

A Man For the Times Genesis 41:1-40

This morning we continue our study in the life of Joseph. We'll be looking at **Genesis 41:1-40** where I invite you to turn in your Bibles. If there was ever a rags to riches story we need look no further than the life of Joseph. Now understand that he didn't start out with nothing and then work hard to get to where we find him at the end of the text we'll consider today. He began as a prince. His father, Jacob, was well off and Joseph was a favored son. He was given a coat of many colors that scholars believe indicated a princely position, a symbol of the inheritance he would receive. But his princely position was instantly erased when his brothers, filled with jealousy and hatred plotted to kill him, but instead profited from selling him into slavery. Time passed and although he was favored by his owner, false accusations by his owner's wife for attempted molestation, landed him in prison. He winds up in prison and in time becomes the favored prisoner of the warden. The desire of our western mindset is to move up the corporate ladder of success, but Joseph's life seems anything but successful.

We have discovered a very important and overarching principle that was true for Joseph and is true for us as well. **"And God was with him."**

You're all old enough to remember playing a record that would get a scratch that resulted in playing the same thing over and over.

I may sound like a broken record, but never forget that God is with you. I needed to remember that one day this last week. I will spare you the details, but just know that in the midst of everything I had to do something came up that challenged my Christian sanctification. I was not a happy camper. The more I thought about the situation, the more aggravated I became to the point of developing resentment. I finally had to say "Lord, I can't do this, I need you." I needed to remember that even in this particular situation God was with me. It didn't happen by chance. God allowed it for a purpose.

God allowed everything to happen to Joseph for a purpose. All that had happened to Joseph to this point in his life, was designed by God, part of His plan for him. As a matter of fact, years later he will have a conversation with his siblings and tell them that all the bad things that happened to him, being sold into slavery, the false accusations, prison, everything, God was with him and God meant it for his good.

Job reacted similarly. After he lost everything we read in **Job 1** that he fell to the ground and worshipped God saying that he came into this world with nothing and he was going to leave this world with nothing, the Lord gives and takes away – praise His name. When you can praise God in the midst of hardship, that's the same as saying God was with him and God meant it for good.

Paul says the same thing in a different way. **"All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28**

Sunday morning after the fire consumed the entire workshop and all the equipment and some vehicles at Barakel last weekend, with the smell of smoke still lingering in the area, the staff men gathered in a lean to next to where the structure used to be and prayed and praise to God.

As I said last week about **chapter 40**, so the principle should be assumed in **chapter 41** that God was with Joseph. **Chapter 40** ended with the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker coming true. One was restored to his position while the other was hanged just as Joseph had interpreted. But we noted his disappointment when the cupbearer had forgotten about the man who gave him hope. It's my opinion that God made him forget. It wasn't yet time for Joseph to be exonerated. But we see that in **chapter 41**. Notice that God's man is exonerated.

I. GOD'S MAN IS EXONERATED – vs. 1-14

The first time I came to preach here filling in for Pastor Don, I well remember sitting up on the platform and before I got up to speak Randy

introduced me by saying let's hear from God's man. I thought to myself, wow, those are big shoes to fill.

There are a number of men in Scripture who are called a man of God, men like Moses, Elijah, Elisha, David and some of the other prophets. It's not a term used for Joseph, but I would like to think that his character was such that we could rightly refer to him as a man of God.

Thinking about his life and the lives of these others mentioned in Scripture I thought about attributes that describe a person characterized as a man of God. I want to give you just five traits that I see in his life that qualify him as a man of God, attributes that we would do well to practice if we would be called a man of God. And when I say man I'm referring to everyone – man, woman, child.

1. A man of God is Honest

The dictionary defines it as not lying, cheating, or stealing; someone who is truthful and trustworthy; showing fairness and sincerity; free from deceit.

Listening to the news these days we want to respond the same as Pilate and ask, "What is truth?" Whether it's news about the Corona virus or news about all the rioting or politicians waxing on about why we need to change this policy or make a change to that law. Things get so jumbled up we have a hard time discerning the truth. We feel lied to and deceived. We want people to be truthful and sincere when they give the news.

On the other hand, we need to be truthful at home or work or when talking with a customer service rep on the phone or if we are returning some item for a refund. We need to be truthful on job applications or when we get pulled over for speeding. We shouldn't cheat on a test or with our taxes.

Leviticus 19:11, 13 is very clear when it comes to honesty. **"Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another...Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him."**

A man of God is honest.

2. A man of God is Honorable

The dictionary also defines honesty as being honorable, but there is a difference in its meaning. Honorable means to be a person of high rank or worth. We refer to a judge as the honorable judge so and so. We might refer to a king as the honorable king so and so.

Joseph may have been a slave and a prisoner respectively, but he was honorable. You see, the word also has to do with reputation, someone who is respected for their integrity, which also has to do with their honesty. An honorable person knows the difference between right and wrong and chooses to do what is right.

Joseph was honorable in how he handled his responsibilities and soon caught the watchful eye of Potiphar and then the prison warden and was honored by being put in charge of everything so that they weren't concerned about anything. They gave him a job to do and knew that they didn't have to worry whether or not it would get done or if it would be done to their liking. That's being honorable. It's the idea that Paul expresses to Timothy about the character of an elder being above reproach (**I Timothy 2:2**).

A man of God is honorable.

3. A man of God is Humble

From the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia we read the following description of humility: **"In the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, humility is an essential characteristic of true piety, or of the man who is right with God. God humbles men in order to bring them to Himself, and it is when men humble themselves before Him that they are accepted; to "walk humbly with thy God" completes the Divine requirements."**

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

II Chronicles 7:14

Micah 6:8

Maybe there was a bit of youthful zeal or lack of humble discretion in Joseph's teen years that seemed to flaunt his perceived elevated position

after disclosing to his family the dreams about them bowing down to him. That may be true, but God used time and circumstances to sand away any remnants of pride and produce in him a truly humble spirit. We have seen his humility in how he responded to the cupbearer and the baker and we will see it in how he responds to Pharaoh.

A man of God is humble.

4. A man of God is Hopeful

By hope I don't mean that he has wishful thinking, but rather hope in the sense of strong faith, confidence in the Word and promises of God. They provide strength and courage to face each challenge.

Psalm 31:24

Psalm 39:7

Psalm 42:5 (42:11; 43:5)

Psalm 71:5, 14

Psalm 119:114

Psalm 130:5, 7

Psalm 146:5

A man of God is hopeful.

5. A man of God is Holy

Now it needs to be said, though I'm convinced you already know this, but Joseph wasn't perfect. We're all sinners and David said it well for all of us when he stated that he was a sinner from birth. As I've said before, we aren't sinners because we sin, we sin because we're sinners. We've all fallen short of God's holy standard. That's why we need a Savior who was perfect. It's preposterous to think, as some believe, that Jesus wasn't perfect. If He wasn't perfect, then we're all still dead in sin and doomed to an eternity of separation from Him. If Jesus was a sinner then He is still dead in the grave. Only a perfect sacrifice could appease the wrath of God for our sin and Jesus offered that sacrifice for us so that we could receive His righteousness.

Hebrews 4:15 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin."

I Peter 1:18-19 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

The call for holiness on the believer is the daily pursuit of being more like Christ in character as we exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. It's a call to put off the character traits of the world and put on the traits of Christ so that our lives demonstrate Christlikeness and point others to Him. It's a life that isn't conformed to the world's ever changing standards, but is transformed through the renewing of our minds by the Word of God (**Romans 12:2**). It's a life that does not love the world and its ways by fulfilling the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of life, but rather a life that does the will of God (**I John 2:15-17**). It's a life that abstains from sinful desires, that war against our soul (**I Peter 2:11**). It's a life that strives to be holy in conduct just as Christ is holy (**I Peter 1:15-16**).

The best example of the desire Joseph had to live a holy life is when he fled from the temptations of Potiphar's wife. He would rather face prison or death than ruin his reputation. We have it on good authority, that being the Word of God, that the man who would desire to be holy lives by the Spirit, walks by the Spirit, is led by the Spirit so that he will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature (**Galatians 5:16**). A man of God is holy.

So, there you have it, five characteristics of a godly man, each in some way practiced by Joseph, attributes we would do well to follow ourselves.

Now I want to draw your attention to one more passage and it's a good segue into our text.

Isaiah 40:25-31

In that word hope, which we looked at a moment ago, there is the idea of waiting (KJV).

Psalm 25:3, 5

Psalm 27:14

Psalm 37:7

Psalm 62:1

Joseph had been waiting in Egypt, waiting on the Lord. He is still waiting when our text opens with some ominous words **“When two full years had passed.”** It’s been about 13 years since arriving as a slave. Two years earlier after correctly interpreting the dreams of two high profile prisoners, he had hope that the cupbearer would put in a good word to Pharaoh, but it never happened. This chapter is very familiar if you have spent any time growing up in grade school attending Sunday school.

Pharaoh had two dreams. In the first one, he was standing by the Nile River. That’s of importance because to the Egyptian, the Nile River was the foundation of life. It must have satisfied his soul to see these seven fat and healthy-looking cows come up out of the Nile. That would mean Egypt was prospering. I just imagine him putting his thumbs in his sash and beaming proudly. They would have been the prize winners at the State Fair. But then seven ugly and emaciated cows came up after the healthy cows. The understanding is that they suddenly and unexpectedly ate up the healthy cows but remained ugly and emaciated.

He was somehow able to put it aside long enough to go back to sleep, but had a second dream. Seven plump looking ears of corn grew up on a single stalk. Pharaoh must have been smiling in his dream to see the bountiful nature of this produce. Blue ribbon specimens, none better looking than these seven ears of corn. But then he saw seven withered ears of corn dried by the harsh winds sprang up and devoured the healthy stalks. How stark the contrast between the good and bad in both dreams.

And our text tells us that Pharaoh woke up troubled. It’s the kind of mental distress that causes anxiety. He was troubled to the extent that he needed some answers, so he called for the magicians of the land. They were not the kind of magicians who do card tricks or pull rabbits from a hat or make things disappear. These magicians were versed in cult practices and interpreted signs and omens. They were the wise men of the land, yet with all their incantations and the like, we read in **verse 8** that they were unable to interpret the dreams for

Pharaoh. They had turned to their god Thot, the god of magical arts, but to no avail. It reminds me of Elijah taunting the prophets of Baal, telling them to cry a little louder. Maybe Baal was away on a long journey or perhaps sleeping or otherwise preoccupied. Scripture tells us that man-made gods can’t see or hear or talk. Try as they may there would be no answer from that god.

They couldn’t interpret the dreams because the true God had given them to Pharaoh. It didn’t matter how much knowledge they had about dreams or how much they believed their books of symbols would help, God kept the answer from them. **Amos 3:7** tells us that God reveals His secrets to His servants. It was not for these magicians to discover.

At this point in the narrative, the cupbearer must have done the old slap the head with the hand how could I be so forgetful thing. He told Pharaoh about a Hebrew man met in jail who correctly interpreted the dreams of he and the chief baker when they were in prison. So Pharaoh sent for Joseph and after a hot bath, a quick shave and a some clean clothes he was ready to meet the king.

John Phillips writes, “God moved to emancipate the captive prisoner and moved providentially.”

Joseph was in prison, forgotten, forgotten by man but not by God. Once again we need to be reminded of God’s promise in **Jeremiah 29:11** that He has plans for us. But Joseph had no idea why he is being summoned before the king.

Proverbs 22:29 fits well here. **“Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.”**

You can’t get more obscure than men found in prison. The bottom of society; left to while away the time in a cell block playing checkers or marking the wall with another line indicating another day has come and gone. But there is Joseph faithful in his work and at just the right time ordained by God, he was remembered by the cupbearer. “I met this guy.” “You should tell him your dreams.” God’s man is exonerated, freed.

God's man is exceptional.

II. GOD'S MAN IS EXCEPTIONAL – vs. 15-36

I love how Scripture puts to flight the notion that man is high and mighty. Let me read two passages.

Acts 4:13 “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

I Corinthians 1:26-29 “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him.”

And then I like how Paul concludes the chapter, **verse 31 “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”**

Prisoner #113729 was ushered into the presence of the most powerful man in the world. I wonder if the cupbearer refused to make eye contact having made a promise to Joseph to speak to Pharaoh about him. I wonder if Potiphar was present and what might have been going on in his noodle seeing his former slave and prisoner brought before the king.

But here's the thing, with all his power and all his wise advisors Pharaoh couldn't find an answer to the dreams that plagued him apart from God.

“I hear you can interpret dreams.”

“Nope, I can't do it.”

Now freeze right there, because just about the time those words came out of his mouth, I see the chief cupbearer looking for the nearest exit.

But Joseph doesn't stop there he continues to speak and what he doesn't say is almost as important as what he did say. It shows us part of his character, what makes us admire him all the more.

He doesn't bargain for his life by saying “if I do this for you, what's in it for me?”

He doesn't begin by telling Pharaoh his sad tale of woe sold into slavery by his jealous brothers.

He doesn't mention how he was wrongly accused by Potiphar's wife and imprisoned as a result.

He doesn't even seek any glory for himself by asking for a position on Pharaoh's advisory team.

Look again at **verse 16, “I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answers he desires.”**

One translation says God would give him peace about the dreams.

He didn't say “God can, but not sure He will” or “Maybe God will” or even “God will if you set me free.”

He said “God will”.

Joseph used a term for God that was fitting for someone who could only know God as the mighty creator/sovereign God. Joseph was talking to a guy who had no clue who his God was so called Him by the only name Pharaoh could know Him by. The God who created everything, the God who controls everything will give you an answer.

Pharaoh explained both dreams and Joseph gave an answer from God. I want you to notice the multiple times Joseph put the name of God out there. Joseph wanted it clear that the interpretation of the dream was from God and not him. God was revealing to Pharaoh what was going to happen over the next 14 years. There would be seven years of bumper crops followed by seven years of severe famine. The famine wasn't to punish Egypt but to save a fledgling nation. We read in Scripture that God would at times use a famine to punish a nation, but that's not the case here.

But Joseph didn't stop with just the interpretation. He also gave Pharaoh some counsel about how to prepare for this pending doom. Again, he wasn't tooting his own horn here. Pharaoh needed a wise and discerning counselor along with commissioners who had integrity. Someone with diplomacy and skill should be selected to guide the nation through what was coming, someone who could help them prepare, someone who could keep the administration from being blamed for the economic fallout, who could keep people from rioting or from

profiteering. We could use a Joseph today.

The word discernment used here is the ability to have keen insight into a situation and act accordingly and responsibly. He should exact a 20% tax from all the crops and store it in cities throughout the land to aid the people during the famine. If people were prone to living it up, they should have some discretion to carry them through the lean years. They shouldn't hoard resources.

God gave Joseph the interpretation and an effective plan to save the nation from economic collapse. It was logical and comprehensive.

God took someone who was foolish in the eyes of the Egyptians, a foreigner, someone despised, a prisoner left in prison to rot in order to confound the wisdom of the day. It wasn't what Joseph knew, it was who he knew. He trusted in and waited on God. He was an exceptional man of God.

In the closing verses of our text for today, I want us to see that God's man is exalted.

III. GOD'S MAN IS EXALTED – vs. 37-40

Earlier I mentioned how a man of God needs to be humble, I purposely left out a key passage.

I Peter 5:5-6

God humbles the exalted, but He exalts the humble. A. W. Tozer writes "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply."

It is in the pits that we learn humility and not on the pinnacle. Pharaoh liked what he heard from Joseph and what he saw in Joseph. He asked the other advisors a rhetorical question. Is there anyone in all of Egypt who fits this description better than Joseph? Pharaoh did the unthinkable, the unheard of, the unexpected. He exalted Joseph, elevated him to a position of authority gave him the keys to the kingdom. He was put in charge of the plan he had suggested. He went from squalor to splendor, from prison garb to palatial garments, from the cold stone walls of a prison cell to the cultured styled ways of the palace. He went from the lowest possible position as a prisoner to the second highest position

in the land.

Don't take offense at God if that doesn't happen to you or me. We may not have such a magnificent rags to riches kind of story, but then, that may not be God's plan for us. We are called to be faithful in whatever God has called us to do, for as long as God has called us to do it in the place God has called us to be. Wherever it is, whatever it is, and for however long it is to be, be faithful. Be a person who is honest, honorable, humble, hopeful, and holy. When you pursue those qualities, never think for a moment that you're forgotten. God exalts the humble.

For Joseph to be the person God could use, he needed to spend time in the refiner's fire of slavery and prison. Job gives us the secret to the refining process God uses to melt us into what is of value to Him.

Job 23:10-12

Follow God.

Keep His commands.

Treasure His words more than your daily food.

Let me close with the words of a hymn written by Mary Brown at the end of the 19th century. Let this be our closing challenge.

It may not be on the mountain's height,
Or over the stormy sea;
It may not be at the battle's front,
My Lord will have need of me;
But if by a still, small voice He calls,
To paths that I do not know,
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in Thine,
I'll go where You want me to go.

Refrain:

I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord,
O'er mountain, or plain, or sea;
I'll say what You want me to say, dear Lord,
I'll be what You want me to be.

CCLI 1292471

Will you be a man for the times like Joseph?
Will you be a man, a woman, a child of God?