

Lent Devotional March 20, 2020

Scripture

Genesis 47:1-26

1 So Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; they are now in the land of Goshen." 2 From among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. 3 Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were." 4 They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen." 5 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." 7 Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" 9 Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn." 10 Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. 11 Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed. 12 And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents. 13 Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14 Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. 15 When the money from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, "Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." 16 And Joseph answered, "Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." 17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. 18 When that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. 19 Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate." 20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. 21 As for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other. 22 Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land. 23 Then Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land. 24 And at the harvests you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." 25 They said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh." 26 So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

Devotional

Josephine (Jodi) Brodhead Moore '96, Mission (2016)

Lent. A time to examine ourselves—our needs, our shortcomings . . . and yes, our blessings, those Old Testament conventions that mirror the original promise God made to Abraham, conventions intended to invoke safety, prosperity, and longevity. In the Old Testament, the activity of blessing displays a proper hierarchy: fathers bless wives and progeny, rulers bless their subjects, priests bless their congregations. Always it is the greater who blesses the lesser in the context of one's own community.

After Jacob's remarkable reunion with Joseph in Egypt, Joseph presents his father to Pharaoh. Astoundingly, Jacob's first act is to bless Pharaoh, both at the beginning of his audience and in its closing. Not only does his action represent a reversal of the standard convention, but, more dramatically, Jacob's blessing also underscores the fact that God's blessing is not limited to the Abrahamic community. God's blessing is intended for all God's creation—a radical notion that Jesus emphasizes again and again in the New Testament.

What is a blessing other than the promise of God's salvation—a theme that interlaces the narrative about Joseph? Here in chapter 47, Joseph's new life in Egypt proves to be a salvific blessing to his family, not just in their loving reunion but also in their escape from famine in Canaan. Pharaoh (perhaps because of Jacob's blessing?) gives Israel's family fertile land in Goshen, east of the Nile, for farming and grazing flocks and livestock. This land will be their home for the next 400 years and will save them from certain starvation and death.

What is remarkable in this little vignette is God's saving grace shown not just to Jacob and his family, but also to all Egypt and Canaan. By working within Pharaoh's existing institutional structures with supplies he had so wisely stockpiled, Joseph sells food and seeds to all Egypt for surviving the next five years of famine.

In our Lenten journey we, like Joseph, must find blessing and salvation whatever our circumstances; like Jacob and his family, we must recognize *when* to seek out salvation; like Jacob, we must remember that even in our weakness, we can bless.

We must also ask the question, Who in this story is chosen? Does Lent call us to acknowledge the powerful human sin of designating some as "chosen" and others as "unchosen"? Does Scripture teach us that God has eternally desired and chosen to bless ALL God's creation?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are beloved sinners of your own creation who are striving always to be more like you. Help us to recognize and root out our need to define ourselves by "the other." Help us to recognize how this attitude permeates society and our institutions. Bless us with a kingdom-view of your creation and a revelation of a just world in which all can participate equally. For it is through your blessing that our fractured world can attain salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.