

From the Prison to the Palace

Joseph's Faithfulness is Rewarded

Text: Genesis 41:1-52

Introduction:

1. In this chapter, Joseph's time in prison comes to a close and he is launched out into his main life's work. The Divine dreams God had given Joseph those 13 years earlier begin to be fulfilled as he goes from Potiphar's prison to Pharaoh's palace in one day. Joseph needed every year of preparation in God's school for the work that was about to open before him. Nothing was wasted!
2. Little did Joseph know when he woke up that morning that his life was about to be swept up in the next phase of God's Divine plan for his life. The tide was about to turn. Joseph had suffered much in the 13 years that had transpired since he was sold into slavery by his brothers. God was now going to reward Joseph abundantly for His faith and steadfastness.
3. Again, this key juncture in Joseph's life would hinge on a pair of dreams. We will study this account under three headings.

I. THE REVELATIONS IN PHARAOH'S DREAM (VS. 1-8)

Pharaoh now has two significant dreams that would set in motion the next phase of God's plan for Joseph. Note several points about Pharaoh's dreams.

A. The Timing of the Dreams (Vs. 1)

1. The dreams came to Pharaoh a full two years after the incident involving the Butler and Baker (Gen. 40). This represented a further period of waiting for Joseph. In the previous chapter, while very human and understandable, we do get a hint of self-vindication in Joseph. The drive to vindicate ourselves is so strong and even the most spiritual people struggle deeply with injustice, especially false accusation. It takes real grace to trust and wait and leave your reputation in the hands of God.
2. Remember! Seasons of waiting in the will of God are not wasted. They are very necessary seasons of preparation. By the time this season comes to an end and Joseph stands before Pharaoh, there is not a hint of self-vindication or self-promotion; only humility and a concern for the glory of God.
3. Psalm 27:14 exhort us, "**Wait on the LORD**: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: **wait, I say, on the LORD.**"

B. The Theme of the Dreams (Vs. 2-7)

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1. Dream # 1: The cow dream (Vs. 2-4). In this dream, Pharaoh stands by the Nile River and sees seven plump, healthy cows come out of the river and feed in the meadow. They are followed by seven thin, gaunt cows which also come out of the river and stand by the seven fat cows. Then a startling thing happens. The ghastly looking, thin cows each up the seven fat cows. Then Pharaoh wakes up. "The cows in the dream would have gotten Pharaoh's attention since the cow was the emblem of Isis, the revered Egyptian goddess of fertility. In the Egyptian "Book of the Dead," the chief Scripture of ancient Egypt, the god of vegetation and the nether world, Osiris, is represented as a great bull accompanied by seven cows." (Morris)
2. Dream # 2: The corn dream (Vs. 5-7). In this dream Pharaoh sees a seven headed stalk of grain grow up, healthy and full bodied. Then a thin, seven headed stalk springs up that has been blasted by the bitterly hot, East winds of the desert wilderness. Then the same startling phenomenon from the last dream is repeated. The thin ears of grain devour the healthy ears of grain. Pharaoh wakes up for the second time.

C. The Troubling over the Dreams (Vs. 8)

1. When the morning came, Pharaoh could not shake of the dreams of the night before. He sensed in his spirit that there was some ominous meaning in the dreams.
2. Pharaoh summons the magicians of Egypt to interpret his dreams. The word 'magician' literally means 'horoscopist' (as drawing magical lines or circles) (Strong's concordance). These magicians may have had satanic powers (E.g., Ex. 7:10-12,22; 8:7) and knowledge of sorcery but they were powerless to interpret Pharaohs dreams as they did not come from Satan but from God Almighty. Only God truly knows the future. If you want to find about the future, read the Bible!
3. Note: Magicians, ancient or modern, may have access to dark, occultic powers, but they have no power to provide real answers to life's great spiritual questions and needs. They are powerless to understand Divine truth with their darkened hearts and minds. Like Pharaoh, so many go to the wrong people to try and get help! In our day, many are turning to witchcraft to try and find hope for their troubled and broken lives. Satan as an angel of light beckons them on, promising power and freedom but in time they find themselves in more bondage than ever.
4. You don't need a magician, you need the Messiah Jesus Christ; you don't need a sorcerer, you need the Saviour; you don't need a witch, you need the Word of the Living God; you don't need a wedgy board, you need the Bible and the blood of Christ; you don't

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need tarot cards but the truth; you don't need horoscopes but the Holy Spirit; you don't need star signs, you need salvation from sin; you don't need palm reading, you need powerful redemption; you don't need luck, you need the Lord; you don't need the devil, you need deliverance; you don't need the new age, you need the new birth; you don't need crystals, you need Christ!

II. THE INTERPRETATION OF PHARAOH'S DREAM (VS. 9-32)

A. The Memory of the Interpreter (Vs. 9-13)

1. The Butler who met Joseph in prison two years earlier, now forms another important link in the chain of God's Providence for Joseph's life.
2. The Butler recounts his experience with Joseph in the prison and the accuracy of his interpretation. Clearly this impressed Pharaoh as he would have no doubt remembered those events two years earlier involving two of his highest-ranking officials.

B. The Meekness of the Interpreter (Vs. 14-16)

1. Joseph is summoned '**hastily**' out of the dungeon. The long period of waiting in prison was over and he literally went from the prison to the palace in a single day. There are seasons of waiting on the Lord but when it's the Lord's timing for you to take the next step, things can begin moving very quickly.
2. Joseph now stands before the powerful monarch of Egypt. Pharaoh tells Joseph that he has heard of his reputation as an interpreter of dreams. Joseph's response to Pharaoh is most instructive. There is not a hint of self-promotion, self-vindication or self-love. If Joseph has been self-focused, he could have easily attempted to seize this situation for his own personal gain.
3. But Joseph was **humble** in spirit – "it is not in me" and focused on the glory of His God – "God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." What a contrast Joseph was to the conniving, self-serving magicians of Egypt.
 - a. "Joseph exhibited by this answer a great growth in spiritual maturity since the time of his own dreams back in Canaan. His years of slavery and imprisonment had indeed taught him humility and patience. Instead of calling attention to the failures of the other wise men and stressing his own powers, he acted with utmost courtesy and restraint, and directed all praise to God alone." (Morris)
 - b. "Six traits stand out which constitute him (Joseph) one of the models for all time: integrity, conscientiousness, diligence, nobility, courage, humility. He is one of the all-round, symmetrical characters of the Bible, always ready, ever

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conscientious, never sacrificing principle, faithful and fearless at every crisis.” (Thomas)

4. Joseph was **bold** and **unashamed** to speak of his God before this powerful man. It made no difference to Joseph whether it was a prisoner in the dungeon or the king on the throne, he would speak boldly of his God. There was a risk for Joseph doing this as Pharaoh was a pagan who worshipped the false gods of Egypt. Note how Joseph’s interpretation was laced with references to God (Vs. 25, 28, 32). Some believers are very willing to witness to people of low status but then hold back in the presence of people of power and prestige (e.g., the manager at work, the wealthy business man, the University professor). Psalm 119:46 “I will speak of thy testimonies also **before kings**, and will not be ashamed.”
5. **Joseph Pictures Jesus:** Joseph came to Pharaoh with a word of peace (“an answer of peace”). The Lord Jesus Christ is the “prince of peace” (Is. 9:6), “preached peace” (Eph. 2:17) and paid the price of peace in his own blood – “And, **having made peace** through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven.” (Col. 1:20)

C. The Meaning from the Interpreter (Vs. 17-32)

1. Pharaoh recounts his dreams (Vs. 17-24)
 - a. The cow dream (Vs. 17-21). Pharaoh adds a couple of further impressions from the dream.
 - i. The thin, unhealthy cows in his dream were worse than anything he had ever seen before in Egypt.
 - ii. They did not look any better after they had eaten up the 7 fat cows.
 - b. The corn dream (Vs. 22-24). Pharaoh emphasizes again the fact the magicians could not interpret the dreams.
2. Joseph reveals the dreams (Vs. 25-32)

Joseph now interprets the Divine message God had given through these dreams. He exercises his God-given gift. Joseph explains:

 - a. The dreams contained a unified theme. Joseph repeats this fact twice (Vs. 25 & 26). The same message had simply been communicated twice.
 - b. The seven good cows and the seven good ears represented seven years and the seven thin cows and the seven empty ears represented seven years.
 - c. There would be seven years of great plenty in Egypt (Vs. 29). These would be followed by seven years of very grievous famine (Vs. 30-31).
 - d. The reason God had given Pharaoh the double dream was because:

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- i. The thing was established by God. If God says something once, we should sit up and listen as it will surely come to pass. If God says something twice, it is for our benefit to impress upon our hearts and minds the certainty of what He has said. Repetition equals importance.
- ii. God was going to shortly bring it to pass.
- iii. Note: Joseph had also received 2 dreams back when he was a young 17-year-old. We get a window into Joseph's faith and spiritual understanding here. Even though up until this point in his life, his own dreams had not been fulfilled, he believed God would fulfill His promises.

III. THE EXALTATION AFTER PHARAOH'S DREAM (VS. 33-52)

A. Joseph's Recommendations (Vs. 33-36)

1. Joseph's second major gift now comes to the fore; his gift of administration. God enabled Joseph not only to interpret the meaning of the dream but also gave him the wisdom and foresight to know how to best prepare for what was coming.
2. Remember the big picture. God was going to use Joseph and the nation of Egypt to preserve the Jewish people through this time of famine and fulfill His prophecy to Abraham (Gen. 15:13). God was doing marvellous things in Joseph's life as an individual but his purposes went way beyond just Joseph. God was working for the good of Joseph and thereby, the good of others as well.
3. Joseph recommends the following:
 - a. That a man be sought to oversee the task of preparing. He would need to be a man who was 'discreet' and 'wise'. The word 'discreet' means discerning, "Prudent; wise in avoiding errors or evil, and in selecting the best means to accomplish a purpose; circumspect; cautious; wary; not rash." (Webster 1828) There would be many men who would be needed for this great work but it first needed **a man** who could lead it. God's way is to raise up a man who can lead His work and then provide others to support and follow. "And I sought **for a man** among them" (Ez. 22:30).
 - b. That officers be appointed to collect and store a fifth (20%) of the produce of the land during the seven years of plenty so they would have food for the seven years of famine.
 - c. Note: We don't get the slightest hint that Joseph was suggesting he was the man for the job or that he gave these recommendations with an ulterior motive. He was guileless, honest and unassuming. No doubt Pharaoh was impressed with Joseph's humility, simplicity and integrity.

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B. Joseph's Rewards (Vs. 37-52)

The time had now come where God would abundantly reward Joseph for his steadfastness. We are reminded of the truth of 1 Sam. 2:30 "...but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for **them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.**" Joseph's reward was threefold. He received:

1. The reward of honour (Vs. 37-44)

Leupold writes, "Only a man like Joseph, schooled by adversity and sorrow, could meet a sudden elevation like this without pride and self-exaltation. His rigorous training enabled him to encounter success without succumbing to its blandishments (allurements)."

a. The presence of God in Joseph's life was recognized (Vs. 37-39). This is a remarkable testimony from the lips of a heathen king. So impressed was he with Joseph's godly life, he

considered Joseph to be a man possessed of the Spirit of God – "Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?" When others see your life, do they see any difference? Do they see Christ in your life?

b. The promotion of God in Joseph's life was realized (Vs. 40-45a)

i. The scope of his rulership – Pharaoh elevated Joseph to the position of second ruler over the entire nation. The level of authority he gave Joseph is highlighted in verse 40, 43b & 44.

ii. The symbols of his rulership. Joseph is given:

1. A royal ring – Pharaoh gives his own signet ring to Joseph. This would give Joseph the authority and ability to make decrees and authorize official documents. Joseph was also given a gold chain to symbolize his position of authority. Apparently, this was a practice in the ancient world as we see the same thing with Daniel (Dan. 5:7, 29).

2. A royal robe – Joseph gets a new coat to symbolise his high position. Joseph's coats make interesting food for thought. He lost his first two coats but now God gives him a royal coat that would not be taken away.

3. A royal ride – Joseph is made to ride in Pharaoh's second chariot in a royal procession of state. Criers when before calling the people to bow the knee to this new ruler of the land. I wonder if Potiphar and his wife were in the crowd that day as Joseph rode past in the royal chariot?!

c. **Joseph pictures Jesus:** Many Bible students again see in this event a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph goes from

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humiliation to exaltation. In like manner, the Lord Jesus Christ “made himself of no reputation”, went through the suffering and humiliation of the cross and then was raised up and exalted by the Father (Phil. 2:5-11 “Let this mind be in you”). To Christ every knee shall bow!

2. The reward of a helpmeet (Vs. 45)
 - a. Pharaoh gives Joseph a new Egyptian name ‘Zaphnathpaaneah’ which is believed to mean “revealer of secrets”. Some say it means “savior of the world”.
 - b. Pharaoh gives Joseph a wife named Asenath. She was the daughter of one of the Egyptian priests named Potipherah (interestingly it is essentially the same name as ‘Potiphar’. The name Potiphar is the abbreviated form).
 - c. You can’t but see the hand of God here. Joseph refused Potiphar’s wife and God rewards him a few years later with the daughter of another Potiphar! There are so many wonderful patterns of God’s Providence in Joseph’s life.
 - d. The timing was of God. Joseph would need a helpmeet as his main life’s work opened before him. There is a certain sweetness that only a lady can bring into a man’s life and no doubt this dear woman was a great comfort to Joseph with all the pain he had endured to date.
 - e. Note: I have no doubt that Joseph led this dear lady to be a worshipper of the One True God of Israel. We have seen from Joseph’s testimony to date that he was willing to refuse the wrong thing even if he paid a heavy price for it and if this lady had been a wicked woman, I am sure Joseph would have said no to her as well.
 - f. **Joseph Pictures Jesus:** We see an interesting picture of Christ here. Joseph takes a Gentile bride. In like manner, the bride of Christ (the church), is largely a Gentile bride.
3. The reward of a heritage (Vs. 50-51)

God gave Joseph two precious sons during the seven years of plenty. The names Joseph gave them provide another window into his heart and his faith in God.

 - a. Manasseh – mean’s “forgetting”. We know this doesn’t mean he mentally forgot what had happened in the past. It means forgetting in connection to the sufferings he had endured. The blessings and joys of God he was experiencing in his life caused the past sorrows to shrink in size and fade in the memory.
 - b. Ephraim – means “fruitful”. God had made Joseph fruitful in the midst of affliction in trial. In fact, it was those very afflictions that made Joseph useable. What a testament to what God can do in such a grievous trial.

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- c. "If the birth of the first son reminded him of the negative side of his life's experiences, enabling him to blot out the memory of the past, the birth of the second son suggested the positive side of his life in the abundant blessing that God had vouchsafed to him. **How beautiful it is when life is interpreted in the light of God's dealings, and when everything, dark or light, has its own Divine significance. Everything in Joseph's experience was illuminated by light from heaven.**" (Thomas)

Conclusion:

1. Joseph suffered much but not nearly as much as the Lord Jesus who died on the cross for your sins. Have you received God's free gift of salvation through Christ?
2. Is there a prominent person in your life you haven't witnessed to yet? Does your manager know you are a Christian or are you more fearful of the potential consequences of telling him/her than being loyal to your Saviour?
3. Are you going through a trial? Trust God for the outcome. 1 Peter 5:6-7
"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."
4. There was a lot at stake in Joseph's life. Imagine the far-reaching consequences if he had not remained steadfast and faithful to God. There is much at stake in your life also! Never underestimate the ripple effect of your decisions for good or evil.