

Topic	Joseph's Rise to Power
Reference	Genesis 41:8-57
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So 2020, right? What a year it has been. Everyone was really excited about it, making all kinds of plans and then everything went crazy. Life is full of highs and lows and 2020 would be considered as one of those lows, right? Pandemic, political turmoil, financial trouble, mental illness on the rise, lives turned upside down. Even Hannah Yeoh, the resilient Hannah Yeoh said that she want to reset 2020.

In times like this, we can't help but ask where is God? What is he doing? There's a belief called deism that describes God as a distant creator. Deism pictures God as a great clock maker who created the clock winding up and let it go, that he made the world with all the laws and simply let history and events run its due course. It paints God as an impersonal force, sitting back folding his arms, watching the world burn. And perhaps for many of us 2020 is making us feel like that about God. But the text before us today simply does not paint God that way. As Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams, which indicates seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, Joseph declares a God who is heavily involved in human history, orchestrating people and nature as he works out his plans and purposes for the world.

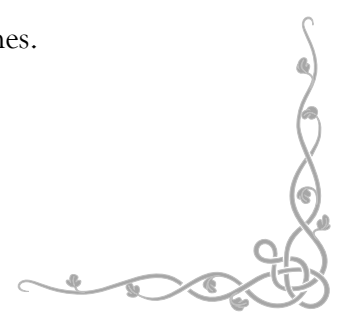
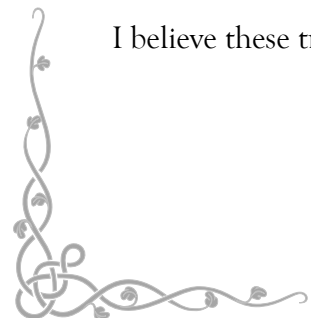
We see here four times in his interpretation, right? He says that God is directly involved in the coming events. God has revealed to Pharaoh, God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The matter has been firmly decided by God and God will do it soon. To be clear God does not always cause great harvest of famine. But in this instance, he's the one doing it. God is the one who gave the dreams to Pharaoh. The interpretation to Joseph, God is the one who brings the seven years of harvest and the seven years of famine. And by the way, right, God is also the one who gives Joseph the wisdom to deal with the family. God is certainly not doing nothing.

He's doing many, many things. How does Joseph know that? How did Joseph arrive at that conclusion? Joseph's life is certainly colored with highs and lows. And then in our text today Joseph is at his first peak and looking back, he see the hand of God upon every moment of his life. And if we stand there with him at the mountain peak and look back on all the highs and lows that let him to this point, I believe we will know it too. Through Joseph's story God is revealing to his people how he works out his plans and purposes in history.

I give you three simple outline:

- God works through people.
- God works in and through our pain.
- God works to keep his promises.

I believe these truths will help us trust and hope in God and persevere in the darkest times.



GOD WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE:

In the rise and fall of Joseph, we see that God uses the hearts and behaviors of men to carry out his plans. God worked through the people Joseph encountered. Everyone Joseph encountered was bringing him one step closer to Pharaoh and almost every person in Joseph's life was wicked. God used Joseph's brother who had murderer's hatred for him. And they sold him into slavery. God used slave traders to bring Joseph to Egypt and sell him to a slave owner named Potiphar.

God used a lustful and deceiving woman and threw Joseph into prison. God used an ungrateful and forgetful cupbearer to keep Joseph in prison for two more years. Why? Because he is not yet needed. It's only when the king needed a dream interpreter, the cupbearer remembers Joseph. Verse 9 to 13

9 Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. 10 Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. 11 Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. 12 Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. 13 And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled."

God used the cupbearer. God is not limited by human allegiance. He can use those who are for him and he can use those who are for themselves. He doesn't just use good people with good deeds. He uses wicked people and their evil deeds. Apostle Paul when he was in prison he heard that there were some preachers who were preaching the gospel out of envy, out of rivalry, out of selfish ambition and this was his response, Philippians 1:18.

But what does it matter? The important thing that in every way, whether from false motives or true Christ is preached, and because of that, I rejoice.

Christ is preached and because of that I rejoice. God is not limited by human allegiance. God can use wicked people to achieve his purposes as well. We also see that God is sovereign over the nations. Pharaoh is a pagan king who calls himself a god. In today's terms, we will say Egypt is a secular government. Yet God gave Pharaoh the two dreams. God withheld the interpretation from him, his magicians and wise men. It is Pharaoh who appoints Joseph as prime minister. God is sovereign over the nations.

Psalm 22 verse 28,

For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

For the Israelites their history will be intertwined with other nations. On certain occasions like in Joseph's story, God uses pagan nations to bless Israel. On other occasions, God uses the nations to bring discipline and judgment upon Israel.

For us, whichever government we are under, we need not be afraid because God is sovereign over all. Whatever comes out to this nation and his leaders, we can trust that He has gone through God's scrutiny and therefore it ultimately serves his purposes for us here. We will pray because 1-Timothy ask us to pray for kings and all the way in high positions that we may lead a peaceful life. But we pray in faith and trust because God is sovereign over all nations.

God works through people. We especially see this of course in the life of Joseph. God raised a favored son to become a wise leader who rescues the nations, which brings us to our next point.

GOD WORKS THROUGH PAIN:

In the rise and fall of Joseph, we see God placing various wicked people in his life to lead him into the courts of Pharaoh. Although he has finally led him to a good place, we cannot simply dismiss the pain that Joseph had experienced all these years. We cannot just brush it aside and say, it doesn't matter, now everything is fine. He experienced the horrors for begging for his life from the very people who were supposed to love and protect him. He was dragged away from the comfort of home into forced labor. He was accused, he was wrongly convicted. He was thrown into prison. He experienced abandonment, a tarnish reputation, being forgotten.

These are not just byproducts of the journey, you know, just forget about it. These are real painful experiences, and they are meaningful and purposeful as God works in and through them. When we are first introduced to Joseph he was a favorite child, boasting about his dreams, of high position and great power before his jealous and angry brothers. At the very least, he was clueless. He was a young 17-year-old who couldn't read a room. So, you wouldn't trust this person with authority and power.

He'll either abuse his powers or he'll make a mess out of everything. But thereafter he experienced things and we see in chapter 41 we see Joseph a different man. Verse 14 to 16

14 So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. 15 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." 16 "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

So, what do we see in Joseph right now? Joseph was tactful. The text highlighted that he shaved and change his cloths. In those times, there is a clear distinction between a Hebrew and an Egyptian. Namely, a Hebrew would have a beard and Egyptian would shave. So, Joseph knew how to appear before an Egyptian King. He learned the culture. When Pharaoh said, I heard that you can interpret dreams, right? Joseph's reply shows great corrector. It showed that Joseph had humility. He says, it's not I, God will interpret it. It is not in me. Joseph had great boldness. He was telling Pharaoh, Pharaoh, who is a self-proclaimed god that this is what God will do.

He could have been impale. He could have been thrown back into jail, but Joseph wasn't afraid to tell a phony god what the real God will do. He wasn't afraid of telling the truth. Joseph not only had boldness and humility, he had empathy. The word used to describe God's answer to Pharaoh, God will give

Pharaoh the answer he desires, right? It's actually the word Shalom, peace. In the past Joseph couldn't read the room. He couldn't tell that the brothers were angry and jealous of him. So he shouldn't have mentioned the dreams. But now he could tell that Pharaoh was troubled and indeed Pharaoh woke up troubled. So, Joseph comforts Pharaoh by saying God will give you peace.

By the way, that's a pretty bold statement of make. Joseph is assuring Pharaoh that his troubles will go away and God will give Joseph the interpretation and through that give Pharaoh peace. This shows that Joseph has great confidence in God. Romans 5:3-4

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character hope

Joseph certainly had hope in God. The sufferings Joseph experienced produced that hope. Joseph also had competencies. He wasn't just a godly nice guy. He actually knew his stuff. After he interprets the dream for Pharaoh, he offers a solution and he was actually successful in executing the solution. He was extremely successful we see in verse 47,

47 During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. 48 Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. 49 Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

Surely, Joseph had learned all these things through his years as a manager in Potiphar's house and in the prison. In slavery in forced labor, Joseph developed his competencies. He wasn't just a figurehead that is in a position of authority because he is the favorite son of the CEO. He was actually competent and good at his job.

Friends our suffering isn't meaningless. I don't believe God wants us to just brush aside our pain and say, it will be okay in the end and so whatever I am going through now, it doesn't matter because it will be all right eventually. I don't think God wants us to think of our pain that way, because in and through pain goal was molding Joseph into a great servant fit for his purposes. And it will be the same with us.

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Joseph certainly did not like anything, but he got their through pain. Recently we received an encouraging text message written by our brother, Jim through WhatsApp. He was kind enough to let me share it with you all. I hope it will encourage everyone who is struggling right now. This is Jim's words,

In my journey of raising my autistic son, I had gone through many continuous struggles that most people do not and perhaps will not experience. Some can have teh tarik with friends, I can't. Some can work in an office, I can't. Some

can choose a career, I can't. Some can have choices to do what they like, I can't. Some just left their problems behind, I didn't. Most people see me suffer and probably that's the most correct word to use. But to me, I don't feel it as suffering at all. Even though sometimes I'm stressed and exhausted and occasionally burst out in anger, frustration, and pain and tears. To me, I'm thankful today as what I've gone through as people see it as suffering is necessary and helpful to me to move on and to help my son. I strongly believe that through love and continuous fighting against the obstacles what I pray to him all these years with the faith I hold onto despite all the failures and disappointment would be answered one after the other. Without doubt it is the tasks given by him, planned by him and guided by him. I believe it can be possible through Christ at any time and all time.

And this the end part he says about all Christians.

And if suffering can be the last part of this journey we face, I trust that most believers have nothing to regret. If we know very well that we have completed our God-given task in glorifying his name, we are not suffering even if it may look like suffering by others. We acknowledge blessing goes to the rich and the poor, so that is glory come through joy and pain.

Glory comes through joy and pain. Our suffering isn't meaningless and our suffering does not mean that God is absent. We often equate suffering to God's absence. When bad things happen, it must be because God has left me and God has abandoned me and that is not necessarily true and certainly it is not true with Joseph's case. God was with Joseph throughout. The lord was with Joseph in Potiphar's house. The Lord was with Joseph in prison and even Pharaoh, when after one conversation with Joseph Pharaoh said, can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God.

God was with Joseph, even pagans can see that. Psalm 34 verse 18.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Our suffering isn't meaningless. God is with us and is working through the suffering to produce something beautiful. We may not see the level of fruitfulness that Joseph experience, we might not be able to understand why God brings about certain horrors and pains in our life, even to the day we die we may not understand, but we can trust that God is working in and through our pain.

GOD WORKS TO KEEP HIS PROMISES:

Through Joseph's life we can see that God is committed to keeping his word to his people. We first look at God's promise to Joseph. Through dreams God informs Joseph of his calling. One day, Joseph will be in position of power and his brothers will bow down to him. We can see the partial fulfillment of that promise in this chapter. We see that

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. 43 He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

In other versions, people who were going before the chariot was shouting bow down or kneel. Soon, his brothers will be like the Egyptians bowing the knee to Joseph just as God had promised. Through all the struggles all those years, God was working to keep his promise to Joseph. In these verses we also see a beautiful picture of restoration. Joseph was stripped of the rope that the father gave him as a sign of his father's favor and now he is dressed by Pharaoh himself. Signet ring, ropes of fine linen and gold chain.

And again, we have to ask, why did God plan all these events to place Joseph as Pharaoh's right-hand man? Why is God doing all these, orchestrating all these events to get Joseph to be in that position of high power? Why? Well, God was fulfilling yet another promise. This event in chapter 41 is a crucial turning point for Israel's history, because God is moving Jacob's family from Canaan to Egypt. With Joseph's position as prime minister Jacob's family will be able to settle in Egypt and blossom and grow into a multitude of people.

Jacob's family would grow into a nation in Egypt because of Joseph. But Egypt is not good news. We see God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15,

Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for 400 years, your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves and afterwards they will come up with great possessions.

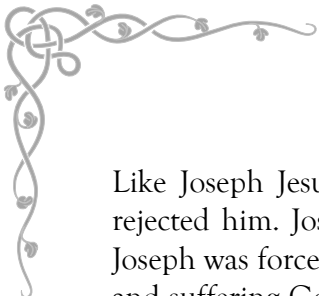
Joseph was a slave who was raised by God to become God's means of salvation to the world. The people of Israel will also be made slaves but then raised up by God to be God's means of blessing to the world. Israel would come off Egypt with great possession and become a great nation, God's own people, but it will be through the route of pain and suffering. And again, we can ask this question, why would God do that? What is he doing?

God was fulfilling another promise. We see in chapter 12 of Genesis, God's promise to Abraham.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

We see this promise partially fulfilled in Joseph, Abraham's descendant when nations came to Joseph for food. We see this promise completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof that God is heavily involved in human history. The coming of Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof that God is not sitting back folding his arms, watching the world burn. The coming of Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof that in our pain and suffering, God has not forgotten us.

Jesus Christ is the son of God coming into human history to participate in it. He is the High Priest who is able to empathize with our weakness. Jesus Christ is the son born to the Virgin Mary and they will call him Emmanuel which means. God with us. Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof that God is not sitting back and folding his arms but rather he comes to us. He is God with us in our pain and in our suffering.



Like Joseph Jesus was the favorite son of the father. Like Joseph Jesus went to his own, but his own rejected him. Joseph was plucked away from home. Jesus, the son of man had nowhere to lay his head. Joseph was forced into slave labor. Jesus willingly took on the very nature of a servant. Through much pain and suffering God raised Joseph up to be a great servant. Through Joseph the world receive food for their bodies and sustained physical life. Through much pain and suffering God raised Jesus up on the cross as the great savior to draw all men unto himself. Through Jesus, the world is offered Jesus' broken body as bread of life for our souls to give us eternal life.

In times of pain and suffering, we may not understand why things are happening. We may not see God's hand at work, but we can trust his heart. God has shown us through the life of Joseph in the coming of Jesus Christ that he is always at work, fulfilling his purposes for his glory and for our good. The coming of Jesus Christ also serves as proof that great salvation comes through great pain and suffering. It is not a surprise therefore that to bring good news to people around us and into the ends of the earth to bring people the bread of life, the good news of Jesus Christ. We would have to make great sacrifices with our time, with our effort, with our finances, with our perseverance in the face of many troubles and many obstacles.

Through it all, we can trust him that he will be with us always. We need not be troubled for he brings us peace and he is with us. Isaiah 26 verse 3

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in you.