

“Not Forgotten”
Genesis 39-41
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My name is Joseph benJocov.

I was just 30 years of age and I was being appointed Prime Minister of the most powerful nation on earth.

I was second in power only to the King, the Pharaoh he was called.

It's not like being Vice-President of the United States – that wouldn't capture the importance of the position to which I had just been named.

It would be maybe more like being appointed Secretary of Defense after Hitler overran Europe and Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

But even that doesn't capture it, for I had just been given full authority over the country – my word was law.

The pageantry surrounding the appointment was almost like a coronation ceremony.

Ten of thousands of people were assembled in the palace courtyard and beyond– the crowd extended as far as you could see.

A great pedestal had been erected for the event – gold chairs for the Pharaoh and his queen, enormous silk banners flying in the breeze, court officials, musicians, military leaders and hundreds of lesser notables were assembled in rows on either side of the dais.

With swelling music, I was escorted to the throne itself and stood before the Pharaoh.

Silence fell over the crowd as the King stood.

First he took his signet ring – the symbol by which anyone would recognize the king's authority – and he placed it on my finger.

Secondly, he took a full-length robe of the finest and most beautiful linen and put it over my shoulders – it was the cloak of royalty.

He next, took a heavy gold chain from a spectacular box and put the gold around my neck.

I was awestruck.

Lastly the Pharaoh commanded that the royal chariot be brought to the base of the platform and I was escorted to it.

And as the carriage was driven through the crowd, appointed men ran before me shouting to the crowd to make way, to bow down.

A reporter much later would say that the most fun about being part of a presidential motorcade is driving down the San Diego Freeway in Los Angeles during rush hour with all the traffic diverted so you can sail through unimpeded.

As my chariot moved forward the crowds separated like the Red Sea – and the people bowed and applauded me!

What an experience!

Pretty heady stuff for a 30-year-old – pretty heady stuff for anyone at any age.

As I looked down at one point in the ride, the light glinted off the gold chain around my neck and I couldn't help but think of the difference between **this** chain and the one I wore as I came into this country just 13 years earlier.

You imagine me now, riding through the applauding crowds, and you think what a charmed life – obviously born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

For your sake and to honor my God I want to tell you something of what those intervening years were like.

Only God kept me from a deep, deep bitterness at what life had done to me during those 13 years.

And right up front I tell you that the most significant outcome of my story is not the power and applauding crowds but what God did in my soul.

I have witnessed the unmistakable and unshakable faithfulness of God.

I was 17 and frankly full of myself.

I'd had dreams about my destiny.

I led a fairly sheltered and pampered life – the clear favorite of my father.

In fact, my father's favoritism, my arrogance and my brother's jealousy combined to create a pretty volatile situation.

The last time I saw my family is when my brothers sold me to some slave traders.

I couldn't believe it was happening.

My own brothers took money and walked away as I was being chained to a string of other slaves tied behind camels.

I had been stripped to nothing but a pair of shorts and for the next two weeks I walked, stumbled, and was half dragged for three hundred miles.

They weren't trying to kill us because we were property.

But with a chain around my neck I endured the hot days and cold nights of the Sinai desert grieving the loss of my father and the hatred of my brothers.

And I was almost crippled with fear for what the future held.

I prayed like I had never prayed before.

I wound up at an auction in Egypt, and I was for sale.

Can this really be happening?

I was destined for greatness and here I am a thing being sold.

Someone wrote:

"Each of us begins life so buoyantly and hopefully. When young, we attempt the solution of the strange problems of existence, we fear nothing, anticipate no ill. The minstrel, Hope, keys her chords to the loftiest strains of exultation. The sun shines; the blue wavelets break in music around the boat; the sails swell gently; Love and Beauty hold the rudder; and though stories of the wreckage of the treacherous sea are freely told, there is no kind of fear that such experiences should ever overtake us. But presently disappointment, sorrow, disaster overcloud the sky and blot out the sunny prospect; and the

young mariner wakes as from a dream, ‘Can this be I, who imagined that I should never see ill?’” Meyer 46

It is almost unimaginable what it’s like to be sold as a slave.

Stripped naked, pushed and poked, made to turn around so all sides of you could be seen, and treated like some horse about to be purchased and not understanding a word of the foreign language being spoken.

I was young and strong and so a rather prosperous looking man with a pretty wife bought me to be a house slave. I was still in shock – in my fear I kept crying out for God!

It wasn’t long before I realized that God had not left me – he was with me.

My former arrogant manner and quick tongue had never endeared me to people, least of all to my brothers and father, and yet here my owner whose name was Potiphar quickly liked me – God gave me favor with him.

I had to make a choice between pouting over my lost past or taking advantage of the present situation.

With God’s help I put myself into my tasks as a slave.

Within a couple of years Potiphar put me in charge of his whole house including his money and investments.

And again with God’s help everything I tried was successful – Potiphar was ecstatic and I was actually enjoying my work.

That’s when the unimaginable happened again.

The boss’s wife had been making a nuisance of herself by flirting with me for months but she finally came on strong and almost commanded me to sleep with her.

Hey, it wasn’t like I was some skilled employee who could just quit and get another job.

I was a slave and she held my future in her hands.

Submitting to her was risky but nothing compared to risk of rejecting her.

I didn't know how God was going to get me out of this but I told her I couldn't do it both because of my commitment to her husband and my commitment to God.

As much I tried to avoid her it was not long after that, that she grabbed me one day and again made her demand.

I ran but not before she caught hold of my coat and it ripped off me into her hand.

I didn't know what was going to happen – but I was afraid!

Well that lying little aspiring adultress told the other slaves and then her husband that I had tried to rape her.

She was clever, she was.

There were no witnesses except the two of us and I was defenseless.

When Potiphar heard he was so angry I assumed he would kill me, on the spot.

I still don't know why he didn't but instead he threw me into a special prison.

When I say "special" I don't mean good, I mean especially bad.

I know any prison is bad but there were no workout facilities, entertainment centers or libraries.

Our prisons were caves with very little light or air and conditions under which you wouldn't keep animals.

If I was "low" when I was a slave following those camels into Egypt, believe me I was "lower" in that prison.

At least as a slave I had some value – now I was truly nothing, just waiting for death either sooner at the hand of Potiphar or later from the diseases of this rotting hole I was in.

I had every reason to assume my life was over.

Along with my anger at Potiphar's wife, I fought against thoughts of anger toward God.

I did wonder where he was.

One year passed in that place and then two.

I couldn't help but wonder about the value of virtue.

I had been faithful in my daily work, I pursued excellence in the little things, I had the right attitude, I resisted great temptation, I was a good man and I expected God to take care of me, even to reward me for my righteousness.

But instead, I was sentenced to die.

Another year passed and then five more.

Have you ever been there?

You did everything as right as you could and for it you got nothing or worse?

You were cheated, swindled, deceived, betrayed and even God did nothing about it – not then and seemingly not ever?

But God WAS with me, even in that prison.

In my darkest moments, when hope dimmed to almost nothing, God showed me his kindness.

Through circumstances only God could manipulate, the prison warden took a liking to me and eventually put me in charge of everything.

And again by God's grace everything I did turned out exactly right.

Hey, I'd like to credit that to my hard work and clever mind but even I couldn't be than lucky – it was God, and I knew it.

I had been in prison for several years, still having no idea of my fate when a couple of the Pharaoh's top people were thrown into the same prison.

In my "favored" status as the chief prisoner, I was put in charge of them and one day, a couple of years later, I noticed they were especially distraught one morning.

They said they had both dreamed during the night and they didn't know what the dreams meant.

I knew God was the only one who could make sense of their dreams and so I offered to interpret for them.

The first man's dream indicated that in three days he would be restored to his position in the Pharaoh's administration.

When I realized what this could mean for me, I asked him to remember me when he got out and be kind to me as I had been to him.

The other guy's dream wasn't as good.

But in three days THEY were released.

One of them was executed but the other one WAS reinstated as an official in the administration.

I was so excited.

I knew that my days in this dungeon were numbered.

Every time someone appeared in the prison, I expected it to be with instructions for my release.

I could hardly sleep because I didn't want to miss the news when it came.

I waited for a week with my excitement growing.

But as week two came to an end and then week four, I began to wonder what had happened.

After three months I began to despair.

And at the end of six months I knew all hope was lost.

I had been forgotten.

I became intensely angry!

After all I had done for that official, how could he forget me?
That ungrateful wretch!

And again I wondered about God.

As I said, six months passed then a year and two years and nothing changed.

I was forgotten.

Did God even know or care that I existed?

Have you ever wondered that?

There are 6+ billion people in the world – and we are just like most of them – we are born, work, play, suffer, and die.

That has been going on for over 5000.

What makes you and I think that we are unique amidst the over 10 billion who have ever lived?

Imagine the number of people living in and around New York City and now imagine 1000 of those and imagine you are one of those 10 billion people and you are not Rudy Guliani or Hillary Clinton – you are just the average “Joe Schmo”, clerk or bus driver or lawyer or homemaker or prisoner.

Does God even know you exist? Does he care?

It is sad to be disappointed but even hope disappears when we are certain we are forgotten – forgotten by others and ultimately forgotten by God.

But I was not forgotten – God was in it.

For those two years especially I struggled but I also remembered I had seen God’s hand work over and over again in my life.

I had been sold into slavery by my brothers but by God’s grace I found favor in my owner’s house.

I had been unjustly imprisoned but by God’s grace I found favor with the prison warden.

I had been forgotten, possibly the hardest trial of all, but my God had been faithful and I knew he was the same God.

Again I grew to understand that my faith was not in the official who had been released, my faith was in God.

With the Psalmist who wrote later, I could say, Psalm 62:5-6 “Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from (God). He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.”

I had finally learned through 17 years that “the night is the time to see the stars.” (Meyer 49)

Like Isaiah later, I struggled "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." But I too came to the same conclusion:

" Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though **she** may forget, **I will not forget you!** See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands..." Isaiah 49:14-16

It was two full years later but the Pharaoh had two dreams.

And this reminded the earlier released official of me and my interpretation of his dream.

I was summoned from my prison and with God's help I interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams and I also with God's wisdom made a recommendation to him about what to do when the dreams came to pass.

So impressed was the Pharaoh and so influenced by God that I stand before you today as the Prime Minister of Egypt.

I know it is tempting to be enamored of the story of how a lowly Hebrew boy makes good.

I know that the pomp and power of my new position could lead me and you to glory in the exalted position.

But I must not get caught up in my own ego.

What matters most to me is not the crowd's approval.

The only one who matters to me is the crowd of One.

He is the one I will serve because He has shown himself faithful to me.

In my loong night, he showed me the Star – He never left me and he never forgot me.

And he has not and will not forget you!