

**Reading:** Genesis 39:1-10 (*Looking at v7-10*)

**Theme:** Triumph over Temptation.

We have seen how Joseph's situation was transformed as he became a slave. In that situation he knew tranquillity, had peace from his enemies, had the Lord was with him and experienced a prosperity in all that he did. Potiphar noted the Lord was with him and promoted him in charge of all he owned. Joseph was top dog. It didn't happen overnight. It is likely we have summarised in the 1<sup>st</sup> 6 verses of this chapter up to 10 years Joseph's life, in which Joseph developed skills, wisdom, gifts and abilities. He also matured from a teenager into a man. He was now in a position of influence and prosperity, yet one which led to temptation, which he triumphed over, but sadly suffered turmoil because of it. Let's see two main things this evening:

### **1. The Temptation in His Situation.**

Joseph had come up through Potiphar's household, from a lowly slave to be overseer of Potiphar's house - but still a slave, a foreign slave with no rights or standing in the country. Joseph was unmarried, but a real man with real feelings and emotions, not a cold machine. There was great immorality in Egypt and he had pressures upon his senses and life that could so easily have inflamed his God-given desires, yet he kept himself from immorality. Here we learn of an area of Joseph's temptation - not greed, hatred, bitterness or covetousness, but he was tempted in an area which could have been so easy for him to fall into – sexual immorality.

Potiphar trusted Joseph completely; everything was under his charge. I wonder how Potiphar would have regarded Joseph if he felt that he was a threat to his marriage and we see from these verses Joseph was exactly that - not of his own doing, but by the desires of Potiphar's wife! Joseph was in a dangerous situation - exposed to an extremely strong and persistent temptation. How many young men could have resisted such a temptation? It was more than just a temptation - Joseph had little to lose - no reputation, no family to

embarrass or hurt, no one was likely to find out anyway. To so many, Joseph was in a win-win situation, but he viewed it so very differently.

As Joseph had grown and matured, he had a tremendous blessing - *"good looks and handsome"* (v 6) but it was this blessing that caused the temptation trouble. Good looks in males or females are not always a blessing. It can lead to vanity and pride, be a snare to them and others, for people, as did Potiphar's wife, have eye trouble and they covet and lust after them. Potiphar's wife's trouble began with her eyes - she cast her eyes on Joseph (AV), she took notice of him. She had probably seen him often before, but now she looks with sinful desire and lust and wants this handsome young man sexually. She could have framed all sorts of excuses to justify the action - *"Everyone's doing it; it's fashionable; it is not wrong in our society; I'm lonely and neglected because Potiphar is so busy in his royal duties..."* Whatever her reasons, her passions are inflamed and she wants Joseph.

It's unusual we have recorded the sexual advances of a woman! Usually we have recorded the actions of men who attracted by the sight of an attractive female; usually men make the move, but here Potiphar's wife has the desire, she instigates the matter, is a predatory female.

We are to be warned by Potiphar's wife and her actions. None of us would, I hope, be so brazen. Yet we have to be on our guard as to what we allow into our minds and hearts through what we watch or read. John Bunyan in his book *The Holy War* says of the various gates attacked in the city of Man Soul that the eye-gate was the most frequent, as it was easiest to defeat and gain entry by. This is an age-old problem; Job said that he had made a covenant with his eyes not to look upon a maiden with lust. Satan knows our weaknesses and will exploit them. We need to make a covenant with our eyes and

hearts. In these days of low moral standards, easy access to pornographic material, we need to be very clear as to God's standards and clearly make our stand. We need to know what the Bible teaches about human sexuality and the blessing it is from God. The Lord knew what He was doing in creating us male and female, but what is designed by God to be so sacred and special between a husband and wife, has been taken and ruined by sin and Satan, has been debased and cheapened by mankind, who regard it as nothing more than a gratification of animal desires and to be exploited.

Potiphar's wife would fit into our day and age. She had little shame, no regard for her marriage relationship or husband. She wanted gratification of her sexual desires and pleasures with Joseph. This wasn't a one-off lapse on her part, but day after day she tries to entice, seduce him (v10). It was a constant and persistent temptation as she constantly attempted to test his resolve and catch him at a weak moment. Such a temptation emphasises:

## **2. The Triumph in This Situation.**

Remember Joseph was real flesh and blood, a real man, with the same desires as are found in any man and would have been a real temptation for Joseph, to his heart and desires, yet he triumphed in and over the temptation. Let's consider his defence in, his approach to resisting this temptation. Remember he was only a slave and she was his master's wife and technically, actually gave him orders he had to comply with. Yet here he does not fear her frown or anger, but withstands her and her wishes.

**Firstly:** he reminds himself - and her of Potiphar's trust. Joseph had been given much from Potiphar - who didn't know what occurred in the day-to-day running of his estate. Joseph knew the goodness Potiphar had shown him and out of gratitude he would not trample such trust into the ground as nothing. Others might do so, but he says "*How then could I do such a wicked thing...?*"

**Secondly:** he looked at his own position - he had self-respect "*How could I?*" - I am the one overseeing this household, none are greater in it than me...

**Thirdly:** he had respect for her. She was a married woman – married to the man who was his master. If Potiphar's wife had no respect, no honour for herself or her husband, yet Joseph would show her respect and honour for Potiphar's sake. Joseph truly honoured, loved(?) Potiphar and his wife - that love and honour would say "*You are his exclusively*". If Joseph been dominated by lust he would have said and acted otherwise.

**Fourthly:** Joseph knew most importantly it would be **sin against God**. Even if Potiphar never found out, if no one ever found out, God would still know and Joseph's overriding concern was "*How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*" The giving of the 10 Commandments were some 450 years away in the future, but God's law was written on Joseph's heart and "*You shall not commit adultery*" was written there large. Joseph knew it was wrong before God. Even though he was enticed, pressurized often, he did not make excuses or say that it was ok just this once, or I've resisted so far, but I can't take it any more. Joseph clung to God's word and standard.

In our days, when so much attention and emphasis is put upon sex, when it is pushed at us through magazines, TV, radio, cinema, adverts, Internet; it would be so easy to compromise and accept it as the norm. As our young people and children are growing up in a high pressure, low morality sexually confused society, and the world, sadly, sees from many churches and Christians - confused, confusing or low standards, we need to assert, to recognise God has not been silent about this whole area of sex and sexuality. God has made us men and women. God has provided marriage for a man and

woman to have this exclusive, intimate glorious sexual relationship within marriage. The world thinks that God is determined to spoil their fun and they fail to realise that God designed our bodies, it's hormones, responses and pleasure pathways for our right and proper enjoyment. He is no spoilsport!

We need biblical standards emphasised in our day. The Bible is clear that sexual involvement outside of our marriage - one man and one woman in an exclusive marriage relationship - is wrong before God. It doesn't matter what society feels is acceptable, it is God's standard and viewpoint which is the one that matters. We need this as a firm foundation in our lives; our children need it, society needs it. Yet it is not just sticking to a cold moral standard, but we need to have a hot love for the Lord who says that such is good and right for mankind. It is not a fear of consequences, or of being caught out, but a love and a reverent regard for God. This was foundational in Joseph's resistance of this temptation. All other arguments could fail and go out of the window, but we have to realise it would ultimately be sin against God.

Use the other arguments that Joseph used. We are to realise the trust others have in us - parents, friends, children, partners, those in the church round about us, those who consider us Christians. To consider our own position - what we have to lose - our self-respect most of all. Consider the other person - someone's wife/husband; father/mother; sister/brother; son/daughter.

Sadly, many have fallen into sexual sin through the years and we hear of more Christians and ministers who have fallen into such and it is tragic. Many of these have given reasons why they couldn't help themselves. Perhaps we should consider such reasons, but as a separate issue - relationships need to be sorted, past sin, wrong thoughts dealt with, bad reading or Internet habits dealt with, their partners counselled and directed us to how they might have failed

the other person or can help in their restoration. First and foremost, the person who has fallen into sexual sin needs to realise their actions, despite, all their reasons and excuses, are first and foremost **sin against God.**

In society people will regard sexual sin most often as a joke, or a triumph to be boasted of - unless it affects them or their family directly! Christians may go to the extreme and see sexual sin as the most serious of sins. Yet it is not a joke, neither is it the most serious sin – for all sin is serious. To our eyes and minds sexual sin can be the most serious as it affects and destroys so many personal relationships and the lives of those they say they love. Yet we are to realise it is sin, an out working of sin against God and as such it is serious, it is obnoxious, it is damnable by Him. It is a sin up there with lying, cheating, deceiving, blaspheming, not keeping God's day holy; failure to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and being; pride, backbiting and so we could go on. We may keep up our external appearance fine, but God sees beyond the externals and He sees our hearts and minds - if we have lust in our heart, it is as the sin of adultery; if we have hatred it is as the sin of murder.

We may not be guilty of "gross" sin, but God sees our smaller sins, all our sins and they are all detestable to Him. Are we fooling ourselves by thinking we are ok because we don't openly do "large" sins? Our smallest sins will condemn us before this holy God as much as large sins. Joseph was able to triumph over the temptation because he loved God and feared to sin against Him. I pray we would love Him and fear to sin against Him and resist temptation and overcome it.

Joseph also took practical steps when he fled from temptation. So often to run away from something is considered defeat, but this is not so with temptation! It must be run away from, especially when we are in danger of falling under its power. Would we stay on the

top of a volcano when it was about to erupt? Would we cuddle an unexploded bomb which could go off at any second? Would we wear a python as a scarf? I don't think so, with them all we would get far away from them - Joseph saw this woman's advances in this light - dangerous and he got out...

Joseph was wise, not only in resisting, not only in fleeing, but in avoiding too - *"he refused to go to bed with her or even to be with her"* (v 10). He avoided the source of temptation. Joseph didn't arrogantly say *"I'm strong enough to withstand her advances!"* Not at all, he knew his own heart and weaknesses and avoided her. He showed his strength and wisdom in avoiding her. We need this wisdom too. We need to know ourselves and avoid as far as possible those situations that would cause us to be led into any temptation and even sin. We dare not pray *"Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil"* and then put ourselves deliberately into situations of temptation. We have to keep well away from such [**Story of coach driver and narrow road**] Realise our hearts are as gunpowder, are as a highly flammable substance and we need to keep away from temptation's sparks as they could ignite our hearts with a catastrophic result. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says *"Flee sexual immorality"*

Joseph was not perfect, even though he withstood this sexual temptation, we have to realise that he was still a sinner. He like us all, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Everyone born of a man and woman is born with a sin bias in them and are inclined to do sin and wrong. We say glibly that no one is perfect, but don't always realise what it means for our standing with God. God has to do a mighty work to change and cleanse our life. There is only one place where our sin and sin bias can be dealt with and that is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ when we trust Him as our Saviour. He was the sinless One, He was pure and holy, yet all our sin was laid on Him and He became sin. Think of the worst sins of adultery,

immorality, theft, lying, blasphemy, murder, genocide, cruelty and He became all that sin - not a sinner, but made sin and took the guilt and the punishment of that sin so God could be the justifier of all who go to Him seeking pardon for their sin. Have we been to the Lord Jesus to have our sin dealt with? We may think we have little or may know we have much, but we need it dealt with. It can be dealt with in and through all the Lord Jesus accomplished there on the cross.

Not only does He forgive us, but He gives us a new life and power to live that new life out, so we do not have to resist temptation our own, but He is helping us. Joseph knew his God's help, even though he was tempted very greatly while he was on his own, away from his family's love and support. Yet in this temptation his God kept him. My desire is that each of us would know our sin forgiven by having the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and that we would know His enabling grace to resist temptation in every area of our life and so triumph to His praise and glory. Jesus is not a hard and cold Saviour, but is able to sympathise with us – He knew far greater temptation than us and resisted. Thankfully He is able to help us too and when we fall, will restore us in the paths of His righteous ways – but that is another truth and topic though!

We have seen the temptation of Joseph's situation and the triumph in that situation and yet will go on to consider the turmoil of his situation, as Joseph suffers for doing the right thing!