

THE LORD PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE

41 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.” 42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. 43 He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, “Make way!” Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

44 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.” 45 Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.^a

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout Egypt. 47 During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. 48 Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. 49 Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

Does the Lord provide me with enough? Joseph had been through a lot. If you don’t know the story of Joseph, it’s in Genesis, the first book of the Bible – from chapter 37 to the end. We can fast-forward through the highlights: Dreams, jealous brothers, sold into slavery, wrongfully accused and imprisoned.

In prison Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams made some new friends, but his hard, honest and faith-driven work is what made him the most trusted prisoner. Finally he was brought to the attention of Pharaoh, and his interpretation (really God’s interpretation) of Pharaoh’s dreams was a warning to all of Egypt: seven years of amazingly productive harvests would be followed by seven years of such severe famine that the good years would be forgotten. Joseph’s hard, honest work and integrity made him the perfect man to oversee the task of building up Egypt’s resources while the good years lasted. And so we come to our text. Pharaoh – I think, but I can’t be certain, that this was probably **Sesostris**.^b At any rate, the Pharaoh or King of Egypt made Joseph his *mishneh*, his second-in-command. We even have an Egyptian word preserved for us here as the soldiers shouted *Avrēk! Avrēk!* Make way! Make way!

All of a sudden, things were going pretty good for Joseph, weren’t they? He goes from prisoner to Assistant Pharaoh in a moment! He gets all kinds of authority, and the outfit to prove it.

He was given a royal or at least a formal Egyptian name – something to be inscribed into a

^b Pharaoh Sesostris II who reigned, we think, from 1897-1878 BC, and who would have died in about the last of the bountiful years, and who was followed by his son Sesostris III, the most powerful pharaoh of Egypt’s Middle Kingdom.

cartouche or picture-word to be used as his seal on documents and as he gave orders. His new name was **Zaphenath-Paneah**, which means either “One Who Sustains Life” or “The Keeper of Secrets,” and it may have been formed by Pharaoh to be a word-play that had both meanings.

And things just kept going better and better for Joseph! He was given a wife, a woman he loved and stayed faithful to his whole life, never taking any other wife, unlike his father. Joseph and his wife [Asenath] had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who would take Joseph’s place in the list of tribes, giving Joseph a double-portion in Israel.

But honored place or not, beautiful young wife or not, authoritative Egyptian name or not, Joseph was not free from trouble, responsibility, stress, or one of the largest workloads ever heaped on a single person’s shoulders.

Are we tempted to think—Oh, Joseph, he had it so good! But what if he had slacked off for a single afternoon? He had to manage every single granary, barn and silo along both shores of the Nile—550 miles from the Cushite border below the first cataract in the south to the tip of the delta in the north, with not a kernel of grain to spare.

And he never complained about whether or not he had enough training or whether he was prepared for the next task. God saw to it that he was ready. From spoiled son to slave to prisoner to Egypt’s Number Two—and the last promotion in the blink of an eye. Joseph didn’t question God. “He never said, “God hasn’t provided me with enough!” He used what he had and he gave God glory with what he did.

Remember God’s warning about those lean years—like scrawny cows devouring fat ones and getting no fatter for it because the famine would be so bad for so long. And not only Egypt—Egypt was the breadbasket in those days. It was the Minnesota and the Iowa and the Wisconsin that fed the surrounding nations. Joseph was reunited with his family because Jacob sent his sons to buy grain during the famine.

It was Joseph’s faith in God, in the coming Christ who would atone for his sins, that kept him going. He had learned to work hard in any situation, in slavery, in prison, or with the lives of millions resting on his daily labor. And he did it without complaining, but simply asking God to give him strength, and being a good and faithful husband and father at the same time.

Joseph understood that we as God’s children must have a careful concern for every thought, action and word. Jesus said: **“I tell you that men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken”** (Matthew 12:36). As we order and plan our days and nights, this leads us to want to serve God more devoutly. Consider in the evening that death may come upon you this night. Consider in the morning that death may come upon you this day. Don’t put off repentance until tomorrow—there may not be a tomorrow. Tomorrow is uncertain, but impending death is always certain.

Don’t think that you’re not ready, or not trained, or not cut out for the next task in your life. If God puts you there, give him glory.

So we take our careless thoughts, our sinful actions, and our imperfect words, and we take them to the cross of Jesus Christ.

We take our fear of approaching death, our desire to possess more than God would give us, our wants that swallow up our actual needs like lean cows consuming fat cows, and take all of that to the cross, too.

We take our guilt, our gnawing uneasiness about our spiritual future, which will split open in the light of God's glory into genuine fear over judgment day, and as we take that fear to cross along with our desires and our guilt and our sins, and as we set them down, listen and let go. Listen to the voice of Jesus: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." That voice, those words, are the Gospel of your Savior. This is his promise: you drop all of that load of sin and fear, and come on in. Lean on that cross, and know that your whole burden is lifted away by Jesus.

The forgiven child of God has no sentence, nothing pending, no guilt any more. This is what it is to be forgiven in Jesus.

Learn from Joseph and from the others in God's word in the history of God's people how to reflect that love of God in your love. When you talk with people, don't drive them away because you're in the habit of using coarse humor or foul language. Be gentle in your speech, and be violent with no one.

In relation to God, live out your faith with thanks, giving him glory.

In relation to yourself, give careful thought to what you will do and say, and even what you think.

In relation to your spouse, pay attention every day to your vow, and don't wander into sinful thoughts about whether you're in love – that wasn't your vow. Charge bravely into wondering in what way today you will show your love. That was your vow.

In relation to everyone else, live the life of someone made righteous through Christ. Be the reflection of Christ in their lives. Work for their benefit, and don't doubt but that God is working for the benefit of yours.

- Let mercy rise to the top of your emotions.
- Let kindness be what people see in your face.
- Let humility become your habit.
- Let the study of God's word be your consuming addiction.
- Let patience be the way you face trouble or trial.
- Let your evening prayers be where you amend the sins of each day, and the way you return to Jesus, day upon day, week upon week, year upon year.

Think each night: How many people fell into sin today? We all did. How many did Christ come to save? All of us. How many reject him, forget him, or don't know him? Too many. But you know him, you haven't forgotten him, and praise God that he will never forget you. The Lord provides for his people. And the peace of God...