

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH

5. Grace That Makes Heroes

Genesis 41

Psalm 105:16-19 NLT

He called for a famine on the land of Canaan, cutting off its food supply. ¹⁷ Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them -- Joseph, who was sold as a slave. ¹⁸ They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar. ¹⁹ Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the LORD tested Joseph's character.

This morning we are in our 5th installment in our study of The Life of Joseph. This amazing man comes on the scene in Genesis 37 at the age of 17. He was the youngest of Jacob's 11 sons. We are immediately told that God had given to him 2 dreams. In both of those dreams Joseph's entire family is shown bowing before Joseph. Those dreams were radically counter-culture in the fiercely patriarchal society of Joseph's world. Children always bowed to their parents, and the younger children always bowed to the older children especially the oldest. Joseph's brothers were infuriated by the dreams. His father was insulted by them — but he filed them away in his heart and mind. But these dreams **were not** about a **cultural revolution**. They were about **salvation**.

I can't stress this enough! This **was not** a **one dimensional** rescue mission! By saving this family, who were the descendants of Abraham, God was ultimately preserving His saving plans and purposes for you and me! In a very real way — you and I are saved because this family was saved!

But check this out! God was going to bring about the salvation of this family in a way that was completely and radically against the grain of everything society believed to be possible; in a way that would turn the value system of the world upside down!

The saving of this family is such an incredible foreshadowing of how God would bring salvation to this lost broken world in a way that was completely and radically different than what man would ever believe

was possible. God would become man — born of a virgin — then die on a Roman cross and three days later conquer death itself! God would bring salvation to this lost broken world in a way that would turn the value system of the world upside down! The infinite glorious king of heaven would humble Himself — to save proud rebels! On the cross the sinless one would die in the place of sinners — the righteous judge of heaven and earth would take the judgment. The Gospel doesn't say that the good are in and the bad are out. The Gospel says that the humble are in and the proud are out.

So here we go!

Genesis 41

The famine that we will read about in the Bible this morning is a FACT of history. Joseph's position of authority along side of Pharaoh is a FACT of history. This is found in a book by Grant Jeffrey titled "The Signature of God". In 1850, Dr. Crutenden — an English explorer — found the tomb of a rich Yemenite woman who died during the time of the Egyptian famine — the tomb was discovered when a flood washed away soil and uncovered it. In the tomb they found an inscription about the famine that read:

In thy name O, God, I Tazia, sent my steward to Joseph to bring back a measure of flour.

As we read **Genesis 41** we can't miss that — just as Isaiah declared in **Isaiah 40:15** — the nations are a drop in a bucket to Him. While we are reading this account — we don't even know what Pharaoh's name is — Pharaoh is just his title. We are only given Pharaoh's title in passing — because to God he was just another ruler in this world. But we know Joseph's name — and we are even given his Egyptian name. We have a record of his entire adult life BECAUSE God is more concerned with this man and the survival of this man's family and the nation that would come from it — than any other kingdom or ruler. From **Genesis 12** forward God's Word only records the history of other nations as it relates to Israel - and thus to Jesus Christ.

Last week we left off with Joseph in prison. He is now 30 years old.

Genesis 41:1 After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, ²and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass.

We need to bear in mind that the Egyptians worshipped the Nile. Archaeologists have found drawings of Osiris — one of the principle Egyptian deities - he is pictured as a bull with 7 cows around him. We might look at this dream and think little or nothing, but this dream would be a pretty weighty thing to pharaoh.

³And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴And the ugly, thin cows ate up (Literally - chewed up) the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke.

Seven skinny killer cows would tend to wake one up!

⁵And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. ⁶And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. ⁷And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. ⁸So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

These were heavy weights in the occultic practices of Egypt. One day in the future (Exodus 7-8) the magicians of pharaoh would stood toe to toe with Moses. Moses will cast down his rod and it will turn into a serpent — they will cast theirs down and theirs will turn into serpents (Only the serpent of Moses ate all of theirs). Moses will turn water to blood — they will do the same. Moses will call up frogs from the land — and so will they. It wasn't until Moses turned the dust of the land into lice that they would say — *THIS is the finger of God.*

So these are no light-weights — they are steeped in the occult.

But they can't interpret the dream because they have no access to the realm from which **these** dreams came. It was GOD who inspired Pharaoh's dream and God had given the interpretation to Joseph.

⁹Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my offenses today. ¹⁰When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, ¹¹we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. ¹²A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. ¹³And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

We all know what it is like to do someone a favor and then they forget about you. You help them paint or hang some drywall — or help them move — and then they have a party and invite everyone but you. But 3 months later they call you back — and ask you to help them paint another room. So this is something we can all relate to! The chief butler wasn't remembering Joseph because of his kindness — he remembers Joseph because there is a NEED again.

The amazing thing to see in all of this is Joseph's character and conduct when he finally gets out of prison. In fact — as we follow Joseph coming out of prison until the time he dies (over a period of 80 years) **he doesn't speak a bitter or an angry word** against his brothers who hated him and sold him; against Potiphar's wife who falsely accused him or against the butler who forgot him. It is REMARKABLE to observe the character of this man!

By the way – We shouldn't assume that Joseph didn't FEEL anything bad about those people that had wronged him? In **James 5:17** the Bible tells us that these guys were subject to the SAME PASSIONS as you and I.

In the book of Ephesians we are told to be *immitators of God and WALK in love*. We're not told to **feel** love — we're told to **chose** to live, act and speak in a way that is loving.

14Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh.

A LITTLE INSIGHT — Jews did not shave — but the Egyptians did. So at the age of 30 this is probably the first time that Joseph ever shaved. And when you stood before pharaoh — you would shave your beard, your head **and** your eyebrows.

5And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” 16Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer (KJV — an answer of peace)”

This is REMARKABLE!!

You know, if you’re going to place a 30 year old guy in charge of the world, he needs to be a REFINED 30 year old. Joseph was REFINED in God’s fire.

As we see Joseph in **Genesis 41** we need to keep in mind that Joseph had no idea about the ultimate reality of those dreams. He had never read **Genesis 41**! All Joseph knew was that God had shown him something about the way his family would relate to him. He didn’t know WHEN it would come about. He didn’t know WHY it would come about. And he didn’t know HOW it would come about. But that vision burned within his heart; moved him; would sustain him through all of the tremendous adversity we’ve seen him go through.

THIS IS HUGE — Every step of the way — Every ounce of hatred he endured by his brothers — Every injustice he encountered — Every moment he suffered — **was all** preparing Joseph for the fulfillment of those dreams. **God was building His hero!** I want us to look at a portion of the passage that we had read to us

Psalm 105:18-19 NLT They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar. ¹⁹ Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the LORD tested Joseph's character.

The life of Joseph is CRUCIAL for every believer! His life informs us about the ways of God. His life defines us in our own suffering. E.M. Bounds (ministered in the late 19th / early 20 centuries and authored 9 books on the subject of prayer) sheds tremendous light on all that Joseph went through leading up to the events we will see unfold in **Genesis 41**.

"Men are God's method. While the Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men."

A.W. Tozer said

"Whom God would use greatly He will hurt deeply."

At every turn God was refining Joseph. Every trial — every adversity was **chosen** — and **measured** by God.

QUOTE: Warren Wiersbe — *"When God permits His children to go through the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat."*

Joseph was REFINED in God's fire. And here comes Joseph — 30 years old — and he refuses to touch the glory — refuses to take any glory from God for himself. He refuses to say – *I'll give you the interpretation if you cut this butler's head off*. He refuses to say — *Yeah - I can do that!* Instead — He says — **GOD** will give you and answer of peace!

¹⁷Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile. ¹⁸Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. ¹⁹Seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows, ²¹but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as ugly as at the

beginning. Then I awoke. ²²I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good. ²³Seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them, ²⁴and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.” ²⁵Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. ²⁷The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. ²⁸It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, ³⁰but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, ³¹and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. ³²And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.

WHEN God repeats Himself PAY ATTENTION — because God REPEATS Himself when He desires to ESTABLISH something!

LET ME ILLUSTRATE — You’re coming down the stairs with a cup of hot coffee and you trip over something the kids left on the stairs. You fall — the cup breaks — hot coffee all over you. You get mad at the kids and then you take it out on your wife. You pick up your morning devotional and it says, *Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it.* Then you get in the car and you turn on Christian radio and the pastor that’s on says – *Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it!* You come to Metro on a Sunday morning or to Monday Night @ Metro — and in the course of the study I quote the same passage.

When *that* happens — TAKE NOTE of it — because God is trying to establish something. And of course – that doesn’t just happen to husbands — it happens to wives too! God will REPEAT Himself to confirm and establish things.

In **VERSE 33** Joseph gives something to Pharaoh that Pharaoh didn't ask for — **ADVICE!** Advice on what to do in light of the dreams.

³³Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. ³⁵And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. ³⁶That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine."

KEY INSIGHT: It was common for governments to take 10% percent in those days. Joseph says that the crops will be **so great** that Pharaoh could take **20%** and they weren't going to miss it.

AGAIN — Joseph has been **TRAINED** by God for this. He was **SCHOOLED** in the Lord's Seminary. He was in charge in Potiphar's house with great abundance. He was in charge in a prison under very difficult conditions. 13 years of on the job management training. Part of it in luxury and part in the rigors of prison life.

CRUCIAL: **God was PREPARING HIS man for HIS work** — and so he does in our lives! We don't always know what's up; but the great thing is that the **shepherd** is NOT dependent upon the **sheep's I.Q.** in order to lead them — **PRAISE GOD!**

³⁷This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. ³⁸And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?"

Pharaoh did not understand the theology of this — but we do. He was a pagan man — a polytheist. **But he did** understand what he could see in this young man's life. The same is true for us. The unbelieving world around us doesn't know — or care to know about the nature of the Triune God; but they can and do **RECOGNIZE** the fruit of the Spirit in a person's life.

³⁹Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.”

THIS IS A STRANGE DAY! Here’s Joseph — his father’s favorite son. One day he was sent out by dad to check on his older brothers because his dad had made him their foreman. **In the morning** — he is the favorite of the father — **but by that night** he is on his way to Egypt as a slave - IN ONE DAY.

He was in Egypt where he served as the chief steward of Potiphar’s possessions. He wakes in the morning as Potiphar’s most trusted and powerful servant and **by the evening** he is in prison.

Joseph’s life seems to make these changes in ONE day! **On this morning** — he wakes up in prison giving out bread and water to the other prisoners. The door opens — *Pharaoh wants to see you* — and **by the afternoon** he is ruling the land of Egypt and only Pharaoh has more power than him.

Psalm 75:5-7 NKJV Do not lift up your horn on high (don’t promote yourself); Do not speak with a stiff neck. (don’t speak out of pride)'" {6} For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. {7} But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.

BY THE WAY — **That** is the **theme** of the book of Daniel — which we are studying tomorrow night!

LIFE CAN and DOES CHANGE in a moment! The idea is to invest yourself in your relationship with God so that when that day comes you have no regrets. You don’t train for a marathon by running the marathon. You train and train before the race. Joseph was being trained — he responded to the Lord — His promises — His plans — His will.

⁴¹And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” ⁴²Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it

on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck.

instead of shackles

⁴³And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.

CRUCIAL INSIGHT: Joseph had been in the God's Seminary for 13 years. He dreamed the dream of others bowing down to him back in chapter 37.

But he was 13 years in the process of becoming the man that God wanted him to be — so that he could be **capable of ruling** when people did bow down.

**⁴⁴Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."
⁴⁵And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah.**

And Joseph said – That's exactly the name I was thinking of!!

Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name and citizenship to give him respect in the eyes of those he would rule.

And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

The priests of On were almost as powerful as pharaoh. So for Joseph to be given a daughter of one of these men was a sign of huge favor.

⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, ⁴⁸and he gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around

it. ⁴⁹And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured. ⁵⁰Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore them to him. ⁵¹Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh.

from a Hebrew verb = to forget)

“For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.”

He forgot the BITTERNESS of his experiences. **GOD did that!** Have YOU known bitterness? Have YOU been hated by your family? been treated unjustly? Have YOU treated dishonorably? Joseph was hated — sold into slavery and falsely accused. From the human perspective 20 years of his life gone down the drain. And without a Bible — without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit — Joseph was able to say - *GOD HAS MADE ME TO FORGET THE BITTERNESS.*

And God is the SAME today — If YOU are dealing with bitterness and anger — God is the SAME God that He was in the day of Joseph. **He** is ABLE to make you to forget too. NOT the lessons that were to be learned — but the venom. Your part, my part, is to WALK IN LOVE; choose to **not act** according to our feelings — but chose to **act** in love — choose to NOT speak bitter words that would tear down. **In time** — **GOD HEALS** our heart.

⁵²**The name of the second he called Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”**

We can only be fruitful in the land of affliction when we yield to the Holy Spirit and refuse to carry bitterness towards those that have hurt us.

⁵³**The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end,** ⁵⁴**and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.** ⁵⁵**When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people**

cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.” ⁵⁶**So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses**

We sing the lyric “Amazing Grace” — but I think we are often underwhelmed by God’s grace. Christian — There is absolutely nothing more amazing than the the stunning patience of God's grace.

We are now 20 years since Joseph was sold. **He was 30** when he came out of prison — and seven full years have gone by — so he is now **37** years old. **For those 20 years** God was **patiently** at work **making a hero!**

20 years earlier his brothers had stripped him of the robe that was the emblem of his status over them. **But now** Pharaoh gave him a robe that represented prominence and power that was beyond any his brothers could have ever conceived of. The signet ring and the gold chain were symbols of Joseph’s authority as second in command in Egypt (check out Dan. 5:7, 16, 29). Joseph was also given his own chariot — and men who went before him commanding the people to bow down to him — just as they did to Pharaoh.

DON’T MISS THIS — Joseph is **ready** to **be a hero** because by God’s **patient work** and **grace** — Joseph has not only gone from a pit and a prison to the palace — he is now — by God’s patient work and grace **capable** of seeing his brothers bow before him — just as he had dreamed and yet have a heart to save them and forgive them!

As we will see in our next study — Joseph could see how God was at work — even in his youth — to **prepare** him and **preserve** him. He could see how God used the things that were so unfair — the heart ache and suffering — to save Joseph from Joseph — save Joseph from bitterness and pride — and make him fit to be a part of God’s saving work!

CLOSE

Before we take communion I want to read a verse from **Psalm 119**

Psalm 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.

It's my prayer that the Holy Spirit is flooding your heart and mine with the truth of **what** grace looks like in our lives. It can look like hateful, jealous people — even those closest to us. It can look like false accusation and injustice. It might be 20 minutes of that stuff — or it might be 20 years of that stuff. It's my prayer that together we will see **the patience of God's grace** in those minutes and hours — those months and years— that are difficult

I pray that **I** will embrace them as God's patient grace that is intended to save me from me **so that** I might be a hero to my kids, my wife and my friends. I pray that **I** will embrace them as God's patient grace that is intended to save me from me **so that** so I might be part of God's redeeming work in a world that is starving for truth — dying without Jesus; so the world that is desperate for grace can look at me and see how amazing God's grace really is — how God's grace can save.

FOR THE UNBELIEVER

Jesus saves sinners! He saves — and only He saves — from the penalty and power of sin. He does it freely! He does it freely because we **could never earn** salvation — and we **will never deserve** salvation. He saves **by what He did** in dying in our place for our sins — and by rising from the grave to conquer death and guarantee salvation — for ANY and ALL who would put their trust in Him.

