

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

⁸ But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹⁶ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison,²¹ the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. ²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. (NIV84)

Theme: Lessons from Joseph:

1. Every sin is against the Lord.
2. How to avoid sin—flee from it!
3. We may face persecution for obeying God
4. The Lord will be with us in every aspect of our lives

What would you be willing to give up for something you love or believe in? Would you give up your time, like many athletes do as

they train? What about your life, like many soldiers put on the line for their country? Would you be willing to give up your job, your family, or maybe even your health for anything?

Would you give up a decade of your life? What if you knew that you'd become rich and powerful, but you would have to give up the prime of your life, in order to get it, would you do it? What if you didn't know any of that? What if you knew that if you did what was right you'd probably get in trouble, and maybe be thrown in jail—would you still do what is right?

That is what happened with Joseph. Today, we learn many lessons from his life.

Joseph was the favorite son from his father's favorite wife. Jacob's other sons were jealous of him. So one day, when Joseph was 17 years old, he went to check on his brothers, they attacked him and threw him in a dry cistern. Many of them had planned on killing him, but one of his oldest brothers, Judah, convinced the brothers to sell him into slavery instead—that way they wouldn't have blood on their hands and they could pocket a little bit of money for themselves. So that is what they did—they sold him into slavery to a band of merchants on their way to Egypt.

Joseph ended up at the house of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guards in Egypt. The Lord was with Joseph and greatly blessed him. Everything Joseph did, the Lord made prosper. Soon Potiphar realized that Joseph was completely reliable and that he could trust in him to do his job. So he put Joseph in charge of his entire house.

But then Potiphar's wife noticed how attractive and well-built Joseph was. She began to command him to go to bed with her. So here is the wife of his master, commanding Joseph to have sex with her. Joseph refused for two main reasons; he said, **No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?**

Joseph was entrusted to everything his master owned. Potiphar paid no attention to him and everything that was under his care. So why would he risk all of that by sleeping with his master's wife? But the other reason why Joseph refused to sleep with her is more important, which is one of the lessons we can learn from Joseph: she wasn't his

wife, she was married to his master, not him. And since any sex outside of marriage is contrary to God's Word he refused. Sinning against the Lord in such a way wasn't even an option in his eyes. He realized that every sin, even sins against the sixth commandment are also sins against the first commandment. So if he were to sleep with her he would be sinning against the Lord who commands us to obey his sixth commandment.

And notice how Joseph viewed the sins of sexual immorality—he called it a wicked thing. That is how he viewed going against God's Word. How do you consider that sin of sex outside of marriage? We see it all the time on T.V. and in movies. It is the norm for people of our society—you are expected to do it and if you don't you are looked upon as strange and weird. We are so accustomed to it that we may not look at it as if it were wicked, and we may even engage in such sinful practices. But as we saw last week, those who continually commit this sin of sexual immorality are wicked and will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Joseph wanted nothing to do with Potiphar's wife; but she was bound and determined to sleep with him. So one day, while no other men were in the house for whatever reason, she grabbed him and again commanded Joseph to sleep with her. Joseph refused and ran away, leaving behind his coat in her arms that she grabbed as he ran away. What a good example we can learn from Joseph! Here was a very real temptation to sin, and he probably wouldn't have been caught. But it didn't matter, he couldn't do such a wicked things—so he fled, he ran away from the temptation. He removed himself from the situation so he wouldn't be tempted to do something that went against God's Word. And he even left behind his coat. He didn't care about his possessions. He would have rather lost everything than sin against the Lord—so he fled and never looked back.

What can we learn from Joseph? To remove ourselves from any and all temptation! That certain T.V. show or movie leads you to lust, then you shouldn't watch it! Being with a certain person really tempts you to sin against the sixth commandment, then you should avoid being alone with that person. Being alone in front of your computer tempts you to visit some websites of ill-repute, then get off the computer and go do something else—sleep, workout, or best yet: read the Bible.

The point is, flee from sin—each and every temptation we face, we should flee from it—and not just from sins against the sixth commandment, but from each and every sin. We pray to God in the sixth petition to “lead us not into temptation.” And so therefore we know that we ought to do all that we can to avoid temptation, to flee from it. Instead of going toward it, embracing it, or maybe even moving in with it like we so often do; we should do all we can to avoid the temptation to sin—flee from it. That is what Jesus was saying in Mark 9 when he says that if your foot or hand or eye causes you to sin you should cut it off or pluck it out, for it is better for you to be lame, crippled, and blind and make it to heaven, than to go to hell. In other words, do everything you can to avoid sin since sin leads to eternal death. That is what Joseph did, and that is we are Christians strive to do.

But, what happened to Joseph? Potiphar's wife turned on him—if he wasn't going to let her have him, than she was going to make his life miserable. So she came up with a plan: after Joseph ran away from her she called for help and made up a story that Joseph had tried to rape her, which is what she means by “making sport” of her. She claimed that she screamed for help so he fled but as he left he grabbed his cloak, which corroborated her story.

It was a classic case of she said, he said. Potiphar trusted Joseph, but it was the word of a slave against the word of his wife. Potiphar has no choice but to do something with Joseph. He ended up throwing Joseph into prison—and there in the jail of Pharaoh's prisoners—worse than prisons today, but not exactly a dungeon, is where Joseph spent many years.

What was Joseph's reward from doing what was right and fleeing from sin? Persecution—pain, torment, loneliness, and so on. God never promises that our lives will be easy if we simply obey his word. In fact, the opposite is true. Look at our gospel for today, where Jesus says that we follow him we must be willing to deny ourselves and take up our crosses. In other words, if we are Christians than we must expect to suffer on account of Christ.

This cross may come at the hands of others. No matter what they say, unbelievers do not like the teachings of Christ, and many despise the way we live our lives. Persecution can take place in many different forms. Perhaps you might be thrown in jail for doing what is right or

refusing to do what is wrong like Joseph. Some are put to death year after year because of their faith in Christ like Stephen and the Apostles. In some countries like China, it is illegal for a foreigner to spread the gospel—those that do risk being kicked out of the country or thrown in jail. Persecution can take place when a group decides to sue a congregation or school for its religious beliefs and practices as is happening to a WELS church and school in Wisconsin. Maybe you won't be able to get a new job because you insist on being able to worship on Sundays, maybe you lost out on that promotion, or your friends don't want to hang out with you as often, or family don't feel comfortable around you anymore because of your faith. We could go on, but you get it. We will face persecution of different sorts for obeying God and refusing to do what is wrong. As Jesus told his disciples, **if the world hates you, remember that it hated me first.**

There is one more important lesson we can learn today from Joseph's life. Moses writes, **while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.** Eventually, just as Potiphar did, the warden put Joseph in charge of the entire prison. He didn't pay any attention to whatever was under Joseph's care because he knew that Joseph was trustworthy and that the Lord would bless his work. But that's not where it ends for Joseph. The Lord was with him even more. Eventually the chief cupbearer and the chief baker angered Pharaoh and they were put in prison. Potiphar, who must have had an inkling that Joseph and not his wife was telling the truth, put them under Joseph's watch in the prison. They both had dreams, which Joseph interpreted, by a gift from the Lord. Two years later Pharaoh himself had two dreams, and again with the help of the Lord, he interpreted those dreams as well, which were about seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe famine. And as a result Joseph became second in command of all of Egypt. He collected and stored excess grain for seven years and then sold it during the years of famine—gaining much wealth, animals, and property of the Egyptian government.

But something more important happened—the famine hit Canaan too, where Joseph's father and brothers and their families were living. Through Joseph God saved his chosen nation, still in its infancy. As Joseph told his brothers, **You intended to harm me, but God**

intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. They would move then to Egypt and live there for 400 years. And under the protection of the Egyptians, even while they eventually became slaves, God caused that nation to thrive and prosper, making them a people numbering over two million. So God used evil for good. He was with Joseph, and used the cross he had to bear to save many lives—to save his people from whom Christ, the Savior of the world, would come. And he does the same for us. He promises to be with us and to take care of us. He has not left us all alone to fend for ourselves, but is watching over us and will guard and protect us. And by the work of that Promised Savior, he saved us from sin and death, and gives us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He will strengthen our faith in him as we turn to his world during difficult times. And no matter what happens in our lives—no matter what persecutions we face, no matter how we suffer for our faith, the Lord will make it turn out for our good—not necessarily for our lives here on earth, but for our eternal well-being! As Paul says in Romans 8, **we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.** And so whenever we face persecution of any kind, we find comfort and encouragement in the Lord, who is always with us and will make everything turn out for our good.

What would you be willing to give up for doing what is right and refusing to do what is wrong? Joseph was willing to give up everything. And thus, so are we. But even if we have to give up our jobs, freedom, or even our lives, we have nothing to fear. For the Lord is with us just as he was with Joseph. And no matter what happens, the Lord is in control and he will make everything turn out for our eternal well-being. Amen.