

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/18/92
Genesis 39 "How to Tell if God is REAL in Your Life"

Intro:

Illust: Ancient Chinese drama--2 levels...

Q: Is God real in your life? Is He real?

Key: You can't fully answer that question sitting in a pew on Sunday morning.
Nor in your easy chair Sunday afternoon.

Illust:

Q: How can you tell if God is real in your life?

This morning, we want to inspect the life of a man in whose life God was real!
Joseph. God was indeed REAL to Joseph. How do we know?

Gen 39 shows us. You know the story well. It's a great story about Joseph.
But it's an even greater story about God. In fact, who is the main character in the story
of Joseph? Not Joseph! But God Himself. I challenged you last week to look for God
in every episode of the story of Joseph. He's there, behind the scenes, over the scenes,
controlling the scenes. Listen. The story of Joseph is really a story about God. And
the God of Joseph is a God who is in control of the details of our lives.

Joseph knew that. God was real to him. He can be in our lives too.

**Proposition: This morning, as we investigate Genesis 39, we're going to see that
God was real to Joseph in his response to 3 severe tests.**

- I. God was real to Joseph in his response to Rejection (1-6).
- II. God was real to Joseph in his response to Temptation (7-10).
 - A. Ethical Grounds (8-9a)
 - B. Spiritual Grounds (9b-10)
 1. Joseph resisted temptation.
 2. Joseph avoided temptation.
- III. God was real to Joseph in his response to Humiliation (11-23).

Practical Lessons from Genesis 39:

1. Practice the Presence of God in your life.
2. Realize that the Reality of God in my life impacts others.

The Setting:

Last week, we looked at the first episode of Joseph's life in Gen 37. What a
great tragedy gripped us in the 4 scenes--The Plot, the Pit, the Plea-bargain, and the
Pain. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers!

Then something unusual happens in the narrative. An unexpected break in the
drama of Joseph creates suspense in Gen 38 (see 37:36 and 39:1). Moses inserts a
shameful story from the life of Judah, Joseph's brother. Why? Most commentators
have very little to say about the interruption in Gen 38, other than to say it's a historical
parenthesis.

Q: Why does Moses interrupt the story of Joseph with the story about Judah?

1. Judah is the rightful heir of Jacob, and the ancestor of the Messiah.

2. Gen 38 reveals the result of sin.

Judah and his 9 brothers sinned against Joseph. His sin returned upon his own head. You can't read Gen 38 without admitting, "Man, what a messed up life and family, because of one thing--Sin!"

3. There is a stark contrast between Jacob and Joe in Gen 38 and 39. Gen 38 reveals the immoral acts of Jacob. Gen 39 highlights the moral purity of Joe. God was indeed REAL to Joseph. Let's see the 3 tests...

I. God was real to Joseph in his response to Rejection (1-6).

V 1 "And Joseph was brought down to Egypt..."

When Gen 39 begins, Joseph is a rejected young man. He has lost his freedom. His brothers sold him. The Ishmaelites transported him to Egypt and resold him to an Egyptian named Potiphar. There Joseph was, a slave, far away from his beloved father, rejected by the world.

Humanly speaking, you'd have to say things were bleak! Joseph didn't have a thing going for him, or did he? I want you to take special note of the next, small phrase. It is the key to the fortitude of Joseph's life.

V 2 "And the LORD was with Joseph"

The Bible need say something only one time for it to be important. If it repeats it twice, you know it's vital. If 3 times, you'd better pay special attention!

v 3 "the LORD was with him"

v 21 "the LORD was with Joseph"

v 23 "because the LORD was with him"

Q: "You mean to tell me that God was with Joseph when his wicked brothers threw him in the pit and sold him into slavery?" Yes. "That God was with Joseph when he was placed on the auction block, and controlled the bidding so that a leading official named Potiphar purchased this young Hebrew?" Yes.

You may be thinking, "I don't understand. Why would God allow something so terrible to happen to one of His own?"

Illust: One of the great Christians of this century was a Dutch woman named Corrie TenBoom. In her book, "The Hiding Place," she tells the horrid, yet true story of her persecution by the Nazis. She herself was not a Jew. But because she aided the Jews, she was driven to a death camp in Germany. She saw people die. She watched her sister die there in Ravensbrook. She felt the sting of a whip. Yet while enduring a hell on earth, she radiated hope. Not a fake hope. But a real hope. The hope generated by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. She knew that Jesus Christ had defeated man's greatest enemy, death, and offers life to all who will trust in Him. It's that hope that strengthens us in the trials of life. I like the way Corrie put it, "However deep the pit, God's love is deeper still."

God was real to Joseph. Joseph knew God was with him. What happened?
Vv 2-6 "...and he was a prosperous man..."

Who was Potiphar? He was a royal official in Egypt. The Pharaoh was probably Sesostri II, who ruled from 1879-1850 B.C. Potiphar not only knew the Pharaoh, but he worked for him. And God placed Joseph in that household.

You have to admire Joseph. Life handed him a lemon, so he made lemonade! He could have moped, but he didn't. He could have had a pity party. But he didn't.

Had he been wronged? Sure! Against his will, he was forced to be a slave. But he purposed to be the best slave he could be! And God blessed him for it.

Joseph gained favor with his master. Potiphar promoted Joseph up the ladder. First he was made his master's personal attendant. Then he was placed in charge of the entire household. Finally he was promoted to being in charge of all of Potiphar's possessions. Potiphar delegated everything to Joe except the food he ate (6)!

Q: What did God do for Potiphar's estate because of Joseph?

A: V 5 "the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake."

Q: Why did God put Joseph in Potiphar's house? What purpose could there have been in allowing Joseph to administrate this domestic operation?

A: Another question--What would Joseph be doing in a few short years? Administrating the affairs of the entire country of Egypt! In Potiphar's house, God was preparing Joseph, and training him in managerial skills he would need later!

Challenge: Be faithful where you are! You say, "I don't like the job I've got! I deserve better!" Did God give you the job you have? Then be faithful. God rewards faithfulness (Lk 19:17).

Lk 16:10 "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much"

God is real. God exists. God is sovereign. Even when we're rejected.

Illust:

Tran: God was real to Joseph. That was apparent in his response to Rejection.

II. God was real to Joseph in his response to Temptation (7-10).

The last phrase of v 6 baits our breath for the drama that follows...

V 6 "And Joseph was a handsome person..."

Here's what happened.

V 7 "And it came to pass...his master's wife...Lie with me."

It sounds like a soap opera, doesn't it? It happens all the time in our society. In the name of freedom, our culture delights in indiscreet behavior. V 7 is so contemporary. V 8 is not.

V 8 "But he refused..."!!

Hurray for Joseph! He refused! He said "NO!" to temptation!

Q: How did Joseph overcome the temptation? He resisted on 2 grounds...

A. Joseph resisted Temptation on Ethical Grounds (8-9a).

V 8 "Behold my master knows..."

What's Joe saying to her? "No! I won't yield to your enticement. For this reason. It wouldn't be right."

Key: The first reason that yielding to temptation is wrong is because sin is wrong. Ethically wrong. Sin is a violation of an absolute moral standard. The sin of adultery, specifically, is a gross ethical violation of another person's God-given rights.

Ex 20:14 "Thou shalt not commit adultery." (7th command)

Common Rationale--"But I don't love my spouse any more. We're not compatible. We don't have any feelings for each other any more. Besides, I love another person. I can't live without him/her. So what's wrong with that?"

Listen to Joseph. Breaking the marriage covenant is wrong for this first reason. It's wrong on ethical grounds. That's why Joseph said "No."

But there's another more fundamental reason...

B. Joseph resisted Temptation on Spiritual Grounds (9b-10).

V 9 "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

Listen. The reason we must say "No" to sin is not because we fear the consequences of getting caught. Joseph could have easily rationalized. He was far away from his family. He was in a pagan culture where immorality was accepted. And besides, he didn't initiate the sexual advance. She did.

But he resisted the temptation. Why? He knew that if he yielded, he would be sinning against God. Listen. God was real to Joseph! So real that he hated and shunned the very thought of yielding to sin!

Illust:

So Joe resisted the advance of Potiphar's wife, on ethical grounds, and on spiritual grounds. He said "No" to temptation. So that was that, wasn't it? No...

V 10 "And it came to pass...day by day..."

"day by day"--She kept coming at him. She couldn't entice him, so maybe she could wear him down with constant seductive advances.

What did Joseph do at this point? Very practical model for us...

In V 10b, Joseph did 2 things:

1. Joseph resisted temptation.

V 10 "he hearkened not unto her"

We mustn't be ignorant of the temptation process. See James 1:14-15

Jm 1:14-15 "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away..."

Temptation > Lust > Enticement > Conceived > Sin > Death

Key: Make a decision to break the chain, by God's help. Don't play with temptation. Say "No!" to it when you first detect it.

Jm 4:7 "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

Notice the next practical step Joseph took...

2. Joseph avoided temptation.

V 10 "to be with her."

Watch this. Joseph not only said "No!" to the temptation, but he put as much distance as he could between himself and the potential sin. He refused to be with the woman!

Some of us here today need to follow Joseph's model.
I Th 4:3 "For this is the will of God, even your sanct, that you should abstain from..."
I Th 5:22 "Abstain from all appearance of evil."
II Tm 2:22 "Flee youthful lusts."
Prov 4:14-15, 23-27 "Enter not in the path of the wicked..Avoid...Turn...Pass away."

Application: Illust: USA Weekend, "The Secret Sins of Teens"

Young people, Joseph's example has much to say to you about your dating life. Don't get involved in a relationship with someone who's not sold out to Jesus Christ. It may be a blast now, but the bomb will drop later. Some here today are involved in an unhealthy relationship that is strangling you spiritually. You need to break it off. You need to do what Joe did and put as much distance between you and the other person as you can, before it's too late.

But the teens aren't the only ones. I'm talking to some men right now who are flirting with fire. You're getting too close to a person of the opposite sex. O men, we must fight to have eyes only for our wives!

Illust:

Having said that, when we choose to do right, don't expect the world to applaud! Things went from Bad to Worse for Joseph in Gen 39.

Tran: First he felt the blow of Rejection by his brothers. But God was real. Then he faced the test of Temptation by Potiphar's wife. Again God was real. But he soon sunk to the lowest depth of his life.

III. God was real to Joseph in his response to Humiliation (11-23).

Vv 11-12 "And it came to pass...she caught him..."

Joe hightailed it out of there as fast as he could. But in the frenzy, Potiphar's wife grabbed his outer garment. And her wicked scheming mind went to work. She fabricated a lie.

Vv 13-15 "And it came to pass..."

Potiphar's wife was some kind of woman. In one scene she is a seductive, whimsical, persistent woman, who is controlled by her passions and fantasies. In the next, she becomes an irate, aggressive, deceptive, emotional, hysterical woman.

Note: V 16--Joseph's coats keep getting him into trouble! (see 37:3)

Q: Do you know what Potiphar's wife's real problem was?

A: She was a self-centered woman. All she thought about was herself, to the point of being unfaithful to her husband, and to the point that she was willing to send an innocent man to prison.

What she does next is insulting...

Vv 16-18 "...she spoke unto him (Potiphar)..."

Think of her nerve! Having been unfaithful to her husband, she now returns to him to protect her hide! What was Potiphar's response?

Vv 19-20 "And it came to pass...his wrath was kindled..."

I'm not convinced Potiphar believed his wife totally. If he had, I wouldn't expect him to encarcerate Joseph. I'd expect him to execute him. He had the legal right in that day. After all Joseph was only a slave, a piece of property to him. But instead, he threw him in prison (a special prison reserved for political felons).

Joseph was humiliated. First he lost his freedom. Now he lost his reputation! Unjustly so. When that happens to a person, you find out if God is indeed real to him!

You say, "Joseph was a victim of some pretty bad luck!"

Q: Is there any such thing as "luck," according to the Bible?

If God is sovereign, there isn't. If God's in control, there isn't. If God is with His people, there isn't. Circumstances don't happen because of good luck or bad luck, but because of God's providence, God's sovereign care.

Illust: What about "Potluck" dinners in Baptist churches?!

Key: When Joseph was at his lowest, God was still real in his life!

Vv 21-23 "But the LORD was with Joseph..."

God did not forget Joseph. In fact, Joseph was to learn that the prison was just a step away from the throne! The dark days of prison was God's way of putting iron in his soul (Talbot).

Quote: Alex Solzhenitsyn, "It was only when I lay on rotting prison..."

Key: God uses adversity to strengthen character. (Rom 5:3-4; James 1:2-4)

Practical Lessons from Gen 39:

1. Practice the Presence of God in your life.

Joseph lived with a constant awareness of God's presence. It made all the difference in the world. Do you? If we don't, we're missing out on the heart of the Christian life. We can't avoid tragedies and temptations and humiliations in life. But we can practice the presence of God like Joseph did.

Illust:

2. Realize that the Reality of God in my life impacts others.

God was REAL in Joseph's life. Listen. Others saw it.

a) Potiphar saw it (3).

V 3 "And his master saw that the LORD was with him..."

b) The Warden saw it (23).

V 23 "The keeper...because the LORD was with him..."

I'm not saying that Potiphar and the Warden believed in the God of Joseph. Undoubtedly they worshiped the pagan gods of Egypt (Potiphar means "he whom Ra, the Sun god, has given"). They may not have believed in the God of Joseph, but they couldn't help but see the reality of His presence in Joseph.

The same goes for us.

Q: Do people know that God is REAL to you? Do they hear you give God credit for what happens in your life? Do they see God working in your life?

Illust: Woody and Frances Gilmore, after funeral for his mother, "You can sure see God in your life."

I can think of no higher compliment. I don't want people to see me, but God.

Challenge:

Q: Is God real in your life? He can be. There's only one way, though. Through a personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ.