

Joseph: Exalted

By John Owen Butler

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Heritage Presbyterian Church

14500 N Western Avenue

Edmond, OK 73013

Website: www.heritagepca.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/heritagepca

Please remain standing for the reading of God's word and before we read, let's pray together.

You tell us, Lord, in Psalm 119, "Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart." Indeed, blessed are you, Lord, Great God, for the testimonies of the prophets, we bless you. For the statutes of your law, we bless you. For the gospel of Christ and the witness of the apostles, we bless you, O Glorious God. Grant us now as we read your word, as we hear it in preaching, as we confer of it, as we meditate upon it and lay it up in our hearts, grant us, Lord, the Spirit of your glory, the brightness of your presence, that we might read and hear and inwardly digest your word and understand and glorify you. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our gracious Lord, and God's people said, Amen.

Our New Testament reading this morning is Philippians 2. We will get to the Genesis reading in the course of the sermon. Our New Testament reading, Philippians 2, beginning at the first verse.

"1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated.

Congregation, as we have been working our way the past few Lord's days in the life of Joseph, that we have seen the glorious deliverance of him out of the dungeon, out of the pit, out of the prison. He has brought in to interpret Pharaoh's dream and Pharaoh has explained to Joseph what that dream is and Joseph has told him what the dream portends: the seven good years of crops that are coming, bumper crops, and then seven horrible, horrible years of famine. He has laid out for him a plan with regards to how to deal with this upcoming famine: to appoint an administrator throughout the land to make sure that 20% of the produce of the land is set aside in granaries that are specially built by the Pharaoh and then they can live off of that during the hard years when they come.

That brings us to the text before us this morning at verse 37 in Genesis chapter 41.

“37 This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. 38 And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?’ 39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. 40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.’ 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’ 42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. 43 And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, ‘Bow the knee!’ Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.’ 45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.”

Have you ever had one of those situations where somebody has proposed a plan and you said, “Okay, bright guy, you're gonna be the one to implement this.” This is case one in that example. I often tell people that if God has laid a particular idea on your heart and you bring it to the elders with that idea, you may also be the one that God is moving upon to help bring that to pass, to help administrate that. So, be careful what you come to the session with. No, I'm not discouraging you, I'm just saying that we have to be open to the possibility that God may also be the one who is putting us in this particular position to come and to help execute this.

Now, I don't think that that was necessarily in the mind of Joseph. He is a humble man as we have seen him here in the previous chapters but it was something that the whole specialness of this event, the whole air of the moving of God the Holy Spirit and the providence of this situation of having the Pharaoh to have that dream and to have the cup-bearer remember that two years previously to the date, the restoration had taken place because there had been this interpretation of a dream that had been done by Joseph that he is there. So, we see God is moving in this circumstance and Pharaoh, hearing of this

plan, says, “You are the man. You are going to be the fellow that I’m appointing to do this.”

Think of this: this is Joseph, a foreigner, a prisoner, who hasn’t served in government, who is 30 years of age, a relative unknown until that time, and he is appointed to be, the term that is often used is the “Grand Vizier”; the Grand Vizier is the chief steward, the under-ruler of the Pharaoh in Egypt. Also, I see it somewhat miraculous that all of Pharaoh’s advisors sign off on this. Now, this is Pharaoh and he’s got the power of life and death and so forth but if you know anything about advisors in government work and so forth, to have somebody come completely out of left field to come in with this idea and the boss signs off on it, if you’re one of the advisors, you think he’s absolutely nuts. There’s all the political intrigue and so forth that goes on but this is definitely, as my Mom used to say, “A God thing.” This is something that is totally beyond the normal experience of what has taken place. Pharaoh is pleased with this; the advisors are pleased with this; this had to be this God thing.

So, we see Joseph from fetters of iron on his feet to a chain of gold around his neck. This is somewhat akin to Hannah in the song that she sings in 1 Samuel 2,

“6 The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. 7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. 8 He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and on them he has set the world. 9 ‘He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. 10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed.’”

You see, it is the Lord who has made the powers-that-be. They are, as Paul tells us in Romans 13, “ordained by him.” He has placed them in position and we see this honor that is given to Joseph. He is placed in this great position of being the Grand Vizier and to execute this plan that had been shown to him by the Lord and, I believe also by extension, not only is the honor paid to Joseph, but to Joseph’s God as well. Although this is coming from Pharaoh who is considered a living god there in Egypt, this is coming from a land that is full of idolatry and yet there is that recognition that the Lord, he is God and he says, “Can we find a man like this in whom is the spirit of God?” And the answer to this resoundingly is, “No.” It is Joseph who is this one who has been given these things so he has been brought to this particular place.

I want you to notice as well that Joseph, although the outward circumstances have changed, is still the same man. That’s one of the things that we’ve seen throughout the life of Joseph, isn’t it? That his outward circumstances constantly are changing; the up and down; the roller-coaster nature of things. The favor that he received from Jacob and then the destruction that was intended for him by his brothers and his casting into the pit

and then being sold off into slavery. Then Potiphar buying him and appointing him in his house and he ranks up, as it were, in the house and he is second-in-command, as it were. Then we see the downfall with his wife and the false accusation. He's there in the prison and yet he becomes one who is managing the prison. Just the constant roller-coaster; the up and down of it. But he is the same man throughout. He is not just some cardboard cut-out that you have and we just kind of put the cardboard image of Joseph there for us to see. He is growing in wisdom and stature and in knowledge of the Lord and in all of these things so we see for such a time as this, he has come to the kingdom.

Notice his administration, if you will, in verses 46-49 and then in verses 53-57,

“46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. 47 During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, 48 and he gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it. 49 And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.”

Then, at verse 53,

“53 The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end, 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, ‘Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.’ 56 So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.”

He had seven years to get everything in place: to establish the granaries, to handle the 20 years of the bumper crops that are to be laid by for those seven years of famine. He has to organize and supervise this work. Now, the Egyptians were no slouches with regards to monumental projects as we know with the pyramids and all the other great things that they had done and so, in God's providence, we have that in place. But this still has to be done; this still has to be administered. All these things have to be organized and they are working on a tight schedule and Joseph is an able administrator we see. He's going all over the land of Egypt to establish these warehouses, to establish this work and then not just the building of the warehouses but putting in place the administrative workers and others who will be there to ensure that the crops are going to be brought in. What a blessing to have Joseph there to administer this and God has blessed the land. In fact, the yields are so great that it's just beyond comprehension, they can't keep tally of all of it. It is just so overflowing for them.

Then we see the beginning of the seven years of famine. In verse 54 we see this coming down the road and it's starting to occur. These famines were a quite common occurrence in Egypt. You would have inadequate rains that would occur in the Nile River basin to the south in the regions that are in Southern Sudan from which the White and Blue Nile join together and become the Nile and then all the other tributaries to the Nile River itself. It stretches into what is today Tanzania and Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and into Egypt. In fact, the White Nile's farthest source is still not mapped. Here we are in the 21st century and we still don't know exactly what is the farthest reach of it.

So, when things go bad up river, then that would mean the Nile would not be flooding for those three months in northern Egypt and so, without that flooding, Egyptian agriculture and Egyptian society is doomed. You see, you've got this very narrow stretch of land if you pull up, say, on Google Earth and you look at Egypt there, you'll see all the brown and shades of brown and tan to either side of the Nile River and you've got this very narrow strip of green. You have just very few stretches of farmable land that's going to be watered whenever the Nile overflows its banks and inundates that region with, not just water but, then also, with silt coming down and to help to create a favorable growing condition there. So, when the taps are turned off further upstream, people die downstream and that is what occurs.

So they are used to this: the boom and the bust years; the famines and the feast years. But what we have here is an event that seems to be unprecedented. They have seven fantastic years followed by seven absolutely wretched years. On a couple of cases in ancient history, there are reports of famines that are so severe in the Nile Valley that the people resort to cannibalism. So, you can see the cyclical nature of these particular things.

We've got this climatological disaster that takes place farther upstream and so this event comes and in verse 55, "When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.'" So, everyone is looking to Joseph as a deliverer, as a savior. One of the things that we have said over and over again and you remember several weeks back on the front of the Worship Guide we had a reprint from one of the ancient church fathers who showed the parallels between Joseph and the Lord Jesus Christ. Some see this saying of Pharaoh's an echo of the wedding at Cana and going to Christ, "Whatever he tells you, do this." So, we see these echoes in the Old Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ in the life of Joseph. In fact, one commentator: "What Joseph was to the men of his day, this and much more Jesus would be to the world."

We see that the areas outside of Egypt have failure as well. This is uncommon because you might have the failure of the Nile in Egypt but then you might have good rains in Canaan and other places as well but here we see this double effect. So, Egypt is doing well because of the foresight of Joseph but now we see the famine taking place in other regions of the world as well. That will be the catalyst for bringing in of Joseph's brothers as we will see, God willing, in future weeks. So, the seven good years and the harvest

ingathered are those that help bolster Joseph's credibility. As he had predicted, so it has taken place and so God has blessed him.

Then we see the additions that God has brought to Joseph and this is kind of a play on his name because his name means "God adds; the Lord adds." Notice here in verse 50,

"50 Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore them to him. 51 Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. 'For,' he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.' 52 The name of the second he called Ephraim, 'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.'"

So, Pharaoh has placed Joseph as Grand Vizier. He's entrusted him with power to oversee the preparations for this oncoming famine. He's given him an Egyptian name that we saw earlier and there's been a lot of conjecture as to what the meaning of this name is and the translation of it but it's best to say that we're not exactly sure so we're going to let it lay. He also gives him an Egyptian wife. Then he names his first-born son Manasseh "For God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." Was he turning his back on his difficult childhood as we might call it today? Is he forgetting all of those things? Is he saying, "You know what? I'm just not going to go there in my mind anymore." Is he turning his back on the promises of God revealed in these dreams, let alone the whole of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their seed forever? Is he just completely committing himself now to meld into the melting pot of Egypt and to get quite accustomed to the power and influence and wealth of the Egyptian lifestyle? I don't think so. I think he was forgetting in the same way that you mothers have forgotten the birth pangs that you went through when that child was set in your arms. Am I right? As difficult as that was, you know what, it just fades away because for the joy that has now been placed in your arms. I think that is somewhat of the forgetting here that he has. All the pain, all the sorrow, he looks back upon and God has salved this. God has soothed this for him. So, he has pulled the stinger out; he has pulled the pain from this. He has forgotten these things but he's not forgotten this God who has blessed him.

But then, notice the name of his other son, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction," Ephraim. So, we see this gratitude on the part of Joseph even in the midst of his circumstances. It appears though, in some respects, that he has reconciled himself now to this new life. This is where God has him and I think this has been the case with Joseph pretty much all along to a certain degree but now he says, "I'm here. I'm in this place. I'm going to bloom where I'm planted. God be praised. God has brought me safe thus far" He is now contented to be there. It does not appear that he thinks that one day he's going to be restored to the land of Canaan, to be restored to his family. I think it is a surprise of all surprises when he does hear his brothers speak to him. So now, he has this wife, he has these sons and God has blessed him there in that particular place.

One of the things I want to look at just briefly as we go through this passage: one of the watchwords of the Reformation is Sola Gratia, by grace alone. We have a living, vibrant example of this here in the life of Joseph. It is the Lord God who has protected and sustained him through all of this. He is preserved by God's providential care through all these trials and tribulations so that he might be the one who brings blessings to his family, to the church at that time and to the world. So, it is by grace thus far through many dangerous toils and snares, he has already come. Joseph surely sees this, he acknowledges this, this grace and mercy and kindness of God that has been superabundant towards him and we see just a snippet of this gratitude in the names that he has given to his sons in Manasseh and Ephraim.

But notice, one of the things we also see in the life of Joseph is faithfulness. But we also see, not only is there a faithful Joseph but there is, more importantly, a faithful God, that our God is faithful to his promises to keep and to preserve and to protect, to grant perseverance to his saints. You see, as I mentioned several weeks back, the story of Joseph really isn't about Joseph, is it? Joseph is the vehicle through which God manifests his goodness, his mercy, his grace, his kindness. It's all about the living and true God himself.

Also as well, not only do we see the faithfulness of God but we also see that faithfulness of Joseph and we need to think on this a minute. God expects faithfulness on the part of his people and he rewards this faithfulness. Scripture is great for it shows us God's people, warts and all. It shows us all our imperfections and our problems. It shows us our failings and yet we also hear God say to Abraham, "I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless that I may make my covenant between me and you and may multiply you greatly."

Last Lord's day evening we heard Pastor Mike from Titus preach, "For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." So, we have the grace of God manifested but then we also see the expectation of the result in God's people that we are created in Christ Jesus as we were told in Ephesians "unto," or for the purpose "of good works," of serving him. We have in Scripture both the grace of God that is given to us but then this expectation of our faithfulness to him. Now, we know that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done but by his mercy he has saved us and so none of us can meet the obligations of the covenant of works, of that perfect, entire, exact and perpetual obedience. Only one has done that for us and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his work, his faithfulness to that law that we are saved but we also have in Scripture given to us as God's people, as his redeemed ones, this law to guide us and to show us of how we may express our gratitude to him.

So we have this interesting contrast here. It's not an oppositional thing. It's not that you have grace over against faithfulness on the part of Joseph. These things don't need

reconciliation because you never have to reconcile friends. Here they are together. Here they are before us. The plain teaching of Scripture is that God rewards those who trust in him and live faithfully before him. But, you know what? They can't trust in him and they can't faithfully live in him apart from his grace. So we've got two sides of the coin here. The problem is that we tend to want to shove things either in one direction or the other. We want to have it all grace and we don't want to hear anything with regards to our responsibilities. The proper response of faithfulness, of gratitude to God, of our covenant loyalties to him, that he will be our God and we shall be his people. And in keeping of this law, in keeping of these things, there is great reward.

One of the things we tend to forget is that there is this constant call to us throughout the Scriptures to covenant faithfulness. Listen to Genesis 22. We see where God has called upon Abraham to offer his son, his only son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah and he has gone through all of this. We have the fire here, we've got the wood here, where's the sacrifice? "God will provide for himself a sacrifice, son." So, he goes through this work and just about as the knife is to be plunged into the breast of Isaac, God stays his hand and says, "By myself I have sworn declares the Lord because you have done this and you have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you. I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, as the sands upon the seashore and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice." He says later to Isaac, "I will make your descendants a numerous as the stars in the sky because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees, my laws."

Joseph gives God glory for his grace and covenant faithfulness shown to him. We see this here in the names of Ephraim and Manasseh but we also see over and over again Joseph's faithfulness to this covenant and to this covenant God as well. He has committed himself to honor God with who and what he is. The events of his life point to this day and more importantly, to be on this day when he is going to be the one who saves his family, the covenant people of God. He chose for the sake of God because of the gratitude that he has in his heart towards his God saving him and keeping him and preserving him and honoring him, in the fear of this God to serve him.

We see this in the face of the great oppositions against him of the world, the flesh and the devil. We know that certainly in the constant torments of his soul that came about when he was continually assaulted by the wife of Potiphar to commit fornication. He's not a perfect man. There is only one who is made like his brother in all things and yet who is without sin, our Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph was tempted but he resisted temptation and fled from it. Think on this faithfulness of Joseph. As a man filled with the Holy Spirit in whom is the Spirit of God, even Pharaoh testifies to this, we see that this is a man who has this Holy Spirit poured out in abundance upon him and now we, under this new administration of the covenant, brothers and sisters, have an even greater covenant with better promises and the outpouring of the Spirit in us and imbuing us with everything that pertains to life and godliness. But think on this: if Joseph had failed, if Joseph had not resisted temptation, if he had given in to Potiphar's wife, he would have most likely have

never been heard of again. We'd have a huge hunk of the Old Testament missing here in Genesis, wouldn't we?

What we do has ripple effects down the timeline. He, in the words of our Lord Jesus, denied himself, took up his cross and followed our Lord. He denied himself and gave glory to God, to the chief baker and the cup-bearer. He denied himself and gave glory to God before Pharaoh and God, by grace, saved Joseph by means of Joseph's faithfulness. Not in spite of it, not without regard to it or in indifference to it. Let me make this as plain as I can: we must be people of the grace of God. We have to give him glory for that grace. We must give him glory for that. Without it, we are nothing, we can do nothing. We live to glorify God for his grace manifested in us and our faith and obedience are the fruit of his grace. It is by grace alone that we stand before God." And we must be also a people who are committed to our Lord Jesus Christ, a people who are faithful to him. To live and to walk in covenant with him to show that we have grasped this grace of God and it has gripped us by faithful obedient love, by submitting to him and his word, who look to his reward.

So, here we are. It is all of grace. It is God who has saved us by grace and by that grace we have our faith and repentance and obedience. This grace motivates us but in the Christian life, grace is not the only motivation. We are much more complex creatures. God has seen to that. He has made us and he knows what it takes to motivate us. We have in Scripture, warnings and exhortations and threats and promise of reward. And in the life of Joseph and in the lives of countless other saints in Scripture, the motivation of reward is one that is brought out there. God's word tells us, at times, of a child of God's faithfulness, obedience and loyalty to God as the reason why God has blessed and rewarded him. "He who honors me, I will honor."

God gives us his law to guide us as believers. It is given not just to point us *to* Christ and shows our need *of* Christ but it also guides us in walking with Christ. "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean. Enduring forever the rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned and in keeping of them, there is great," what congregation? "Reward." There is great reward. Not in earning of one's salvation but in our daily living and experiencing of that joy and that pleasure and that delight of the Lord. Because if this is the case, and it is according to the word of God, we have to ask ourselves in light of examining our lives and in light of the word of God: is it the case in our lives that we do not have the blessings of God because we do not have that in our lives which God would bless?

With regards to prayer: do you remember Jesus' words, "You have not because you ask not"? Psalm 66:18, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." That exhortation to husbands in 1 Peter 3, "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since

they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” There is this if/then, this cause and effect in Christian living. “The Lord bestows favor and honor, no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless,” we’re told in Psalm 84:11. Then, “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him and he will do this. He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.”

The testimony of Scripture is that if we are faithful, then God rewards that faithfulness. Now understand, his giving us of this is all of grace. It’s all of grace but as a gracious father, he delights to lavish upon us these favors and if we see that there is more faithfulness, then greater the reward. We have that expectation of this in the parables of the talents. You remember the committing out to the servants of these amounts of money and he tells them as he is about to depart, “Do business until I come. Get busy.” Then he comes back and there is that servant who buries that talent and we see how he is dealt with and then we see the one who has five and he has invested it and he has been blessed with five more and that with ten. Another example: we see that with regards to rule over cities and the blessing that is given there. There is that if/then-ness to it.

When we lack some blessing from God, when we long for what he has not yet given us, shouldn’t we as faithful believers ask first of all, “Have I honored the Lord that he should honor me?” You see, there has been this tendency to decouple these things. We’re all about grace. We want the grace of God and we want God to accept us as we are and praise God that his grace is that way but we want our lives to be without obligation to him, without desire to follow him and without this consequence. We should be examining our lives and what goes on around us, of seeking out the favor of God and the honor of God to do all that we can. Why? Out of the motivation of love for him but also understanding that there is that reward in so doing.

If you read through some of Cotton Mathers’ work on the history of New England in his day, this was something that was constantly on the minds and hearts of them, that they would see every hurricane and every earthquake and every shipwreck and so forth, searching out, “God, what are you trying to teach us out of this?” We tend to decouple those things in our minds and our existence today; we don’t think of the hand of God as much in hurricanes and in tornadoes and in earthquakes and business collapses and all kinds of calamities and so forth. We have in our minds and hearts in this modern day a God who is remote and distant and disengaged. He’s a God of the deists and how we tend to think of things. We, as evangelicals, are a little bit better than that but we are not asking ourselves, “Lord, what are you trying to teach in the middle of this? Through sickness, through trial, through disappointment, through these things?”

Now, not every earthquake is going to be in punishment of God’s people. Not every tornado. Not every economic downturn necessarily has with it fully the judgment of God behind it but what’s to say that it isn’t? That’s where we fail to ask the right questions. This God requires of us holiness. This God calls on us to be faithful, to fear him, to walk before him and be blameless. Yes, it is with the realization, “I cannot do a single thing

apart from his grace and mercy. You see, that's where our problem is: we get hung up on trying to do these things apart from the grace and mercy of God, apart from continually applying to him for everything that he has promised to give us, seeking to be dependent with him, to realize that we are to be continually drawing from him the resources. We tend to do it on our own strength, in our own striving.

He has also told us that "without me you can do nothing." Yes, I can do nothing apart from him but what is it we're told? "I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me." This is a man, Joseph, a man of covenantal integrity, of faithfulness, of steadfast loyalty to God who reverences him with his life, who realizes that apart from him he can do nothing that he is called on to do and in him, he can do all things. You see, that's what we're called to do: to be his people; to live for him; to fulfill that design for which we have been created and recreated in Christ Jesus; that we are people who are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of these good works; of seeking to follow him in covenant love. But we always do this in remembrance of what he has done for us. We have opportunity, again, to have this front and center in our thinking. The Psalmist says in Psalm 116, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people."

Maybe you've never personally put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from the penalty of your sin. Just as the whole world had to come to Joseph during the famine for bread, so everyone must come to the Lord Jesus Christ who is that bread of life, that bread which has come down from heaven. Without him you will die, you will perish. You must come to him to receive the gift of life that he has, that he offers and those who come to him, he will in no way cast out. Just as God delivered Joseph in one instance from prison to palace, so he will deliver you from the dungeon of your sin and give to you eternal life the instant you cry out to him.

For those of us who have believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ as he's offered in the gospel, let us be grateful and take up the cup of salvation and now remember our vows to the Lord and pay his vows in the presence of all his people.

Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank you that it is by grace that we are saved and sustained and kept and in that grace we walk, in that grace we do, in that grace we serve you. So we pray now as we come to your table, that you might lift up our hearts to you in whom is life, in whom is salvation, in whom is hope, in whom we have all things richly to enjoy. You created us, Lord, for pleasure and fulfillment, to find it all in you, to find it ultimately in that one at whose right hand our pleasure is forevermore. Lord, we have, by your gracious appointment, this foretaste of these things given to us here at this table. So we pray that you would turn our hearts and minds to this great reality that our hope is in the Lord, it is in Christ Jesus. It is in his name that we ask it and God's people said, Amen.

