

From Pit to Power

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[0 : 00] 13 years ago, 13 years. Cast your minds back if you can, picture what that was like. Where were you 13 years ago?

Some of you that was too long ago to remember, maybe some of you were too young to remember where you were 13 years ago. How much has changed in your life in 13 years?

I ask because although it's only a couple of pages in our Bibles, that's how long it's taken for Joseph to get from chapter 37 to chapter 41.

We read in chapter 37 he was 17 when he was put into the pit, and he was 30 when he was raised up into power.

Now, 13 years is a long time for anyone, but I think pick any 13 years of somebody's life, and you could hardly have picked a more formative period in somebody's growing up.

[1 : 03] His whole journey from boyhood to manhood is summed up, isn't it, in these three dark chapters of the Bible. Three words, if you like. Pit, slave, prisoner.

We're not told how long each bit lasted in those 13 years. The kind of time stamps that we get are after some time or some time later.

I guess that kind of reflects perhaps how Joseph felt about the passage of time in his own life. Who knows how many weeks have passed? Years go on with no change to speak of.

We only know it was two whole years from the time that he helped the baker and the cupbearer in prison to the time that the cupbearer remembered him. But those two years were the final stretch of more than a decade of continuous suffering.

I imagine for lots of us in a room like this, if not all of us actually at some level, we have a sense that things haven't quite gone the way that we wanted in our lives.

[2 : 16] Things have gone wrong for us. And perhaps cynically we think life's not fair. Reflecting on how you cope when suffering comes into your life, as it does for all of us, I wonder, what would 13 years in the pit have done for you?

What kind of person would you be on your 30th birthday? Friends, no one had more reason than Joseph to feel hard done by, but after 13 years of suffering, what kind of man was raised out of the pit?

Brought before the most powerful man in the world, fresh from the pit, his request finally granted, his wisdom being sought. This is his big break, right?

What kind of man, verse 16? Joseph answered Pharaoh, it is not in me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.

Not a bitter young man burning with hatred and resentment. Not a hardened cynic ready to play the system to get his life back.

[3 : 29] No, what does he say? You've got the wrong guy. But I do know somebody who can help you. God most wise. God most gracious. The God over all things.

Friends, the man we see raised out of the pit stands head and shoulders above all of us, doesn't he? In the words of Pharaoh, can we find a man like this?

In whom is the Spirit of God? You know, there are lots of people in this story, aren't there, who we've met along the way in Genesis. The funny thing is, I think, the one that we can't really relate to is the one that we most want to read ourselves into.

That's Joseph, isn't it? But in this chapter, brothers and sisters, we do better to take our cue from Pharaoh and from the soon-to-be-hungry people of the world as we look in wonder at Joseph, who was wrongly condemned, but raised up out of the pit to rule and reign and save.

Back at the start of the series, we thought about how Joseph's life is following a V-shaped pattern. He's come a long way down, hasn't he, to suffer in the pit.

[4 : 44] Tonight, we begin to see him lifted up a long way to a place of power, and we find we can say again, can't we, that in the shadow of Joseph, we see Jesus.

It's hard not to see him here again, isn't it? The suffering servant become now the risen king. Now, it's a helpful place to start because it's a long chapter.

We won't actually have time to deal with everything in the chapter. So tonight, I just want us from that point to tug on three threads that show us why Joseph was raised up and how, therefore, we should respond to the one whom God has raised from the dead and set over us all in the place of supreme power, who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So firstly, then, we see in this chapter that he is raised up because God speaks through him. Now, I hope we're comfortable by this point with the weird dreams in Genesis that come thick and fast, especially since last week, we saw another pair of dreams, didn't we, come true?

The baker and the cupbearer have vivid and disturbing dreams on the same night, but the right man was on hand. And we finish the last chapter with God's green tick next to Joseph's words.

[6 : 09] Pharaoh restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he hanged the chief baker, verse 22, who, as Joseph had interpreted to them, God is speaking through Joseph.

And that news eventually reaches Pharaoh's ears. Now, you know those moments of horrible, dreadful realization where you realize and remember that you have done something terrible.

Maybe you've forgotten something. Maybe you've forgotten someone. The blood sort of drains out of you. Well, I think something like that must have happened on the morning when Pharaoh woke up feeling not quite himself.

Magicians are suddenly all over the palace. The whole place is in a frenzy. The chief cupbearer is coming down the corridor with Pharaoh's morning coffee. What's all this about?

Pharaoh has had some disturbing dreams, and he wants to know what they mean. And in an instant, it all comes flooding back.

[7 : 15] That man in prison two years ago. The way the cupbearer begins in verse 9, it could be a tactile way of bringing up the fact that he'd once upset Pharaoh.

You know, I was having a good old reflect on my offenses recently, Pharaoh. The word for offenses, though, is sins. And you have to wonder why I remember them today.

So another possibility is that he could be saying something like, I remember today that I have done something terrible. That is, by having forgotten Joseph in prison.

But the reason why he's remembered now is very important. He's remembered Joseph now, hasn't he? Because, well, he's the guy who can read the dreams. As he interpreted it to us, so it came about.

And today, of all days, is when Pharaoh needs somebody who can do precisely that. Now, we'll have lots of opportunity to say this through our series, but I don't think we can say it often enough.

[8 : 19] That God's providence is a mysterious and an almighty thing. Think about it. How much would Pharaoh have cared if the cupbearer had said two years ago, Pharaoh, there was a lovely guy in prison, and he really helped me out?

Do you think you could do me a favor and maybe spring him out of prison for me? I don't think Pharaoh would have cared at all if he had said that two years ago. Now, the cupbearer forgot to say that, but apparently, for such a time as this, because now, of course, on the day he does remember Joseph, well, he's the man Pharaoh desperately wants to see.

Pharaoh has a very keen interest, doesn't he, in getting Joseph out of the pit and before his throne. Now, that raises loads of questions for us, doesn't it?

Why didn't God give Pharaoh the dreams two years earlier, right? Or, is the cupbearer culpable?

Is he guilty for having forgotten Joseph if that was all kind of part of God's plan? We don't know how to answer some of those questions, do we?

[9 : 35] But this we know for sure, that God's providence, brothers and sisters, is big enough for all the things that shouldn't have happened, but did.

Those silly and ridiculous things in life that set us back, that is frustrating, isn't it, when those things happen, and we think that could so easily, so easily not have happened.

It would have been easier, actually, for the whole thing to have just gone ahead and life to have been smooth and easy and plain sailing. It's deeply frustrating, but brothers and sisters, we can take our frustration to the God who knows the end from the beginning and leave it in his almighty hands, because he has woven every single detail of our lives, even the setbacks, into his majestic

story of the world.

But back to the big point here, Joseph is raised up because someone remembered God speaks through him. Joseph's keenly aware of that. Verse 16, again, it's not in me, God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.

Again, verse 25, God has revealed to Pharaoh what he's about to do. Again, verse 28, God has shown Pharaoh what he's about to do. Joseph wants us to be in no doubt.

[10:57] It's God speaking to Pharaoh through him. By contrast, just notice the point Pharaoh makes in verse 24. He says there, I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.

And of course, he summoned, verse 8, all the magicians and all the wise men of Egypt. But where they have failed, Joseph and Joseph's God have succeeded.

Now, that's quite important, I think, for grasping what Genesis wants us to see here because, okay, pop quiz, who would you think of if I said, name someone in the Old Testament who was raised up by God to speak to Pharaoh and stood down the magicians?

If you have any familiarity with the Old Testament at all, I think we would all reach, wouldn't we, for Moses, right? Let my people go or God will send the plagues.

The magicians try to copy the plagues. After a few, they have to give up because their party tricks cannot compete with God and Moses. The reason that's significant is because, of course, who do the first hearers and readers of Genesis have standing right in front of them but Moses.

[12:27] Hearing this, would they not have seen something Joseph-like in Moses? Joseph spoke from God about the future of the land, seven years of feasting, seven years of fasting.

Moses spoke from God about the future of a promised land and the possibility of knowing God's blessing and God's curse.

For both Pharaoh and the Israelites, what is the difference between hunger and fullness, life and death? Well, it's listening to and believing God's word through his messenger.

Listen to Joseph, your future is secure. Listen to Moses, your future is secure. Listen to God's word through the one he has raised up from pit to power.

Your future is secure. Friends, do we have someone like that speaking to us today? If you only take one thing away from this sermon tonight, let it be this, that we must listen to and believe in the words of the risen Lord Jesus Christ when he tells us where to find God's blessing rather than his coming curse.

[13:55] Like Joseph, Jesus was raised from the pit because he spoke the truth from God. No lie or even a half-truth crossed his lips in all his life.

He did not make it up as he went along. He did not say what suited him on that day or what would please anyone to hear. And his resurrection is proof of that because if Jesus had done or said anything that didn't perfectly represent and reveal the Father, well, he would have left him in the grave.

But Jesus' resurrection is God's stamp of approval on everything that Jesus said and taught. This is my son, it says. Listen to him.

The world we live in, our lives, what we see on our screens, it often feels, doesn't it, like a sickening roller coaster which is hurtling us into an uncertain future and we can't get off.

Terrible, unpredictable, frustrating, saddening, confusing things happen and we don't know what it all means and we don't know where it's all going. But here is Jesus raised from pit to power, raised from grave to glory who tells us there is a world of blessing to come.

[15:24] There is an inheritance being kept for you in heaven that cannot perish, spoil, or fade. There is a room being prepared for you in the Father's house and a feast is being laid for the day of his return.

He has revealed to us from God where the world is going, where the roller coaster ends, a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Friends, believe in him.

Trust his words, live by them and whatever happens between now and then, we will be there with him and know God's protection and blessing and safety forever and ever.

Jesus, risen from the dead, says to us tonight, I've got the plan. Trust me to see it through. He tells us, for all the days until then, there is a throne in heaven that we cannot see.

And there's one seated on the throne who is too holy for us to look at. And there is a scroll, the great scroll of the history of the world that only he is uniquely worthy to open and unfold.

[16:40] And again, he says, I've got this. Trust him. Trust him with where the world is going. Hold on tight to his words. Live by them and know true security and blessing, not only in eternity, but tonight tomorrow and this week, next month, next year, and all the years that we can't see coming.

This is where we know to find God's blessing, isn't it? Through the risen Christ and his words. And so, like Pharaoh, the best response we can make to him tonight is, since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning, so wise as you are, you shall be over all my house.

All I have I put at your disposal. Lord, you be over all, I'll order my life at your command. Jesus, be Lord of my life, because you are Lord of all.

For he was raised up because God has spoken through him. Secondly, we also see Joseph was raised up because God is faithful to him.

Now, JT pointed out in our team time this week that this is actually the third pair of dreams that we've had. So, we've got Pharaoh's two dreams, the baker and the cupbearer's dreams on the same night, and of course, before that, Joseph's pair of dreams.

[18:12] The dreams are not randomly spread, are they, through the section? They're paired for a purpose, and perhaps you spotted why, as we read through, why Joseph says they are paired, verse 32, the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.

To see that, a pair of dreams, he says, so there's a certainty to the message, and there is a soonness to the message. That's something we didn't actually find out, isn't it, back in chapter 37, but it sheds light on Joseph's own dreams.

They too are doubled, and therefore, I take it, what they promised was also certain and soon. And what did God promise through those dreams?

Well, that Joseph would rule over his father, mother, and brothers who would bow down to him. And we said at the start of the series, that question would hang over this whole section.

Will Joseph take the throne and rule over God's family? Well, here we see, don't we, that that definitely begins to come true. Look again what Pharaoh says to Joseph in verse 40.

[19:32] You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.

there could be no higher promotion. This is not understand like growing up, I imagine, I haven't, in the United States as a young child and thinking one day I'll be president.

You could not become prime minister of Egypt just by working hard. Right? Moses actually has to be married into a noble family just to make it look legit.

He had no right to be put in that position. Joseph is now second only to the most powerful man in the world. This man who minutes ago, remember, wasn't fit to enter Pharaoh's presence without a shave and a clean set of clothes, is now robed in royal linen, decked with gold chains, and given Pharaoh's signet ring, etched with Pharaoh's signature, so that with a single stamp, he could approve everything in Pharaoh's name.

God promised that Joseph would be bowed down to, well now he's paraded through the streets of Egypt and everyone is told, bow the knee. To call it a meteoric rise would be an understatement, wouldn't it?

[20:59] In not even a day, perhaps only an hour or two, Joseph has gone from pit prisoner to most powerful person in the world but one.

How has that happened? Genesis wants us to see that it is because Joseph's God is rock-solid faithful.

God is faithful. Even Pharaoh can see something profoundly otherworldly, spiritual, is at work in this man. The spirit of God is in him, he says.

Which is quite something coming from a man who would have thought of himself as a God in that context. Previously, we've been told whatever his former masters gave Joseph to do, the Lord blessed and made it succeed.

So now on a far larger stage, as Joseph toured Egypt and set up grain stores and collected 20% of the crop each year, it was clearly the Lord who caused that to succeed in his hands.

[22:03] Genesis winks towards that, I think, when it says in verse 49, that 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.

Where before in this same book of Genesis have we heard that same phrase or that comparison before? Well, it's God's promise, isn't it, to Joseph's great grandfather, Abraham, and to his father, Jacob, I will surely do you good, and make your offspring or seed as the sand of the sea which cannot be numbered for multitude.

So it's kind of a play on words, isn't it? This is seed in a different sense, but a very firm nod towards God's promise to bless this family and through this family to bless the nations of the world.

There's hardly anything harder is there for governments to achieve than economic security and infrastructure projects, and yet under Joseph he delivers these two things well on time because the Lord was faithful to him.

And Joseph himself knows very well it's all down to God's faithfulness. Think about it, he has a new Egyptian name, Egyptian clothes, Egyptian wife, Egyptian job.

[23 : 26] He has basically become, in most senses, an Egyptian, and everything is going very, very, very well for him. Easy wouldn't it have been to let it all go to his head, this is who I am now.

But what does he call his two sons? Two sons in Egypt and he gives them two Hebrew names. Verse 51, Manasseh, for what?

God has made me forget all my hardship in my father's house, and Ephraim, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.

Who does Joseph credit with his rise to power? It is the faithful God who keeps his promises. He might as well have called his sons out of the pit and into the palace.

Now can't you just hear, I hope you've never heard, but perhaps in the back of our heads we can hear a load of charlatans at this point saying, therefore Christians, God wants you to live your best life.

[24 : 40] God's going to give you that promotion, he's going to put you in a position of influence, he'll give you success, normally followed by, and won't you please leave a big fat check on your way out. Brothers and sisters, God has not promised this to us, has he?

He has not promised us a life of worldly success, he has not promised you that promotion, he has not promised you a world of, a life of worldly fame, or importance, or influence.

So what do we do with this? What do we take away from it? Well, who do we know that he did promise would rise to power, and kept his faithful word?

We sang these words this morning, didn't we? I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced, my flesh also will dwell in hope, for you will not abandon my soul to death, or let your holy ones see corruption.

Preaching from that psalm in Acts 2, Peter, the apostle, says that David, who wrote it, for saw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to death, nor did his flesh see corruption.

[26 : 00] This Jesus, God raised up, and of this we are all witnesses. Or remember what the angel said at the empty tomb, why do you seek the living among the dead?

He is not here, but is risen. Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and on the third day rise. And they remembered his words. Promise made, the Christ will rise again, promise kept, he is risen. Why?

Because God is faithful to raise up those whom he promises to raise. friends, we wait long this evening for a life like we read about Joseph.

Couldn't God give me a life of meteoric fame, even a life of marginal success? A little bit of help with my exam, or a little word in the ear of my boss for that promotion, could he not give me that?

[27 : 11] If that's us, remember that this, this chapter has been preceded by 13 years of constant suffering. If you're in Christ, God has promised you a kingly life when Christ comes again, and we are raised to live and reign forever with him.

But brothers and sisters, dear friends, we are not there yet. We're not there yet. In one sense, we could say, couldn't we, that we are still in the pit.

Who are we in this chapter? Well, we are the soon-to-be hungry masses, or next time, we're the desperate brothers pleading for help. Paul says we groan in this life, in our suffering, under the curse in a fallen world.

But what Joseph's rise to power, what Christ's resurrection does assure us of, though, is that the same faithful God who raised Joseph, and the same faithful God who raised Jesus, is the same faithful God who will raise us, if we are in the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, our rising to glory is both certain, and, says Jesus, it is soon. He who testifies to these things says, I am coming soon.

[28 : 41] And he is faithful to keep that promise. Brothers and sisters, you do know, don't you, you do know, that as hard as it is for you to imagine now, that whatever you go through in this world, that you will be able to stand on that future day of his return, and look back at everything that you have gone through and say, God has made me forget all my hardship.

You do know, don't you, that you will look around in a renewed world where there is no more pain or suffering or death anymore or curse, and be able to say, God has made me fruitful in the land where I was once afflicted.

That is his promise to us. Friends, it will be done. God has said it. Look at Christ, risen and reigning now, and see your future hope confirmed.

He was raised up because God was faithful, and he still is. And our third and final point tonight, Joseph was raised up because God will save through him.

We focus rightly, I think, on the blessing that God brought through Joseph, but we miss, I think, the significance of that if we don't see it in the context of God's impending curse.

[30 : 04] Back in Genesis chapter 3, straight after sin entered the world, God said to Adam in the garden, because you've listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it will bring forth for you. You shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread. Till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

In other words, because of sin, your work will no longer reliably produce plenty. There will be scarcity, not feast, but famine.

And God's people knew that as they read this. Moses had said to them in Deuteronomy 28, the Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all you undertake to do until you're destroyed and perish quickly on account of your evil deeds because you've forsaken me.

[31 : 11] The heavens over your head will be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. It will be that hard to raise a crop, he says, because of your rebellion against your creator.

So when Pharaoh dreams of a coming famine, we, I think, with the first readers of this book, are supposed to think this is a symptom of life in our fallen world.

This is the curse for sin clamping its jaws down on fallen humanity. This is because of our sin. But what has God put in place?

Not only a prophet to preach it, but a savior to save from it. With that big context in mind, just read with me from verse 54 to the end of the chapter, and just let the significance of these words settle on our hearts.

There was famine in all 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.

[32 : 23] What he says to you, do. So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened up 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. At this point in the story, if we didn't know where it was all going, would we not be tempted to think, this is the savior of the world?

Wouldn't we almost be tempted to wonder, is he the one, the serpent crusher, the curse lifter to save us from sin? Now we know, not quite do we, he is not the one.

But he points us ever so clearly to the one who is. Just think of it for a moment, think of it. In a world that is hungry and empty, crying out for wholeness and fullness and life, didn't he just this morning feed us bread?

Bread that spoke of a body broken for our wholeness. And wine poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins.

[33 : 43] Did we not gather to remember the one who has lifted God's curse from us for eternity by dying on the cross and rising again from the dead? And so the message, as we finish, friends, is the message that Pharaoh sends the world.

The hungry people came to him and he said, go to Joseph. I cannot help you. I cannot save you, but go to him. And as we close, like one beggar telling other beggars where to find bread, let me tell you, friends, go to Jesus.

Go to Jesus. I cannot help you. I cannot save you. But here is one who can. If your heart is hungry and crying out for fullness, go to Jesus.

If you are lost and confused in a broken world, go to Jesus. If you are in the grip of fear and anxiety over an uncertain future, go to Jesus.

If you are trapped and struggling in sin, go to Jesus. If you are living in the fear of death, go to Jesus. If you know that you are under God's judgment and curse, go to Jesus.

[35 : 02] And he will save you because that is why God raised him up. Whoever you are tonight, go to Jesus.

And you can know the blessing of God through him, the savior of the world. Before we pray, I just want to read some words for you.

I don't think we sing this hymn. But as I was reflecting in the week, I think it so beautifully captures where this chapter leads us as a fallen world flocks to God's savior.

So hear these words and then we'll close in prayer. Come ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore.

Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love and power. Come ye weary, heavy laden, lost and ruined by the fall.

[36 : 04] If you wait until you're better, you will never come at all. See the incarnate God ascended, pleads the merit of his blood. Venture on him, venture only.

Let no other trust intrude. I will arise and go to Jesus. He will embrace me in his arms, in the arms of my dear savior.

Oh, there are 10,000 charms. Let's come to him as we pray together. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, you truly are the savior of the world.

You are God with us, entered into our suffering and pain to save us from our sins. And Lord, we draw near to you now in faith and by your Holy Spirit, seeking that salvation which you hold out so freely.

Lord, we pray that you would heal our broken hearts, that you would be our certainty in times of confusion, that you'd be our security in times of anxiety.

[37 : 14] Father, we pray that we would know peace with you through him in our times where we struggle deeply with guilt. Father, we pray for friends here tonight and those whom we know who as yet have not come to Jesus for that fullness and wholeness and eternal life which is in him.

And by your spirit, we pray, grant that faith that they too may draw near and know your goodness forever and ever in him. This we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.