

June 24 – Rise to Power

Genesis 41:39-49, 53-57

It has been 13 years since Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. During this time he has matured and gained in wisdom. The once self-centered young man now, in the presence of Pharaoh, is humbly giving God the credit for any ability he might have to interpret dreams. It would have been so easy for him to use this rare opportunity to lash out at Potiphar for throwing him into prison, without so much as hearing his side of the story, or make some comment about the untrustworthiness of the cupbearer who had promised to plead his cause but was forgotten. He could have used this moment for his advantage, but instead behaves as an agent of God. He doesn't know it at the time, but it is these very actions that are going to cause his rise to the very pinnacle of power in Egypt.

Joseph not only interprets Pharaoh's dreams but also gives Pharaoh a recommendation as to what he should do. That is being a little audacious but, in this case, it is seen as a word from God instead of being seen as Joseph puffing himself up. So obviously, the tone in which he shared this information is much different from the days when he talked about his dreams and made his brothers and father so angry with him.

Pharaoh, and we should not discount this, is portrayed as a wise and religious man. He sees in Joseph's words the spirit of God. Since Joseph is speaking for God then obviously God is sharing with Pharaoh that Joseph is the one God has chosen as overseer of Egypt to make sure that these plans to protect the people from the famine are carried out. Pharaoh sees in Joseph the one who can save Egypt and, by implication, his throne and dynasty. I doubt Pharaoh would have seen Joseph as the overseer of Egypt if Joseph had still been self-centered and his words had all been about how he could interpret dreams Pharaoh would have likely seen him as ambitious and therefore dangerous. If Joseph had been filled with anger at those who had mistreated him Pharaoh would have worried that he would abuse his power. But, in

presenting himself as God's agent, Pharaoh sees in Joseph the type of person he needs if he is to give one such unlimited power as suggested by the dreams.

Pharaoh then invests Joseph with the symbols of power. He is given a ring with Pharaoh's name engraved upon it. He is given fine garments and gold chains to wear and a chariot to ride in, with soldiers going before him telling all to kneel. He is given a priestly wife. He has become the prime minister and in this role goes about collecting food during the time of plenty in preparation for the times of famine.

What I want to focus on is what Joseph names his two children. This is something that I learned in my research for this series. I had not taken the naming seriously until now. The names tell us much about Joseph's present mindset and how he had dealt with his past.

He names his first child Manasseh because "God has caused me to forget all my hardship." What an incredible gift. God enables one to forget, to put the past behind us, and to move beyond dwelling on misfortunes. This allows us to embrace the ever-new gifts that God brings us each day. For Joseph to focus on the past, his betrayal, his march to Egypt, his time in the house of Potiphar, his imprisonment and abandonment would have caused him to become angry and bitter. He would have been out to plot revenge, and it would have been a terrible revenge, when his brothers arrive to buy grain. He has let go of the past. This does not mean he is not worry concerning his brothers when he finally meets them. He isn't sure if they have changed so he will test them. But he has let go of his anger. He no longer holds a grudge against his brothers. He no longer holds a grudge against Potiphar or his wife.

If we are willing, God too will grant us the power to forget, to let go of any pain and anger we have for past events. This allows us to focus on the present and see how God is at work now in our lives. Where do you need the power of forgetting? If you are still angry about past events you need this gift. It does not mean we will forget what happened. It means that we can learn, like Joseph, to grow to a place where it no longer controls our emotions We will not look at today's events through those past events' lenses.

I think about a wedding I did a few years back. The parents of the bride had divorced some years before and it had been ugly and contentious. The anger and pain of that event still colored much of their current interactions with each other and their daughter. As her wedding approached, both were trying to score points against the other. One made it clear they would come only if their new spouse sat with them. The other said that was a deal breaker. In almost every decision, they wanted their daughter to choose a side and pick one of them against the other. The daughter was in tears when she came to talk to me about how her parents were ruining her wedding. She was about ready to call it off and go to Las Vegas. The only thing keeping her from doing so was her grandmother, whom she loved deeply. The bride had always wanted her at the wedding. I was given permission to talk to grandma about all of this. After listening to what her granddaughter was feeling she paused and then said, "Don't worry about it and tell my granddaughter not to worry about it. I'll take care of it." There was a look of determination as she left the room. I later learned that she went to her former son-in-law's place of business and told him that he needed to let the past go and focus on his daughter and her happiness or he was uninvited to the wedding. She let him know her daughter was going to hear the same message which she delivered that night. Both were angry and upset and wanted to contact their daughter. They had been told one word, one email to her, was an automatic canceling of the wedding and grandma would take the couple to Las Vegas! A few days later I got an ecstatic call from the bride. She learned that her parents had gone out to dinner and worked things out! I don't know if she ever learned of Grandma's ultimatum. Those parents learned the need to forget and focus on the present. It is something we all need to have happen in our lives. Joseph learned this and it shows his maturity.

The second child Joseph named Ephraim because God had made him fruitful. Joseph now sees Egypt as his place of blessing. He was a long way from family, in a strange land but here was where he understood God was blessing him. Too often, we tend to believe God only works in certain ways and places. To celebrate what God is doing right here and now, is to live fully in the moment. It is hard to not look back, because as we have said we need to forget some of where we came from, and also to

not look forward hoping life will take us to a different place. To see this place as a place of blessing is something we are reminded of by Joseph.

When life goes along in an orderly way and we are on the path that we more or less expect, it is easy to live in the moment. When life has moved us in new direction and we are now headed along paths that we maybe didn't want to be on, it is sometimes hard to see the blessings of God. If we look at what is happening right now instead of thinking about what might have happened, we will see that the blessings are there. This is something Joseph teaches us.

I think of a woman who had to leave her home, her house and her cat because of declining sight. Life had forced her to move into assisted living and she chose to be near family instead of in the town she had been living. I visited with her just before she left. What she said has always stuck with me. "I am on a path I did not choose. What I do have a choice about is how I walk this path. I choose to walk it with grace, believing God is with me and there will be blessings each day." And as you can guess, with that kind of attitude she did find many blessings.

Joseph has now risen to power. He has forgotten the pain of the past, focused on the blessing of today. The next hard challenge awaiting him is meeting his brothers. Will he be able to keep this grace-filled attitude going when life becomes more challenging?