

# **Sermon Text for July 31, 2016**

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**Philippians 4:10-14, Genesis 41:25-36**

“In plenty and in want”

I heard a seminary professor once explain to his class why he taught in a classroom instead of in a church as a pastor. He said if you are going to be a good pastor you need to be a decent preacher. In order to be a good preacher you need life experiences for sermon examples. In order to have good examples you need a life and since he said, he didn't have a life, he decided to be a professor.

This past week I have been able to reflect on my life and I can't think of anyone who has had more life experiences, and has felt more blessed than what God has allowed me to experience and be involved in. The presence of God has been evident in my life in times of plenty and in want, and I've had both.

Thank you for allowing me this past week away from Strasburg. I was able to marry off a friend of mine who lives in Moscow but is from Holland along the Adriatic coast of Italy. It was an experience of a lifetime. 150 people showed up to a destination wedding, and let me tell you nothing was spared. It was absolutely an experience of the rich and somewhat famous. I then made my way across the country to stay with a friend of mine who is a pastor in Italy, who makes probably \$2000 a month with a wife and two children. We visited Albanella which is where we will probably have our mission trip in 2018 and I visited a close family of ours, he who is on his last legs, in their very, very modest house.

One of my favorite Scriptures is our first one for today where Paul tells us that he has learned to live with plenty and in want. Our living conditions should never change our relationship with our Savior. We have learned to live making \$800 a month as missionaries in Italy, to what we are now making because of your incredible generosity. How do we live our lives always pursuing our Savior regardless of our life situation? That is what we are going to be addressing today.

As we have been following Joseph we find that he has had many opportunities to live in plenty, as a favored child of his father and mother, to his most recent history where he has been in want. In these last times of want he has had the option to just throw

his hands up and say, I'm done, this is too much, I've been forgotten for too long. But he never does, he keeps going. And today is payback, he is finally remembered and all the painful journey that he has been on is finally worth it today. Let's read in Genesis.

Joseph finds himself as we have seen, up against the odds time and time again. But today, the odds start to turn in Joseph's favor. Joseph is remembered today because of his gift of interpreting dreams. Brief flashback as to why Joseph is in prison and how he could have gotten out. So today, Pharaoh calls him up from the dungeon and tells him of 7 fat cows and 7 ugly and skinny cows and then of 7 plump ears of grain and 7 dry and scorched ears of grain. The ugly, skinny and dry and scorched consume the fat and the plump without a problem. What does it mean?

Of course, again we hear that this interpretation is of and for God and only for God but Joseph states that it means there will be 7 years of plenty and 7 years of want. These years of want will eclipse the years of plenty and the people will find themselves without resources. Joseph is basically telling Pharaoh, listen, these are God's plans, in the end we will have 7 years of want that will put us on our knees, but don't worry, I have a plan. That's the bad news, but I have some good news. The bad news is that we are going to be hungry, but the good news is that God has shown us how to provide for ourselves so we don't have to dwell on the bad news.

Joseph could have stopped at the bad news, throw up his hands and say, woe is me, woe is us, we are going to starve. But instead he acted. Joseph realized that God's plan was fixed, we weren't going to change that, but he also sees an opportunity to act creatively within God's plan. This drama that is about to be played out over the next 14 years Joseph realized must be embodied and implemented by human imagination.

Joseph wasted no time in providing a solution to what was going to happen. This is God's plan, but here is how we can work within God's plan. What a great way to deal with a problem, with the times of want in our lives. So often I hear people and minister to people that when they find themselves in times of plenty they are sky high and without a worry, and they take credit for themselves. When they are in times of want then they throw up their hands, come into my office and aren't able to see past the next day.

I think Joseph began what is called the Protestant Work Ethic. You know when you join First Presbyterian Church you inherit the title of Protestant which means you

need to know what this means. What it means is that we strive to go forward, to produce, we succeed in good or bad times, in plenty or in want. When we feel that things are happening in our life that makes us want to quit and give up, we don't quit and give up, we work even harder, we are determined to succeed, to go forward for one simple reason. We believe, as Joseph so clearly believed, that God is in control and even more importantly that this God who is in control is on our side. God is on our side so if we give up we give up on God. If we keep going, and creatively work in the context in which God provides for us God will bless us.

This title I chose because it has its origin in the early marriage vows. The promises are made to be faithful to each other in plenty and in want. I think the reality in which we find ourselves is more often than not we have a tendency in our relationships to throw our hands up in times of want because we do not feel that God is in control. I know, believe me I know, that there are times that God never wanted a marriage to take place, relationships based on abuse, both physical and verbal, should never have begun in the first place and maybe giving up is actually staying in that relationship when God is telling you to move forward and get out. But there are other times when abuse is not part of the relationship when couples decide to move on, give up, try something new, I feel that this is a sign that we are a people not willing to trust God completely that even in times of want, we can be creative and find ways to serve God and our spouses.

Joseph did anything but sit back and watch things happen. But it is easier to say this is what God wants without creatively acting within God's plan. Just because God's plan is greater than our plan doesn't mean that we stop planning and moving forward. The reason we are known to have a tremendous work ethic is because we have a tremendous example.

What if our Savior had somewhere along in his ministry thrown up his hands and said this is too much. I can't do this, God will figure out another way to save these people. Jesus had so many opportunities. When his mother and family thought he was crazy and called to rescue him. When he was constantly criticized by the religious leaders. When his disciples and best friends deserted him. When he hung on the cross. When Jesus was faced with times of want he remained faithful and became even more determined to work and be productive and make a difference within God's plans.

Joseph allowed God's plans to shape and direct his life instead of lying down and getting run over and carried along in the wave of life. To believe is to have a stubborn faith that in plenty and in want, to believe that there is no evil dark enough that God somehow, someday, sometime cannot redeem.

Mark Twain once stated that man was made at the end of the week's work when God was tired. I don't know about that but I do know that when we get tired in life is when we need to push harder as we see Joseph and Jesus do, because it allows us once again to open the door to a future that would have been closed to us if we had not been faithful to God in plenty and in want. Amen.