

The Real Housewives of Egypt Genesis 39

Well friends, once again we've seen a story that could easily compete with the worst of the Reality TV Shows out there.

A bored housewife of a wealthy gov't official, who is used to finding a little excitement and fun on the side through extra-marital affairs, sees that her husband has a new servant working for him – a young man who is particularly attractive.

He's their servant, and he makes his master's life prosperous and easy - so why can't she have a little bit of fun with him, why shouldn't he serve her needs as well.

So she propositions him – and he refuses, and apparently she thinks He is just playing hard to get – so she throws herself at him, following him around while he's working – still no luck, he just works harder to avoid her.

Finally, one afternoon – no one is home – and Joseph is all alone working in the house, and she finds him and essentially

begs him to have an affair with her – but he runs off, leaving behind his cloak.

Ms. Potiphar finally realizes that she has been scorned, and so her attraction turns to fury and she uses Joseph's cloak as evidence that he had tried to rape her, and he ends up getting thrown into prison because of her false accusations.

So ends another episode of "The Real Housewives of Egypt."

And friends, at first glance the events of this chapter look an awful lot like a soap opera plot, and so our first instinct is apply it in a moral fashion; that this story exhorts young men and women to avoid or flee any situation where the temptation to have an affair is present – just as Joseph avoided and fled from Ms. Potiphar.

Infidelity is wrong, and so you flee from it – regardless of what might happen to you, or what it might cost you to resist the temptation. As the Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 3:14 *"But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed."*

And we might also think of Jesus' words in Matthew 18:8 *"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire."*

So friends – if this is all you hear the Holy Spirit speaking to you about this morning, and Joseph's actions inspire you to flee from infidelity instead of flirting with it - that's a good start.

But – there are some other words of Jesus that come to mind as well.

Matt 5:27-28 where he says *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

And I bring this up friends because while it's important and good to avoid and flee from the temptation to commit

adultery – it can also become a matter of pride that we've done so.

And it's easy to start to identify ourselves as "good people," because we've never done that sort of thing, along with other major crimes like murder, grand theft auto, and domestic assault and so on.

However, Jesus words force us to reconsider basing our identity as good people on external actions alone and examine our hearts – where, if we are honest, we will find that sin has produced all the necessary motivations, like lust and anger for committing things like murder or adultery.

In God's eyes, a lustful glance is enough evidence to convict us of not "being good people" and having an affair would just be acting out what is already in our hearts, so there is no room for passing judgment on those who have committed adultery, as if we are fundamentally better than them.

Nor is there any room for pride or self-righteousness before God – and that’s the point.

So – all this is to say that this chapter in the story of Joseph must to do more than simply warn us to flee from the temptation to have an affair.

While there are obvious dangers and consequences to having an affair – there is also the unseen danger becoming proud for having successfully resisted that particular temptation.

So the question really ought to be “how does this story reveal the unfaithfulness that is hidden within our hearts; and then prompt us to turn to Jesus Christ for salvation from that unfaithfulness!”

Because friends, we believe that all scripture is able to make us wise for salvation in Jesus Christ - including this story about the Real Housewives of Egypt.

So let’s start off by noting that in this chapter begins by telling us that God has shown up, and not just as a vague higher power off in the distance – but up close and personal as Yahweh.

This is the name which God uses when He is revealing Himself in a relationship, when He is making promises – like the promise Yahweh made to Joseph’s great-great-grandfather Abraham: *I will bless you and make up into a great nations and all people on earth will be blessed because of you!*” (Gen 12:2-3)

The narrator reveals it is Yahweh at work in Joseph’s circumstances in Egypt by saying “The LORD (Yahweh) was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.”

And in the next four verses, the narrator emphasizes Yahweh’s blessing of Joseph by mentioning His name four more times – Joseph’s success is 100% attributed to Yahweh. Yahweh, Yahweh, Yahweh – it’s all Yahweh!

Contrast that with chapter 37 from last week where God was conspicuously absent. Now, in chapter 39, He is overtly present.

And that's because the scripture wants us to see that Joseph's coming down to Egypt is a good thing, in fact it's a God thing - because he is now far away from the corrupting influences of the Canaanite peoples - whom his brothers live amongst.

Not so much because Joseph was in any real danger of being corrupted by the Canaanites had he remained with his family - we know that Joseph is a young man of integrity and faithfulness and he can face down temptation anywhere, Canaan or Egypt - but because God's intention to be the one who gives this family the Promised Land is threatened.

You see there was always the potential for Joseph's older brothers to leave their father's family and settle down and live among the Canaanites; merge the family of the Promise into these indigenous families through intermarriage - and thus securing a claim to the Land through their own efforts.

And that would seem to be a very natural way to claim the fulfillment of God's Promise that they would possess this land.

But then there would always be the temptation to forget God gave it to them- they could always say, and others could say, that it was fulfilled through their efforts by marrying in with the people who already lived there, and through the willingness of the Canaanites to accept them - and that the Canaanites actually gave them the land.

But this was God's promise to keep - one that He would fulfill - in ways that could only be attributed to him - like giving Abraham and Sarah a son when they were far past child-bearing age, so it was important that Jacob's family stay separate from the Canaanites.

However, Judah had decided that he would to leave his father's home and go and live among them instead and risk being assimilated.

Now you may have noticed that in telling the story of Joseph we have jumped from chapter 37 to 39 – and that’s because chapter 38 is a rather salacious episode about the time when Judah lived among the Canaanites.

So as I mentioned Judah had moved away from his family and he married a Canaanite woman and had three sons – the eldest of whom married another Canaanite woman named Tamar.

However, the influence of growing up amongst the Canaanites, away from the Family of the Promise, meant that Judah’s eldest became wicked in the eyes of the Lord, and so God put him to death.

His widow however has no child, and so Judah instructs his second son to sleep with his brother’s wife to give her a son. But Onan is greedy – knowing that any offspring he produces won’t be legally his, he uses Tamar only for his pleasure and refuses to get her pregnant.

His greedy actions are wicked in God’s sight also – so God puts Onan to death as well.

Judah is now thinking that his daughter in-law is bad luck – she’s a black widow, there’s no way he’ll risk his third son with her, leaving him with no heirs.

So he makes a false promise that once his youngest is old enough – Tamar can marry him – but Judah does not intend to follow through on this promise.

Some time goes by, and Tamar can see that Judah has no intentions of keeping his promise – so she takes matters into her own hands and disguises herself as a prostitute, sits by the road when Judah is on his way to the sheep shearing celebrations and solicits him.

Judah sleeps with her, not knowing it is his daughter in-law, and she becomes pregnant.

Tamar finally has her legitimate heir and the continuation of her dead husband's line, which assures her of a future as well.

When Judah figures out what has happened – he is shamed into admitting his own wrong and spares Tamar the punishment for her actions.

Now I had enough trouble trying to figure out how to present the drama this morning with Ms. Potiphar trying to seduce young Joseph without adding in daughter-in laws pretending to be prostitutes and so on... so needless to say we cut chapter 38 from the drama presentation today.

However – it's actually an important story – and while there are parts of it which probably confuse and repulse us – it's fairly easy to see how the events of chapter thirty eight contrast with Joseph's circumstances in Egypt.

Judah willingly leaves to go live away from his family while Joseph was forcibly taken away from his family.

Judah's circumstances give evidence that the Family of the Promise was being drawn into their surrounding culture and shaped by it, while Joseph is resisting his surrounding culture in Egypt.

Judah denies a widow her "pension plan" and commits adultery and there is no public outcry against his actions, while Joseph is a model administrator and refuses to commit adultery, however he is thrown in prison because of it.

It's easy to see the contrast, and that's why it's important not to skip past chapter thirty eight, because it's this contrast which gives meaning to the narrator's emphasis on Yahweh's blessings and intervention in Joseph's circumstances.

The narrator is setting the stage so that we can clearly see it was God's plan all along to remove Jacob's family from Canaan, where they risked being absorbed by the Canaanites, and eventually bring them to Egypt - where they can develop into a nation without the risk of becoming like the Egyptians,

and forfeiting any claim to the land of Canaan except for God's promise.

So Joseph has been sent on down ahead, to get things ready for the rest of his family and put things in place for God's larger plan – He just doesn't know it yet. But, that's for later on - we don't want to get ahead of the story.

For now we just need to see that Yahweh is blessing Joseph – giving him success and granting him a promotion, helping him to develop his administrative gifts and realize his potential as a loyal and faithful steward in Potiphar's house.

Joseph is learning certain skills and gaining experience in Egyptian society which, unbeknownst to him, will be very necessary for him to have in the future.

And his time in Potiphar's household provides the opportunity for Joseph to demonstrate that he cannot be corrupted. He can stand up to temptation and resist the opportunity to take

what does not belong to him, when he could have easily done so and no one would be the wiser.

So he turns down Mrs. Potiphar's advances – and she retaliates by leveling false accusations, which ironically, only confirm Joseph's integrity and incorruptibility, because they are coming from Mrs. Potiphar.

Notice that Mrs. Potiphar has to gather all the servants around to make sure they get her story straight – but she gets no reaction and no sympathy from them.

They work for her and they know who she really is, and they also know who Joseph has proven himself to be as well, even Potiphar knows his wife is falsely accusing Joseph.

When the text says Potiphar "burned with anger" (vs. 19) notice that it's not directed at Joseph. In all likelihood Potiphar is furious that his wife has put him in a position where he has to fire Joseph and lose the most loyal, trustworthy household administrator he ever had!

When Joseph was looking after his affairs, every day was a vacation for Potiphar – now he will lose all that.

The other indicator that Potiphar knew Joseph was innocent was that he spared his life. Adultery was a serious offense that required the death penalty.

But Potiphar gives Joseph the lightest sentence available – house arrest in the King’s Prison – a minimum security “Club Fed” type facility where prisoners still get full service treatment and have their needs attended to by the warden.

So – while all of this looks like a gross travesty, and we’re thinking poor Joseph he just can’t catch a break, these circumstances actually establish irrefutable evidence - in a way that nothing else can – which proves Joseph is a person of incomparable integrity and incorruptible character.

God is preparing Joseph for what lies ahead, for his future calling where he will need to be above reproach, and no one

will be able to dig up any dirt on him and undermine his reputation and credibility.

And friends as we see what God is up to here – and why God is doing all this – I think this is how the story reveals our own unfaithfulness to us.

We can relate to Judah and his brothers – and we are related to them - as the family of the promise because we have inherited the promise of new life in Jesus Christ.

And the fulfillment of that promise through Christ is endangered when we leave the family of God and settle down among the Canaanites by adopting the beliefs and values and actions of our surrounding culture instead of staying separate from them.

In other words when we become *of the world* instead of being *in the world* we risk thinking that we have achieved our new and improved life, and we give the world the opportunity to

tell us “that’s not really from God, we actually we gave you that life.”

In fact when we moralize the story of Joseph, and say that Joseph’s example ought to inspire us to resist the temptation of adultery - we are settling down among the Canaanites of our day, adopting their misplaced confidence in our human ability to do what is right.

And if we succeed in resisting temptation and experience the blessings of fidelity in marriage – we will say “look what I have done!” and we won’t receive it as a blessing from Christ, it’s our accomplishment.

But – if we look to Joseph’s integrity and character and faithfulness as that which points us to Jesus Christ – and specifically allow Joseph’s resisting temptation to point us to the time when Jesus Christ resisted Satan’s temptations in the desert – then any success we experience from resisting temptation is a result of putting our faith in Christ’s ability to do so over our own.

So in that awareness and experience of our own insufficiency, we are put in a position to experience Jesus Christ being fully sufficient for us, and to receive His power to endure further temptations and overcome them.

And often times friends – we cannot get to that point unless God steps in and starts rearranging things in our life, just as He did with Joseph.

You see friends our faith depends on us having confidence that God produced our faith – not us. We need to know God did this in us, God caused us to believe, God caused us to trust and put our faith in Jesus Christ – and the good news is that’s God goal.

He started our faith in Him, and He is going to bring us to the point where we can clearly see He is responsible for that – And when He brings us to that point, our faith will be strong and secure and unwavering because we know we didn’t

produce it - it was Him, Yahweh, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So we need God to do the kinds of things that only God can do – like arrange for the hard times and the tough breaks to occur, to reposition us and take us away from the alluring option of believing in ourselves and our own abilities, and show us the all surpassing greatness of Christ's faithfulness – which He will give freely to us.

Don't give into the temptation to think that God has it out for you, that you can't catch a break, or that you can't win for losing- that's not what is happening.

God has a promise of new life to bring about in you – and He is going to work it in such a way that there is no doubt in your heart that it was God Himself at work, no one else – just Him.

Friends this is God's Providence, this is what Joseph's story is all about, and this how it helps us realize our own

shortcomings and instructs us to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ instead.

Thanks be to God, that He truly does work in ALL things for our good! Amen.