

Genesis (2011) 39A

- This is the 90th lesson in our Genesis study
 - It is also the second anniversary of the start of our Genesis study
 - We have about 20% of the study remaining, which means about 6 months
- As we enter into Chapter 39, we find ourselves backing up in time
 - As you remember, at the end of Chapter 37 we left Joseph sitting in chains in a Midianite caravan headed down to Egypt
 - His brothers had sold him into slavery
 - Then they reported to Jacob that Joseph had been killed by wild animals
 - Then we moved into Chapter 38, where the focus of the narrative shifted to Judah's misadventures in Canaan
 - Chapter 38 spanned 20+ years of Judah's life
 - When Chapter 38 began, Joseph was about 17 years old
 - When that chapter ended 22 years later, Joseph was nearly 40
- Now we move back to the start of that same 22 year period
 - Only this time we'll learn what Joseph was experiencing during that same 22 year period
 - Chapter 39 begins at the same point that Chapter 38 began, with Joseph at about the age of 17
 - He's arrived in Egypt as a slave
 - He's hurt by his brothers' betrayal, he's frightened, and he has no idea what lies ahead
 - And don't forget the larger story we're also following, that being the *toledat* of Jacob
 - This story follows the question of who receives the privilege of the birthright with the double portion of the inheritance and the patriarchal leadership over the family

- We learned earlier that the Lord gave Joseph dreams that foretold how Joseph would rule over the rest of his family
 - Those dreams tell us that Joseph will receive the birthright above all the rest of Jacob's sons
 - This would be true despite Joseph being next to last born
 - Though he was the first natural born of Rachel
 - But Joseph's dreams never revealed how the Lord will bring about that outcome
 - But the next chapters in Genesis will provide that answer
- Because Joseph's brothers decided they couldn't allow Joseph to rule over them, they decided to stop the dream from coming true
 - After discussing options, they decide to sell him into slavery, thereby preventing him from obtaining the birthright
 - Did their plan thwart God's purposes or merely ensure God's success?
 - Are Joseph's circumstances evidence that men are putting God's promises at risk, or are they proof that God is at work in a marvelous way?
 - Finally, we will continue our search for parallels between Joseph's life and the life of Christ
 - Joseph's story is one of the Bible's great shadows of Jesus
 - So many details of Joseph's life reflect details in the Messiah's life
 - And so we want to make note of those connections when we find them

[Gen. 39:1](#) Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.

[Gen. 39:2](#) The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

[Gen. 39:3](#) Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.

[Gen. 39:4](#) So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge.

[Gen. 39:5](#) It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.

[Gen. 39:6](#) So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

- As I mentioned, the story of Joseph picks up from Genesis 37:36, as Joseph is led into Egypt
 - As it turns out, the buyer to purchase Joseph is a man named Potiphar, a servant of Pharaoh
 - The Pharaoh in this case was probably Sesotris, who ruled during the early 19th century BC
 - Joseph has been bought by a man of power and means
 - Potiphar is called an Egyptian
 - You might be saying, well of course he was an Egyptian (this is Egypt, after all)
 - But this wasn't a given in that day
 - The Egyptian empire in that day was ruled by non-Egyptians, a Hamite people
 - As we learned in Genesis 9, Africa was settled by the descendants of Ham (which we call Hamites)
 - While the eastern lands were settled by the line of Shem, (Semites)
 - One of the semitic peoples, the Hyksos, invaded Egypt and conquered the Hamite Egyptians
 - Historically, the Hyksos ruled Egypt during the 16th and 17th Dynasties of Egypt
 - So when we hear that Potiphar was an Egyptian, it means he was a Hamite who had chosen to work for the occupying Semite rulers

- You can learn more about the importance of the Hyksos dynasties and how they play a role in God's purposes for Israel in our study through the Book of Exodus
- Thirdly, Potiphar is the captain of the guard
 - He was the leader over the personal bodyguards of the Egyptian Pharaoh and the court
 - Since he was an Egyptian, this means he had proven himself to be a man the Pharaoh could trust
 - Potiphar must have been a ruthless man, someone willing to turn his back on his fellow Egyptians to gain the Pharaoh's confidence
 - This is a man who seeks power
 - It also means he was a very tough, perhaps even harsh man, as his position would have required such a person
 - He had authority to put men to death if the circumstances justified
 - So he was a man who must be respected and feared
- Finally, Potiphar was an officer of the Pharaoh's court
 - The word for officer in Hebrew is *saris*, which is literally the word for eunuch, meaning an emasculated male
 - It was common for monarchs to require those who served in his court, especially around his harem, to undergo emasculation
 - Once the person is made a eunuch, they won't pose a threat to Pharaoh's wives
- And so Joseph settles into his new life as a slave in Potiphar's house
 - And immediately Moses tells us that the Lord was with Joseph in his circumstances
 - The effect of the Lord's presence was that Joseph became successful
 - Everything Joseph did turned out exceptionally well

- And Moses makes clear that this success was the direct result of the Lord giving Joseph favor
- Isn't this an unexpected way for the Lord to bless His child, Joseph?
 - Since we know Joseph carries the birthright within the family of Jacob, aren't we expecting to see the Lord rescue Joseph?
 - If I tell you that Joseph is sold into slavery and then I report that the Lord has stepped in to bless Joseph, don't you assume I'm speaking about God freeing Joseph?
 - Perhaps the Lord strikes Pharaoh with plagues like He did for Abraham and Isaac
 - Perhaps the Lord rescues Joseph by a battle like He did for Lot?
 - Perhaps the Lord appears to Potiphar in a dream and demands Joseph's freedom like He did to Abimelech?
 - But these aren't the blessings the Lord brings for Joseph
- Instead, the blessing the birthright holder of the family of God received while serving as a slave in a foreign land is...to be a very successful slave
 - God does nothing to change Joseph's circumstances, at least not yet
 - Instead, everything Joseph does prospers, so that he becomes a successful man, according to v.2
 - Potiphar even takes notice, and that leads to even more responsibility as a slave
 - Joseph eventually takes charge of all the master's house
 - All other slaves report to Joseph
- Keep in mind, Joseph is a young man, probably still a teenager when this happens
 - Self-evidently, the Lord is blessing Joseph in powerful ways
 - Joseph must have had certain natural talents and abilities, but this success is far beyond the natural

- Moses tells us that the Lord was with Joseph and the Lord caused Joseph's work to prosper
 - This is a supernatural result, a dramatic set of successes that defy explanation and knock Potiphar's sandals off
- Can it be possible to say God "blessed" Joseph while still leaving him in the grip of slavery and oppression?
 - Oh yes, He most certainly can
 - Joseph was a slave for a reason
 - And even though slavery as an institution is repugnant, Joseph's slavery plays an important part in God's plan
 - Therefore, the Lord desires for Joseph to be in his present circumstances
 - Nevertheless, the Lord shows Himself to be faithful to His promises by bringing Joseph prosperity even in the midst of His slavery
 - Here we see the true definition of God's blessing
 - A blessing isn't something we like or want, though we may call such things "blessings"
 - But Biblically speaking, a blessing is anything that demonstrates the Lord's faithfulness and kindness
 - It was a blessing when you were brought to your knees in conviction and repentance of your sin
 - But that wasn't a happy moment
 - It was a blessing when the Lord was crucified on the cross
 - But it wasn't a moment of joy or happiness for those who experienced it, least of all Christ Himself
 - And it was a blessing when the Lord gave Joseph prosperity in slavery
 - Since the Lord promised Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt

- But they would not be without the Lord's presence and His faithfulness to His promises
- And here we see that faithfulness at work
- In fact, Moses goes out of his way to emphasize God's faithfulness in the midst of these circumstances
 - The proper name of God, Yahweh, is used seven times in this chapter but only one other time in the entire *toledat* of Jacob
 - Moses is determined to make clear that the Lord hasn't forsaken Joseph
 - The Lord hasn't forgotten Joseph and the Lord isn't forgetting His promise to bless Abraham's seed
 - Yahweh is the name of God that communicates His covenant-keeping nature
 - It's the name scripture uses when it wants to emphasize how God keeps his promises
 - Seven times in this chapter Moses repeats the Lord's name, emphasizing these circumstances aren't evidence of God failing Joseph
 - On the contrary, God is at work to bless Joseph
 - So when we seek to be blessed by our Father, we're asking to seek the Father's faithfulness and mercy
 - And when we seek these things, consider what the Lord has promised for His people during this age as we await His Son's return
 - He didn't promise sunshine and roses
 - Instead, He promised that a life of faith would be a life of trials, of persecution, of martyrdom in some cases

[Matt. 5:10](#) "Blessed are those who have been **persecuted** for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[Matt. 5:11](#) "Blessed are you when people insult you and **persecute** you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

[Matt. 5:12](#) "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they **persecuted** the prophets who were before you.

- Persecution is reserved for the blessed, for the righteous
 - And you can know that when such things come upon us because of our faith, it doesn't mean God has fallen down on the job
 - It doesn't mean that God has turned His back on you
 - It means you are privileged to be counted among a cloud of great witnesses
 - It means we are witnessing the faithfulness of the Lord, Who is working through these circumstances to ordain a great and wonderful eternal outcome
 - And should you catch yourself whispering that this isn't fair, then may I suggest we remember the One Who stands ahead of us in any test of unfairness
 - And at the head of that line is our Lord Himself

[2Cor. 5:21](#) He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- And if our Lord was subjected to such treatment for our sakes, then what must we expect for ourselves as we follow Him?

[John 15:20](#) "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they **persecuted** Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

- So we're witnessing Joseph suffering for the sake of righteousness, but nevertheless the Lord is blessing him in his suffering
 - How is Joseph blessed? Well, we're told that Joseph is working in Potiphar's house
 - Slaves in Egypt could have the most miserable of lives
 - Slaves built the pyramids, under severe stress
 - Thousands – maybe millions – died from the forced labor
 - Conditions could be cruel and intolerable

- Slave owners could abuse and kill slaves without fear of retribution
- Nevertheless, Joseph is placed in perhaps the best of all circumstances – in the house of a very senior aid to the Pharaoh
- In v.5 we're told that Potiphar had fields to care for as well as the house, reminding us that Joseph could have easily ended up in the fields – much harder labor
- But in vs.2, 4 and 5 we're clearly told of Joseph's enviable working conditions
 - He is in the house and in charge of the house
 - He doesn't even have to worry about other servants lording over him
- This is a true blessing, a meaningful example of God providing for Joseph even in the midst of his suffering
 - But if we are to walk as mature Christians, we must learn to view our own circumstances this way
 - We need to recognize His faithfulness in blessings that come our way
 - Each small mercy reminds us of His goodness
 - Become accustomed to looking for all ways the Lord brings blessing to us during a time of trial and grief
- Speaking of blessing, there is a second Biblical principle working through Joseph's experience in Potiphar's house
 - A believer can, by our obedience, cause the blessing God brings to us to spill over and impact others around us, including unbelievers
 - We've already seen Jacob becoming a blessing to Laban as a result of God working to bless Jacob
 - On a larger scale, we know the world is blessed by the existence of Israel and the Lord's work through that nation
 - And here we see the home of a pagan Egyptian benefitting from the slavery service of a man blessed by God
 - This phenomenon didn't end with Joseph

- All believers can be a source of blessing to the world around us as God blesses us for our obedience
 - Our nation receives blessings when men and women of faith lead by seeking His will and obeying His word
 - Companies run by godly men and women often prosper as a result of God's blessings
 - Godly employees bring blessings to their employers
 - And families can be richly blessed when godly parents obey God
- But some Christians miss the opportunity to be that blessing to others
 - We're too distracted wallowing in self-pity and dissatisfaction over our circumstances
 - We don't get many details about the way Joseph served Potiphar, but we can safely assume that he didn't spend his time whining about why he shouldn't be there
 - Of why he didn't deserve to be a slave and why it was all a mistake
 - Instead, we can be sure that Joseph did his best, worked hard and trusted the Lord to handle the details
 - Which means he had to learn to look past his own difficulties by resting in God's sovereignty
 - Then God could work through him to bring blessing, both to Joseph and to Potiphar's house
- When we experience suffering and injustice, as Joseph did, and we respond like Joseph, with obedience and diligence, then naturally we should expect our circumstances to improve, right?
 - Certainly, it's reasonable to expect the Lord to respond to Joseph's obedience by bringing good things
 - Do you know the rest of Joseph's story?
 - If you do, then you recognize there is something wrong with that assumption

- Because Joseph's situation isn't going to get better, at least not in the near term
 - He does everything right, yet he is mistreated
 - The Lord blesses him with great success even as a slave, but then as we'll see next week, Joseph's circumstances go from bad to worst
- Joseph's story is instructive on so many levels, but one of my favorite ways is how it dispels the myths of blessing and reward in our walk as Christians
 - We're surrounded in our day by shallow and misinformed Bible "teachers" who preach to us about "blessing"
 - They pander to our flesh telling us that God is ready to give us whatever we desire in this world, which is their definition of blessing
 - They argue that if our life is empty and filled with need, it's merely evidence that God is displeased with us
 - And then they sell us snake oil in the form of lies demanding we do or say or donate according to their rules, and only then will the Lord grant us what we desire
- They reduce our relationship with the Lord to a quid pro quo relationship
 - One where we perform to earn God's favor and receive the payoff we want
 - They reduce God's purposes to punishment and reward
- When you reflect on Joseph, ask yourself what was Joseph's behavior?
 - He was faithful, obedient, patient, long-suffering
 - And how did the Lord respond to Joseph?
 - Tested him by sending him into slavery
 - Then blessed him by making him a successful slave
 - Then tested him again, leading him from slavery to an even worse fate

- Don't settle for simple, trivial, false views of the Lord, the Creator of the Universe
 - Believe in His word
 - Believe that He can bless you in the midst of persecution and trial
 - Believe that obedience brings reward, even when it's not visible in your present circumstances or even this side of Heaven
 - Believe that God is present with you even when no one else is, knowing that He is faithful to His promises
 - Believe that His pleasure in you isn't measured by your happiness in what you have, but by His happiness in who you are
 - Believe that trials and injustice and persecution are the best way to demonstrate who you have become in Christ, to see the power of His blessing