

GOD WAS WITH JOSEPH

Genesis 37:1-39:23

Lesson 15a

Key Verse: 39:2

"The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master."

In many ways, Joseph is the fruit of Genesis. He lived in a cursed world and felt the full force of the curse of sin overwhelming him like the rushing torrent of a river at flood stage. But he believed in the God of Genesis, the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth. He believed that God is the Lord of history and the Sovereign Ruler of men and nations. He believed that God had a purpose for his life, for he believed the promises of God. He knew that God was with him--even when circumstances seemed to say that God had forgotten him. He never doubted the love of God. So God trained him and blessed him and used him to save many lives, especially, to save a remnant of God's people, keeping them alive on the earth both physically and spiritually. Although Joseph was not the covenant son, his life of redemptive love points to Jesus and reflects his image.

The covenant son was Judah. His life is a stark contrast to that of Joseph. In his early years he was as evil as Joseph was good. But God worked a miracle of grace in Judah's heart and he was changed. Joseph's redemptive love for his brothers was the catalyst that brought about that change. But that is the subject of a later lesson. In this lesson we want to meet the God who was with Joseph.

1. Joseph's youth (37:1-36)

This is the account of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob. He grew up in a home that was full of jealousy and human conflict. His father was a successful businessman and was very wealthy. He had 2 wives, 2 concubines 12 sons and a daughter. The Bible does not make any comment about Jacob's having 4 wives--he was a man of his times; but the suffering and tragedy that this brought to him and to his family is very evident. And this is clearly a lowering of God's standard for marriage in Genesis 2. Joseph's father, Jacob, was very partial to his second wife, Rachel, and Joseph was her first son. After Rachel died while giving birth to her second son, Jacob lavished all of his love and affection on Joseph. Somehow, Joseph

was not spoiled; he received his father's love well, and grew up until he was a teenager of 17 without lacking anything. He loved his father and was obedient to him. He was oblivious to his brothers' jealousy and had no idea of the intensity of their hatred for him. Once, when he was tending the flocks with some of his brothers--the concubines' sons, he brought his father a bad report about them. This didn't improve their relations. Later on, his father made him a very special coat. It was richly ornamented--it looked like a prince's robe. Every time he innocently wore it, his brothers burned with jealousy.

From his youth Joseph was different. He dreamed dreams. His dreams were not ordinary dreams. They were God's revelation to him. They were like his Bible, for there was no written Bible at that time. So Joseph became a "Bible student" who meditated on God's word. Because Joseph lived his life on a spiritual level, he could see things from a different perspective. He deeply accepted God's sovereignty, not only for his own personal life, but also over the created world and over history. His brothers could not comprehend his inner spiritual life.

Joseph was a pure-hearted man, so everything seemed pure to him. He seemed unaware of the raging storm of jealousy that whirled around him. His brothers hated him for being a tattletale; they hated his beautiful coat; but most of all, they hated his dreams. He seemed totally unaware of their hatred when he innocently told them about his dreams, especially his dream about the sheaves of grain in the field, then later, about his dream of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. No one understood his dreams, but Joseph hid them in his heart. They were God's word of promise to him.

One day, Joseph's easy-going, prince-like life came to an abrupt end. He was 17 years old, and his father sent him on an errand to find his brothers who were taking care of their father's flocks near Shechem. When he came to the place where they were supposed to be, they were gone. He didn't give up and go back home, but asked around and found that they had gone further north to a place called Dothan. So he went there.

When they saw him coming, wearing his beautiful coat, their anger and hatred boiled over. They remembered his audacious dreams and decided to kill him. The oldest son, Reuben, was too weak to exercise any leadership among his brothers, but he secretly planned to rescue Joseph. They followed Reuben's suggestion and stripped him of his beautiful robe and threw him in an empty cistern. Reuben intended to come back and pull him out. But before he could do so, something happened.

Judah was the 4th son, but he was the real leader. He saw a caravan of Midianite traders on their way to Egypt, and had a brilliant idea. "Let's not kill him. What would we gain by that? Let's sell him to the Midianites." The brothers agreed. Reuben was not around, so they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites (Midianites) who took him to Egypt, and sold him to a man named Potiphar, the captain of

Pharaoh's guard.

2. Judah's unfaithfulness (38)

Before picking up Joseph's story in Egypt, the writer tells us about Judah, the brother who proposed and carried out the terrible plot to sell his younger brother into slavery. After the deed was done, Judah and his brothers dipped Joseph's beautiful coat in the blood of a goat and took it to their father. He saw the bloody coat and concluded that a wild animal had killed Joseph. From that day on, he could not be comforted. A gloomy pall settled over the family. Judah couldn't stand it. He couldn't deal with his father's inconsolable grief or with his own guilt. So, he left home.

Chapter 38 begins with the words, "At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah." He met and married a Canaanite woman, and had three sons by her. He raised his sons there among the Canaanites. When his elder son was old enough, he got a wife for him. Her name was Tamar, and she was a faithful woman. Judah's son Er was wicked and the Lord put him to death. The second son, Onan, was told to take his brother's widow as his wife, according to the levirate law. He, too, was wicked and the Lord put him to death also. Judah didn't want to give Tamar to his third son, so he sent her to her father's house with a promise which he did not intend to keep. In the meantime, Judah's wife died.

Tamar realized that Judah was not going to keep his promise, so she took matters into her own hands. She disguised herself as a prostitute and slept with Judah, her father-in-law, and conceived. She was determined not to die a sorrowful, fruitless widow in her father's house. She was called to bear an heir for the covenant family, and she was determined to do so. She was faithful to her husband's family. When Judah found out what she had done he said, "She is more righteous than I..." (26) After she gave birth to twin boys, Judah took his family and returned to his father's house. One woman's faithfulness touched his heart, and he came home to become a faithful son, and again become a leader among his brothers.

3. JOSEPH IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE (39:1-23)

Joseph was suddenly thrust into the cruel reality of slave life in a strange land. Psalm 105:18 says, "They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons." Genesis 42:21b says, "We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen..." The Bible does not tell us about his early years as a slave boy in Egypt, but we can imagine how many blows he must have received and how many tears he must have shed in the night as he thought about his father. We can imagine how lonely and frightened he must have been. We are not told how he mastered the language of Egypt, but he did, for later he spoke like a native. He was a hard worker, and he overcame himself and his environment. The writer of Genesis only tells us, "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered..." (39:2) He grew from a slender, dreamy boy of 17 into a handsome, well-built man of 25 or 26. He was an able man and his life in Potiphar's house demonstrates the real meaning of the word, "stewardship." The words

of Ephesians 6:5-8 might have been written about Joseph. "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men..." Because Joseph accepted God's sovereignty and trusted God's love in both good times and bad, his heart did not become crooked. He believed that the sovereign God loved him even more than his father had loved him, and that God had sent him to Egypt for a purpose.

The life of faith must be undergirded by a deep and humble acceptance of God's sovereignty. This means that one can't become fatalistic. One's life is not determined by an impersonal fate or by accidents or by chance. The loving Sovereign God is the Ruler and Lord of life. He created each of us for a purpose and he is working out that good purpose in each person's life--if we trust him.

Because God was in his heart, hardship and mistreatment did not make him bitter; and success did not make him proud. These experiences--the good and the bad--made him grow in character in his inner man. All people have ups and downs in life. Some people become bitter and angry toward God when they encounter hard things; and they become proud or self-indulgent when things go well. But God was with Joseph, and Joseph trusted God, so the experiences of his life, both good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, could be used by God to build his character.

Joseph's time of testing came at the height of his power and success as a steward and practical master of Potiphar's household. Potiphar's wife was very much attracted to the young, handsome and very able Joseph. She tried to seduce him, not just once, but day after day. Joseph was clear and unwavering. He reminded her of her husband's complete trust in him. But more than this, he told her that what she was asking him to do was wicked in the sight of God. It was a sin. So he refused to sleep with her, and he did his best to avoid her. If Joseph had allowed passion, pride or ambition to get even a small foothold in his heart, he would have surely fallen. But God was in his heart. Potiphar's wife was proud and full of desire. She waited for an opportunity and one day, found it. She was at home alone, and Joseph came into the house to attend to some duty. She said, "Come to bed with me." And she took hold of his cloak. Joseph fled, leaving his cloak behind. She was furious. She turned the story around and lied to her husband, and Joseph was thrown in jail.

Joseph had tried to do what was right; he was faithful to God, and look where it got him--in jail. One might think that a slave is on the very bottom of society and can go down no further, but that's not so. A slave in prison is worse off. Joseph's imprisonment was a great injustice. He could have been filled with bitterness; he could have despaired. But he overcame himself and depended on God who was with him in prison. Before long, he was the practical steward of the prison. God was preparing him for a great task, and this was one necessary step toward that task. Joseph believed that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Ro 8:28). God was with Joseph because Joseph had faith in God.