

GENESIS: THE BEGINNING IS NOT THE END

Joseph's Story – My Story

Text: Gen.37-50

INTRODUCTION: In preparing the message for today, I set out to talk to you about the schools to which God sent Joseph, the son of Jacob, to enable Joseph to become the man God purposed him to be. But in my preparation time, I discovered I could never give you the whole picture in a single message.

So this morning, I am not going to talk about the schools Joseph attended. I am going to save that for next week. Today, I just want to tell you the story of Joseph's life, but not just so that we know his story, but because there is more in common with Joseph's story and each of our own stories than you might imagine.

STORY:

Abraham was the physical father of the Hebrew people and the spiritual father of men and women of faith. God promised Abraham to make him a great nation and that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed. God began to fulfill that promise in Isaac, the miracle baby of Abraham's old age. The Lord extended the promise to Isaac's son Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. Israel had twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The eleventh of those sons was named Joseph.

From the time of his birth in his father's old age, Joseph was the favorite of Jacob's sons. One of the ways that Jacob expressed his unbalanced love was in giving a beautiful coat of many colors to his favored son. The privilege that Jacob thought he was giving his son by such favoritism was transformed into a terrible trial for Joseph in his teenage years.

When he was seventeen, Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were away from home, watching the family's flocks of sheep. Jealousy, envy, anger and bitterness combined like sparks and gasoline to produce an explosive hatred in the hearts of Joseph's brothers. Joseph had undoubtedly fanned the flames of this hotbed of hatred by occasionally flaunting his special status. So when his brothers saw him approaching, easily recognizable by his brilliant colorful coat, they plotted to get rid of him once and for all.

Most wanted to simply kill him and tell Dad he died. But Reuben and Judah, while equally desirous to be rid of this annoyance, did not want their brother's blood upon their hands. Instead, his brothers captured him, held him in a dry well and sold him as a slave to a caravan of traders who passed nearby.

Quickly did sin produce its hideous fruit.

- **The sin of a fickle father who favored one child above another.**
- **The sin of Joseph himself in proudly exhibiting the marks of unmerited favoritism.**
and
- **The sin of the brothers' unforgiveness, bitterness, and the intent of murder.**

- **The fruit of inconsolable grief for Jacob** when the object of his favoritism was taken away.
- **The fruit of life in captivity and slavery for a teenage daddy's boy.**
- **The fruit of guilt among ten young men who knew they had betrayed** their own flesh and blood and broken the heart of **their aged father.**

The caravan of Ishmaelites came and did what it had done so many times before: purchased a man to turn him into an ordinary slave. Little did they know that they were a cog in the wheel of an extraordinary plan being executed by an omnipotent God as they hauled Joseph with others they had purchased or captured in recent weeks to the land of Egypt where slaves brought a good price in gold.

Neither did Potiphar, understand all that was happening. He was the powerful captain of Pharaoh's guard. Potiphar purchased a young, strong, robust, Hebrew man to do the heavy work around the household. But he soon discovered in this man a depth of character he had never before seen and an ability of administration such as he had not witnessed. Soon Potiphar promoted Joseph to be the steward, the house manager of his entire estate.

Potiphar's wife also saw Joseph's strength and youthful charm, which she made the focus of her lustful, adulterous eye. Many times, she would catch Joseph alone and invite him to share her evil desire. But Joseph did not allow resentment for what had befallen him, or hatred for Potiphar's buying him to provide an excuse for falling into sin. Instead, he remained steadfastly faithful to his earthly master, mindful of the loving, watchful eye of his Heavenly Master. In kind but firm terms, Joseph steadfastly refused her devilish advances.

One day while Potiphar was away and the other slaves were outside, Potiphar's wife grabbed Joseph by his coat in an attempt to pull him into a romantic embrace. As a lizard abandons the tip of its tail in the mouth of a hungry predator, so Joseph left his coat in the woman's grasping hands. Her unfulfilled lust turned to hatred, and her evil mind conceived a vengeful and wicked scheme. When Potiphar came home, she accused Joseph of assaulting her and held out his abandoned garment as proof of the attack.

Many have often considered that Potiphar did not really believe his wife's accusations. In all probability, he was aware of her unfaithful heart and lying tongue. If he had thought that Joseph had so severely betrayed his trust, he probably would have killed him. After all, Joseph was just a slave. But Potiphar preferred to placate his wife rather than to confront her in her deceitfulness, so he sent Joseph to jail. How could Potiphar know that this injustice to a faithful servant would be used by God to move Joseph one step closer to the realization of the glorious plan the Almighty had determined for him?

Therefore, God would not allow Joseph to be cast away into just any prison. He was put into the jail reserved for prisoners of the Pharaoh. Even in prison, God was with Joseph and showed him mercy. It was not long before the Lord gave him favor in the eyes of the jail keeper who gave Joseph authority over all of the other prisoners. One day the former chief butler and chief baker of the household of Pharaoh offended the king and were thrown into prison with Joseph. During the night, each of them had a dream, but they did not know their meanings. Joseph told them that the one true God could give the interpretation of the dream, so each told

his dream to Joseph. Joseph listened intently, and God told Joseph the meaning. To the butler he said, "In three days Pharaoh will restore you to your original position and you shall serve him again." To the baker, Joseph said sadly, "In three days Pharaoh will have you hanged from a tree, and you will die." In three days, it happened just as the Lord had told Joseph it would. Before the butler left the prison, Joseph said to him, "When you are free, remember me. Tell Pharaoh that I am unjustly held in this place." The butler was restored as God had promised, but he forgot all about Joseph. Until...

Until one day two years later when the Pharaoh had a dream. He dreamed that seven fat and healthy cows came up out of the river, followed by seven thin and sickly cows. But the thin cows ate the fat cows. Then he dreamed that seven plump heads of grain came up on a single stalk, but then seven thin and blighted heads came up after them. And the seven thin heads devoured the seven good heads. When Pharaoh awoke, he called for all of his magicians to tell him the meaning of the dreams, but they could not.

Then the butler remembered Joseph and told his Pharaoh of the man in prison who had interpreted his own dream and the bakers and that things had come to pass just as he had declared. Immediately Pharaoh sent for Joseph. Joseph was given a bath, a shave, and a change of clothes and walked into the ornate throne room of the king of Egypt. Pharaoh asked Joseph, "Can you give the interpretation of dreams?" Joseph said, "It is not in me to do so, but God can give Pharaoh the interpretation."

Pharaoh then proceeded to explain the two dreams to Joseph. When he had heard them, Joseph replied. "The God of Heaven has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven fat cows and seven fat heads of grain are seven good years in which the harvest in Egypt will be plentiful. But the seven thin cows and seven thin heads of grain are seven years of famine which shall follow the years of plenty. The fact that God sent both dreams to you means that the matter is settled. God will surely do it, and it will begin soon." Then Joseph dared to counsel the king. "Appoint a man of wisdom to supervise the storage of grain throughout the seven years of plenty so that when the years of scarcity arrive, you will have food available for your people."

Pharaoh responded, "Where could we find a man with more discernment and wisdom than Joseph, and he has within him the Spirit of God." And Pharaoh declared, "I appoint, you, Joseph to be over all of my house and over all of the land of Egypt. You will be second only to me." The king took the ring from his finger and put it on Joseph along with a gold chain to be worn around his neck. He gave him fine clothes and a royal chariot, and everywhere that Joseph went the people of Egypt bowed before him.

Over the next seven years, God sent prosperity to the land as He had declared He would do. Joseph traveled over the land of Egypt and had great storehouses for grain built in all of the cities. He had much of the grain harvested in the fruitful years stored away to protect against the scarce years that were yet to come. But they did come. And when the people of Egypt began to grow hungry, Joseph opened the storehouses to provide food. And while the rest of the surrounding nations were in great distress during the years of famine, the people of Egypt had no lack.

Some of those in distress from the widespread famine were the family of Joseph back home in the Promised Land. There Jacob still lived with his other eleven sons but with perpetual sorrow in his heart for Joseph, for he had been told by Joseph's brothers that Joseph had died at the hands of a wild animal. When the shortage of grain began to press upon Jacob's family, the patriarch told the ten older sons to go to Egypt and buy grain, for the word was out that Egypt was the only land with food available for sale. So the brothers went, except for the youngest, Benjamin, whom father Jacob wanted to keep safely at home.

When the brothers arrived in Egypt, they were required to appear before the governor in charge of grain distribution. Little did they suspect that the man who looked so Egyptian in dress and custom was actually their brother whom they had sold into slavery. But Joseph recognized them immediately. In the course of the conversation, Joseph inquired about their father and if they had any other brothers. Learning that his father was still alive and that his younger brother Benjamin was well, caused Joseph to leave the room lest his brothers see the tears flowing down his cheeks. In addition to the emotion of knowing that those he loved were still alive, Joseph must have been overcome by the realization of the sovereignty and mercy of God. For he knew that it was God who allowed him to be taken from his family, sold as a slave, imprisoned for years, but finally made to be the second most powerful person in all the world. And now his opportunity for vengeance had arrived. The very people who sold him into slavery and who had been the source for every cruel thing that had ever happened in his life were bowed down before him. With just a word their lives would be forfeit.

Vengeance was not on the agenda, but Joseph did have an agenda. A plan conceived by the Almighty Himself was now brewing in Joseph's mind. For some reason, God wanted them all here in Egypt: his brothers, his father, their families, the whole family. God wanted them all to come and live in Egypt. But how could he get them here? Suddenly Joseph said to his brothers, "I do not believe your story about being brothers and having yet a younger brother back at home. You are spies who came to see if Egypt has been weakened by the famine." In spite of their protests to the contrary, Joseph had them all thrown in prison. After three days, he came to them and said, "One of you stays here, but the rest can go and bring the grain back to your family. When you bring the youngest brother back to prove you are telling the truth, then all can go free."

The next morning they left early with heavy grain bags filled to capacity on their donkeys. Simeon remained in prison awaiting their return with Benjamin. When they arrived at home, they opened their sacks and discovered that the money they had given the Egyptians to pay for the grain had been returned to their sacks. Far from pleased, they were terrified, fearful that the Egyptians would think they had stolen the grain. They pled with Jacob to let them take Benjamin back to prove their truthfulness and retrieve Simeon, but Jacob would have none of it. Still playing favorites with the younger ones, Jacob would rather lose Simeon than risk Benjamin.

But eventually the food ran out. Jacob told his sons to go buy more, but they replied, "We cannot go back without Benjamin." Finally, facing the starvation of his family as a very real possibility, Jacob relented, and allowed Benjamin to go with his brothers. When they arrived, Joseph arranged for a banquet for them in his own house. Joseph's brothers still did not recognize him and feared the invitation to Joseph's home was a trap. But they had little choice, and they went. Once there, other mysteries awaited them. They were seated for the meal in birth order, oldest to youngest, yet no one had extracted this information from them. And when

they were served, each was given plenty, but Benjamin was given five times more than any of the others.

Joseph then gave orders that it was time for them to leave, but it was just a part of God's plan to bring them back to stay. Joseph told his steward to hide Joseph's own silver cup in the grain sack belonging to Benjamin. After the group left, the steward rode out to intercept them before they were even out of the city. There he accused them of stealing his master's personal cup and declared that the guilty party would return to become Joseph's slave. Each brother vehemently declared their innocence, but when the sacks were checked, the cup was found in Benjamin's. But rather than send Benjamin back alone, all of the brothers went back, knowing that their return to Jacob without his youngest son would almost certainly bring death to their father.

Once they were again in the presence of Joseph, Judah pled with Joseph to let him become the slave instead of Benjamin. Finally, Joseph moved more than he could bear, sent everyone from the room except his family and cried out, "I am Joseph! I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt." The men were aghast and terrified, but they looked at his face past the Egyptian headdress and neatly trimmed beard, and hearing him speak perfect Hebrew, they knew that it was true. The certainty only increased their fear for the evil they had done and for so long had hidden.

But Joseph said, "Do not be afraid or even grieved, for you did not send me to Egypt; God did. It was God's plan to send me ahead of you so that in these days of famine and death He might provide for you here. There are still five years of famine to come. So go and get your father and your wives and children. Bring them here, and I will give you a land and food, and you shall grow and prosper. For what you intended for evil, God intended for good."

And so all the sons went back and told old Jacob that his son Joseph was alive after all and was now the governor of Egypt. And Jacob accepted the invitation to move to the land of Goshen with all of his family, saying, "Joseph is alive. I will go and see my son before I die." And he went with 69 people: sons, grandsons, and great grandsons and nearly an equal number of daughters-in-law, granddaughters, and great granddaughters. On the way they stopped at Beersheba to worship the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And there God told him, "Do not be afraid to go to Egypt, for I will grow you into a great nation there. I will go with you, but I will bring you up again and back to the Promised Land." And that promise God also fulfilled. Some 400 years later, God would bring them out, and by that time, He had grown them from a family of less than 150 to a nation of 2 ½ million people.

The principle presented here to us in the beautiful story of Joseph is enunciated clearly not just in Genesis, but in

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.

Folks, in Joseph's story, in my story, in your story,

I. GOD IS IN CONTROL!

No matter how out of control the world may seem to be, America may seem to be, your life may seem to be, God is still in control.

II. YOU ARE PART OF GOD'S GRAND PLAN.

God has a plan for you. Whatever the circumstances of your birth, it is God Who caused you to be born. God desires each of us to be a part of His plan.

May I show you a simple formula for how this works?

III. (GS x GP) + (YF1 x YF2) = F + B

- **God's Sovereignty**
- **God's Power**
- **Your Faith**
- **Your Faithfulness**
- **Fulfillment of God's purposes**
- **Blessing in your life and the lives of others**

CONCLUSION: Is any part of the formula missing in your life?