

In Charge 2-3-08

Genesis 41:41-57

⁴¹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Joseph went from prison to being in charge of the most advanced nation on the earth overnight. Only that hard road he had traveled could have prepared him for what he had to face each day. That much power could be an extremely heady thing if you weren't as humble as Joseph. It is said that power corrupts, but Joseph had been inoculated against corruption by his utter dependency on God.

If you think the fellow servants in Potiphar's house despised a Hebrew being placed over them, what do you think Joseph faced with the secular and religious leaders of Egypt? There is a record of someone with a Semitic name being in a place of authority in Egypt, but it was extremely rare. What made Joseph's situation even more difficult is that he had been a herdsman, something else the average Egyptian despised. (Genesis 46:34) His nationality and trade were held against him. He would need supreme authority to carry out his task.

⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. Talk about a makeover! This was prison rags to kingly riches. In previous sermons, I've compared it to our resurrection, when we see the Lord face to face and experience our change. (1Corinthians 13:12)

The signet ring was what Pharaoh used to seal the documents and orders he signed. The robe of almost transparent linen signified his new status as being among the elite of the nation. The gold necklace was payment for the interpretation and symbol of his new status. (Daniel 5:16) It would have been tempting to deal with Potiphar or at least have his wife punished, but Joseph understood it was all a part of God's plan to bring him to power so that lives could be saved. He won't abuse his newfound power; instead, he'll jump right into his new position just as he did working for Potiphar and the warden of the prison. Joseph is consistent, whether at the bottom or the top.

Joseph had learned a lesson that will later be expressed by the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote, ¹² *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* ¹³ *I can do everything through him who gives me strength.* Philippians 4:12-13 (NIV) He found his strength in the Lord. The presence of Lord was enough to get him through anything. Joseph could rely on that presence and find in Him the strength and contentment He needed for every situation.

You've seen Christians like that. They know Paul and Joseph's secret to contentment. They look to the Lord for strength and give their current situation all they've got. There are quadriplegic Christians who have incredible ministries. Then there are those of us who are healthy as can be and reject any opportunity to serve

Commented [notes1]: Genesis 46:34 (NIV)
34 you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians."

Commented [notes2]: 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV)
12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Commented [notes3]: Daniel 5:16 (NIV)
16 Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

others. There are wealthy Christians who wouldn't give one percent of their income even if it were a life and death situation, and there are those who barely get by but are always generous toward any real need. There are some who are always murmuring, always complaining, and surrendering continually to all the evil they see around them. Their focus is on the negative instead of the Lord who has them where they are for a reason. Joseph was the generous, hardworking, thankful kind of believer who focused on the Lord's presence with him. (Ecclesiastes 9:10a)

Commented [notes4]: Ecclesiastes 9:10 (NIV)
10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

Joseph was like a rock because he leaned on the Rock. You've probably heard of people that have won the lottery and thought it was their dream come true, but their life went from happy and simple to terribly tortured. It is the story of many that are placed in a position of power or wealth. They have nothing to lean on. They depend on self, and selfish pleasures and when they can't find satisfaction, they have nowhere else to turn. (John 6:68) But those people on the Rock are the same regardless of wealth, health or power. They are unmovable because they are in the immovable One.

Commented [notes5]: John 6:68 (NIV)
68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

⁴³ He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Pharaoh made everyone aware of the new man in charge by having a chariot parade with Joseph as the number two man. Runners went before commanding people to "Make way!" or another translation would have it, "Bow the knee!" Joseph had been bowing and scraping to everyone for the past 13 years. Now they are all bowing to him. I imagine the gossip spread from the royal court and streets Joseph passed through until it filled all of Egypt. A Hebrew was in charge of everything!

⁴⁴ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." Pharaoh made it clear that he was still the boss, but without Joseph's authority, no one was to do anything. Joseph needed that kind of complete authority to get the job done.

⁴⁵ Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. Now Joseph has an Egyptian identity and is married to a priestly family. This was not Joseph's choice, but his ruler Pharaoh's command. That is submission to authority. Unless we understand that God is sovereign over all things, we can't understand why we should submit to the authority God has placed over us. Once we understand, we see that submission to them is submission to God. God is working through all these things to bring His will to pass. (Romans 13:1)

Commented [notes6]: Romans 13:1 (NIV)
1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Pharaoh may have done this to downplay or even hide the fact that Joseph was a Hebrew. He probably thought it would be easier to get people to follow his instruction if they saw Joseph as one of them. The name he gave him means, "the god said let him live". That seems to be the most accepted interpretation, though there are others. We don't know exactly what that is referring to. It may be reference to him surviving several life threatening situations. Others translate it as "God speaks and lives". That would be an acceptable name for a man like Joseph.

His wife was the daughter of the priest of On (the religious center of Egyptian solar dieties) and her name means "she who belongs to Neith". Neith was the goddess of the cult center Sais. So highly esteemed was this family line that some of the pharaohs chose their women for wives.

At the age of thirty, Joseph took a tour of all Egypt to assess the situation and develop the plan that God had given him. He was a hands on person. He needed to see and understand the extent of what needed to be done. (Luke 14:28)

Just as the dream had predicted, there were 7 years of abundance. Joseph had great storehouses built in cities that were throughout the land. This made it easy to bring in the 20% and would in the future make distribution easier. There was only one problem. There was such and abundance that it was impossible to count it all. "As much as the sands of the sea" is not a literal statement, but a description of a quantity that is too large to count. The dream God gave to Pharaoh was coming to pass, just as Joseph had predicted. (Genesis 32:12)

⁵⁰ Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. In the years of fruitfulness, Joseph was also fruitful. God gave him two sons. Normally, a Hebrew wife would name her child, but Joseph took that responsibility. ⁵¹ Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."

The pain had lifted from Joseph's heart. He could see his troubles had served to place him where God had ordained him to be. The pain of having his brothers forsake him was now removed by having a family of his own. So many of the pains of living in a fallen sinful world are overcome with time and new blessings. When we are in the midst of them, it seems that we will never overcome them, but God had made him forget. If we will have that tenacity that Joseph had and put our whole heart into what God has put before us, we will find that in time God will help us forget. It isn't that we can't remember, but the intensity of the pain is forgotten.

So many of God's people are stuck in the past. They relive painful events on a daily basis. They tell the story to any new ear that is willing to listen. It is a strange thing about human nature that we tend to dwell on what has caused pain in our life. We let it hurt us over and over again as we relive the event. God deals with that pain by bringing us into new blessings, but we can't enter into those new blessings unless we are willing to look forward and not backward. The Apostle Paul said he was always forgetting what was behind and pressing ahead. (Philippians 3:13-14) That is how Joseph made it through his troubles. That is how we all make it. Look forward! Expect God to do great things. Know where He is taking you.

When I counsel people on moving forward and leaving the past in the past they will readily agree, but in the next breath they will bring up the past. I'm always amazed at how blind we are to this problem in our own life. Someone says they have forgiven someone and then they keep bringing up what it was they forgave. Don't underestimate this need in your life. Watch your own conversation to see how much you go back to old wounds. That will tell you if you are looking forward or back.

Commented [notes7]: Luke 14:28 (NIV)
28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?"

Commented [notes8]: Genesis 32:12 (NIV)
12 But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

Commented [notes9]: Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV)
13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,
14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

⁵² *The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."* He went from forgetting the pain of the past to fruitfulness. That is the natural order. We can't really be fruitful until we get over the pain of the past. Even in the land he had suffered so much, he was fruitful. Suffering can end up in fruitfulness if we look forward and have faith in God. It can also end in bitterness if we insist on looking back and reliving it. (Mark 11:25)

Not only had God made the land fruitful, but He had made Joseph fruitful as well. In a very literal sense this meant his two sons. But in the spiritual sense, God is using Joseph to accomplish things of eternal significance. This is real fruitfulness. Joseph knew his work would be saving lives. It would really matter. (John 6:27)

Are you doing something that is really fruitful? What are you doing that will last through eternity? (Isaiah 55:2) It might be quite unseen like an encouraging word to those who need it, or gift to the needy. It might be supporting an orphan in India, or missions giving. It may be more out in the open like housing someone that is in need, prison visitation, or working on a place of worship. All those things go on quietly and often unnoticed right here in this church. They are things of eternal significance. God is making you fruitful and for some of you it is in the land of your suffering.

There is another point to be made in the naming of Joseph's sons. In spite of everything that was done to make Joseph Egyptian, in spite of the temptation to just be one of them and so avoid the disdain toward Hebrews and shepherds, he blatantly gave his boys Hebrew names. He was still standing on the solid rock of conviction that the God of the Hebrews is the only God. He still believed that God is the One that saw him through his times of difficulty and placed him in a position of power. He refused to let the culture swallow him up. In the pit that was easier, for difficulty drives us to God, but now in the lap of luxury we find out if the lessons of the pit stuck. They did. No amount of wealth or power could assimilate Joseph into forsaking his God. (1John 2:28)

Just as God had shown in the dream, the seven years of abundance came to an end, and the seven years of famine began. It affected, not only Egypt, but also all the surrounding lands. If the Nile didn't flood and bring in the water and nutrients, the surrounding areas probably didn't get rain either. It was a seven-year drought. There are historical records of cyclical drought so severe that Egyptians resorted to cannibalism.

All the surrounding nations were desperate for food, so they began to come to Egypt, where they usually came. This time, however, Egypt's grain came not from the annual flooding of the Nile, but from the direction of Almighty God through His servant Joseph.

The famine was severe, or another translation would be, "gripped the land". Everyone, Egyptians and people of the surrounding lands were all dependent on the storehouses that had been filled over the last seven years. Imagine the loss of life if

Commented [notes10]: Mark 11:25 (NIV)
25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Commented [notes11]: John 6:27 (NIV)
27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

Commented [notes12]: Isaiah 55:2 (NIV)
2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Commented [notes13]: 1 John 2:28 (NIV)
28 And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

God had not given the dream and placed Joseph there to interpret it. (Matthew 6:26)

Each week we follow the amazing parallels of Joseph and Jesus. In our chapter today, we see that Joseph was a forerunner of Jesus in that he utterly believed the word of God. He did not bow to the culture but stood unshakable in his faith in God's sovereignty. (Matthew 5:17) Joseph began his ministry as savior of the world at the age of 30. That was true for Jesus as well.

We also see that the world was experiencing a famine. There was no bread to be found. When Jesus came into the world there had been a famine as well, not one of physical bread but of the spiritual bread of life. (Amos 8:11) Jesus compared himself to manna from God, to feed the souls of mankind. (John 6:41) He said He is the bread of life and if we are hungry we must come to Him. (John 6:51) In the world around Egypt, if someone wanted bread, they had to go to Joseph. These are amazing parallels because the God who ordained history was painting pictures of the climax of history, the revelation of His Son.

There are a few lessons for us to remember in Joseph's becoming in charge of the Egyptian world. The first is that only a humble person can rule without letting power corrupt them. You don't want to step into a position of power or wealth unless you have been broken by hardship and humbled by life's lessons. Do you still want to go there?

The second is the one we are in the most need of. That is if we are to go forward and do something that is truly fruitful, something that lasts, we must look forward and refuse to allow the past to continue to scar our souls. (Luke 9:62) If we want to forget the pain because of future blessings, we must look forward with expectation and hope. We may be standing in the midst of our land of suffering, but God can make us truly fruitful even there, if we will look forward with eyes of faith.

The third lesson is one of lasting significance. Are you doing something that really matters, something that will last? If life is all about you and only you, I'd ask you to consider the wonderful plan God has in mind for you. Has He blessed you with a gift you haven't been using? Is there some nudge in your heart from the Holy Spirit that you keep ignoring? Why would you live for the here and now, when you can invest in eternity? (Romans 6:23) Test the water. Try it out. Ask others who are doing what you are considering. Most of all, obey the Holy Spirit's call. Seeing the need in others can put your own in perspective. Striving to bring joy to others usually brings joy to you. (Matthew 10:39)

Finally, has the comfort and ease of the 21st century lulled you into just fitting in with the world around you, or are you boldly standing up for truth and righteousness? Has our luxury and power drawn us away from our Savior who saw us through the pit or did the lesson of the pit stick? Are you wholeheartedly and uncompromisingly a citizen of heaven? (Philippians 3:20)

Commented [notes14]: Matthew 6:26 (NIV)
26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Commented [notes15]: Matthew 5:17 (NIV)
17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Commented [notes16]: Amos 8:11 (NIV)
11 "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land-- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.

Commented [notes17]: John 6:41 (NIV)
41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

Commented [notes18]: John 6:51 (NIV)
51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Commented [notes19]: Luke 9:62 (NIV)
62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Commented [notes20]: Romans 6:23 (NIV)
23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commented [notes21]: Matthew 10:39 (NIV)
39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Commented [notes22]: Philippians 3:20 (NIV)
20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,