

Text: Genesis 39:1-23

Title: "The Providence of God calls us to moral purity in an immoral world"

Time: June 21, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Today is Father's Day. This past Monday was also my Dad's birthday. My mom sent out emails to some of us less reliable types in the family to remind us that we needed to let Dad hear from us on his birthday, so I called him last Monday. We had a good conversation, but one of the things Dad wanted to know was where his present was. I had not gotten him anything, and so I explained that I was planning on sending him the birthday/Father's Day combo gift. He did not seem thrilled with the idea, but it seems to me that it is always good to try to kill two birds with one stone.

That is what I hope to do with the message. Ordinarily, Father's Day calls for a Father's Day message. This day also calls for a message from Genesis 39 per the schedule of our study of Genesis together. I will attempt to do both.

If we understand Genesis 37-50 as an exhibition of the providential work of God, His ability to work His plan as One who can see before, then chapters 38 and 39 are about the importance of moral purity when it comes to enjoying the benefits of that plan. Last week we saw the negative example of Judah's lack of moral purity in the bonds of marriage. That chapter serves especially as a contrast with our chapter this morning, a chapter about Joseph's moral purity in an immoral world.

Joseph is not yet a father, but what we read about him in this passage makes him a very good one, when God gives him that privilege. I want us to see this Father's Day the truth that God's work of providence calls us to moral purity in an immoral world. Joseph teaches us three things about this.

I. Following God's plan for moral purity means living in an immoral world, not being cloistered from it (vv. 1-6a).

Illustration: I have a church history volume in my library called *Christianity Through the Centuries* by Earl Cairns. Chapter 14 of that volume is called "The Christianity of the Cloisters," and it tells how various factors first led Christians of the fourth through sixth centuries to withdraw from the world in order to live a more morally pure life.

At the very extreme of what is called the monastic movement in the medieval church are characters like Saint Simeon Stylites (390-459), who first lived for several months in the ground buried up to his neck, and then for the next 35 years on the top of a sixty-foot pillar outside of the city of Antioch, in order to escape the immorality of the world.

The chapter shows the picture of a medieval woodcut that depicts a monk in the presence of a woman burning his fingers off of his hand. The caption of this picture is instructive: "Monks regarded females as the sources of temptation and sin and consequently withdrew from their companionship. The irony is that sex then tended to become an obsession with them. To dispel his temptation, the monk is burning away his fingers. Nothing remains on his left hand except a stump, and on his right hand only the thumb and forefinger remain."

Application: These extreme examples do not tell the whole story of monasticism, but they do illustrate for us the importance of the truth that God has called us to live a morally pure life in an immoral world, not outside of it. The presence and help that Joseph received from Yahweh to be morally pure is something he experienced in the house of Potipher, not something he found in an isolated cave or on the top of a pole.

The help of God's presence means that we must live moral lives in an immoral world without excuses. We are called to a

time, a place, and a set of circumstances by the God of providence, and He expects us to not make excuses for immorality under that calling.

Think about Joseph's time - He was a young man; think about Joseph's place - He was in an immoral society far from home (Potipher's name = "He whom the god Re has given"); think about Joseph's circumstance - he was single until after the age of 30. None of these things were an excuse for immorality; all of these things were a part of God's plan to use Joseph in a moral and mighty way. We cannot blame our time, place, or circumstances for a lack of moral purity in our lives.

The help of God's presence also means that we must live moral lives in an immoral world without shame (v. 3, 9). Potipher understood that Yahweh was the key to Joseph's success. One of the keys to Joseph's moral purity was his openness about his faith. People who live so as to hide the presence of God in their lives are people who have set themselves up for failure in the area of moral purity. The presence of God in our lives should be very obvious not only at church, but also at home, at play, and at work.

The help of God's presence means that we must live moral lives in an immoral world without coercion (vv. 4-6). Joseph did not need to be constantly reminded about what the responsibilities of his stewardship were. As a pastor, I am glad that there are co-laborers here that do not need to be called and reminded about their responsibilities every week.

Is that how you conduct the stewardship of your spiritual responsibilities? Or must you be constantly reminded of what these responsibilities are? If you are in the category of needing constant reminders, you need to ask the Lord to change that with His presence in your life. Matt. 24:45-51: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed

is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

II. Following God’s plan for moral purity means battling against an immoral world, not compromising with it (vv. 6b-12).

Illustration: Another unique feature of the history of Christianity during the middle ages was the crusades conducted by the Roman Church to free the pilgrimage sites of Palestine during the 11th thru 13th centuries. These military efforts against Muslims were more costly than successful.

Especially tragic was the Children’s Crusade of 1212. Hundreds of children from France and Germany, led by two boys named Stephen and Nicholas who were not yet teenagers, believed that the purity of their young lives would bring them success in battle in a way their corrupted parents had failed to experience. Many simply did not survive the rigorous trip to Palestine, and those who did were sold into slavery in Egypt.

Application: When we say that following God’s plan for moral purity means battling against an immoral world, not compromising with it, we need to remember the nature of spiritual warfare. Paul describes it this way, “For we wrestle not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). We do not need military strategy for this battle; we need to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. I want us to

notice some good strategies for how to battle impurity from the example of Joseph dealing with Potipher's wife.

A. Battle impurity by refusing to feed the desire of your eyes (v. 6b-7). Moral impurity begins with the eyes. The corruption of the wife of Potipher begins with what she saw. The desire of the eyes has the ability to render us morally blind.

Illustration: I read a Chinese tale about "a man who had a great craving for wealth" who "was walking through the thronging market one morning when he happened to pass the gold dealer's stall. His glance fell on the glittering display of rings and bullion and nuggets – and he grabbed as much as he could from the table and began to run down the street. The police soon caught up with him. 'With so many people in the market, how in the world did you think you could get away?' they asked. 'When I looked, I saw only gold, not the people,' he answered."

That tale illustrates the power of the desire of the eyes to render us morally blind. The enemy we battle understands the power of this spiritual weapon. Today, his arsenal includes television and the internet on handheld devices. He want us to satisfy the desire of our eyes the way Potipher's wife did, because he wants to destroy our moral purity. Feeding the desire of our eyes will deceive us and blind us to the devastating consequences of this sin.

Eve saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eyes; she did not see the consequences. Lot lifted up his eyes on the plain of Jordan by Sodom; he could not see the spiritual condition of its people. Samson could not get right with the Lord until the Philistines had put out his two eyes. Little did David know that adultery and murder were in his future as he saw from his roof Bathsheba bathing. Failure to control what our eyes see destroys lives. And so we need to covenant with the Psalmist (101:3): "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes."

If we have set wicked things before our eyes, we need to experience the power of the Word of God to enlighten our eyes: “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the testimony of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:8).

B. Battle impurity by remembering the nature of sin (vv. 8-9).

Illustration: Aesop wrote a poem about flies and a honey pot:

“A jar of honey chanced to spill
Its contents on the windowsill
In many a viscous pool and rill.
The flies, attracted by the sweet,
Began so greedily to eat,
They smeared their fragile wings and feet.
With many a twitch and pull in vain
They gasped to get away again,
And died in aromatic pain.
O foolish creatures that destroy
Themselves for transitory joy.”

Application: There is a transitory joy available to Joseph in the proposal of Potipher’s wife. But Joseph remembered the nature of sin in two respects. First, sin is an offense against God. Remember that David after his sin with Bathsheba said, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned.” Impregnating Bathsheba and murdering her husband was a sin, only because there is a God in heaven. If there is no God in heaven, then it was merely tough breaks for Uriah. There is a God in heaven. We need to remember that sin is an offence against Him. Second, sin is destructive of the blessings of God in our life. Joseph’s blessed future would have been irreparably harmed had he fallen here.

C. Battle impurity by taking precautions against it (vv. 10-11).

1. Put geography between you and temptation. This involves some special technology when we are talking about

cyberspace. We have to have a certain configuration of software if there is going to be cyber-geography or cyberspace between us and temptation.

2. Put people between you and temptation. Refuse to be alone with temptation. The absence of others provides the enemy with an opening we do not want to give him.

D. Battle impurity by running away from it (v. 12). My kids have learned a Patch the Pirate song related to Joseph's example here called "Put on your running shoes." That is a Scriptural response to temptation. Paul says to flee fornication, and that is exactly what Joseph decides to do. Are you fleeing fornication, or toying with it? Without Joseph's willingness to flee it, we will not win the battle against it.

III. Following God's plan for moral purity means taking abuse from an immoral world, not being popular with it (vv. 13-23).

Application: Joseph's example counsels us to be ready for three forms of abuse from an immoral world.

A. Expect the abuse of dishonesty (vv. 13-18). Joseph the pure is cast as Joseph the rapist by an immoral world that is very upset that he was willing to be pure. We can expect to be lied about if we stand for the cause that Joseph stood for.

B. Expect the abuse of injustice (vv. 19-20). Joseph the innocent is thrown into prison as though guilty. It is not true that everything goes smoother for the person who chooses to do right. Sometimes things go very badly when we make that choice. But God is with us in spite of these difficulties.

C. Expect the impotence of abuse because of the Lord's presence (vv. 21-23). Try as he may, Satan cannot destroy the one who is submitted to God's plan for their lives. In spite of the vitriolic hatred and Satanic deceit of Potiphar's wife, in spite

of the discouraging outcome, ruined reputation, and loss of freedom, in spite of the loneliness and discouragement, God's plan was right on schedule. God's plan had called Joseph to moral purity in an immoral world, and it would not let Joseph down after he had responded so well to that call.

Conclusion: How are you responding to this call? Are you living a morally pure life? Are you guarding what you see and purifying yourself from what you have seen? Are you putting geography and people between you and temptation? Are you fleeing fornication? If so, God is not going to let you down. His unstoppable plan will mightily use and bless you in spite of hardships inflicted by the immoral world we live in today.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching