

An Unexpected Future
Genesis 41:46-52
January 7, 2018

Longtime NY Yankee player and manager Yogi Berra once said, **“The future ain’t what it used to be!”** - Pause and think about that one for a moment - Yet, strangely enough, I think I know exactly what he means.

We have DREAMS & PLANS for what our future will be - but sometimes it does not become EXACTLY WHAT WE PLANNED - Our future, WHEN IT ARRIVES, ain’t what it used to be!

SEVEN DAYS AGO the Calendar rolled over to 2018 - Can you believe that? - How many of you can remember Y2K (Year 2,000 for those under age 18)? - Can you believe that was 18 years ago?

The future MAY NOT BE what it used to be! - But one thing about the future, IT KEEPS ON COMING! - Time marches on RELENTLESSLY - and it does so at A VERY STEADY PACE of 1 hour WITH EVERY TURN of the clock!

But for some of us today, we aren’t living in 2018 - Some folks in this room today are stuck SOMEWHERE IN THE PAST - Something happened somewhere along the PATH OF YOUR LIFE and you just can’t move on!

For this reason, 2018 IS NOT WHAT you hoped it would be - Somewhere along the way to today, things WENT WRONG - Life did not happen AS YOU HAD PLANNED!

So, You are STUCK - You keep LOOKING BACK wanting to CHANGE WHAT WENT WRONG - But you are realizing THAT IS NOT WORKING! - You want to be OPTIMISTIC about 2018, but it is just not happening - It is not the FUTURE YOU PLANNED FOR!

This morning we are going to examine THE LIFE OF A YOUNG MAN who could have gotten stuck very easily - You talk about an UNEXPECTED & UNCERTAIN FUTURE - Few have live a TOUGHER STRETCH than Joseph - for about 15 years, his life was A TRAIN WRECK!

Yes, he bore SOME OF THE BLAME - but he did nothing to DESERVE WHAT HE GOT - Joseph might have easily said, **“The future ain’t what it used to be”**, **BECAUSE** his life did not in any way TURN OUT LIKE HE IMAGINED!

This morning let’s see how he dealt with an UNEXPECTED FUTURE - How did he deal with CHANGE & FRUSTRATION & DISAPPOINTMENT? - How does a person avoid getting STUCK IN THE PAST?

Gen 41:46 Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. 47 Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. 48 So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. 49 Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable.

Gen 41:50 And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him.

Gen 41:51 Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house."

Gen 41:52 And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

HOW many of you were named by your parents for SOMETHING OR SOMEONE SPECIAL?

- I am ALWAYS IMPRESSED with parent who come up with INCREDIBLY MEANINGFUL NAMES for their children - each NAME, each LETTER has special meaning
- Donna and I PUT A LOT OF THOUGHT into naming our children - but ultimately we just picked out NAMES WE LIKED!
- Our children's NAMES mean a great deal to us, but they would not NECESSARILY CONVEY anything special to others.
- Though each name is MEANINGFUL TO US, they did not always ARRIVED AT EASILY - take for EXAMPLE Our youngest child, Jamey.
- SHE WAS BORN ON A CHURCH FAMILY VACATION down on St. Simon's Island - Donna was about 8 ½ months along - but this was our 4th - Relaxed!
- I don't think she would have GONE INTO LABOR had she not done the BODY SURFING at the beach that last day!
- Well, the LAST NIGHT there she went into LABOR - We went to the LOCAL HOSPITAL and had a beautiful baby girl - We were on vacation, we weren't planning on having A BABY YET! - we didn't know if our NEW ARRIVAL WAS going to be a BOY OR GIRL - we hadn't DECIDED ON A NAME!
- We decided we would work on a name on the WAY HOME - but they wouldn't let us LEAVE THE HOSPITAL without a name on the BIRTH CERTIFICATE! - We didn't have ANY HEALTH INSURANCE so we were UNDER THE GUN to get out of there in 23 hours - that second day was expensive!
- A FEW HOURS LATER we left the hospital with Jamey! - Our LAST CHILD WOULD BE NAMED after her dad - Well, her FIRST NAME - my MIDDLE NAME is Albert - We couldn't do that to her!

- I was named after my 2 Grandfathers - one James, one Albert - I hated the day Bill Cosby came out with the FAT ALBERT skit - I had to keep my MIDDLE NAME a secret
- Hated the FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL when the teach READ THE ROLL - especially if they use MIDDLE NAMES - teachers don't ever do that to your students!

In our TEXT TODAY Joseph has 2 SONS - NOT while on vacation - but while ON AN UNPLANNED HIETUS in Egypt! - their names were WELL THOUGHT OUT and had MUCH MEANING to their DAD - THEIR NAMES in a sense TOLD THE STORY of his life.

Joseph names his children after TWO INCREDIBLE THINGS GOD'S HAD DONE in his life.

Let's RECOUNT the story of Joseph's life:

- He was the ELEVENTH of 12 boys born to Jacob
- Being a son of Rachel, He was a FAVORITE of his Father - and his brothers knew it
- Showing Favoritism at home is a DANGEROUS GAME - it can lead to very unhealthy sibling relationship - Jealousy & bitterness are just 2 of it's fruits!
- Picked on by 10 older brothers
- Their Hatred soon turned to ABUSE - Fake Joseph's death
- Sale him into Slavery
- He experiences Imprisonment - after being falsely accused of rape
- While in prison he is Forgotten by his friends
- Joseph lives out 15 years of FRUSTRATION, DISAPPOINTMENT & HEARTACHE!
- MAYBE you can relate - Maybe the past few years have not been what you had ENVISIONED FOR YOUR FUTURE!
- Then Pharoah has his DREAMS - Joseph interprets them - and the rest is History!

- 7 Years of ABUNDANCE - Followed by 7 Years of FAMINE
- Ultimately God would raise up Joseph to 2nd in Command in Egypt
- During the YEARS OF ABUNDANCE, he marries and has 2 sons

Manasseh - “causes to forget”

Joseph had had a DIFFICULT LIFE - it was a COMBINATION OF PAIN AND LOSS - but somehow he knew he had to LET GO OF THOSE MEMORIES - He had learned to FORGIVE, FORGET & MOVE ON.

It is very difficult to FORGET THE PAINFUL episodes of life - I think the only way we can is by ALLOWING OURSELVES TO EMBRACE THE NEW that comes our way - Even when that NEW IS NOT WHAT WE PLANNED.

For so MANY PEOPLE their attitude is **“if it is not what I want - if it is not the way I planned - then I am not going to be happy with it”** - They miss out on so much of the GOOD THAT GOD wants to give them!

My OBSERVATIONS:

- Bitter people never forget anything
- They Hold on to grudges with a VICE GRIP!
- IN Counseling: People can RECOUNT HURTS from 30 years ago like they happened yesterday
- Years ago I met with a MIDDLE AGED MAN who literally TREMBLED WHEN he talked about HIS MOTHER and how she had VERBALLY & PHYSICALLY ABUSED him - when he was telling me about it he GOT ANGRY like it had happened the day before - SHE HAD BEEN DEAD for several years!

CS Lewis wrote: “Hell will be a place where you remember every misdeed that has happened to you”

- It is HELL ON EARTH to remember every misdeed done to you

- I have the Blessing of a SHORT MEMORY - I call it the ABILITY TO LET GO of the past - but many people I know CAN'T LET GO OF ANYTHING - as a matter of fact they spend a GOOD PORTION of their time CHASING THE PAST

The MOVIE “The Bourne Identity” is the story of a TRAINED ASSASSIN who has developed amnesia when he is nearly killed - he had FORGOTTEN HIS PAST

- THE PLOT centers around his attempt to REMEMBER HIS PAST
- Most of us have JUST THE OPPOSITE PROBLEM - we can't FORGET - we REFUSE to let things go - in our MINDS WE LIVE in the past
- Our calendars are rapidly MOVING INTO 2018 - but we are STUCK IN 2017 OR 2007 OR 1997 OR 1977! - something HAPPENED THAT YEAR that HURT US:
- That was the YEAR...
 - Your dad WALKED OUT on you & Your Parent's DIVORCED
 - That terrible CAR ACCIDENT that caused so much pain
 - LOST a child or a spouse
 - BETRAYED by a trusted friend
 - You were PASSED OVER FOR that DREAM JOB
 - Abused and no one would RESCUE YOU
- BUT you keep CHASING IT - as if you could somehow CATCH UP TO IT AND THEN CHANGE IT - but we CAN'T!
- DON'T YOU KNOW there were days when JOSEPH LONGED for his FAMILY & HIS HOME in Israel - Don't you know he DREAMED ABOUT WHAT might have been if Dad had not given him that MULTI-COLORED COAT!

BUT, God had helped Joseph to FORGET - The name implies LITERALLY **“MADE HIM FORGET”** - GOD had HELPED HIM LET GO OF HURTS - And God can help you as well.

Joseph FORGOT 2 THINGS:

1. **TOIL (His Pain)** - those things in his life that were HURTFUL & PAINFUL - betrayal of brothers - years of SLAVERY AND IMPRISONMENT - being forgotten in that prison by HIS FRIENDS.
2. **FAMILY (His Loss)** - what he HAD LOST - things that had been TAKEN FROM HIM

What was Joseph’s Secret of FORGETFULNESS?

1. **He stopped LOOKING BACK** - Joseph stopped CHASING THE PAST
 - Never see Joseph SEEKING TO GO BACK to his father’s land - Even when he had the POSITION & RESOURCES to do so!
 - They finally COME TO HIM - it is at THIS POINT THAT HE DEALS with his brothers.
 - But, because Joseph is NOT FIXATED ON THE PAST, He can now LOVE & FORGIVE them
 - HE HAS NOT built up years of BITTERNESS
 - The FRUIT OF A BACKWARDS FOCUS is always bitterness!
2. **He stopped HAVING PITY PARTIES**
 - Many times HE DESERVED to have one
 - Joseph was HUMAN - I don’t want to PRETEND that he did not HAVE MOMENTS OF SELF-PITY - but he did not STAY THERE long enough for the Holy Spirit to RECORD IT!
 - Some people LIVES ARE ONE BIG PARTY - one big Pity Party!

- EX: My Mom - Advice when I was having a FEEL SORRY FOR ME SESSION - 12 years old
- Older Brother - Popular - Good-looking - Wanted nothing to do with me
- **“You can sit here and feel sorry for yourself, or you can ENJOY LIFE, but you CAN’T DO BOTH”**
- Some of you need to HEED MOM’S WISDOM!

3. He HAD EMBRACED THE NEW path God placed him on

- He had WORKED HARD and live RESPONSIBLY where ever he found himself
- Taken the JOB OFFER of Pharaoh
- Married EGYPTIANS Wife - it became HIS HOME!

PAUL had an EXPERIENCE SIMILAR to Joseph’s - often HURT BY THE VERY PEOPLE he was trying to love - A FUTURE that did not turn out AS HE HAD ENVISIONED!

2 Cor. 11:24-28 Paul tells of his PAINFUL PAST - **From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.**

AND YOU THINK you have problems! - But let’s read what he later wrote to the Philipian Believers:

PHIL. 3:13-14 - **Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

- First - we see Paul “forgetting” those things that are BEHIND HIM!
- **“reaching forward” - “press towards”** - his eyes were CONSTANTLY LOOKING AHEAD
- HURTING, BITTER people tend to constantly LOOK BACKWARDS
- Hurting/bitter people WANT PITY from others
- People stuck in the past REFUSE TO MOVE ON and embrace where God has them

WHICH DIRECTION are your eye’s looking? - WHAT IS IT you refuse to LET GO OF?

Joseph’s SECOND SON - **Ephraim - “doubly fruitful”**

- First God DEALT WITH HIS PAST by helping Joseph FORGIVE AND MOVE ON
- Second, God BLESSED HIM - He had been **“doubly fruitful”** in Egypt!
- His life is now no doubt FAR MORE EFFECTIVE & POWERFUL THAN it could have been in Israel
- But, notice GOD’S ORDER - we must GET OVER our past BEFORE God can BLESS OUR PRESENT

Look at something here that is VERY IMPORTANT - “Fruitful where” - **in the land of his AFFLICTION!**

- Most people WANT OUT of their land of affliction -
- This was the Jewish people after they had been CARRIED OFF TO BABYLON after Jerusalem had been destroyed - Their FALSE PROPHETS were telling them that they would soon be back home

- God, through Jeremiah, SAYS “NO” - you are going to be in this LAND OF AFFLICTION for a while - 70 long years
- God tells them in **Jeremiah 29:5-6** “**Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished.**”

God INSTRUCTS THEM to do 3 things WHILE IN THIS TOUGH SPOT:

First, BEGIN TO BUILD houses - Start right where they were and BUILD SOMETHING NEW - INVEST IN their new situation - You might be surprised at THE NEW LIFE you can build in a place you DIDN'T PLAN to be in.

Next, PLANT – begin to SOW GOOD SEEDS - plants some SEEDS OF FORGIVENESS - sow some SEEDS OF COMPASSION - Cast out some SEEDS OF KINDNESS!

The HARVEST that you will reap will ENERGIES & NOURISH you - It will also put you BACK ON A PATH to the life you want - **Your situation will not improve until you plant for a better future.**

Third, MARRY & TO MULTIPLY – My application here is not that you necessarily LITERALLY MARRY & HAVE CHILDREN - No, multiply in the sense that you begin to INVEST IN OTHERS - Reach out - Focus on the NEEDS OF OTHERS!

IN TIMES OF AFFLICTION we don't want to FIND JOY - We don't want to MOVE ON - often we only want to FIND A WAY OUT!

God wants to USE THE AFFLICTION TO STRENGTHEN & MOLD OUR CHARACTER - To TOUGHEN US UP - to BUILD our faith! CHANGING MY CIRCUMSTANCES very rarely solves my problems - WHY? - Because my problems are USUALLY WITHIN ME - they just FOLLOW ME WHEREVER I GO!

When it comes to LIFE'S CHALLENGES, are you FIGHT OR FLIGHT - fight through PROBLEMS or RUN FROM PROBLEMS?

One sign that we TEND TOWARDS flight over fight is that we are really good at BLAMING OTHERS for our problems!

BLAMING MY BOSS for my FAILURES AT WORK - Blaming my SPOUSE for my SELFISH THOUGHTS & DESIRES - blaming my teenager my ANGRY OUTBURST!

MAYBE, just maybe, the problem IS ME!!!

But we DON'T LIKE OUR EGYPT! - but it is the place God is using to CHANGE YOU - IT is the place God is using to PRUNE YOUR LIFE and make you into a person HE CAN USE!

Joseph's FRUITFULNESS happened BECAUSE HE EMBRACED EGYPT - he LET GO OF HIS PAIN - As he MOVED ON, God was ABLE TO BLESS HIM.

Joseph ACCEPTED HIS LIFE in Egypt - MARRIED an Egyptian wife - made a HOME THERE - If this was GOD'S PLANS for him, then he would ACCEPT IT & EMBRACE IT

When we ARE STUCK & HOLD ON to a PAINFUL PAST, we don't allow ourselves TO TAKE THE NEW PATH God has for us - Thus we PREVENT THE FRUITFULNESS He longs to bring to our lives.

What about you? - As the CALENDAR CONTINUES to turn, ARE YOU STUCK in the past?

What are you going to do with the YEAR AHEAD?

Stop CHASING THE PAST - EMBRACE the life God has for you this year.