

Joseph, Sermon #3

Genesis 37

I've entitled today's message "Joseph in Potiphar's House"

Genesis 37:36

If you noticed, we are going to skip Genesis 38

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word.

Genesis 37:36

Genesis 39:1-6

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

Joseph in Potiphar's House

Joseph has entered the strange land of Egypt. How many of you folks have been to Egypt?

- To be in a foreign land and sold into slavery is a very dreary prospect for a seventeen-year-old boy.
- There is nothing to bring any encouragement to his heart except those dreams.

What did Egypt look like in Joseph's time?

What did he see after he crossed that desert? One of the major sights in Egypt is the Nile River.

- The lifeblood of Egypt was the Nile and is the Nile
- The river is over 4,000 miles long, the longest river in the world and this river flows to the north, emptying into the Mediterranean Sea.

Just like today, ancient Egypt lay along the river.

- In some places, Egypt was only a mile wide and in other places 25 miles.
- Wherever you were in Egypt, all you saw when you looked east or west were the high-rising, rugged desert cliffs.
- So, Egypt is a little green strip with deserts on both sides (satellite)

When Joseph descended into Egypt, he found himself a stranger among millions of people.

We find Joseph in Potiphar's house—serving God through service to a man.

- This reminds us of the Biblical principles of Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3 regarding our employers—to work for them as we would for Christ—to do it heartily, not as a man-pleaser but a Christ-pleaser.
- We serve God through serving our church, our home, and our employer.

This passage tells us how Joseph was a testimony for God to heathen people in a strange land.

In vs. 1, we see the human events that took place to bring Joseph into Potiphar's house:

- The caravan would have come down and entered the capital city of Memphis—that's where the Pharaoh would be!
- It was also the best prospect to make a profit—go to the city.

Memphis is 25 miles south of where the Nile River breaks into twelve rivers, making up that delta region.

If Joseph was sold in a typical manner, he would have been put into a slave market—put up on the auctioneer's block.

People would come from all over to bid on the slaves.

Now, Joseph probably stood out:

- He was young, from Israel, and verse 6 tells us about his physical appearance and countenance—handsome and strong and not broken.
- He appealed to Potiphar, probably by sight.
- The Bible tells us that Potiphar purchased him.

We are told that Potiphar was captain of the guard.

- That phrase is a little difficult to interpret.
- It literally reads that Potiphar was a dignitary of the executioners—he was chief of the slaughter men.

He was obviously a very high official and I think it is beneficial to know a little about the social standing of that day.

- The top level in Egypt was the Pharaoh and his family, the royal family, and Pharaoh was worshiped as a son of the gods.
- The chief people outside of the Pharaoh and right under him are the priests.
- Priests had a death hold on Egypt—what they said the gods wanted or demanded was law in Egypt.

Royal family, priests, scribes, army

Then were the scribes—everywhere in Egypt there were scribes.

If we were to look at the inscriptions from Egypt, the scribes often worked in multiples for all events—putting down in writing every single thing.

It was quite an art to be a scribe because in those days, the writing was not in letters but in pictures—hieroglyphics.

So it was quite an art.

The government was a large bureaucracy, with many officials at various levels and thousands of scribes to keep the records.

The next people were the soldiers, the army officials.

- The Egyptians did not have a standing army—this was not the period of great conquest, so a very small army and their job was to guard Pharaoh and the royal family.
- The deserts were Egypt's best defense

★ If Potiphar had anything to do with the military and Pharaoh, he would have lived right there in Memphis—near the home of Pharaoh.

Joseph was sold into the house of an important dignitary.

- If Joseph was treated as a customary slave, the first thing that Potiphar would have done to Joseph was shave his head.
- They had a problem with lice, and typically, all slaves and servants had shaved heads. Then he would have been branded or tattooed.

Those were the human events—now in verse 2, we see the hand of God.

II. Secondly, we see the divine hand that was moving Joseph to the place of God's appointment.

This is the first time the Lord is mentioned in the life of Joseph.

And, the Bible says

In vs. 2 – the Lord was with Joseph

Vs. 3 – the Lord was with him

Vs. 3 – the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand

Vs. 5 – the Lord blessed Potiphar for Joseph's sake

Vs. 5 – the blessing of the Lord was upon all

Five times . . .

- In these four verses, there are more references to the Lord and Joseph than in all the verses and chapters combined.
- The only other place that it tells us about the Lord and Joseph is when he was in prison.

So, God is communicating to us as we read about Joseph in Potiphar's house that it is no accident/no mistake where he is!

- And when Joseph was in prison, it was no accident/no mistake.
- The Lord was with him.

God chose Joseph to be in Potiphar's house—God has His hand in the places we are.

God directs even our places of employment..

In fact, if we study the history of this period of when Joseph was in Egypt, I am amazed at the hand of God putting Joseph where he was.

The whole history of Egypt stretches from 3000 B.C. to 332 B.C.

- Does anyone know who conquered Egypt in 332 B.C.? Alexander the Great!

Egypt's history was 2700-2800 years long—divided into three kingdoms—the Old, the Middle, and the New Kingdom.

- The Old Kingdom was the period of great construction projects.
- The sophistication of the society was incredible.

For instance, King Kiops (Che-ops) built what we know of today as The Great Pyramid, the largest one.

- That pyramid was 481 feet tall, over the length of a football field.
- It was 756 feet long per side and was made out of over 2,000,000 blocks of stone.
- Those stones weighed on average 2 ½ tons—that's 2 million, 2 ½ ton-blocks.
- And, when they measure the sides, the difference is less than 9 inches.

Just amazing construction!

Joseph lived in the shadow of these pyramids built 1,000 years before Joseph—Sphinx

The Egyptians were great builders, and the rulers needed both slaves and their own citizens for vast building projects.

Skip the Middle Kingdom

The New Kingdom was the period of time that Egypt became a world power and conquered other lands.

- She began to advance and explore and send out her armies.

Between these two periods was the Middle Kingdom.

- There were a total of 30 ruling dynasties for Egypt.
- In the Middle Kingdom were two of the dynasties—the 11th and 12th Dynasties.
- Joseph came to Egypt during the 12th Dynasty in what we call the Middle Kingdom..

And, probably the Pharoah (king) was Cysteros the Second.

- When Cysteros came on the scene, Egypt was a divided country—Lower Egypt and Higher Egypt.
- His desire was to unify Egypt, rebuild the economy, and rebuild the loyalty of the people.

Cysteros had a number of projects going on:

- He reopened the gold mine in Newbia.
- In the Sinai Peninsula, he was mining copper; he was building a pyramid for himself; he was damming up one of the little rivers of the Nile to make some more farmland.

Joseph should have and could have ended up on one of the work gangs for any of those work projects. They needed labor.

Joseph could have ended up there, but God saw to it that he ended up in a home of a high-ranking Egyptian official.

Notice now, verse 2e, he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

That tells us that Joseph was not a field laborer.

This is no accident.

- If we are a submissive believer, the place we are employed is the place of God's appointment.
- ★God, behind the scenes, arranges for His people to work under certain people and in certain sets of circumstances, because that is God's will to work in us and through us.

Vs. 2 – the house of Potiphar is more than just one building.

Compound—servants' quarter—pool, stables/barns, gardens, trees in the courtyard.

- The whole complex could be considered the home.
- Joseph was brought into the complex and he worked in a certain area.

The area Joseph worked in prospered under his care and Potiphar noticed.

- How did Potiphar know it was Jehovah, the Lord? (vs. 3)
- Why would he think that Joseph's God was prospering him?

In Egypt, there was a pantheon of gods—every city had its own god—there was a great deal of religion:

- Rah, the sun god; Potiphar—"he who Rah has given"—the sun god

How did Potiphar know of Jehovah and that Jehovah was blessing Joseph?

- The only thing I can assume is that Joseph told him.
- Joseph could have been sour, bitter, questioning, and disbelieving God.
- He could have been intimidated by Egypt

Some people, in less serious circumstances, have disbelieved God and have become spiritually shipwrecked.

However, Joseph's confidence was not in his ability to understand his circumstances—his confidence was in God.

The Word of God says that although Joseph was only a slave in Potiphar's house, “the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man” (Gen. 39:2).

- ★What a contrast—the slave was a prosperous man! It is character that counts.
- When a person is in right relationship with God, he is prosperous regardless of his material possessions. Prosperity with God does not mean a high paying job.

Joseph did not question the sovereignty of God—He left the outcome to God and he gave himself to the work at hand.

This is a key principle in life:

- People are always trying to work the system or worm their way up
- Joseph's confidence in God was so complete that he did not have to be concerned about the future.
- He was concerned about doing his work in a way that would bring honor to God.

Joseph was only 17 years of age, but because of his simple trust in God, he performed his duties as a slave.

Instead of complaining, Joseph faithfully served as a slave.

This was because he was serving not just an Egyptian man, he was serving God.

Joseph's life of faithfulness was obvious to Potiphar (vs. 3)

- Even unbelievers are able to discern the Spirit-filled laborer.

Do those who work closely with us see our faithfulness and observe that God is spiritually prospering our life?

★ Sometimes we think what we are doing is so insignificant that it is unimportant whether we are faithful in our duties or not.

However, the Word of God tells us: *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [money], who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?”* (Luke 16:10-12).

Joseph must have told Potiphar why he was blessed and who the credit goes to.

- No one is ever saved by a silent testimony.
- Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.
- Some day and at some time, we have to speak.

Well, what happened?

Vs. 4 – now, Joseph is in charge over everything.

I am impressed with Joseph's willingness to accept increased responsibility without any prospect of increased pay.

- Increased responsibility is increased risk!
- Increased responsibility is increased work!

None of us should be working solely for money—we are on a mission field for God.

Vs. 5 – God rained down blessings on Potiphar and it was because of Joseph (vs. 5c)

- God blessed Potiphar, Potiphar's house, and his fields because of Joseph's sake.
- Every business needs a Joseph.

Potiphar was being blessed because of Joseph's relationship with God; therefore, he put Joseph in complete charge of his house.

Vs. 6 – Potiphar left

- “Left” means abandon.
- Joseph is in charge of it all and Potiphar is on a permanent vacation.

Joseph managed the entire household.

Potiphar made Joseph his comptroller, which meant a personal overseeing of his entire estate.

- He no longer even bothered to check up on his own business.
- Concern-free business.

Potiphar trusted Joseph so much that he never even demanded an accounting—he didn't have to hire a C.P.A. to go over the books.

He believed in the integrity of this young man.

Everything except what he did eat—speculate on something (vs. 6)

- Preparation of the food involved concessions/acts of worship to the gods of Egypt.
- Food to the idols would have caused Joseph to be defiled, so Potiphar may not have required Joseph to take part in this area.

<p>Five principles about serving God through our service to man:</p>

#1 – We need to realize we are in the place of God's appointment—wherever we are working.

How can I know if I'm in the place of God's appointment?

- **Are we a surrendered Christian?** A person who makes his decisions even about the place he works out of the context of an unsundered life has no security about that decision.

- **Matter of motivation—fatter salary?** What is the primary motivation? Offered a better paying job---why was he going to pay you more? Under-the-table dealing—I told him, don't take the job.
- **The restriction of our Christian testimony.** Our testimony restricts the activities in which we can engage in the place of employment. We cannot work in a place that demands we compromise our testimony.

Principle #2 – We need to do our work in such a way that it reflects on God. On the Lord's name—make God great in the way we work.

#3 – We need to verbally commit ourselves as a follower of God.

#4 – Accept additional positions of responsibility as a means to bring greater credit to the name of God. Don't be afraid to accept greater positions of responsibility.

#5 – Prove yourself such a wise steward that your employer will have the confidence that you will care for his interest as if they were your very own.

There is a lot we can learn from Joseph

Let us stand for closing invitation.

We serve God through our service to man.

God will really bless our life and He will bless people through you!

Although everything seemed to go wrong for Joseph, and the outward aspect was dark, each event was a step bringing to fruition God's purpose in this man's life.

If we are the children of God, we can have the assurance of God that nothing comes to us without His permission.

- God works all things together for good to them who love Him.
- Even our misfortunes, heartbreaks, and sufferings are for our good and His glory, includes our poor-paying jobs, hardworking jobs, etc.

God's method for building us is to give us a job to do and people to obey.

- He tests us as servants before He promotes us to being rulers (Matt. 25:21).
- Before He allows us to exercise authority, we have to be under authority and learn to obey.

Oftentimes, God is working us here for something else later on.

The education we receive in one job often prepares us for the next.

People are what they are because of their relationship with God, which is expressed in their faithfulness in whatever they do.

Whenever people come into right relationship with God they become better people, which often results in better circumstances and environment.

The man who is genuinely prosperous lives with his trust in God, not with his eyes fixed on the things of the world.

All of this begins at salvation

Next week, Joseph and sexual temptation—men, don't miss next week!