

## “From Pit to Penthouse”

Genesis 41:1-40

May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017

In and out of trouble as a boy, there seemed to be no direction in George’s life. He had no thoughts of becoming an actor. But the producers who discovered him recognized a natural talent. Somewhere, buried beneath all that toughness, there was a freewheeling style that attracted people to him.

George’s first film was completed in record time. Only a few days covered all the shooting. His supporters were so thrilled that he received \$25,000 for his first job in the industry. Quite a sum for the early 1900’s!

When George got the check, he didn’t cash it, nor invest it. He kept it and showed it to friends and anyone who might be impressed along the way. He carried it with him wherever he went.

Months passed. For George and his check, the honeymoon had come to an end. By the time he got it to the bank, much had happened. The movie, already released, had failed. The producers went bankrupt. The check...bounced. All George had to show for his hour of glory was an ego as deflated as his pockets.

The silent-film producers who spotted George had him pegged as a star. And they were right, but it would take many years, many failures, and another profession to prove it. George never shook the toughness of youth, and that rugged, blunt-faced determination it is summed up in a nickname the world knows well. George Herman “Babe” Ruth. “Babe” Ruth. The greatest baseball player of his day, and easily among the best all-time.

Everyone loves a good story, especially those of the “rags to riches” kind. Persevering through hardship and achieving a goal that at one time looked like an impossibility, many well-known American personalities have overcome, and achieved success and stardom: Sam Walton, Oprah Winfrey, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Steve Jobs...the list goes on.

For sure, Jacob’s favored son Joseph would be numbered among them, and, could be the first such example in human history. After a one week break, we return to our continuing sermon series through the Bible’s first book – Genesis. Today, we come to **Genesis 41**, which “forms the turning point in the Joseph story, for it tells how Joseph came to power.” (Ross, 636) Joseph has been languishing in the king’s prison in Egypt for some time at this point; you’ll recall that he was sent to prison by Potiphar - the captain of the Egyptian guard and Joseph’s boss – because Potiphar’s wife accused him of seducing her. That took place in **Genesis 39**.

### **Genesis 41:1-40:**

“Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. <sup>3</sup>Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the river. <sup>4</sup>And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke. <sup>5</sup>He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. <sup>6</sup>Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. <sup>7</sup>And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, *it was* a dream. <sup>8</sup>Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but *there was* no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.

<sup>9</sup> Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: “I remember my faults this day. <sup>10</sup> When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, *both* me and the chief baker, <sup>11</sup> we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream. <sup>12</sup> Now there *was* a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his *own* dream. <sup>13</sup> And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him.”

<sup>14</sup> Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. <sup>15</sup> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and *there is* no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you *that* you can understand a dream, to interpret it.”

<sup>16</sup> So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “*It is* not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.” <sup>17</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: “Behold, in my dream I stood on the bank of the river. <sup>18</sup> Suddenly seven cows came up out of the river, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. <sup>19</sup> Then behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such ugliness as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup> And the gaunt and ugly cows ate up the first seven, the fat cows. <sup>21</sup> When they had eaten them up, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they *were* just as ugly as at the beginning. So I awoke. <sup>22</sup> Also I saw in my dream, and suddenly seven heads came up on one stalk, full and good. <sup>23</sup> Then behold, seven heads, withered, thin, *and* blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. <sup>24</sup> And the thin heads devoured the seven good heads. So I told *this* to the magicians, but *there was* no one who could explain *it* to me.”

<sup>25</sup> Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh *are* one; God has shown Pharaoh what He *is* about to do: <sup>26</sup> The seven good cows *are* seven years, and the seven good heads *are* seven years; the dreams *are* one. <sup>27</sup> And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them *are* seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine. <sup>28</sup> This *is* the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He *is* about to do. <sup>29</sup> Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; <sup>30</sup> but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land. <sup>31</sup> So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it *will be* very severe. <sup>32</sup> And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing *is* established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

<sup>33</sup> “Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup> Let Pharaoh do *this*, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth *of the produce* of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. <sup>35</sup> And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. <sup>36</sup> Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.”

<sup>37</sup> So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. <sup>38</sup> And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?”

<sup>39</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you. <sup>40</sup> You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.”

**MP 1 – The Problem – The Mighty is troubled.**

**MP 2 – The Solution – The Humble is remembered and exalted.**

**MP 3 – The Lessons**

The emphasis of the chapter, and really all of the Joseph account, is the sovereignty of God. He is the One orchestrating the things that are taking place in this chapter: He sent the dreams that disturbed Pharaoh, God caused the butler to remember Joseph, God is the One who gave

Joseph the ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, and He elevated Joseph to second place overall of Egypt.

The chapter opens with a **Pharaoh troubled by his dreams**. This is the third coupling of dreams Scripture shows us in recent chapters of Genesis. The first coupling was the two dreams God gave Joseph while he (Joseph) was still at home (**Genesis 37:5-11**). Those two dreams showed Joseph elevated above his parents and brothers. The second coupling of dreams God gave to Pharaoh's butler and baker (**Genesis 40:5-23**) – the butler's foretold his release from prison, and the baker's foretold his death. And, with **Genesis 41:1-8** today, we learn God is troubling Pharaoh in his dreams.

Specifically, Pharaoh sees himself standing next to a river watching 7 healthy cows come up out of the river. Then he saw 7 more cows come up out of the river, but those 7 cows were thin and scrawny. All of a sudden, the skinny cows eat the healthy ones! Pharaoh then woke up.

After he fell back asleep, he dreams of 7 healthy heads of grain on a stalk, and then 7 unhealthy heads of grain on a stalk. Like the first dream, the 7 blighted heads eat up the 7 good heads. Pharaoh wakes up again, and he is distressed because he doesn't understand what these vivid dreams mean.

So, Pharaoh calls for the wise men and magicians to advise him on the meaning of the dreams. But, none of them are able.

At this point, Pharaoh's butler remembers Joseph who interpreted the butler's dream some 2 years previously. The butler informs Pharaoh of Joseph's abilities, and he then summons Joseph be brought to Pharaoh's chambers. **Joseph becomes a possible solution to Pharaoh's troubles.**

Joseph spruces himself up for his audience with Pharaoh, and verse 15ff reveals the interchange between the most powerful man on earth at the time, and one of earth's most insignificant men – humanly speaking.

Pharaoh gets right to the point, and explains that he's in need of dream interpretation. He asks Joseph if he's able to help out. Joseph's reply is in verse 16 - "...*It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*"

Pharaoh proceeds to tell Joseph of his dreams and how his advisors couldn't help him. Joseph shares the interpretation beginning in verse 25 running through verse 32. Joseph explains to Pharaoh that God is giving Pharaoh a peek at things to come – and this is repeated twice – verse 25 and again in verse 28. 7 years of abundant harvests will be followed by 7 years of famine.

**But, God also gives Pharaoh a solution to the forthcoming famine.** That solution is Joseph. Beginning with verse 33, Joseph declares to Pharaoh the kind of man needed to lead Egypt through the upcoming lengthy and severe famine. He must be "a discerning and wise man" (v. 33). Further, he must be a man "in whom is the Spirit of God..." (v. 38).

This is the first mention in the Bible of the Holy Spirit's coming upon a man. And, God revealed to Pharaoh that the man stipulating the qualifications of the famine breaker was standing before him – Joseph!

So, with verse 40, we see Joseph elevated from prison pit to penthouse in Egypt. From that point on, he would be over Pharaoh's house, and rule over the Egyptian people. He would be second in command only to Pharaoh.

What an amazing turn of events! *What can we learn from this in terms of our own benefit?*

**1 – God is behind all that happens to us.** He is intimately involved in our lives. He oversaw Joseph's unjust imprisonment, and He caused His release from prison. God orchestrated the arrest of the butler and the baker, putting Joseph in touch with Pharaoh's inner circle. When the time was right, God troubled Pharaoh with dreams – the very medium that Joseph helped the butler with 2 years previously.

As God, He is the First Cause of all things. He has “foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.” (WSC Q.7) Further, He “preserves and governs all His creatures, and all their actions.” (WSC Q.11)

This amazing truth should bring comfort to you, believer in Christ. God has purpose in every good thing He accomplishes on your behalf, and every difficulty and trial He brings to your life. Who among us doesn't find comfort from **Romans 8:28** – “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.”

To want a different outcome than what God brings is to be small-minded, self-focused, and ultimately sinful. He is working out His good purpose in you each and every day. If we have our minds on God, we see God in our circumstances and we can trust Him!

**2 – God can use the least of us to accomplish great things.** Joseph was a Hebrew slave, sold into slavery by his brothers. He served in Potiphar's household and was branded a gigolo by Potiphar's wife. He was cast into prison – a criminal, an enemy of the state, so to speak; seemingly forsaken and forlorn. Yet, God did not leave, nor forsake His man, Joseph.

Joseph was put in prison (the tomb) but God would not allow him to remain there because God's purpose for Joseph was not yet fulfilled. So it was with Jesus Christ, God would not allow Him to remain in the tomb (**Acts 2:24**).

Irving Berlin only had two years of formal schooling. He never learned how to read music. When he composed his songs, he would hum the melody and a musical secretary would write down the notes. He became one of the greatest songwriters our country has ever known. Among his hits: “White Christmas”, “Blue Skies,” “Happy Holiday”, “There's No Business Like Show Business,” “Puttin’ on the Ritz,” and “God Bless America.”
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Christian, our God calls us “the least of these, (His) brothers.” (**Matthew 25:40**) The psalmist in **Psalms 84:10** notes, “I'd rather scrub floors in the house of my God than be honored as a guest in the palace of sin.”

Apart from God and His grace, we are nobodies headed nowhere! But because of His mercy and grace, we are His, and He is ours, and right now counts forever!

3 – **God’s way is not Man’s Way**; (it rarely is). We’ve noted often in our study of Genesis that the older siblings often serve the younger. Abraham’s firstborn son, Ishmael, was not the promised heir, but his second-born son, Isaac was. Esau and Jacob were twins – Esau was first-born, but he would serve his younger brother Jacob. And, Joseph was not the firstborn son – he was the 11<sup>th</sup> son – and as we’ll soon see, all his brothers would serve him when the famine pictured in Pharaoh’s dreams would take hold.

Presidents, Prime Ministers, Emperors, Tsars, Monarchs, and Kings do not make history – they only serve history, as Jesus would declare in His answer to Pilate’s question: “So Pilate said to him, ‘You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?’ Jesus answered him, ‘You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.’” (**John 19:10-11a**)

Friend, if you are not a believer in Christ your future is dim, and your days are numbered and short-lived. If you leave this present life in death without submitting to God the Son, Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord, you will die in your sins, and your eternity will be long and tortuous – hell is forever!

There is coming a day – perhaps soon – when every person will bow before the true King of heaven and earth – Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul describes what will happen in his New Testament letter to the Philippian churches:

<sup>5</sup> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

*Will you rot in the pit, or will you reign from the penthouse?*