

Genesis 39

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 July 2012

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Well, we close every Sunday morning when I'm preaching with the words of benediction from number 6. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you. The Lord turn his countenance towards you and give you peace.

We pray for people, don't we? That the Lord would be with them. I hope you pray for that. We pray that the Lord would be with them. Now, why do we pray that? Think about that. Why do we pray that God would be with them? Why do we pronounce that?

The benediction. We know, don't we, if we know our Bibles at all, that God is present everywhere. The little children have been learning a word for that. The little ones. What is that word?

Do you know the little ones? What is that word? God is present everywhere. Do you remember? Not inspiration. That's another word you've learned, isn't it? What is the word? Omnipresent.

That's right. What was it, Marius? Omnipresent, isn't it? God is everywhere. There is nowhere that you can go where God is not. We know there is nowhere in the universe where God is not present.

[1 : 09] God is with, isn't he, in that sense, every human being. But when we pronounce the benediction, when we pray that God would be with you, we're not thinking there of the general presence of God, which is everywhere.

We are thinking of what the Bible describes as the covenantal presence of God. His loving, his kind presence. God's presence to help and to keep and to bless.

And that is one of the great promises in the Bible, isn't it? Before he went back to heaven, the Lord Jesus said to his people, Surely I am with you. It's a great promise, isn't it? As you go out this week. The Lord Jesus says to you, I am with you. And the promise is much older than that. Because for some years before Genesis 39, God himself had said the same, didn't he?

To Jacob's, to Joseph's father Jacob, in Genesis 28 and verse 15. He said to Jacob in his crisis of life, he says, I am with you.

[2 : 15] I am with you. I will watch over you, wherever you go. Now what does that mean? What is that referring to? Is that what we sometimes call, you know, the mountaintop experiences of life?

Times when we are tangibly and particularly conscious of God. Times of great blessing where we sense his presence.

And rejoicing, we say, when we hear the word preached, I know that God is in this place. There are those times, aren't there? Well, it certainly includes that, but that is not all. Is God with you?

And with us in our ordinary humdrum daily lives? Is God with us? In the dark times? The painful times?

Or are they the exceptions to that promise? Well, they're not exceptions, are they? Because you'll remember that when I quoted Jesus' words before his ascension, I didn't finish the quotation, did I?

[3 : 18] Because Jesus says, I am with you always to the end of the age. I am with you all the days of every day.

And he means it. Now let's look at Jacob in Genesis chapter 39. And we see that the chapter is 20 years prior to chapter 38.

It's 20 years back in time from the end of chapter 38. And Joseph has been taken back to Egypt.

Think about what it's like for Joseph at the end of 37, at the start of 39. He's far from his family, isn't he? He's far from his home.

He's in a strange and an alien and a heathen place. And verse 1, almost unemotionally says, doesn't it, he was bought from the Ishmaelites.

[4 : 19] It's very unemotional, but just imagine the horror of that for a minute. The humiliation of it. The degradation of it. We're told that slaves had to stand up on a platform.

And people came and examined them as if they were buying a horse or a cow. They'd look at the teeth to see how healthy they were. They'd feel their muscles.

And they'd see how strong the slave was, like a working animal. And then bids would be made. And Joseph would have had to stand there, perhaps naked, and be bid for like a beast.

And be bought by someone. Imagine. It's a low point in his life, isn't it? He's away from home. He's away from the promised land of Canaan. He's been bought as a slave.

And yet, what is the first thing we're told about Joseph? Verse 2. The Lord was with him. The Lord was with him. And that really is the theme of Genesis 39.

[5 : 21] In fact, there are five references in those verses. To the Lord blessing Joseph. And to the Lord being with him. And what is very interesting is when Stephen is thinking back on this passage.

When he's preaching Jesus from the story of Joseph. He gives us his summary in Acts 7, verse 9. And Stephen pulls it all together.

And he says what happened to Joseph. Him being sold to slavery. The reason behind it was the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph. They were jealous of him.

And they sold him as a slave. But why did they do that? Why were they jealous? Acts 7, verse 9 says, because God was with him. So Stephen says, by inspiration.

The great thing to remember. The great theme of these chapters. The main point. The big idea. Is that God was with him. And that is the marvellous subject we've got today.

[6 : 17] The Lord was with him. God's loving presence. In the life of a Christian. And I want to look at it from two aspects. First of all, in verses 1 to 6.

In verses 1 to 6. The Lord was with him in prosperity. The Lord was with him in prosperity. Joseph is down in the dumps.

He's down in the depths, literally. He's been kidnapped. He's been sold to Egypt. He's been bought as a slave. But at once in Genesis 39.

You begin to see, don't you, the circumstances are changing for the better. Beams of light. The Lord was with him. Are beginning to shine in on the darkness. And things are starting to improve.

So who bought him? In verse 1. Who bought him? It is an aristocrat. It is a noble man.

[7 : 16] It is one of the most powerful. One of the most influential men in the whole land of Egypt. It could have been anyone, couldn't it? It could have been a farmer from the south of Egypt. We read in verse 1.

And now Joseph had been taken to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials. The captain of the guard bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. And you can see God's hand, can't you?

In overruling the precise individual who bid for Joseph successfully. And bought him. It was no accident. It was a man who was very close to Pharaoh the ruler.

In those days, many of the slaves. And in many, many other countries as well. Slaves were divided into two groups. There were the field slaves.

And there were the house slaves. And if you were a field slave, you didn't expect to live very long. You worked extremely hard. Conditions were very poor.

[8 : 14] And basically, you were worked to death. That was what a field slave was. A house slave was the more enviable position. It was a white collar job. You kept your hands clean.

You lived in your master's house. You ate good food. You were well dressed. Your work was light. And it was interesting. So we're told in verse 2, the Lord was with Joseph. And he prospered.

And he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. There's a lot of evidence here, isn't there? That God was with him. We know it's not coincidence. We know the providence of God.

That God is working out his purposes. He wasn't sent out to make bricks. Or to get water from the Nile. Or to serve in agriculture. He was taken into the house.

And then verse 4. We found that Joseph found favors in his master's eyes. And became his attendant. He became Potiphar's butler.

[9 : 15] He became chiefs to Potiphar. He became his manservant. He became his PA. He became his special attendant. His private secretary. He was not just an ordinary servant.

But he was in a very, very privileged position. And not only so. We see in verse 4, don't we? That there's further promotion. And he, Potiphar, put him in charge of his household.

And the administration of the whole palace guard. The captain of the palace guard was given to him. Was given to Joseph. And then he rises even higher, doesn't he? In verse 4. He entrusted to

his care everything he owned.

So do you see the rise of Joseph? Suddenly, he becomes Potiphar's estate manager. His chief executive officer.

He is second in command. He's in charge of all his possessions. Not only in the home, but in the fields. Now that probably took 10 years.

[10:21] 10 years. For these things to happen. Takes about three verses in our Bible, doesn't it? About 10 years. It didn't happen just in a few weeks.

If you compare the chronology, it did take about 10 years. But here is a remarkable advance, isn't it? He's on the fast track. Here is a young man who is a slave.

Being bought. And 10 years later. He is in charge of all the property. Of one of the most important noblemen in Egypt and the world. Here is prosperity indeed, isn't it?

And it's a pattern. Again and again we see in the Bible. Humiliation. It's changed to exaltation. Now why did Joseph get on so well?

Well we know, don't we, from the rest of the story. If you know the story at all. Joseph is actually a very gifted man. He's honest. He's intelligent. He's able.

[11:23] He's hard working. And no doubt, Joseph adapted quickly to his new country. He is well built.

And handsome. Handsome. I was on a camp once. And taking a teenage Bible study. And the boy reading didn't read particularly well. And said, Joseph was well built and had some.

And that was the end of the Bible study. As you can imagine for the next half an hour they mocked him mercilessly. But that was Joseph. He was well built and he had some. He was handsome. He was bright.

He was intelligent. He learned the language. He understood the culture. The way of life. That is true. But actually the Bible tells you where the prosperity came from. Look at verse 2. The Lord was with him.

The Lord was with him. And he prospered. Look at verse 3. When his master saw. That the Lord was with him. And that the Lord gave him success.

[12:23] In everything he did. And it was the Lord's presence with him. That was the secret of his prosperity. Even the heathen. The non-Christian they recognised that.

Potiphar, his master, was a pagan. He was a heathen. His name comes from the name Ra. Which is one of the main Egyptian gods. The name means he who Ra has given.

Ra was the sun god. He's one of the main gods of Egypt. And Potiphar means servant of the sun god. And yet we read, don't we, in verse 3.

That this man, his master. Saw that the Lord Yahweh. The covenant god was with. Joseph. And the Lord, Yahweh. The God of Israel.

Gave him success in everything he did. Joseph apparently spoke to his master. Joseph wasn't shy about his faith. About his religion. And Potiphar saw.

[13:21] And heard. And said. And it is Joseph's god. Who is making Potiphar so prosperous. And more than that. We're told in verse 5, aren't we?

We're told in verse 5. That the blessing of the Lord was everything. On everything that Potiphar had. Both in the house. And in the field. Not only.

Joseph prospered. But Potiphar prospered. But Potiphar prospered. And this heathen, pagan Egyptian. Became richer. Because of the God of this young Hebrew.

God blessed Potiphar for Joseph's sake. Do you remember the great promise given. The covenant promise given to his great grandfather Abraham.

I will bless those. Who bless you. You will be a blessing Abraham. Here is the fulfilment of this promise. Joseph is not only blessed himself.

[14:24] But he is a blessing to Potiphar. It is foreshadowing, isn't it? It is foreshadowing what God is going to do for Egypt. What did Joseph do for Potiphar?

Potiphar is blessed because Joseph is there. And the whole land is going to be blessed, isn't it? Because Joseph is there. He is pointing forward, isn't he?

He is pointing forward to Jesus Christ. To the ultimate fulfilment of the covenant promise of Genesis 12 verse 3. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

And before we reach the end of Joseph's story. We will see that all the peoples of the earth are blessed through Joseph. God was with him in prosperity. And that means that you and I too can

anticipate this.

It doesn't always happen. It really doesn't. Some of God's people don't prosper in the world. But I want to say to you, it often does happen.

[15 : 24] And it often happens with us. As it did with Joseph. That the Lord is using your abilities and your gifts. And your hard work and your conscientiousness.

To bring success. And to bring prosperity. And some of you have enjoyed. Some of you do enjoy that prosperity. You've gone on well, haven't you?

In your chosen careers. You have advanced. You've been promoted. And I say to you, that is a sign. And that is an evidence of the Lord's blessing on your life.

The Lord gave him success in everything he did. You do well in your exams at school. Or at college. It is the Lord, isn't it, that gives you that success.

You do well in your career. You advance. You get promoted. It is the Lord that gives you success. Success. He is with you. And this prosperity is an evidence of his presence.

[16 : 25] And you also may be a blessing to your family. To others. To your family. You may be a blessing in your workplace. In your community. By God's blessing. You are somebody who is valued.

Many of you are. And you are appreciated. And people think highly of you. And they often think well of you. And we need to remember.

This is the beautiful balance of the Bible, isn't it? We have seen in the last two chapters. Horrifically. How Christians are disliked. And how Christians are marginalised.

And how Christians are hated. And persecuted. But we have got to realise. That isn't the whole story. That is not the whole story. Many of you here. By God's mercy.

Have got a good reputation in work. That is something to give thanks for. People like having you around. They feel that you contribute to the team. And sometimes, aren't we?

[17 : 23] We are made an eternal blessing to people. The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptians. Because of Joseph. And isn't it exciting.

As you think of this week. Of your school. Of your university. Of your office. Of your home. And the Lord blessing there. Because of you. You are a real asset to them.

And it is wonderful. To have this presence of God. In our lives. And just because. The fanatics. And nut jobs. Of the health and wealth.

Movement. Who say that every Christian. Will be wealthy. And will be successful. And will be healthy. That is obviously nonsense. Just because of that.

We don't need to go to the other extreme. Do we? And deny the biblical truth. That often. Christians are wealthy. And are successful.

[18 : 23] In this life. And that is because God has blessed them. And the blessing of God. Even extended to Joseph's looks. And physique. Look at verse 6. Verse 6.

He's well built and handsome. Isn't he? He's a good looking fella. But in fact actually. That didn't prove to be much of a blessing at all.

To this. In fact. That leads us to the next troublesome section. And so a word of encouragement. John Calvin gives. A word of encouragement. To those of us who look in the mirror.

And if it's a full length mirror particularly. We say oh dear. Don't we? Or we look in the mirror in the morning. We say oh. Good grief. Listen to what Calvin says. Whereas elegance of form.

Was an occasion of great calamity. To holy Joseph. Let each one of us learn to be content. With his own lot. Joseph had elegance of form.

[19 : 19] Didn't he? But it was a problem. And it was a temptation. And it got him into trouble. So if you haven't got elegance of form this morning.

And looking out. There are not many. But. Cheer up. And be thankful. Because it saves you doesn't it? It saves you from many dangers.

So children. Isn't it? We often want to be the best looking in our class. The prettiest. But actually we need to realise. That it is that blessing.

That got Joseph into many troubles. And so don't spend your life. Wishing you were good looking. The Lord was with Joseph in prosperity. Let's look at verses 7 to 20.

And let's see. The Lord was with Joseph in temptation and suffering. The Lord was with Joseph in temptation and suffering. It's interesting isn't it? If you look in dictionaries. If you look in encyclopedias.

[20 : 15] You look online. Ancient engravings and inscriptions. The Egyptians of Egyptian women have come down to us. And they are often shown Egyptian women as drunk and shameless and promiscuous.

And Potiphar's wife is no exception to that. It's interesting. The Bible gives her no name. She is not honoured with a name in the Bible. And this Egyptian noble woman is immoral, shameless and promiscuous.

And she sets her sights, doesn't she, to seduce this handsome young guy. And it is a very powerful temptation which Joseph faces. Joseph is a normal, red-blooded young man.

He's been lonely. Joseph has been single for many years. And this is natural. This is a normal desire that she is appealing to.

It is not something perverted in itself. It is God implanted. We are sexual beings, aren't we? And Joseph is away from home. He is away from constraints and limitations. He is no father to watch over him.

[21 : 24] He is living in a very wicked culture where immorality is the norm. And she is a very influential, powerful woman. And if he does what she wants, it may be of great help to him in his career.

If he angers her, well, it may cause great harm to his career. And the temptation comes not once, but over and over and over again. Look at verse 10.

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day after day, she's trying to wear him down. And then there's this perfect opportunity.

She finally captures him in the house in verse 11, where nobody's there. Nobody's home. None of the household servants are inside. Nobody is there.

Nobody is watching. And at the end, there is this overwhelming pressure. Look at verse 12. She caught him by his cloak and said, Come to bed with me.

[22 : 25] Come to bed with me. But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. That phrase in the middle of verse 12, Come to bed with me.

It's just two words. And they are not very polite. You can guess them, I expect. You can guess them. Here is a very, very powerful temptation.

And when Joseph refuses this man's lust, Well, love turns to rage, doesn't it? One poet says, Heaven has no rage, Like love to hatred turned, Nor hell a fury, Like a woman scorned.

And here is a woman scorned. And in an instant, She turns viciously on this young man.

And she tries to destroy him. Joseph had not said anything about this. Perhaps he wanted to cover her shame. Perhaps he wanted her to stop and leave him alone.

[23 : 31] Perhaps he wanted to protect her in some way. But she turns his silence against him. And she calls in the household servants. Look at verse 12. Look at the subtlety.

And the viciousness. And even the racism that is here. She says, This Hebrew. This Hebrew. Verse 14. It's a racist term.

This Hebrew was brought to us. Do you see what she does? She classes herself with them, doesn't she? We are all together. I am one of you. I am like you, the servants.

But he is not one of us. He is a foreigner. He is an outsider. This foreigner. This alien. This immigrant. She says, I screamed. She knows perfectly well, doesn't she?

There is nobody in the house. There was nobody in the house. Nobody could have heard her.

Nobody could check her story. Nobody could contradict her. She says, I screamed and I screamed.

[24 : 30] And note the subtle change in words in verse 13. She says, when she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of her house.

She called her servants. Look, she said to him. This Hebrew has come to us to make sport of us. He came in here to sleep with me. Verse 12.

That's different, isn't it? In verse 12. She caught him by his cloak. So verse 12. She pulled it off him. But in verse 13.

He took it off himself. And left it beside me. It is vicious. It's clever. It's believable.

And it's slanderous. And she repeated it to her husband. You see it in verses 17 to 18. And then we're told in verses 19 to 20. When his master heard this story.

[25 : 27] His wife told him saying, this is how your slave treated me. He burned with anger. He burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison. The place where the king's prisoners were confined.

Psalm 105 says. Of Joseph. They bruised his feet with shackles. And his neck was put in irons. He was chained by the throat to a prison wall.

And his feet were twisted into iron shackles. What a fall from prosperity. One morning he woke up as the chief executive officer. One morning he woke up as the master's estate manager.

And the next morning he woke up chained by the neck to a torture chamber. Ten years of faithfulness. Ten years of obedience. Ten years of hard work and responsibility.

And it goes like that. And I'm guessing. But I think the worst of it for Joseph is him thinking, what does Potiphar think?

[26 : 34] He thinks I let him down, doesn't he? Potiphar thinks I betrayed him. Potiphar thinks I was unfaithful to him. And yet all the time I was loyal and true.

The pain of an unjust accusation. The pain of being accused of something that you have not done. And you are not guilty of. How can you say the Lord is with Joseph there?

How can we say the Lord is with Joseph? Well. God preserved Joseph. God preserved Joseph. And God kept him faithful.

And God kept him pure. And God kept him holy. And God kept him from sinning. And so let me say to you from a Christian perspective.

It doesn't matter if we go to prison. It doesn't matter if you lose your prosperity. It doesn't matter if you are falsely accused. If God keeps you from sin.

[27 : 38] And if God keeps us true to himself. And if God is faithful. Matthew Henry says. It is better to lose a good cloak.

Than a good conscience. The Lord was with him. And the Lord is with Joseph. And in fact he is isn't he? He is a case book study of how to resist temptation. We could go.

We could spend several sermons on this. But the first thing you read in verse 7. Is you read when temptation came to Joseph. He refused it. He refused it.

And he said I am not going there. I am not doing that. He is the blessed man of Psalm 1 isn't he? He will not listen to the counsel.

Of the ungodly. And what some people would have used as an excuse. He uses as a reason not to sin. Verse 8. He says. My master does not concern himself with anything in the house.

[28 : 40] Everything he owns he is entrusted to my care. His master wasn't there. His master wasn't watching. A wicked man would have said. Well here is the perfect opportunity isn't it? To have an affair with the wife.

Joseph says. This man trusts me. This man has been kind to me. This man has given to me a responsibility. I can't betray him. And he appeals to this woman's conscience.

If she had a conscience. And so he says in verse 9. No one is greater than this house. Than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me. Except you.

Because you are his wife. And again in verse 9. He calls it as it is. Doesn't he? He calls her proposition.

By its proper name. He says it is wickedness. He says it wasn't recreational sex. It wasn't a wonderful affair.

[29 : 36] It wasn't just a bit of fun. He says it is a wicked thing. It is a wicked thing. It is such a wicked thing. She didn't call it that.

She would have said. Joseph you are far from home. And you are entitled to a relationship. Like everyone else. You have got needs Joseph. And I am not fulfilled by my husband. My husband does not understand me.

No says Joseph. It is a wicked thing. And God is more real isn't he? God is more real to Joseph. Than anything else. So he says to me gloriously.

How could I do such a wicked thing. And sin against God. He is conscious of God's presence. And he takes precautions.

Doesn't he? Verse 10. Day after day after day. He refuses to be with her. He avoids her. He stays away from her. If he sees her in the building. He goes out of the building. If she is in one room.

[30 : 38] He goes to another room. He does his utmost. To stay as far away as he can. And when it comes to the crisis. He leaves his coat in her hand. And runs out of the house.

I have a friend. Who works in the city. And was struggling with temptation. With a girl in the office. And he has recently left his job. Because he said he couldn't cope with the temptation anymore.

That is to be applauded isn't it? We can expand on this wonderful story.

How to resist temptation. But the Lord was with Joseph. And Matthew Henry says this. He says Joseph's escape. Was as great an instance of divine power. As the deliverance from the three. In the fiery furnace. Do you remember the three? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They were thrown into the fire. And yet they came out unharmed. And we say that is a miracle. But Genesis 39. [31 : 34] Is a miracle isn't it? A healthy young man. In those circumstances. With that situation. And this temptation. And he comes out unharmed. And it's a miracle.

The Lord was with him. And I can't prove this. But I think as I've studied this. I think even in his sentence. The Lord is with him.

My guess. Is that Potiphar actually didn't believe his wife. Am I surprised you? The Bible is deliberately ambiguous isn't it? Do you see that verse? Potiphar burned with anger.

It doesn't say who he was angry about. Perhaps. There is no way in my opinion. That a slave who tried to rape his master's wife. Would have been put in prison. I think that's very unlikely.

He would have been tortured to death instantly. And he's put into the king's prison. The royal prison. The breast prison. Best prison. I think Potiphar knew perfectly well.

[32 : 33] That his wife was an immoral liar. But he's faced with a very public situation isn't he? And all the servants know about it. And he had to lose this good servant.

This faithful, loyal, able servant. It's a great contrast isn't it? To Judah in the previous chapter. Do you remember last week? That dark chapter?

Well what a note of hope there is. Last Sunday the world invaded the chosen people. And the church compromised with the world. But chapter 39 says there is hope. And God is saying I can keep you holy.

And how many people have been helped by Joseph's example? How many thousands of us have been? How many young guys have memorized that verse? How can I do such a wicked thing? And sin against God? It's a great verse to memorize isn't it? And some of you know this temptation don't you? You do know it. You face it.

[33 : 33] You do. And God can help you through it. Now why do you face that temptation?

Why did Joseph face this temptation? One writer says when all you have is sunshine. All you get is a desert. That's a good coach.

Because we need the hard times. We need the clouds to bring fruitfulness. Think of this. Think about if Joseph had never gone to prison.

He would never have been in the palace. What is going to happen in the prison? Who is he going to meet in the prison? He's going to meet the servants of Pharaoh. And this is going to be God's way for him to meet Pharaoh.

And to work for Pharaoh. And if he had never been sent to prison. He would have continued as Potiphar's steward. Possibly for the rest of his life. And this is God's way of lifting him up to a greater honor and grateful usefulness.

[34 : 36] And when God casts us down for faithfulness to him. When we suffer in some way for faithfulness to him. It may be that God is preparing you. For greater usefulness to lift you higher.

To give us something better than what we have before. We can identify with Joseph can't we? He lived 4,000 years ago. But we can identify him.

But it's not just. Because Joseph's experiences are typical of life. That he's in the Bible. Because this passage is typical of Jesus. Just think about it for a moment.

Jesus is the favored son isn't it? This is my son with whom I'm well pleased the father says. And he comes from the presence of his father. To a new place.

And he takes the form of a servant. Does that remind you of anyone? That he lived as a servant. And the people around him.

[35 : 39] They see that he's different. And they respect him. And he grows in favor with God and with man. And then he's tempted. He's hugely tempted.

But he does not fall. And then he is falsely accused. Of something he never did. And he is condemned though he's innocent. And he's put into the darkness of suffering.

And God is going to bring him. Out of that darkness. And lift him higher than he ever was before. The Lord was with him. And so the Bible speaks to you today doesn't it?

It speaks to you and I. That in times of prosperity. Which many of us are going through. Let us never forget. That our prosperity is due to the Lord's blessing. As a blessing. And it is telling us.

In times of temptation. And suffering. The prison may be dark. And a sense of injustice. May be very keen.

[36 : 40] But look at how verse 20. Merges into verse 21. But while Joseph. Was there in the prison. The Lord was with him.

And next week we will see how God was with Joseph in prison. But you are able to see how God is with you. In your prison long before that. Let's sing.

Thank you.