

Genesis 41:38-41

I believe that the greatest success story of all time... is the Biblical narrative about Joseph that we find in the book of Genesis. ... It teaches us so many truths... that are embedded in this true story. ... But just think for a moment about God's choice to use narrative (like this) to impact us with great truth.

God's truth can be communicated in several different ways. The truths that are found in Joseph's narrative... could have been simply listed (one by one)... as exhortations: "you must do this..." and "you must do that..." But God chose narrative... so that we might **FEEL the effects** of the truths.

Some portions of the Bible are written-out as listed exhortations. ... The Apostle Paul (for example) wrote letters to churches of the first century... and they tend to do that. ... We need spelled-out exhortations... just as we need narrative (about people we can identify with.) ... That is why God had His Word written in different styles – because **He really wants** to communicate with you and I.

The various types of literature that we have in our Bibles... affect us differently. (You see)... God knows that simple exhortation has its place... (it will communicate)... and so will poetry... (But truth expressed as poetry... such as the psalms and proverbs will touch us in a unique way)... And legal writing (the Law)... has its own way to impact our lives. The same can be said of apocalyptic style of writing (like the Prophets and Revelation.) ... LISTEN! Have you ever considered how God really wants to connect His truths to your life...? ... God is the Master communicator.

He wants to deeply influence our lives with His truth... and to forever make us different.

As we return to the Bible's narrative about Joseph this morning... God wants to impress upon our lives... some truths about success. But the truths that we see in our narrative about Joseph... God has also had recorded in other forms of literature. For example... in letter form... the Apostle Paul wrote:

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

This truth that Joseph illustrates is a certainty that every Christian should memorize and rely upon... especially in times of trial and hardship. ... But imagine if the only expression that we had of this truth was in Paul's writing... (in other words... imagine for a moment that we did not have the Genesis account of Joseph.) ... Think how much easier it would be for us to grow very impatient under the process of God is taking the tangled threads of our lives... and *making them* "work together for good." ... With just Paul's statement of this truth for us to know... we can so easily become very occupied with present circumstances... to the point that hope is no longer exercised... and the brighter and better future is blotted from our view.

What if you had a great difficulty in your life... and you came to me for counsel... and I simply gave you cold truth to know... "*Well... you know... all things work together for good, for those who are called according to God's purpose...*" ... I would have given you absolute truth – but how much better is it... when you are also able to FEEL this truth...?

This is why we (also) have narrative literature in our Bibles. ... 2/3rds of our Bible is narrative. ... God wants to hit us in the head... **AND** in the heart.

To hit us in the head (again... but a little differently) with the truth about Joseph... God has (also) given it to us in the form of wisdom literature.

Wise King Solomon wrote:

Ecclesiastes 7:8 (ESV)

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

(Dave... please hold this verse up for a moment longer)... Boy! Isn't that a good summary of the Joseph story...? (Now... just in case any of you plan on coming up to me after I finish preaching... and quoting this Scripture: "*Better is the end of a thing than its beginning...*" Be forewarned... I will complete the verse with the second part – "*and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit...*")

Poetry is designed to hit us in the heart. ... And God also used the poetry of a psalm... to teach us the same truth from Joseph's narrative. *Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes with the morning.* (Psalm 30:5)

Today's passage about Joseph's life... is a part of God going out of His way to communicate to us... His truth concerning **success**. ... But... before we input into our minds this truth... lets first try to unclutter our minds of some of the junk that the world might have deposited within us.

(You know)... Our greatest fear should not be of failure... but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter.

The American missionary Adoniram Judson arrived in Burma... (or Myanmar) in 1812... and died there thirty-eight years later (in 1850.) ...

During that time... he suffered much for the cause of the gospel. He was imprisoned... tortured... and kept in shackles. After the death of his wife, Ann... (to whom he was devoted)... for several months... he was so depressed... that he sat daily beside her tomb. Three years later... he wrote: "*God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I cannot find Him.*"

But Adoniram's faith sustained him... and he threw himself into the tasks to which he believed God had called him. ... He worked feverishly on his translation of the Bible. ... The New Testament was printed first... and he finished the Old Testament in early 1834.

Statistics are unclear... but there were only somewhere between twelve and twenty-five professing Christians in the country when he died... and there were not ANY churches to speak of.

Now fast-forward 150 years. At the anniversary of the translation of the Bible into the Burmese language... Paul Borthwick was addressing a group that was celebrating the Burmese Bible. ... Just before he got up to speak... he noticed (in small print on the first page)... the words: "*Translated by Rev. A. Judson.*" ... So Borthwick turned to his interpreter... a Burmese man named Matthew Hia Win... and asked him... "*Matthew... what do you know of this man?*" Matthew began to weep as he said:

We know him—we know how he loved the Burmese people, how he suffered for the gospel because of us, out of love for us. He died a pauper, but left the Bible for us. When he died, there were few believers, but today there are over 600,000 of us, and every single one of us traces our spiritual heritage to one man: the Rev. Adoniram Judson.

But Adoniram Judson never saw it!

Was he a success? Yes! And ***that*** kind of success... may very well be the case for many of us. ... We may be called to invest our lives in ministries... for which we do not see much ***immediate*** fruit. ... (So please take it to heart) that your success may not be as dramatic as Joseph's. ... But we can certainly trust that the God of all grace (Who oversees our work)... will ensure that our labor is ***not*** in vain.

Now... lets have input to our minds... (and impact to our hearts) with God's truth concerning success... as He has laid it out for us in Joseph's narrative...

Genesis 41:42-44

On the spot... Pharaoh ceremonially bestowed upon Joseph the paraphernalia of power. ... First... the king removed the signet ring from his own hand... and slipped it onto Joseph's. ... The ring was used to press Pharaoh's seal upon official documents... therefore delegating to Joseph... the ability to operate with Pharaoh-like authority. ... When the signet ring was pressed into the wax on a document... it was just the same as Pharaoh's signature.

Second... Joseph was decked out in garments of "fine linen"... an almost transparent linen that was worn by court officials.... It was a garment suspended from shoulder straps... so that it hung straight from the chest to the ankles. ... Henceforth Joseph would be clad in fine linen... the garments of the powerful and well-connected.

Third... a gold chain was hung around his neck as a symbol of highest distinction. ... The chain was also a symbol of authority. ... It would do the same thing that bars... stars... stripes... and chevrons do on military uniforms.

Then... having donned the visible signs of power... Joseph was then treated to an inaugural parade... as Pharaoh made him ride in his second chariot... with runners preceding him... and calling out "*Bow the knee!*"

What a rush that must have been for Joseph. ... He had been bowing and scraping to everyone... for the last thirteen years of his life. ... He had been the "*Hey, you*" guy... both in Potiphar's house... and most recently in prison... where he had served Pharaoh's servants. ... Now he rode in a royal chariot... that plowed through masses that divided before him like a sea on bended knee.

Pretty heady stuff! ... And on top of all of this... Joseph received Pharaoh's formal words of enthronement: "*I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt*" (v. 44) — that is, "*no action will be taken without your OK.*"

Think of it. ... In the morning he was in a dirty... stinking pit. ... But by nightfall... he was sitting in the palace... dressed in designer clothing... having servants fan him with giant feathers... and brushing the flies away. His meal menu was drawn from the highest quality cuisine on the Nile... and in the stable... his chauffeured chariot-limousine... was ready to transport him everywhere (through worshipful crowds.)

But... Joseph's soul was in greater peril... than at any other time in his short life. ... It is one thing to remain believing... and God-centered... and faithful - in the pit. ... It is quite another to be faithful at the pinnacle.

(Now here is where we have some much-needed lessons about success!)

Being at the pinnacle of Egyptian life... could have easily inclined his soul toward pride and independence. There at the top... a looking up to God... would not be natural. ... (Think of it)... It would be far easier for Joseph to look down on humanity... and to depend upon servants to meet his needs. ... Also... the undeniable brilliance of his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams... and his plan to spare Egypt... could well have begun to give him a sense of mental (and moral) superiority.

Life at the top can make people imagine themselves so original and so wise (a one-of-a-kind... that deserves all that he or she has.) ... Extended time at the top of society... can work an incredible ugliness of soul.

Henry Ford is one of the biggest names in American life. His use of mass production in manufacturing the Model T automobile shaped not only the economy and industry... but the values of 20th century America.

A 2005 biography of Ford tells the story of the man who achieved incredible fame and fortune... and describes how (in the end) this "gifted man was undone by his own success."

Ford loved the ordinary folk... and they loved him back. ... By 1920... half of all cars on US roads were Fords. ... But it wasn't just cars that Ford was selling. ... He preached a new gospel... to a public raised on Puritan ideals of delayed gratification and self-control. ... Ford believed that money was

for spending... and that workers should use their income to buy products that would improve their lives... (products like his Model T.)

Seen as a hero for making it possible for the average family to own a car... Ford's opinion was sought out for every area of life... from world peace to marriage and child care.

The adulation of others ultimately convinced Ford that he was infallible... and led him to ruinously bad decisions. ... It blinded him to his own hypocrisy... as he preached family values and old-fashioned virtue... and yet kept a mistress. ... It may also have driven him to destroy his only child.... The older Ford (offended by his son's gentle style and superior education)... ruthlessly undercut him at every turn... only then to mourn grievously when Edsel died young. ... Ford's last days were sorrowful. On a visit to the house where he had lived as a newlywed... he told his chauffeur... *"I've got a lot of money, and I'd give every penny of it right now just to be here with Mrs. Ford."* [P a u s e]

Now... before we go any further... I need to ask a question about Joseph. ... Joseph is now the second most powerful man in the world. He has all this power and ability. Why didn't he want to contact his family at this point? ... Why does no message go from Joseph to ease (what he would have to know) was his father's mourning heart? ... Two years prior... Joseph showed that he was thinking of them... when he asked the chief butler to help him find justice for himself.

Perhaps if this were you or I... we might say to Pharaoh... *"Thank you very much... Sir... but there is something I need to take care of first. ... I'm going to take my new chariot on a brief trip to Canaan... I'll be right back..."*

and then I'll get started on our plan. ... We have some time... Pffft... 14 years!" But even during the seven years of plenty (when things were going tremendously well)... Joseph does not go... or send any word to Canaan.

(You see) Joseph has just been validated for his being able to correctly interpret dreams... and he (no doubt) bears in mind those early dreams of his childhood. ... All that he has just experienced... has confirmed him in the belief... that they will one day be fulfilled. ... He can leave it entirely to the all-wise providence of his God... to bring about their fulfillment.

Joseph is true to his life-long character. He leaves all in the hand of God... and he waits in anxious (but silent) hope. (I think what we see here... is what we had as the theme of last week's sermon - Joseph submits to the sovereignty of God.) Joseph was prepared for this promotion... by continually submitting to the sovereignty of God. And now that he has been promoted... (in all of his success)... he is still submitting to God's plans... instead of his own.

Genesis 41:45

It is evident that Pharaoh was intent on Egyptianizing Joseph because he gave him a new name and a wife. Pharaoh called Joseph's name "Zaphenath-paneah"... This was the acquittal of Joseph. Joseph had been in prison. Pharaoh was wiping-out any bad connotations of that experience. ... "*Zaphenath-paneah*" meant such things as "*revealer of secrets*"... and the "*prince of life of the world.*" ... This would boost Joseph's reputation.

(Do you see what is happening here?) Joseph took care of his **character**... and in due time... God took care of Joseph's **unjustly smeared reputation**. ... Here is yet another thing for us to learn about success. We need to take care of our **character**... and let God take care of our **reputation** (even if it has been unfairly ravaged.)

Now... an Egyptian **name** is one thing... but an Egyptian **wife** is quite another. Because Joseph has received **both**... we can see a huge potential problem for Joseph. ... It is obvious that Pharaoh intended Joseph to become more and more identified with Egypt. ... If this happens... would Joseph forget... and **turn away** from his heritage... and especially his God...? (Is Satan up to something here? ... You know... His temptations are often the strongest after we experience a major victory.)

Asenath was of aristocratic blood, "the daughter of Potiphara priest of On". She was of such high-born lineage that the Pharaohs sometimes chose wives from this family. The city of On, which is also known by the Greek name Heliopolis ("Sun City"), lies today about ten miles northeast of Cairo and was the center of worship of the sun-god Re. ... As priest of On... Asenath's father presided over the temple-city of Heliopolis and officiated at all major festivals and supervised the other priests.

This **ultra-aristocratic** wife... made Joseph well-connected—and ominously in danger of Egyptianization. ... His clothing was Egyptian... his name was Egyptian... his wife was Egyptian... and his father-in-law - **was the leading Egyptian sun-worshiper**.

But Joseph responded well. ... He did not assume the indolent lifestyle of the Nile's rich and famous... and neither did he forget his heritage... or his

God. ... Our first clue of this... is how he responded with the obedience that characterizes true faith. Joseph believed that Egypt would have just seven years of plenty to gather up grain for seven years of famine. Why did he believe that? Because God revealed it to him. Joseph (by no means) had a dull response to God's word. ... Because of it... he gave himself wholly to hard work. The frenetic pace of Joseph's activity is underscored by the repetitions in the verses that describe Joseph's work.

Genesis 41:46-49

When Joseph was appointed to his new position... he did not sit around and bask in the honor and prestige of his new position... but focused on his responsibilities. ... Joseph was more concerned about his responsibilities... than his privileges and honors. ... We nearly get weary trying to keep up with Joseph's industrious energy. Joseph was not lazy! ... He had work to do and rolled up his sleeves and went to work.

In earnestly collecting the food... Joseph evidenced his sincerity about Divine revelation. He believed the Divine revelation... and this belief controlled his life. (Boy! ... If only the Word of God would so control all of our lives!)

But the next few verses give us even greater evidence of Joseph's enduring faith in God... and remembering the heritage passed down to him from Abraham... Isaac... and (his father) Jacob.

Genesis 41:50-52

Manasseh means "*he who causes to forget*"— Baby Manasseh brightened his life. The birth of that little boy helped Joseph to forget the appalling

hardship of his initial thirteen years in Egypt. ... God was removing the bitterness... sting... and sorrow of those days. ... He could have carried a grudge in his heart because of the way his brothers... Potiphar's wife... and even Potiphar had treated him... but grudges are like weeds in a garden... or germs in a healthy body... they just don't belong there. ... Joseph had discovered that the blessings of God... more than compensate... for the burdens from God. ... God's blessings will drown out the sorrows. [PAUSE]

Ephraim means "*fertile*" and broadly celebrated not only the birth of his second son... but all the bounty Joseph was personally experiencing. Joseph was filled with gratitude... optimism... and hope.

But here is the great thing (and you must not miss it.) ... Joseph declared his allegiance to God and his faith in God's word... by giving his boys Hebrew names! ... Remember... Joseph had been renamed with an Egyptian name (Zaphenath-paneah)... and his wife was Asenath (which means "*she who belongs to the goddess Neit*")... referencing her idolatrous Egyptian ancestry. ... But the names of the sons of their union (amidst the aristocracy of the Nile) were blatantly Hebrew! ... Again... when it would have been so easy for Joseph to accept assimilation and welcome Egyptianization... Joseph reasserted his ethnic and spiritual origin. ... Joseph believed that YHWH was with him in both the pit and at the pinnacle.

Genesis 41:53-57

What storied success had come to Joseph! ... Not only did Joseph engineer the saving of Egypt... but all the earth came to Egypt (to

Joseph)... to buy grain. ... Money readily poured into Egypt's coffers... so that not only did the people have plenty to eat... but everyone actually prospered during the famine. ... Joseph became the hero of the Nile. All the earth named Joseph as its temporal savior. ... God had caused Joseph's reputation to soar high (far and wide) in everyone's eyes!

... .. [P A U S E]

What have we learned about success from Joseph...? I will emphasize two take-aways that I'll leave you with...

#1. Whether you are in the pit... or at the pinnacle... submit all your plans to the sovereignty of God. You may... or you may never see dramatic success like Joseph... but we can certainly trust... that the God of all grace (Who oversees our work)... will ensure that our labor is not in vain. ... And if God ever does grant to you such an obvious sense of success – recognize the perilous situation that you are in. Stay dependent on God... not yourself. Keep submitting your plans to His.

Here is how we submit to God's sovereignty. If you are at the pinnacle... let God's word (not society's elite standards) control your life. ... Do not accept assimilation... and welcome Egyptianization. ... Boldly go against the tide! ... Demonstrate allegiance to God and faith in His Word.

And if you are in the pit... (This may sound strange... but...) we must make sure that we do not decide that we shall succeed. ... Carry on every day... simply seeking to do God's will... whatever He has for you in that day. ... If we decide to succeed... then we may succeed without succeeding in God's way.

Who... then... are we... when we make our focus to succeed...? It becomes all too easy... to plunge into self-glorification ... convinced that the dazzling success of our projects will prove definitely who we are. ... And this fails to satisfy. Our triumphs ring hollow. Our victories so often turn to ashes in our mouths. ... But never mind. Tomorrow we will run faster... climb higher... and one fine morning... who are we? ... We are creatures who have forgotten what it means to be faithful to Someone... other than ourselves.

But if we go on from day to day seeking to do God's will... then we shall be prepared to receive success from Him ***if He wills it***... and if He does not... then we need to humbly fix our mind along the lines of King David's lesson: *"It is God's decision that David shall not build the temple, but he will raise up Solomon."*

Whether you are in the pit... or at the pinnacle... submit all your plans to the sovereignty of God.

#2. Just as Joseph took care of his ***character***... and God took care of Joseph's ***unjustly smeared reputation*** ... we need to take care of our ***character***... and let God take care of our ***reputation*** (even if it has been unfairly ravaged.)

Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes with the morning. (Psalm 30:5)