

Fatal Attraction

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[0 : 0 0] we listen to God's word together. Our reading comes from Genesis 39, which can be found on page 43 of the Church Bibles.

Joseph and Potiphar's wife. 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.

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant.

Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. 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.

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.

[1 : 3 0] And with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. 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.

But he refused. 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?

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even to be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.

She caught him by his clock and said, come to bed with me. But he left his clock in her hand and ran out of the house. When she saw that he had left his clock in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants.

[2 : 4 1] Look, she said to them, this Hebrew has been brought to us to make support of us. He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard the scream for help, he left his clock beside me and ran out of the house.

She kept his clock beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story. That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make support of me.

But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his clock beside me and ran out of the house. When his master had 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. But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him.

He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warder. So the warder put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.

[3 : 50] The warder paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to God's word. Heavenly Father, we trust that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We pray that we would indeed discover this morning that your word enlightens us in the darkness, and we ask that your spirit within us will move each one of us to walk in your ways while we wait with renewed confidence for our saviour's return.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there's an outline inside the notice sheet, and if you could keep your Bibles open at Genesis 39, that would help. And this morning, one of the questions that this passage helps us think about is what sort of a person do I need to be for God to use me greatly in my life?

And what does the pattern of Christian greatness look like? What does the Lord seek from you and me so that he can work through us effectively and we can live lives that count for him?

And if we've made wrong choices in the past, wrong decisions that we regret, have we left it all too late to be useful for God? Well, here in our series in Genesis, we're picking up the story of the beginnings of the people of God.

[5 : 25] Joseph is one of the 12 sons of Jacob. God renamed their father Jacob Israel, and so he becomes the father of the nation Israel. God's going to turn this family's descendants into the Old Testament people of God, that great nation Israel.

But here it's just one family, Joseph and his brothers, so they are the people of God in their generation. And we know from God's promises to Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, Joseph's great-grandfather, that it's through this family that God will bring his blessing to the world.

God's world was made good and God blessed the first people, but then the world has come under a curse because of sin, because people have turned from God. And God has promised that through Abraham's offspring, he will bless the world.

Those who bless them, he will bless. Those who curse them, he will curse. Now, two weeks ago, we were introduced to Joseph and two dreams that Joseph had, a double dream to confirm the certainty of God's plan.

Joseph had this dream that there were, he's got 11 brothers, and in the dream, there were 11 sheaves of corn that all came and bowed to his sheave of corn, his sheave of corn. And then he had a dream where the sun and the moon and 11 stars came and bowed to him.

[6 : 47] And these represent his brothers, his family, bowing down to him. God is saying, one day, his family, the people of God, the church in that generation will bow down to him.

Joseph is the leader that God has chosen, the deliverer that he's chosen. Now, Jacob, his father, made Joseph his favorite, a terrible thing to do to a family. And he gave him this ornate robe, but his brothers stripped him of the robe that he used to swan around in, and they sold him to some slave traders passing by who've taken him to Egypt.

Last week, we had an interlude. We were with Judah, Joseph's brother, in Genesis 38. And Joseph's brother, Judah, failed to look after his daughter-in-law, Tamar, when Judah's son died.

He was married to Tamar. And then when he thought Tamar was a prostitute, he slept with her. So now we're coming back to Joseph in Egypt. And our first point is, Joseph is a successful servant used by a faithful God.

Something extraordinary happens to Joseph after they sell him in verse 1. 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.

[8 : 12] And that phrase, captain of the guard, is a big deal. The musical about Joseph said that Potiphar was just a rich man. Potiphar had very few cares.

He was one of Egypt's millionaires, having made a fortune, buying shares in pyramids. But that's not true. It may well be that the chief of staff, this role, captain of the guard, was the kind of commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

And this is the strongest army in the known world. This is a really powerful man. Joseph has sort of landed on his feet. Well, how did that happen in verse 2?

These are very significant. Verses 2 to 6. The Lord was with Joseph, saw that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

Verse 3, when his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant.

[9 : 17] So Potiphar puts him in charge of everything. It says he's in charge of everything in the house and everything in the field. In other words, everything. Five times in these verses the Lord is mentioned.

And the reason that's so remarkable is because the Lord is hardly ever mentioned in this section of Genesis, chapters 37 to 50, that we're looking at, these big chapters. I counted only three times that God's name, the Lord, is mentioned in these chapters, except for here in chapter 39.

Now why is that? It's because one of the key things that God tells us through this section of Genesis is that he is always at work in the world, and often it's through his hidden hand of providence.

So what's going on here in these verses as it says, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, is that Moses, the writer, is rolling up the kitchen blind for a moment and saying, this is what's really going on behind the scenes, spiritually.

The Lord is at work. And the effect goes on on Potiphar and Joseph if you look at 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.

[10 : 37] The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had. And verse 6, so Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care. With Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

So Joseph is running the show and because of that, the show is going really well. Through this single Israelite young man far from home, God is working out his purposes of making himself known to the people of other nations.

Did you notice that? Potiphar sees that Joseph's God is worth having on your side. Joseph's God, the Lord, is with him. And through him looking after Joseph, he is experiencing the blessing of God which is just what God had promised would happen to Abraham.

What God is doing here in Potiphar's house, he will then do at the end of the chapter in prison, in the prison as Joseph's there. And then he will do later in the book for the whole of Egypt as Joseph is exalted.

And it will bring blessing to the nations. So Joseph is a man who goes down in history as a man greatly used by God. He's a man used by God greatly even though he has absolutely no control over where he is.

[11 : 54] And folks, I think that's a really helpful thing for us to get on board with this morning. Think about our Ukrainian families here at St. Silas. Here in Glasgow because of terrible things happening back in their homeland over which they had no control.

Our families who were here from Hong Kong, some of them were born in Hong Kong, grew up in Hong Kong, Hong Kong was home and now through situations beyond their control, they're here in Glasgow.

For others of us, even if we've always lived here in Glasgow, our temptation in life is to think, I just wish I knew where God wants me to be so that he could use me.

I'd like to be useful for God but I just need guidance from him. Where should I be? What should I do? I need to know what God's plan is for my life.

Well folks, if you're not sure how on earth you've ended up where you are today, you're not sure what's gone on in your life that you could have ended up in Glasgow in the place you are with the job you've got and the family situation you've got, then consider Joseph a man greatly used by God sold as a slave when he was perhaps 17 years old in a foreign land now when he arrived he almost certainly could speak none of the language.

[13 : 19] The Canaanite language is very different to ancient Egyptian. He probably couldn't understand anything anyone was saying as he was sold as a slave and started working in the house. This is now some years later, could be 10 years later, probably a very hard decade for Joseph.

He's a single man and in slavery so with, at this stage, apparently no prospect of ever getting married. Humanly speaking, he is accidentally where he is and he would never have chosen this life.

And worse than that, he could even think this is my fault because what we saw of him in chapter 37 was he was a bit of a brat showing off his ornate robe.

So he could be there thinking I would never have chosen this and it's my fault because of my stupid decisions. But he doesn't need to think any of that for here God is greatly using him.

Joseph doesn't need to live with regrets. He doesn't need to spend his life saying, you know, I just really wish I hadn't made that decision. Why? Because God is much bigger than that.

[14 : 27] His plans cannot be subverted by wrong human decisions. He's bigger than the wickedness of Joseph's brothers.

God is bigger than the wickedness of political powers today and tyrannies. He's bigger than the selfishness of Joseph's own past and God is bigger than ours as well.

So Joseph can tell himself and we can tell ourselves God's hidden hand got me here and God can and will use me here if I'm faithful to him.

If I trust him and I'm faithful. But that faithfulness gets solely tested in our second point which is that Joseph is an obedient servant loyal to a righteous God.

Joseph becomes for us here an outstanding model of resisting temptation. He's far more than that as we'll see but we can learn from him because when the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth we looked at that letter last term as a church 1 Corinthians chapter 6 when he talks to that church about being sexually pure he kind of riffs on Joseph and what Joseph does here as he says flee sexual immorality run away from it for that's just what Joseph does.

[15 : 50] And the inspiration Joseph is here is important for us because temptation is a mark of the Christian life. There will not come a point in the Christian life if we're doing it right before Jesus returns in this fallen world there will not come a point when we don't feel temptation to sin.

For many of us at times it will be sexual temptation but we can be tempted in all kinds of ways by all kinds of sins in our lives. And we can learn from this chapter about the nature of temptation and how Joseph wisely and courageously resists.

The first signs of trouble come when Moses tells us about how Joseph looks in verse 6b he is ripped verse 6b 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.

The temptation is persistent in verse 10 she spoke to Joseph day after day sometimes it's said opportunity only knocks once but temptation leans on the doorbell and that's often the way with temptation in our lives that unless we change a situation where we feel tempted we can find that we're continuously tempted and it starts to wear us down.

It's one of the reasons that pornography is such an ensnaring problem for people today trapping people because it's accessible and it's available and it looks as though it's free for the user it's not free but it looks like it's free and when I was growing up if someone wanted to use porn that if I had to go to a news agent and get a magazine and get past a shopkeeper with the magazine and all that shame but now it's available so there's that persistence to temptation and that can be the same with lots of areas of temptation for Joseph here the temptation is acute he is unmarried he's a slave living hundreds of miles from his family the chances of him getting married seem very slim and here is the opportunity handed to him for sexual pleasure when he's isolated isolated from God following friends from accountability partners from family even it seems isolated from anyone who would ever find out in verse 11 one day he went into the house to attend to his duties and none of the household servants was inside she caught him by his cloak and said come to bed with me it's flattering temptation it appeals to his pride here is his master's wife desiring him because of how he looks so this is enormous pressure on Joseph sustained acute appealing and apparently with very little risk of anyone finding out you could picture

[18 : 54] Joseph at work in the house on a hot afternoon and Potiphar's wife calls him in no one else is around and she's there in a revealing summer dress and she asks him just to sit with her on the bed and help her with some accounts she's doing another time she's lying by the swimming pool in a bikini and then calls for Joseph and asks for him to come and help her with something in the secluded walled garden it's on a plate for him so how does he respond he runs away he flees verse 10 and though she spoke to Joseph day after day he refused to go to bed with her or even to be with her he avoids her he refuses even to be with her he doesn't think I wonder how far I can go without crossing the line I'll spend a bit of time with her I'll indulge the fantasy no part of Joseph would think I'll see how close to the fire you can get without getting burnt but the reality is all too often that is our strategy when it comes to temptation we like to see how close we can get to the fire without crossing the line that we've drawn in our heads indulging ourselves and foolishly thinking it's okay

I'm in control I'm not going to go too far maybe it would be private messages we start sending to a friend of the opposite sex on social media that start to heat up or the long business trip away with a younger attractive colleague or the time and space alone just with our boyfriend or girlfriend so then for Joseph the key moment of entrapment comes in verse 12 if you have a look 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 so how does Joseph withstand that pressure and resist well first we can see that it's because of who he is deep down inside and we see that in verse 8 he refused Potiphar's wife and said this with me in charge 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 now what's remarkable about that what that reveals to us is what Joseph is like as a person because he could have said all of those things to justify sleeping with

Potiphar's wife he has the opportunity he could arrange for everyone else to be somewhere else to get away with it but instead those that very opportunity he sees as an opportunity for integrity and service and I take it that that's because we're looking here at a man who has nurtured in his life godly habits so that instinctively on the inside he is a man of dependability and honour and dignity he knows that it's walking in the pathways of the Lord's word that lead to flourishing he trusts the Lord's word so he sees power and authority as a chance to show faithfulness to Potiphar and to others not as a chance to indulge himself next he resists because he sees sin for what it is in verse 9 at the end there he says how then could I do such a wicked thing it's different to how we might describe sin in our lives we might say to a friend you know what

I slipped up it was a moment of weakness no one's perfect we're all sinners Joseph says how could I do such a wicked thing it's not a small thing it's a wicked thing and next he resists because he fears God and he knows God is watching so the end of verse 9 he says how can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God in other words even if no one else finds out about this sin it would still be a terrible thing because it would be a sin against God and tied in with that must be a genuine knowledge for Joseph of who God is that he's good and righteous and trustworthy and knowledge of God's faithfulness and goodness so that Joseph can say no to this pleasure it would be pleasure because of the all surpassing pleasure of friendship with God that means pleasing him means you laugh at the offer of a different kind of pleasure away from him and that's true for us today that we can't resist temptation in our lives just by thinking about the negatives of the sin and thinking

I mustn't do that we have to fill our minds and our hearts with such a sense of the beauty and majesty and glory of God in the face of Jesus that it means that we see that sin as just grotesque hideous dehumanizing and we run from it to be who God calls us to be that's what pleases us communion with him friendship with him there's nothing like it Joseph is completely different to his brother Judah we saw last week he slept with Tamar at the first opportunity he got thinking she's a prostitute Joseph says no to Potiphar's wife despite many opportunities Joseph cares more about his purity than his prospects Judah left behind his cloak with the prostitute Tamar when he thought she was a prostitute because it was security for paying Tamar and Tamar could then use that cloak to expose the truth about Judah but Joseph is willing to leave his cloak behind as he runs away so that he can maintain his purity even though she will use that cloak to conjure up a lie about him

[25 : 19] Joseph trusts that walking with God is what brings blessing so let me invite you to ask yourself this morning in what area of your own life are you fighting temptation and conscious of it how are you fighting it Joseph fears God he knows God is watching he entrusts himself to the goodness of God even when he knows that will be very costly for him so we come to our third point Joseph is a suffering servant blessed by a sovereign God Potiphar's wife grabs his cloak that he's left behind she calls the household servant and then her own husband and she says Joseph tried it on with me and he only ran away when I screamed and Potiphar burns with anger and Joseph goes to prison there's lots of mention of Joseph's cloak verse 16 verse 18 it comes six times the mention of his cloak

I just wonder if it's there as a symbol of how Joseph has changed from the Joseph we met in chapter 37 when we saw him there his cloak defined him the symbol of being his father's favorite favorite of the prestige the ornate robe meant that he never did a day's work and his brothers had to strip him of his robe now some years later he's wearing a cloak that presumably also is a symbol of status in the house not of being his father's favorite but of being his master's favorite in charge of everyone in the house but now this is a change Joseph who is willing to lose all of that his status for the sake of purity walking in the ways of God's laws and it means that his world collapses again he's wrongly sent to prison but the chapter ends again with the assurance of verse 21 the Lord was with him he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden so in verse 22

Joseph is put in charge of all the other prisoners his effect on the prison is the same as it was on Potiphar's house and it's his audition for the role he'll soon play for Pharaoh himself being put in charge of all of Egypt verse 23 like Potiphar it says 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 so the chapter begins and ends by telling us that spiritual reality we have a man who goes from being a slave for years in a land he never chose to being a prisoner wrongfully convicted but whether the Lord is granting him success or allowing him to be mistreated the spiritual reality is always the same God is faithful and he is at work using his servant and he is blessing his servant and here is the shape of God's salvation more than

Joseph being an example for us as we see God at work in Joseph's life we're seeing that this is how God treats his chosen deliverer of his people we know that he's qualified now to be God's chosen deliverer in his generation because he's obedient he's faithful but God allows him to be despised and rejected and mistreated and more than that it's actually by this astonishing mistreatment and rejection that God is getting his suffering servant exactly where he needs him to be as we'll see in the weeks to come so that he can deliver his people God uses the rejection to bring deliverance through his rejected servant and as Joseph lives out that pattern he points us to the true and better Joseph Jesus who was obedient when he passed the test in the garden the wilderness for 40 days he was in the wilderness

Satan tempts him it's persistent it's acute and Jesus resists the temptation so that Hebrews tells us that Jesus can sympathize with our weakness because he was tempted in every way just as we are and was without sin and as he our deliverer was despised and rejected and unjustly condemned God used that rejection of him so that his own son would die a sin bearing death in our place so that we can enjoy the blessing of walking with God people reject Jesus because they think what kind of a saviour would look so weak and be have his life ended in apparent failure dying on a cross God wants us to identify Jesus as God's man God's chosen deliverer so he weaved through human history people like

[30 : 48] Joseph so that we could see the foreshadow in him this is how God does things this is what God's deliverer will look like and if we follow Jesus we see this morning that this cross shaped pattern of life is a pattern we should expect to see again and again in the lives of God's faithful people that sometimes you have to choose between obedience and worldly success between your purity and your prospects between pleasing God and pleasing people and when we see Christians getting maligned getting rejected we shouldn't despair and think God can't be at work here otherwise they would find power and be able to use that power well no this is God's way of doing things with his people sometimes the path of obedience is one that means the world mistreats you unjustly and it can still be the experience of being blessed by God that you learn that he is with you even in extraordinarily difficult circumstances but all the while God assures us he can use all our faithfulness to him he can use it even when we can't make sense of how he's using it to make the rich tapestry that he's weaving across history he's promised that he will save a multitude from every nation to spend forever with him and he can draw them to him even through his weak rejected people trusting his despised rejected saviour and when we're in future glory with him we'll be able to look back and marvel at the way that his wisdom was worked out through his hidden hand let's pray together heavenly father father as we see joseph we thank you that we have a saviour who heroically fought temptation thank you that he passed the test when he was tempted by satan thank you for his magnificent life a life well lived for us thank you that though he came with power and faced persistent intense flattering temptation he withstood choosing to walk the path of your word choosing the way of godliness that even meant death on a cross we praise you that you use that death for our deliverance thank you that just as you exalted joseph in potiphar's house you have now exalted jesus to the highest place and given him the name above every name help us we pray to entrust ourselves to your goodness and your faithfulness help us to be people who care more about our purity than our prospects to be those who flee temptation that we might be the people you use in our generation to make jesus our savior known for we ask in his name amen