

## Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, March 25, 1973

### Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (45:40)

The subject, as you know, is the character of Joseph. While we're turning to the 39th chapter of Genesis, may I say that I believe that the narrative, the history of Joseph is, in its broad outlines, a type of the Lord's dealings with the nation of Israel. Joseph is sent to his brethren, and they just conspire to kill him, but that is averted, and he is sold into slavery. And then for some 13 years, or rather 22 years, nothing is heard of Joseph from his brethren or his father. But in the meantime, Joseph has been elevated to the second-highest place in the kingdom of Egypt.

And that, I believe, is a picture of the Lord's present service to his Gentile people, although it includes Jews; at the first it was practically all Jewish people, but in the 1900 years that have elapsed the gospel has gone out to the Gentiles and God is now choosing a bride for His Son. But a time coming, after the Lord comes for his Gentile bride, that he begins to take up with the nation of Israel, those who rejected him at the first. And this, in a short summary, is the story of the life of Joseph.

Joseph began with a rejection by his brethren, and if the first plan had gone through, he would have died. In fact, he was left in a pit while they broke bread, while they listened to his cries and pleas, and refused him. Then you know the choice was to sell him to the slave traders. The slave traders in turn sold him to an Egyptian of high rank, Captain of the Guard in Egypt, and in that way you can see the Lord's hand in preserving Joseph, and getting him into high quarters. However, though the Lord was with him, and prospered him, he came to severe temptation, and constant temptation, and in resisting it he was finally falsely accused and thrown into prison.

But again it says that the Lord was with him, and prospered him, and then we find the rest of the story. But I'd like to just read a few verses in Genesis 39 which confirm what I've been saying, and then I'd like to read two other passages, that give the explanation, what spiritual prosperity is, how it's achieved, and that would be the lesson for us. In Genesis 39, verses 2, 3 and 4, we read that "the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian." (Remember now he is a slave here, he is not a free man.) "but his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight," (that is, he found favor in his sight) "and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand."

Then in the 21st verse of the same chapter we read, after Joseph was thrown into prison, having resisted the temptation that I referred to, he is said then, that "the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper." Notice in both of these passages the thought is that Joseph was still a prisoner. Though he was a slave, the Lord was with him, and gave him favor, gave him mercy, and things prospered.

Now the passages that allude to the matter of prosperity I think are two in the Old Testament, and probably we have some in the New. The first one is in the book of Psalms, and to save time, just let me

read them. I'm sure you know them. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." (Now here is the verse that speaks of the prosperity of such a man:) "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." [Psalms 1:1-3]

The second passage that alludes to this is the one in Joshua. Joshua, immediately after Moses being taken home to Glory, and having the burden of the nation of Israel, the leadership of it, confided (?) to his care, this is the principle that is given to him. This will produce success. "This book of the law" (now remember, the law was just the five books of Moses, from Genesis to Deuteronomy) "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." [Joshua 1:8]

I believe that, though Joseph did not have any Law, that's referred to in these passages, the Law of the Lord, he had the Lord Himself. And in those days, you remember how God appeared to Abraham, personally. We don't know just in what form. He also appeared in visions; He appeared in dreams. And in the time of Joseph, for Joseph, I don't believe ever had an experience like his father Jacob, where Jacob saw the angel's ladder ascending and descending from Heaven, or when he wrestled with the Angel who was the Lord himself, Joseph had another way of communication with the Lord, and that was through dreams, at least partly so. And these dreams were the reason that he, so to speak, got into trouble with his brethren.

He interpreted one of these dreams to them one day, and said that his sheaf was standing up in the field, and their sheaves, all their, the other eleven, ten rather, the ten sheaves, all made obeisance to him. On another occasion he had a dream where the sun, the moon, and the stars bowed down to him, and his brethren could not take it. They hated him for this. I'm sure that Joseph did not say this in any superior sense, or with the idea that he was better than they, but his father had made the big mistake, I believe, of showing his love for this eleventh son, the last one before Benjamin, Benjamin not then born, but he showed his extreme favoritism for this late son. I believe, from figures that we can take from the number of years mentioned in the book of Genesis that Jacob was 91 years old when Joseph was born. And so, when Joseph was 17, a young lad, and was sent to visit his brethren and seek their welfare, Jacob was already 108, and probably thinking that he would not live much longer. He lived quite a number of years later, as we shall see, and he is part of this wonderful story of the life of Joseph.

Well Joseph becomes a prisoner. First he's cast aside by his brethren, his coat of many colors, that his father had given him as a token of his love and favor, that's stripped from Joseph and he's left in the pit to die. Well, the brethren cannot agree upon his death; Ruben, the oldest son, who is doubtless the responsible one of the brothers, seeks to save his brother. But while he is away, they take him out of this pit and sell him to slave traders, who in turn sell Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of the guard of the king of Egypt, the pharaoh of Egypt.

And one can imagine the sorrow, the suffering, the anguish of Joseph under those circumstances. Averting death, he becomes a slave. That probably would, to him, mean that that would be the end of his connection with the family, he would never see his father again. The wonderful thing of the life of

Joseph is how he brings God into every circumstance. And every time he has the chance to speak, he brings the name of God into it, in a beautiful way, in showing that he is in communication with God, that he gives God the glory, that he takes no credit to himself.

Now these events that are so important in his life, that have such a typical meaning, they last for a great number of years. Just imagine being in a prison, unjustly there, having done nothing to warrant it, and a slave besides, at the beck and call of this prison keeper. He exists there, under such circumstances, for some 13 years. Eleven years of those 13 go by, and nothing seems to happen. He's just eking out an existence from day to day.

In the eleventh year of his incarceration he has a visit, or rather something happens to the butler, and I take it this would be the equivalent, not of the present day butler but of the cup-bearer, such as Nehemiah was, the wine taster for the Pharaoh. And the butler and the baker of Pharaoh have both offended him and are thrown into this very prison where Joseph is. Joseph notices their sad appearance and asks the reason. He is told that both of them have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And I'm sure by this time Joseph has been in communication with God, and received many dreams, and known the interpretation of them. And the interpretation of the butler's dream is that within three days his place will be restored to him, he will have his situation and his position restored to him and he will be again in favor with Pharaoh.

The baker hearing this, says that he has a dream also. He tells it to Joseph, and Joseph interprets it and says, I should have said this at the first, instead of interpreting it at first, he says, "tell me the dream, does not interpretation belong to God." You see he takes no credit for being an interpreter of dreams. He says that God probably inspired these dreams, and God is the only one that can give the answer. But through his servant he supplies the answer, and the answer to the baker was that within three days he would be hanged.

And this took place; both interpretations were right, and both took place within three days. In the meantime, Joseph had asked the butler, when he was restored to his office, not to forget him. We know the sad answer to that: the butler did exactly that, he forgot Joseph. "Yet did not the butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." [Genesis 40:23] Just think what a crushing disappointment, what a blow that must have been to Joseph, thinking that every day now, every day I'll be released from this, I'll be restored, I'll get out of this slavery, and God can use me again. For two years, he languishes in prison. And I'm sure that was God's plan for Joseph. The whole story of Joseph of course is suffering, suffering, suffering, suffering. Just as our Lord said to his disciples on the road to Emmaus, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered," [Luke 24:26] not just once, many times. Just think, his life here on earth, was a constant life of suffering. What was his life before that, in the Glory? Was it anything more than suffering? It says in Isaiah 63 that in all their sufferings, and all their afflictions, that is, the people of Israel, the nation of Israel, the godly remnant, "in all their afflictions he was afflicted. and the angel of his presence saved them. in his love and in his mercy he redeemed them; and carried them all the days of old." [Isaiah 63:9]

Just think how wonderful that is. Here is the suffering Savior, the one who came from earth, sent by his father, to save his brethren, instead he's crucified, but he enters into his glory. What a wonderful statement, isn't it. "Ought not the Christ to have suffered, and enter into His glory."

Well, such was the case with Joseph. After 13 years, Pharaoh has the dream that's repeated. You remember, out of the river Nile comes the seven well-favored, well-fleshed kine, very beautiful specimens. But they're followed immediately by seven ill-favored, scrawny, bad-looking kine, or cows, and these devour the first set of seven. When they're finished devouring them, there is no difference in their appearance, they're just as scrawny as they were before. Pharaoh tells this to Joseph.

And then he tells, it's repeated in another way. Seven ears of corn, beautiful specimens, they arise out of the earth, and right after them come seven, treated, it says I believe, by the east wind. And the east wind would be the kind that destroys, that would spoil the grain. Well, these devour the seven good ears of corn. And Joseph says, and now I'll ask you to turn to the 41st chapter of Genesis, two chapters beyond where we were before. And you read in the 25th verse, "Joseph said to Pharaoh, This dream of Pharaoh is one: God has shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do." And then he tells about the seven ears, and the seven bad ears, seven good and seven bad, that these are seven years, seven good years of plenty, to be followed by seven years of famine.

And then in the 28th verse, notice how Joseph confirms this. He says, "This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth to Pharaoh. It's not a thing I'm telling you what's going to happen; God is showing you this. This is a divine work, God is revealing something to you that no other one but He can do, and He's choosing to do it through me. He takes no credit to himself. Then in the 32nd verse, then Joseph says "And for that the dream was doubled to Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

Here Joseph, so to speak, goes out on a limb, says that God is not only going to do this, but He's going to do it immediately. He's beginning to do this right away. But he doesn't stop there. This is a wonderful thing. So much of what one reads in the papers today, or the magazines, they can find fault, lay the blame, curse the wrongdoer, the evildoer, but they very rarely give you an idea of what should be done. This is what Joseph did; divinely guided, I believe, he gives the remedy. Here's the situation: seven years of plenty, seven of famine. The famine is going to destroy all that happened in the seven good years. What is to become of man at the end of those seven evil years?

Then he gives God's plan for the restoration of the world. Notice how he tells not Pharaoh what to do, but suggests it, gives this as his suggestion, and says that if Pharaoh in the seven years of plenty will put away one fifth of all the grain, of all the produce, and put it in treasure cities, pile it up, then the situation in the seven ill-favored, seven lean years, will be overcome, and the world will be saved.

And amazingly enough, Pharaoh accepts this, and says "can we find any other person in the world that's better fitted to handle the situation than this man Joseph." And he speaks of the spirit of God being in him. I'm sure Pharaoh was so impressed with this man, just out of a dungeon, had to shave himself and make himself presentable to the king, yet he speaks with final, with Divine authority. He credits God with everything he says, and puts it up to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh suggests that this be done. He makes Joseph the second in the Kingdom, no one greater in the kingdom than thou, and gives him the ring, the ring of authority, and the clothes, and the chariot, and gives him a name. And this is something, this name is remarkable, because the meaning of the name is not given, I don't think it's given even in the references in all the Bibles I've seen, except one, Mr. Darby's bible, and he was a great scholar. He says that this name Zaphnathpaaneah has two meanings. In the Hebrew, it's revealer of secrets, and in the Egyptian it's savior of the world.

And isn't that what Christ is to us. What a remarkable name. Here's a man certainly favorable to Joseph, but perhaps knowing nothing of spiritual things; he's led to give Joseph this wonderful name. What our Lord is, the revealer of secrets. He's revealed in his life here on earth, in those three and a half years, he's revealed the heart of God. All the secrets of the heart of God are made manifest through him, and through his life. And of course he is the savior of the world. No one is saved without him, just as no one else has ever had any light without him. So they've never had any divine light without him, and divine light is the secret of salvation, isn't it. It's God's light made ours. We get eternal life, the very life of God himself.

And so Joseph receives, in addition to all these great things, tokens of the favor of Pharaoh, he receives a wife, and in the course of time has two sons. And notice how he brings God into that situation, too in verses 51 and 52, Joseph calls the name of the first born Manasseh "For God, [said he], hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." And verse 52 says "And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." Manasseh means forgetting, and this brings to mind that beautiful verse in Philippeans 2, or 3, "forgetting the things that are behind, looking forward to the things that are before, we press forth toward the mark for the calling on high" [Philippeans 3:13] not the high calling, the calling is high of course, but our calling is to be on high with Christ Jesus. And Ephraim means fruitful, "God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

I'm sure Joseph never forgot, in all the glory he achieved, from the prison to the palace, in that one fast step, he never forgot the long period of years and years that preceded this.

And then we must hurry on to the next part of Joseph's life, for nine more years Joseph goes on, as the dispenser of this wonderful, first of all a collector of all the food, and then as the seven years are over and the eighth year, the year of the beginning of famine comes, all the world comes to Egypt to be fed. And Joseph is the one that dispenses it. Well in the second year of this seven years of famine, the famine is so severe in the land of Canaan, that Jacob asks his sons to go down to Egypt to buy some food. You remember the story; I don't know that I can give it all in this time, but it's a marvelous story, and I believe Joseph was divinely guided to what to do with his brethren, to bring them gradually, gradually to the point where they would recognize the wrong they had done, the terrible injustice, the terrible murder in their hearts. And murder in those days was more or less a common thing. You remember that Levi and Simeon, two of the eldest brothers of Joseph, I think they were the second and third to be born, they had killed off a whole city of men that had bespoiled their sister, in revenge for it. So these were men who know what taking life was.

And Joseph was, I believe divinely guided. The same God that enabled him to interpret the dreams, to stand the pressure that he endured, the threat to his life, the throwing into slavery, and then to be unjustly charged, to be a prisoner for eleven years, and then two years more, all of this was only endured by the help of God, and that is why I believe that God is so constantly in his thoughts, and in his words.

In the 45th chapter we have the beginning of the movement of Joseph's brothers, through Jacob, into Egypt. And this was a divine work. I believe this whole famine, this plenty and the famine that followed, was all a part of God's plan to bring first Joseph, and then Jacob, and his brethren back into Egypt. Because in the 15th of Genesis you'll remember the Lord had spoken to Abraham, that he was

going to bring the nation, that was still to be born, remember Abraham had no son at this time, but he tells Abraham that he will be the father of a nation, and that nation will spend some 430 years in Egypt. And I believe that 430th year began with the first time that Abraham went into Egypt to escape famine in Canaan. And because it says in Exodus 12, that on the very day that that 430th year ended, that was the day that the nation of Israel marched out of Egypt. There's never any scripture like that, in the whole book of the scripture that mentions it so specifically that on the very day that the 430th full year ended, Israel went out of Egypt, marched out of Egypt a free nation.

So God used this great event, this series of events, just as he used the census of the nation of Israel in the time of Caesar Augustus, so that every Israelite went to his home city to be counted. That was the way the Lord Jesus Christ came to be born in Bethlehem; otherwise he might have been born in some other city. But you see, Micah, 700 years before, had prophesied through the Spirit of God that "the Lord would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, of Judah, and that out of that city would come the One who was to be the ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," [Micah 5:2] showing that none but a divine person could answer to that prophecy.

And so we have this tremendous series of events, that are aimed to bring Israel back into Egypt, not as slaves although they became that later, but here as free men, as honored men, for Joseph not only was honored but all his brethren and his father, and all that house. And that lasted for, I guess some hundred years after Joseph's death. And then when Moses was born, things had changed. There was a new dynasty in Egypt; the shepherd kings were gone, and as the Israelites multiplied exceedingly, the Egyptians made them slaves.

Well in the 45th chapter, Jacob's sons, Joseph's brothers come into Egypt, and we have the first of four statements by Joseph. Rather I should have said that the 45th chapter to which I'm referring now gives us the end of the dealings of Joseph with his brethren. They made two trips; in the first one, they are accused of being spies, and Joseph demands that one of them be kept, so that they'll be sure to come back. Simeon is put into prison, kept in captivity, but when the food is used up, then Joseph's brethren have come again. And they had been told that they should bring their younger brother, because Joseph had asked about him, Benjamin, meaning the son of my right hand. And he was now the favorite of Jacob. And you'll remember how Judah pleads with Joseph, not knowing that it was Joseph; Joseph knows who they are, just as the Lord knows his brethren now but they don't know him, and Judah pleads with Joseph to spare Benjamin, not to let him have to come, but Joseph is so touched by that plea, that he weeps and makes himself known, says "I am Joseph."

And then the picture changes tremendously; it says that the brothers are troubled at his presence. But that's just the worst word that could be used there, it's terrified at his presence, for they were in his power now. They were captives, he had already accused them of being spies, and their money was returned in the sacks, they were also accused of being thieves, although they disclaimed it and of course they were right. But the dealings of Joseph with them is really remarkable. you wonder how he could do these things, and how they wouldn't tumble to it, so to speak, that here's somebody that knows us through and through. Because when he ate and drank with them, he placed these brothers in their right order, from Reuben down to the very last one, and Benjamin, his youngest brother, it says that he gave him five times as much as any of them.

So if they had any anything but the most hardened consciences, they should have known, that here is somebody that knows us. that knows our number, and they had already had some inkling of their guilt. They were reminded of Joseph's pleas and cries when he was in the pit. And Joseph knew this, Joseph heard this, because he could understand them, whereas he spoke to them in Egyptian, through an interpreter. Well just notice when he reveals himself to them "I am Joseph" what wonderful words, and I think nothing better than amazing grace would be a comment for this, just notice in 45:5, "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life."

What a wonderful statement. Nothing of the injustice that he'd suffered, what that selling him into slavery had led him to, just one disaster after another, "God sent me before you to preserve life." Notice in the 7th verse "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." How God can say that about each one of us.

God sent his son to be the savior of the world. Well if he hasn't been the savior of the world he has at least been a savior to a great many. Multitudes will acclaim him in the day to come. Heaven will ring with the wonderful statement to him that loved us, and washed us from our sin in his own blood. Verse 8: "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen," and so on.

What a remarkable series of statements, not only that he sent Joseph to preserve life, but sent him before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. Takes no credit for it himself, this was all God's plan and God's work. And how that should be a lesson to us, shouldn't it. Not to think of ourselves, but to seek to be in God's hands. a means of blessing to others, to take no credit for that, because as we read before, in the prison, whatever was done, Joseph was the doer of it. And the Lord Jesus, is not that a perfect picture of Him in this scene. Whatever was done, that was done for God, he was the doer of it. He was God's instrument, God's messenger, here in this scene.

And so the family of Joseph, of Jacob, and all his sons, and grandsons, I think 70 or 75, they come into Egypt. And they are given the best part of the land, Joseph takes wonderful care of them. And I believe in the 17 years that elapsed between the time that Jacob the father and his family came into Egypt and settled there, and multiplied, it was 17 years of wonderful blessing.

But that's not the whole story. We have to go to the 50th chapter, now, to see what takes place, and how despite all this grace, all the blessings that are showered upon the nation, come that small number of people, the blessings that are theirs, the protection, the prosperity, the success, all of this is largely initiated by their fear. When Jacob their father dies, they have the fear that now Joseph will take revenge on them. How little they'd understood the character of Joseph; it's said that it made him weep.

And if there's one thing that, I'm sure, hurts the heart of God, it's to be misunderstood. For all the grace and love that He's lavished upon his people, to have them so careless, to have them so unappreciative, so lacking in gratitude, so little able to speak of Him, to think of him, that must be really painful to the heart of God. It certainly was to Joseph. He wept when they said, and they bring in a lie to cover this up, notice how it says "when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said Joseph will

peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did to him. And they sent a messenger to Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they said this to him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. [Genesis 50:15-18]

This was the very thing that they had hated Joseph for, that they would have to bow down to him, do obeisance, own his superiority, though he never took that place. But they imagined it. I can imagine older brethren, probably as much as 15 to 20 years older than the youngest son, Joseph, To think that they would have to kowtow to him, that they would have to bow before him, why that was anathema to them. That was why, they bring out all the hatred. But you see that's one of the main lessons in the book of Genesis. It began with Isaac and Ismael; it continued with Jacob and Esau; it continued with Manassah and Ephraim; in fact that was a lesson that even Joseph never learned, because when Jacob wittingly guided his hands and put his right hand on the hand of Ephraim, and not Manassah, Joseph was displeased, and tried to have that reversed, but Jacob said not so, the elder shall serve the younger.

You see in the spiritual sense that means that what is natural, must bow, take place, before the spiritual. The spiritual, the second, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." [John 3:6] The flesh comes first, the spirit second, the second must replace the first.

Well what is Joseph's answer to them. "Joseph said unto them Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly to them."

You see the character of Joseph has not changed. He is the same, right from the beginning. What a wonderful character he is. I think that the mistake that he made about his two sons, and the blessing that Jacob gave them is a minor one, compared to the wonderful grace and mercy, the kindness, the love, the consistency of all of this, that he didn't, as we often do, we flare up in anger. We say things that we wish we'd never said, things that are hard to take back: pride prevents that. But this man was consistently good; I think he had the mind of God, he put himself in the lowest place. ...

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