10 – *"...she spoke to Joseph day after day..."*

So, how did he deal with this temptation. Again there are a few things we should note and I believe we can learn from:

1. He had strong convictions about what was right. These convictions had obviously been learned in the presence of God. A quick look at his family background shows that it was not there that he developed those convictions.
2. He looked beyond his own desires to the future results of yielding to the temptation and to his own passions. Look at vv. 8-9 – *read...* He knew that to give in to the advances of this woman would hurt his employer and master, Potiphar. Ethically, it would be wrong to do so. Potiphar trusted him and Joseph was unwilling to violate that trust. He also recognized the consequences that such sin would have on his relationship with God. He understood that all sin was ultimately against God and he was not willing to jeopardize that for a moment of pleasure.
3. He did everything he could to avoid the lure of sin. He avoided contact with this woman as much as possible. *Read v. 10 – "...or to be with her."*
4. He knew enough to run when there was no other option – see vv. 11-12. When faced with the powerful allure of sin, he ran as fast as he could as far as he could. He understood the importance of getting away from the situation. He did not flirt with sin, or argue with it or reason with it, He fled from it.

So, Joseph successfully overcame the temptation that came to him through a woman who was in a position of authority over him. He did what was right. He honored God in his body, and refused to do something that would harm his master Potiphar. It only seems natural that there would be some reward for that. Right?

Well, you all have heard the statement that, *"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."* Well, Joseph was soon to realize the truth of that statement. Potiphar's wife was ruled by her passions and when he refused her, her desire turned to anger and she immediately sought revenge. She lied to her husband, accused Joseph of attempting to rape her and had him thrown into the prison.

Joseph passed the test of the body—he overcame incredible temptation—only to find himself facing another test – the test of discouragement and disappointment, as he languishes in the dungeon of Potiphar's prison. But... we'll look at that test next week.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 10:13 that, *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*

So how do we overcome temptation? We do what Joseph did:

1. Establish our convictions on the Word of God and protect ourselves with the armor of God.
2. Look beyond the pleasures immediate gratification to the effects of yielding to the temptation on others and our relationship with God.
3. Avoid the lure of sin. We are not to put ourselves in places where we know we will be tempted. Paul tells us in Rom. 13:14 – *"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."*
4. When confronted with temptation, don't try to argue or reason with it. Run from it. Paul told Timothy, *"...Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness..."* (2 Tim 2:22). That is still good advice for us today. No matter how old we are, in years or maturity, Satan never gives up trying to lure us into sin and we need to learn to overcome.