

“In the Land of Egypt”
Genesis 41:41-57
May 28th, 2017

At the heart of America’s involvement in World War II Europe - July 1943 - the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment jumped at night into the hills north of Gela, Sicily. Their mission was to disrupt enemy communications and to slow reinforcements to the beaches to be invaded by Allied forces.

Despite high winds and navigation errors regiment leaders gathered stragglers together to get the job done. In one hard-fought battle, American soldiers eliminated a series of enemy pillboxes along a strategic resupply route leading into Gela.

Sixty-one years later a group of US and Italian officials joined together in a ceremony to honor the American paratroopers who fell in the battle. A memorial was built on the site where three German pillboxes are still visible. The names of 39 Americans who died in the battle are inscribed on the memorial.

The mayor of a nearby Sicilian village said at the ceremony, “These young American soldiers defended the ideals of freedom and democracy upon which western civilization was founded. We give thanks to the American soldiers who fought and died for our liberation, an event that changed the history of our country. Yet we see them not as foreigners, but as our heroes for what they did.”

On this Memorial Day weekend, our nation reflects upon those who have given the “last full measure” in dying for our nation while serving - or having once served - in our nation’s armed forces. The mayor gave proper tribute to those Americans who gave their lives, thereby saving Sicily from the Axis threat during World War II. Similarly, we can see that God placed Joseph in a comparable position to save His people from the threat of severe famine.

Today, as we finish our study of **Genesis Chapter 41**, it’s insightful to note that Joseph was a victor in the battle with sin. In the chapters of Genesis that follow, nothing bad is said about Joseph. In fact, he is one of the few major characters in the Bible – Daniel is the only other – of whom this can truthfully be said.

Genesis 41:41-57:

“And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.”

⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³ And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, “Bow the knee!” So he set him over all the land of Egypt.

⁴⁴ Pharaoh also said to Joseph, “I *am* Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” ⁴⁵ And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷ Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. ⁴⁸ So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. ⁴⁹ Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for *it was* immeasurable.

⁵⁰ And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. ⁵¹ Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: “For God

has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." ⁵² And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

⁵³ Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do." ⁵⁶ The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy *grain*, because the famine was severe in all lands."

MP 1 – Joseph is Faithful in a Secular Society.

MP 2 – God is Faithful in His Promises

MP 3 – We are to be Faithful in the Secular Society Where God Places Us.

There is a phrase that is repeated 10 times in these 17 verses. It's in two forms, "In the Land of Egypt" or "All the Land of Egypt." We find those phrases in verses 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 53, 54, 55, and 56 of Genesis 41. **Egypt was the secular society in which God placed Joseph.** From my earliest memories, I've been fascinated by the pyramids of Egypt – marvels even in comparison to today's building technology! (No wonder they'd be included among the so-called "Seven Wonders of the World.")

We remember that Joseph got to Egypt after his brothers sold him to Ishmaelites who took him there. After arriving in Egypt, they sold him to Potiphar. Joseph was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, and ended up in the King's prison for two years (Egypt's king is called Pharaoh). God sent dreams to trouble Pharaoh, who in turn looked for someone to interpret his dreams. Pharaoh's butler remembered Joseph interpreting his dream, and Pharaoh ordered him to appear before him. Joseph did, interpreted the dreams, and Pharaoh rewarded Joseph by placing him in high authority over the Egyptian people.

With today's passage, we see Pharaoh clothes Joseph as an Egyptian – he's given Pharaoh's ring (which would be used to seal written communications – meaning Joseph spoke on Pharaoh's behalf). Further, Pharaoh gives Joseph Egyptian fine linen to wear and a gold chain around his neck. *Interesting, isn't it, how clothing often factors into Joseph's story?* Joseph's father Jacob showed his favoritism toward Joseph in giving him a colorful cloak; Potiphar's wife grabs Joseph's garment as he flees her presence in Potiphar's quarters, and now the royal garments of Egypt! Joseph is being highly honored before all Egypt!

* Language differences – next chapter with brothers.

Verse 43 reveals Joseph was also given official transportation as he served as second command only to Pharaoh. His limousine was "the second chariot." As Joseph rides through the Egyptian crowds, heralds called out before him that the people must "Bow the knee!" In one of the dreams God gave Joseph, Joseph saw his brothers bowing before him; now all Egypt was bending the knee!

Not only was Joseph dressed and equipped according to Egyptian secular society, but he was given an Egyptian name as verse 45 teaches - Zaphnath-Paaneah, which means "God speaks and

he lives.” Pharaoh also gave Joseph an Egyptian wife whose name was Asenath, which means “belonging to [the goddess] Neit.”

We know that many a good man or woman has been intoxicated with the power and influence that come with life at the top. It can make people imagine themselves so original and wise – a one-of-a-kind that deserves all he or she has.

Extended time at the top of society can work an incredible ugliness of soul, as it did in the proud English Duke of Somerset who gave commands to his servants by hand signals because he could not condescend to speak to such lesser beings!

Today we see this kind of ugliness in those who have had a meteoric rise – professional athletes, media personalities, and children of the rich and famous. One well-known pop diva, for instance, is purported to be so full of herself she hires people to hold her drinks and keep her skirt from touching the ground.

Accordingly, young Joseph, second only to Pharaoh at age 30, rises from nowhere and suddenly is living the life of luxury. He is potentially in great danger! But, instead, he serves as an example for each of us godliness amid a secular culture that is often hostile toward Christians and Christianity.

Verses 46-49 reveal that Joseph performed his calling faithfully – he spent the 7 years of abundant harvests foretold in Pharaoh’s dreams going throughout Egypt having grain saved up in all the cities. Joseph was so effective in his work that grain too numerous to account for was saved up for use during the coming famine. Joseph served to the great glory of Yahweh God!

Just as important is what we find in verses 50-52. There, we see another indicator of Joseph’s faithfulness amid the pagan Egyptian culture – his two sons born during that time. **Notice their Hebrew names!** The first born Joseph named Manasseh, which means, “For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” The second born, Joseph named Ephraim, which means, “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” Giving his sons Hebrew names is a way that Joseph exalts God in the midst of pagan surroundings.

In placing Joseph in such an exalted position, God was also showing **His faithfulness to His Promises**. Going all the way back to the opening three verses of Genesis Chapter 12, we are there reminded what God said to Abram – “I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (**Genesis 12:2b-d, 3c**)

God came through on these promises to Abram, to Isaac, to Jacob, and now Joseph. We will see how that transpires for the rest of Joseph’s family beginning with the very next chapter, which, Lord willing, we will begin our study of next Sunday.

God’s faithfulness continues throughout the remaining pages of the Old Testament, including the likes of Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Debra, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Hosea through Malachi. God’s faithfulness to His promises finds its ultimate fulfillment in the arrival of the long-promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The psalmist in **Psalms 75:6-7** teaches, “For exaltation *comes* neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. ⁷ But God *is* the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.”

God delights to bring His promises to fruition through means and people we often least expect. The Apostle Paul picks up on that theme in **I Corinthians 1:26-31**, which Dustin read earlier in the service of worship. God's people are "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble... But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen..." (**I Corinthians 1:26b-28a**) This list includes Joseph; it includes you, and it includes me.

Speaking of you and me, what about us? God has placed us in the fellowship of this particular church family, with the particular members He has placed in our families, and in the communities in which we live for His purposes and glory. We are to be in the world, but not of it. He commands that we be **Faithful in the Situations Where He Places Us** – in the land of America, Mercer County, Quad Cities Area, Muscatine, where we may be.

Dear one, you are God's man or woman everywhere He places you:

1 - Like Joseph, (who was for 13 years a slave and/or prisoner) you may be in a miry pit or dank dungeon that you can't seem to get out of – trust God, and simply do as He commands. (**Psalm 37:4**).

2 - You may be in an uncomfortable work environment or family situation – your own Potiphar's house, so to speak. Seek to do all that you can to be faithful where you are, rather than expending all your energy to get out of it.

3 – You may be looking at a potentially difficult health diagnosis, uncertain job prospects, or living in the consequences of previous bad decisions. Pharaoh told the Egyptians to go to Joseph, but we are to go to Jesus to do "whatever he says to (us)." (**Genesis 41:55**) That means we are to be faithful to our vows of marriage (if married), to our vows of church membership (if we're Christians), and to declare to the world all what Jesus has done for us!

With verse 54 in today's passage, the good times had ended, and the 7 years of famine were upon the people. *Are you hungry for spiritual things, friend?* Jesus is the Bread of Life (**John 6:35**). *Are you thirsty?* Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." (**John 7:37**) "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" is His promise in **John 6:37**. The Bible tells us that all who come will receive from Him, "without money and without cost." (**Isaiah 55:1**)

The last line of Genesis 41 tells us that "the famine was severe in all lands." So it is today. If famine or any other trial or difficulty has you in its grasp, you must go to Jesus and do what He tells you to do. You must confess your sin and receive Him as your personal Savior.

It is not extending grace to anyone to leave them in their sin, but it is of grace to expect them to do what the Bible does. Friend, you know you don't like to be wrong. But, your whole existence is wrong apart from Christ. Do what He wants you to do instead of insisting upon what you want to do which differs with God's Word. Turn from your pride, leave your stubbornness and your unbelief behind, and receive the saving grace of God. And, even if you find yourself living in the land of Egypt, you have the assurance that doing right – being right - is always right!