



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 39: 1-23

“Joseph, Tested and Triumphant”

TRANSCRIPT

If you have your Bibles with you, I hope you do have them, turn with me to Genesis chapter 39. Remember in Genesis chapter 37, the story of Joseph relates the continuation of the story of Jacob, but Joseph is the character around who most of the story from now on gathers that began in chapter 37, there was interruption of the story of Judah and Tamar in chapter 38, and now the story concerning Joseph is picked up again by Moses and we read in verse of 1 of Genesis chapter 39.

“Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. And the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge.

And it came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the

Lord’s blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. So he left everything he owned in Joseph’s charge; and with him around he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.”

Some have thought that the last statement except the food which he ate is a statement that had to do with certain ceremonies that the Egyptians observed with reference to food, certain food laws and requirements. Others have said that simply everything was put in the hand of Joseph and the only thing that part of our concern, which was the food that he ate in the house.

“Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And it came about after these events that his master’s wife looked with desire at Joseph, and said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused and said to his master’s wife, ‘Behold, with me around, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in the house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?’ And it came about as she spoke to Joseph day after day that he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me!’ And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, she called to the men of her household and said to them, ‘See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. And it came about, ‘When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed that he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside.’ So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with these words, ‘The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to

me to make sport of me; and it happened as I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled outside.

Now it came about when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, ‘This is what your slave did to me,’ that his anger burned. So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.”

From all that we can learn it would seem that under similar circumstances, Joseph would have been put to death. There may be some indication by this that Potiphar was not completely certain of the testimony of his own wife. Verse 21,

“But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. And the chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.”

The subject for this morning in our study of Genesis chapter 39 is Joseph tested and triumphant. When we think of Genesis chapter 39, most of us who are familiar to some extent with the Book of Genesis, think of this as one of the truly great chapters on the subject of how to overcome temptation, and we think also of temptation as one of the great tests of life and character.

Oscar Wilde once said that he could resist anything but temptation. [Laughter] This past few weeks I have been looking over a book that was written, I believe last year, entitled, *Unhappy Secrets of the Christian Life*, by two young men, Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford and in this book if you might expect from the title there is a chapter on

temptation. It is entitled, I think very aptly, “The Squeeze” and in the course of the discussion, this chapter is written by Mr. Stafford.

He says that temptation can be a physical object that you encounter. Temptation is a beautiful woman you can easily turn into an object instead of a person by letting her body preoccupy your thoughts. Temptation is a piece of pie when you are trying to lose weight. Temptation is a pornographic magazine. Temptation is too much change returned by a cashier. And then temptation is a pressure situation. And he speaks about certain pressure situations as being illustrations. Temptation is when your boss jumps on your back and you feel like lashing out at him or her. Temptation is when you are in a group of strangers who are laughing and having a good time among themselves and you feel like creeping away and feeling sorry for yourself. Well, that’s no particular temptation for me, but it is evidently for him.

Temptation comes with pressure situations. Temptation again under another subject is a voice in your head suggesting, “You are worthless, why try?” Temptation says, if they treat you like that, you ought to treat them the same way, they deserve it. Temptation says, “What difference does it make if you foul things one more time and so on?”

Now many of you are not troubled by these forms of temptation, but nevertheless in life you are tempted. There are different sources of temptation, if not different kinds of temptations, and there are different methods of meeting temptation.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, in a sermon that he preached many years ago that I heard and which he has incorporated into many of his works, has suggested that since temptation comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil we are to listen to what the Bible has to say about how to meet the struggles that come to us from the world, the flesh, and the devil, and if we do, then we will understand how to meet temptation and he says that so far as the tests that come from the world are concerned.

Well, Paul in Romans chapter 12 and verse 2 has a word for that because Paul says, “Be not conformed to this world, but by the renewing of your mind, be transformed so that the way to meet the tests that come to us from the world is nonconformity to the world. And then he also speaks of tests that come from the source of the devil, and that suggested to him the text, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you,” so that tests that come to us from the devil are to be met by resistance.

But when we come to tests from the flesh, Paul has several words on this. He says, “Flee youthful lusts,” and even more directly, “Flee fornication,” so that tests that come from the lusts of the flesh are to be met by flight. And so we can think of nonconformity with reference to the world, resistance with reference to the devil, and flight with reference to the lusts of the flesh, we will have the divine solutions to temptation.

Sometimes, we fail to realize that temptation is not only necessary, but it is desirable. Now of course, no one wants to be tested at points of weakness, but nevertheless it is a necessary thing and it’s a desirable thing. We read in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12 that if we expect to live godly in Jesus Christ, we shall experience persecution. But we also know that it is a desirable thing.

James says blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he has tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him, so that the blessings of life flow out of experiences of temptation when we endure. In fact, James has another word in the opening part of that chapter -- that was about verse 12 -- but he has a word in verse 2 that pertains very directly toward to this as well. He says consider it all joy my brethren when you encounter various trials. So, temptation is not something that we should look at as being a useless kind of thing that we must endure, but it is an experience from which we are to grow.

One thing you learn from reading literature is that dramatists and novelists who make it their business to give accurate representations of human life proceed from the

understanding that there is a kind of plot in the human life. And they have learnt that in order to make a plot interesting, to make a life interesting, one must expect that life to encounter certain situations in which, in the situation there is possibility for the true nature of that being to be revealed about whom the story is concocted. And the same is true in life. If we lived through our lives without any tests, without any temptations, without any struggles, without any types of situation that enable us to really see what we are deep down within, life would be a very dull and insipid thing. And this is one of the reasons why we face temptation, why we face trials, its God’s way of letting us see truly who we are and also the stuff of which we are made.

So we want to look at temptation in the light of the divine word. Blessed is the man who falls into various trials. And blessed is the man that endures temptation for when he has tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promises to those that love Him. Therefore we look at the trials that face us as things that are desirable and so far as they are means by which we may grow, by which we may learn ourselves, and by which we may as James says, “Be prepared for receiving the crown of life, which the Lord promises to them that love Him.” So we count it all joy when we fall into various trials and tests.

Now nevertheless in spite of all of that, the trials and tests are not very nice when we are in the midst of them, and of course in Joseph’s case that surely was the situation. The opening six verses of chapter 39 of the Book of Genesis detail for us the picture of Joseph as the trusted slave. This chapter incidentally as the commentators have pointed out is a rather symmetrical chapter, and it’s designed to stress as we have said in our initial study of Joseph, the sovereignty of God in the life of a man, because you can see that when Joseph is sold into captivity in Egypt, it is the sovereign Lord that brings him to the place of responsibility in the house of Potiphar, the captain of the bodyguard.

And then later on when Joseph is thrown into jail, it is the sovereignty of God that sole works in Joseph’s life that he becomes the one who has the supreme responsibility in

the jail. And being under the chief jailer, Joseph by the sovereignty of God becomes his right hand man. So it’s a chapter in which we have a very symmetrical presentation of things in such a way that when we get through we realize that God is sovereign in the affairs of men and He works constantly in the lives of his saints.

Now I gather that that means that we are to look into our lives in that way too, and if we do not look at them in that way, we shall miss some of the exciting things in the Christian life, so Christians you are to look into your life as a life that is guarded and directed by the sovereign control of our triune God. Now that ought to make all of our lives different.

Now Joseph’s situation is described in the first verse, now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. The Hebrew text says as for Joseph, we had just been talking about Judah and Tamar, and so now he returns to the subject of chapter 37 and verse 36 by saying, now as for Joseph, he had been taken down to Egypt and Potiphar an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh. The word translated officer in verse 1 is an interesting word. It is the Hebrew word, *çariyç*, which originally meant a “eunuch” and many feel it means that heir. That is, he was a eunuch of Pharaoh. It was the custom incidentally for men who were in positions of authority in lands, like kings and princes, to have men who had been castrated as their right hand men, because they would not have the temptation to steal their position by means of a military coup like others, and so they had these men, these eunuchs around them for their own personal protection.

Now Potiphar is described as an Egyptian officer. That word means “eunuch.” It is possible philologically that the word came to mean simply an officer; that is the idea of the eunuch, the one who had been castrated may have been lost from it. Because we know that Potiphar was a married man; however, it is a very debatable thing, but it’s possible that he still was, because it’s possible that he was married because this woman liked the position and the authority and also the financial position that he undoubtedly enjoyed as the head of the KGB of Egypt, because it says that he was the captain of the

bodyguard, which means the captain of the executioners. So he was a man who had a very responsible position, the right hand man of Pharaoh and you can understand a woman who wanted position and money might be willing to marry a man who was a eunuch, and that may throw some light on the temptation that she posed to Joseph later on. She may have been more inclined toward adultery by virtue of the situation in which she was living. We cannot be certain of that however, and that is pure speculation. The Bible unfortunately does not give us a precise word on the point, but that is the meaning of that word originally: an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh that is a eunuch, the captain of the executioners, who had bought him from the Ishmaelites, and who had taken him into his house.

Now the success of Joseph is described in verse 2 and the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. Wycliffe in his old English version says, “For he became a successful man, now he was a lucky fellow.” I just wonder if we were suddenly transported back into the days of Wycliffe, would we even understand what people were talking about when they were using the English language. He was a lucky fellow, but the force is not what we would think of by “lucky fellow.” It means that he was prosperous, he was a successful man, he was a man who had made some achievement, humanly speaking in his position as the personal servant of Potiphar. It is not status so much as it is achievement that is meant by, so he became a successful man. It was the Lord who was responsible ultimately, but Joseph was a successful man.

Now the cause of this is obviously the character of Joseph and also his work. For we read in verse 3, “Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.” So here is a young man, and he is a young man who has been living in the presence of God, and he has been carrying on his activity as unto the Lord. It’s an illustration of the fact that a young man can be an unusual man.

This past week, since I have my office, the only office I have down here at the church now, occasionally, if I have nothing to do, I walk in the church library and pull

out a book I haven’t looked at and I did see one this week that I had not read. It was some proverbial sayings of Mr. Spurgeon. It’s a big book. There is a lot of interesting things in it. The sad thing about the book is it does not have any table of contents or index and you cannot look up things that you are interested in. So I just thumb through it reading a few little things here and there in it. And I noticed a little paragraph that said, “Chins without beards are better than heads without brains.” [Laughter] And Mr. Spurgeon went on to say, “Young men when wise are to be preferred to those without sense who do not even have youth to have as an excuse for their folly. When Queen Elizabeth had sent a somewhat a young ambassador to a foreign court and the king complained of it. The ambassador replied, ‘If our majesty had known that you measure wisdom by beards she would have sent you a goat.’” Well, it is an illustration of the fact that a young man can be a sensible man and it is true. Chins without beards are better than heads without brains.

Joseph was an intelligent young man, but most of all the Lord was with him and he did his work as unto the Lord. That’s a word to servants of all kinds, household servants if you should happen to be that, and it’s also a word to anyone who works for anyone else, and that includes most of us, we should do our work as unto the Lord. And when Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand, he rewarded Joseph by giving him more and more responsibility. I could not I am sure find a better illustration of how we are as Christians to adorn the doctrine to which we hold.

Paul says, Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. And so you men who are in business, most of you are bound to have some kind of boss – there are a few of you who are your own boss of course – but not too many of us. Even our most successful men usually have some kind of board that is over them under whom they serve and we are to do our work as

Christians heartily as unto the Lord, realizing that it is the Lord Christ whom we serve, not the chairman of the board, not the president of the company, not the head of the department, it is the Lord Christ that we serve, in our business, in our employment.

Joseph is a beautiful illustration that seems to me of what it means to adorn the doctrine which we as Christians are supposed to hold.

Now the success that Joseph had was observed and rewarded by Potiphar. There is a kind of progression in these verses as you notice and verse 6 is the climax. It is the pinnacle. And the words of verse 6, particularly the last sentence, prepare for the attack that he almost invites by his outward appearance and also by his inward character and appeal. It has been interesting incidentally in comparison with Genesis chapter 12 that we have here already an illustration of some of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing.

Remember in the promises that were given to Abraham, The Lord said, “Now Abraham those that bless you, I will bless and those that curse you, I will curse”? Now here is Potiphar and he is blessing Joseph. He sees Joseph, he sees the Lord is blessing what he is doing, and so he makes him his personal servant. He gives him the oversight of his house and everything that he owns, he puts under his hand. The only thing that he concerns himself with is the food that he eats in the house. Everything now has been put in the hands of Joseph.

It is an illustration of the fact that when we bless -- for Joseph was of the chosen family -- when we bless those of the Abrahamic line, we shall expect to receive blessing, and so, Potiphar attracts Abrahamic blessing by the way that he treats Joseph or we can put it the other way around. Joseph attracts Abrahamic blessing to his boss because his boss treats him in blessing. As a matter of fact, it was God paying this pagan handsomely for his servants’ keep. And so he was blessed because he took care of Joseph and took care of him well.

Donald Gray Barnhouse in his little meditations on the Book of Genesis has an interesting little paragraph in which he speaks about an unsaved boss who fired his

secretary because she refused to type letters saying that goods had been shipped when they had not. So he fired her, and she wanted to stand for principle. But later he called the secretary back and gave her the job as cashier, because it was a post that demanded higher trust and in that business the cashier could steal without much fear of detection and so he was smart, he realized that this young lady was the just kind of person for that, so she got a better job by sticking to her Christian convictions.

Well, the next verse has come to the heart of the chapter and here Joseph is presented as the tempted slave. Our society sanctions a great deal of the types of sexual sins that are reflected here in this section. We tend to think of sexual sin as a kind of indiscretion or as a man who is sowing wild oats or something like that, but the Bible does not look at these sexual deviations in that way, nor did Joseph, as we shall see. And isn’t interesting too that the temptation comes just as Joseph, having been humiliated by the slavery now has reached the place of prosperity and ease, because it’s just at that point in spiritual things that we usually are exposed to temptations. So when things now finally have become good for Joseph again in the land of Egypt, it’s then that he is attacked, and the first approach that the woman made was a vehement assault on his chastity. It came about after these events that his master’s wife looked with desire at Joseph. It’s just said he was handsome of form and appearance. Those words incidentally are the same words that we used to describe Rachel, and so Joseph is a young man who has Rachel’s good looks.

Only two other men in Scripture are said to be beautiful -- that is in the Old Testament -- Absalom and David. And here is the third, Joseph a handsome young man in form and appearance, a pure young man, a noble young man, a spiritual young man, but here is the test. “Beware of certain squalls,” one of the commentators says. Usually when storms come on the sea or on the lake, you have warning of them. It’s the sudden squalls in which you don’t have adequate warning that there is extreme danger. And this was one in which Joseph is thrown and by which he is thrown into extreme danger.

Egyptian females at this time had a great deal of freedom. In fact, one of the commentators says that Egyptian females had as much freedom at this time as females in our society. So here is an ancient Cleopatra in the home of unchastity, for Egypt was the home of unchastity. All kinds of marital infidelity characterized the Egyptians at this time. So here is a woman with great experience in immorality who makes her tempting approach to Joseph with, “Lie with me.” And now policy and conscience are at war. Policy, well it would have been wise for Joseph, humanly speaking, to have good relations with the wife of his boss because she would stand for him in cases of difficulty. But on the other hand it was the conviction of his conscience that this was not only wrong but it was a sin against God, his reasons for refusing to have any relationship with her or another man’s reasons for yielding.

In fact, the very way that he puts it almost seems as if it is like Eve in the Garden of Eden. She says of all the trees of the garden we may freely eat, we cannot eat of that one tree, nor can we touch it. One almost gets the idea that Eve was frustrated by this one thing. He allowed her everything, but one, as the one thing that is disturbing her like a little child who has a big pile of toys and another child comes in the room and there is one toy that he has, and this child cannot keep his mind on anything until he has that toy that the other child has.

And so here Joseph says to Potiphar’s wife, “Your master or your husband has given me everything.” My master has given me everything and the only thing that he has withheld from me is you because you are his wife. But in Joseph’s case, conscience overcomes policy. And he gives the proposition it’s right name, he says it’s a great evil, and when a person gives that it’s right name, he makes truth, his alloy and so truth is the alloy of Joseph and therefore firmly, promptly, bravely, and yet in a kindly manner, he refuses.

F. B. Meyer has a remarkable paragraph. I think in his exposition of this, when he speaks about verse 9 and the words that Joseph speaks, “How then could I do this

great evil and sin against God?” He has unfolded all of the blessings that had been given to him. And now he says, “In the light of all that my master has done for me, how then can I do this great evil and sin against God?” And Mr. Meyer says, “How then can I, I for whom Christ died?”

And we should make the application there when testing and the temptation to sin comes, How can I, the object of the electing grace of God, the object of the work of the Holy Spirit and efficacious grace who has sought the elected one and brought me to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? How can I who have come to understand that salvation is by the grace of God, and I have been led to entrust my life into the hands of the one who bled for my sins? How can I? And then, how can I do this great evil? It’s a wickedness. It’s an evil. Some people might call it gaiety. Some people might call it just being a little fast, or sowing some wild oats, but Scripture calls it an evil.

And not only that, but it’s a great wickedness. Many might wink at a little bit of indulgence in immorality. But it’s a great sin. And finally Joseph says, “How can I do this great evil and sin against God?” It’s not simply a sin against me. For it is against me, adultery is a sin against the body, but it’s also a sin against the other person, but primarily it is a sin against God. So how then can I do this great evil and sin against God? It is a magnificent position.

Well, he won the first of the encounters, but it was not the first and so we read, it came about as she spoke to Joseph day by day that he did not listen to her to lie beside her or to be with her. So there was constant pressure implied. It was profound, it was searching, it was persistent, and incidentally was also flexible. She was a very, very capable adulteress. Notice the expansion of words in verse 10. He did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. And you can just imagine the words that she uttered day after day, “Come on Joseph, lie with me. Come onto the bedroom with me.” And then as Joseph continued to refuse she said, “Well, Joseph just be with me. Just spend some time

with me,” because if he cannot be won by storming, perhaps he can be won by coaxing. And so all of her feminine wiles were used and Joseph was the object of them.

Some of the men of God failed right at this point and it is Samson who most readily comes to mind, because it was the persistent coaxing, which Samson could not stand or withstand. In the Book of the Proverbs in chapter 5, God has a word to say about adulteresses. Listen to these words which open the fifth chapter. “My son, give attention to my wisdom. Incline your ear to my understanding that you may observe discretion. And your lips may reserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword, her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of Sheol. She does not ponder the path of life; her ways are unstable, she does not know it. Now then, my son listen to me and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house.” That’s the Proverbs’ way of saying, flee fornication. It is Paul’s expression in 1 Corinthians chapter 6.

Now she flattered Joseph. She no doubt commented on how handsome he was. She had sparkled him at the beginning, but she continues now with the flattering and hoping through attrition to win the battle, but there comes one final as one of the commentators says, described it, “one final ambush.”

Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the household was there inside and she caught him by his garment. She took hold of his long cloak and she said, “Lie with me.” And there was something in Joseph’s mind and heart that said it’s better to lose your coat than your conscience. There was something inside Joseph that said, “Joseph fly, fly out of this house” and he fled because he realized that this sin was a defense of the authority of God, of the goodness of God, of the justice of God, of all of the attributes of our great God. It was a denial. And he fled out of the house.

Now someone has said, “Hell hath no fiery like a woman scorned.” It’s often a matter of pride. When she was unable to seduce him, her pride had been affected or when a man is unable to subdue a woman, his own ego is affected. And often one discovers that it’s not really so much the physical gratification that is a part of adultery but it is the more fundamental pride and ego that are involved. So she thrusts out in pride against this person, she begins to call the Hebrew and also you can see that she is sort of now wants to attack her husband.

It’s her husband who has brought the Hebrew in and she mentions that, “See he,” she doesn’t even name him. She says, “He has brought this Hebrew in to make sport of us.” And verse 17, “The Hebrew slave whom you brought to us came in to me to make sport of me;” and so she poses there as a victim with the *corpus delicti* of the cloak by the side of her and she hopes to persuade her husband and of course her husband, it says his anger burned within him because he did think there might be something to it, but the fact that he didn’t put Joseph to death is evidence that he was uncompletely sure about her and no doubt she had given many reasons previous to this to make him think that she might have been lying.

The last of the chapter is the story of Joseph, the trusted prisoner and the humiliation that has already been experienced by Joseph is reenacted again. He had been humiliated, a member of the chosen family, sold into slavery down into Egypt, and so the pattern of humiliation has been seen in his life already, but now it is seen again. And Joseph, the member of the chosen family, the choice son of Jacob is now not only humiliated by having been sold into slavery in Egypt, but he now is put into jail.

But the same other pattern is also found here. The pattern of exaltation and just as he was exalted in his slavery to become the personal servant of Potiphar, the captain of the bodyguard, so here he becomes the chief man in the jail itself under the chief jailer. And so the pattern of humiliation and then exaltation is found in Joseph’s life and this is one of the reasons why Joseph is an illustration of our Lord Jesus Christ, because the

pattern of humiliation and then exaltation is the pattern of the life of our Lord. And this is why Stephen in his great sermon in Acts chapter 7 lays hold of Joseph among others and draws up this pattern of humiliation and exaltation as he seeks to show those that were listening to him that pattern of humiliation was seen in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and the pattern of exaltation is seen in him and the same attitude of Israel toward the men of the Old Testament, the prophets, and the kings has been shown by them toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

He received no gentle reception in prison. The psalmist says that he was in fetters there, but God was with him, and it wasn’t long before the chief jailer noted the success of Joseph, observed it, and rewarded it, and the abilities and the integrity of this man were crowned with the touch of God and the chapter concludes with the chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph’s charge because the Lord was with him and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.

It’s important when we think about temptation to distinguish between those appetites that are natural to us and the appetites that are required by our evil habits. There are certain appetites that are natural to us as men, they are not wrong. There is no sin in having the tendency to eat, but there is a great deal of difference between the natural appetites and those that are required by evil habit. There is nothing wrong in being tempted.

As a matter of fact, we have seen from James that it is the occasion by which God brings us to an understanding of ourselves and also to a new plan in our Christian life. Our Lord Jesus Christ was tested. It is not a sin to be tempted. It’s a sin to yield to temptation. A mob may batter at the palace gates, but if the mob is unable to enter in, there is no damage done to the kingdom and in the case of an individual it is the kingdom of the inner man that is the important thing controlled by the Lord God. There is nothing wrong in temptation. The sin consists in the yielding to temptation. You note

from this also that the sinning is no necessity. Joseph is a proof that a man can resist. He has proved that a man can overcome. He has proved that a man can be pure. One of course wants to ask, naturally, how can we overcome? Well, look at Joseph’s success and ask yourself why is it that Joseph managed to overcome. Well, surely in reading this chapter there stands out the truth of the Lord’s presence with Joseph.

Now the Lord was with Joseph for I read; “Now his master saw that the Lord was with him.” Verse 21, the Lord was with Joseph. Verse 23, because the Lord was with him. So there is of course from the standpoint of God that initiative on the part of the Lord God who supported his servant, upheld him, that’s what the Bible says, the Lord God does for us. He upholds us. He supports us. He stands with us. He is with us and on the other hand, the other side is proved too, Joseph lived in the presence of God. That’s very clear. He conceived of his life as a life lived in the presence of God. He recognized that when he sinned, it would be a sin against the Lord God.

And so the first thing that stands out with me is the fact that here is a man, who by the grace of God walked in the presence of God. He thought of his life as a life lived in the presence of God. That’s really what it is. You may not have any conception of it as a believer, but nevertheless it is true, and the things that characterize your life are things done in the presence of the Lord God if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. And then of course he fought with the weapons that come from the word of God. He recognized what was evil and what was not evil. In other words, he was true to the truth of God.

Now in the New Testament, when the Apostle Paul is describing the warfare of the believer, he speaks of this very thing in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 17. He says, “Take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God,” and incidentally that expression is such an expression that by the original text, there is stress upon the precise application of specific Scriptures. In other words, if we are to be successful in fighting temptation, we must know the teaching of the word of God, the specific teaching of the word of God.

When the Lord Jesus met his temptation with Satan, he did not meet it in general. He met it in particular with citations from three texts from the Book of Deuteronomy. How many of you could stand up and cite three texts from the Book of Deuteronomy? Don’t bother to raise your hand. [Laughter] Well, it’s no wonder then that we are so -- such easy marks in temptations. We do not understand the word of God. We do not know the word of God as we should. If we are going to succeed in temptation, we must fight our struggles with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

And then of course Joseph fled. He avoided the occasion of the sin. It’s much better to lose your dress than it is to lose your conscience and your honor, and so if you put it together, you can see that here is a man who walked with a sense of the presence of God girding him and surrounding him and he fought with the weapons of the word of God. And when specific temptation came, he fled.

There are many of you who face similar tests. There are many businessmen who face tests because the Lord has made it that way. When I was in the insurance business, I remember specifically some of the tests that we would have. We were members of a certain board. And we had as an insurance agency committed ourselves to certain principles. We could not cut rates for example. And occasionally, a large policy would depend upon your ability to cut a rate. What shall you do? You are going to make success in the business world or you are going to argue, well I have got to live, my family has got to live, or are you rather going to say, Well, the word of God says this and I will stand by that.

There are some people you see who meet every test in life by saying in situations like this, “But we must live.” But a Christian doesn’t meet it with that. He meets it with, “But we must die.” And one day stand before our Lord in judgment. For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and to him it is far more significant to arrange his life in such a way that when he stands before the Great White Throne, when

he stands before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, he will be able to stand there with a conscience that is clean.

May God help us to learn the lesson of Joseph. Most of us face tests just like this. May the Lord help us like Joseph to say, “How can I for whom Christ died, how can I commit this great evil and sin against the Lord God?” Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee Lord for the lessons of life that come to us from this ancient book, so modern. May the lessons from Joseph’s life grip us. And may those who attend Believers Chapel be known as men and women who have truth as their ally. Deliver us from the great evil of sinning against Thee.

If there are some here Lord who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ and his saving and atoning work, who still perhaps trusting in their own good works which are not good in Thy sight, give them no peace nor rest until they see themselves as wicked sinners under divine judgment. May they flee to the place of refuge, the cross of Jesus Christ to receive us a free gift everlasting life. May the grace of our great triune God go with us.

For Jesus sake. Amen.