

## Miracle of Miracles

Lenten Midweek #3 – 03/16/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.  
Genesis 39:1-21 Pastor Keith Besel

### **Introduction**

- ✘ Martin Luther looks at our Old Testament text tonight from Genesis, chapter 39 and considers the fact that Joseph doesn't lose hope; that he doesn't lose faith; that Joseph doesn't give in to temptation and lose his virginity in a shameful and wicked sin, and Luther calls it "a miracle of miracles".

### **I. Joseph attacked with many temptations**

- ✘ Let's not forget that Joseph was just a boy. Or was he a man? He was just seventeen-years-old when his brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites. We aren't told exactly how old Joseph was by the time he reached the prominence in Potiphar's house that we hear about tonight.
  - ➔ But let's say that he at least celebrated a birthday somewhere along the line. That would still make him only eighteen. Verse six tells us he's a handsome guy. And throughout the story we learn that he has the kind of character and faith and wisdom that few men of any age possess.
- ✘ And there is no question whatsoever – the devil is attacking Joseph on at least two different fronts. On the one hand, the devil is tempting him to fall into doubt and despair and defeat; trying to get him to conclude that God has forgotten and forsaken him ever since he was betrayed by his own brothers.
  - ➔ How easy it would have been for Joseph to abandon the faith he'd been taught by his father. How easy it would have been to give in to despair and depression; to be consumed by hatred because of his brothers' betrayal.
  - ➔ And as if that wasn't enough, now his boss's wife is trying to seduce him on a daily basis. It would have been so easy for Joseph to just give in to that temptation; so easy for him to justify a sexual dalliance. What harm would there be? Who would ever know?
  - ➔ Martin Luther put it this way, "Joseph spurns and rejects an opportunity so convenient; ...so full of safety, power, favor, and pleasure" (AE 7:77). Yet Joseph does not waver or equivocate one little bit. He calls adultery and sexual immorality what it is when he responds to the continuous attempts by Potiphar's wife to wear him down. He says in verse 9, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"
- ✘ So where is it that Joseph, an eighteen-year-old, gets this strength and clarity of character? How does he so clearly differentiate between right and wrong? And remember, he's got no Sixth Commandment to draw upon, no catechism to consult, no pastor to preach to him at this point in history.
  - ➔ The two tablets of stone and Mount Sinai are still over 450 years in the future, and Luther's Small Catechism is more than three thousand years down the line.
  - ➔ Neither can Joseph just crack open his Bible for strength and guidance to sustain him in his time of trial. There was no Bible written yet! All Joseph has is the Law of God written in his heart and the promises of God passed down from his father.
- ✘ And yet, with only those little crumbs of truth to draw upon – miracle of miracles! – faith continues to reign steadfast in this young man's heart. Two thousand years before the apostle Paul would exhort the Christians at Corinth to flee from sexual immorality because their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:18–20), Joseph sheds his garment and flees from sexual immorality, knowing that his body is indeed a temple of the Holy Spirit.

## II. We face similar temptations today

- ⊗ My dear Christian friends, it's no accident that the Lord inspired Moses to write this down and record it for you and me to read and consider all these years later. It is God's will, in fact that Joseph's story be studied, preached and proclaimed for us here tonight.
  - ➔ Why? because the temptations to sexual immorality and adultery are just as plentiful in and around us all still today. Potiphar's wife, with her promises and lies regarding sex and sin without consequences – she is everywhere we turn today in our modern culture. She's on your television screen and your computer screen. She's in your phone; the same phone that never leaves your side and so readily hides all your secrets.
  - ➔ Yes, the devil never quits, never eases up, never stops seeking to violate your chastity and destroy your faith.
- ⊗ And so, this particular episode from Joseph's life confronts us directly tonight, with an "in-your-face" kind of boldness. And because it comes from God's Word, we know that this episode is true; that it really did happen. Yes, the Bible is unabashedly honest and accurate about the ways of this world regarding its response to people of the Christian faith.
  - ➔ God may respond to Joseph's character, granting him "favor", as verse 21 puts it. But Joseph's great faith and his steadfast refusal to sin did not bring applause and accolades and promotions from many in the world – same as we see still today. Instead, no good deed goes unpunished. Things actually go from bad to worse – out of the frying pan and into the fire – as Joseph descends into prison; one step short of hell itself.
- ⊗ If that's what happened to Joseph – whose faith and life were above reproach in every way – shouldn't you and I expect far worse? I know how badly I falter in my faith; how fully steeped in sin my life is, and I think it's safe to assume that every one of us here would honestly confess the same, right?
  - ➔ Since that's so, we should all rightly expect nothing but earthly and eternal punishment; the things we honestly all deserve, right?

## III. Jesus as our substitute

- ⊗ Except for one crucially important fact; one even more important person – our new and greater Joseph. Yes, Jesus is the one to whom Joseph points us all to trust in for help and strength and deliverance from the depth and depravity of our temptation and sin.
  - ➔ Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet never once did He fall into sin. Jesus took on the temptations of a thousand wives of Potiphar and never, ever, took the bait; never did what would have been convenient or easy or pleasurable. Why not? because He battled all of that temptation for you – as your sacred substitute.
  - ➔ Where you and I fail, He succeeds. Where you and I stumble, He stands firm. Where you and I are weak, He is strong – the very power of God Himself.
- ⊗ And miracle of miracles! – Jesus undertakes a great exchange with and for you. Martin Luther called it *The Joyous Exchange*. Jesus takes all of your guilt and gives you all of His innocence. He bears your sin and absolves you of everything!
  - ➔ He drinks deeply and fully from the cup of God's wrath against your sin so that you might now drink the sweet wine that is His blood once shed for you on the cross for the forgiveness of all your sins. He takes your punishment and dies your death so that in the baptismal flood of His grace you might die to sin and rise again to life everlasting.

- ⊗ To a far greater extent than Joseph, Jesus humbled Himself and made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave. While Joseph did a lot of good, Jesus did good in all things: preaching the Gospel, casting out demons, cleansing lepers, giving sight to the blind, feeding the hungry, stilling the storms, and even raising the dead – and miracle of miracles – He also lived out all of the Ten Commandments to perfection.
  - ➔ Still for Jesus, as it was for Joseph, there was no applause or accolades or promotions. What started as shouts of “Hosanna!” became cries for His crucifixion. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. One of His own, in fact, betrayed Him with a kiss.
- ⊗ So it goes for Jesus. So it goes for Joseph. And so it goes for you. When Jesus took on temptation, He did it for you!
  - ➔ Face it folks, this world will not remember the times when you stand firm against temptation. Even when you, by the grace of God, lead a sexually pure and decent life in what you say and do; when you say no to sin and yes to the Lord Jesus, who loves you and gave Himself for you, the world will not honor you or give you a prize or even a word of congratulations.
  - ➔ No, Martin Luther says, “You must never hope the world will acknowledge ... your faithfulness and diligence, for it does the opposite” (AE 7:97). It could even be, like Joseph, that your good conduct might land you in prison or worse.
- ⊗ But do not lose heart Christians, for miracle of miracles you are precious to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Holy Baptism, He has connected you to Himself; to His death and resurrection, and He has made your body now a temple of the Holy Spirit.
  - ➔ That’s the miracle! You belong to the Lord – body and soul – redeemed and saved by Christ the Crucified. Amen.