

wonderful words of trusting God's work in his life.

Joseph let God mold his character, chose faithful actions but also trusted God's presence and action in his life. In the highs and lows of life what we must have is trust.

We find a great example in the life of Jesus. Jesus also trusted the father completely. On the cross we are told that Jesus "commended his spirit unto the father." In other words, Jesus trusted his heavenly father at the point of death. Jesus trusted God would keep God's promise. Jesus trusted His own future to the power of God.

In the highs and lows, Joseph reminds us that we can trust God. God's presence and God's promises can be trusted. We will not be forsaken and forgotten.

One last thought from this wonderful story and that is the person who is faithful and trusts God in the highs and lows of life will be remembered. I think some of the saddest words in the Old Testament are in Exodus 1:8. There came a new King who did not know about Joseph. After all that Joseph had done, he had been forgotten. His legacy in Egypt had passed. So it is for many of us. No matter what we do in this world, most of us will be forgotten by the world. However, we will not be forgotten by God and by God's people. We have a hard time knowing who exactly is this new king but we remember Joseph, the boy with the coat of many colors who became the savior of Egypt and of his own people. We know his story. We remember him even today. Why? He was faithful and he trusted God.

We all live lives that are filled with highs and lows and how we act and react in those moments will determine our testimony to each other and to our world. What if we were to see those moments as moments when God is at work? What if we were to see those moments as moments that we can choose to be faithful? What if these were the moments when we trusted God? What an encouragement we would be to one another. What a testimony we would have to our world. For why would anyone live that way unless they were followers of Jesus?

If you believe in Jesus you are on your way to heaven. We know how this story ends. We are going to one day be face-to-face with Christ in the place God has prepared for those who have placed their faith in Christ. However, right now we live in the MEAN time. Right

now we live a life like Joseph filled with highs and lows. How can we learn to walk like and Egyptian? That is how can we learn to thrive and be faithful in any situation. We remember that in the highs and lows God is there with us. The Psalmist declares, "If I go to the heavens you are there. If I go to the depths of the sea you are there." In the highs and the lows of life... God is there. Let us be faithful and trust our God who is faithful that we might bring glory to God.

In my life Lord...be glorified be glorified. In my life Lord... be glorified today.

That is what it means to thrive and be faithful in the MEAN time.



VACATION SPOTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Walk Like an Egyptian

Genesis 41:41-57



It was Carlyle Marney that said we live in the MEAN time. Every time we live on this earth is the MEAN time. There will be a time when time is no more, but in this life there is the MEAN time. This is true. Our lives are filled with the emotional highs and lows of living. As one of my friends said the other day "Facebook, Twitter and all social media is us sharing the life we want to live. Yet, the truth is we all live a life that is full of ups and downs, highs and lows and the MEAN time.

This is especially true for Joseph. Joseph's story is the story of a life filled with hope and despair. It is filled with power and poverty. It is a story of God's faithfulness in a world filled with sinful and faithless people. We have just read a portion of Joseph's story, but for our sake today we are going to look at the whole story of Joseph to make some observations about what his story says to us, as we live our own lives in the MEAN time.

Joseph, as you remember, was born as the first-born son to Jacob and Rachel. If you remember the story, Jacob had two wives. Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel and he worked for seven years for the right to marry Rachel. Yet, on his honeymoon night his Uncle Laban, Rachel's father, tricked him and switched Rachel for the older daughter Leah. We were told that Rachel was beautiful, while Leah was described as literally hard to look at. When Jacob awakes from his honeymoon night, he is astonished to find not Rachel, his love, but Leah. In fact, the Bible puts it succinctly. He awoke and there was Leah. There is shock and awe in this phrase. Laban agrees also for Jacob to marry Rachel and so Jacob has two wives. Leah is very fertile and gives birth to many sons, while Rachel remains the story of the promise to Abraham and like Sara and like Rebekah is first barren. Then, finally Joseph is born. It is not hard for us to imagine that Joseph would be somewhat of Jacob's favorite. Joseph was born to the woman he truly loved and so there were favorites.

Jacob had learned such dysfunctionality in his own home of origin. A home where he was the favorite of his mother Rebecca who had enabled him to trick his own father, Isaac, for the birthright that belonged to his brother Esau.

Joseph was Jacob's favorite and the others knew it. Joseph would even tell stories of dreams of all of his family bowing down before him. Joseph also had that multi-colored coat. It was like a blaring sign that everywhere he went he was announcing look at me. I am the favorite. Once, when Joseph went to the far country to see his brothers as they were herding the sheep, the brothers saw him coming and when they did they were filled with jealousy. They wanted to kill him right there and if it were not for Ruben stepping in, they would have killed him. Instead, they chose to throw him into a pit and when a caravan came by they sold their own brother into slavery. They covered the coat of many colors with blood and returned home and told Jacob, his father, that Joseph was dead. Killed by a wild animal.

Joseph landed in Egypt and was sold to Potiphar an official in the court of Pharaoh. Joseph was so faithful as a servant that he was put in charge of the house of Potiphar. However, Potiphar did not have control of his own home. Potiphar entrusted him with his home and his wife. Yet, Potiphar's wife could not be trusted. Over and over again she tried to seduce Joseph and Joseph rebuffed her advances. Then finally, one night she grabbed him and in no uncertain terms told him her intent. Joseph ran away leaving his robe in her hands. Later, she lied and said that Joseph had tried to rape her. Potiphar believed his wife and had Joseph put in jail. While in jail Joseph made friends with the baker and the cupbearer of Pharaoh. There in jail Joseph interpreted the dreams of the two and when the cupbearer was spared his life and went back to his position, Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him to Pharaoh. However, when Pharaoh began to have his own dreams and no one could interpret them and we are told that

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the cupbearer did not remember Joseph.

However, later the cupbearer did remember Joseph and when Pharaoh learned of Joseph's abilities to interpret dreams he called for him. When Joseph heard Pharaoh's dream he knew it was a hard interpretation. There was going to be a famine, but there was time to prepare. Upon hearing this interpretation, Pharaoh decided that no one had the spirit of God like Joseph and Joseph was placed in charge of all of Egypt. Of course when the famine came, Joseph's own family came to Egypt for food and there we have the story of reconciliation. The story of Joseph ends with Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers and his declaration, "what you meant for harm, God meant for good to accomplish what is now being done... the saving of many lives."

Joseph's story is the story of the MEAN time. Joseph learns literally to "walk like an Egyptian." However, this does not mean compromise as much as it means that he learned to thrive and be faithful in the many changes in his life. The question for us is how can we learn to thrive and be faithful in the Mean time? What do we learn from Joseph. Let me mention five thoughts from Joseph's story.

First, we all live lives of emotional highs and lows. Joseph is just but one story of the highs and lows of living we find in the Bible. Abraham's life is filled with highs and lows. Jacob's life is filled with highs and lows. Note Leah and Rachel. Job, the Bible's oldest story speaks of a man who had it all and had nothing and then had it all again. David's life is filled with victory and defeat. He is a success politically, but a failure as a father. Elijah would have victory at Carmel and then a few days later be scared for his life hiding in a cave. The Apostle Paul was a man who knew the heights of ministry and the depths of ministry. Our Lord Jesus' life was filled with highs and lows. He was received and He was rejected. He was followed and He was criticized. How high and low is the difference between the cross and the grave and resurrection and ascension? Yet, in every moment of Jesus' life... God is fully present. We all have a life with highs and lows. Joseph faced the highs and lows we know. He went from favorite to betrayed. He went from trusted to mistrusted. He went from being in charge to being in prison. He went from prison to being in full power. He went from rejected to reconciled.

We live lives that are high and low. We need to accept this as life and expect this in life. The concept that somehow all of life is on an upward trajectory and that there is never to be trouble is not Biblical. It is some odd combination of American Culture and warped gospel that has created disappointed and disillusioned Christians.

In a recent blog by Dr. Russell Moore, who is the new Director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, he addresses this concept as he talks about what he is learning from church leaders in other nations who are persecuted. He writes these words:

In the "religion" aisle at any given bookstore, one can see volumes promising "every day a Friday" and so on. Jesus is the totem to acquire what American culture has told us we deserve. This is closer to Canaanite fertility religion than to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have become the people Jesus warned us about.

In this life there are highs and lows. We call that life. Accept it and remember that everyone else is also living in the highs and lows of life, regardless what they might say or portray. Everyone is carrying a burden and everyone has a celebration just waiting to be shouted. If we will pause long enough and listen to each other we will discover we all live with highs and lows.

Joseph reminds us that in our highs and lows God is present. We have said that in Jesus' highs and lows God was fully present. There is never a moment when God is not fully present in Jesus. So it is with us. God is present in the lowest moment and in the highest moment. How is God present? Joseph said, "What you meant for harm, God meant for good." Are we to assume that this means God caused all of this to happen to Joseph or are we to read this that God intends good, even when others are intending harm. Those are two separate ideas.

Let's ask some questions to guide our thinking. Could we say that it is God's will that the brothers of Joseph would have been jealous, envious, and bloodthirsty and could have betrayed their brother and then told this horrible lie to their father? Does that sound like God's work? Could we imagine that it was God at work causing Potiphar's life to be adulterous seductress and then a liar? Does this sound like God? Can we imagine that it was God who instructed the Cup Bearer to forget Joseph, probably to save his own skin? So, where is God at work?

Joseph is claiming the God is at work when others choose sinful ways and when Joseph chose faithful ways. What was intended as harm God has used or meant as good. This is what Paul tells us Romans 8:28. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to God's purpose.

This verse does not say everything is God's will. This verse does not say God causes all things. This verse says in all things, in the highs and lows, in the choices that are sinful and the choices that are faithful, God is at work.

God is working, present and continual tense to bring good for those who are called to God's purpose and love God.

Here is our second thought: We live with highs and lows and God is present in every situation.

What is God doing? God is building character in every situation. It is interesting that we focus on the high and the low, but God focuses on the heart and forging our character in the moments of life.

Look at Joseph again. We don't know what Jacob had taught Joseph, but we assume that Joseph had learned something about being faithful to God from a father who had his own journey with God. It was a journey of running from God, wrestling with God and returning to God. Jacob had been so changed in his journey with God that he had been given a new name, Israel. When Joseph is faced with the tests of his life it is his character that shines through.

A character that is being shaped by God for God's use.

It is character that has him turn from Potiphar's wife. It is character that has him be faithful to his friends in prison. It is character that has him stand before Pharaoh with hard news of a famine. It is character that causes him to forgive and accept his brothers and not exact revenge against them. Over and over again it is character that enable Joseph to be faithful.

In the highs and lows of life God is forging our character. In the highs He is teaching us not to be prideful, to practice humility and not to become self-indulgent and forget His blessings. In the lows of life we learn to depend on God and we learn to prioritize what is important to God. We learn to be thankful in all things.

James writes in James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

In our highs and lows God is forging our character. So that we might choose faithful actions. Joseph reminds

us that in all moments we can choose faithful actions. Joseph did not start out that day to be the second in charge in Egypt. Joseph just went out to check on his brothers who were tending sheep. Then one moment after another, in Joseph's story, he chose to be faithful and God raised him up. I think many times we think that we must know all of God's will and we must know everything God is doing and yet, the truth is all we really can do is be faithful today where we find our self today.

This week my life was interrupted. My week began with plans, meeting, funerals, sermon prep and changes, which were coming to our congregation. Then on Tuesday with one phone call, in the late afternoon, my week was changed. I was on my way to Knoxville in the night to be with my Mom who had fallen and broken her hip. I don't have to tell you how serious that is for someone with my Mom's dementia and age. This was not what I had planned, but all of a sudden to be faithful had to do with sitting, waiting, praying and attending to her basic needs. My faithfulness was to feed her, make

her comfortable and be her advocate. It was not what I thought I was going to be doing to be faithful, but this week I kept reminding myself this is what it means to be faithful right now...today.

Elizabeth Elliot, whose husband Jim was killed as a missionary and whose life was made famous by the movie End of the Spear, writes out of her being twice a widow and the highs and lows of life that God's will is for most of us the next thing. To do God's will is to be faithful in the next thing. She would say if the next thing is to empty the dryer, then that is God's will go and do the next thing. Her point of course is not to worry so much about the big picture, which of course Joseph could not have imagined, but in the highs and lows of life to be faithful. Joseph reminds us that in the highs and lows of life we are called to be faithful right here and right now.

Joseph reminds us to be faithful, but also to trust God. In Joseph's story there is a trust that God is with him and God's ways are right. With Potiphar's wife Joseph says, "how can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God." Joseph knew God's way was best. When it came to the interpretation of dreams over and over again Joseph would say this is not me, but God will reveal the meaning of the dreams. Even after he is placed in charge of all things, Joseph speaks of God's healing his hurt caused by his brothers. Then of course, he ends his story with those

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