**GOD WAS WITH JOSEPH (The Key to Prosperous Life)**

 May 27, 2018

Genesis 37-39

Key Verse: 39:2, “The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

As we review last week’s message, we remember that God helped Jacob to solve his 20-year old unsolved problem; his fear of Esau due to his sin of deceit by allowing Jacob to struggle with God. Jacob experienced true peace free from bone-melting fear for the first time by struggling with God until receiving his new identity; his new name Israel; one who struggle with God. God also helped Jacob to continue his pilgrimage when he wanted to live just comfortable life without God’s mission in Shechem by using a tragic event in which his daughter Dinah was involved.

From today’s chapter, among Jacob’s family, Joseph comes to stand out into the main stage of God’s redemptive story even though he was not a covenant son in Jacob’s family. Many bible scholars agree that in many ways, Joseph is the fruit of Genesis who represents the image of Jesus; namely innocent suffering, redemptive love and forgiveness, and life saving of God’s remnants.

In today’s passage, we are deeply amazed at how Joseph could overcome his upside-down life situation and all unbearable circumstances as a slave in Egypt. The key to his prosperous life was “God was with Joseph.” In 39, this phrase is repeated four times. Joseph’s life powerfully testifies to what prosperous life means and how we can live prosperous life. May God bless us to learn the key to our truly prosperous life regardless of our human situation or circumstances through Joseph’s life of faith! Amen.

1. **Joseph’s youth (37:1-36)**

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob whom Rachel had borne to Jacob.Jacob was very partial to his second wife Rachel and since Joseph was her first son, after Rachel died while giving birth to her second son, Jacob lavished all of his love and affection on Joseph. However, somehow Joseph was not spoiled. He received his father’s love well and grew up until he was a teenager of 17 without lacking anything. He loved his father and was obedient to him. He was oblivious to his brother’s jealousy and had no idea of the intensity of their hatred for him. Once when he was tending the flocks with some of his brother’s-the concubine’s sons, he brought his father a bad report about them. Thisreveals his naiveness and honesty. Later on, his father made him a very special coat; richly ornamented robe which looked like a prince’s robe. Every time he innocently wore it, his brothers burned with jealousy.

From his youth Joseph was different. He dreamed dreams. His dreams were not ordinary dreams. They were God’s revelations to him. They were like his Bible, for there was no written Bible at that time.He meditated on God-given dreams like a bible student who meditates on God’s word. Because Joseph lived his life on such a spiritual level, he could see things from a different perspective. He deeply accepted God’s sovereignty, not only for his own personal life, but also over the created world and over history. His brothers could not comprehend his inner spiritual life.

Joseph was a pure-hearted man, so everything seemed pure to him. He seemed unaware of the raging storm of jealousy that whirled around him. His brothers hated his beautiful coat. But most of all, they hated his dreams. He seemed totally unware of their hatred when he innocently told them about his dream, especially his dream about the sheaves of grain in the field, then later, about his dream of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to him. No one understood his dreams, but Joseph hid them in his heart and he firmly believed God’s sovereign purpose for his life based on God-given dream.

One day, Joseph’s easy-going, prince-like life came to an abrupt end. He was 17 years old, and his father sent him on an errand to find his brothers who were taking care of their father’s flocks near Shechem. When he came to the place where they were supposed to be, they were gone. He did not give up and go back home but asked around and found that they had gone further north to a place called Dothan. So, he went there. When they saw him coming, wearing his beautiful coat, their hatred and anger boiled over. They remembered his audacious dreams and decided to kill him. The oldest son, Reuben, was too weak to exercise any leadership among his brothers, but he secretly planned to rescue Joseph. They followed Reuben’s suggestion and stripped him of his beautiful robe and threw him in an empty cistern. Reuben intended to come back and pull him out. But before he could do so, something happened.

Judah was the 4th son, but he was the real leader. He saw a caravan of Midianite traders on their way to Egypt and had a brilliant idea. “What will we gain if we kill our brother and coverup his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.”(37:26-27)The brothers agreed. Reubenwas not around, so they pulled Joseph up out of cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites (Midianites) who took him to Egypt, and sold him to a man named Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s guard.

1. **Judah’s unfaithfulness (38:1-30)**

Before continuing Joseph’s story in Egypt, the Genesis author tells us about Judah who proposed and carried out the terrible plot to sell his younger brother Joseph into slavery. After the deed was done, Judah and his brothers dipped Joseph’s beautiful coat in the blood of a goat and took it to their father. He saw the bloody coat and concluded that a wild animal had killed Joseph. From that day on, he could not be comforted. A gloomy dark cloud of sorrow settled over the family. Judah couldn’t stand it. He couldn’t deal with his father’s inconsolable grief or with his own guilt. So, he left home. Chapter 38 begins with the words, “At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah.” He met and married a Canaanite woman and had three sons by her. He raised his sons there among the Canaanites. When his eldest son was old enough, he got a wife for him. Her name was Tamar, and she was a faithful woman. Judah’s son Er was wicked and the Lord put him to death. The second son, Onan was told to take his brother’s widow as his wife, according to the levirate law**.** He, too was wicked and the Lord put him to death also. Judah didn’t want to give Tamar to his third son, so he sent her to her father’s house with a promise which he did not intend to keep. In the meantime, Judah’s wife died. Tamar realized that Judah was not going to keep his promise, so she took matters into her own hands. She disguised herself as a prostitute and slept with Judah, her father-in-law, and conceived. She was determined not to die a sorrowful, fruitless widow in her father’s house. She was faithful to her husband’s family which was God’s covenant family. When Judah found out what she had done, he said “She is more righteous than I..”(26) After she gave birth to twin boys, Judah took his family and returned to his father’s house. One woman’s faithfulness touched his heart, and he came home to become a faithful son, and again become a leader among his brothers.

1. **Joseph in Potiphar’s house (39:1-23)**

Joseph was suddenly thrust into the cruel reality of slave life in a strange land. The Bible does not tell us about his early years as a slave boy in Egypt, but we can imagine how many blows he must have received and how many tears he must have shed in the night as he thought about his father. We can imagine how lonely and frightened he must have been. We are not told how he mastered the language of Egypt, but he did, for later he spoke like a native. He was a hard worker, and he overcame himself and his environment. But the writer of Genesis does not emphasize his hard working but only tells us one thing repeatedly. Chapter 39:2a says, “The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, …”This sentence emphasizes that his prosperity was not a mere result of his hard working but came from God. This also means that Joseph believed in sovereign God who controls everything above all things including his own life. Because Joseph accepted God’s sovereignty and trusted his goodness and love in both good times and bad, his heart did not become crooked or bitter. He served his human master as if he was serving the LORD. When he did so, even his ungodly mastersaw that the LORD was with him and blessed his household because of Joseph and Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar entrusted everything in his household to his care except the food he ate.When he became prosperous in his master’s house, his heart did not become proud. He remained as a humble servant. This was true prosperity; inner prosperity. His inner prosperity made him endure all bad times and brought outer prosperityas well later. One Harvard University professor researched about the relationship between happiness and success using hundreds of people as a sample. His conclusion was that we are not always happy just when we make success but when we are really happy, we makemore success. Here,**“**being happy”that the professor meant was “inner prosperity,” such as thankfulness, trusting in God, kindness, gentleness, serving wholeheartedly and faithfully in both good and bad times. Such inner prosperity is our true happiness. When we have such inner prosperity, external success comes to us as its by-product.

All people have ups and downs in life. Some people become bitter and angry toward God and men when they encounter hard times; and they become proud or self-indulgent when things go well and successful. But God was with Joseph and Joseph trusted in him, so the experiences of his life, both good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, could be used by God to build his character; his inner prosperity.

When Joseph’s life was prosperous and at peak in his master’s house, the time of testing came to him. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,and after a while his master’s wife took notice of him and said, “Come to bed with me!” She tried to seduce him, not just once but day after day. Joseph was clear and unwavering. He reminded her of her husband’s complete trust in him. But more than this, he told her that what she was asking him to do was wicked in the sight of God. It was a sin before God. So, he refused to sleep with her, and he did his best to avoid her. If Joseph had allowed passion, pride, or ambition to get even a small foothold in his heart, he would have surely fallen. But God was with him and he lived before him. Potiphar’s wife was full of adulterous desire and waited for an opportunity. One day, she found it. She was at home alone and Joseph came into the house to attend to some duty. She seduced him again and took hold of Joseph’s cloak. Joseph fled, leaving his cloak behind. When shecouldn’t get what she wanted, she became furious and lied to her husband, and Joseph was thrown in jail. Once again, Joseph’s life seemed to go from bad to worse even though he did what was right. Since his imprisonment was a great injustice, this time, Joseph could have been filled with bitterness or despair. However, even in prison as a slave, God was with him and he held on to his trust in God. When he did so, before long, he became the practical steward of the prison. Later we come to know that his imprisonment turned out the straight way for him to become the prime minister in Egypt. Joseph was just doing his best at lowest situation trusting in God and serving men as if he was serving God. But behind his hard life, God was working for the good of him and all who were called according to his good purpose; his world salvation work.

In conclusion, today we learn what the key to Joseph’s prosperous life was. It was his trusting in God, his sovereignty, and love. When he trusted in God both in good and bad times, he was prosperous inwardly regardless of outward situation and later it brought outward prosperity as well. Those who believe in and trust in God are people living in 3-dimensional level (things-people-invisible God) while unbelieving people live merely in 2-dimensional level (things of the world-people including themselves-no God). Truly prosperous people are those living in 3-dimentional level who trust in God and serve men like serving God. May God bless each of us to live in in 3-dimenstial level like Joseph so that we too can become truly prosperous both in good and bad times! Amen.