

# JOSEPH: Living with Integrity - PART 6

## The Testing

By: Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Genesis 41:38 - 45:15
Subject:	What Joseph did after he had become a ruler in Egypt.
Complements:	He provided for the needs of his family and revealed his identity to them.
Exegetical idea:	When Joseph became a ruler in Egypt, he provided for the needs of his family and revealed his identity to them.
Homiletical idea:	<b>When you find yourself in a place of prosperity, continue to live with integrity.</b>
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers to continue to live with integrity when they find themselves in a place of prosperity.

Joseph had been tested before. When he served in the house of Potiphar, captain of the guard, Potiphar's wife had repeatedly tried to seduce him. During his years in prison, falsely accused for a crime that he did not commit, Joseph was tested again. Would he allow his heart to be filled with anger and bitterness or would he continue to believe, even in the most difficult circumstances, that God had a good plan for his future?

Now Joseph faced a different test. He had just interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams and counseled the Pharaoh to implement a disaster preparedness plan! We can read the story in Genesis 41:33-36. "And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. After careful deliberation with his counselors, the Pharaoh ordered that Joseph be brought back into his audience chamber. Pharaoh's startling declaration is recorded in Genesis 41:38-45a. "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." 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. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah..."

And if that wasn't enough good news for Joseph for one day, we learn in the second half of Genesis 41:45 that "the Pharaoh gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, to be his wife!" Joseph is definitely having a good day.

Now Joseph was facing a different test. Would he continue to live with integrity in times of prosperity and blessing, just as he did during times of adversity? The answer to that question is found in the verses that follow. We read in Genesis 41:46b-49, "Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. 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. 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.”

Joseph was diligent. He continued to believe the word of the Lord even though one year of plenty was followed by another year of plenty. I’m sure that Joseph had his critics. “That Hebrew ex-slave is a fool! He is storing up enough grain to feed the whole world! But Joseph did not waver in his commitment to store 20% of the harvest during each of the seven years of abundance. He believed the Word of God that had been revealed to him.

Then we read in Genesis 41:53, “The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. Now Joseph will be tested again. The severe famine was also affecting people in the land of Canaan. Jacob and his family were facing a crisis. Without emergency assistance, they would soon face starvation. So Jacob said to his sons, recorded in Genesis 42:1-2, “Why do you just keep looking at each other? I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.”

When Joseph’s ten older brothers arrived in Egypt, Joseph recognized them, but they did not recognize him. As they bowed low before this high-ranking government official, Joseph remembered his dreams from 20 years earlier. But something was missing. What was it? Ah yes, in his dream all 11 brothers bowed down to him. But here there were only 10.

Now Joseph put his brothers to the test. He accused them of being spies and had them all placed in confinement for 3 days. I wonder how he decided on the length of their confinement. He had been confined for 250 times that length of time. But he ordered only 3 days of confinement. On the third day, Joseph came to them again and said, recorded in Genesis 42:18-24, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households.

But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.’ They said to one another, ‘Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come upon us.’ Reuben replied, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.’” They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.”

Why do you think that Joseph had Simeon taken and bound in front of his brothers? Simeon was the brother with the hot temper. Simeon took his brother Levi and killed the inhabitants of Shechem. Simeon was the one who wanted to kill Joseph. And so Simeon is bound and kept as a ransom until the brothers return with their youngest brother Benjamin.

Scripture records in Genesis 42:25-26, “Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain; to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.” Joseph was generous in providing supplies for their journey back to Canaan, but why do you think that Joseph ordered the silver to be put back in his brothers’ sacks? When his brothers found out about it they were troubled. Genesis 42:27-28, “At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. ‘My silver has been returned,’ he said to his brothers. ‘Here it is in my sack.’ Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, ‘What is this that God has done to us?’

Did Joseph order the silver to be put back in their sacks to trouble them; or to see if they were honest? What do you think? When his brothers had sold him to the Ishmaelite traders 20

years earlier, what did they receive? Twenty pieces of silver! And now the one that they sold is giving them silver!

It would have taken the brothers several weeks, perhaps a month or more to arrive back at their family encampment in Hebron. When they reported the whole story to their father Jacob, he refused to allow his sons to take their brother Benjamin down to Egypt. We read in Genesis 42:38, “My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.”

But the famine was so severe and so prolonged, Jacob finally agreed that his sons could take their youngest brother with them to Egypt. We read in Genesis 43:15, “So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph.” Why were they in such a hurry? Were they anxious to see Simeon, or were they concerned that their families would starve to death if they took too long?

When they arrived in Egypt and requested an audience with Zaphenath Paneah, they were ushered in to a banquet room. We read in Genesis 43:26-29, “When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. He asked them how they were, and then he said, ‘How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?’ They replied, ‘Your servant our father is still alive and well.’ And they bowed low to pay him honor.” Now the dream given to Joseph 20 years earlier is fulfilled. All eleven of his brothers are bowing low before him (Verse 29). “As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, ‘Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?’ And he said, ‘God be gracious to you, my son.’”

Deeply moved at the sight of his younger brother, Joseph hurried out of the banquet hall and wept. After he had composed himself and washed his face, he returned, and the banquet commenced. The brothers were startled as they were seated in their birth order, and when the food was served, Benjamin was given 5 times as much as anyone else. Either the other ten were given meager portions, or Benjamin was very full at the end of the meal!

As Joseph sends them on their way, he decides to test them again. He orders that the silver be placed in the brothers' sacks but also that his silver cup, which the Egyptians considered sacred, be placed in Benjamin's sack. What is Joseph trying to accomplish here? Not long after the brothers have set off on their homeward journey, Joseph orders that they be apprehended. When the silver cup is found in Benjamin's sack, they were stunned. They tore their clothes, which was a sign in their culture that they were overwhelmed with grief. They were escorted back to Joseph's residence and Scripture records in Genesis 44:14 that they did more than respectfully bow. They threw themselves to the ground before him. Once again, his dream from 20 years earlier is fulfilled.

When Joseph suggests that only Benjamin needs to remain as his slave and the rest can return home, Judah speaks up. Do you remember Judah's role when the brothers were trying to get rid of their despised younger brother? Judah was the one who suggested that they sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders. Now he offers to be enslaved himself so that his youngest brother can go free. Listen to his plea, recorded in Genesis 44:18, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself." And then look down to Genesis 44:32-34, "'your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!' 'Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy,

and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father.’”

What do you notice here? A change of heart! Instead of enslaving his brother, like he did 20 years earlier with Joseph, Judah is willing to enslave himself that his youngest brother might go free. Then comes the startling revelation - Genesis 45:1-3, “Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, ‘Have everyone leave my presence!’ So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still living?’ But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.”

Their terror is understandable. This is their brother whom they sold into slavery. Now he holds their lives in his hands. Again, Joseph is tested. How will he respond? Listen to his words, recorded in Genesis 45:4-8a: “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ When they had done so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.’” Verse 15 “And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.”

As I studied the story of Joseph this week, I thought about Jesus. The Son of God was in the highest position of authority and prosperity at the right hand of the Father in heaven. The

Bible tells us that He was our Creator, and when we sin, we sin against Him. The Son of God could have used that position of power to condemn us, to make us suffer for our wrong doing. But praise be to God He didn't. He came down to this sin-ravaged world and embraced us. And more than that; He kissed us! He showed us His love, a perfect revelation of the Father's love.

There is a lesson that each one of us can learn from the portion of Joseph's life that we have studied today. When you find yourself in a place of prosperity, when you find yourself in a place of honor, when you find yourself in a place of power, continue to live with integrity. Continue to honor God. Continue to reveal the love of God. Then your life will also be a blessing to those around you!