

Reading Schedule for February 20-26, 2017

We are launching into the heart of Joseph's life, as he is promoted to the second highest position in all of Egypt. This is one of the most amazing stories in the Bible, and reminds us of what God can do. I don't know if you have thought about the fact that God sent his Son to be a servant and to pay for our penalty through the cross. That was the lowest of lows, right?! But then God exalted him above every name. I think that Joseph was a forerunner to how God can raise us up from the depths of captivity to be exalted to the right hand of God. I am seeing similarities between Joseph and Jesus, and possibly your own life. Because of sin we deserve death, but we have been lifted up to a place in heaven where we will enjoy fellowship with God forever.

February 20 – Genesis 40:1-23: “‘We both had dreams,’ they answered, ‘but there is no one to interpret them.’ Then Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.’” (v.8) We learn something about Joseph that clearly gives credit to God and explains why everything Joseph does is blessed by God. He did not point to himself, even though he gave an accurate interpretation of the dream. Rather he pointed to God. This took some courage, in a pagan world with many gods, to point to the one true God. This is who Joseph is, and this is why God would bless his life. We are seeing the courage of Joseph as he forthrightly interprets the dreams, and even gives one person a very honest and discouraging interpretation. How do you personally respond to this chapter?

February 21 – Genesis 41:1-40: “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.’” (vv. 39 & 40) This is the most unlikely scenario, yet God often works in this way. He likes to take the least and the weakest, and make them the best and the strongest. When people tell Joseph's story and for thousands of years now read about Joseph, they will think of God, not Joseph. Joseph was on the bottom, and God lifted him up to the top. Joseph was a slave and a prisoner, and he had learned important lessons about serving God and others. God is training you to be the best you could be, especially when your circumstances are the most difficult. I think this is one of the main lessons of the whole story – that Joseph would be refined through 13 years of slavery and imprisonment to become the man God wanted him to be. He would remain humble in the highest position. How does that help you interpret what is going on in your life? What do you take away from the reading today?

February 22 – Genesis 41:41-57 “The second son he named Ephraim and said, ‘It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.’” (v.52) You see that Joseph interpreted his time in Egypt as “the land of suffering.” For most of his life he had endured great hardship. These seven years of abundance were received by Joseph with humility. Joseph had a great deal of trust in the Lord, in that what God had told him through the dream would happen. Sometimes I am certain about God's direction in my life, but it doesn't take me very long to wonder if I heard the “word” right. But things happen just like God had told Joseph, and after seven years there was a great famine. Without God's intervention, the Egyptian nation would have crumbled. No wonder Joseph was elevated – because they saw God in him. There are so many ideas spinning around in my head about Joseph. I love this story and it gives me a great deal of hope. What has happened shows the faith of Joseph, as well as the courage to stand up for the Lord. Do you agree? How do you respond to this story of Joseph?

February 23 – Genesis 42:1-38: “Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, ‘You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.’” (vv. 8 & 9) Personally

I am surprised that Joseph remembered these dreams. They would have been a sad memory and best to bury them for good. But in this circumstance, Joseph recalls God's message to him through his dreams as a teenager. As a young boy, Joseph had been boastful about his dreams. As a man defined by God, he no longer flaunted his superior status. He showed restraint because it wasn't the proper time to reveal his identity. I think this part of the story is fascinating as well. He wants to be reunited with his brother and father, and uses a very interesting approach to accomplish that goal. This is another reason to be impressed by Joseph and God's leadership in his life. What stands out to you in this chapter? What dreams has the Lord given you that you are waiting for him to accomplish?

February 24 – Genesis 43:1-34: “Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.” (v.30) All that Joseph had gone through had not hardened his heart. He remained tender towards his family connections, especially with his youngest brother. I am enjoying reading the story of Joseph, and I am sure you are too. I am impressed with Joseph's patience as he waits for the right opportunity to reveal his identity. This is not the best time, even though I am sure he would love to embrace his brother and reveal his true identity. I am almost speechless about what to comment on. My heart is especially stirred by Joseph's restraint. So often I want to say what I am thinking, even if I should wait on the Lord for the best time. I am impressed with Joseph's patience. Do you agree? What stands out to you in this chapter?

February 25 – Genesis 44:1-34: ““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.” (v.33) There is another person who has been growing in this story. Previously, we saw him as selfish and vulnerable to sexual sin. His name is Judah. Joseph must have been impressed with Judah. He realizes that God is at work in his brother's life. Judah was the brother who suggested Joseph be sold into slavery. To me, the reality of Judah changing for the better made him the right candidate for the Messianic line. The tribe of Judah would be the ancestors of Jesus, our Savior. We learned this Sunday that repentance is always a change for the better. I would suggest that Judah had repented of his previous sins and lifestyle. He had repented of selfishness and sensuality. God had changed Judah, and now he was compelled to sacrifice himself for the good of another. How do you interpret the life-change of Judah? Who else do you notice in this story that gets your attention?

February 26 – Genesis 45:1-28: “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.” (v.8) Joseph again is giving credit to God. The summary of his resolve is written in Genesis 50:20, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” It is essentially what he is saying here. This is a profound insight that Joseph believed wholeheartedly. He forgave his brothers, even though he had been rejected, kidnapped, enslaved and imprisoned. This is another amazing quality of Joseph. He has the same heart as God. God forgives so freely, and continues to bless us even when we don't deserve it. Joseph has that same kind of posture towards his brothers. The culmination of this story is the reuniting of Joseph and his father, which we will read tomorrow. What impresses you most about Joseph? What characteristic would you like to have more of that you read about in Joseph's life?

Prayers: Please pray for our elders as they seek God during an overnight retreat Friday and Saturday this coming weekend.