

Protecting

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Date: 18 June 2023

Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

- [0 : 0 0] Today's scripture is from Genesis, chapter 39, verses 6b through 23. Now Joseph was well built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, Come to bed with me. But he refused.
- With me in charge, he told her, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house. Everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am.
- My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?
- And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.
- She caught him by his cloak and said, Come to bed with me. But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.
- [1 : 2 4] When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. Look, she said to them, this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us.
- He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house. She kept his cloak beside her.
- She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story. That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me.
- But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house. When his master heard the story, his wife told him, saying, This is how your slave treated me.
- He burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in prison, the Lord was with him.
- [2 : 3 5] He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.
- The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. And from John chapter 14, verses 10 through 14.
- Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing his work.
- Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing.

And they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

[3 : 55] You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. So friends, let's pray together.

Almighty and gracious God, we give you thanks for this moment. We give you thanks for this time we have spent together, as we know that you are on the move among us. Our hearts are open, Lord, and we can feel your spirit burning afresh in each of us.

Lord, as we have poured ourselves out to you in singing praises, in offering prayers, and in hearing your word, Lord, pour yourself afresh into each of us. Light a new fire in each of us, that we will go into the world, and the world will be drawn to that light.

Give each of us what you know we need. In Jesus' most holy name we pray and ask. Amen. So as you heard me say during the greeting time, we are walking through this series called A Way Out of No Way.

A Way Out of No Way. And I need to start this with a bit of a disclaimer. First, some of you may have already discerned, as you have heard Sandy in the reading, that this particular story focuses on an episode of sexual harassment.

[5 : 05] If that's a challenging conversation for you, if that brings something up and you need to take care of yourself emotionally, please do. All right? So that said, let's get into our conversation for today.

Now, A Way Out of No Way, and we're talking about God's protecting. God's protecting. So to start, I'd like to just offer a bit of a confession.

Y'all know I do this from time to time. And I know there's people in this room who are much better at this than me, which is part of the reason why I got to say this. Now, most of us come to our lives wanting things to work as intended.

Yes? Like, you buy something, say, from Amazon or off the shelf, you want it to work like it's supposed to work. Pretty clearly, right?

But then, sometimes you open these boxes, and there are these fun little white books in them. And these fun little white books tell you what you got to do in order to put the thing together and have it work correctly.

[6 : 13] Now, how y'all doing with them little white books? Right? My record is okay. Maybe like four out of five times, I do all right.

But even in the four out of five times, that sometimes you get to the end of this process, like you follow along with all them fun little pictures, and you try to find bag A and box B and part 12 and all that sort of thing.

And you get to the end of the process, and they're just like these magic extra things. Right? Now, sometimes they're kind, and they just give you a little extra because they know people like me will screw it up.

But one real example is the desk that I have in my office here at the church. Now, my daughter and I put this desk together when I was first appointed here.

Not, well, when I first became lead pastor here. And we spent an afternoon. We put it all together. We get to the end of the process. And then all of a sudden, we are all proud of ourselves because it actually looks right.

[7 : 19] And all the things work and everything fit together. But then we look over here, and there's, as we said, these kind of bonus parts on the floor. And we're like, um, what are we supposed to do with all that?

Because this kind of looks like it's supposed to belong on the desk. So we go back over to the desk. We check, and it all still works the way it's supposed to work. Doesn't look like anything's missing, but there's still this stuff on the floor.

So we kind of, okay. We got on with our lives. But fortunately for me, the desk still works the way it's supposed to work. Now, you think it's a desk, right? So there ain't a whole lot of complicated movement to this thing.

But it is one of those ones that's a stand-up desk, so it rises up like this. And so the fact that it's working, not a small thing. But I want you to hear me on this is because, as I said, you want your stuff to work like it's supposed to work, right?

And when you think about your life, wanting things to work as they are intended, I'm betting that all of us have had times when we're a little frustrated because things don't work according to the instructions in the box.

[8 : 34] We've all fought with that from time to time. We've all gotten a headache or two because stuff didn't seem to go according to the instructions. The reason why I'm bringing that up for us today, friends, especially as we talk about this idea of God's protection, because I think that a lot of folks, and I know this from some conversations I've had with members of our church family and in other places, is that folks struggle with this idea of what it means to actually be protected by God.

Because bad things happen in life. Hard things happen in life. Things that are serious. Things that are challenges. And sometimes when we get into one of those moments, we find ourselves going, God, that's not how this is supposed to work.

That you said you would protect me. So why is this happening? Friends, if we unpack that a little bit, using the story of Joseph that we just heard, we might figure out what it means to actually know God's protection.

To understand it properly. And say, well, you know, for those of you who may be sitting there struggling, you know what? I'm kind of at the end of my thing with God.

Because I'm simply going through too much. And God said it wasn't supposed to be like this. Maybe if you sit and sit with this for a minute, hopefully we can open your eyes a little bit to how God may be working in your life.

[10 : 08] So let's talk about Joseph. Joseph. Now most folks know Joseph the patriarch. And they know him for this one thing. That most folks, especially thanks to Broadway, know that when he was younger, he got this gift.

And this gift was what we called usually the coat of many colors. Right? And so it was bright. And it was colorful. And his father gave it to him because Jacob was kind of predisposed to Joseph.

In some ways, Joseph was kind of the miracle child for Jacob. Because he and Rachel, the woman he really wanted to be married to, if you want to understand all that drama, go back and check out some earlier chapters.

But Jacob and Rachel had trouble conceiving. But Jacob had other wives. And he had already had 10 sons by this point.

And along comes Joseph with the wife that he was really wanted to be married to. And so off we go. Now the thing about Joseph is Joseph started having these dreams when he was younger.

[11 : 18] And he had this sense that God was at work in his life. And so he told his brothers some stuff. And some folks also know this about Joseph's story.

It's because of how he shared these things with his brothers. His brothers weren't too pleased with him. And because his brothers weren't too pleased with him, they actually threw him into a cistern and had him sold into slavery in Egypt.

Okay? Now, this idea of being sold into slavery in Egypt, that's kind of where we enter the story today. Now there's a little bit in the chapter before this, as you can follow in your bulletin, that we started in verse 6.

But there's more before this. And it talks about that peace in Egypt, how he gets there and he's sold to this official named Potiphar. Potiphar obviously has money. He obviously has power and status.

because he's got a household with all these different servants in it and all that sort of stuff. And enter Joseph. Okay? Joseph does his job well and he catches Potiphar's eye and all of a sudden, he's actually put in charge of stuff.

[12 : 30] And that is where we enter the reading. Okay? Everybody with me? That is where we enter the reading. So, I want you to hear this part again.

We're just going to check out this first part. Now, starting at verse 6, we're starting in 6B. And that's one of them churchy, pastory things. That when you split a verse sometimes, like there'll be a few sentences, they give it letters to help us to distinguish them.

And so, we're starting at the part where it says, Now Joseph. Okay? So, read along with it. Now, Joseph was well built and handsome. And after a while, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, Come to bed with me.

But he refused. With me in charge, he told her, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house. Everything he owns, he is entrusted to my care.

No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife.

[13 : 37] How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? Even though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

So, this is Joseph's life. Okay? And I want you to just see it to this point. Because as we say, Joseph's been through some things.

Right? I mean, already at this level, he already been through some stuff. And I want you, when you consider your own journey and you start thinking about the storms you've battled, the things you've been through.

Okay? Hear that in relationship to Joseph. Because he'd been through some things. So, having said that, our journey now is to figure out what is it we can learn from Joseph that helps us as we navigate life's storms and understand what it means to have God's protection on us.

Okay? So, there's three things I want to highlight in this. Okay? Three. So, first, if you are struggling to navigate a storm or feeling like God may be not protecting you, the question I ask you is this.

[14 : 53] Is how sure are you that you are walking in God's plan for you? Hear that question again. How sure are you that you are walking in God's plan for you?

See, the thing is, God has a will and a plan for all of us. That every time God creates a soul, God sees that journey. God says, here's what I'm hoping this one will do.

The problem is, we get born and we start thinking with these brains that He's given us and we start doing our own thing. Okay? Now, if you have put any meaningful time into trying to figure out what is God calling me to be?

Who is God calling me to be? What is it that God wants me to do? If you've put real work into that and you're walking in God's plan for you, you're in kind of a different place than a lot of folks.

You see, here's this thing. That folks will often have this restlessness about them. Folks will have, actually, what on the surface looks like pretty nice lives.

[16 : 12] You know, got the home, got the family, got the job, got the toys, all of that. And yet, there's still this thing, right? I know some of y'all talk to your friends and relatives and know what I'm talking about.

That everybody's like, is this it? Shouldn't there be more than this? Or, I'm still not happy. Right? Now, there could be some very real, like, medical and psychological things going on there, so we're going to make space for that.

But while all that is happening in people's lives, the question I would ask is while you're taking care of the body and while you're taking care of the mind, are you taking care of the spirit?

In other words, have you made a choice that is taking you off of God's path for you? Because if you're standing outside of God's plan, why would you be surprised that you don't feel as locked into God as you would like to feel?

It's not that God is not in your life. It's not that God doesn't love you. But, if you haven't invested time, energy, in figuring out what God is up to, what God is hoping for you, and much less if you've done that and sort of figured it out, but then still not actually done it, why are you surprised that there's this rumble in your spirit?

[17 : 44] Okay? Now, the reason why I say that, connecting it to this idea of protection, is that, you know, when the storms of life come, those medical diagnoses, those challenges in life, all that sort of stuff, well, then we really start to go, hey, God, what are you doing?

It's not supposed to work like this. Okay, we're going to get back to that. But that being said, you know, there's this other thing, is that if you have put the work in to be as close and as aligned with God as you can be, then if you know that and you're in your spirit and you know the spirit's in you and you are plugged into what Jesus has taught and what Jesus is leading you toward, and if you have all of that working, when all that other stuff is happening, you know that God's got you.

And if you know that God says, well, here's my plan, or at least I know I'm locked in and I'm following you, God, wherever you go, then one of the things that you can be sure of is that this storm is not the end of my story.

That this storm is not my destiny because God has taken me over there. But if you're not checked into that, if you've not done that work, then that storm seems awfully big and awfully scary because you have no idea how you're going to deal with it.

So thing one, are you as sure as you can possibly be that you are walking in God's plan for you? Let's check Joseph. You heard me talk about those dreams that he had, right?

[19 : 31] So all of y'all with younger siblings can imagine this story, right? So you one of the older ten and along comes the kid with the nice jacket.

And one of the things he tells you is, I had this dream the other day. And then in this dream, I was at the center of this gathering. And what happened is ten other folks came in and bowed down to me.

Now how would you feel about that story? Guess what? He has another dream that's pretty similar to that and comes back and drops that on the family too.

So there's a sort of build up, okay, of all this resentment because now not only does he have the cool jacket, but now he seems to be getting these messages and telling everybody, hey, guess what guys?

I'm the best. Now, if you're one of those older siblings, your feelings are understandable.

[20 : 38] But here's the thing. Joseph wasn't wrong. He was in his purpose. He knew what God had put on his heart and he wasn't shy about it.

Like I said, we can check maybe some of the arrogance involved in how he is relaying this information, but he's not wrong. And so he's walking in his purpose.

And so he knows that. So when we get to that part of the story that I was telling you about before, now here's the thing. if you read the story carefully, what you find out is that his brothers initially planned to kill him.

That was the plan. They were going to straight up murder him. But one of the brothers talks them out of it and says, no, we ain't gonna kill him. And then they drop him in the cistern.

Then they try to do something else. They come back and he's gone. And what happens is he's gone off. These slave traders came and got him. So now what? Read your Bible.

[21 : 46] You'll figure that part out. Now, but as I said, Joseph's done been through some things. But even in the midst of all of that, did you catch this? He's plugged into his purpose.

And even when all these things start going down, he hasn't forgotten that. I'm sure it didn't feel good. I'm sure he didn't love it, but he knew that God was with him because he was walking in that purpose.

Okay? So you have to make sure that's part of your work. Make sure that you are as closely aligned with God's will as you understand it for your life as possible.

Second thing is that you still have to do the work. Let me say that again. You still have to do the work.

Here's what I mean by that. When Joseph gets to Egypt and he's put into Potiphar's house, now remember, he was one of Jacob's sons and he was doing his work in the family business.

[23 : 00] He gets sold into slavery. Now, he could get miserable. He could get cynical. He could get bitter. He could get all those things. But what happens is he actually shows up and does the work.

Now, like I said, he probably ain't in the happiest place, but he shows up and he does the work. And because he does the work, one of the things that also happens is that Potiphar notices that he's doing the job well.

He's doing his job well. not only is he doing his job well, something else is happening. It's that he's producing fruit.

He's producing success. And because he's producing success, there's something that rides along with that that we have to pay very close attention to. If you read those first five verses, what you will see is that it tells you that the Lord was with him.

okay? Now, when it says that, what I want you to connect that to is the first point.

[24 : 08] See, because if you walk in God's will, right, this idea of God working through you, this idea of God blessing the things that you are a part of, this thing that God has taken you to the place where God said he wanted to take you, that's what that means.

The Lord was with him. Okay? So, but Joseph still had to get up day after day after day after day after day after day and perform.

So, think about this, friends. The storm hits. The bad thing comes. And you can let it cut you off.

You can let it break you. You can pull up and go, you know what? I'm done. This is not the plan. Because you, God, told me I was going over there.

Or, you can trust that God is still God. And if God has said, this is my plan for you, that God hasn't forgotten that.

[25 : 24] And yes, you may be in this season, but that doesn't mean God won't do what God said God would do. He just didn't do it today.

And the question is, can you hang on in the middle of that? Can you stay faithful in, not only when it's hard, but this may even be more challenging, when it's boring.

Okay? Because that's what I mean. Every day, is getting up and doing what you're supposed to do, and doing it at a high level, because you trust that God said, I'm going over there.

Like I said, it may not be today, but that's what God told me, and I'm walking in my purpose. So, one and two, right? Are you as sure as you can possibly be that you are walking in God's will?

Two, you've got to get up every day and do the work. We see that, both of those things, in Joseph. Here's number three. That a bad season does not mean God has stopped the promise.

[26 : 45] A bad season doesn't mean that God has given up on you. And see, that's where this really hits, because that's what we have been conditioned to think.

That's what the world makes us feel like, is that when something hard comes into the picture, as we said, that medical diagnosis, that unexpected house problem, or maybe your daughter's car gets stolen.

Okay? When those sorts of things hit our lives, that's when we want to shake our fist at God, right? We say, this ain't it. No, no, no, you're supposed to take me over there.

But the bad season doesn't mean God has forgotten you. And see, if we start to fall into that trap, here's the real danger, y'all. When we start to fall into that trap, what happens is the more we start shaking our fist at God, the more mad we get at God, all those sorts of things, because we say, nope, this is not how it's supposed to work, Jesus.

What happens is if Jesus doesn't flip this and poof us to the happy place we want to go, then what starts to happen is we actually start pulling out of our relationship with God.

[28 : 06] That we start saying, you know what, I'm done with this, this doesn't work. that clearly I either misunderstood or God isn't who I thought God was.

But the thing you got to remember, and y'all know that I say this a lot, but I'm going to say it again today because it's the truth, that that is not a God problem, that's an us problem.

We're the ones separating ourselves, not God. And that is the danger. And so, we see all of that in Joseph.

Because you heard me say just a few minutes ago, Joseph done been through some stuff. But you hear that in the passage that we read? That Joseph hung on.

That he said, look, Mrs. Potiphar, this ain't going to work. Okay? But did you hear, not only did he say, I'm not going to do this because of how I respect my boss and my position, but he also said, how could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?

[29 : 17] God is on his mind. God is on his mind and on his heart, and he keeps that close. Even in the midst of all he's been through, all he is enduring, that is still important.

Now, when stuff starts hitting you, have you let that go? You see, because that's where we start to have those conversations, where folks pull out, where I'm done with Jesus.

Right? And in that passage we read, did you hear that other piece? Because it connects to the second point, where it says, day after day, she kept coming at him, but he still stayed strong.

So all of this is how we get it done. And then it gets worse. Right? Because we know what happens at the end of the story, that, well, she sets him up.

So all the other household staff are gone. She brings him into the house. She tries again. He refuses. She grabs his cloak. His cloak comes off. He runs out in some state of undress.

[30 : 41] Then everybody comes back in. Her husband comes home. She sets him up. And her husband throws him into prison. Now I want you to catch a couple details about this story, because there's something else as you start to think about God's protection that we may have missed in this.

Right? Because I told you before that when Joseph was thrown into the cistern, the original plan was to kill him. I want you to think about this moment too.

Joseph's life has no value in Egypt. He's a slave. Potiphar is an official, and he can do whatever he wants to Joseph. In fact, he could just kill him on the spot, and no one in Egypt would have given it a second thought.

No one would have cared at all. And I'm willing to bet that there's some folks in here, if you came home and your wife told you, this fool came at me today, you know how you'd feel, and you know what you might be inclined to do.

Jesus and all of that still being in the building, you know what you might be feeling. Come on, y'all. Let's not play like that. Now, that being said, do you not get this idea of what it means to be protected by God?

[32 : 18] Because, as we said, that was not Joseph's destiny. And even though that was a thing, he ended up putting him in prison.

And we say, well, that's some consolation prize. However, what happened in prison? Did you hear that in the reading? He gets into the prison, and he does the work.

And all of a sudden, the warden has raised him up and put him in charge of stuff. And what did you hear in that reading? Two times. Because the Lord was with him.

And what y'all got to understand about this is the rest of Joseph's story. I know some of you know it, but what happens is Joseph eventually becomes second in Egypt to Pharaoh.

Eventually, he's running the whole show. Right? And not only that, remember the dream at the beginning. Because there's a famine in the land.

[33 : 32] And because there is a famine, Jacob and his family can't eat. And where are they going to go for food? Well, where the guy said, make sure we store up food for a number of years because there's going to be a famine.

Okay? And so they go and in order to get food, what did the brothers have to do? Connect the dots, y'all. What do the brothers have to do?

And so, as I told you, Joseph wasn't wrong. He wasn't wrong. But see, what we forget when we're going through these storms and these hard times is that how do we get to our destiny?

Right? Because Joseph actually wasn't clear on the destiny. He just had that vision in his brain and he knew that God had given him that vision and he was holding on to it.

But he doesn't get to be second in command in Egypt unless he interprets Pharaoh's dream. He doesn't interpret Pharaoh's dream unless he interprets the dream of the other two who are in prison with him.

[34 : 37] He doesn't get to prison unless he deals with Potiphar's wife. He doesn't deal with Potiphar's wife unless he's sold into slavery, into Egypt. Now it's not that God just brings bad things on you because God does this for sport.

But friends, what will happen is that God will use the storms in your life to bring about your destiny. And if you hold on in the midst of those storms and trust that God is still God in the middle of those storms, you will know God's protection in so many different and new ways.

But stop believing the world's version of God's protection and trust God's version of God's protection. That's what we've got to learn. That's what we've got to believe.

And when you talk about a way out of no way, how many people, if you were Joseph in the bottom of that cistern, would have seen a way? How many people, if you had been thrown into prison by your boss's wife, would have seen a way?

But that's who God is. See, friends, this idea of what works in our lives, listen to Jesus.

[35 : 57] The reason why that John reading is there is because there's a line in it that is critical for us. It says, if you don't believe what I'm telling you, this is Jesus talking to his disciples on the night he gives himself up for us.

says, if you can't believe what I'm telling you, or if you don't believe the Father is in me, at least believe on the works themselves.

Believe on the works themselves. What Jesus is telling them is that you have seen what I can do. You have seen what I have produced in your life.

And if you can't believe what I'm telling you now, because the words aren't making sense, and if you can't believe that I am who I say I am, then believe on account of what I've already done for you.

Believe on account of the works themselves. So, friends, if you find yourself facing storms right now, if you find yourself doubting that God is with you, or God isn't protecting you, check your story.

[37 : 16] Because I know there's people in here who have been, like me, sitting there going, you know what? I look back on my life. Even in the midst of the drama I'm in right now, but I look back on my life, and I see this moment, and I see that moment, and I didn't understand it then, but I can look back now, and I can see God's hand at work all along.

It didn't make sense to me when I was in it, but I can look back now, and I can see it. And friends, if you are struggling with what's going to happen now, because you're looking forward, and you're like, I don't know how God's going to work on this.

If you don't believe the words, believe on account of the works themselves. The same God who brought you to today is the God who's going to take you into tomorrow.

And if you believe that, know what it means to have been protected by God, the one who has always and will still make a way out of no way.

Amen? And amen. Loving and gracious God, we thank you that you are who you are, that you move in our lives the way that you do, that you have shown us that no matter what our circumstances look like, you are still God.

[38 : 50] And that if we trust you, if we follow you, if we believe not only your words, believe not only what you have promised, but believe what you have already done, we can trust that no matter where you are leading, you are taking us to the place you know is best, to the place you have always promised.

Give us the strength, the faith, and the courage to follow. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen and amen.

Our Lord's name is worthy to be praised, and his name is indeed blessed. As we look forward to how we might go into the world and live our faith this week, know we have some important things coming up.

Our third Finding Our Way conversation will be Tuesday night at 7 p.m. If you are interested in following up to those first information sessions, this is the one for you.

Join us Tuesday at 7. Our Tough Stuff Bible Study group is meeting Thursday night at 6.30. So if you want to be a part of that deeper dive into scriptures and social issues, then join us Thursday at 6.30.

[40 : 12] We also have other opportunities for giving and spending your time. Those are laid out pretty clearly in the bulletin. The final thing I want to leave with you is that you know we have this upcoming sermon series called My Story, My Song, which allows members of our church family to share how a particular sacred song has touched their lives.

And so we've done this for a few weeks. If you're interested in possibly offering one of those reflections, you have until Wednesday. I've got to make the final decisions by Wednesday. So if you're interested in doing that, you can still just get in touch with me before Wednesday and we'll see where we are.

But Wednesday has to be the final day. So if you've not thought about it or if you're still working on it, it's laid out pretty clearly in your bulletin, but I wanted to just make sure everybody knew Wednesday is the day.

So that said, let's receive our benediction. The one who calls you, the one who loves you beyond measure, the one who is almighty and still your creator will set the path before you.

Never let the storm that arises in the path keep you from believing that you are under his protection. He is with you in all the ways you need.

[41 : 29] Now in the name of God, our creator and king, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our counselor and our sustainer, may God bless us as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children.

Amen.