

# Sovereign Grace to Exalt

*Grace from the Patriarchs*

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You know, one of our nation's most beloved presidents is Abraham Lincoln. I'm sure if you're a US citizen, if I asked you to list your 5 favorite presidents his name would most assuredly appear on your list. One of the many instructive aspects of his story is the number of times he suffered defeat before being exalted, before being elected to our nation's highest office. For example, at age 23, he lost his bid for a seat in the Illinois legislature. He was defeated. Then 2 years later he started a store with a business partner who died and that venture failed. The next year, his sweetheart, Ann Rutledge, died. At the age of 29, he was defeated in his bid to become the Speaker of the Illinois House. In 1848, he sought the position of Commissioner of the General Land Office in Washington, DC and he did not receive that appointment. In 1858, he was elected to the Senate by popular vote but then the Legislature chose his rival, Stephen Douglas, to fill the office. Defeat after defeat after defeat. Two years later, he was elected President of the United States. Now, I understand there is some controversy about some of those events. I understand he also enjoyed plenty of successes along the way as well but there is no question about this: before being exalted and used at a crucial point in our nation's history, Abraham Lincoln was frequently defeated, frequently humiliated, frequently broken. The exaltation came last, not first. It came later, not sooner.

You know, this topic of exaltation is a fascinating study in the word of God. Scripture has a lot to say about this. It begins with understanding that God by virtue of his nature and his character is the truly exalted one. So we would read great verses like Psalm 97:9, "For You are the LORD Most High over all the earth; You are exalted," do you believe that? "Far above all gods." Or Psalm 99:2, "The LORD is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the peoples."

You also learn this when you chased this concept around the word of God: you can tell much about a person by who or what they exalt. For example, positively, those who love the Lord would say things like this, Psalm 57:5, "Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Your glory be above all the earth." That's what I want to exalt. That's what I want to focus on. Or Psalm 21:13, "Be exalted, O LORD, in Your strength; We will sing and praise Your power." That's why we have gathered to worship today. We want to exalt our God because we love him. Godly people want the name of the Lord to be lifted high in their hearts and on their lips but what about those who don't love the Lord? Psalm 12:8,

"The wicked," here's a passage that's relevant for the day and age in which we live, huh? "The wicked strut about on every side When vileness is exalted among the sons of men." Or Psalm 66:7, "He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; Let not the rebellious exalt themselves." You see, that's really true. Listen to a person's music, check out their social media postings, examine their checkbook and you can tell much about a person about who or what they exalt.

The Bible also teaches us this: a person should never exalt himself. You don't do that, do you? Here is a verse, Proverbs 30:32, "If you have been foolish in exalting yourself Or if you have plotted evil, put your hand on your mouth." Am I the only one who would say, "There have been a few times or maybe a lot more than a few where the words slipped out before my hand made it to my mouth"? Don't you love the Bible?

Well, for our purposes today especially, here's the real point: the Lord decides when, the Lord decides how and the Lord decides who should be exalted. Is that true? Absolutely. Emphasized in many places like Psalm 75, "For not from the east, nor from the west, Nor from the desert comes exaltation." You haven't been looking in the wrong place, have you? "But God is the Judge; He puts down one and he exalts another." Or Psalm 89:16, "In Your name they rejoice all the day, And by Your righteousness they are exalted. For You are the glory of their strength, And by Your favor our horn is exalted." Or in a similar text, Psalm 92:10, "But You have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox," that's a good thing. "I have been anointed with fresh oil." And you understand exaltation, it's always in the context of whom the Lord wants to use in the accomplishment of his plan. It's not just exalted for you, it's exalted for a purpose and the principle of the Bible is clear: our sovereign God is the one who makes such decisions. He exalts who and when and how he wants.

Now, here's why that matters this morning: you can be in a situation right now where it feels like everything is going against you yet you are the polar opposite of being exalted right now. Or you're just being terribly underutilized. Or you can't catch a break to save your life. You may have thought the Lord has forgotten your name or your email address. But the lesson of Scripture is that can turn on a dime. That can turn on a dime and that principle comes screaming out of the story of a man named Joseph.

With that in mind, please open your Bible to Genesis 40. Genesis 40, that's on page 31 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. So Genesis 40 or page 31 in the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Our annual theme this year is "Finding Grace," and so to that end we have been focused this summer on grace from the patriarchs, a study of the book of Genesis and the lives of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. I've had a number of people say to me that they have really enjoyed this study, really been helped by it. Can I just respond to that by saying, "And your pastors have enjoyed it more." That really is true. Having a church family that wants to hear all of the word of God, even the book of Genesis, that is becoming rarer all the time and I suppose that shouldn't be surprising. The Apostle Paul told young Timothy, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,

who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Why? Why? Here's why, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." So I would just point out to all of us: if we have pastors who count it a privilege and an honor to teach the word and if we have a congregation who by their presence and participation indicate that they want to hear and follow it, well, it sounds to me like all God's people have a lot to be thankful for, huh? Absolutely.

Now, last week Pastor Green began the Joseph narrative, clearly the climax of the book of Genesis and the story whose life points to the character and work of the future Messiah more clearly than anybody else in this book because now we start to find answers to some of the key questions that have been raised in this book. Questions like: even if our adversary is allowed to bruise the heel of the Messiah as was prophesied in Genesis 3, is God truly powerful enough, is God truly sovereign enough to in turn crush Satan's head whatever and however he chooses? If you've wondered about that, study the story of Joseph. Or this: what impact will God making promises or covenants with human beings, that's a key theme in this book, what impact will that have on those who choose to exercise their faith in what he said? Can people who are walking in faith endure suffering? Can people who are walking in faith endure temptation? If so, for how long? And how much? Those questions are answered in the story of Joseph.

This question too: is God really able to preserve his chosen nation? You know, he made a covenant, in fact, a series of covenants with the nation, Israel. Is he able to keep those promises? Then, is God really serious about using his people to be a blessing to other nations? Other nations? So, what might that actually look like in real time? That's going to be answered before our eyes this morning. Then this: how does all of this help us be better prepared for the life and the ministry and the death and the resurrection and the mission of the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ? What a great, great section of Scripture, the life of Joseph.

Now, you could say this: that last week mean Pastor Green left poor Joseph in prison and it's time for a sweet Pastor Viars to get him out. You could say that. I would not say that, of course, because that would be needlessly adversarial with one of my staff members and it's just not my way. But you could say that, I suppose. That's kind of the way things have shaken out here in the preaching schedule which I assembled a number of months ago but that's where we find ourselves in Genesis 40. Now, you love the word of God, right? You didn't want to just have your ears tickled, did you? Absolutely not. So pay careful attention if you would to Genesis 40 and ask God to help you understand this text.

Genesis 40:1, "Then it came about after these things, the cupbearer and the baker," get those two guys in your mind. "For the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief

baker. So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the same place," surprise, surprise, surprise, "the same place where Joseph was imprisoned. The captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time. Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his own dream and each dream with its own interpretation." Now, note this next part carefully, "When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected. He asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, 'Why are your faces so sad today?'" That's fascinating. "Then they said to him, 'We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it.' Then Joseph said to them," note this, "'Do not interpretations,'" what? "'Belong to God? Tell it to me, please.'

"So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, 'In my dream, behold, there was a vine in front of me; and on the vine were three branches. And as it was budding, its blossoms came out, and its clusters produced ripe grapes. Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's hand.' Then Joseph said to him, 'This is the interpretation of it: the three branches are three days; within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer. Only keep me in mind,'" Joseph said, "'when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.'

"When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, 'I also saw in my dream, and behold, there were three baskets of white bread on my head; and in the top basket there were some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.' Then Joseph answered and said, 'This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you.'" Well, that ain't such a great dream.

"Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand; but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

"Now it happened at the end of two full minutes." Did I get that right? It happened, here's how long Joseph had to wait, "it happened at the end of two full weeks." How's that? No. Feel free to scream out, "No!" as if you don't really like your pastor right now. "It happened at the end of two full," what? I need to hear that from Faith West right now. "Two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. The ugly and gaunt cows ate up

the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke." I guess you would. "He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

"Then," seriously, two years later? "Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, 'I would make mention today of my own offenses. Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker.'" Do you remember that? "We had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. Now a Hebrew youth was with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related them to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his own dream. And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him.'

"Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself," you've always got to shave, you know? "When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.'" Now, don't miss this, "Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, 'It is not in me.'" Don't you love that? "'It's not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.'"

Now, I'm going to skip these next verses for time. This is just Pharaoh recounting the dream we've already talked, the two dreams we've already talked about. Look at verse 25, "Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one and the same. The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind will be seven years of famine. It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do. Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will ravage the land. So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe. Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it. Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine.'

"Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants.

"Then Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is a,'" amazing this is in the book of Genesis, "'a divine spirit?' So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has informed you of all this,'" isn't that amazing? "'Since God has informed you of all of this there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you.' Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, 'Bow the knee!' And he set him over all the land of Egypt."

We're talking this morning about God's sovereign grace to exalt. Do you believe God possesses that power and ability? It's sovereign grace to exalt and with the time we have remaining, let's think about 3 principles to remember when you are in a lowly position. Here is the first one: look for ways to serve God and others even if you're in a lowly position today. Now, there are many life situations to which this particular emphasis could apply but basically we're talking about areas of your life about which you would say, "I wish this was different." Have you got anything like that going on? "I wish this was different. I feel like I'm in a lowly position at work," you might say. Or, "I feel like I'm in an unfortunate situation at home or with my extended family. I don't like what's happening to the place of the church in culture," you might say. "I'm imprisoned in a body that isn't working well. People in my social setting don't always give me the appreciation or the respect I think I deserve. It looks like I'll be riding the bench again in my sport when I really wish I could start or play more." You see, many of us can relate to Joseph in prison for all sorts of reasons. Here's the question: what do you do when you find yourself there? And the answer from this text is: look for ways to serve God and look for ways to serve others even while you're in that position.

Now, I realize you might fire back at me and say, "Now look, do you realize that what you're suggesting is the exact opposite of the way I feel in those kind of situations?" Yes I do which is why it is so important for us to come together and study the word of God on the Lord's day and why it's so important for you to wake up early in the morning and get some time in your Bible before you go off into the world. Why? Because you recognize like Paul would later say to the Romans, "You don't want to be conformed to this world. You don't want to respond to being in a position of lowliness like they would. You want to be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove, like Joseph did, what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Now, you might say, "Well, how do I transform my mind so that I am motivated to look for ways to serve God and others even if I'm in a lowly position today?" Here's one very important answer: always factor the sovereignty of God into your circumstances. That should be one of our primary focuses. What is my sovereign, not what do I not like about this? How should I be treated better? How can I change this right away? What is my

sovereign God up to here? Which means there are going to be all sorts of details about it that really don't matter. In fact, isn't it interesting, there are a ton of details about what occurred in this situation that we're not told. It's amazing how much is left out. I mean, don't you want to know what the cupbearer and the baker did to offend Pharaoh? Burn his toast? Put 3 lumps of sugar in his coffee instead of 2? What was the problem? Or in verse 2, don't you want to know when the Pharaoh became furious, what did that look like? I mean, did he yell? Did he cuss? Did he pout? There are so many details here that apparently don't matter, however, what is important for us and for the original audience to grasp, "So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard in the jail, the same place," surprise, surprise, surprise, "the same place where Joseph was imprisoned." Had the Lord forgotten about Joseph? Has the Lord forgotten about you? Has the Lord forgotten about Joseph? Was the Lord punishing Joseph? Absolutely not. God was working sovereignly his plan for the preservation of Israel and even for a blessing on Egypt through one of the patriarchs in a way that only a powerful, loving, all wise God had the ability to do.

Now, let me ask you this about this text: do we have any indication that God specifically revealed to Joseph in advance exactly what he was going to do in verse 3? In other words, did he say, "Now Joseph look, be nice to these 2 guys. They are your ticket out of jail"? Absolutely not. Joseph recognized and respected God's sovereignty though he could not yet see the end. It's been rightly observed that God's working is like a tapestry where we just see the underside, what appears to be jumbled threads and shapes and colors that don't make a lot of sense, while from God's perspective, the picture he's weaving is absolutely stunning. So what do we do between being in a lowly position and seeing it all come together? The answer is: trust in God sovereignty even when we can't see it. "When I'm afraid," the psalmist said, "I will put my trust in you." Did you do that this week? When I was afraid, I was in a lowly position, I was in a situation of uncertainty, "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?"

You see, what does it even mean to trust the Lord? Believing that my current circumstances are no mistake and that he is up to something even when I can't see it yet? Which, do you realize, short circuits a lot of sinful responses. It's pretty hard to be speaking or behaving sinfully if I am recognizing my situation as from the sovereign hand of my God. Which then, you say, "If I'm not wasting a bunch of time sinning in that lowly position, what does that give me bandwidth to do?" The answer is: looking for ways to meet the needs of those suffering around you. Isn't it amazing that Joseph says in verse 7, "Why are your faces so sad today?" The fact that he would even notice, huh? The fact that he would even care. And what does that tell us? He's not focused exclusively on his own circumstances. Are you? He's not focused exclusively on his own pain or what he can do to claw his way out of his own lowliness. "Why are your faces so sad today? How can I serve you, fellow prisoner?"

You see, you may be in a job right now that you really hate and you feel like you're being underpaid and maybe you are. You feel like you're being mistreated and maybe you are, and underutilized, all sorts of painful things, but there may be people all around your

office facing similar circumstances but they don't know the Lord yet. They have not had access to the biblical truth that you have yet. In fact, the entire reason the Lord has you in that office may be because you're the connection point between that person who is suffering and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And after a conversation over coffee or maybe a lot of coffees, where at the right time and in the right way you can share how you are finding your joy not in where you stand in the corporate structure but in who you are in Christ, that's exactly what that person needed to repent and place his or her faith in him.

Maybe you're struggling with a bad medical diagnosis and you hate the thought of going back for another treatment. It hurts. It just hurts. And the uncertainty brings fear to your heart and you have to sit in that waiting room again and then deal with the mounting insurance paperwork again. And I've known plenty of followers of Jesus Christ who woke up and said, "Lord, please help me find someone to serve today. I realize this entire illness may be about the nurse I'm going to interact with today. Or a fellow patient in the waiting room. Lord, please give me someone to serve just like Joseph did and I'll leave the issue of relief to you. I'll leave the issue of exaltation to you. I just want to gird myself with a towel and find some dirty feet to wash."

Then this: look for ways to bring your faith into the conversation. Don't miss this part. In Genesis 40:8, "Then they said to him, 'We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it.' Then Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations,'" boom, "'belong to God?'" Now hear this: Joseph just as easily could have said, "Well, I can do that for you. I can do that for you," and left his kindness untethered to any kind of ministerial purpose. You see, the reason that some supposed followers of Jesus Christ would never bring God into the conversation at work is because they think that might get in the way of their advancement up the ladder. Joseph didn't just behave in a way that was kind, Joseph's kindness was tethered to a ministerial purpose. In fact, you see all the way through, Joseph developing a very natural and purposeful way to exalt the Lord in his conversation with the Egyptians so much so that when the story is over, the Pharaoh says, "Since God has informed you of all of this." Now, how in the world did the Pharaoh learn to talk like that? The answer is: he had been listening to the patriarch. He had been listening to Joseph.

By the way, think about this book globally now for a minute. What we're talking about right now illustrates a significant difference between Joseph and Esau. Think about that. You see, Joseph cares about his birthright meaning his place in the accomplishment of God's plan and God's purposes on this earth. There is no way of knowing how the baker or how the cupbearer and certainly not the Pharaoh were going to respond to all of this God talk. In fact, that alone could have short-circuited Joseph's desire to get out of prison. It could have resulted in him being demoted further. But he wasn't organizing his life around getting what he wanted as quickly as possible or always saying and doing that which garnered immediate approval of people who didn't know the Lord. Esau was the polar opposite. Esau sold his birthright. I wonder how many followers of Jesus Christ do that? He sold his birthright for some of that red stuff. Do you remember the way that chapter ended, by the way? "Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew and he ate and



drank and rose and went on his way," and the polar opposite of what we're seeing Joseph do in this text, "Esau despised," his purpose for living. "Esau despised his birthright."

This may be one of the points of this narrative that many of us need to seriously consider. Am I using times of suffering simply to be kind to others? And by the way, I'm glad you're kind as opposed to being harsh. But am I using times of suffering simply to be kind to others or am I looking for opportunities to let my kindness be the time that I can then speak for Christ? It was good for Joseph to inquire about their sadness, it was better for him to find the right time to speak for the Lord. That's why Paul would later say, "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were making an appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God." You see, look for ways to bring your faith into the conversation.

Now, I realize you might say, "Well, this is kind of getting challenging." We haven't gotten there yet. This next piece helps us on that. Be sure to speak lovingly but don't forget the truth. Paul would say to the Ephesians, "Speak the truth in love." You say, "Why would you bring that into the story?" I would suggest Joseph was in a pickle after he heard the baker's dream because the text is clear the reason the baker was so excited about telling his dream was the favorable interpretation Joseph gave to the cupbearer. When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted the previous dream favorably and if Joseph's ultimate goal was to garner favor from this man, he would have told him what he wanted to hear, not what he needed to hear. I would suggest to you the immediate approval of man in order to exalt oneself is a prime example of that red stuff. Something that might cause us to put a bushel basket over the light of God's truth in order to pursue our selfish agenda instead of the Lord's, all the while despising our birthright of speaking the truth in love.

Now, let's just pause and ask this: how would you stack yourself up to Joseph on this particular principle? His focus and his lowly position was on serving God and serving others. Where is the ministry opportunity here? Instead of being bitter, instead of being disgruntled, instead of being self-absorbed, can you think of ways that you have chosen to be like him? Can you think of ways that you have missed?

Now, what else can we learn to help us in lowly positions? Remember, the timing of promotion rests entirely with the Lord. You look at Joseph's character and you look at Joseph's actions throughout these verses, the way he serves these men, the way he testifies for the Lord, surely he might as well get himself cleaned up and packed up because the door is going to open any minute with a person announcing his release. Yet it wasn't a minute, was it? It wasn't a week. It wasn't a month. "Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph but forgot him." How in the world is that even possible? Well, if you've worked with people you know how that is possible. "Now it happened at the end of," what? "Two full years that Pharaoh had a dream." This might be a spiritual gut check time for some of us. What if the Lord prefers for you to be in a lowly position in a way or to a degree or for a period of time that is far different than what you want? Will you joyfully love and serve him anyway? You could say it this way: the words patience and patriarch aren't just close in the dictionary. They are true throughout this narrative. How

many times have we seen, for example, husbands and wives in this book unable to conceive children, in some cases children that were specifically promised by God for decades? The timing of promotion rests entirely with the Lord. The prophet Isaiah would say it like this, "'For My thoughts,'" speaking for God, "'are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,'" declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.'"

You see, you might be in a lowly position just like Joseph was hoping you're going to get releaved in a day and the fact of the matter is it's going to be years and part of what God calls upon you to do in the meantime is to, here's a word: to wait. To wait. That's a great Bible study to do, just to read how many times the Bible talks about waiting. Psalm 27:14, "Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD." Or Psalm 62:1, "My soul waits in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation."

Now, you can be authentic about it. I realize there are people who are hearing this message right now. This isn't just impersonal. There are people hearing this message right now who are in a position of waiting, in a position of lowliness and it hurts. You can be authentic about how that feels. "I'm weary with my crying. My throat is parched. My eyes fail but I'm still going to wait, while I wait for my God." Psalm 106, "They quickly forgot His works; They did not wait." You don't want to be here, do you? "For His counsel." "You are my hiding place and my shield. I wait for your word. I wait for the Lord. My soul does wait and in his word do I hold. My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen for the morning. Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning."

God gave Joseph the power to patiently wait for his promises to unfold. Can I just ask you this morning: how are you doing on that one? Is it possible that one of the reasons you struggle looking for ways to serve God and others while you're in a lowly position is because you're impatiently trying to claw your way up the ladder using whatever methods you think are necessary at the time? You see, faith and participating in the accomplishment of the plan and purposes of God are issues better suited to the crockpot than the microwave and the sooner some of us learn that, the better. I guess you could summarize part of this message: hurry up and learn to be patient.

Can we push this one step further? Do you need to say to someone in your life or say to the Lord this morning, "Please forgive me for missing all the growth and ministry opportunities because of my stubborn impatience"? And, "Lord, right now I am relinquishing my time table in this matter. Keep me in this lowly position as long as you choose." And remember this: we may never know this side of heaven why God's timing works the way it does. There is no logical reason in this text that I can find for the 2 years. Do you realize these events could have unfolded in 2 weeks as far as we know and it would not have changed the narrative at all. So why 2 years? There you go. Why 2 years? Because the God of heaven and earth said so, that's why. Are you okay with that because apparently that was perfectly okay with Joseph. He would continue to serve the Lord where he was planted and trust God for the timing of all of this. You see, "the Lord is not slow about his promise." Do you believe that? "As some count slowness but is

patient toward you and everyone else, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

You could say it this way: God's plan and program is generally slow cooked over just the right amount of heat for a long period of time. It's the polar opposite of coming to my house and having me grill your chicken because let me tell you something, I grill hot and fast. It won't take long but it's going to be dry. That's just the way it is. Me and chicken, I haven't got any time for waiting around. You say, "I'm going to eat somewhere else." God's plan and program is generally slow cooked over just the right amount of heat for a long period of time and sure, it takes longer. It takes longer. It makes your stomach roar, doesn't it? But it's so good. It's so good when it's fully cooked. Are you okay with that? One more round of treatment so that you can interact with that nurse one more time? One more trip to the mechanic so that he can see how sweet Christians are when their new van never works right? One more year of teenage snarkiness so your child can observe the patient love of their mom and dad? Remember, the timing of the promotion rests solely with the Lord and if he wants it to be 2 years, it's going to be 2 years and he doesn't have to tell us why.

Well, how does this part of the story end? Don't forget this, don't forget this: believe God can change your circumstances in an instant. If and when the Lord decides it's time for a promotion, look out world. Did you hear what the word of God said? "Then Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?' So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has informed you, of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you.' Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him," the guy just barely shaved, "clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck." He has some shaving cream behind his ear if he's like me, by the way. "He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, 'Bow the knee!' And he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.'" That's called having a pretty good day but not from the perspective of Joseph getting what he wanted but for Joseph to be used in the fulfillment of the covenant that God made to Abraham because you realize the nation of Israel is going to be preserved through all of this and through this patriarch, the nations of the world would be blessed just like God promised.

If you know your Bible, you probably had a tape running through your mind, another passage of Scripture, Jesus is here. Jesus is here. Philippians 2:5, "Have this attitude in yourselves," Paul said, "which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God," what? In his time, in his time, "highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and

under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

You see, God may have you in a lowly position right now so you would come to the end of yourself, you would acknowledge your need and you would place your faith and trust in Christ. And if you're in that condition today, we would urge you to do so while you have the opportunity. Christian friend, if you're in a position of lowliness and we all are, I would encourage you to consider the way you are responding to this man Joseph and the ways you are like him, praise him for your transformed mind, huh? In the ways you are not, may God help all of us to change.

Will you stand with me for prayer?

*Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to study your word. Lord, thank you for this marvelous text and for the marvelous Savior that it points us to. And Father, I pray that each one of us would respond in a way that would help us honor you more. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*