

OPTICS



THE LIFE OF JOSEPH IN FOCUS

Optics: The Life of Joseph in Focus

Hyperopia
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November 20, 2016

Discussion Notes
The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

Today we are in the midst of a short, but powerful three-week series called “Optics”. It deals with how you and I see the world and our lives, and discusses the lens through which we view God and our relationship with Him. As we grow older, one of the changes we experience is not being able to see clearly. Sometimes the images are blurry just as we see the present as fuzzy and the future out of focus. Today we are looking at Joseph and doing some foundational corrective work on the optics through which we see things: the two lenses of our perspective and God’s promise. The life of Joseph, as presented in Genesis, is one of hopefulness even under the most dire circumstances.

SCRIPTURE¹

Genesis 40:23 “The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him”

Genesis 41:1 “When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds.”

Genesis 41:8-9 “In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, ‘Today I am reminded of my short-comings.’ “

Genesis 41:14-16 “So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.’ ‘I cannot do it,’ Joseph replied to Pharaoh, ‘but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.’ “

Genesis 41:29-30 “ ‘Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance of Egypt will be forgotten, and famine will ravage the land.’ “

Genesis 41:32-43 “ ‘The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God and God will do it soon. 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 of 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 kept 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. So Pharaoh asked them, ‘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 shall 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.”

Genesis 41:46 “Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout Egypt.”

Genesis 41:51-52 “Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.’ The second son he named Ephraim and said, ‘It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.’ “

¹ All scripture listed is NIV unless otherwise indicated

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OBSERVATION

Joseph didn't allow his view of life to be blurred by the situations in which he found himself, but he remained hopeful because he believed that with a great God there is great hope. Joseph didn't believe that good circumstances result in good feelings. He knew that when circumstances are bad, people begin to think that God has abandoned them. Even though he had a dysfunctional family and his life was fraught with suffering and unhappiness, throughout Joseph's story we see his great hope: God was with him! There is no television episode in history that would have turned out the way Joseph's life did, but it happened because God was writing his story - and He will write ours, too.

Question: What would your life look like if you responded to every situation as if God was with you?

APPLICATION

The Bible doesn't have a formula for happiness. Instead it has a promise of hope. Therefore, our great God gives us great hope and hope transcends our circumstances.

If we are honest, we know that when we are in need, we pray and are desperate for God to show up. When we're not in need, we don't pray. Joseph's life was placed on pause for two years when the cupbearer forgot him, yet Joseph prayed continually. We can learn a lesson from him if we look for it as we see Joseph go from pause to prosperity.

Question: When have you forgotten to pray to God when a crisis has passed?

Question: When has your life been on pause with nothing happening to change a bad circumstance? What did you do?

We are often tempted to put our faith aside to do anything, no matter what it takes, to gain an opportunity for prosperity. We compromise what has always been important to us and we fail the test of prosperity. The way a person responds to the test of prosperity may tell more about his character than does the test of suffering and trials.

Question: In what situation did you put your faith aside in order to do whatever it took to gain an opportunity to prosper?

When God has prospered us, we need to declare our dependence on Him, leverage what we have for others, and remember where we came from.

1) Declare our dependence on Him publicly: We need to remember Philippians 4:13 which tells us, "We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength" and step out boldly as the days are short.

Question: What does it look like when you publically declare your dependence on God?

2) Leverage what we have for others: God didn't bless us just for us. He blessed us so that we could use our blessings for others: our talents, our resources, our faith.

Question: Where is the place God has entrusted to you?

Question: How are you planning to leverage the gifts God has given to you?

3) Remember where we came from: Joseph named his sons so that he would remember God's goodness to him. We need physical reminders of what God has brought us through: A scripture card, a Christian bookmark, a cross, a letter from a Christian friend, or a verse-emblazoned T-shirt.

Question: What are your daily reminders of what God has brought you through?

We have no idea what might happen if we took all our talents and resources and became God's person regardless of the circumstances. Don't you think it is time we found out?

Question: How would you respond to your present circumstances if you were confident that God is with you?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to remember that you are with us always, even to the end of the earth. This awareness will give us clarity and keep us on the path of obedience. We know that are dependent upon You for everything; that we need to use our gifts from You for others; and that we need to remember where we came from in order to keep a proper perspective of our time in this world. We want our vision for this life to be "we live for God and He is with us." In Jesus' name. Amen