

and appreciated his abilities. He happened to come in contact with a jailer who was not the usual crude, rough type, but an intelligent person who gave him the benefit of every opportunity. He happened to find himself in a situation - geographically, and politically, in which he could be made a Prime Minister. He was one of those persons who led a charmed life, and it was just luck, just chance.

But others will say, no, it wasn't all luck. It was Joseph himself. He got along because he did so well. He used his head, and behaved himself. He made the most of every situation. It was his own capacities and efforts that got him to the top.

You'll notice however that the writer of the story had a different answer. It wasn't luck, nor was it all Joseph's doings. He put it this way: "The Lord was with Joseph. The Lord made all that he did to prosper". In other words, the writer of the story reads the whole course of human events as the movement of God in the midst of men, and he sees in this remarkable rise of Joseph, one of God's major moves on the checkerboard of human events.

And so this brings us to this question. How do you explain the ups and the downs of life, of your own life, and the life of the world. Do you say, well it looks like chance. It's just luck. My luck is bad. I never gott the breaks, or He got the breaks. Or do you say, it all depends on me. If you're going down instead of up, is it because you haven't done well. Is that what you say? Or as you look, do you say something like this. Far be it from me to explain this or to understand it completely, yet, somehow or other, I see the movement of God in all this mystersious pattern of events. Things happen that I can't fully explain, but somehow each chapter leads into another chapter, and the story goes on, and there is through it all, the thread of divine planning.

I'm not going to answer the question, nobody can answer it for you. I leave it with you as something to think about. I will say this however, that if you can answer it the third way, you have a kind of security in life that other people do not have. But in the next and last chapter of the story of Joseph that we shall speak about next Sunday, you may have some help and guidance in the answer to that greatest of all questions about life: Is it an accident.. Does it all depend on me ? Or do all things work together for good to them that love God?

PRAYER: As we face the temptations of the world, O God, help us to find real security in Thee. Deliever us from the false security of laws and customs. And as we grow in reverence for the lives of other people, help us to grow in reverence for Thee and thy purposes for us and the whole creation. In thy name we pray. Amen

You know as well as I do that such decisions are not likely to be good ones. I think all of us are tempted to get excited about something that touches us deeply, and we often fly off the handle without considering the issues involved, and the people's background. We make snap judgments, and make decisions in great anger, and then usually after it's all over and we've cooled off, we're sorry. This isn't the time to dwell on this point, but only to issue a warning. It's a dangerous policy, and can lead us into trouble. The next time you're ~~tempted~~ burning with anger and about to make a decision, sit down and hear both sides of the story and think things through objectively and without emotion.

At any rate, the next time we see Joseph, he's back in prison. I imagine it was hard to take. Here he was being punished for something he hadn't done. But prison didn't turn out to be quite as bad as it could have been. The jailer fortunately recognized some of Joseph's good qualities, and soon he was giving Joseph responsibility, and before long he is one of the officials of the prison. The opportunity arose for him to use his wits to interpret two dreams that two of the men in the prison had been troubled by. I'm not going into the content of those dreams, but the fact is that Joseph interpreted them correctly, and in three days the men were released. Joseph himself stayed on in prison for another two years. According to the story, Pharaoh himself had a dream. He dreamed that he was standing beside a river and there came out of the river seven fat, well fed cows. And then there came seven lean, ugly, ill fed cows, and the lean cows proceeded to eat up the well fed ones. Nobody could understand what it all meant. The Pharaoh learned of Joseph's reputation for interpreting dreams, and he had him brought out of prison to the palace. Joseph stood before Pharaoh and when he heard the dream, he said:

"This is what it means. There will be in this land seven years of plenty represented by the seven well fed cows, followed by seven years of famine."

And then he went on to make the suggestion that Pharaoh appoint some intelligent man to gather the wheat and grain while it was in abundance, and store it into barns so that when the famine came the people would have enough food and to spare. The Pharaoh got the point, and he looked at Joseph and said: "You shall be my Primer Minister". There he was, the Prime Minister, thirty years old; thirteen years after he had been sold by his brothers to a passing band of merchantmen, considered dead. In less than fifteen years, he had risen from less than nothing to be the Prime Minister of the greatest Empire in the world.

CLOSING SECTION And so as we bring this section of this chapter to a close, one thing strikes us about this story and it is this. Wherever Joseph went, he always went to the top. when he went to Potiphar's house, he was soon put in charge of the entire household. When he went to prison, he was soon after made one of the prison keepers; and then when he went to Pharaoh's palace, he was soon made Prime Minister. Every set back seemed to move him forward a little more and more. And we ask ourselves, why. How is this. How to you explain this amazing rise from rags to riches?

Some will say, well Joseph was just one of the lucky ones. He got the breaks along the line. He just happened to be there ~~xxx~~ at the right moment. He happened to ~~xxx~~ be sold to a man who recognized

Joseph on the other hand refused the invitation, decisively and persistently. He said to her:

"My master has kept nothing from me except yourself, for you are his wife. How then can I commit this great crime, and sin against God"

In other words, Joseph refused because he believed himself to be in a position of trust. Potiphar had trusted Joseph with everything that he had, and before God he would not violate that trust. He refused to accept her invitation because he refused to violate the human relationship and the personal dignity that he felt for himself and for the man who was her husband and his friendly master.

I'd venture to say that this area of self restraint is one of the most confused areas in the life of modern man. I do not propose to deal with it now. I'd merely like to launch it on to the seas of your own private thoughts. I think we're living in a time when people are reacting quite violently against a restraint that was often unhealthy and insincere, and they are priding themselves on the fact that they are free personalities. I have two comments to make in this area. I realize that they are in no way adequate to cover this vast concern. I offer them as guideposts for whatever thought you may give to this. First - the person who is free, or feels free to do anything that he wants to do is never a happy person. There is no real happiness until a person is bound to some great loyalties that come to him from above. And then the other comment is this: if we are to recover the kind of restraint that people feel must be exercised in this area of life, it will be found, not so much in civil laws, or in the religious taboos which make it crime and sin, but rather in the recovery of the integrity and dignity of personal relationships, of which this particular activity is a basic part; and this dignity and integrity of personal relationships will be recovered only when we stand once again before the mighty, majestic Giver of all Life, from whom we all come and because of whom we dare not violate our relationships with any of his creatures.

BACK TO JOSEPH      But getting back now to Joseph, we find that Joseph's fortunes soon took a turn for the worse. Potiphar's wife had a trump card. In all of this she was not in an especially pleasant state of mind towards Joseph. One day she found Joseph working in the house by himself. She went over to him, and made the same proposal that she had made a hundred times, and as she did she caught his robe. Joseph once again refused the proposal, and pulled away from her, but as he did, his robe was left in her hand. She then hurriedly called in some of the other servants and in an excited tone of voice said:

"The Hebrew slave that has come into our house came into my apartment to insult me, and when I screamed for help, he fled and left his robe. Here it is."

And then when her husband came home, she told him what happened, and Potiphar, because this touched a very delicate spot in him, as it would in any man, burned in anger, and had Joseph thrown into prison.

I feel I cannot pass by this episode without offering some comment about the decisions that you and I often made in moments of anger.

## ROUGH DRAFT: JOSEPH AWAY FROM HOME

**INTRODUCTION** Last Sunday morning we began the story of Joseph, and followed it to the point where the eleven jealous brothers of Joseph sold him to a band of Ishmaelite traders. Before they did this however, they stripped him of his coat of many colors which was the symbol of their hatred of Joseph, dipped the coat in the blood of an animal and told his father that he had been killed by a wild beast. His father quite naturally believed them, and the curtain went down on a dark and tragic scene. You'll recall that we looked into some of the causes and reasons that lay behind this family tragedy. We saw only one ray of light, and that came at the end of the chapter; namely this, that whereas Jacob thought he had come to the end of the story, he had in reality only come to the end of the chapter.

**CHAPTER TWO** The second chapter might well be entitled, "Joseph Away From Home". It's the story of Joseph in Egypt. The Ishmaelites, to whom Joseph was sold, were on their way to Egypt, and soon after arriving there, they sold Joseph to a man whose name was Potiphar. Potiphar was a man of considerable wealth and prominence. He liked Joseph right away. He was an intelligent man, and recognized Joseph's superior qualities. He appreciated his talents, and certainly one of the most encouraging things that can happen to anyone is to be appreciated.

Potiphar made Joseph his personal attendant, and when he saw that Joseph was reliable and dependable, he gave him more and more responsibility. Soon he became the head of the household staff. It was a happy arrangement. Potiphar didn't have to worry about anything, and things were going well for Joseph.

Potiphar liked Joseph. So did Potiphar's wife. Joseph was young, good looking and handsome. He was also a slave, and a slave you'll recall was supposed to do everything he was told to do. He was a stranger on the scene, and a face that is not familiar sometimes has a fascination that the old familiar faces do not have. To put it as delicately as I can, Potiphar's wife made improper advances to Joseph. And she did this, not subtly in a way that Joseph might not understand. She did it directly, in a way, that Joseph could not possibly misunderstand. And she did it not once, but the story tells us, she did it day after day.

**MEANING FOR US** Now suppose we pause in the story, and as we do I come to a statement that I have put in my notes, and I hesitate to make it, and I do so with some reservation. This is the statement: I think that 50% of the young men in this country, placed in the same situation that Joseph found himself in, would accept the invitation. It may be an exaggeration. Perhaps the percentage is too large. I have no way of knowing, but I do know this that the people of today do not live under anything like the restraints that their ancestors lived under one hundred years ago. If a young man accepted the invitation of a woman like Potiphar's wife, he would probably reason it out like this: first - he would enjoy it for there's no reason why a person shouldn't enjoy himself. Second - it would satisfy his normal, natural desires, and such desires have been given to us in order to be satisfied. Third - it would harm no one, and no one need know about it. And he might add, he could do things in North Africa that he might not be so ready to do in his hometown.