

Reading: Genesis 41:25-44

Subject: Joseph's Rise to Power

God worked in Joseph to prepare him to be the man He wanted him to be, to fulfil the purposes God had for him. We've seen principles from Joseph's life what it means for God's time to come and noted God's dealing with Pharaoh and applied it to His dealing with people - how God disturbs our comfort, designates the messengers, directs the message and demands action.

Pharaoh was told of the 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine. Joseph advised the course of action to be taken to Pharaoh. I wonder if it would have immediately sprung to mind, or to get a committee to plan what to do! Joseph basically said "*Now is the time for action, to preserve life and the kingdom.*" Do it then, now - it was the crucial time. So often what God says is crucial for the time we are in and not some future date or time; this is especially true with the gospel message because God says to us all that **today** is the day of salvation, **now is accepted time** for us to seek God for our salvation. Are we going to listen and take action?

Let's look at Joseph's change of circumstances, his quantum jump to power and authority. He got up that day a prisoner, ended it as the Prime Minister; started the day in rags, ended it in royal clothes; began it in iron chains, ended it in a gold chain; had no standing in society, ended it revered by all; in lockdown in prison, was able to go freely in Egypt and go where he wanted!

Yes, God's time had come for him. Joseph's years of suffering, maltreatment etc. were now a thing of the past as God greatly exalts His servant. For 13 years Joseph had known hard times. As a slave he had known some ease in Potiphar's house, then he ended up in prison and his hope, some 2 years, before had been dashed, but now he is in an unbelievable situation - it was like a dream, beyond his

wildest imagination or dream. I don't know if they had fairytales in Joseph's day, but it would have seemed like one to him!

Joseph finished giving Pharaoh advice. Pharaoh, understood the truth of Joseph's interpretation, his sound advice, turns to all his officials and publicly says and does amazing things for this imprisoned foreign slave: Let's see he:

1. Honours Joseph. (v38)

Pharaoh saw in Joseph a greatly gifted man, even though unrecognised until that time, so he honoured Joseph with his words and set an excellency upon him that others would have to agree with. Pharaoh didn't turn around and say "*Who are you speaking to in giving such advice?*" Not at all, he recognised good counsel had been given; he was wise enough to realise he needed to follow it and employ the giver of such wisdom.

Pharaoh saw a difference in Joseph from all his other wise men and counsellors. Yes, they were men of learning, of wisdom, of skill, but Pharaoh knew that the spirit of God was in Joseph. Here Pharaoh, who was himself considered as divine, a god, owns the superiority of the God Joseph worshipped and served. It is quite an amazing statement for a pagan to make, let alone one who everyone viewed as a god. Joseph refused praise and honour to himself at all times, but gave the glory at the start and throughout to God (v16, 25, 28 & 32). Pharaoh quickly realised here was a man who was a favourite of his God and he must have him as his counsellor. Even in his pagan darkness Pharaoh could see God's hand upon Joseph.

Many people search for an answer as to what life is about and may have gone to a church for the company, to enjoy an evening out (*or at least to have an evening out!*) Perhaps they go to a church like ours as they respect the people, they may know these ones have something that they haven't got. Such churches, like our church, will

speak of God as a Friend and Father; of Jesus as their own personal Saviour and those things seem strange to them, but they may feel they are real as God is speaking to them - even though they may be going about in darkness and not understand everything, maybe understanding very little. Some things can be clear to them even if they cannot quantify them, but they want to know what it is about these people and their God. I wonder if anyone listening to this message is like that?

Pharaoh knew one such as Joseph should be highly honoured and he set out to honour him, show there was no one else like him. If God has called any of us to Himself, He has called us not only **on purpose, but for a purpose** and He will equip us over the years to do the work He wants of us. No man or woman is called to serve God unless they are fitted of God for such work. It was obvious that Joseph was the man for that moment, had been placed there by God for that time and purpose. Pharaoh honours Joseph, but see he:

2. Acknowledges God. (v39)

Maybe Pharaoh had never heard of the true God before, but he is presented with someone who knew this God and spoke openly of Him. Amazingly Pharaoh knew this God was true and acknowledges God before all his court officials - Joseph had His Spirit, God had made known all these things to Joseph. I wonder how Joseph felt? He must have been amazed, but he was learning a further lesson from God - *"Those who honour me I will honour,"* (1 Samuel 2: 30). Joseph had honoured and owned God. Now he was honoured and owned by God and therefore honoured in the sight of Pharaoh and his court. These ones consider him a man of incomparable wisdom.

Yes, Joseph went through hard times, yes, had been foolish and arrogant in his youth, but he had learned much of God in his years of sufferings and he, as a man of wisdom, was ready to point to God in all he did and said and to give Him the honour. In later years he

was to acknowledge God's goodness, as even all the hardships were of God and God meant it for good ultimately.

Often in our lives we see things as a tangled mess. All the heartaches, tragedies and disasters in our own lives, all look like a jumbled chaotic mess. We need to see God means it for good - even though we cannot understand or follow it. We need to realise we see the underside of the tapestry of life, with loose ends and dark strands, but God sees exactly what He is doing and weaves our lives as He knows is best, because He sees the full picture from the upper side. God wants us to acknowledge Him, His hand and His working in our lives, especially to see our need of Him as our own Saviour and God initially and then as our Father and Friend as we go on in our lives.

Trouble is we don't always see that truth as we go through hard and difficult times. Perhaps Joseph, before this point, couldn't say so and if we had told him at that time that God was working it all together for good, he would never have believed us; but later on he acknowledged that God was working, even at the lowest moment of his life, as his brothers planned to kill him and then sold him, he could say "*God intended it for good*" (50:20)

God may bring us to the place, where we see our life history in the light of His goodness and care - perhaps realising this after many years, even if not at the time we went through such things - as those events seemed so painful, deep and difficult for us then. We sing: "*When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, my grace all-sufficient shall be your supply; the flame shall not hurt you: I only design your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.*" Here we see Pharaoh came to the conclusion that God was with Joseph and therefore he was discerning and wise, so he:

3. Vindicates Joseph. (v38 & 39)

Joseph is a wise, discerning man, discreet (AV). He had been charged with attempted rape, but Pharaoh says in effect "*Look he's no fool, he'd not be so stupid as to try such a thing - he is wise and discerning!*" Surely Potiphar knew that already, or he would have had Joseph put to death, not put him in prison and allow him the freedom of and virtual rule of the prison's affairs. Pharaoh also affirms Joseph's intellectual gifts and ability "*there is no one so discerning and wise as you*". Joseph's gifts were at last recognised. The cupbearer forgot, his brothers were angry, but Pharaoh recognised his gifts.

We may feel we need to vindicate ourselves in a situation, or for our reputation's sake. We want to squash the false stories, the lies said about us. Learn from Joseph and let God do it in His way and His time, for He will vindicate us in a far more glorious way than we could ever imagine. Our gifts and talents will be drawn out in God's time, even recognised as part of our vindication. Even though that's been said, it doesn't mean it will be easy, for going God's way is an unknown way for us and it is so easy to question God, to doubt His leading, but it will be the best way. We see that God used even the unlikely person of Pharaoh to vindicate Joseph. We can never know what God will do in our lives or who He will use to vindicate us. But see Pharaoh:

4. Promotes Joseph. (v 40 & 41 & 44)

Joseph is given the job of Premier, Prime Minister of all of Egypt. He was second in command in Egypt, subject only to Pharaoh in power and authority. To be given this position could have led to the destruction of Joseph. Many people, when given great power become deluded and drunk by it and ruin many lives, including their own. All the praise heaped on Joseph, both then and subsequently, could easily have destroyed him. Any person who becomes egotistical and inflated with pride at the praise they receive needs to be so very careful! It takes a steady hand to carry a full cup!

Often, we can think of trials and difficulties as the only means of testing us; but praise is a most dangerous means of testing and refining us in its own right. We read in the book of Proverbs 27:21 *"The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives."* Joseph was ready for all the adulation which would be heaped on him for he had already prepared the means to deflect it away from himself and to direct it all to God in his speaking to Pharaoh. It would appear he was not greatly dejected by his suffering, nor was he swollen with pride and vanity when he was praised from the mouth of the king. Joseph was able to take the blessings heaped on him and not to wrongly use or apply them.

We are to learn that all we have and are is of the Lord, that every grace, gift, ability, every advancement in work or education is of God. If we do, we may be being prepared for further use and worthwhile service. If we become full of pride then we may become useless, for we take the glory of any promotion or success to ourselves and not give it to the Lord. The Lord has said that He will not give His glory to another and we are not to be so foolish as to think we can do anything without His help or blessing. Now see finally Pharaoh

5. Presents Joseph as Royal. (v42, 43 & 45)

Joseph had probably worn the same clothes in prison for years. On his removal from prison is given a change of clothes; now again he is given a further change! Joseph had a limited form of authority in prison even if all was under his charge, but now he is given Pharaoh's own signet ring and told that all in Egypt was under his total authority! He is given a gold chain, a royal chariot to ride in, men to proclaim his arrival and honour should be his.

What a contrast he experienced - a slave, a prisoner, pitied, chained, restricted, dressed in rags, with no hope for the future and then

suddenly it is all changed - now free, promoted to Prime Minister, chained in gold, with authority, dressed in royal and best clothes, given Egypt to travel about in, view and command. He was the man of the moment, with a bright future; he was the mover and shaker in Egypt; he was the one that would have been on the front of the Pyramid Times magazine and hit all the headlines of the day. We can imagine the documentaries made about him, the rising star. Everyone knew of Joseph and I suspect they knew of Joseph's God too.

Our lives can be turned upside down and inside out in a matter of moments - either for good or bad. Many people seem to have everything they want and then their lives have been ruined by an illness or bereavement. Many things tell us this world is temporary and fleeting, that we dare not rest our hopes on the things of this life alone. We need to have something firm and secure in our lives – for both time and especially eternity. The gospel of the Lord Jesus proclaims there is something firm and secure for time and eternity which we can know and have. It is when a change occurs in us when we become, or occurred in us if we are Christians, and it greater than the change that Joseph experienced when he went from an imprisoned slave to Prime Minister!

The Bible tells us the change which occurs in our soul and life when we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour is totally amazing and transforming - it's as if we are born-again and made new creations in Christ - that's exactly how radically the Bible describes it! We are to realise we are all by nature in a worse prison, in more cruel chains than Joseph ever was; because we are in prison to sin and chained by it - not that we are necessarily evil or openly wicked; for we may be nice helpful people, but the power of sin traps us, imprisons us, binds us and we need to be set free. The trouble is we can do nothing to escape out of the prison of our sin. Amazingly, the One who is totally God, didn't just send messengers to free us, but He came

Himself to where we were imprisoned in sin, dressed in the filthy rags of our own making (*which we think are fine*) and He came to free us. As He frees us, He transforms us - for *He gives us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness* (Isaiah 61:3).

Have we realised anything of the great transaction He does for us when we trust Him as our Saviour? I guess many listening know this experience and it should thrill us to consider it afresh and often. Perhaps not everyone listening knows this, so seriously consider my questions: "*Do you know this? Do you know He makes you more than a Prime Minister – He makes you His child, you belong to the Royal family of heaven?*" Those of us who have experienced such, should rejoice in the amazing things our God has done for us. Read Ephesians 1 & 2 and just list down the amazing things God has done for the likes of you and me – who were rebel slaves against Him. Don't do it as an academic exercise, but apply it to your life and realise it is true of you as well as all Christians here and throughout the world. Then let those things affect the way that we live, so that we live as those who have had lavished upon us the inexpressible riches of Christ Jesus and we will not keep living as beggars at sin's door, but live as those who are children of the King and live for His glory and honour in word, action and heart.