

"Joseph: Guarded Passion or Sex not in the City"

[For those online, there is the text of Scripture at the end]

Introduction

Tarantulas have a method of dating that is very particular. And it's one of the saddest. During the autumn season they swarm. On certain California roads, you can't help but cover your tires with their dead bodies. Housewives are overwhelmed with their presence. And use brooms and their husbands to kill them! Tarantulas are everywhere.

This may sound like a horror movie, but it's rather odd. You see tarantulas, like our Steve Irwin likes to report, are more inclined to hide under a bush than to jump out and bite a human and they are virtually blind. They are solitary, oversized, ungainly creatures with a bad reputation.

So how does a blind, poor, spider, living a solitary life under a pile of brush, find a mate? The answer is this autumn swarm. Some instinct sends them all out into the countryside, bumping into everything in his path, risking terrified housewives and speeding cards until he bumps into a tarantula of the opposite sex. Without much vision and without extraordinary powers of hearing or scent, he has to establish contact by touch.

So it's really only by accident that two tarantulas find each other. The fact that there are so many tarantulas, and that they try so desperately, keeps the

tarantula race intact. But most tarantulas fail in this mating movement, and go bumping across the bush until the end of their forlorn days.

Maybe that's a description, borrowed from Tim Stafford in his book "A Love Story" (1977, Zondervan), that helps us think about finding a mate in these days. Are we like the tarantulas bumping our way through school, through clubs, through work stations looking for the opposite sex, to find the mate who will satisfy us and make our lives full?

In today's story, especially contrasted with last week's fateful and woeful tale of our father Judah with his daughter in law, Tamar, we see Joseph, our hero, choosing to live a sexually moral life. This is as outlandish today as it was then. Overcoming temptation is not easy for anyone in any arena. Yet, Joseph, my favorite bible character, does just that. He overcomes sexual sin.

Now, put this in context of our story recently and of our story overall. The theme we've been using of the book of Genesis is Pleasure, and it's the pleasure of God and the pleasure of man which is linked when we do God's will. We live in his garden of delight and enjoy the wife of our youth. We endure pain and suffering, but it seems only a fortnight when it's actually seven or 14 years of tsuris. He chooses for us children and encounters and situations which will make us know Him personally and improve our lot eternally.

John Piper said in "The Pleasures of God", 'when we hope in God, we glorify God as the fountain of deep and lasting joy. And when we pray, we give expression to that God-glorifying hope. Obedience to God makes this God-glorifying hope visible and proves that it is real in our lives. Obedience is the

irrepressible public relations project of those who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good." (page 234)

Let's look at chapter 39 of Genesis and see how Joseph continues his life of obedience and divine pleasure, especially as relates to sexual sin and the sin of resentment. Our chapter divides into thirds, like a triptych in the art museum, featuring his times with Potiphar, Potiphar's wife and the jailer as the settings.

With Potiphar

Joseph is the man of blessing and is in the godly line of Abraham and Isaac. Thus it seems that prosperity is a continual promise and promise fulfilled in the Jewish people, even in the life of Joseph. Even though back home in Hebron, his brothers found it a nuisance, in Egypt, the Pharaoh found him an excellent choice for prime minister. Verse two tells us, "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered" Remember, what we have said. Prosperity is first and foremost being with God, and knowing God. It's our personal relationship with the Almighty that characterizes a person of faith and valor.

The Abrahamic blessing however was not only for the family to be prosperous. The blessing had to do with the nations of the world. "All nations will be blessing themselves" in relation to Abraham. This from chapter 12 of Genesis. So here, we read " the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph" (verse 5) The substance of the covenant is applied to the family of Potiphar as bible fulfillment. Just as God blessed Laban because of Jacob (30.27), this covenantal splash continues, and I believe to this day. The

nations that bless the Jews are blessed; the ones who curse us are cursed. Take note, oh United Nations.

Joseph's character seems to ooze out of the text doesn't it? He is an honest and faithful worker. The people he worked with enjoyed him. He learns to obey. The description in verses one to six set the stage for the next scene in our triptych, the temptation sexually with Mrs Potiphar.

With Potiphar's wife

Joseph had been in danger before. His brothers had sold him into slavery, and almost killed him because of their jealous rage and their anger at their own father for pre-selecting him to be the heir apparent. The brothers had let their anger be known and Joseph had received his brunt of it.

Now he moves into an even more dangerous position. Proverbs 23 (verse 27) says "A harlot is a deep pit, and a seductress is a narrow well." Joseph had his share of pits and wells before. This one is very deep. And will move him into an even deeper one in the next story.

Genesis is very clear about illicit, that is, out of bounds, sexual activity. Here we see adultery. Genesis 6 talked about fornication; rape in the case of Dinah in chapter 34. Incest in chapter 19 with Lot and daughters. Prostitution in the last chapter in Tamar's case and homosexuality in chapter 19 with Sodom.

But it's also clear about the pleasure of licit, that is, in bounds, sex. Proverbs 5.15-19, Song of Songs 7.6-10, Genesis 24 with Isaac and Rebeccah are all sections that point to the mitzvah of sex. Rambam taught that the purpose of

sex was to perpetuate the species, and not for the pleasure of the act alone. But I disagree. It's the pleasure of the act that makes it so appealing.

So here we have a young 27 year old, virile, handsome man. His sex drive was created not by some Viagra or by Playboy magazine, but by God. He saw that it was good. Only its misuse is sin.

Let's comment on the temptation itself. The temptation came when he was away from home. A good home is a restraining influence on the behavior of children. But once we are away from home, emancipation may make for licentiousness.

Secondly the temptation came from an important woman. Joseph was always someone's favorite. First his father's. Then Potiphar's. Now Mrs Potiphar. Verse 6 says he is handsome. He appealed not only for his looks, though, but also for his ambition. Imagine the short cut this might have been for Joseph to gain importance himself. This is a temptation to power and control.

Third, the temptation came often. Verse 7 and verse 12 are not isolated incidents. She is often asking him for sexual favors. One would think that in due course Joseph would wear down. This is nothing less than the current vogue term of "Sexual Harassment" from a superior to an inferior, but it's amazing that Joseph stands up to it, isn't it?

Fourth, the temptation came with great opportunity. As chief steward, Joseph would have to pass through the inner apartments of the house daily to inspect and to oversee operations. He was alone, and she was alone. Consenting adults, no one will know. It's easy.

Finally the temptation came after elevation to a prominent position. His stature gave him more opportunity and in his new position he could do things ordinary men would not. Or could not. A steady hand is needed to carry a full cup, and a firm balance to stand on lofty heights. He needed the balance of the Almighty to do what lay ahead.

So how did he overcome these temptations?

First he recognized that yielding would be sin against God. His standards of right and wrong were fixed and unflinching. Contrary to the popular notions of their day and certainly against the sledge dripping tide of our current Hollywood society, adultery is wrong.

He knew that adultery was wrong because it went against God's plans for family. It protects the family if everyone is sexually pure at home and going into marriage and into death. He called it 'sin against God' verse 9, and well describes it as such.

Second he avoided sin. I get the picture that Joseph avoided the sections of the palace where the Mrs would have been. Lead us not into temptation? Then don't lead yourself there. Remember Eve hung out at the wrong tree in the Garden.

Third, he kept busy. Idle hands are often a lure for evil traffic. The Turkish proverb is "men are usually tempted by the devil, but an idle man tempts the devil." It was while lounging at home in the palace 700 years later that King David lusted after Bathsheba, committed adultery and murder and entered into a major era of collapse in his own life.

4. "Refused"
Vay'maen

SFourth, and most importantly, he fled. Sometimes, we have no other way out other than just getting up and leaving. Paul wrote Timothy "flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim 2.22), and the best way to win here is to get up and go early. For the second time in his life, Joseph loses a garment, but as the Puritan preacher said, "Joseph lost his coat, but kept his character." Since Potiphar was involved in the judicial system, we wonder why he didn't try to put Joseph on trial or execute him. But I think it was that Potiphar knew his wife and believed Joseph over the lies she told.

With the jailer

The final scene of our triptych is in the jail. Joseph again takes his place in a society that is not going to be his in the long run. He is agreeable and once again "God gives him success." Being 'with Joseph' is the key.

The story ends today with Joseph again being given sovereignty and rule in a foreign place. Again we see the blessing of God given to the child of God. Even though he is in jail for an evil done to the wife of the 2ic, we have a God intervention and elevation. No matter what your circumstance, God himself is involved, and can make the best out of your life.

The story of the jailer gets clearer next week as we read chapter 40, so stay tuned.

For now, we see in today's story a man who in every circumstance of life, in every scene of his life, is a faithful and God centered man. It's not that his father was so good; it's not that his brothers are so good. It's that God is so good and makes a man into who He wants him to be. There's hope for me, amen?

Compare to Y'shua

As we started this list, we continue it today with a comparison of Y'shua, the Messiah, and Joseph, our hero in today's story. As temptation came, so did it surely come to Messiah. And he overcame it by the Scriptures. We read, "he was tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin" As a result of the temptations, Messiah was lied about. As lies are told about Joseph, so they are told about Jesus. They said Jesus had spoken sedition. They said he spoke against the Law. They said He spoke against the priesthood and the Temple. Yet, all the while God is with him and he prospers.

Summary

God created sexuality as a treasure. Like most jewels, it's not truly cherished until counterfeits are exposed and proper matrix is disclosed in which it can sparkle. Here are some things I see as we conclude, and you can add your thoughts to your own list.

- 1) Prosperity is in knowing the living God.
- 2) Sex is good and proper only in the context of a one man-one woman lifetime committed marriage relationship
- 3) Temptation comes to us and the sooner we avoid it the better off we will be.

Dear friends, we have eternal life due to the Saviour Y'shua, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His new covenant. His teaching is great, and yet it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God, which will in turn give us pleasure with Him.