

Lesson 6 4th June, 2017

Joseph, a Faithful Servant

Lesson Scope: Genesis 41

References in brackets refer to Genesis 41 unless otherwise noted

Lesson Focus

When the messengers explained to Joseph his assignment before Pharaoh, did his mind flash back the dreams of his youth or of his fellow prisoners? Dreams again! As he soon discovered, he was on the threshold of his life work, for which God had been preparing him throughout so many years.

How many of us can relate to an advancement like Joseph experienced in today's study? Whether the promotions come rapidly or slowly, many have been unable to resist the unique pressures and temptations that accompany swift promotion and vast authority. Joseph's example shows us that power does not have to corrupt, and that the proper use of authority is for the well-being of others. The same faith and moral fiber that preserved Joseph when life seemed to be falling apart, later kept him steady in his rise to power and honour. God gives His children varied opportunities. In their service, whether lowly or great, God requires faithfulness.

Take some time to consider the dramatic change of circumstances that Joseph experienced in this lesson. Perhaps you have been inside a prison for ministry to the inmates; consider yourself confined with them. Perhaps you have toured a state capitol or the White House; consider yourself established there. Such a contrast still falls short of the advancement that Joseph experienced.

Our society today expects those in authority and position to enjoy the perquisites. Furthermore, they commonly attempt to divide between personal and public life, with different standards for each. Joseph's life demonstrates that uprightness in public life depends on integrity in personal life.

Joseph retained his spiritual and emotional equilibrium because his eyes were fixed on God rather than on himself. May his example instruct us, whatever our calling in life.

Lesson Aim: To portray qualities of a faithful servant.

Theme Verse: [Luke 16:10](#). He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

Lesson Text

Acknowledging God

Genesis 41:14-16

Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved *himself*, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. ¹⁶ And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is* not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

Genesis 41:25

And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh *is* one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he *is* about to do.

Genesis 41:32

And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; *it is* because the thing *is* established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

Advising Pharaoh

Genesis 41:33-41

Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh do *this*, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. ³⁵ And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. ³⁶ And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine. ³⁷ And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. ³⁸ And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find *such a one* as this *is*, a man in whom the Spirit of God *is*? ³⁹ And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, *there is* none so discreet and wise as thou *art*: ⁴⁰ Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.

Administrating the Plan

Genesis 41:50-57

And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him. ⁵¹ And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, *said he*, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. ⁵² And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in

the land of my affliction. ⁵³ And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. ⁵⁴ And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do. ⁵⁶ And the famine was over all the face of the earth: And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy *corn*; because that the famine was *so* sore in all lands.

Questions for Study

Acknowledging God

1. How did Joseph's speech and demeanor acknowledge God?
2. How should we consider the testimony of our speech and demeanor today?

Advising Pharaoh

3. How did acknowledging God benefit Joseph in this encounter with Pharaoh?
4. Discuss the tone of Joseph's interpretation and advice to Pharaoh.
5. What can we learn from Joseph's response to acclaim?

Administrating the Plan

6. What do the names Joseph chose for his sons reveal about his character?
7. What lessons can we learn about the honorable exercise of responsibility and authority?
8. What are some long-term results of Joseph's faithfulness?

Analyzing the Passage

Pharaoh was urgent in finding an interpretation for his distressing dreams. His messenger brought Joseph hastily out of the dungeon. But, having been in prison, he was not ready to stand before Pharaoh. He first needed to shave himself and change his raiment. This showed both his self-respect and his respect for his superiors. His response to Pharaoh (41:16) indicates his humility, his faith in God, and his personal integrity. There is no indication throughout this narrative that Joseph ever allowed his responses to be influenced by any desire to press his own advantage.

Joseph clearly explained the meaning of the dream. The doubling of the dream emphasized the surety of the coming famine, and the poor condition of the lean cattle and ears of corn after they had consumed the good ones

demonstrated its severity. Joseph's advice regarding preparation for the famine was acceptable to Pharaoh, likely because it seems to have come by the same inspiration as did the interpretation.

Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams convinced Pharaoh that Joseph would be the best-qualified administrator of the survival plan. He quickly elevated Joseph to a high position, but it was also a place of responsibility that required diligence.

Giving Joseph a priest's daughter for his wife was likely Pharaoh's way of acknowledging Joseph's religious devotion. It also increased his acceptance among Egyptian society.

Joseph's choice of names for his two sons shows that Joseph still identified with his Hebrew family and considered himself a stranger in Egypt.

Principles and Applications

Acknowledging God

1. A faithful servant displays a respectful attitude (41:14). Dignity and respect are godly virtues that amplify our verbal testimony. Joseph's grooming and attention to his personal appearance affected his effectiveness as divine message bearer to Pharaoh. We likewise should maintain a personal appearance that becomes the divine message we carry to those about us.

2. A faithful servant humbly acknowledges that he is but a worker in God's kingdom (41:15-16, 25, 32). Like Joseph, we periodically receive praise for being nothing more than a channel through which a blessing flows. No matter how consequential the blessing may be, may we always remember the lowliness of our role in delivering it. Rather than become proud, we should be filled with wonder that God uses ordinary men and women to accomplish His purposes. We should point those who praise our lowly works to God the great mastermind.

Advising Pharaoh

3. A faithful servant is objective and orderly in his thinking (41:33-35). The interpretation of the dream demanded an urgent response, and Joseph lost no time in using the influence he had gained through his interpretation to recommend immediate preparation.

4. A faithful servant seeks the good of others (41:36). This was not the time to be concerned with rewards for services rendered, but to anticipate the needs of other people. The tendency we all face is to look outward only for a time and to revert to inward thinking after signal successes. Joseph demonstrated here that the gaze of faithful servants is ever outward.

5. A faithful servant is worthy of increased responsibility (41:39-41). The

desire for usefulness and responsibility is a God-given desire, but the true path to usefulness and influence is via patience and faithfulness. Concern yourself with doing what He calls you to do right now, and let God take care of the advancements. If Joseph's life goal had been to attain the position of being second to Pharaoh, he surely would not have achieved it. Those who are driven by ambition to achieve prominent positions generally do not have the character to fill them nobly. Many have been great, but not good. Joseph's life demonstrates the beauty that results when a person is both.

Administrating the Plan

6. A faithful servant does not let the unpleasant events of his past mar his present usefulness (41:51-52). We live in a fallen world, as we are continually reminded. Through God's abundant power, He can accomplish His will even through the malicious scheming of evil men. Forgiveness is hard, but it is the divine pattern to release us from the pain and hurts of our past.

7. A faithful servant can face the future with confidence because of preparation and forethought (41:53-54). Yes, we are only channels of blessing and servants in God's marvelous work. But still He calls us to do all that is in our power to do. When we have done so, we can rest assured that the outcome is in the hands of the almighty God, and that we have pleased Him.

8. A faithful servant is worthy of trust and confidence (41:55). Faithfulness is marked by consistency and steadiness. Whether the task concerns accumulation or distribution, a faithful servant can see the underlying requirements of the situation. He can be relied upon to act in the best interests of all concerned.

9. A faithful servant becomes a blessing to others (41:56-57). Untold numbers of people survived as a result of Joseph's faithfulness. His service amplified the Egyptian influence among the nations. His example inspires us today. The blessings of faithful service extend far beyond the servant's ability to see.

Important Teachings

1. A faithful servant displays a respectful attitude (41:14).
2. A faithful servant humbly acknowledges that he is but a worker in God's kingdom (41:15-16, 25, 32).
3. A faithful servant is objective and orderly in his thinking (41:33-35).
4. A faithful servant seeks the good of others (41:36).
5. A faithful servant is worthy of increased responsibility (41:39-41).

6. A faithful servant does not let the unpleasant events of his past mar his present usefulness (41:51-52).
7. A faithful servant can face the future with confidence because of preparation and forethought (41:53, 54).
8. A faithful servant is worthy of trust and confidence (41:55).
9. A faithful servant becomes a blessing to others (41:56-57).

Answers to Questions

1. How did Joseph's speech and demeanor acknowledge God?

He acknowledged God verbally, multiple times. His grooming and preparations complemented a godly mindset and indicated due respect for Pharaoh's position as well as a sense of dignity and properness concerning his own person. Our bodies are gifts from God, as well as temples of the Holy Ghost. We show respect, dignity, and appreciation for these gifts by neatness and modesty in public life. Authority is of God as well, and we show respect for that authority in the same manner.

2. How should we consider the testimony of our speech and demeanor today?

The inspiration behind the saying "Cleanliness is next to godliness" clearly resonates across culture and millennia. We should not be ashamed of neatness, tidiness, and properness. Our speech should remind others of God, show respect for them as persons, and reveal an approachable attitude about ourselves. The outlandish dress, fads, and fashions of society indicate a loss of respect for the sanctity of life and the body, as well as disrespect for the positions of those in authority.

3. How did acknowledging God benefit Joseph in this encounter with Pharaoh?

He had the courage to speak before Pharaoh in an intimidating situation. He had the answer to Pharaoh's questions with the attending honor, rather than the humiliation of the imposter who falsely claims to speak for God (Acts 19:13-16).

4. Discuss the tone of Joseph's interpretation and advice to Pharaoh.

His interpretation was clear and forthright. He was not flattering or obsequious in the presence of power. He referred to God multiple times. He went beyond interpretation of the dreams and gave direct advice and counsel with persuasiveness and authority. His manner made him easy to listen to, and his advice was easy to accept.

5. What can we learn from Joseph's response to acclaim?

Not once does the story reveal Joseph's response. Pharaoh was the one who praised him, who selected him as the "man discreet and wise." He appears to have been passive in receiving the praise (Proverbs 27:2).

6. What do the names Joseph chose for his sons reveal about his character? He had not forgotten his heritage, family, or homeland. Rather, he had survived the trauma of being forcibly removed from them, for which he thanked God. He was satisfied and fulfilled to be useful after languishing in slavery and imprisonment. He was not embittered, vengeful, or broken spirited.

7. What lessons can we learn about the honorable exercise of responsibility and authority?

Authority is required to carry out responsibility. Responsibility without authority is unfair. Authority must be exercised for the good of other people rather than for selfish indulgence.

8. What are some long-term results of Joseph's faithfulness?

Untold numbers of people of many nations survived. The reunion of Joseph with his family occurred through the pressures of the famine. Egypt acquired global influence through Joseph's effective administration. However, eventually Egypt forgot her debt to the Hebrews and made them slaves. The later deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt has been used to typify deliverance from sin for the remainder of time.

Summarizing the Lesson

A slave and prisoner stood before Pharaoh, and Pharaoh placed responsibilities paralleling Joseph's ability upon his shoulders. Through Joseph's faithful service, Pharaoh would accumulate the entire wealth of the inhabitants of Egypt, while Egypt extended her sphere of influence over surrounding countries. Joseph finally received recognition for his sterling character. All God's servants will be amply rewarded with these words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Research Guide

1. Review Hebrews 11 for some inspiration from saints of the past.
2. Read Psalm 105:16-22.