

Genesis 41:41–52

⁴¹Pharaoh also said to Joseph, “Look, I have appointed you over the whole land of Egypt.” ⁴²Pharaoh took his signet ring off of his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand. He dressed Joseph in robes made from the best linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³He had him ride in the second best chariot that he had. Men went ahead of him crying out, “Kneel down!” Pharaoh appointed him over the whole land of Egypt. ⁴⁴Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, but in the whole land of Egypt no one will lift up his hand or his foot without your permission.” ⁴⁵Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath Paneah, and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, as a wife. Joseph went out and began to rule over the land of Egypt. ⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and traveled throughout the whole land of Egypt. ⁴⁷During the seven years of abundance the earth produced plentiful harvests. ⁴⁸He collected all the food during the seven good years in the land of Egypt, and he stored up the food in the cities. In every city he stored the food from the fields that were around the city. ⁴⁹Joseph stored up a huge amount of grain, like the sand of the sea. Finally he stopped keeping track, because it was too much to measure. ⁵⁰Two sons were born to Joseph before the first year of famine arrived. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, gave birth to them. ⁵¹Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, because he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s house.” ⁵²He named the second son Ephraim. He said, “Yes, God has made me fruitful in the land where I was afflicted.”

1. We recognize God’s guiding hand
2. We recognize our servant status
3. We recognize God’s promises for the future

Sermon for August 16, 2020, Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: Believers Recognize God’s Care in Our Lives

St. Paul’s Green Garden, MI

Imagine it. You are Joseph, sold into slavery at age 17, would you have given up on God? But yet he knew and believed that God had promised him a home in heaven. Could it be that God had abandoned him even as a slave in a foreign country? What’s more he remembered the dreams that God had given him, implying he would one day rule. A future like that seemed improbable when he was tied like an animal to a cart or a human handler on his way to Egypt in a slave trader’s caravan. But God’s promises reminded Joseph that God was still taking care of him. Imagine yourself in his place.

Who of us would not have been tempted to give up on God? Who of us would not have questioned the words of Paul that we know so well, **“All things work together for the good of those who love God.”** Did Joseph question whether or

page 2

not he loved God enough and that was why God allowed the brothers to sell him into slavery? Do evil things happen to us or to a family member because we have not loved God enough? Don't even go down that road, as great a temptation as that is. What we need to remember, what Joseph held onto, is the truth that God's love for us never fails. And as we look at this turn of events in Joseph's life we recognize that God's love was not only for Joseph, it was his love even for Joseph's brothers who had sold him into slavery, it was God's love for all of Joseph's family, the people of Israel in the future, and his love for all people, even though Joseph could not see those things as a slave, when he was falsely accused by his master's wife and then thrown into prison, where he languished for years. Yes, for thirteen years he lived in Egypt as a foreigner with no prospect for release. But yet as a believer, and we as believers, our God reminds us to recognize his care in our lives. 1. We recognize God's guiding hand; 2. We recognize our servant status; 3. We recognize God's promises for the future.

Did Joseph's brothers begin to hate him when their father gave Joseph a special robe? Perhaps. And their hatred was only fueled by his dreams that seemed to indicate one day he would rule over them. So when their father told Joseph to go locate his brothers while they were tending the flocks and looking for pasture, it came to a head. The brothers saw Joseph in the distance and hatched a heartless plan. Rather than kill him, they put him in a cistern, an empty water collection pit. And when a caravan of traders came along, they got rid of him by selling him into slavery

where he would go down to Egypt and never be heard from again. And of course, they would simply lie to their father and tell him that a wild animal had killed him while he was on his way to find them. That would end the matter they thought. Had the brothers' wickedness finally thwarted God's plans for this family. The Savior was supposed to come from their family line. But how could God cut through all their hatred? How could God bring good from all the evil they were guilty of?

It is important for us to note Joseph's reply to Potiphar's wife, years before this text, when she tempted him to commit adultery. He said, "My master has given me charge of everything in his household. He doesn't worry about anything except the food on his plate. He has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife. How could I do such a great wickedness and sin against God by committing adultery with you?" Joseph knew he was responsible to God. So he believed that God had not left him alone, that God's guiding hand was over his life, even if he could not understand what God was doing.

Page 3

Now fast forward several years. The Egyptian Pharaoh had two dreams. In one dream seven fat cows came out of the Nile River followed by seven skinny, gaunt cows. The seven gaunt cows ate the seven fat cows but remained skinny and gaunt. In the next dream Pharaoh saw seven plump heads of grain come up out of the Nile River followed by seven thin, shriveled heads of grain, scorched by the east wind. The seven shriveled heads ate the seven full, plump heads of grain, but remained as shriveled as before.” Now recall that while Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh’s chief butler and chief baker had been in prison there for a time. He had interpreted the dreams of both the chief butler and chief baker which both came true. The chief butler was restored to his position, but the chief baker was executed. When Pharaoh heard this he called Joseph out of prison and asked if he could interpret his dreams. Joseph answered this way: **“It is not in my power. God will give Pharaoh an answer to give him peace of mind.”** So once again Joseph shows his belief that God is guiding his life. In essence he told Pharaoh that he himself was only God’s mouthpiece, the interpretation was God’s.

So, far from thinking that God had let things get out of control, Joseph believed God was in control and that even when he may have felt there was no way out of prison, he believed God still had his hand of blessing over his life.

How hard it is for us to believe that God has his loving guiding hand in our lives, now that it seems a microscopic virus has taken control of the world. And don’t we worry that this disease will take the life of a loved one or a friend. In some cases, perhaps it has. Is God showing us that we have not loved him enough? No. We should not think that we can control the outcome of all of this in our country and around the world. God uses all the situations in our lives to point us to his word, so we recognize our sins, repent, receive his forgiveness and be assured of his love for us. Because when we understand his love for us then we recognize our servant status before God.

Joseph had been a slave in Potiphar’s house; he had been a trusted inmate in prison. Both were positions of service. Those thirteen years certainly helped shape Joseph to be ready for service at the moment when Pharaoh said this: **“Look, I have appointed you over the whole land of Egypt.”** ⁴²**Pharaoh took his signet ring off of his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand.** Now Joseph had the authority of Pharaoh himself. The signet ring was the king’s own seal of authority. In our terms it was the equivalent of the president’s own signature as he signs legislation into law.

What would Joseph do with this authority? We get an idea when we hear Joseph’s advice to Pharaoh. **“Let Pharaoh, therefore, look for a man who is wise and discerning, and set him over the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does this,**

let him appoint overseers over the land to collect one fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance.” What was the position that Joseph was describing? A position of service, one designed for the good of the people of Egypt, someone who would be in charge of collecting 20% of the crops from the seven years of abundance so that Egypt and its neighbors would be able to survive the seven years of famine. We should not think Joseph was so presumptuous as to think of himself as the one who would take this position. He was in fact offering wise advice to Pharaoh who may have been rather bewildered at the message he had just heard. But don't we see Joseph recognizing his servant status. He was a servant of God, giving wise advice to the ruler of the country where he lived, even if that ruler was not a believer.

When Joseph was given this position of authority, he acted like the servant that he truly was. Moses tells us this: **He collected all the food during the seven good years in the land of Egypt, and he stored up the food in the cities. In every city he stored the food from the fields that were around the city. Joseph stored up a huge amount of grain, like the sand of the sea.** It was a monumental task, but God gave Joseph the strength to be a servant to Pharaoh and Egypt.

We should not think that just because we are not the prime minister of a country that our servanthood is less valuable to God than Joseph's was. For that is who he truly served. And so do we. Why? Both we and Joseph serve God because we know He sent us a Savior to give us eternal rest with Him. When we serve God we want to give glory to him through our service. Jesus said others will see our works and praise God. So when we are tempted to complain about serving, whether at home, or at our place of work, or in our community, or anywhere else we can be thankful that our Lord moves us to repent and has given us a Savior to take our sins on himself. He puts away our sins. His mercy to us is new every morning. It is important we remember this truth because as our God takes care of us in this life, he reminds us of his promises for the future.

While Joseph was in slavery and in prison, he surely could not see God's plan or how it would unfold. Those thirteen years from the time he was a slave until he became Prime Minister of Egypt must have seemed to have no end. But as things began to unfold, he could surely see that God had placed him in a position of authority, not only as the agent of Pharaoh, but more importantly as God's agent. God gave him wisdom to see what should be done to make sure the bounty of the years of plenty was not wasted, but stored up so people would not starve. God had his specially chosen servant in the best place at the best time so that Joseph's family, the family from whom the Savior would come, would be kept safe during the famine.

Page 5

You see, Joseph believed in God's promises. He knew that Egypt was not the place of destiny for God's people, his father Jacob's family. There was something more, the promised land of Canaan, and even more important, the eternal destiny of God's people, heaven itself. Family was important to Joseph, even though his own brothers had treated him so terribly. So when Joseph had sons of his own he gave them significant names. He gave his older son the name Manasseh which means to forget. He would not allow the pain of his brothers' betrayal of him or the false accusation of Potiphar's wife to cause him perpetual bitterness. Instead he allowed God to take away all that pain and instead, to focus on God's hand of love in his life. He also wanted to give complete attention to the unique opportunity he had to serve God though he was a foreigner in a heathen nation.

The name of his younger son was just as important in showing us Joseph's state of mind. **He named the second son Ephraim. He said, "Yes, God has made me fruitful in the land where I was afflicted."** The name Ephraim, means double fruitfulness. The name expresses Joseph's joy over this second gift of God, another son. You see, Joseph did not consider Egypt to be his home. It was only the land where he had suffered, but he realized that God had a purpose in all of his suffering. He used Joseph as his agent for the good of his father and brothers and the future nation of Israel. Egypt would be the place where God's people would spend 400 years in slavery. But God's goal was always to take his people back to Canaan. Joseph believed this and longed for it because he also believed Canaan was where the Savior would be born, the Savior who would take away all sin, who would suffer the pains of hell itself to be the sacrifice for our sins. Though Joseph did not understand everything, we know he understood enough, because years later, after he was reunited with his family, he told his brothers regarding their terrible sins against him, **"You intended to harm me but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."**

He knew God's purpose for his suffering was good, even if people had wicked intentions. He recognized God's purpose of love in his life. So no matter what your trial is, if it is the restrictions we have to endure because of the covid pandemic, or physical ailment, or financial hardship, or family relationship challenges, know that God always has you in his loving care. We may not always understand why God allows suffering. None of us is likely to become the leader of our country. What is important is that we remember that our God loves us for Jesus' sake, that he has in mind, heaven as our permanent home. Keep the long distance destination in your mind and your heart and remember that your Lord has you in his loving care. This means he only has a loving purpose for your life, even if you and I are not yet able to see it. Amen.