

## TEMPTED AND ACCUSED

22nd April, 2018

Sermon Series: The Story of Joseph

Readings: Genesis 39:6b-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Today, as we track through Joseph's story, we come to his troubles in the house of Potiphar. Trying to do the right thing, he's faced with sexual temptation and gets into a whole heap of trouble. Now, you won't need convincing on how relevant this is given the age we're in. Sexual temptation is everywhere, bold and in your face - big time. What used to be hard to find now comes to our screens without any effort. What's considered the norm by many today would appall previous generations - and even shocks us. Here's an all too common example.



In an essay called *The Loves*, Sheldon Vanauken describes how a Christian friend named John shocked him by announcing that he was leaving his wife for another woman. John explained his sudden change of heart by saying, "It seemed so good, so right. That's when we knew we had to get the divorces. We belonged together."

Soon after Vanauken had a conversation with another friend named Diana, who left her husband for another man. Diana defended herself with virtually the same words: "It was just so good and right with Roger that I knew it would be wrong to stay with Paul."

As Vanauken explains, both John and Diana were "invoking a higher law: the feeling of goodness and rightness. A feeling so powerful that it swept away whatever restraint they would otherwise have felt for what they were doing to their spouse and families."

Now, John was a Christian and wasn't looking to be unfaithful but "wham" out of the blue he gave into sexual temptation. And so we too can be tempted in the work place or in social settings, or online and on social media. Sometimes looked for sometimes out of the blue. We wonder where will it end? More importantly, we wonder whether we're next and how can we remain faithful to God and his ways?

Now, this is where Joseph's story is both helpful and practical. He was tempted day after day in a situation so easy to give in to - but he didn't. If Joseph did this without Christ in his life how much more should we be able to stand against temptation. So this morning as we look at Joseph's story we'll see...

1. What temptation is
2. How to resist temptation
3. How to be motivated to resist temptation

*Let's pray*

We pick up Joseph's story in chapter 39.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. Genesis 39:1

Betrayed and abandoned the 17 year old Joseph finds himself captive and enslaved. We can only imagine how he felt towards his brothers who sold him, his father whom he missed and to God who'd given him those wonderful dreams but where was he now.

Meanwhile, though feeling abandoned and betrayed, God was at work.

The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. Genesis 39:2-4

Now normally a slave would go out into the fields or similar hard labour. Long hours in the hot sun facing high rates of illness and death. But no, Joseph finds himself in the household where he quickly rises through the ranks to become his master's personal assistant. More than a PA, Joseph manages the whole household and extensive estate, second only to Potiphar and his wife. Why is this? How did Joseph rise to the top at all, let alone so quickly? Because... "the Lord was with him". Four times in this chapter we're told Joseph is successful because "the Lord was with him". Why four times? To make it crystal clear God is working out his great plan, his "meanwhile", so when the plan comes together God gets the glory. Not Joseph, not his family, not even Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt. No. It's God's plan, by God's hand, for God's glory.

But after this wonderful, God directed rise - trouble. Big trouble in the form of a powerful woman and art of seduction.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" Genesis 39:6b-7

## I. What Temptation Is

Let's pause here for a bit. To the question, "What is temptation?" we need go no further. This is a prime example. Now a couple of dictionary definitions are helpful:

Temptation is the wish to do or have something that you know you should not do or have.

Temptation is a desire to engage in short-term urges for enjoyment, that threatens long-term goals

Do these apply to Joseph? They certainly do. Joseph knew it was wrong to sleep with his master's wife. He also knew any short-term enjoyment would be followed by serious punishment, even death, at the hands of a powerful and angry husband.

We can dig deeper still. What's behind, not only this temptation, but every temptation? What general principles are in play that can help us identify and resist what's going on? To answer, let's go back to the very first temptation in human history. What's that? Where would I turn?... To the parents of all humankind, in a special garden with a crafty serpent. Given free run in paradise, in a world without stain or blemish, Adam and Eve had just the one restriction. Not to eat from two special trees. Now, one day Eve is admiring a restricted tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, when the serpent, the devil, speaks.

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" Genesis 3:1

Eve explains all trees are theirs to eat except this one. Countering with a lie the serpent says...

You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4-5

Eve believes the lie, and sin and death enter God's perfect creation. And with this lie the pattern for all temptation is laid down. The pattern goes something like this:

"God's not really good. He's holding something back. You deserve this. Take it"

So for Eve: "If God was really good he wouldn't withhold delicious fruit with special powers. Go on. You deserve this. Take it."

For Joseph: "If God was really good you wouldn't be a slave. He's holding back on you in so many ways. Go on. You deserve this. Take it."

For a husband of twenty years attracted to a colleague at work: “If God was really good you’d be a lot happier in your marriage. He’s holding back on you. Go on. You deserve this. Take it.”

And this is how all temptation works. Grabbing short term pleasure that we know is wrong and will harm us in the long run. Why? Because the devil whispers, “God’s not really good and he’s holding back something you deserve. Go on. Take it”

So, how does Joseph get on? Does he resist or give in? Does he refuse or take it? Does he give a firm “no” or a keen “I’m in”? Verse 8 - is short and sweet

But he refused. Genesis 39:8a

Joseph refused, he resisted, he stayed firm. He did the right thing and by doing so shows us how we too can resist temptation. Let’s see how he does it. Verse 8

## **II. How to resist temptation**

“With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” Genesis 39:8–9

Here, in these words, are three principles we can apply straight away to ourselves. We say “no” because giving in to temptation...

### **1. Breaks trust**

Giving into temptation breaks trust. Verse 8: “Everything he owns he has entrusted to my care” This was Joseph’s first reason for saying no. His master had put great faith in Joseph to run the house and respect boundaries. Joseph refuses to break this trust.

It’s the same with us. People trust us to do the right thing. For a husband tempted to have an affair at work his boss trusts him to do the right thing - especially given the complications office affairs bring to any business. But more importantly his wife trusts him to do the right thing. His children trust him and the wider family.

### **2. Shatters relationships**

Secondly giving into temptation shatters relationships. Verse 9: “My master has withheld nothing from me”. Joseph is saying, “If I break this trust my relationship with my master will be shattered, destroyed, never to be the same again”. Joseph refuses to destroy this relationship

For a husband tempted to have a work place affair relationships hang in the balance. If he gives in, relationships - most importantly with his wife, children - will be shattered, destroyed, never the same again. The cost will be too high and it will come back to haunt him - big time.

### 3. Is against God

Joseph's third reason for saying no was because it would be a sin against God. Verse 9: "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" Now this needs some unpacking. I mean, we understand sleeping with Potiphar's wife is a sin against Potiphar and a betrayal of trust, but isn't this between the three of them. Well, no. For when we sin, we sin against God first and then others - something we conveniently forget. The Ten Commandments include "do not commit adultery" and so if we do commit adultery we sin against God first, then secondly, the people directly affected.

Our New Testament reading helps here. In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul talks about avoiding sexual immorality and the following the behaviour of those outside the church. To drive home the seriousness of this instruction he writes

Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God. 1  
Thessalonians 4:8

When we sin against another, we sin against God. When we reject God's commands, we reject God. Joseph knew this and refuses to sin against God by sleeping with his master's wife.

Here then are three reasons Joseph said "no" to temptation. For giving in...

1. Breaks trust
2. Shatters relationship
3. Is a sin against God

Now, what happens next? Joseph's resisted, said no, does the right thing. Will life go back to normal? Will Potiphar's wife let it go? Does temptation pack it's bags and leave the building? Let's find out.

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her<sup>1</sup>. Genesis 39:10

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 10: "he refused to... even be with her". Notice Joseph's practical response to on-going temptation. He wouldn't be in the same room with her alone. This is both practical and effective. This a rule Billy Graham brought into his ministry almost from day one. He determined never to be alone with a woman who was not his wife. A number of preachers in similar high profile ministries had publicly crashed and burned due sexual infidelity and Billy Graham was determined not to follow suit. Now, because of our work situation we may find this isn't practical one hundred percent of the time but you'll be surprised how starlight forward this is when you put your mind to it. The "Billy Graham rule", as it is now known in ministry circles, works!

Oh dear! Day after day. This is serious. And unfortunately this is often the way. We may resist the first time or nine times out of ten or even ninety nine times out of hundred. But temptation has a habit of coming back and it only takes one exception to fall a great distance.

### **III. How to be motivated to resist temptation**

So our next question is, “How can we too stay motivated, especially when temptation keeps on coming back?”

From the Word of God both a warning and an encouragement. First the warning. A finger waving, stern instruction from Malachi 2:15

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.  
Malachi 2:15

Crystal clear. Do not break faith with the wife of your youth. Now for the encouragement. An open handed, warm invitation...

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth...  
may you ever be captivated by her love. Proverbs 5:18–19

Now I know not everyone here is married but for those who are remember when you were first married whether you were in your twenties or 50's or older. Remember the delight you had in your spouse. Well, remember also when you face temptation. Cultivate that delight for not letting this love grow cold is the best protection against sexual temptation. Who's interested in a greasy, steak sandwich when you have a delightful three-course meal at home?

Now, Joseph wasn't married and neither is everyone here today. However, there's another, stronger way to resist sexual temptation. And it's tied up with Joseph's words to Potiphar's wife. Verse 9

“How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? Genesis 39:9

Joseph knew God and was in awe of God. He had a great respect for God, a holy fear of God, a delight in God. And this is exactly how Jesus resisted temptation. Remember immediately after his baptism what happened? The Holy Spirit lead him where? To the desert to be tempted. Now, we've only time to look at the last of the three temptations. Matthew 4:8-10

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Matthew 4:8–10

Jesus stood firm. Why? Though tempted time and time again he knew if he gave in he would betray God's trust, he would destroy his relationship with God and he knew full well that he'd be sinning against his Heavenly Father.

How could he when he had such awe and respect and love for God. Jesus's heart was captivated by his Father and so he stood firm. He stood firm then and in Gethsemane and before Pilate.

And, not only was Jesus tempted again and again, in the desert and Gethsemane and the like, but he was accused. Innocent and accused. Just like Joseph. Remember, time and time again Joseph resisted the advances of Potiphar's wife's until alone, she caught him by his cloak, "Come to bed with me!" But wrenching himself away he ran out of the house leaving his cloak in her hands. Hysterically she screamed accusing Joseph to the servants and then later in a cool, calculating manner, to her husband. Yes, Joseph was tempted and accused. Though innocent, lie upon lie was piled on him until he was thrown into the deepest, darkest dungeon and left to rot. And so also... Christ was tempted and accused. And though innocent lie upon lie was piled upon him. On the night of his betrayal he was accused before the Jewish leaders. Very early on that first Good Friday he was accused before Pilate and the crowds. On the cross he was mocked and accused until he cried, "It is finished" - and the innocent and accused gave up his last breath.

And so as we face temptation, whether it be sexual or an other kind, let us remember and stand firm, resist and say no. Why? Because giving into temptation

Breaks trust  
Shatters relationships  
Is Against God

And how do we to resist day after day? By delighting in and being captivated by a great love. For those married, it's the renewal of the joy we had in spouse of our youth. But for all of us, it's the delight in a Saviour who was tempted and accused. There on the cross, though innocent and able to call upon legions of angels, he then gave up everything for you and I.

Amazing love, how can it be  
That You my King would die for me  
Amazing love, I know it's true  
It's my joy to honor You  
In all I do I honor You  
*Chris Tomlin*