

A Salty Servant Genesis 41:41-57

I did a search this last week trying to find examples of someone who was working at the bottom of a company and instantly became the CEO. I didn't find any. There were examples of people who started with nothing and then worked their way up to become billionaires. Oh, we hear about athletes who came from poverty and after hard work and college scholarships signed multimillion dollar contracts or the lucky winners of the big lottery jackpot, but there is nothing I could find about someone like Joseph who went from a nobody to a somebody in a matter of minutes.

Let's take a closer look at what happens to this news headliner. Think about the kind of story that would make at 6:00. The buzz on the streets would have been tremendous. Think for a moment about Potiphar's wife. Maybe she didn't sleep so well after the news reached her ears that the guy who she once falsely accused and sent to jail as a result is now the second most powerful man in the nation. But let's remember that Joseph was cut out of a different bolt of cloth than everyone else in Egypt. He had a character of integrity and humility. His newfound freedom and position didn't go to his head where he turned on a dime and exacted revenge on all those who had mistreated him for the previous 13 years of his life.

Last week I gave five attributes of the man that we see in the life of Joseph that we would do well to practice ourselves. He was honest, honorable, humble, hopeful, and holy.

In what we read in these verses I will end by giving you two additional character traits of the godly person that was also evident in Joseph's life.

In **chapter 41** Pharaoh was given a glimpse through the window of time that would encompass the next 14 years. It came through two dreams. We learned that dreams in pairs indicated the certainty of it coming true. Cows and corn were predictors of the near future and Joseph was the means through whom God would interpret Pharaoh's dreams.

Joseph affirmed multiple times that the interpretation came from God and not from any special ability on his part. He also advised Pharaoh on what should be done. I find it interesting that the advice wasn't something Joseph had been thinking about on his free time in prison. He didn't say to Pharaoh "you know, I've had a lot of time sitting in prison thinking of how you could run this country better. Let me lay out a business model I think would really help this country's economy." Joseph had no idea about what was going to happen until he heard it from Pharaoh and God gave him not only the interpretation but also the implementation. I hope you notice that he didn't offer several ideas to pick from, there was just one plan. How's that for confidence in the God you trust in and serve?

Pharaoh asked a rhetorical question of his advisors if there was anyone else in all of Egypt who was like Joseph in whom is the spirit of God? We didn't talk about this last week, but let me just say that there are two interpretations to this depending on which Hebrew text it was translated from. The NIV translates it as a reference to God Himself an acknowledgement from Pharaoh of the living God. They also suggest that the "spirit" mentioned here is not a reference to the Holy Spirit, since pagan kings would not have known about him. Others translate it as spirit of the gods (little g, with the emphasis on plurality) lumping God with all the other gods of Egypt. It could be either one, but it is clear in **verse 39** that he speaks of the interpretation coming from the creator God.

Is there anyone like Joseph? The answer is no because none of Pharaoh's advisors could interpret the dream. Maybe they were all formulating their own opinions about who was qualified to lead this campaign of stockpiling food for the pending years of economic doom. But Pharaoh already had his mind made up. It didn't matter that he was a nobody, dug out of the pits of prison. He was the man for the job and Pharaoh promoted him on the spot. As we finish out **chapter 41**, the first thing we note is his appointment.

I. HIS APPOINTMENT – v. 41

I mentioned **Proverbs 22:29** last week and do so again today because it fits Joseph. **“Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.”**

The most powerful man in the world speaking directly to Joseph with everyone else standing around gave him a charge. “You, Joseph, will be in charge of the whole land of Egypt.”

Consider a few of the reactions that may have just emerged by those who heard what was just said.

Some had stunned looks out of disbelief.

Some jaws dropped.

Others blinked a few times trying to take in what was just said.

Others gasped perhaps out of disapproval.

The court recorder chiseling away on the stone tablet capturing the words of Pharaoh had to go get another tablet because his chisel made a big gouge in what he had just hammered out.

We weren’t there, but we can only imagine what they must have felt at that moment.

Joseph may have also been stunned by what he just heard. He wasn’t seeking any fame or even freedom. He was just doing what he was told to do, interpret the dream. Now he is in charge of the land of Egypt to implement the plan he had just laid out. All eyes were now on him. Imagine the pressure.

It’s been estimated that at the time of Joseph there were approximately 3-4 million people in Egypt. It was one thing to be in charge of a household as a slave.

It was another thing to be in charge of the people and production of what took place in prison.

It was an entirely different thing to be put in charge of ensuring the well-being of an entire nation. And we learn at the end of the chapter it wasn’t just Egypt that looked to Joseph, the nations around did as well.

He was given sole responsibility over Egypt. That was his appointment by Pharaoh. But here he was, someone who had been a slave, someone who had a rap sheet for attempted rape and was in prison as a result and he was a foreigner no less. He wasn’t even an Egyptian. So we see in **verses 42-45** that

Pharaoh took care of that. We not only see his appointment, but we also see his authority.

II. HIS AUTHORITY – vs. 42-45

A change was necessary for this new authority he was given. It first of all had to do with his clothes.

A. His Clothes – v. 42

We begin with his accessories, three things that would speak of his authority. Notice first the ring.

1. The ring

Ladies know about accessorizing. Robyn wears scrubs every day to work. She needs to because she goes out on the treatment floor, but that doesn’t keep her from accessorizing, picking out a pair of earrings to match the color of her scrubs. Sometimes she will ask me if I have seen a certain pair of earrings that seem to be missing and I’ll tell her that I put them back after I was done with them. No, actually I have no idea where she put them.

To look your best, you wear a certain pair of earrings along with maybe a bracelet and necklace. You get the picture.

He wasn’t given a piece of costume jewelry. It wasn’t an old High school class ring or even a secret decoder ring you get out of a box of cereal. This was Pharaoh’s ring and with it came authority. This was his signature ring. With it he signed all important documents, transactions, official letters. It would be like a piece of stationery with a symbol at the top that says “office of the President of the United States.” You didn’t treat such a letter as something addressed to “RESIDENT” or “OCCUPANT”. When the signet ring was affixed to anything it was official and must be acted on. Joseph was given this ring to use in his official capacity and when he used it, it was as if the order came from Pharaoh himself.

That was the ring he was given.

Then notice his robes.

2. The robes

Some of you will remember power ties and power

suits. They have a certain look or style or color. They were supposed to give you an edge, a subtle nod of confidence as you strolled into a business meeting or interview. Heads turned. Eyebrows raised. The squeamish went running.

In an era where CEO's may be more likely to wear jeans and a hoodie, it's hard to know how to dress appropriately for the job in order to climb the corporate ladder of success. A 2012 study published in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, said that those who wore a doctor's lab coat scored higher on attention-related tasks than those who didn't. And even though an employer should be concerned about what you offer through your skills, it also helps to dress the part.

In another survey, two-thirds of those interviewed stated that when it comes to getting ahead, image is everything. For example, wearing designer or labeled clothes indicates someone who is financially successful. We tend to correlate financial success with characteristics that help us become successful like discipline, hard work and intelligence. There is a sub-conscious association we give to a person we believe to be successful and reward them with a higher salary or more opportunities.

Before Joseph met with Pharaoh he had a quick shower and shave and a clean set of clothes appropriate for meeting the king. But those clothes wouldn't do in his new role. He needed a new wardrobe, clothes that would indicate his position. They were made of fine linen. What a drastic contrast between the torn, scruffy clothes of prison and the finest linen clothes of the palace. He had to dress the part in royal robes.

The third thing that would speak of his authority was his ribbon (okay, I know that's a stretch, but you know I like to keep things alliterated).

3. The ribbon

It's a gold chain. Worn around the neck, it was a symbol of authority. Think in terms of military rankings. Each rank has a unique symbol that depicts a certain level of authority. No one else in

all of Egypt had a gold chain like the one given to Joseph. Only Pharaoh wore one of greater importance and everyone else who had a gold chain was less in rank than Joseph.

Those are his clothes and then in **verse 43** we see his chariot.

B. His Chariot – v. 43

Again, only Pharaoh's chariot was more ornately decorated. He has his own horse-drawn limousine. He would never have to walk anywhere again. The snap of a finger and his chariot was made ready. He was given a royal procession of state to introduce him to all of Egypt as the second in command. Loud cheering, banners waving, confetti raining down, it would have been a festive mood. The secret servicemen assigned to accompany him would have been all around and one would have been leading the chariot commanding people to bow down.

It reminds me of the account in Esther where Mordecai is honored by the King being led by Haman telling everyone that this is what happens to the man the king wishes to honor.

His clothes and his chariot were symbols of authority. But so was his change. We see that in **verses 44-45**.

C. His Change – vs. 44-45

When he woke up that day, it started out as a normal day in prison. Check on the prisoners and make sure everyone and everything was okay. The next thing he knew, he was quickly ushered out of his cell, cleaned up and standing in the presence of Pharaoh and in 10 minutes time he catapulted from prison to the palace.

A change came to the **commands** he could give. Pharaoh essentially said that no one could do anything in Egypt but at his word. He was given extreme power, surpassed only by Pharaoh.

A change came to what he was **called**. The people would be more accepting of his position if he was given an Egyptian name. So he was named

Zaphenath-Paneah. Although there are a number of suggestions, the meaning of his name is uncertain. It's been interpreted to mean Abundance of life, savior of the world, revealer of secrets, God's word speaking life and furnisher of sustenance just to name a few.

Then there was a change to his credentials. He went from being single to being married. Given to him as a wife was the daughter of the priest of On. Later it would be named Heliopolis which means Sun City or City of Re, the sun god. Potiphara, whose name means one given by Re, would have been the overseer of the city. Joseph's new wife, Asenath means she belongs to the goddess Naith.

Essentially, with all these changes, Pharaoh was giving him Egyptian citizenship making it easier to accept his rule.

The clothes, the chariot, the changes were all means to establish the credibility of his authority after which he promptly assumed his new responsibilities and set to work to enact his plan. It's in **verses 46-49** that we see his administration.

III. HIS ADMINISTRATION – vs. 46-49

We talked briefly last week about his plan and now here it's the implementation. He not only had to be a person who could provide direction but also do it with diplomacy. No one likes to see their taxes increased. No one likes to be told that they have to scale back on what they eat or how they spend their money. He had to convince the nation that everything being done was in the best interest of the people and their well-being. He had to convince the nation that bumper crops and a boon in the economy were going to be followed by severe famine.

When it comes to his administration of the plan, we see in these four verses his actions and his accumulation. First he wanted to get an assessment of the current condition of the land. He may have also taken a look at each of the cities to determine where it made best sense to store the crops that would be coming in so that there was easy access by

everyone in the land. I mentioned last week that the Nile River was considered to be the foundation of life to the Egyptians. Little rain fell in that region so they relied on the flood waters of the Nile to irrigate the land. Flowing from the south, the river would deposit rich soil along the banks when flooded to enrich the land. If the river didn't flood, then it was going to be a bad year for crops. We read that just as Joseph had interpreted, there was a bumper crop each year for seven years. There was an abundance that he then stored in the surrounding cities in preparation for the ensuing famine. We read that there was so much that they had to stop keeping a record of what was brought in.

Joseph acted on his plan and accumulated a vast surplus of grain for the coming years. That was his administration.

But then we come to a parenthetical section in the text. It's as if to say that in spite of all the tremendous responsibilities that were placed on Joseph, he still had a life outside his work. He took time to start a family. It's part of his arrangement.

IV. HIS ARRANGEMENT – vs. 50-52

The author is careful to note that it took place in the years of plenty. We don't know when during the seven years of plenty they were born, but the names have significance.

Given that Asenath was raised in a pagan culture with a name that bore her commitment to the goddess Naith, we have to wonder if Joseph didn't have long talks with her about how these children would be raised. We are left to wonder if Joseph had many conversations about the one true, living God. We have to wonder if in the course of their conversation about things related to faith that she didn't at some point herself come to believe not only in God as the powerful creator and sovereign God, but also to believe in Him as the covenant God who desires a relationship with each one of us.

If you don't know God in a personal way through faith in His Son Jesus Christ today, by faith you can trust Christ, confess that you are a sinner in need of a Savior who alone is Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ

for salvation assures you of eternal life as promised to us in His Word. That is a guarantee.

We don't know anything about Asenath or any possible faith she may have had, but we do see in the names of their two sons the evidence of at least Joseph's faith and perhaps of hers as well. The firstborn was Manasseh and simply means forgetting. It does not mean that Joseph was now able to forget about his family back in Canaan because now he had a new life. Instead it refers to being able to forget about the years of hardship and suffering as a slave and then as a prisoner.

The second born was Ephraim, a name that means doubly fruitful or fertile. It speaks of how thankful he was to God who had blessed him.

Something of even greater importance is evident in their names. With all that had taken place to Egyptianize Joseph, he gave them Hebrew names. He had not forgotten God. His trust in God is still evident in the names given. His time of suffering and humiliation served to temper him in a way that would keep him from allowing the temptation of pride to swell his head and heart once exalted to this lofty position. Many through the centuries have unfortunately succumbed to their rise in authority causing them to lose perspective and faith joining the ranks of casualties, but not Joseph.

Strengthened on the anvil of suffering, he was able to assume the significant shift in status without becoming a negative statistic, a failure on the way to success. He was what Professor Wilson of Princeton Theological Seminary would call a big-godder. When any of his former pastoral students would return to the seminary to speak in chapel he would always go and hear them once. On one occasion he spoke to a former student and explained that after hearing him preach, he believed the student to be a big-godder not a little-godder.

Joseph had a big God and believed in a big God. I was reminded this past week of a verse written by Paul, a verse that I needed to find true in things that both Robyn and I are going through. It's a good one for you to keep in front of you all the time as well.

Ephesians 3:20-21 "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably (exceedingly – KJV) more than all we ask or imagine (think – KJV), according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

There is nothing too hard for the Lord and He is working in our circumstances with power that we can't even fathom and He's doing so for His glory. So, are you a big-godder or a little-godder?

The remaining verses of our text tell us about Joseph's apportionment.

V. HIS APPORTIONMENT – vs. 53-57

Something else comes true here. The prosperity of the seven years ended and the famine began. We read that it wasn't just in the land of Egypt but all the surrounds lands and nations as well. From their perspective, it was global.

I find **verse 55** significant. It says that the famine was felt by all of Egypt. It impacted everyone, no one was exempt.

Just after stores began to open up after the first surge of the corona virus, when I would go to a store I felt oppressive spirit. It was heavy. Everyone has been affected.

All of Egypt was affected by the famine and they came to Pharaoh for help and he sent them to Joseph. He opened up the storehouses to sell the grain and he opened it up to the world as well.

Maybe this is part of the promise given to Abraham by God that through his seed the nations of the world would be blessed because not only would Joseph feed the people of Egypt but also the surrounding nations as well.

I want to close the message with two attributes that are evident in Joseph in this passage.

VI. HIS ATTRIBUTES

Whether overseeing the home of Potiphar, the care

of the prisoners or the people of Egypt, one attribute stands out to me and this is a character trait the person who would be a person of God. He was a person of God who served.

A. A Person of God Who Served

If you remember back in the 80's you might recall the fictional character Psalty the singing songbook. He taught kids Bible lessons and sang praise songs. You might remember this song.

If you want to be great in God's kingdom,
Learn to be the servant of all.
If you want to be great in God's kingdom,
Learn to be the servant of all.

Another song we sing is this:

Make me a servant, humble and meek,
Lord let me lift up those who are weak.
And may the prayer of my heart always be:
Make me a servant, make me a servant, make me a servant today.

Joseph was a servant, a person who put others before himself. If he had been like any other slave or any other prisoner, I suspect he would have had an attitude and complained about his work or did only what he had to because he had to. But he was a man of God and as such he was a servant who willingly served those who were over him and now that he was over people, he still served them.

In his book *The Finishing Touch*, Chuck Swindoll states that "servanthood implies diligence, faithfulness, loyalty and humility. Servants don't compete, or grandstand, or polish their image or grab the limelight. They know their job, admit their limitations, and do what they do quietly and consistently."

One of the books I had to read for my Master's program

at Spring Arbor was *The Power of Servant Leadership*

by Robert Greenleaf. The premise is that if you want to lead well, learn to serve. But the concept of servant leadership goes back centuries to what Jesus taught.

Matthew 20:25-28

Matthew 23:11 "The greatest among you will be

your servant."

Matthew 25:21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.'"

That speaks to the life and character of Joseph.

Jesus not only taught about serving others, He also demonstrated it by serving their needs, feeding the hungry, healing the injured and ill and then in an act of serving took a towel and basin of water and washed the disciples' feet (**John 13:1-15**) to show them what real servanthood looks like. Paul tells us in **Philippians 2:7** that Jesus, God in the flesh, the One who spoke and created the universe, took on the very nature of a servant.

Great leaders don't exercise their authority by demanding others serve them or who flaunt their position but rather those who quietly and faithfully serve. Joseph served Egypt for the well-being of its people.

Are you willing to be a servant to your family, your boss, your employees, your neighbors, and so on?

Let me leave you with one more attribute evident in the life of Joseph. A person of God must be salty.

B. A Person of God who was Salty

Matthew 5:13

Joseph lived in a corrupt culture. He saw its darkness and it needed his flavor, his moral compass to be a light to point them to God. That's why we see at different times his reference to God. Our world, our culture needs us to be salt. It needs us to provide a little sting factor by pricking its conscience by pointing to a holy God.

We are to create thirst for the gospel.

We are to be provide a preserving influence in a world that is morally decaying. To retard what John MacArthur calls "spiritual spoilage".

We are seeing before our very eyes a culture that has lost its way because the church has not been salty. **Will you be a person of God who is salty?**

Joseph was a servant to his culture. Joseph was salty in his culture. He was a person of God. **Is that person you?**