

PM Genesis 41:37-56 Life of Joseph: Prime Minister

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[0 : 00] Good evening, welcome to another Sunday evening as we're considering together the life of Joseph. We come to this incident this evening of this episode in Joseph's life, where he is in effect made prime minister over Egypt, where he's made the second in command over the land.

If you like, we find this incident recorded for us in Genesis chapter 41. Genesis chapter 41, from verse 37 down to verse 56. We're going to read it together now.

Genesis 41, verses 37 to 56. This is the word of God. This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.

And Pharaoh said to his servants, Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God? Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are.

You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards to the throne, I will be greater than you. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.

[0 : 59] Then Pharaoh took a signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. And he made him ride in his second chariot, and they called out before him, Bow the knee.

Thus he sent him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without your consent, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphonath-Panaeah, and gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potipharah, priest of Awn. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plentiful years, the earth produced abundantly.

And he gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it. And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

[2 : 05] Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potipharah, priest of Awn, bore them to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, for he said, God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.

The name of the second he called Ephraim, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end. And the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said.

There was famine in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt, there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, go to Joseph, what he says to you, do.

So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let us turn to the Lord in prayer. Now let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

[3 : 17] We thank you for the instruction that it gives us. We thank you for the way that it speaks to the reality of life today. We thank you that it doesn't hide the faults and failures of its main characters.

That it shows us them in all their humanity. But we thank you most of all for your son, Jesus Christ, who, despite being God and man, never sinned.

Despite knowing all the temptations and weaknesses that we do as humanity, he never sinned. We pray, Father, that you would be with us now as we come to study your word.

That you would open our ears. That you would open our eyes. That you would soften our hearts. And we pray most of all, Father, that we would not be hearers of the word only, but that we would be doers of the word also, we ask.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Let's turn to this incident now in Genesis 41. Genesis 41 from verse 37 down to 57, verse 37 down to the end of the chapter.

[4 : 13] This incident where Joseph is made second in command of Egypt. How are we going to get out of this? That's the question that's been on everybody's lips recently, hasn't it?

How are we going to get out of lockdown without the R number rocketing? How are we going to ease the restrictions that are in place without risking a huge wave of second infections?

Without risking a so-called second peak? You go onto the BBC website and they will have their expert telling you that what we need to do is to have a test, trace, isolate strategy in place.

That we need to have a robust strategy for dealing with localised outbreaks of coronavirus in place. And that way it can be kept under control. You go onto the Daily Telegraph website and they might say, well, no, no, no.

What we need is not test, track, isolate. What we need is a strong herd immunity approach. What we need in effect is for lots of people to get the virus, to build up antibodies to it, so that eventually you starve the virus of a host.

[5 : 18] You might go onto the Guardian website and their expert will say, well, no, no, no. That's not what we need at all. What we need to do is to stay indoors until a vaccine is found and therefore we can have confidence going out and about our lives again.

Then and only then will it be safe to lift the lockdown. How are we going to get out of this? And that's essentially the question that we find Pharaoh asking this evening.

How are we going to escape this famine? How are we going to get out of this famine? How are we going to deal with the devastating news that Joseph has brought? How are we going to deal with these seven years of famine that will come?

What can we do? We finished last week, you might remember, by looking at Joseph's pitch for the job, looking at Joseph's instructions. Remember what he said to Pharaoh? Well, look, Pharaoh, if I were you, I would appoint a wise man over all the land of Egypt.

And if I were that wise man, this is what I would do. I want to think about three things this evening, see three things together tonight. Firstly, we want to think about the good plan.

- [6 : 23] We see Joseph's plan coming together. Secondly then, we want to think about the good years. We see these seven years of plenty. We see these seven years when the earth produces just as God had promised it would.
- And then thirdly, finally, we want to think about the good God. That even in the midst of darkness, that even in the midst of famine, we see the goodness and mercy and grace of God.
- So firstly then, the good plan, the good plan. And we see that in verses 37 through 45. So big picture, where are we?
- Joseph, Pharaoh, sorry, has had these dreams last week. Joseph has interpreted them for them. Joseph has told Pharaoh that there's seven years of good times coming. There's seven years when the earth will produce abundantly its crop.
- But following that, then there's going to be these seven years of famine. And that Pharaoh really should store up these food, the food in the good years for the bad years. That he should store up the food in the years of plenty for the years of famine.
- [7 : 24] And that's where we are as we come to verse 37 then. That helps us understand what we read in verse 37, that this proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. What proposal is it?
- Well, it's the proposal that Joseph's just made. It's the proposal that all of the food be stored in barns. It's the proposal that wise men be appointed as governors over the regions of Egypt so that the food can be collected, so that the food can be stored during the good years.
- And Pharaoh turns to his servants, verse 38, and sort of wonders out loud almost, doesn't he? He thinks out loud. What does he say? Can we find a man like this? Can we find a man in whom the Spirit of God is?
- Now you may notice in your Bible that God has a capital G, leading us to think that Pharaoh here somehow uses the covenantal name Yahweh.
- If you have a footnote in your Bible, it will tell you. Can we find a man like this? In whom is the Spirit of the gods? Of course, the Egyptians worshipped many gods.
- [8 : 31] The Egyptians were polytheists. Joseph, by his interpretation, has shown himself to have the Spirit of the gods. Now, as we understand it, of course, we know that Joseph has the Spirit of God.
- We know that Joseph has the Spirit of Yahweh. We know that Joseph has the Spirit of the one true God. But we can't read that into Pharaoh's statement here. We can't read that into what Pharaoh says.
- Can we find a man who has the Spirit of God? We see that again. Verse 39. Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has shown you all this.
- Again, you'll notice the capitalization of God. But again, it could be since God, since the gods have shown you all this. We know that it's the God of Israel.
- We know that it's Yahweh. We know that it's the covenantal God of Israel who has revealed this to Joseph. But we can't read that into what Pharaoh says here. We can't think that that has clicked in Pharaoh's mind.
- [9 : 28] We can't think that Pharaoh has that level of understanding. We can't assume that Pharaoh uses God in that sense.
- And what does Pharaoh say? Well, since God has shown you all this. Verse 39. Since God has revealed all this to you. Since God has given you this wisdom. Since God has given you this insight and understanding. Is there a better man for the job?
- Is there anyone we'd rather have in control of affairs than you? You will be over my house. Verse 40. All my people will do everything you tell them to do.

All my people will follow your instructions. All my people will listen to you and to your wisdom that comes from God. Only I will be greater than you. Only as regards to the throne, I will be greater than you.

Only as regards being the ruler, the king of Egypt, I will be greater than you. But you, in effect, will be the second in command. You, in effect, will be the prime minister. If you don't like that, you, in effect, will be the deputy prime minister.

[10 : 35] But I want us to note in passing here, friends, that Joseph was expected to act upon the wisdom that he received from God. Joseph was expected to do something.

Joseph was expected to put it into practice. He's expected to do something with the revelation that God has given him. You may remember a few years ago, there was a slogan that was kind of popular in Christian circles that said, let go and let go on.

The idea was that we kind of passively drifted through life following the path that God had laid out for us, that we passively drifted through life, allowing God to direct everything that happened, letting God take care of everything, that we simply let go and let go.

It sounded spiritual. It sounded like we were abandoning ourselves to the mercy and grace of God. It sounded spiritual. But in reality, that wasn't the case for Joseph, was it?

He was expected to tell Pharaoh the interpretation of these dreams. He was expected to act with wisdom. He was expected to follow through on these plans that he'd set out.

[11 : 46] He was expected to work hard as governor over the land of Egypt. He was expected to do all of these things. God had given him the gifts. Yes, God had given him the gift of interpretation of dreams.

God had given him the gift of organization. God had given him the gift of wisdom and insight. But Joseph was expected to use them. He was expected to put them into practice.

He was expected to use the talents and gifts that God had given him to further the kingdom of God. To perform the role that God had for him. We don't simply let go and let God.

Rather, we see here with Joseph that we are active participants in the plan and purpose of God for our lives. That we simply do not drift through life aimlessly waiting for God to shine a special light of revelation.

Rather, we get on with working hard. We get on with doing the work that's in front of us. We get on with doing what God has planned for us. We're not equal partners.

[12 : 48] Of course we're not. God is sovereign. Of course he is. But we work hard. And leave the results up to God.

So Joseph said, over the land of Egypt, he's given this dominion, if you like. He's given this dominion. And to emphasize that, Pharaoh gives him a set of linen clothes.

To emphasize that, Pharaoh gives him the signet ring. He puts a gold chain around his neck. Now don't you just love that? This was a man who was in prison a few days ago.

This was a man who was in a pit a few days ago. This was a man who was slopping about a few days ago. And now here he is, the second most powerful man in Egypt. Here he is, a man who's been rapidly promoted.

It's easy for us to miss, but the signet ring, in effect, gave Joseph great power and authority. With that signet ring, Joseph could speak for Pharaoh.

[13 : 50] Pharaoh trusted him with all of the decisions that had to be made. Pharaoh trusted Joseph to do all that needed to be done. And Joseph could make them knowing that he carried the authority of Pharaoh.

The signet ring, in effect, enabled him to sign Pharaoh's name. An ambassador today for a country will often carry with them a letter of credence.

That letter of credence is presented to the foreign affairs minister of the country to which they're going. What's the point of that letter of credence? Well, it shows that the person is genuine.

It shows that they're an ambassador. It shows that they speak with the authority of the country from which they have come. And there's a similar idea with the signet ring.

It gave Joseph power. It gave Joseph authority. It gave him the right, the ability to speak for Pharaoh. But notice, it's almost a comical little detail that's recorded for us.

[14 : 57] Notice what happens. Pharaoh's busy saying to Joseph, you're going to be great. You're going to be second in command. And you're going to be great in the land of Egypt. But what does he say to him in verse 43?

It's a funny little detail. He made him, and Pharaoh made him, Joseph, ride in his second chariot.

Not the best one, but the second best one. It's almost like Pharaoh subtly reminding him of the reality of the situation. I'm going to ride in the best one. I'm going to ride in the first chariot, you Joseph.

You can ride in the second one, the second best chariot. And people call out before him, bow the knee. And he's set over all the land of Egypt. Now things are looking great for Joseph at this point, aren't they?

Things are really looking up for Joseph at this point. He's been freed from prison. Great. He's been set over the land of Egypt. Great. He's been shown to be trusted by Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

[15 : 56] Great. His plan is being implemented to save possibly millions of lives. Great. But not everything is smooth sailing.

Not everything is great. Notice verse 45. And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphoneth-Paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potipharah, priest of Aum.

So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. We have here Joseph taking an Egyptian name. We have here Joseph marrying a foreign woman.

Not only that, but it's a daughter of a priest of Aum. It's a daughter of a foreign god, if you like. The priest of a foreign god, if you like. It doesn't exactly sound like a marriage made in heaven, does it?

It doesn't exactly sound like things are going to be great with them. But what can we learn from this good plan, though? Well, as we've already said, God expects us to use the talents and abilities.

[17 : 00] God expects us to use the gifts that he's given us to advance his kingdom. Joseph used his gifts in interpreting dreams. Joseph used his gifts of wisdom and administration in order to advance the kingdom of God.

Secondly, though, we see a wonderful picture of redemption here, don't we? Of being bought back. Joseph is bought from the pit to the palace.

Joseph is bought from prison to prominence. And now, of course, that's exactly what happens to us as we hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't it? As we respond to the good news of the gospel, as we come to accept Jesus as our savior, as we come and find that forgiveness for sin, that's exactly what happens to us.

We're freed from our sin. We're released from our bondage to sin. We're taken from that broad road that leads to destruction and put on the narrow path that leads to life.

We're taken out of the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light. We're changed from being sons of disobedience to sons of obedience. We're changed from being sons and daughters of the devil to being sons and daughters of the most high God.

[18 : 12] You see, the message of the gospel is fundamentally life-changing. It's fundamentally life-altering just as much as Joseph's life was altered by being taken from the pit to the palace.

So the gospel is fundamentally a message that changes our life. It's not a message that tinkers around the edges, that cleans up a few little rough edges in our life.

It's a message that fundamentally changes us. It changes who we are. It changes our standing before God. It changes what we do.

But I wonder this evening, friends, have you been changed? Have you been transformed by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you experienced this life-giving, life-changing, life-renewing vitality for yourself?

You see, you can tinker around the edges. You can try and make yourself more moral. You can try and make yourself a better person.

[19 : 21] You can try and tinker around the edges of your life. But if you're looking for something that's truly life-changing, if you're looking for something that's truly life-transforming, then it's only the gospel of Jesus Christ that does that.

That's the good plan. Secondly then, we want to think about the good years. The good years. And we see that in verses 46 through 52. 46 through 52. The good years.

So the plan's in place. Joseph set out his stall. Joseph set out what he's going to do over the next few years in the land of Egypt. And we see verse 46 that Joseph was 30 when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

And he goes out throughout the land. Now why? Well, no doubt he's scouting it out. No doubt he's seeing what's being grown where. No doubt he's checking out what can be stored in barns. What can safely be kept that will stay for a while.

How much needs to be stored and kept. Now why do I say that? Why does it matter in a sense? Well it shows Joseph's pattern of life, doesn't it? It shows how he was.

[20 : 31] He had this reputation for thoroughness. He had this reputation for hard work. He had this reputation for dedication. Think about Potiphar's house. We were told earlier on in the narrative in Genesis that Potiphar didn't worry about anything that was under Joseph's control.

Why? Because it succeeded with Joseph working at it. It succeeded because God blessed it. Think about Joseph's experience in the prison. Again, the prison guards set Joseph over and above everything that happened in the prison.

He didn't worry about anything Joseph was in charge of. Why? Because Joseph made it succeed. Now this doesn't happen if you're work shy and lazy. This doesn't happen.

This prominence and promotion doesn't happen if you're not prepared to work hard. If you don't know and experience the blessing of God. Joseph works hard.

And so he's surveying the land. He's putting his plan into action. And notice the Lord's faithfulness. Verse 47. During the seven plentiful years, the earth produced abundantly.

[21 : 33] Joseph puts his plan in place. He gathers the grain to himself. He gathers the grain into these barns so that there might be grain to eat during the famine. There's so much grain in the storehouses, we're told, that it can't be counted.

There's so much grain in the storehouses that it looks like the sand on the seashore. There's so much grain in the storehouses that people don't even bother counting it anymore. Just there is such a vastness, such an array of grain.

Most of you probably know that Suzanne grinds, mills her own grain. And it arrives in the manse in these massive 20 kilogram bags.

They are huge, huge bags of grain. But it's only 20 kilos. I can lift it, just about. But I can lift it.

Think of this image in Egypt where they don't even bother counting. They have no idea, no clue as to how much grain they have. The Lord promised that this would come to pass.

[22 : 37] The Lord promised that there was going to be seven years of abundant harvest. Seven years, perhaps, of plenty like never known before. And that's what happened. The Lord is faithful to his promises.

The Lord is faithful to his revealed word. Now, it's easy to doubt the Lord, isn't it? Maybe not a thing that you hear a minister say very often, but it is easy to doubt the Lord.

When personal tragedy strikes, it's easy to doubt. When national disaster comes, it's easy to doubt.

In the midst of coronavirus, it's easy to doubt. When you're confined to your own home, when you're left alone with your own thoughts, it's easy to doubt. But it's then that we need to remember that God is faithful to his promises, that God always keeps his word.

He's promised us that all things work together for those who love him for their good, for those who have been called according to his purpose for their good. He's promised us that Jesus Christ is coming back again to take us to be with himself, so that we might know and live with him forever.

[23 : 50] We can rest and trust on the promises of God. Just as Joseph stored up all that grain, trusting in the promises of God.

You can imagine some of the Egyptians thinking, well, this will never end. You can imagine some of the Egyptians thinking, well, why don't we just eat this grain now? I mean, it's grown every year for the past four, five, six years.

But Joseph acted in trust on the promises of God. Life continues for Joseph. He has these two children.

We're told, verse 50, before the year of famine came, there are these two sons born to him. The first, of course, Manasseh, saying, God has made me forget all my hardship. The second, Ephraim, verse 52, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.

So we've seen then the good plan Joseph once enacted. We've seen the seven good years that prove God's faithfulness. And then finally tonight, we want to think about the good God.

[24 : 57] There's famine everywhere, we're told. Verse 53, the seven years of plenty that occurred came to an end. And the seven years of famine began to come. Verse 54, just as Joseph had said.

There's famine everywhere. Famine across the whole world. Famine in all of the lands. Famine in Egypt. But notice the difference, that in Egypt, in all the land of Egypt, verse 54, there was bread.

The people are famished. The people are starving. And they cry to Pharaoh for bread. They cry to Pharaoh for something to eat. And Pharaoh says, in effect, look, go to Joseph. Do what Joseph tells you to do. He's the one that I've left in charge of this.

He's the minister for famine, if you like. And we see that the situation seems pretty severe, doesn't it? Verse 56, when famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for famine was severe in the land of Egypt.

And moreover, all the peoples of the earth hear that there's grain in Egypt. All the peoples of the earth hear that there's food in Egypt. And so they go to Egypt seeking to buy food. Because there's famine all over the earth.

[26 : 13] Now we've called this section the good God, but it doesn't seem too good, does it? God doesn't seem too good in this section. We have famine, presumably death, that comes with famine.

But I think we see the goodness of God in at least two ways. Firstly, we see the goodness of God in what we might term common grace. Yes. We see the goodness of God in that there is food still available.

We see the goodness of God in that there have been these seven years of plenty leading into the seven years of famine. We see the goodness of God in that a godly leader has been raised up to keep the people safe.

There is still grain. In the past, there had been times of seed time and harvest. The famine was severe. Yes, it was difficult.

Yes, but it wasn't as bad as it might have been. The grace of God, the common grace of God mitigates against the worst of the famine. Just as today, the whole world experiences common grace, doesn't it?

[27 : 17] It's what we often say, the sun shines on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. That all of humanity experiences the common grace of God, the common grace of relationships.

The common grace of food. But I think secondly here, we see the special grace of God, don't we? As we're going to find out next week, God has been using this situation to bring this family back together.

God has been using this situation to provide for His people, to provide food for His people, to bring about His purposes and plans.

We see the special grace that God extends towards the church today in the response to the gospel and the salvation of sinners and people being brought from darkness to life.

We see the special grace of God today and the particular care and concern that God has for His people. truly this evening, friends, the God we serve is good and faithful and kind even in the midst of difficulty and distress, even in the midst of disease and days of darkness.

[28 : 39] Look to Him and trust that He is good. Look to Him and be satisfied.

Look to Him in special grace. Come to Him and He will by no means cast you out.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your common grace. We thank You that You care for and sustain the world that You created. That You haven't wound it up and left it to spin on its axis out of control as some would argue.

But that You actively sustain and care for this world. We thank You for the way that the sun shines on the just and the unjust alike. That the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous alike.

But most of all, Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your special grace that has shown itself in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That has shown itself in You calling a people out of darkness into Your most glorious light.

[29 : 48] That has shown itself in that moment when each of us was awakened to our need of a Savior. Each of us was awakened to that grace available to us in Your Son. And we pray, Father, that as we preach that gospel that we may see more and more people added to that number.

That Your church would continue to grow and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.