

JOSEPH

Part 3 - Final

Genesis 45:1-15

Intro: Most of you know that our daughter, Carolyn James, speaks quite often at women's conferences. One of the first that she had was in her home church in Orlando. This week Lucille and I listened to a tape of her message on Tamar, who was Judah's daughter-in-law. Judah, as you also know was Joseph's half-brother. In the course of her message she referred briefly to Joseph and his attitude toward his brothers, and she called Joseph "cocky." As I thought about that, I think that Carolyn must be right. It would have been very unusual if Joseph had not been "spoiled" by the attention his father, Jacob, gave to him. Jacob made no attempt to hide the fact that he loved Joseph more than any of his other sons. He had made and given that special coat to Joseph when he had not done anything special for any of his other sons. Then when Joseph had those dreams, he told his brothers about both of them, and that made them hate him all the more. So I think that one reason Joseph experienced those years of severe testings, was that Joseph needed to be humbled. Solomon's book of Proverbs had not been written when Joseph lives, but the trials had a humbling effect on Joseph. Solomon's words apply here are the words, "before honor is humility" (Prov. 15:33; 18:12).

Obviously, the Lord had ordained that Joseph would have a position of the most unusual honor, but, if he were to be useable in that position, he needed to learn humility. Obviously a cocky person, or one who thinks too much of himself, is not a humble person.

Most of us are inclined to think too much of ourselves. In even minor honors come our way, it is so easy to think that it is because we deserve them, or that we have earned them in some way. Pride is one of our greatest enemies, and we all have large supplies of it. Many a preacher has had his ministry ruined by pride. Pride opens the door for many other sins, and that is what makes it so dangerous. Another good word that Solomon has given us is that "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Perhaps one reason we haven't made more progress than we have made in Iraq is because the Lord knows that we would take the glory to ourselves instead of giving it to Him. One reason that it was so long before David became the king of Israel, must have been that the Lord was teaching him humility.

The greatest example of humility that the world has ever been given, has been in our Lord Jesus Christ. In that wonderful second chapter of Philippians, the Apostle Paul told the Philippian believers that they were to have the mind of Christ. And he prefaced that exhortation with these words:

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others (Phil. 2:3-4).

And then Paul went on to illustrate from the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world, what he meant. I repeat, the greatest example of humility that we have ever been given is in the incarnation of Christ.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote, speaking of our Lord:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

There never has been a better Person than our Lord Jesus Christ, and yet there never has been a Person in all of history who has died a worst death than He died – and there never will be. The Lord Jesus demonstrated the ultimate in humility.

James had this to say about humility:

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up (James 4:10).

And the Apostle Peter said almost exactly the same thing:

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (1 Peter 5:6).

Look at Abraham. Look at Jacob. Look at Moses. Look at the prophets. Even look at the Apostle Paul. Why was he given a thorn in the flesh? He tells us himself: “Lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7). So there was the possibility that pride could have spoiled the ministry of the Apostle Paul. We speak of him as “the great Apostle Paul.” He spoke of himself as *the chief of sinners* in 1 Timothy 1:15. The NIV translated that phrase as *the worst of sinners*.

None of us is naturally humble. We aren't! We are naturally proud.

Humility has to be learned, and it is often a very painful experience, and usually a long experience. In fact, I doubt if any of us really learns humility to the exclusion of pride. In the world it is generally felt that you need to push yourself ahead. You see it in sports, and it is especially bad in professional sports. We have recently been through a grueling political campaign. We force men and women to spend their time and money to tell why they are better than anyone else for a particular position. Why have Americans been given the title, the ugly American? Pride. What made Lucifer into the Devil? It was pride. Pride is the root sin. And so, if we are to be useful instruments in the hands of God, we have to learn humility.

Before I get back to Joseph, let me remind you of the example John the Baptist has given us of humility. He was the first great prophet after 400 years between the OT and the NT when there had been no fresh revelation from God. Then John the Baptist was born. There probably never has been a prophet who enjoyed the blessing of God like John the Baptist did, especially being the one appointed by God to herald the coming of the Messiah.

But there is an incident in the life of John the Baptist that is important for us to notice. His disciples were jealous for John's popularity. But when the Lord Jesus began His ministry, John's disciples felt that something had to be done to protect the ministry that he had had. Let me read to you about this from the Gospel of John, chapter 3, beginning with verse 22. It comes at the close of our Lord's ministry to Nicodemus:

22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

24 For John was not yet cast into prison.

25 Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the

bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:22-30).

That is true humility. When we get to the place when we are able to say that from the heart, we are making progress toward learning humility.

So I believe it is important to keep this in mind when we read the story of Joseph. The Lord was preparing him for the special place of ministry that he was to have. Although Egypt was a heathen nation, that is where the Lord took Joseph for most of his theological training.

Let us review some of the major steps in his training. Please notice that Joseph was unable to skip any classes or to drop any courses.

I. THE STEPS IN JOSEPH'S TRAINING.

A. Joseph's home life in Canaan (Gen. 37).

He was born into a home where his father, though a man of God, had four wives. Joseph had ten half brothers and one full brother. He was his father's favorite, and that caused trouble with the other members of the family. But Joseph like the position he had. However, he did not behave himself with much wisdom. His father was definitely partial to him, and made no attempt to hide the fact that Joseph was his favorite.

Consequently his brothers hated him. But God gave Joseph two dreams in which he was told that he would have a position in which his brothers and his parents would fall down before him. This made his brothers hate him even more.

One day Jacob sent Joseph to see how his brothers were doing who were out on the range feeding their flocks and herds. When his brothers saw him coming, they knew this was their opportunity to kill him. Reuben and Judah sought to protect him, but it was finally decided to sell Joseph to some traders who had come by, and were headed for Egypt. This is what they did, and Joseph was taken into Egypt where he had never been before. He knew no one there. He could not speak their language. At the time Joseph was just a teenager, so this had to be a most difficult experience for him.

B. Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 39-50).

1. In Potiphar's house (Gen. 39 1-20).

Potiphar was the captain of the royal guard whose primary responsibility was to protect the Pharaoh. Joseph went to work for him with such excellent work that Potiphar turned over all that he had for Joseph to manage.

However, this good situation was not to remain good for long. Potiphar's wife took a liking to Joseph, and began to seduce him into sin. Joseph refused. One day she tried to force him into sin, and he ran out of the house. Potiphar's wife was so angry because Joseph had rejected her, that she lied about him, and told her husband that Joseph had tried to take advantage of her. Consequently he was thrown into an Egyptian prison.

2. In the Egyptian prison (Gen. 39:21-41:36).

Here Joseph served the jailer like he had served Potiphar, and so the jailer turned all of the responsibilities of the jail over to Joseph. But notice verses like 39:2-3, and 21 and 23. The Lord continued to follow Joseph, and to bless him. And so he prospered. But all of this seemed to most Joseph farther and farther away from the fulfillment of the dreams the Lord had given him.

In the jail he met Pharaoh's top servants, his butler and his baker. There evidently had been an attempt on Pharaoh's life, and so these servant had been put in prison. But each of them dreamed a dream, and Joseph was able to explain the meaning of their dreams. And the dreams were fulfilled exactly as Joseph had interpreted them: the butler was restored, and the baker was put to death by hanging.

In Gen. 40:14 we see that Joseph asked the butler to mention him to Pharaoh in the hope that he might be set free. But the first part of chapter 41 tells us that the butler promptly forgot Joseph for "two full years." This means that Joseph lived every day of those years hoping that the butler would remember him, and that he would be set free.

Provisionally at that time Pharaoh dreamed two dreams. The butler then remembered Joseph, and spoke to Pharaoh about him, saying that Joseph could interpret his dreams for him. Pharaoh called for Joseph, and Joseph interpreted the dreams which were a warning to Pharaoh of seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh took Joseph out

of prison and made Joseph second only to himself over all of the land of Egypt, with the responsibility of setting aside food during the years of plenty, and then dispersing it to the people during the years of famine.

Joseph was 30 years old when he was exalted to be second only to Pharaoh. See Gen. 41:46.

C. Joseph's royal position.

Before we get to what happened, let us give some thought to what Joseph experienced during those 13 years as each step moved him farther and farther away from the fulfillment of his dreams. It could have done one of two things to him.

First, it could have made him bitter, bitter against his brothers, bitter against Potiphar's wife because of the lie she told about him, which caused him to be put in prison, and finally bitter against the butler who forgot him for "two full years." Or, **on the other hand**, it could have sweetened him. It could have humbled him. It could have removed, or closed the door, to any resentment he might have been inclined to feel in his heart. It could have made him forgive his brothers, forgive Potiphar's wife, and forgive the butler. Which did it do?

Well, again in the providence of God, the famine in Egypt extended into Canaan, and Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to get food. They thought that by this time Joseph had probably died. Little did they know what they were doing when they got to Egypt and had to go before Joseph (not knowing who he was). But read Genesis 42:6. *Joseph's dream was fulfilled.*

I won't go into all of the interesting drama which followed, but when Joseph's brothers ran out of food, they had to come back to Egypt, and we read in Genesis 43:26 what they did again. Benjamin was with them on that occasion. When they left Joseph had his divining cup placed in Benjamin's sack, and so soon after the brothers left Joseph had men pursue them, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, and he told the others they could go home. It was then that Judah interceded on behalf of their father, and after Joseph listened to him he could no longer conceal his identity from his brothers.

Gen. 45:1-15 (7)

His brothers thought immediately that Joseph would retaliate on them for what they had done to him. But notice Joseph's word in Genesis 45:3-8 to his brothers – no resentment, no desire to get even with them, just total forgiveness and reconciliation.

And here is the important point which we all need to learn. What kept Joseph from deep depression, and increased resentment against all who had sought to harm him? It was that he saw the hand of God through all of those circumstances as the Lord moved him step by step to the full realization of the dreams the Lord had given him.

This scene was repeated in chapter 50 when the father of all of these men, Jacob, died. Listen as I read Genesis 50:15-21.

Joseph had learned through those years in Egypt that if we as His people will keep our eyes on the Lord and not on the people who have caused us a lot of trouble and heartache, then we will be able to experience the peace of God as we wait for Him to make His way plain to us, but most of all as we wait to see how He will glorify Himself in our lives.

This is truly a wonderful story. But it is here so that you and I will know that while nothing may be under our control, yet everything is always under His control. And that he is not only working for us, but He is working in us, to humble us, and to teach us that we are always safe in trusting Him.