

**“This Great Wickedness”**  
**Genesis 39:7-23**  
**April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017**

An eager but somewhat unscrupulous salesman was delivering a bid to an engineering firm. While the man waiting on him stepped away from the desk for a few moments, the salesman noticed a competitor’s bid on the man’s desk. But he couldn’t read the amount of the bid, as there was a juice can on top of the part of the bid that showed the total amount.

The temptation was just too great, so the salesman looked around to make sure no one was watching. He reached over to move the can to see what the competition was bidding. As he lifted the can, his heart sank as he watched thousands of BBs pour from the bottomless can and scatter across the floor!

*Who among us isn’t tempted to do what we shouldn’t?* It started this morning with the battle waking up – rather than getting out of bed with the alarm, we may be tempted to hit the snooze button – once, twice, three times – all the while justifying why we need more sleep and, by implication, less time with the Lord and His people!

And, when we did eventually crawl (or fall) out of bed, we may have looked out a window. And, the glorious sunshine and warm weather compelled us to think of all the things we could be doing instead of going to church – like mowing the grass; washing the car; swinging the golf clubs; casting the fishing pole; riding a motorcycle; going for a hike; playing ball...the list of activities tempting us to forego corporate worship is as long as our imaginations.

And, hopefully, before submitting to the temptations, we remember that when the Lord called us to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, He also called us to an active fellowship with the Church. That’s why we “*Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.*”

I would venture to guess that you know your weaknesses, especially when it comes to temptation. You probably know the kinds of things that tempt you to sin, whether that is doing something(s) you shouldn’t, or not doing something(s) you should.

The text before us today is a well-known one, if you’re even remotely familiar with the Bible. Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, was sold by his brothers to Ishmaelites who transported him to Egypt. There, Joseph was bought by Potipher, a high-ranking official in the Egyptian government, who has entrusted all of his household matters to Joseph.

As we read **Genesis 39:7-23**, notice how Joseph rebuffs temptation. And, let us endeavor to follow his lead.

**Genesis 39:7-23:**

<sup>7</sup> And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.”

<sup>8</sup> But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. <sup>9</sup> *There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

<sup>10</sup> So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her.

<sup>11</sup> But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house *was* inside, <sup>12</sup> that she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. <sup>13</sup> And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, <sup>14</sup> that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, “See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. <sup>15</sup> And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside.”

<sup>16</sup> So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. <sup>17</sup> Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, “The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; <sup>18</sup> so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside.”

<sup>19</sup> So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, “Your servant did to me after this manner,” that his anger was aroused. <sup>20</sup> Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners *were* confined. And he was there in the prison. <sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. <sup>22</sup> And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. <sup>23</sup> The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph’s* authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made *it* prosper.”

I’ve given this sermon the title “This Great Wickedness” – taking it from the words Joseph spoke to Potipher’s wife. We’ll answer five questions as we break down this text:

**Q. 1 – What is the Great Wickedness of which Joseph speaks?**

**Q. 2 – How was Joseph Tempted to this Great Wickedness?**

**Q. 3 – How did Joseph Overcome the Great Wickedness?**

**Q. 4 – How was Joseph Rewarded for Overcoming the Great Wickedness?**

**Q. 5 – What will you Do When Faced with this Great Wickedness?**

Let’s look again to verses 7-9 as we seek to answer our first question, “**What is this Great Wickedness of which Joseph speaks?**” <sup>7</sup> And it came to pass after these things that (Joseph’s) master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.” <sup>8</sup> But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. <sup>9</sup> *There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

The Great Wickedness Joseph speaks of is committing adultery with Potipher’s wife. She was married; and she was trying to get unmarried Joseph to engage in sex with her! It’s not hard to image that Potipher’s wife probably got whatever she wanted. She was a seductress – an illustration of the crafty harlot of **Proverbs 7:16-19** who said to an unsuspecting young man:

“I have spread my bed with tapestry,  
Colored coverings of Egyptian linen.

<sup>17</sup> I have perfumed my bed

With myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

<sup>18</sup> Come, let us take our fill of love until morning;

Let us delight ourselves with love.

<sup>19</sup> For my husband *is* not at home;

He has gone on a long journey.”

Adultery is a much more common sin than we may care to admit. Family therapist and psychiatrist Frank Pittman believes, “There may be as many acts of infidelity in our society as there are traffic accidents.” (Probe ministries article) And, to think that adultery isn’t somehow a problem within the confines of Christ’s church is naïve and uninformed.

Given the destruction it leaves in its wake for families, Joseph rightly refers to adultery as “this great wickedness.” But, our second question asks, “**How was Joseph tempted to this great wickedness?**” We remember that Joseph was a Hebrew slave in Egypt. Potipher was his master, and it seems he was often away from home. That put Joseph in regular contact with Potipher’s stay at home wife as he (Joseph) went about his duties.

Think about the hardships that Joseph had been through, and we get a better picture of the godly man he was able to remain in the face of great temptation. One author writes:

“Joseph knew the dysfunction of a father’s favoritism (37:3), the scorn of ten brothers’ hatred (37:4-5, 8), the betrayal of being sold for profit by those responsible for him (37:27-28), the disdains of a slave’s life as chattel (37:36, 39:1). With this as his bio, Joseph had every reason to be angry, bitter, resentful, cynical, fearful, self-serving, and self-pitying... Joseph had every human reason to find fleeting solace in an illicit embrace.” (Schmutzer, quoted in Hughes, 463)

On two occasions in today’s text (verses 7 & 12) Mrs. Potipher asked Joseph to “lie with her.” And, verse 10 reveals that this was actually a daily occurrence. Day after day, Joseph was subjected to her verbal temptations for him to commit adultery with her. But, verse 12 also shows Potipher’s wife made a physical advance toward Joseph, grabbing his clothing (the second time that he has lost his tunic!).

Back up in verse 6, we learn that Joseph was “handsome in form and appearance.” Potipher’s wife took notice, and she was determined to have him sexually. She put on the hard sell, but Joseph wasn’t biting. **So, how was he able to overcome the temptation to engage in this great wickedness?**

First, we note that Joseph refused Mrs. Potipher’s request (v. 8). Then, he reasoned with her in the remainder of verse 8 and all of verse 9. Joseph called what she wanted to do what God calls it – great, evil sin. As such, he made truth his ally. Adultery was, and is, sin against God. But, he also instructed Potipher’s wife with truth by refusing her invitations to engage in sin.

When the advances became physical, Joseph’s remedy was to get out of Dodge – he “fled and ran outside.” (v. 12)

Joseph didn’t have a New Testament at his disposal (it had yet to be lived and written in Joseph’s day!) But, what he did when faced with temptation was what the Apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the Church in Corinth (**1 Cor. 6:15-19**):

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! <sup>16</sup> Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” <sup>17</sup> But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

<sup>18</sup> Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”

Despite doing all the right things to rebuff temptation, **how was Joseph Rewarded for Overcoming this Great Wickedness?** *Did he receive a trophy for being “Most Valuable Slave”?* *Was he held up as a paragon of virtue?* *Did God free him from the bondage of slavery?* Well, no – none of the above. Joseph got prison – an innocent man sentenced to confinement in the king’s cellar!

We’ll learn more about his prison experience as we move into the next chapter. *But, what was the prison experience like for Joseph?* **Psalm 105:18** gives us a peek - “His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron...” It seemed that Joseph had once again hit rock bottom – he was confined to a pit without water by his brothers, and now he was in the king’s dungeon in Egypt.

But, like all things, this was part of God’s plan and purpose for Joseph. The two years he spent in prison (**Genesis 41:1**) were a school where Joseph would learn to wait on the Lord until it was His time to vindicate Joseph and fulfill his dreams. Away from the hustle and bustle of managing Potipher’s household and affairs, Joseph would have time to think and pray and to ponder the meaning of the two dreams God had sent him. “He would learn that God’s delays are not God’s denials.” (Wiersbe, 98)

Someone acquainted with God’s severe providence was Corrie Ten Boom. Imprisoned for helping Jews escape Nazi persecution during World War II, she once said that “There is no pit so deep enough, that (God) is not deeper still.”

How does all of this apply to us – our fifth and final question is **what will you do when faced with this great wickedness (or something similar)?**

*Is there any reason not to do the same thing Joseph did?* He **refused** temptation’s invitation. He **identified** it as a great wickedness and sin against God. He **steered clear** of giving temptation any crack to get a foot hold in his life.

It is also helpful to understand the seed bed where temptation can take root.

An article in *Enrichment* magazine asked the question, “When are you most likely to face temptation?” respondents were allowed multiple choices. Of those surveyed:

- \* 81 % said it was when they had not spent much time with God;
- \* 57% when they had not had enough rest;
- \* 45 % when life was difficult;

- \* 42% during times of change;
- \* 37 % after a significant spiritual victory.

Some have succumbed to this great wickedness – perhaps you or a loved one have fallen for the lie that adulterous relationships are healthy and necessary? You are not beyond the reach of God’s forgiveness and grace. Come home to Him – see His face humbly, forsake your sin, and receive God’s forgiveness in Christ – and go and sin no more.

We must draw near the Lord and His people; to isolate ourselves from the fellowship of light is to invite darkness to overwhelm us.

When tempted, we must learn the lesson of the dog. Anyone who has trained a dog to obey knows the scene. A bit of meat or bread is placed on the floor near the dog and the master says, “No!” The dog knows that means he must not touch it.

The well-trained dog will take his eyes off the food, because the temptation to disobey would be too great, and instead will fix his eyes on the master’s face.

This is the lesson of the dog. Always look to the Master’s face.

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Captain Allan Gardiner was a British Royal Navy officer and missionary in the late 1700’s. He went to preach the gospel to the people of Tierra del Fuego in Chile.

Because of a harsh winter, Gardiner and his companions all starved to death. Their bodies were found at the entrance to a cave. On the entrance to the cave, Gardiner had scrawled the following lines – “My soul trust still upon God.” And in his diary were found his last words – “I know not how to thank God for His marvelous loving-kindness.”

Even in the midst of such a death, God was with Allan Gardiner. May we realize, too, that He is with us, even in the midst of the direst and trying circumstances of life.