



ROSE
HILL
CHURCH

Genesis 39:1-6a

The Story

Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaohⁱ

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Today we continue in “The Story” – our series looking at God’s Upper Story and our Lower Story and how they intersect, overlap, and relate to one another. We started with Creation and saw that our biggest problem is that we try to do life on our own, apart from our creator...but God continually is seeking after us to bring us back onto the straight and narrow path of living by faith in relationship with Him. Last week we saw God pursuing and working through Abraham and Sarah and the next couple of generations after them as well, as God does things in His timing. And now we’re looking at Joseph, the great-grandson of Abraham.

Before we get to today’s Scripture reading, I want to share a video with you that will help give some context for today’s Scripture reading and message on the life of Joseph... **(Online video clip here.)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOCiHSiAITQ>

That’s the larger context of Joseph’s life. Today’s passage comes from Genesis 39:1-6, which is part way into the story of his life... **(Scripture Passage here). (Sermon Title)**

So, in many ways, Joseph was what we might call a “good guy.” Perhaps a little arrogant or just foolish in how he addressed his brothers, but he sought to be on the straight and narrow path, and to honor God. And oftentimes we think that if we live the right way and do the right things – like pray often enough, give enough financially to the Lord, give enough time to the Lord, attend church often enough, laugh at the pastor’s stupid jokes – we think that if we do these kinds of things, that God will then reward us or treat us in certain ways.

And at times, it’s easy to see Joseph’s life as being that way. For instance, as we read a moment ago, we see that he ends up in Egypt, in the home of Potiphar, who’s got an important position in Pharaoh’s military. And we read in verse 2, “The Lord was with Joseph and he *prospered*, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.” Verse 4, “...the Lord *blessed* the household of

the Egyptian because of Joseph. The *blessing* of the Lord was on *everything* Potiphar had..." (emphasis added).

We read this, and it's so easy to stumble into believing that this is the way it should be for any of us – that God will “prosper” us. If we do the right thing, if we honor God, then everything will prosper, and we'll be able to walk around wearing those t-shirts and hats that say, “Life is good” and really mean it – though frequently we get caught up in the world's definition of the good life. But how quickly we forget why Joseph is even there to begin with: His brothers, who were originally going to kill him, faked his death, threw him in a pit, then pulled him out and shipped him off with a caravan of people who were headed to Egypt. He's not in Egypt because of his own desire to go there...he's not on a mission trip or a vacation. He's there against his will, separated from his family (by his family!), in a foreign country.

Then Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him and he runs out in a rush, leaving his coat behind, because: **He knows it's better to keep his character than to keep his coat.** And this is where we are once again reminded that just because we do the right thing, that doesn't mean that everything will turn up roses. She accuses him of trying to rape her, and he's thrown in the slammer. If our actions guaranteed a certain outcome or guaranteed a certain reaction from God, then Joseph should have been promoted because of his good character rather than getting thrown in to prison based on false accusations.

So what we end up doing so often, even if accidentally and without realizing we're doing this, is that we seek to control God. I'm not saying we actually do, but we believe that if we do the right thing – like forsaking our coat to keep our character – then God will guarantee a positive outcome for us, and “prosper” us – with that usually defined pretty narrowly. Underneath it, no matter how hard we might try to spin it and say otherwise, it is really an effort to manipulate and control God. We want to do “A” and “B” so that God will do “C.” However: God will not be controlled like that.

All we needed to know about God's relationship with Joseph is given to us in the first few words of verse 2, when we read, **“The Lord was with Joseph.”** Everything good that came about after that was simply because God was

gracious toward Joseph and by extension to others in Potiphar's household. Then, while he's in prison, it becomes known that he has a gift for explaining the meaning of people's dreams, and he ends up with an opportunity to explain Pharaoh's dreams. He does so; Pharaoh sees the wisdom in his answer, and he pulls Joseph out of the prison and makes him the deputy Pharaoh. Or, to use other terms that might be more familiar, we could say he got named the vice-president or the prime minister.

What we see is that Joseph goes from preferred son to the pit to Potiphar's house, to the prison, to the palace, where he becomes the prime minister, and is a perfect picture of God's Providence.ⁱⁱ Gotta love the alliteration, right? But we see here that he's up and down like a yo-yo. It's not all sunshine or roses without the thorns. So: **Through the life of Joseph we see God's providence.** This is not an every day word, unless, I suppose, you live in Providence, Rhode Island. But that's not the providence that we mean when we speak of God's providence. The Bible speaks of God's providence – either using that word, or similar words or phrases that describe it – with some frequency.

If you can't remember what the word providence means, there's an easy way to summarize it that you can remember. In essence, to speak of God's providence is to speak of God providing what we, or someone else, needs. And that's easy to remember because providence is the combination of two great words: **Provide(nce)** “provide,” and “nce.” ☺ Ok...one great word, “provide” and it helps us remember that in his providence, God provides.

We see this addressed in other places in Scripture as well. For instance, Hebrews 1:3 tells us that **“The son [Jesus] is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3).** All things are sustained by him. In other words, he provides what is needed for everything to exist...he brings things along. In fact, it's the same word that Mark uses in describing what the men did who brought the paralytic to Jesus to be healed. This is the event in Mark 2 where Jesus is teaching in a house...it's packed to overflowing...and these guys want to get their buddy to Jesus because they believe Jesus could heal the man. So they bring him to Jesus by lowering him through a hole in the

roof that they cut out. And when the text says they “brought” him, it’s the same word as this “sustained” in Hebrews. In the gospel of John when Jesus changes water to wine at the wedding feast, the servants are told to carry the jugs to the master of ceremonies. It’s the same word – carry or bring...sustain the jugs all the way to the master of ceremonies.

So: The first thing to know about God’s providence is that He brings along. ...he carries along...He provides what we need. In fact, He sustains us...bringing us through life in the direction he’s leading. You see, history, including your life and your place in it, is not just going around in circles with no point to it and no direction. God is bringing all things along...he is moving history along. This means that in regard to our lives, He is like a shepherd who prods his sheep to move along in a certain direction, and in his providence, he provides what we need. In His providence, He provides.

The second thing to know about God’s providence is that **God uses all things for his purposes.** We see this quite profoundly in Joseph’s life. All the bad stuff that happened to him – thrown in the pit, sent to Egypt, put in prison – all of them were then turned around by God to be used for His glory, to put Joseph in the right place at the right time, and in the end to provide for his people. Probably many of you know that after he got promoted to deputy Pharaoh, or Vice President, or whatever title you want to associate it with, the dreams he interpreted came true. First there were 7 years of prosperity for Egypt and crops were abundant. Then there were 7 years of drought and famine, and because of the wisdom with which Joseph led, the people of Egypt had saved up grain during the good years.

The famine didn’t just hit Egypt, it hit all over North Africa, and what we call the middle-East...maybe beyond. But people from all around heard that Egypt had full silos, and they came to Egypt for assistance. Through Joseph, all kinds of nations and people groups were rescued because of the knowledge God gave him about the coming famine. And some of the people who show up at their doorstep are none other than his brothers who shipped him off to Egypt in the first place. They don’t recognize him, of course. He’s now speaking fluent Egyptian – in fact, the Bible tells us that he used a translator to speak to them even though he understood them perfectly well –

he was certainly wearing Egyptian royal clothing and his head was probably shaved. The Hebrews were a little more of a rag-tag nomadic bunch, with long hair and scruffy beards. They just weren't as concerned about their appearances. They were more concerned about their relationship with God: and they just wanted to be saved...while the Egyptians...well, they just wanted to be shaved. ☺ (Sorry! Used that several years ago, too!)

So they show up and don't recognize their brother, but he recognizes them. And the upshot of it all is that he finally reveals himself to them...they tremble in fear, he forgives them, then they hug and cry catch up on life at the local coffee shop, and because of his position as second in command in the country, he makes a way for them to move to Egypt, have all the grain they need, and he's reunited with his whole family.

And soon after he finally revealed to them who he was, Joseph said to his brothers, **“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20)**. Now, the word here for “intended” (both times) is “sha-shav” and it's more literal meaning is “weave” or “fabricate.” The metaphorical sense is “plan” or “intend.” And what we see here is that they “wove” or “fabricated” certain plans that they carried out when they shipped Joseph off to Egypt; but God “wove” it into something else. He fabricated something different and better from it. In fact, if we want to take it just a bit further, I think it's fair to say that they wove something, and God took the fabric they wove, brought it down to bare threads, and re-wove it into a completely different piece of fabric that suited His purposes: providing for the people through whom he's going to one day bring the savior of the world. In His providence, God provided for His people, and used even this terrible event in Joseph's life, to bring about something good.

By the way, one last observation that I think is really fascinating. I don't know if it's an actual “thing” (maybe I'm just off in left-field on this) but this is really cool. We talked earlier about how God provides for Joseph, and that this provision is a part of God's providence. And we looked at this Hebrews 1:3 verse that tells us how God doesn't just provide, but even “sustains all things.” And I mentioned that the Greek word can mean “to bring along or

carry along.” The Greek word that we’re talking about there is phero. It’s pronounced exactly the same as the Egyptian word, Pharaoh. **When Pharaoh was unable to provide for his country...when he could not alter the 7 years of famine that were going to come...when he could not solve the mystery of his dreams...God “pheroed.”** What Pharaoh could not do, God did because he pheros” all things...He sustains all things. God provides, in his providence. And he uses it all for his glory and for his purposes.

We all feel at times like we’re on a yo-yo, or a roller coaster, like Joseph’s life was – from preferred son to the pit to prominence to the prison to prime minister. We go up and down as well. Some of you right now are going through some down times. Some of you have told me...and I know there are others, too. Some of you are looking for work; some of you are battling cancer or other diseases, or your loved ones are; some of you are struggling with an addiction or a particular sin that has a strong grip on you; some of you are grieving a loss...there’s a lot that many of you are facing now, and that we all face at different times of our lives. Joseph’s life shows us that God works through all of it for his purposes. That’s not to say that God ordains and blesses the down times and that he’s brought them into your life...but he will take them and bring something out of them that will bless you, benefit others, and glorify Him. We can’t always see it in the moment, and we may wonder what’s going on. Undoubtedly Joseph had those same thoughts during the 30 years he was there before being reunited with his family. But, as verse 2 of the passage we read today says, “God was with him.” And God is with you in the midst of your own pits and prisons, as well as the palaces and positions of power. And in His providence, as Romans 8:28 says, **In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).** May you rest in that knowledge today and always, as God works providentially in your life. Let’s pray...Amen.

ⁱ Today’s sermon correlates to Chapter 3 in “The Story” and is influenced by a sermon from Max Lucado at Oak Hills Church a year ago. As for “The Story:” we took orders at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for “NIV The Story Bible” at their website.

ⁱⁱ Max Lucado gave the framework for this alliteration, and I’ve added onto it.