

Sermon preached at Old Baptist Chapel, Chippenham
by Mr. G. D. Buss
on Lord's Day morning, 24th April, 2016

Text: *"And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." Genesis 41, verses 51 & 52.*

Here, before us this morning, we have the family of God's servant, Joseph. The two names he gave to the sons that God gave him (no doubt directed by the blessed Spirit), were indicative of the path that he had walked and was now walking. I want to bring before you this truth: that, in a sense, the two names which Joseph called his sons: Manasseh meaning 'forgetting,' and Ephraim meaning 'fruitful,' are a description of the life of the believer. And, every believer here this morning hour will understand the forgetting, and will understand the fruitfulness, in due season.

How Joseph came to be at this place is well-known. It all began with those strange dreams he had years before, strange dreams that he himself could not fully fathom, except that they gave him to understand that he would be in such a position that even his family would give him honour. And yet, to interpret his own dreams, he found more and more difficult. For, the more his path went on; from the bitterness in his home, to the pit, then to the slave market, to Potiphar's house, to Potiphar's wife's disgraceful behaviour, and then to the prison; there being forgotten for those two full years after the baker's and butler's matter was dealt with: the more he went on, the less able he was to interpret his own path. Is that where you are this morning? The more you go on, the less able you are to unravel the secrets and the mysteries of your path. It seems to get darker. It seems to get more complex and more perplexing. Well, Joseph would have understood just where you are.

But, you see, blessed be God, although to Joseph it was perplexing, it was not perplexing to God. We are told on one occasion that Joseph “was laid in iron” – margin reading: “*his soul came into iron.*” That must have been an exceedingly trying place. Satan got at him, and no doubt challenged the faith he had, the dreams he had and the God he had. He was not able to answer. Do you know what that is? But, although he knew that path, in one remarkable day he went from the dungeon to a throne. Never, ever limit, dear friends, what God can do! The man who lay at the pool of Bethesda had been there in that condition thirty-eight years. No man could help him, and he had no friends to help him into the water when the waters did move and others were healed. But, with one blessed word from the dear Saviour, he rises, takes up his bed, and walks. Friends, is there anything too hard for the Lord? He who could free Joseph from his fetters, deliver him from a prison cell, and put him at the right hand of Pharaoh in one day, what cannot He do for you?

“But bring your hard cases
To Jesus to-day.”

J. Kent

And surely, Joseph’s example is one which we may follow. We just pause here a moment. The day of the death of a believer, and I am only speaking about the death of a believer, is even more glorious. The day of that believer begins as any other day. He is still in the body: still with ‘this wretched man’ to plague him, still with the devil to tempt him and still with this dying world around him. But, by the end of that day he is released, eternally released. He joins “the spirits of just men made perfect.” He is washed in the blood of the Lamb, clothed in the obedience of Christ and sings that heavenly anthem and doxology: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” That is what the Lord does when a believer dies. “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.” It is the Lord gathering home His harvest. It is Christ seeing the travail of His soul and being satisfied. The death of a believer, though it leaves many sore hearts and sad gaps

behind; is a wonderful thing in the sight of the great Head of the Church,

“Give the Saviour, without grudge,
The purchase of His pain.”

J. Hart

Why I say that, this morning, I know not. But, may it be so when we come to our end as it was with Joseph: from the dungeon to the throne in one day. It was so with the dying thief. “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”

For thirteen long years, Joseph’s trouble had gone on. He was seventeen when he met that man in Dothan and, humanly speaking, things began to go wrong. Now, thirteen years later; thirteen years of trouble, temptation, disappointment and discouragement, he is, at last, a ruler over all the land of Egypt. God waits to be gracious, dear friends. *His* time is not *our* time. All that Joseph passed through was so vitally necessary so that he could be a ruler at the right time. He now had the wisdom of the experience, from which he had passed through, to be able to handle matters wisely and thus find good.

So, Joseph is now the ruler. He had been able, with God’s help, to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. You will notice that the magicians and the worldly-wise men could not interpret those dreams. And the wisdom of this world will not be able to touch your case, friends. You may go to worldly counsellors with your case, but it is only the wisdom of God that will touch it. Only *that* will get to the bottom and root of it, and unravel the secret of it. “I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places.” What does that mean? Well, in the context, it was when the bowls of gold and silver and all the implements of the Temple were ransacked by the Chaldeans and taken down into Babylon. They were hidden in the vaults. The remarkable thing was that not one of them was stolen or lost. When the captivity returned, they all came back, as God promised they would. “Treasures of darkness” and “hidden riches.” Spiritually, what does this mean? In

the day of your captivity, everything is hidden. All the riches seem to be out of sight. But, they are preserved by your God for the day of deliverance. He will bring them to the light. What does good Micah say? “He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness.” Bless God, dear friends, He will come again. “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” “Ye now therefore have sorrow:” Joseph knew that, “but I will see you again.” Friends, wait for it. The visit is on its way. The deliverance is appointed. “They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me.”

Well, now Joseph is at the right hand of Pharaoh. And, with the wisdom God has given him, he is ordering the affairs of state, and men are giving the honour due to him. The Lord gives him a wife, and then these two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. These two names, as I said at the outset, are descriptive of the path of God’s people who are called by free and sovereign grace. Just a word about divine sovereignty here; something you would have thought that Joseph would already have learnt much. He had, but there is always more to learn, isn’t there? You will remember that when Jacob was dying, Joseph brought these two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to his father to be blessed. Jacob, who was blind, put his right hand on the younger one, Ephraim, and his left hand on Manasseh. As the godly Puritans said, it was a cross-handed blessing. It was not what Joseph thought ought to be. In effect, he said, ‘You have got it wrong, father. Manasseh is the eldest!’ ‘I know, my son,’ says Jacob, ‘but Ephraim will be the greater.’ Divine sovereignty. Friends, we must bow under that. It is not a harsh doctrine to God’s dear people.

“Sovereign Ruler of the skies,
Ever gracious, ever wise;
All my times are in Thy hand,
All events at Thy command.”

J. Ryland

It is not a harsh doctrine; it is a precious doctrine! It means that your God is on the throne. He is ordering affairs according to His own

purpose and will. He has all your times in His hand. Although He often takes His way in the sea and His path in the deep waters; although He makes the winds His chariot, yet, blessed be God, He never vacates that throne. And, although there may be cross-handed blessings in your life; things you would have altered and had different had you had the ordering of them; you will live, my dear friends, to bless God that you did not have the ordering of them and did not have the management of them. You and I make so many mistakes when we try and order and manage our own steps. Surely, we learn this lesson: "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," it is God's gift. If there is someone here this morning needing direction, remember that. "It is not in man." Joseph said: "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Get on your knees with that need you have of divine direction. Pour out your heart before the Lord and tell Him what direction you need. Tell Him you are watching to know which way you should take; tell Him it all, and wait for His answer, watch for His appearing. Do not be like Saul, who would not wait and could not wait because he lacked faith. May God give you the grace of waiting faith, for, "the Lord will appear." Joseph would tell you that. Thirteen long years of affliction! But, the Lord appeared. And He will appear.

Now let us come to these two names. Firstly, Manasseh. "For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." The prosperity that now came upon him, and the release and the relief he must have felt, blotted out, as it were, all that had gone before. He was not complaining about what had gone before, but now the joy outweighed the sorrow. The time of harvest had come. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." That was the time that Joseph was now in. He had come to a harvest time; a "nevertheless afterward." There will be that time. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless *afterward*." You say, 'But I cannot see an "afterward." I cannot see a future.' "Nevertheless, *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

There is an expectation for God's chastened people. He will not always chasten, He will not always bring the rod out. He will lay it aside in due season, and kiss you "with the kisses of His mouth." He will enlarge your coast and show you the "needs be" for all that has gone before. And, when He blesses your soul, dear friend, it will be like our Lord says in John 16. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." Joseph had known what travail was: deep, bitter, heart-rending sorrows; loneliness, pain, affliction and humiliation. But now he remembers it no more in the sense that the Lord had brought him into "a wealthy place." He was now "in green pastures" and "beside the still waters." Bless God for His delivering grace. What did you just sing?

"Still is He gracious, wise, and just,
And still in Him let Israel trust."

P. Doddridge

We have two or three cases in the Word of God that set this before us. We have, for example, that very wonderful case in Psalm 45, where the good psalmist says this: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; So, shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." Here is the picture of the bride being taken by the Bridegroom. The bride is to forget her father's house. She is now, as it were, to be so taken up with her Bridegroom's house as to have no heart for any but Him. That is what that beautiful word in John 3 says: "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom." The Lord Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom, and the Church is the bride. He has her, and she is so taken up with Him that she can leave the world. She can leave her father's house willingly, as constrained by love divine. Have you left your father's house? Do you know what I mean? We are sons and daughters of Adam. We are fallen creatures, by nature. Our home is this world: its sins, its spirit, its company, its pursuits and its corruptions are

natural to us. Sadly, and solemnly, it is our father's house. But, if grace touches your heart, it will no longer be your home.

“We've no abiding city here;”
Sad truth, were this to be our home;
But let the thought our spirits cheer,
“We seek a city yet to come.”

T. Kelly

Friends, is this world no longer your home? That is the point. As good George Rose used to say, ‘When a believer dies, he goes home. Heaven is his home. But, when an unbeliever dies, he leaves home.’ Where does he go? You will never call eternal misery ‘home.’ There are no comforts there, do remember that. Friends, what is your home? What is your company? Have you left your father's house, like the one we have just read of? Are you forgetting, as it were, your father's house as we have a type before us here of Manasseh? Is that behind you now? Or is your heart still hankering after it? Is it double minded: one moment serving Christ, and the next, the world? “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” “Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord,” says James. How right James is! May God make you, and me, single-minded and single-hearted. “Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.”

This, of course, was the spirit of Ruth when she left Moab. Her heart's desire was to be numbered among God's people; the people of Naomi. “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” She was forgetting her father's house. Orpah didn't. Orpah went a little way with natural affection. Natural religion will take you a little way; quite a long way! But, it will never take you to heaven. “Ye must be born again.” You must have a heart for heaven. We are not born with it. I wasn't born with it, and nor were you, either. It must be given to us. It is an act of ‘sovereign grace, o'er sin abounding.’ Have you a heart for heaven? Your own heart will tell you, let conscience tell you. Have you a heart for heaven, for Christ, His Word, His people and His Truth; for

Father, Son and Holy Ghost? Well, may God make it so.

Ruth had a heart for God's people. And, so did Rahab. What a remarkable case Rahab's was! She was brought up in the most idolatrous city of the day, and was surrounded by idols. But, she heard what happened at the Red Sea. She heard of the miracles in the wilderness. Deep in her heart was this desire: 'If only I could be one of the number of God's people!' It seemed an impossibility. How could she, a heathen woman, be numbered among the people of God? You can read how it came to pass in the Book of Joshua. The Lord had spared Jericho for that very reason, that this daughter of Abraham, as she was in a spiritual sense, would be revealed. How wonderful are God's ways and God's works! But, Rahab had to leave her father's house, didn't she? No doubt it fell with the walls of Jericho, after she was taken out from it.

Then, look at it another way. In Philippians 3, Paul speaks of leaving his father's house. He gives a very accurate description of what must take place in the hearts of all of God's people in greater or lesser measure. Listen to this: "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Friends that was all natural religion, all of it. Then what does he say? "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." Later he says: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Do you understand, then, the name 'Manasseh'? Are you a pressing soul? Are you pressing towards the cross, pressing towards the precious blood of Christ, pressing towards

the name of Christ, yea, pressing towards all that is in the blessed covenant of grace? Are you one who is, as it were, wrestling on towards heaven,

“Against storm, and wind and tide”?

A. R. Cousin

“For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.” One other way of looking at it: when we are under the law, we toil. The law demands perfection, rightly and justly so. It demands perfection in all its precepts; in thought, word and deed. And, when the awakened soul realises that, it sets to work. It resolves to be different. It resolves to turn over a new leaf and be a different person. But, how fruitless that toil is!

“The more I strove against its power,
I sinned and stumbled but the more.”

J. Cennick

Is that where you are this morning? You have been toiling and working so hard. But, you are failing because sin is mingled with all that you do! When the law examines your efforts, it says: ‘No. It is not good enough for me. It is not perfect. It is not pure. It is mingled with sin. I will have nothing to do with it.’ And there you are, as it were, right at the beginning of the matter again; still no further on. You are even further back. This is your toil, until you come to where the good hymnwriter came:

“His word is this (poor sinners, hear);
“Believe on Me, and banish fear;
Cease from your own works, bad or good,
And wash your garments in My blood.”

J. Hart

That is forgetting all your toil, isn't it? You are now leaning on the work of another; Christ's work, Christ's obedience, Christ's precious blood, Christ's atonement and all that Christ is: a blessed resting place

for this weary soul who is worn out with working to no effect! “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Rest from all your efforts, because the work is done; it is finished through a precious Christ.

“For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.” One last thought on this part of our text. When a believer arrives home, he leaves behind all the sins, the sorrows, the thorns, the crooks in the lot and the crosses that he had to bear.

“There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast.”

I. Watts

What a prospect! God permits the troubles and trials of our life for that very purpose: to make us long for that rest. “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction.”

“Heaven is my Fatherland,
Heaven is my home.”

T. R. Taylor

“Yes, I shall soon be landed
On yonder shores of bliss.”

Gospel Mag., 1804

Well, that is what a believer anticipates as he gets near the end of his journey.

Now we come to the second son that God gave Joseph: Ephraim. He was to be the greater (in numbers) of the two. Ephraim is mentioned very much in the minor Prophets. His was the dominant tribe of the ten seceding tribes in the days of Rehoboam. We read here that “the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful

in the land of my affliction.” Let me take you to three other verses for a moment, and see the secret of Joseph’s fruitfulness. The first is our Lord’s own words. “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” How often the knife, the purging knife, was brought out against Joseph! He has these dreams, and then the knife comes out; his brethren hate him, and even his father misunderstands him. Eventually he goes down to Egypt and there begins to prosper in Potiphar’s house. But, the knife comes out, and, before long, he is in a prison. There he prospers, as well; so much so, that the keeper of the prison leaves everything to him. But, Joseph is still a prisoner. Then the knife comes out again; the butler forgets him, “two full years” of loneliness, darkness, trial and temptation. What does it mean? “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

Have you asked the Lord that you may bring forth more fruit? Have you been bemoaning your barrenness? ‘Lord, I need to bring forth more fruit!’ What has He done? He has brought out the purging knife to make you pray, to deepen your exercises, to search your heart out, to wean you from your idols and to draw you closer to Him, hasn’t He? That is what the Lord is about: a purging knife. “*Every* branch,” not some branches, “*every* branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it.” It is a very necessary work. I am not, in any way, used to pruning trees, but if a tree is not pruned, it would soon become very barren and fruitless. Here it is then: a purged tree.

Now we go to Joseph’s blessing; the blessing that Jacob blessed him with at the end of his days. “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall.” See the picture: here is a vine. It is supplied by a well, and its branches are supported by a wall. That is a picture of Joseph, isn’t it? He is the vine and he needs support. His God supported him. He needed supplies: grace supplied him. And that was the secret of his fruitfulness. “A fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall.” And, dear

friends, if you are to bear any fruit you will need just the same: support from God and a supply of grace.

And think, just for a moment, of another aspect of that wall. Our dear Saviour had to walk this path, did He not? No tongue can tell what He endured so that there might be fruit on His branch for His dear people to partake of. Not that He needed purging in the way that you and I do, don't misunderstand me. But, He says: "I am the Vine." And, bless God that the branches have run over the wall so that poor sinners can partake of the fruit of His grace. We sometimes feel separated, don't we? Our sins, the world and the flesh get the better of us and we feel at a distance. To think that the Branch ran over the wall of separation so that a poor sinner might partake again! What a mercy! That is just a side thought.

But, here is the secret of Joseph's fruitfulness: supplied and supported. And you will not bear fruit any other way. There was a secret supply that kept Joseph alive through all those long years of tribulation. We are told he was supported "by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." What did you sing just now?

"His shield is spread o'er every saint,
And thus supported, who shall faint?"

P. Doddridge

Joseph would have sung our hymn with vigour this morning, had he been here. He would have said: 'I have proved it.'

"Still is He gracious, wise, and just,
And still in Him let Israel trust."

P. Doddridge

Again. You go to those words in Exodus 1. "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." That new king knew his history book; you can be sure of that. He knew the history of Egypt. He knew what had happened when the children of Israel came, and how this man, Joseph, was raised up. In what way did he not know Joseph?

He did not know Joseph's God. No. He did not *want* to know Joseph's God, either! The sad fruits that we read of in the early chapters of Exodus are very plainly and clearly seen. We read in chapter 1 these words: "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew."

"And must it, Lord, be so?
And must Thy children bear
Such various kinds of woe,
Such soul-perplexing fear?
Are these the blessings we expect?
Is this the lot of God's elect?"

J. Hart

Is this the way home, Lord? Yes, it is. "The *more* they afflicted them, the *more* they multiplied and grew." And notice what Joseph himself said later concerning what took place. There is no doubt his brethren meant it for evil; they would have murdered him had not God intervened. And others that came against him, through his long trial, were all malicious and all vindictive. But God was over it all. "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." What a difference! Friends, it is what God means that matters. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ is called the "Amen." Have you ever thought of that? Revelation 3: "These things saith the Amen." That is the closing, isn't it? We say 'Amen' at the close of our services. We do not say it glibly; we are asking a petition: let God do what we have just asked for. 'The grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God the Father, the communion of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, rest and abide with us each, both now and for evermore. Amen.' Solemn, sacred prayer! Oh, that it might well up in your heart when we say it! But, 'Amen' means 'it shall be so' when God says it. We make it a prayer: 'let it be so.' The 'Amen' in God's account means: 'it shall be so.'

And, friends, it means that God always has the last word. The devil will not have the last word, the world will not have the last word and your unbelieving heart will not have the last word. Joseph: the iron in your soul will not be the last word; God will have the last word. What

is the last word in the matter? It is this: “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:” the “Amen.” Can you see how it is? Bless God for the “Amen.”

“For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” Hezekiah would say the same if he were here this morning. On his apparent death-bed, an army around him and his sins staring him in the face. But, all was overruled by God. “By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.” Do you understand Ephraim’s name, then? Is it a name that you covet? Do you covet to be fruitful? A barren tree yields no honour to its owner, does it? Remember that barren fig tree that our Lord came to. He cursed it. “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.” In a day, it shrivelled up. Solemn, awful thought! Friends, if Christ should come and call your soul from time into eternity and there be no fruit, how terrible that would be! How solemn it would be to face a holy God with no fruits of repentance, no fruits of living faith, no fruits of the love of Christ, no humility, no patience and no teachings of the Spirit! Oh, how solemn an end that would be! May it not be so with you or me. ‘Lord, teach me to bear fruit.’

“Jesus, immutably the same,
Thou true and living Vine!
Around Thy all-supporting stem,
My feeble arms I’d twine.

I can do nothing without Thee;
My strength is wholly Thine;
Withered and barren should I be,
If severed from the Vine.”

A. M. Toplady

“And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” Some of you know what the land of affliction is, don’t you? Not just literally and physically, but also the land of sorrows and trials. But, listen. If the Lord calls you to be fruitful in it, in the end you will thank God for it.

That may sound strange. I am sure Joseph could not thank God every day for the land of affliction before he came to his deliverance. But, looking back he could. He said to his brethren: “It was not you that sent me hither, but God.” And that is the secret of our text this morning. “And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” May there be many ‘Manassehs’ and ‘Ephraims’ among us.

Amen