

Ordinary Joe

Joseph's Life in the Book of Genesis
How God Uses Ordinary People to Carry Out His Extraordinary Plans

Message 3 – "Dangerous Liaison"

Genesis 39

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As we prepare our hearts, would you join with me in prayer?

Gracious Lord, we pray that You would open us up to Your word and open up Your word to us. Father, teach us what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we have been in a series that we've been calling "Ordinary Joe," and one of the main principles behind this entire series is this:

God uses ordinary people to carry out His extraordinary plan.

Ordinary people like you, like me. Just like every single solitary person that God used in the Old and New Testament alike. Ordinary people that God uniquely used to carry out His extraordinary plans.

Well, two weeks ago when we introduced this series, we asked a question. If in fact each and every one of us is ordinary, we have to ask: "What does God have to do to claim our ordinary?" in order to carry out His extraordinary plans.

What we have been doing is looking very specifically at the life and the journey of the Old Testament person, Joseph. A very fascinating story found in the book of Genesis starting at chapter 37 and going all the way pretty much to the end of Genesis (chapter 50). Through Joseph's life we are being taught amazing examples of how God can claim our ordinary. If He could do it with Joe, He could do it with us.

Last week, we saw that Joseph was beaten up by his brothers. The entitlement that had been shown in the coat of many colors that he was gifted to by his Dad to show favoritism -- that coat was just stripped off of him and they dumped him in a pit. That pit taught us something very important. What it taught us is that God's ability to use us is not limited by our view of our circumstances.

God is not limited by anything, in fact – God, we discovered, is a God who never wastes anything, including our hurts. God never wastes a hurt. So, today I want to draw us further into the story, we're going to pick up right where we left off where Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Sold into slavery! We're going

to pick up in Genesis chapter 39, and what I want to do is read a chunk of this passage and then briefly stop here and there on the journey, explain a bit about what's going on and then apply all of what we are learning to our lives today.

Bear with me because today's topic concerns temptation and the message title is "Dangerous Liasons". Folks, this is in the Bible. This is in Scripture and it's got lots to teach us. So, let's dive into Genesis chapter 39. Let's join together and listen for the Holy Spirit to teach us from His word. Starting in verse 1, we read:

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt and 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).

Alright, this is an important geographical and contextual verse. It tells us that not only is Joseph in Egypt, but that he was "bought." In fact, I want to highlight just two words in this verse - "Bought him". What those two words tell us is that Joseph, at 17 years of age, is no longer free. He is no longer his own man. Hold onto those two words because they're going to come back to us later on in this message.

So, he's sold into slavery and the guy who now owns him, a man named Potiphar, is pretty up there in the Big-Wigs of Egypt. He is a captain of the guard in Pharaoh's army.

Reading on, verse 2 says,

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered (Genesis 39:2).

That phrase is incredibly important - it's telling us that what we learned last week, that God is not limited by our circumstances; what we're seeing here is that God is still very present with Joseph no matter what's going on in his circumstances. That phrase is repeated over and over throughout this section (vv. 2, 3, 21, 23). In fact, the "meaning" of the phrase is experienced very profoundly in just these three verses. So, it says, "*The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.*" I don't know about you, but this surprises me -- to have a slave that is not sleeping in a back house somewhere. He's actually living "in" the house of Potiphar.

Genesis 39:3 continues:

When his master saw that the Lord was with him -- There's that phrase again -- and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in Potiphar's eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

Ok, so just in these few verses we're seeing an incredible progression in the leadership capacity of Joseph. That leadership capacity is a clear illustration of that favor that God has poured upon Joseph's life. Even in the midst of slavery, even in the midst of broken-down circumstances like slavery, God is uniquely present with Joseph. That unique presence is showing itself in favor -- basically, whatever Joseph

is doing, whatever Joseph is in charge of is multiplying in a positive way and Potiphar sees it. The more Potiphar sees it, the more responsibility he gives to him. Always keep in mind in this story that Joseph is a slave, he is not free.

The story continues in verse 5 –

From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph
(Genesis 39:5).

There's a mutuality here, wherever Joseph applies himself, the blessing of God not only blesses Joseph but blesses Potiphar because of Joseph. It says,

The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care." (Get this) With Joseph in charge, Potiphar did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. (Genesis 39:5-6)

This is so important, these verses are describing an ever-expanding, and ever-increasing capacity of both leadership and trust. Potiphar is trusting Joseph, a slave - and what we're seeing is that Joseph is no longer the entitled kid, the 17-year-old that was favorited, but somehow God is uniquely blessing Joseph, perhaps in supernatural ways that go beyond our understanding. God has been taking an ordinary kid and carrying out extraordinary plans.

It goes on,

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome... (Genesis 39:6b)

Wow, what a descriptor, right? Well for those of us who know the story, this is foreshadowing. Joseph was well-built and handsome -- just like your pastor, right?! Well, certainly not the short guy up front, it's the other pastor, right? So, Joseph was "well-built and handsome..." The story goes on,

After a while, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me! (Genesis 39:7)

Folks, this is in the Bible, right? This is not a Harlequin romance; this is Scripture and what it's doing is it is telling us a story that may reveal some pretty risqué stuff. Don't worry, though, we're going to keep it to a G to PG rating. But keep in mind the content of what we're going to read may be a little challenging for some.

So, Potiphar's wife now, is interested in this handsome, well-built slave of Potiphar. It's the set-up. Now what comes next? Verse 8 gives us three very important words that reveal a lot about Joseph's character –

But Joseph refused... (Genesis 39:8)

He refused the advances of Potiphar's wife. Just let these words sit with us for a brief moment. He refused. Hmmm... why did Joseph refuse?

Temptation is an opportunity to reveal who or what defines our life.

Very key, this temptation was an opportunity for Joseph to define himself. Why did he choose to refuse Mrs. Potiphar's advances? We're going to read about it next

"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." [Get this] No one is greater in this house than I am." What a profound statement for a slave to make! "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)

Alright, so there are 3 reasons why Joseph refuses Potiphar's wife's advances:

First, he refuses based on loyalty - loyalty to Potiphar. Crossing that line and taking advantage in this moment would betray Potiphar's trust. Notice that Joseph calls Potiphar "his master." So, at no point does Joseph even consider that he's not a slave. There's clearly a hierarchy. There's such a tight loyalty that Joseph has established between Joseph and Potiphar and Potiphar to Joseph that he doesn't want to cross that line.

Second, Joseph chooses to refuse based on his perspective of the covenant of marriage. The covenant specifically that he doesn't want to violate is the marriage vows of Potiphar and his wife. Now, this is from Joseph's perspective, we don't know what the ethics were like in Egypt in that day, we don't know if it was common for Egyptian men and women to violate their marriage vows, but what we do know is that Joseph was a Jew and as a Jew, a follower of Almighty God, there was a very strong sexual ethic. That ethic was rooted in the marriage relationship. Joseph valued that covenant.

The third reason was based on Joseph's integrity - Joseph chose to refuse Potiphar's wife to uphold his personal relationship with God Almighty. He wasn't going to violate that relationship; he wasn't going to violate and sin against God. For Joseph, violating the sexual boundary with Potiphar's wife would be violating his relationship with God. We have it here - Loyalty, Covenant and Integrity.

Every time you define your boundaries based on who you are and why you're here and where you're going, there's bound to be a push back from those who do not respect or value your boundaries. I have to tell you that from the standpoint of Scripture -- both the Old and New Testament -- while all sin is equal at the foot of the cross of Christ -- sexual sins are different than any other sin. Sexual sins are different, why? Well, to get that answer we're actually going to jump way ahead, centuries later to the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians. The apostle Paul answers that question as to why sexual sins are different than any other sin.

Let's look at what he says 1Corinthians 6:15-20. He writes,

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. (1 Corinthians 6:15-16)

Let me pause there, there's a little bit more we'll get to in a second, but just to explain, back in this time period of the early church and extending even further back, the sexual ethic for believers was very strong. In fact, those who were faithful Jews as well as those who were followers of Jesus defined the sexual relationship as "two becoming one." Therefore when Paul describes this in a context in Corinth -- when there's violations of sexual relationships all over the place and sexual immorality was normative -- not only in the culture but also in the church, Paul drew a line and reminded those people, those early believers, that whenever you are united physically with another you become one in the eyes of God.

We too must remember who we are, Paul says. We must remember that the body, our bodies should be in covenant with God Almighty, first and foremost. It then continues, verse 18,

Therefore, flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body." And then he says, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. (There's that phrase again) Therefore honor God with your bodies (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

You were "bought at a price," Paul says. What was that price? In our case, it was the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. We are no longer our own. "We have been crucified with Christ", Paul says in **Galatians 2:20**. We are not our own, we are owned by a new Master.

So, let's take this concept back to Genesis 39 in verse 10 where we left off. Any time there is that moment of temptation and it is refused the person that is refused can retaliate and Potiphar's wife does just that. Verse 10,

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day...

Notice the aggressiveness here, the pursuing that she does here -- keep in mind she is married to a very powerful man. Joseph is a slave, she is in a position of power and influence over him.

Day after day she approaches Joseph and he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. (Genesis 39:10)

Let's remember that temptation is an opportunity to reveal who or what defines our life. The story continues... Verse 11 -

One day Joseph went into the house to tend to his duties and none of the household servants were inside. (Genesis 39:11)

That's an important phrase. It lets us know that no one is going to be able to corroborate his story. Verse 12 –

She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. (Genesis 39:12)

Keep in mind here that just two chapters ago in chapter 37, he was stripped of his coat, his ornate coat of favoritism, and now there's another cloak involved -- and it will be used against him as well. Verse 13,

"When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants, "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." (Genesis 39:13-15)

Don't miss this - notice the first persons that she tells this made up story to are Joseph's underlings. Joseph is in charge of all of the household servants. Potiphar's wife goes after all of those people that report to Joseph and she shares this false accusation and she uses the cloak as evidence.

It doesn't stop there - verse 16,

She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told Potiphar this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." (Genesis 39:16-18)

What's different here? This time she's blaming her husband. "This is the slave you brought home, just want you to know this is *your* fault." Verse 19 continues,

When his master heard the story his wife told him saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. (Genesis 39:19-20)

So, it's pretty tight security. Then, the story continues in a very profound way,

While Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him. (Genesis 39:21)

Notice the circumstances don't matter,

God's presence is still with him. He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden, so the warden put Joseph in charge of

all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.
(Genesis 39:22-23)

There is an ongoing progression of responsibility because God's favor is pouring itself out in Joseph's life. Whether in slavery or in prison, God's presence with Joseph makes Joseph do extraordinary things! This is powerful stuff!

Friends, when we look at temptation, it's important to recognize that many times temptations come to us in seasons. It's as true for us today. Temptation comes to us in seasons of weakness, it comes to us when we're feeling vulnerable, exposed or needy. Temptation comes in seasons of anger, it comes to us when we're reacting or rebelling or because of pain we may not even be able to put into words. It comes to us in seasons of strength - this is the ironic one. It comes to us in celebrations and victories that make us feel like we're better than the boundaries that protect us. Temptation comes to us in seasons of grief when we're looking for comfort, hope or even saving from the pain of loss that we're going through. No matter what the season that we're in, temptations arise as an opportunity for us to define who or what will make our integrity secure. Temptation is that opportunity to reveal who or what defines our life.

Temptation is a very real issue for us today. Many of us face into temptation on a daily basis. Some of us are going through seasons of loss and grief, some of us are facing into weakness, we're feeling vulnerable or anxious. Some of us are in the season of anger. And, quite frankly, our circumstances in our society right now -- it could be any of those seasons for any of us. It could be that right before us is that individual that seems to be paying more attention to us, giving us an invitation to cross a line. Or maybe it's not a person who is seducing us, maybe the seduction is from a bottle that's sitting in a cupboard, or food and an over-indulgence need that repeatedly taunts us. Or maybe it's something else, maybe it's an image that pops up on your computer screen that promises a hope to meet a need like no one else could.

Every time temptation comes our way it's an opportunity to choose in that moment what or who will define our life. I had the opportunity to hear Max Lucado relatively recently and he shared something on this topic of temptation that really spoke to me. A mentor of his had invited him to make a list of all the people who might be impacted by one bad decision to cross the line of temptation. So as Max tells the story, he made that list and it started with his wife and then it went to his family and the more he started writing the names of the people that would be impacted negatively, the more he found strength inside of himself to refuse to cross those lines.

I wonder what would happen if we did the same thing? Who would be on your list? Whether it's loyalty or covenant or integrity we have an opportunity wherever we face temptation to choose what or who will define our life. I know I have faced

temptation many times and I still do. One of the phrases I use personally in the moment of temptation (I have shared with many of you before) is –

Is this what I want to be known by?

And it's not just because I'm a pastor that I want my life to honor the Lord. I always want to honor my wife, honor my family and honor all the people that I am called to serve. It may mean that I have to say "no" in the immediate moment to something that promises a lot of hope or promises to meet my needs. But in reality, there's only one - One - who can meet my needs and define my life. For I have been bought with a price and I serve at the pleasure of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the choice I want to always make.

Temptation is an opportunity for us to choose what or who will define our life. Let's choose wisely.

Will you pray with me?

Lord God, the harsh reality is that we face temptation every day. The clear picture is that we are a people who are longing for connection, longing for healing, longing in the midst of our brokenness for hope and restoration. Lord, we need to see in that moment the clear picture of Jesus on the Cross, so I pray by supernatural intervention for each and every person watching or listening to this message today, that in any moment of temptation that the first image that You, Holy Spirit, place before our mind's eye will be the image of Jesus on that Cross. Through that image, that You would give to each and every one of us an inner strength to always choose loyalty, covenant and integrity in the name of the Lord Jesus. Thank You, Lord, for those opportunities. Be the Lord over our moments as we pray in Jesus's name, Amen.