

Genesis 39

1st September 2019 am Hill and Arcadia

Keeping the marriage bed pure

I had considered skipping Genesis in favour of **a specific message** applicable to the dedication of children.

But then the thought crossed my mind that so often I have been told and others have reminded me that one of **the greatest gifts** we parents can give our children is for us to love each other.

A significant part of loving each other is that of **being faithful to each other**; not betraying each other by cheating on each other or indulging in some other act of sexual indiscretion

The writer to the **Hebrews** expressed this so well in a challenge to married couples...

Hebrews 13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

In our passage today **we see Joseph** honouring the marriage bed of Potiphar and his wife; and also at the same time preserving his own sexual purity.

Read Genesis 39

This is not just another incident of potential sexual misconduct. What we have represented here is **the clash of opposing lifestyles**. This is a drama of 2 opposing world views in conflict. There are 2 different principles of living in tension.

Joseph represents those who are God fearing; who have it on their hearts to please God, and **Potiphar's wife**, on the other hand, represents those who live and do as they please.

This **drama of conflict** does not just belong to a bygone era of Joseph and Potiphar's wife but is re-enacted every day. It is a battle that you and I do not escape

Like Joseph, we find ourselves **pulled constantly in two directions** – living according to the dictates/commands of God or those of our culture and the sinful nature.

On the one hand **God says** ... I made you and designed marriage and blessed you with the gift of sex. The marriage bed should be kept pure.

Genesis 1v27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. V28 God blessed them and said to them, 'be fruitful and increase in number ...

Proverbs 5v3 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is as bitter as gall ... v18b ...may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.

On the other hand **the culture** of our day and the inclinations of our own sinful desires says ...

Follow the desires and inclinations of your heart.

Sleep around with anyone before you are married and while you are married - as long there are two consenting adults – male or female. After all sex is nothing more than a biological impulse and function

The **pressure is on** to accept men having sex with men and women having sex with women as normal.

Every person with **access to internet** faces the temptation feeding their sexual fantasies with any form of pornography they choose.

The Television and media parade and promote perverted loose living as a norm for everyone. The catch phrase of our day is “just do it”.

That **struggle is real** for everyone teenage and up. The honest believer is prepared to admit; I am struggling with sexual temptation.

There are at least 2 lessons we learn from God in this passage:

1. The struggle with sexual sin is won and lost in the heart

Potiphar’s wife was willing to “indulge herself” in the absence of her husband **but for some reason** Joseph declines her tempting offer. His immediate response exposes some of the reason he can’t just hop into the bed of his boss’ wife.

Genesis 39v9b ...how then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God

It is true that personal resolve, determination or even an accountability group can help us in avoiding sexual indiscretion, but the real solution is something far more crucial.

Joseph is **immediately concerned** about sinning against God. The reason he is concerned about sinning against God is because of “*heart sensitivity*” toward God.

Not so with David. Nowhere in the encounter with **Bathsheba** does God feature in David’s reasoning and decision making processes. He is so absorbed with satisfying his lust, God is out of the picture.

It is only later after **the prophet Nathan** confronts David with his sin do we see sensitivity in David’s heart toward God emerging; so much so that he confesses that *it is against God and in the sight of God that he has sinned and done evil (Psalm 51v4)*.

Like David and Joseph, your and my heart is at **the centre of the struggle**. David in *Psalm 51* helps us see the significance of the heart. I’ll touch on just 3 of the verses:

- In v6 **David confirms** that God *desires truth in the inner parts* and that *he teaches him wisdom in the inmost place (heart)*.

Practically that means that the heart needs to be **saturated with the truth of God** with helpful outcomes as indicated by the Psalmist in *Psalms 119:11 I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

This is what Joseph must have done. He had over the course of his life **stored up** the word of God in his heart. This 'storing up' **in preparation** that he would not offend, sin against and grieve the heart of His precious God

- In *v10*, David prays for **a new heart** (*Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit with me.*) He knows that there is no hope for him if his heart does not change. He understood what Jesus would later say in *Mark 7:21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,*
- David goes on to plead with God *not to remove his Holy Spirit from him (v11).*

The struggles with **sexual sin** is won and lost in the heart. If you have a hard heart insensitive to the ways of God or no inclination to please God or oblivious of the presence of God – you will like Potiphar's wife go for it.

If, however, you know something of being a new creation in Christ you are more likely to win the battle. That requires a miracle of grace. It requires God to make you alive in Christ. It requires eyes to see and ears to you **the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

- The gospel is a message about **historical events**: the life and death and resurrection of Christ.
- The gospel is a message about **what those events achieved** before we experience anything or even existed; the completion of perfect obedience, the payment for our sins, the removal of the wrath of God, the installation of Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah and king of the universe, the disarming of the rulers and authorities, the destruction death.
- The gospel is a message about **the transfer of those achievements** from Christ to particular persons through our union with Christ by faith alone apart from works.
- The gospel is a message about **good things that are now true about us** as the achievement of the cross is applied to us in Christ: that God is only merciful to us now instead of wrathful (propitiation), that we are counted righteous in Christ now (justification), that we are freed now from guilt and power of sin (redemption), that we are positionally and progressively made holy (sanctification).

Efforts at morality won't do anything more than window dressing. But by believing and experiencing the gospel will change your heart...

The struggle with sexual temptation is **won and lost** in the heart. Nurture heart sensitivity toward God.

2. The struggles with sexual sin is won and lost with the feet

There is a **civil war that rages inside of you – all of you**. What you are by natural birth has declared war on what you have become by new birth. The remaining sin in your life battles against your new disposition as a believer.

If you are to win this battle you must recognize that **the basic problem lies within you**. It is your own evil desires that lead you into temptation.

Jerry Bridges: “*desire has come to be the strongest faculty of man’s heart. The next time you face one of your typical temptations – watch for the struggle between your desires and your reason. If you give in to temptation, it will be because desire has overcome reason in the struggle to influence your will. The world recognizes this and makes appeals to our desires through the pleasures of sin.*”

James 1:14-15 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

You may think that you merely respond to outward temptations that are presented to you but the truth is **your evil desires** are constantly searching out (looking for opportunity) temptations to satisfy their unquenchable lusts.

Joseph knew how to deal with **the sex trap** at the office in Egypt.

Has anything changed in 4000 years? The scenario remains the same. A man and a woman together in a given situation and it isn’t long and the biology gets to work.

- **The circumstances**

In spite of much hardship Joseph ends up being **promoted** to a place of prominence in Egypt. He eventually gained Potiphar’s complete and unrestrained trust.

Genesis 39:5-6 ...The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. 6 so he left in Joseph’s care everything he had; with Joseph in charge; he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

And it is **not without significance** that the next phrase is included (*V6b*)...*Now Joseph was well built and handsome,*

- **The sensual temptation**

While **Mr. Potiphar is appreciating Joseph’s** reliable business sense and trustworthy nature, Mrs. Potiphar is becoming increasingly preoccupied with Joseph’s good build and good looks.

She makes **the first move** *Genesis 39:7 and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!”*

Joseph immediately but politely **refuses her advances**. He first tries to appeal to her reason and then to her conscience

Genesis 39:8-9 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. 9 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?”

But Mrs. Potiphar is not interested in the sanctity of her marriage or the trust between her husband and Joseph or whether or actions grieve the heart of God. She’s **only interested in gratifying her physical lust** – now!

It was not easy for Joseph. This was happening in the place he lived and worked, face to face with a very attractive woman. Her advances surely must have **flattered Joseph’s ego** and aroused his own lust.

The **source of temptation was persistent**.... *day after day (V10)*

This woman chased him **when he was alone and vulnerable**, when no one need know about what was happening. (*V11 ...none of the household servants was inside*)

The **final test** for Joseph came when Potiphar’s wife resorted to more than just words to lure him to have sex with her.

Genesis 39:12 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.

Joseph responded by implementing the **God given practical** directive for avoiding sin. He turned and ran!

- **He used his feet**

This same escape route is confirmed in the NT. *1 Corinthians 6:18* *Flee from sexual immorality.* The remedy is simple, get out and run!

The struggles with sexual sin in won and lost with the feet!

There are some things that we are told to stand and resist, but **when it comes to sensual temptation** we are told to do just as Joseph did. Turn and run. If you stay you will probably give into the sin.

Conclusion

Keeping the **marriage bed pure** is getting harder and harder as society becomes less and less conscious of God and His ways and society becomes more and more driven by self-indulgent pleasure.

It is a battle however that can be won; we do this with God’s help as we foster our relationship with Him and run like blazes when we are ever in a dangerous place.