

CAPITOL STUDIES

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JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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Verse of the Week

Genesis 47:10-11

And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence. ¹¹So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered.

How to Truly Prosper



SOMETIMES STORES OFFER CONTESTS where the winner has a certain amount of time to run through the store and select as many items as he or she can. When the time is up, the prices are totaled, but the person doesn't have to pay. If you won such a contest, you would think carefully about what you wanted to get. You would probably go for expensive items that you needed the most. You wouldn't waste time on the cheap or frivolous. You would be focused on getting the most in your time frame.

In a way, life is a lot like that contest, except we don't know how much time we have to do the things we want to do. The clock is running, and we all spend our time in one way or another. The question is, when the clock stops, will our baskets be full of things that really matter, or will we have carts full of trivial things that are worthless in light of eternity?

Pastor Arin Hess
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INTRODUCTION

It's easy to say, "I want to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness above all things." But it's also easy to be distracted by things that are not so important. We rush through our daily routines. Before we know it, we've spent our lives on things that we probably wouldn't have chosen had we taken time to think. They aren't necessarily bad things, and to those looking on from the outside, it may seem that we're doing pretty well, but if we aren't prosperous in God's eyes, we are not really prosperous.

Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, devotes a significant portion of Genesis 47 to the introduction of Joseph's family to Pharaoh and then the account of Joseph's administration of Egypt during the famine. Two themes seem to emerge from the text: the prosperity of Joseph's family (Israel) contrasted with the dire straits of the Egyptians, who were nonetheless saved through Joseph's wise oversight. Years before, Abraham chose to make God and His will supreme when he left Haran and set out for Canaan. Joseph, like his great-grandfather, committed himself to honoring God above everything else and in spite of everything else. Now God is fulfilling His part of the covenant He made with Abraham by blessing his descendants and using them to be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). It's a good illustration of God's promise in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." God wants to do the same for us today. If we commit ourselves to making God and His will the top priority in our lives, He has promised to provide everything else that we need.

HOW CAN I KNOW TRUE PROSPERITY?

I. BE HOLY AND SET APART TO GOD

A. Being Set Apart Then

Genesis 46:31-47:4

Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me;³² and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.'³³ When Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?'³⁴ you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians."

¹Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers and their flocks and their herds and all that they have, have come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen."²He took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh.³Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your



occupation?” So they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers.”⁴They said to Pharaoh, “We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants’ flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, therefore, please let your servants live in the land of Goshen.”

With Joseph’s brothers coming into the land with all their flocks and herds, Joseph needs to apprise Pharaoh and gain his consent for them to live in the land of Goshen. In Genesis 46:31-32, Joseph informs his brothers that he will tell Pharaoh that they are shepherds and keepers of livestock. He asks his brothers to give Pharaoh the same message, not to try to impress him that they are something they are not. His purpose is that they “may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians” (vs. 34). He warns his brothers that Pharaoh isn’t going to think highly of their occupation, but he thinks it will probably result in their getting the land of Goshen to themselves. And that is what happened.

Joseph has learned a lot about the pagan Egyptian culture during the last 20 years. He knows the hatred the Egyptians have for shepherds, so he probably wants to protect his family from disdain and ridicule by keeping them apart in Goshen. Perhaps he is thinking that Pharaoh will offer his brothers government positions because of his partiality toward Joseph, and while he is able to handle the high society life in Egypt and remain pure before the Lord, his brothers may not be. Though we cannot definitively know Joseph’s reasoning, we do know this was all part of God’s plan for Israel to be a distinct nation, set apart unto Him.

B. Being Set Apart Now

One of the greatest needs for God’s people today is to be distinct from the world, set apart unto God. The biblical term for that is holiness. “You are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine” (Leviticus 20:26). “Like the Holy One Who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior” (1 Peter 1:15). It is grievous when we hear of Christians acting in the same sinful way as those in the world. When Christians use foul or abusive speech, are dishonest in business, live for selfish pursuits, are morally impure, etc., we lose our impact on others. We cannot make a difference for God if we are just like those in “the world.”

Biblical holiness starts with the way we think, what we meditate on (Philippians 4:8). The more we meditate on the truth of God’s Word, the closer we draw to God, and the farther away from the world’s pull we are. It is easy to talk about being holy, but it is another thing to do it when the pressure is on. We’re saints by calling, but we’re still creatures of the flesh. We all face the same temptations to bend the truth at times, to gratify the flesh, to be selfish and greedy. It’s only by spending consistent time alone with God in His Word that we have the strength to “deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:12).





C. Experiencing Blessing

Genesis 47:5-6

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. ⁶The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any capable men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock.”

Note the blessings that come to Jacob’s family after they ask to live apart from the Egyptians in Goshen. Pharaoh says to give them the best of the land and offers them positions of responsibility.

II. BE A BLESSING TO THOSE AROUND YOU

A. A Blessing by Words

Genesis 47:7-11

Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many years have you lived?” ⁹So Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.” ¹⁰And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence. ¹¹So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered.

Next Joseph presents his aged father to Pharaoh. It is significant that this old shepherd, whose occupation was despised by the Egyptians, walks in before this great leader and is not intimidated. Instead, Jacob knows that he has something to offer Pharaoh, namely, a blessing from the living God. Jacob’s exact words are not recorded, but he probably prays that God will be gracious to Pharaoh and bless him. God does prosper Pharaoh through Joseph’s administration of the famine relief. Again, we see fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant: “you shall be a blessing... I will bless those who bless you, ...and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3).

B. A Blessing by Deeds

Genesis 47:12-22

Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father’s household with food, according to their little ones. ¹³Now there was no food in all the land, because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. ¹⁴Joseph gathered all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the grain which they bought, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁵When the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, “Give us food, for why should we die in your presence? For our money is gone.” ¹⁶Then Joseph said,



“Give up your livestock, and I will give you food for your livestock, since your money is gone.”¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses and the flocks and the herds and the donkeys; and he fed them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year.¹⁸ When that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, “We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent, and the cattle are my lord’s. There is nothing left for my lord except our bodies and our lands.¹⁹ Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh. So give us seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate.”²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh’s.²¹ As for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt’s border to the other.²² Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land.

Jacob’s blessing in word is fulfilled in deed by Joseph’s wise administration on Pharaoh’s behalf. Notice the contrast between verse 12, which states that Joseph provides his family with food, and verse 13, which says that there is no food in the land because of the famine. God allows His people to prosper while the Egyptians basically give Joseph everything so they can survive the famine. This may seem like favoritism; however, for years, Joseph has sought the best interests of Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, and everyone senses that. We know that Pharaoh also shows “favoritism” toward the priests, at least, and probably his family as well.

Joseph doesn’t presume upon Pharaoh. He doesn’t pull rank and remind Pharaoh of how he saved his throne. He is open and up front with him about his family. Pharaoh is the one who tells them to take the land of Goshen (Genesis 45:18-19; Genesis 47:6, 11). This isn’t a democracy, but neither is it a terrible situation. It would seem logical that Joseph moves the people to the cities for more efficient distribution of the grain (Genesis 47:21), but we would be reading into the text to assume that he splits up families and carries people off in chains.

C. The Blessing Continues

Genesis 47:23-26

Then Joseph said to the people, “Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh; now, here is seed for you, and you may sow the land.²⁴ At the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food and for those of your households and as food for your little ones.”²⁵ So they said, “You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s slaves.”²⁶ Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt valid to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh’s.





It is no small feat for a politician to please the one over him while at the same time having his constituents thank him for taking their money, their livestock, and their land, and then instituting a 20 percent tax! Joseph does what few have done: he is a skillful politician and administrator while at the same time he is a man who puts first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Because of that, God blesses him with amazing wisdom and leadership skills. Joseph's wisdom and compassion are evident in the way he provides for everyone's needs when they have nothing, then gives them what is necessary to take care of their own needs. He is truly a blessing to others.

That's what God wants you to be in your world, whether at home, in the neighborhood, or at work. He wants you to be His channel for blessing your family and friends. He wants you to seek the best interests of your employer and fellow employees. Be a blessing through your words (as Jacob did) and your deeds (as Joseph did).

Jacob thought he was going to die soon (Genesis 45:28; Genesis 46:30; Genesis 47:9), but God gave him 17 more years. We do not know how long we have to live, so we must live each day in light of eternity, redeeming the time by blessing others with the good news of Christ. Wherever God has you, purpose to be distinct as a Christian and to be a blessing to those around you through your godly behavior and verbal witness.

III. BE FOCUSED ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Genesis 47:27-31

Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous. ²⁸Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years. ²⁹When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." ³¹He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.

Jacob's final 17 years are probably the best years of his life. His children are restored to him. His extended family is prospering. It would be easy to think, "Egypt isn't such a bad place. We have a good life here. God has taken care of us. Let's just stay here." But instead, as he comes near to death, he calls Joseph and asks to be buried in Canaan, the land of God's covenant blessing promised to his grandfather Abraham and his descendants. Jacob wants his family to think of Egypt as only their temporary home. He does not want them to forget God's blessing promised in Canaan.

This takes some faith on Jacob's part. It has been over 200 years since God promised Canaan to Abraham. Jacob has no tangible indication that God's promise about Canaan will be fulfilled. It would be so easy



for him, especially in light of the hard times he had experienced before in Canaan and the good times he has enjoyed in Egypt, to have set God's promise for Canaan aside. But in spite of his prosperity in Egypt, Jacob keeps his priorities straight.

When Joseph agrees to Jacob's request, the old patriarch bows in worship. Hebrews 11:21 says "By faith Jacob, as he was dying, ...worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff." He believes that God will keep His Word and will fulfill His promises concerning Canaan. Even though Jacob will not personally see their fulfillment, he believes that his descendants will and, therefore, he worships God.

The good life in "Egypt" can never compare to the blessings of the Promised Land. We all face the danger of becoming enamored with Egypt's pleasures, forgetting that we are awaiting a grand, heavenly city to come. God graciously provides for us in this world, but our purpose on this earth is not to accumulate the things our world has to offer. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

CONCLUSION

Let's come back to that contest. Each of us has used up some of the time on the clock. We all have some things in our shopping cart. Let's look at those things in light of eternity. Are they things that will really matter when the time is up? If not, you still have time. Use that time to make God and His will your priority. If you do, God promises to meet all your needs here, and you will be sending treasure ahead to heaven.

If you have not placed your trust in Christ to rescue you from sin's chains, you may be very successful by this world's standards, but you've missed the prosperity that really counts. None of earth's riches can earn us a place in Heaven. Jesus advises us to be rich toward God. That process begins when, by faith, you receive God's offer to forgive your sins and give you eternal life. Where is your treasure?

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Arin Hess".

Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible (NASB), 1995 Update*.

Some of this material came from the work of Pastor Steven J. Cole, which can be found at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-78/>.



